

SINGAPORE

Insights from the Inside

Volume II





Singapore

Insights from the Inside

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Singapore

Insights from the Inside

Editor: Richard Hartung



**Singapore
International
Foundation**
for a better world

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Foreword

TOMMY KOH

I believe that a better world begins with better understanding between people of different countries and cultures. I therefore congratulate the Singapore International Foundation for launching the second volume of *Singapore: Insights from the Inside*.

I am delighted that 50 of our foreign friends have, once again, generously shared their insights and experiences.

I have enjoyed reading the 50 Singapore stories and thank the writers for their kind words and praise for Singapore's innovativeness, cultural vibrancy, and stewardship as a responsible global citizen. I am equally thankful for their critique and well-meaning advice. Our friends tell us that we can be too anxious for results and too focused on our goals. They remind us not to lose our culture and heritage amidst rapid urbanisation, and to renew our commitment to appreciate and conserve our native flora and fauna. They see the social challenges that have emerged as Singapore develops and suggest embracing our cosmopolitanism and leveraging our social diversity's huge potential for innovation. They encourage more ground-up initiatives among Singaporeans to grow community.

As we celebrate Singapore's golden jubilee this year, we need both loving critics and critical lovers as we chart the course for the next 50 years. Our friends have not only provided us with food to reflect on what Singapore is, but also to envisage what we can be and what we collectively can do to build a better world.

Tommy Koh

Ambassador-at-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The **Singapore International Foundation** makes friends for a better world.

We build enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harness these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change.

Our work is anchored in the belief that cross-cultural interactions provide insights that strengthen understanding. These exchanges inspire action and enable collaborations for good.

Our programmes bring people together to share ideas, skills and experiences in areas such as healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, as well as livelihood and business.

We do this because we believe we all can, and should, do our part to build a better world, one we envision as peaceful, inclusive and offering opportunities for all.

Preface

JEAN TAN

We published the first book in the *Insights from the Inside* series to gather the unique insights and personal perspectives of members of the international community who have lived, worked or studied in Singapore, and to answer the question, *What is Singapore?* so that many more, including ourselves, might come to know Singapore better.

We were heartened by the enthusiasm of 31 friends who readily contributed stories that shed light on who we are as a people and shared lesser-known facets of Singapore. We were so greatly encouraged that we are publishing the second volume with an expanded collection of Singapore insights.

In celebration of Singapore's 50th year of independence, we have put together 50 essays about Singapore's *head, heart, and soul*. They are written by a cross-section of friends of Singapore, including arts and cultural professionals, business people and social entrepreneurs, diplomats, academics and social leaders. We are grateful for their contributions and partnership in our mission to foster greater

understanding between Singaporeans and world communities to build a better world.

Through their 50 stories, our friends share their ideas and experiences to uplift lives, pique interest, and start conversations that will continue in a series of dialogues on *What is and What's next, Singapore* which we are organising in cities around the world.

Enjoy these *Singapore insights from the inside*.

Jean Tan

Executive Director

Singapore International Foundation

Introduction

RICHARD HARTUNG

Even for someone who has lived in Singapore for more than two decades, the stories in this book provide surprising and insightful glimpses into facets of Singapore that often remain hidden. From artworks in unexpected places and caring individuals helping the needy to titans of industry strengthening businesses and creative educators or social entrepreneurs transforming society through their innovations, the impact these people have on us is vast.

The stories provide more than just entertaining snippets of what life is like in segments of Singapore society. Indeed, they offer us enlightening viewpoints and a depth of understanding about what makes Singapore tick and about the place that visitors and residents alike have come to like so much. And in reading these many stories, several commonalities rose to the fore.

First, rather than being bystanders watching the city evolve, writers who live in Singapore are hard at work creating the type of society that they want to live in far into the future. For some, this means creating the cultural richness that adds so much enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure to the lives of Singaporeans as well as others who now call

Singapore home. For others, it is scaling up existing businesses or catching the crest of the latest trends to create something entirely new. And along with helping build a new Singapore, the writers are teaching, coaching, mentoring, or parenting to help friends, family, colleagues, and students grow up to support this new society too.

Whether they are residents or visitors, the writers' love of Singapore peeks through the stories continually as well. Visitors who came here for work or a study tour went away so impressed that they have changed what they do back home or have come back repeatedly to soak in more of the atmosphere. Some came as sceptics who expected to put up with being here for a short while or stay for a short-term assignment but ended up settling down in Singapore for decades—so far. And whether they came to stay in one of the world's leading cities or to take advantage of opportunities they never would have had in their native land, others decidedly moved here intending to stay and make a new life.

And perhaps the most surprising part is the number of people who came here as students and took away lessons that they're using to transform their own country—or somewhere else—after they leave Singapore. Whether they completed short-term study programmes or full undergraduate courses here, these former students have used what they learnt to improve healthcare, empower women, develop youths' skills, start building the next Silicon Valley, and more. More than just acquiring skills and knowledge, they developed the teamwork, creativity, innovation, social awareness—and, yes, *kiasu*-ism—that are helping power them to the future.

The writers have opened up their lives to share their learnings, thoughts, families, and aspirations with readers in inspiring stories that often tug at the heart. *Singapore: Insights from the Inside* is a rare chance to learn much from the people around us who we may

never have known about before or only read about in the media, and who will become inspiring friends as we read their stories.

Richard Hartung

Editor

Singapore: Insights from the Inside – Volume II



Richard Hartung

Richard is a freelance writer and consultant who has spent most of his career in Asia and who has lived in Singapore since 1992. He worked in retail banking in Japan and in the diplomatic corps before moving to Singapore, then worked for financial institutions here before shifting to consulting more than a dozen years ago. He writes for *TODAY*, *gtnews*, the *Efma Journal* and other media as well as for in-house corporate publications and was a contributor to the first volume of *Singapore: Insights from the Inside*. Richard has a BA from Pomona College and an MBA from Stanford University. He is an active volunteer who serves on boards of non-profits including the Metropolitan YMCA and the Jane Goodall Institute (Singapore), and he is a volunteer writer for the Singapore International Foundation and the Centre for Non-Profit Leadership.

What Makes Singapore Tick?

Is Singapore the Perfect Country for Our Times?

— ANDRÉS MARTINEZ —

You land at Changi Airport after flying from the United States for what seems a lifetime, and you're naturally disoriented, even before you hit the customs booths that feature bowls of mints, dire warnings about the death penalty for those bringing in drugs, and digital comment cards asking if the service was to your liking. Duck into a public restroom and you'll be exhorted to aim carefully and to "flush with oomph" for the sake of cleanliness. Outside, it's tropical and sticky but impeccably clean, in a city inhabited by Chinese, Malays, Indians, and a multitude of guest workers from around the world—with the vast majority speaking English.

Singapore is an assault on one's preconceptions.

Singapore calls itself the Lion City, but it would be more accurate to call it the Canary City—the canary in globalisation's gold mine. Arguably no other place on earth has so engineered itself to prosper from globalisation, and succeeded at it. The small island nation of 5 million people (it's really just a city, but that's part of what's disorienting) boasts the world's second-busiest seaport, a far higher per-capita income than its former British overlord, and a slew of

number-one rankings on lists ranging from least-corrupt to most-business-friendly countries. As it celebrates its 50th anniversary as an independent nation, Singapore is proof that free trade can and does work for multinationals and ordinary citizens alike. So long as globalisation continues apace, the place thrives.

Singapore's defining achievement is summed up in the title of its longtime leader Lee Kuan Yew's memoir, *From Third World to First*. When it split off from Malaysia a half-century ago to become a separate nation of dubious viability, Singapore had little going for it, other than a determination to become whatever it needed to be—assembly plant, container port, trustworthy banking and logistics centre, semiconductor hub, oil refinery, mall developer, you name it. But the brilliance of its founding fathers (okay, it was mostly one father, Mr. Lee) was in realising that the precondition for any and all of this to happen was good governance.

During a week of recent meetings and briefings with Singaporean business and government leaders, sponsored by the non-profit Singapore International Foundation, two offhand remarks bore this out. The first was a statement by one business leader that he has never had to pay a bribe in his lifetime. To an American audience, that may seem like a fairly modest boast, but as this speaker noted, it'd be a difficult claim to make in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries (or developing nations anywhere). Growing up in Mexico, my dad—a businessman who'd never set foot in Singapore—would often go on and on at dinner about how our country needed a Lee Kuan Yew. I had a vague sense of what Dad meant, but only now do I get the vehemence behind his sentiment. You couldn't get by in Mexico back then without paying bribes, constantly.

Like Americans, Singaporeans worship the concept of meritocracy. Unlike Americans, Singaporeans entrusted their society to an all-

knowing one-party technocracy, a civil service that has delivered the goods across two generations—including affordable, publicly built housing for a majority of the population and a system of lifetime savings vehicles that are the envy of policy wonks the world over. Society’s cohesive glue, in addition to English, is a collective form of the “Singlish” term *kiasu*, which roughly translates into a fear of losing or being left behind.

Kiasu usually refers to the extraordinary lengths to which people—individually and collectively—have gone to ensure success. And the motivating anxieties are not hard to discern in a nation-state so small it must rely on other countries for the water it drinks and the space to train its armed forces. What if China and some other Asian state go to war over disputed islands? What if Shanghai or Hong Kong leverages its domestic markets to overshadow you as an Asian financial hub? What if the Malaysians cut off your water? The brutal Japanese occupation during World War II and the heart-wrenching dip in trade during the recent financial crisis are stark reminders of how quickly things can sour for a vulnerable canary in a gold mine.

Even now, at the height of its success, Singapore doesn’t get much love (as opposed to grudging respect) from the legions of foreigners who avail themselves of its First World amenities. Some Westerners visiting or residing in Singapore complain about the “sterility” of the place, and joke about the carefully manicured boulevards and the pristine shopping malls, contrasting Singapore unflatteringly to the grittier authenticity and “character” of nearby Cambodia and Vietnam.

It’s indeed easy to mock Singapore if you haven’t lived in a poor country, and it’s perhaps a form of prejudice to begrudge Singaporeans their lack of Third World “charm”. We prefer our tropics to be exotically chaotic, thank you—not tidier and more efficient than the Swiss.

But the interesting wrinkle here is that Singaporeans themselves seem to be joining in the second-guessing about the price of development. Opposition parties are gaining some ground in parliamentary elections, capitalising on unhappiness with strained public services, soaring prices, and an influx of super-wealthy foreign investors that resulted from the government's openness to rapid growth. Having taken care of its population's basic needs and then some, it must be galling for Singapore's relentlessly pragmatic leadership to see a surge of yearning for rooted authenticity. The few older neighbourhoods that haven't been demolished—including the first generation of public housing complexes—are now heralded as historic landmarks, and Singaporeans treat their old botanical gardens as sacred ground. At the Singaporean government's world-renowned scenario-planning futures think tank, one analyst confided that she is looking into the uptick of nostalgia and what it might mean for policy.

This ill-defined sense of nostalgia reflects the tensions inherent in globalisation. You can leverage all of your comparative advantages to succeed in the global marketplace and transform yourself accordingly, only to end up feeling some unease at having your distinctive sense of place eroded.

Until recently, Singapore was among the most welcoming places to outsiders, with one out of every three residents born elsewhere. But with fertility rates dropping, the country opened the floodgates to immigrants to ensure continued growth and prosperity—turning immigration into a lightning rod. This being policy wonk heaven, one of the triggering events to a national debate on the issue was a government white paper discussing the target of reaching a population of 6.9 million. A more spontaneous triggering event was a small riot late in 2013 in the city's Little India district. This was the subject of the second offhanded remark that struck me most during my recent

week in Singapore, when a government official, off-script, said with some relish: “Imagine that, we had a riot. We must be a real place.”

A general unease about Singapore’s identity and concerns about overcrowding—owning a Honda Accord will set you back more than S\$100,000, in what has to be the bluntest form of congestion pricing anywhere—have forced the government to slow down its intake of immigrants and taper its growth projections. The move was a testament to how responsive Singapore’s system can be to its citizenry’s needs and desires, without being terribly democratic.

It was a testament, too, to how perfect Singapore—and its paternalistic, technocratic cosmopolitanism—is for an age of interdependence that prizes connectivity over a sense of place. There are many cautionary tales to globalisation’s downsides, but no better canary in the gold mine of globalisation’s tenuous triumphs than Singapore.



Andrés Martínez

Andrés is the Editorial Director of Zócalo Public Square, a Fellow at New America, and a Professor of Practice at the Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University. Previously, Andrés was the Vice President and Fellows Director at New America, the Editorial Page Editor of *The Los Angeles Times*, an editorial board member of *The New York Times*, and a staff writer at *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. A native of Mexico, Andrés studied history at Yale University and Stanford University, and then obtained a law degree from Columbia University.

The Singapore Scent

VISHNU SWAMINATHAN

Any scent has an amazing trait. First, the olfactory organs realise the strength of the scent. Then, very soon, you get totally used to it and you do not smell it anymore. Our minds get so used to it, yet if that scent is not there, you start to miss it.

Singapore has a unique scent for me. Obviously it is not just one flavour, but many which are possible only in Singapore. I hope I am able to take you on a nosey nostalgic journey.

The first scent which hits you the minute you land is in Changi Airport. The scent is so unique that it reminds me that I am back home. I have not lived in Singapore for over a decade now, but that scent brings me back instantly to Singapore. It is the scent of being home, a warmth that embraces you, and drifts you to the memories of this lovely home. You walk a bit, and while you cross through customs, you can sense the distinct smell of *nasi lemak* or fresh *kaya*. The stalls preparing breakfast invite you not with signs but with these amazing scents.

You either give in or move on, and you hop into a taxi. Each taxi has a unique scent. Be it the brand new black Chevys or the traditional old

Crowns, you feel a gush of scent as you get in, and within a minute you are one with it. The scent of Singlish takes you home and you would be smiling by this time.

I have not experienced the potpourri of such unique scents in any other country, where you can bask in so many scents in a very short period. You could hop on a SBS Transit (SBS) bus or Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) train, and that is a unique smell. You might decide to stop at Chinatown, where you will be completely taken over by the myriad unique flavours—from the line of shops which sell clothing and artifacts to the carts selling roasted chestnuts. What is also unique is that you cannot miss the fragrance of fresh flowers and incense from the Mariamman Hindu temple and the Mosque, which are just next to each other within the Chinatown area! One side of Chinatown has the best Nepalese food, alongside Chinese vegetarian food. As you stroll by the lanes, you cannot miss these wonderful aromas, which invite you, a gastronome. You would also walk by the famous Buddha tooth relic temple, and the strong, unique incense engulfs you.

You walk a bit back to enter the famous Maxwell market, where scents have to learn to co-exist between stalls which are adjacent to each other. Chicken rice, porridge, congee, eggs, and seafood all have their own inviting ways. All you have to do is to stroll by, and the strong scents just surround you. You could just stand there, take them in and go where your nose leads you to. The nose is the way to your stomach here. Even dessert stalls can offer you their own unique aroma. As you step out after a great tummylicious experience, you now cannot miss a strong, pungent smell which just strikes you.

There is also something people either love or totally hate. I tend to lean towards the hate side, as it is too strong for me even to take it near my mouth. Durians! The spiked fruit manages to pack a huge punch of whatever (people describe it in a thousand ways), but it is

definitely an acquired love or hate. You pass through that, and after just a few train stops, you are at Little India.

This spice capital of Singapore welcomes you with a strong scent of flowers, a nice aroma of *dosa* on the roadside, all mixed with spices of various kinds into a different land of sensory experience. You wonder how many spices go into making just one dish and how they all add up to this wonderful-tasting banana leaf lunch. Even the fish love it, as they offer their entire head into the curry!

If you follow your nose, it takes you to the most interesting places of Singapore—The Arab experience of carpets, fabric, and food at Arab Street; the Malay experience of the fantastic food, lifestyle, and living at Malay village; the unique smelly tofu at Geylang; and much more. But the true scent of Singapore is with its culture, its people, its diversity, and its quest for precision. The environment in Singapore continually satisfies anyone, even those with a very high appetite for fun, business, leisure, community, and efficiency. For example, entrepreneurs who want to get intellectual property protection can simply walk into the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS) office and everything is clearly laid out, assisted, and a grant is even available for the startup. Such is the efficiency which drives new startups to flourish in Singapore. Everything one wants to experience is within very quick conquerable distances, which leaves no excuse for not doing it. The continuous innovation and creation of the citizens never fail to enthrall anyone who lives there or goes there often. I vividly remember Singapore was one of the first countries to establish a bio-technology park in the early 2000s, and the latest is Gardens by the Bay—there is no excuse not to innovate, as the environment continuously pushes one to challenge the status quo. The country has never failed to interest and engage me—no matter how many times I go there and how frequently I do that. The power of unity, the trust

of oneness, and the quest for excellence keep Singapore the most innovative nation in Asia.

When you live in Singapore, the pinpoint precision of how things get done and how society is taken care of can actually be taken for granted. The minute you step out and live in a different nation, it comes back to you, reminding you to look at how easy life was in Singapore. Singapore has long been known to be the best supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurship—the ability to start a company within hours, a transparent taxation law, grant and investment support all the way through to a public listing—as services are efficient and accessible to any entrepreneur. Be it the availability of cutting-edge technologies, access to the best regional talent, the availability of investment, or the ease of getting intellectual property rights—all of these are available the quickest amongst top countries, for entrepreneurial innovation. The spirit of growth can be seen in the number of people who choose to travel or live there. Heading towards its 50th National Day, Singapore is young, dynamic, and has huge opportunities for social innovation.

Be it the haze, which when it comes puts a white blanket over the city and adds a distinct scent that appears once in a while, the food which enthralls you every day, or the spirit of the individuals for excellence—Singapore definitely offers the most unique scents of the world and is truly the best one to remember.



Vishnu Swaminathan

Vishnu is Country Director of Ashoka Innovators for the Public in India. Vishnu is a social entrepreneur who has done significant work in the area of affordable housing in India through the Housing for All initiative. Earlier, he was a for-profit entrepreneur in Singapore, creating two innovative startups in the field of financial inclusion and animation technology—one of which is presently part of the national payments network of Malaysia.

Emergent Communities are Changing Singapore

GRACE SAI

Co-working spaces such as the global Impact Hub network are changing how we work, think, and collaborate, as part of the trend toward people creating the realities of the environment they want to live in. And while it may be hard to see from our vantage point now, it's part of a centuries-long shift where small groups of people started with an idea that eventually changed the world.

In recent centuries, we have indeed seen significant events that have changed millions of lives for the better. From the anti-slavery movement in the 19th century to the women's emancipation movement in the 1970s, and from the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 to the more recent environmental outcry, historical moments were started by small groups of people. As Jane Jacobs said in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when they are created by everybody."

As a fresh university graduate in 2006, I had made a conscious decision to leave Singapore. While I did not know what I wanted as a career, I had a hunch that it was not to get a normal job, and that it would

deviate from the country's definition of success at that point in time. After spending four years in San Francisco, Oxford and Jakarta though, I returned to Singapore in 2010 wanting to change it. There were signs that Singapore was beginning to recognise that it had compromised a chunk of its soul in exchange for speedy progress and was changing for the better. Third-generation cafes were popping up, art shows and galleries were becoming the hype, and living in hippie neighbourhoods such as Tiong Bahru and Joo Chiat was the new "hot." I found this reversal refreshing, and betting on this spirit of bottom-up excitement and self-initiated communities, I decided to start the first Impact Hub in Asia, here in Singapore.

The Hub Singapore, part of a global network, is a co-working space and community for individuals and start-ups which use entrepreneurship and innovation to impact the world positively. It is an inspiring and collaborative space, part incubator, part café and events platform, and has meeting rooms and a "siesta corner." Our community is about 60 per cent Singaporean and permanent residents, and 40 percent are other people who have made Singapore home. Most of them are young and energetic, while all of them are there to collaborate and use their entrepreneurial spirit for good. It is a testament to an emergent and growing community, making it Singapore's home for "change to go to work".

As Singapore redefines its social and economic fabric while seeking for inclusive growth, emergent communities that are being created are important in three ways.

Communities as a nexus for collective action: We see a surge of like-minded communities starting up in Singapore—from the makers' community to social enterprises, from men-heavy tech geek groups to groups of women entrepreneurs, and from university alumni groups to religious groups, each clustering around their respective shared

interests. They meet regularly to share knowledge, network and help each other succeed. In our first two-and-a-half years, we saw more than 20,000 people walk through our doors, attending events and community meet-ups. Many of these people have been spurred into taking collective action for causes they care for. For example, the team at Our Better World is a group of journalists, writers and social media experts who are tired of using their skills to spread “bad news” on mass media. Instead, they want to use their skills and connections to spread positive stories that will spur global social action by creating viral content on their popular platform. Individually, these people might not have created these outcomes, but collectively, they have fun doing so, hence reinforcing repeated outcomes.

Communities as a birthplace of disruptive innovations: The ascent of the web has not only decreased the marginal cost of transactions to almost zero, it has also lowered the cost of collaboration and innovation. A good example is 3D Robotics, America’s largest drone company. Chris Anderson, its founder, shared that 3D Robotics started out as a hobby and community at first. It was not intended to be a company, but it has grown into a community that is now America’s largest drone company. He shared, “At our doorsteps, disruptive innovations are happening through collaboration amongst community members.” Back here in Singapore, our community members are similarly working on disruptive technologies and on platforms that are democratising funding, publishing and media, just to name a few. Startups like Woomentum, a crowd-funding platform for women entrepreneurs, are redefining the perspective on women in business, while startups such as Publishizer are negating the need for traditional, high-barrier print publishers so that ordinary people can now crowd-fund book publishing. Progressive adventure social enterprise, Gone Adventurin’ combines social causes and documentary filming to produce viral media content while doing good. A global impact investing network I am part of, Toniic, uses a co-investing

syndicate model to shift more capital from high net worth individuals to social enterprise investments, ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000 per deal. None of these startups work in a silo—they are birthed from a diversity of community members, and the chance meeting of the right person at the right time that brings things from point A to B, or B to Z is probably the single most valuable asset of the community. We call this “planned serendipity,” and my team works hard to create this environment.

Communities towards One Singapore: A key defining feature of a community is that its members share a strong sense of common purpose that transcends individual self-interests. It is the same essence that brings solidarity in a country. As a result, we see foreigners and locals, young and old, entrepreneurs and professionals, coming together around shared common interests and values. In that flow of commonality, fears and misunderstandings dissipate. By conversing and interacting consistently, trust—a community’s biggest currency—is built. It is trust that makes communities resilient and it is resilient communities that make a strong nation.

Conclusion

I believe there is going to be a race between cities in Asia that want to be the go-to hotbed for innovators and ideas. My belief is that the city that gets community-building right and encourages community-driven innovations best will win. For Singapore, this is already happening, but more space is needed for communities to emerge, breathe and live. And as important as they are, movements and communities are living systems that must be led and designed by the power of many, not the few in power.



Grace Sai

Grace is the CEO and Co-Founder of The Hub Singapore and Head of Toniic LLC in Singapore. An ecosystem builder, she speaks widely on social entrepreneurship in Asia. She has been invited by the Prime Minister's Office in Singapore to share her input, sits on the advisory board of Ben & Jerry's Singapore, is Social Entrepreneur-in-Residence at INSEAD, and a nominated Young Global Leader, World Economic Forum (2013). She is also leading Social Entrepreneurship national planning at MaGIC, the Malaysian National Agency for Entrepreneurship. She has an MBA from the University of Oxford and is a Skoll Scholar. She likes to ski and dive at least once a year.

Singapore—“Can, Can”

MARK HOWARD

Through my job with the British Council, I have been lucky enough to live and work in a wide range of countries and contexts. To say we are an international family is an understatement. My wife is from Ecuador, my son was born in Colombia, my daughter in Portugal, I am from the United Kingdom, and the dog is from Korea! Apart from all the great memories and experiences, one of the things that we seem to do is take a word or a phrase from most places we have been, and it takes its place in the family vocabulary. If someone falls over and hurts themselves, then they get a *bubă* (Romanian for bruise). From Portugal we took *torradas* (toast). If I am driving and getting instructions from backseat drivers, I am inevitably told we need to go 왼쪽 or 오른쪽 (*wen-jjok* or *orun-jjok*, left and right in Korean). We have a few words from Quechua (the language of the indigenous people of Ecuador), such as *carishina* (someone who doesn't know how to cook, usually directed at me!). So what did we bring from Singapore? The word that we have taken from Singapore for the Howard vocabulary, and which reminds us of our time, is the very simple “can, can,” in place of “yes, definitely.”

And I think that “can, can” is a particularly apt word to take back from a place like Singapore. Since moving back to Europe (we are now in Madrid), we have appreciated even more the sense of “can,

can” from Singapore. An early experience in Madrid was trying to buy a sofa and being told that it would take 40 days to deliver. Imagine that in Singapore! Singapore, of all the places I have lived, embodies a sense of “can, can.” Build a garden city, “can, can.” A university in the top 30 in the world, “can, can.” Have the first nighttime F1 race, “can, can.”

My job has meant that I have a strong interest in the promotion of language. The British Council promotes education, culture, and language, in our case the teaching of English. For someone who works in language, Singapore is a fascinating place to see the role that language plays in culture, identity, and how it is a source of debate in everyday life. I was fascinated to arrive in Singapore from Korea, in the middle of South East Asia, and just be surrounded by English. The street names (we lived in Sandwich Road, which delighted my daughter, who called it Tuna Sandwich Road—in fact it is named after a town in Kent, as are all the streets around there) and all the road signs. It was interesting to read Lee Kuan Yew’s reasons for sticking with English after independence. “Why did we choose English,” he says in his book *Hard Truths*. “My reasons were quite simple. First, internal stability. Everybody on an equal basis: we all have to learn English, a foreign language. Nobody gets an advantage. Second, it’s the language of international commerce....what motivated me? Internal stability and peace. We treat everybody equally. We judge you on your merits. This is a level playing field. We do not discriminate our people on race, language, religion. If you can perform, you get the job.” Most countries don’t have to make that choice. The language of most places has evolved over many years—it doesn’t usually take a government decision. For Singapore it was different. Despite that choice of English, there are four official languages in Singapore. There is also of course Singlish—everybody uses it (including the expats!), although the government is very keen on promoting Singapore Standard English, which according to Wikipedia, uses British spelling and grammar.

There are annual campaigns promoted by the Speak Good English Movement, which are always very inventive. The current one has Kumar, Singapore's comedy icon, dressed as the Queen of Grammar, and previous ones have been based around hawker centres. For some people, Singlish proudly shows the multi-cultural character of the place, whereas to others it is very colloquial and full of grammatical errors. I liked hearing Singlish when I lived in Singapore, and it is clearly strongly linked with a sense of identity for most young Singaporeans. It is of course important to be able to code switch (i.e. not to use Singlish in the boardroom), but I think for most of the Singaporeans I met, it is an important part of what makes them Singaporean!

In my job I also got to be involved in some very interesting cultural events, which also highlighted this sense of identity and the role of language. At the British Council we did a project called Civic Life, which was a high quality professional film, but using non-professionals as the actors. It was set in Tiong Bahru and the local residents were the actors. We were able to get agreement that the film was shot with the actors using mainly the Teochew dialect, and subtitled in English (even though films shot in Singapore have to be made in one of the four official languages). I liked the idea of the British Council supporting a film, made by British film-makers, but that didn't use English, and used a dialect that wasn't supposed to be used in official films. However, probably the most memorable event regarding the role of language was one that I attended at the Arts House, more specifically in the old parliament building, a very historic setting which still has the names of the first cabinet after independence on the seats. The place was of course built by the British, another place for an expat Brit like me to feel completely at home. To make it even more of a home away from home, the event that I was about to see as guest of honour was from the works of one of the most identifiably British people—Shakespeare—and the play was Macbeth, the famous Scottish play. However, this particular version had Macbeth played by

a woman, and the whole thing was performed in Hokkien, as an opera, with subtitles in Mandarin and English! Despite my surroundings, what could be more Singaporean than that.

One of the things that I miss most about being in Singapore is the sense of not feeling like an outsider. I know that there has been a lot written and said about the pressures of immigration, and this is a particular issue in the United Kingdom now as well as in Singapore. I hope that Singapore can maintain its variety and sense that all who come to the little red dot, who contribute and try to fit in, are welcome. Again, to quote Lew Kuan Yew, “The traumatic experience of race riots also made my colleagues and me even more determined to build a multi-racial society that would give equality to all citizens regardless of race, language, or religion.” Any country that has four official languages and can put on events which have a play by the most famous British playwright, in a colonial building that has been turned into an arts centre, with a Taiwanese lead actress playing a King, and all done in a dialect of southern China, is surely open to a wide range of influences! Can Singapore keep itself as a melting pot of cultures, whilst retaining its sense of identity? “Can, can!”



Mark Howard

Mark lived in Singapore from 2009 until 2013 and was Director of the British Council. Through his work Mark was fortunate to meet and work alongside some wonderful people from both Singapore and the United Kingdom. He previously worked for the British Council in Korea, Portugal, Romania, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Prior to that he worked as a civil engineer, a history teacher, and a full-time carer for people with physical disabilities in the United Kingdom. He is currently the head of teaching for the British Council global teaching network and lives in Madrid with his wife, daughter and son.

Contrasts

FU JUN

The city of Singapore is globally renowned for its urban planning. The city is orderly, complete with superb basic and secondary infrastructure and amenities, making it extremely convenient for residents to travel, shop, go to school, dine, or find entertainment. At a glance, Singapore is dotted with new contemporary architecture, not unlike other modern architecture found in other parts of the world.

When I was in Singapore in 2011 as a participant in Singapore International Foundation's Young Business Ambassador exchange programme, I remember characterising my initial impression of the city with the terms "cutting edge" and "youthful." A Singaporean architect whom I got to know once joked that "The most prominent characteristic of Singapore (新加坡) is being new (新)!"

Truth be told, while I could occasionally chance upon a building with some unique features, these would usually be either religious buildings or buildings of historical significance, like the Old Parliament House, High Court, Police Headquarters, or Christian schools. They were likely conserved for their historical significance or unique architectural style or appearance.

These historical buildings, however, were often refurbished into “new” buildings, unlike in China, where the philosophy of refurbishment is to restore a building’s original integrity and authentic form, according to how it had been in times past. As a result, the historical buildings in Singapore have the look and feel of a modern building, very clean and tidy. These refurbished buildings lack the depth of emotional textures and atmosphere that I usually encounter in historical buildings back home in China. Most of the historical buildings I mentioned have been converted to government offices or cultural facilities. Many of the old districts in Singapore have unfortunately been thoroughly demolished.

I was fortunate enough, through the works of a 70-year-old Singapore watercolour artist, to have seen some unique Singapore districts of the past. As the artist was introducing these old districts through his works, he told me that the scenes in his paintings have practically vanished over time. Unbeknownst to the old artist, he has actually documented a part of the city’s unique history and scenes of the past with his paint and brushes.

Apart from being new, the city of Singapore is filled with pastel colour tones. The generous use of bright colours such as pink, light green, light blue, light yellow and light purple, gives the city the feel of a children’s playground, innocent and lively. Some buildings even sport large swathes of bright primary colours. Perhaps this is somewhat influenced by the local tropical weather. Visually, it was a little shocking for me initially. My initial overall impression of the city was therefore, “clean but simple, lively but unsophisticated.”

Whenever I stand in this highly precise and unusually neat country, I cannot help but recall a phrase by Lung Ying-tai: “Water that is too clear has few fish; one who is too critical has few friends.” This echoes, in a way, my current feelings. An environment that appears sanitised and man-regulated is often not conducive for fostering certain aspects

of arts and culture. To me, cultivating the arts and helping the arts and humanities to thrive necessitates a more natural, “uncultivated” way of life or ecology.

This is probably a common dilemma facing all developing countries and fast-growing cities—managing the contradictions and relationships between the growth and expansion of the city and the preservation of history and cultural heritage.

For Singapore—a young island-state with no natural resources—to emerge as one of the four Asian dragons within a span of few decades required the willingness of its people to dedicate themselves and their time to hard work. But the fast-paced urban lifestyle results in tremendous work pressure. Government agencies, high-rise office towers, and MNCs—even the malls, subways, and streets—are filled with highly efficient, well-trained young people. But they seem to be always in a hurry, often working till late in the night. For food, they usually settle for simple meals at food courts or in hawker centres near their work places. Fortunately, food and beverages sold at these places are of a higher quality than those in China. There is also a greater variety of food—simple Western meals, Chinese noodles and fried rice, Indian and Malay cuisines—all at very affordable prices within reach of average income earners.

This lifestyle is perhaps necessary for the growth of the nation, but the resultant stress may inevitably limit the space needed for cultural and artistic growth. Recently, the Singapore government has taken notice of this and is implementing measures to provide a more encouraging environment for culture and the arts.

Singaporeans are known to be bilingual. In my experience, however, I have observed widely differing degrees of this ability across the Chinese-speaking population.

I do not feel out of place in Singapore, perhaps because both Shanghai and Singapore are fast-developing international cities. We share similar urban scenarios—skyscrapers forming a concrete jungle, an advanced commercial economy, people thriving in fast-paced city life, a diligent working class, and ubiquitous McDonalds and ATMs. Additionally, I resemble Chinese Singaporeans here—black eyes, dark hair, yellow skin—and we share similar origins and ancestors.

Differences immediately surface, however, once Singaporeans start to converse with me in Mandarin. Proficiency varies greatly among Chinese Singaporeans, and in the majority of instances, falls below the standard of spoken Mandarin in China. English words are usually merged into Mandarin sentences during conversations, sometimes due to a lack of vocabulary. The Singaporean accent is also unique, with rigid, heavy intonations, which can sometimes be difficult for a foreigner like me to understand at first. Both these traits of spoken Mandarin are definitely unique to Singapore!

I believe that languages do not serve merely as tools for communication or expression. They also inform our thinking processes and reinforce our values. Singaporeans live in a society that prioritises English language usage, resulting in young people speaking mainly English today. Conversely, the Chinese Singaporean population's inconsistent proficiency in Mandarin may inadvertently distance them from their cultural roots.

From my initial interactions with Singaporeans, I formed some theories about our similarities and differences that were confirmed, reformulated, or discarded as I got to know them better. Slowly, I came to understand and recognise the many ways in which we are similar and different, all at once.



Fu Jun

Fu Jun—curator and art critic—has been the Deputy Director of the Shanghai Oil Painting & Sculpture Institute (SPSI) Art Museum since 2003, where she oversees artists and exhibition projects, research and audience development. Prior to this appointment, she was with the planning agency of the Shaoxing Government. She has a keen interest in art and art criticism, and is a proponent of international cultural and academic exchanges. She holds a Master's degree in Fine Arts from Shanghai University.

Cosmopolitan Singapore—A Beacon of Positive Change in a Diverse World?

ANDY HOLLEY

Having worked and lived in various parts of our small blue planet, and having followed what was happening in the world, it had been obvious to me for a long time that Asia would exert a profound influence on my life, both work and private, no matter what I would do and where I would live. I could have decided to watch all of this happen from elsewhere, yet I was too curious to leave it at that. I felt that I needed to embrace it and experience Asia firsthand, move there, truly immerse myself, and live and work there, even if that meant leaving my own comfort zone. I really wanted to understand the diverse cultures that make up Asia, get to know people, and build bridges that connect cultures.

I moved at the end of 2006, and after travelling through parts of India, Southeast Asia and China, I decided to settle in Singapore. When I arrived, I too, heard the stereotype of “Asia light,” “too clean” and so on. Indeed, Singapore stood out as a place where “things work,” the air was clean, infrastructure and public services were thoughtfully organised and managed, travellers enjoyed the best airport in the

world, and the city was beautifully green. I could not see anything wrong with that, but that was not the main reason for me to settle here. The Lion City revealed herself to be as Asian as any other part of the region, if not more so, given that I could find almost any Asian culture represented here. One just had to be open and receptive, reach out and ask questions, maybe try living in more “local” neighbourhoods, and look beyond Orchard Road.

I am a big believer in the idea that diversity is the spice of life. So it was only natural that I felt alive amidst the diversity of people calling Singapore their home, with roots stretching into all corners of the region and well beyond, connected to more cultures than even Singapore’s four official languages suggest. At the same time, Singapore’s heritage as the crossroads between East and West, North and South, as well as the travelling nature of my work and doing business in one of the world’s most open and well-connected economies, ensured that I would remain in constant touch with the rest of Asia and the world.

Supported by visionary leadership and propelled by hard work, modern Singapore has not only managed to catch up with the developed world’s most prosperous places, but gone well beyond in so many ways. Looking ahead, Singapore’s best possible future may well be that of a truly cosmopolitan city—a city in Asia that meets New York or London eye to eye, of course with her very own identity.

On the other hand, Singapore has developed so fast and changed in so many ways, that, despite all good reasons and intentions, it does not surprise me that not everyone here shares the same level of enthusiasm for the city’s cosmopolitan future. Naturally, there are people who feel pushed out of their comfort zones, are concerned about the pace and scale of growth and all it may bring with it—big questions about distribution of wealth, the rising cost of living to

concerns about infrastructure constraints, and the higher levels of uncertainty. Some fear that younger generations would take today's prosperity for granted and become complacent, or define success too narrowly by school grades, material wealth, or status.

Embracing the vision of a truly cosmopolitan city, however, may itself be the safest recipe against many of those concerns. After all, a cosmopolitan city is a place to make things happen, things that may have impact well beyond the city itself, and a place that keeps attracting the best talent from all over the world. Immigrants from very diverse backgrounds, armed with dreams, ideas and a strong will to turn them into reality through creativity and hard work, have fuelled New York's success as a global city for generations.

Singapore's history has seen waves of migration as well. While visionary, long-term leadership and thoughtful governance were essential to lay the foundations for modern Singapore to flourish, it is the collective identity of people living here, whether born locally or recently moved, that will determine Singapore's success as a truly cosmopolitan city.

I still feel a bit out of place every time a taxi driver first asks me where I am from, and then insists that my answer, "Singapore," cannot be correct as I "don't look Singaporean." You would rarely get that question in, say, New York to begin with. Or the occasional expression of surprise that I do eat spicy food and like durian, and do not live in a condominium. Or some rather vocal reactions by some against immigration, which I admittedly worried about, despite my appreciation of people's concerns about the pace of change and all else that needs to happen to support it.

However, I would also suggest that most of those situations cannot conceal that Singapore's cosmopolitan identity is indeed deepening,

and has been doing so very rapidly since I came here at the end of 2006. Singapore is a more “bubbling,” buzzing and diverse city than ever before. People from all over the world keep coming to play their part, excited to “do something” and “make a real difference,”

Not only multinational corporations, but entrepreneurs from Asia and Australia, Europe and the Americas, in fields from food to investments to technology, keep choosing Singapore as a base to set up and do business, often on a regional, or even global scale. Singaporeans keep venturing out into the world, as demonstrated by quite a few of the first or second-generation business owners I work with—expanding their businesses through sales, sourcing or partnerships not just across Australasia, but across Europe and North America as well. Some of the best local blue chip companies I know have developed a remarkably diverse and highly international leadership and talent pool.

Academics is another example. Singapore’s evolution to a global education hub has brought very diverse talent—professors and students alike—and shapes graduates with a much more global outlook than ever before. I could see this first hand, not just through my studies on the Singapore campus of one of the world’s leading business schools, but also through my work with professors and students at Singapore universities.

Organisations such as the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) are playing a key role in this process as well—for example, through Young Social Entrepreneurs (YSE), one of several SIF programmes that aims at building stronger ties and friendship between Singapore and the world, and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue. Designed to be highly international, the 2014 YSE programme included 12 teams from at least nine countries, shortlisted from 35 teams, and more if you add the various mentors and partners. YSE helps develop a generation of young people who build bridges across Asia and the world, while making a

tangible difference to the communities or causes they impact with the social enterprises they create. When working with YSE to evolve and deliver the mentorship programme with the help of volunteering colleagues, I cannot help but be impressed by the energy and drive, as well as the spirit of diversity, purpose and embracing inclusiveness that permeates the entire programme. And there are many more examples.

All this helps deepen the foundation and identity of a cosmopolitan Singapore and while more remains to be done, my experiences in Singapore show just how it has developed a far deeper cosmopolitan identity. I believe that this identity bodes well for Singapore's prosperous future as a beacon of inclusive, responsible and positive change in Asia, and a diverse and connected world. Now that's a place to be if you consider yourself a true cosmopolitan.



Andy Holley

A global citizen at heart, Andy has lived on three continents and now calls Singapore home. In his work as a management consultant, manager, and leadership coach, he works with leaders in Singapore, across Asia and beyond. At the moment, Andy serves as Practice Manager for McKinsey's Business Technology practice and McKinsey Digital in Asia-Pacific, as well as a core practitioner of McKinsey Leadership Development. He also coordinates McKinsey's mentorship of Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs. Andy holds an MBA (Dist) from INSEAD, a degree in Business Administration & Information Technology from Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Mannheim in his native Germany, and is a trained coach.

Eight Dimensions of Singapore

— IBRAHIM AGBOOLA GAMBARI —

Since the 1990s, I have had the privilege of visiting Singapore on a number of occasions, but for short periods. However, from 5th January to 9th July, 2013, I stayed in the country as a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University (NTU). This gave me an opportunity to gain personal insights and experiences, which I am delighted to share in this short and anecdotal contribution. In this regard there are eight major dimensions of what Singapore is to me as a result of my longest sojourn in the city-state.

First, high levels of public safety and security were instinctively felt when I lived in the country. There is no obvious or intimidating presence of uniformed police officers on the streets but everyone seems to know what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. There is a palpable sense of decorum and order as everyone goes about their business. Unlike in big cities such as New York or Lagos, where one's sense of hearing is assaulted constantly by sirens from ambulances, fire engines, or police cars, there is a relative calmness on the streets of Singapore.

Second, there are deliberate and successful efforts to preserve the beauty of the environment. It is green everywhere in the city and suburbs. As I went to work every day from my apartment in the heart of the city to the NTU campus, it was pleasing to view the beautiful trees and grasses in the median and on both sides of the highways. The serenity and beauty of the country's environment could also be enjoyed as I went to and returned from the airport. Few cities in the world can compare with Singapore in terms of the preservation of beauty and greenery of the environment.

Third, there are the multi-ethnic and wonderful cuisines. In some restaurants, one can sample Malay, Chinese, and Indian cuisines in the same place. Food is constantly a topic for discussion, and one is frequently asked, "Have you eaten? Are you aware of this or that restaurant which serves the best noodles?" However, one of the biggest ironies during my stay in Singapore was to have been invited to dinner at the home of a retired Chinese-Singaporean couple whose son, assigned to assist me by Dean Barry Desker of the RSIS, is married to a Ugandan. For dinner, I was served one of the best traditional African meals ever eaten outside of our continent. The food was cooked by the matriarch of the family, who had lived with her medical missionary husband in Niger, where her son was born, and who also went to secondary school in Jos, a city in neighbouring Nigeria.

Fourth, the friendliness and informality of the people of Singapore are impressive. It is easy to strike up a conversation with people, whether in a bus, train or taxi. The conversations, expressions of strong views and opinions, especially about the top leadership of the country, are almost always polite—sometimes, too polite as I observed, following some of the presentations which I made in the University and especially at a public lecture on a deliberately

provocative title, “Beyond Mineral/Natural Resources: Why Africa Matters to the World.”

Furthermore, during my stay in Singapore, arrangements were made for me to meet with Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, ministers and other senior government officials, distinguished Singaporean diplomats including Bilahari Kausikan, Dean Desker and senior academic colleagues at RSIS, Kishore Mahbubani at the National University of Singapore (NUS), leading businessmen such as Wilmar International CEO Kuok Khoo Hong, members of the Singapore Business Federation, senior officials of the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, and the managing director of the Singapore Economic Development Board. In all these meetings, the atmosphere was informal, the dressing often smart casual but, make no mistake, the exchanges were very focused and business-like. The informality is disarming and at the same time impressive.

Fifth, there is the strong culture of hard work and perseverance as well as the visible and less visible hands of strong leadership. These are clearly what have been responsible for the transition experienced by Singapore, in the words of its founding father Lee Kuan Yew, from the Third World to the First World. Everyone seems so busy and so dedicated in their work, bearing in mind that they are contributing to the national consensus for building and sustaining a Singapore that is peaceful, prosperous, strong and environmentally beautiful. There are no visible miscreants and layabouts and, unlike in a number of African and Asian countries, begging is strongly discouraged.

Sixth, the commitment of the public and private sectors to investments in education, science, and technology is clear and clearly paying huge dividends. This is based on the recognition that for Singapore to maintain its level of prosperity, it must remain competitive in an increasingly globalised world. This competitiveness, along with an excellent record

in public safety and security, continuity, and predictability in public policy, strong leadership, and inclusiveness are the root of Singapore's success. These linkages are, in my view, clearly understood by the first generation of leaders. It is to be hoped that they would not be taken for granted as they tend to be and, rather, they should be consolidated by succeeding generations.

Seventh, there is one subject which generated enormous, quick and unusual heat in public discourse during my stay, and it had to do with the government's White Paper on population. The Paper lays out critical issues concerning the country's demographic challenge resulting from a projected total population that could reach between 6.5 and 6.9 million by 2030. There appears to be a feeling in some quarters of fatigue, and a questioning of further immigrants and the attendant pressures on public services such as transportation, housing, education and health. The good news is that there were lessons learnt by the government to engage in deeper and more extensive consultations with the populace prior to the introduction of such landmark policy papers. Furthermore, also on the positive side, the White Paper generated important questions, the answers to which would determine future public policies, especially with regard to social services and physical infrastructure. The lessons learnt by Singapore in addressing these issues would be particularly relevant and most instructive, especially in mega-cities such as Lagos, in my own country Nigeria, where the pressures of population—estimated at close to 15 to 18 million—on social services are growing daily.

Finally, the opportunities for shopping in Singapore are almost limitless, and citizens and tourists engage in this pleasant activity with passion. Sometimes it seems that Singapore is one giant shopping mall and that everyone is preoccupied with going out to either eat or do some shopping, especially in the evenings and on weekends. This is no doubt a sign of affluence and increasing purchasing power while,

at the same time, one hears complaints that the prices of goods are increasing. Still, there is a huge variety of shopping malls, with items that range from the high end to ones with quite affordable prices.

In summary, I left Singapore with the distinct impression of a city-state that works and works well for the overwhelming majority of citizens, immigrants, tourists, and long-term visitors. I thoroughly enjoyed my almost half a year stay in this country. And, as General MacArthur said, in quite a different context of course, I shall return.



Ibrahim Gambari

Ibrahim is the Founder and Chairman of Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development. He has served as a Director-General at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, a Foreign Minister and subsequently an Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations. He was appointed a delegate at the 2014 National Conference on the restructuring and promotion of national unity in Nigeria. At the international level, Ibrahim held UN positions including Chairman UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, and UNSG's Special Adviser on Africa. He also served as Joint AU/UN Special Representative in Darfur and Head of UNAMID. Ibrahim received his B.SC from the London School of Economics, and his MA and PhD in from Columbia University in the United States. He is the pioneer Chancellor of Kwara State University in Nigeria.

Singaporeans Really Do Speak Up

CAMPBELL WILSON

I cannot claim decades of residence in Singapore. I cannot claim to have grown up here, or to have observed this island's transformation from colony to nation. I cannot claim to be wedded to a Singaporean, or to have Singaporean offspring.

But though I may not have such ties, I have worked in the interests of Singapore, both here and overseas, for my entire working career. In the process, I have lived here twice, and now consider it more my home than any other place.

In my two decades of association with Singapore, its physical environment has changed relentlessly and apace. Absence for but a few months resulted in surprise or minor shock at some significant change to the landscape—a building added here, a construction project there. In more recent years, the addition of parks, green connectors, and other “quality of life” initiatives has been especially impressive, transforming our environment and, it seems, our collective willingness to get out and sweat.

But most impressive, to me, has been the social development of young Singaporeans.

My previous employer regularly assembled groups from around the world in Singapore for training courses, and in the 1990s I participated in many. Invariably, multiple nationalities were represented—Western and Asian, Singaporean and others. And just as invariably, the conversation then was dominated by non-Singaporeans. Westerners are, of course, loud—most stereotypes contain a grain of truth—but there was something else afoot.

Later, when I first moved here to live in the early 2000s, working in otherwise exclusively Singaporean teams, a similar dynamic was evident. My colleagues’—exceptionally intelligent, educated and opinionated (in private)—reluctance to speak out, to share an opinion when managers were present, regardless of their approachability or invitation to contribute openly, was clear.

Even outside work, the social differences were sometimes just as stark, such as the fancy dress party at which 95 per cent of attendees didn’t come in fancy dress (unlike me). Or the experience of going on the “stag night” of a colleague: 12 people, three of them girlfriends of attendees, consuming a grand total of 10 beers over an evening—of which I had five. Rather a different experience than in the other countries where I had previously lived.

There were clearly deep and strong reasons underpinning all of these observations, and there is of course nothing wrong with differences. But my colleagues’ apparent reluctance to share opinions and ideas, or to test and develop them through robust debate, or to relax and let their hair down, seemed to me to be the organisation’s, and the nation’s, loss.

So, it was with some concern that I returned to Singapore in 2011, after five years overseas, with a mandate to start a new style of low cost airline. The vision was to build an airline focussed on the leisure traveller, with an engaging, slightly quirky and people-oriented positioning, and an open, egalitarian and inclusive internal culture to suit. To create a home-grown airline representing and reflecting contemporary Singapore but accessible to and comfortable for all ages and nationalities.

How would one achieve that vision without the sharing of ideas? Without open discussion? Without robust debate and without people having the confidence to speak out? Based on my prior experience, I had real concerns, as, even though a leader can set a tone and foster a culture, it requires others to pick up the ball and run with it. How could the airline reflect today's Singapore if today's Singaporeans didn't contribute?

Delightfully, I needn't have worried. Whether through the rise of the internet and social media, increased overseas exposure through travel or study, changing social and familial norms or education reform, the youth I came back to were vastly different than those I'd left five years before. The confidence, the ideas and the willingness to contribute. The greater openness to discussion and debate. The creativity. The preparedness to take a stand, or to stand out.

And stand out they have. Under the challenge and protection of "Scootitude," the airline's guiding compass on all things attitude, our cabin crew have donned Halloween costumes, cross-dressed to celebrate International Women's Day, or worn the uniforms of their favourite World Cup soccer team in-flight. Our marketing team have embraced such lines as "7 inches of extra pleasure" as the tagline for our ScootBiz premium cabin, and our ground staff have challenged

me to duty-free sales competitions on board where, if they sell more than I do, they become CEO for the day. Our office holds periodic “International Shorts Days,” where everyone turns up in, well, shorts, and the costumes at our anniversary parties are a sight to behold.

That the vision of Scoot’s external positioning and internal culture has been realised is thanks to a great team—a team of many nationalities, but the overwhelming majority being Singaporeans. Whether they are in marketing, on the front lines as cabin crew, flying the plane, or in other roles behind the scenes, each of them stood up, spoke up and made a contribution. A contribution that will continue down the years as part of Scoot’s DNA.

There are pros and cons to every change, of course. Some may genuinely prefer the anonymity or perceived control of a “seen and not heard” environment. And there is understandably a melancholic fondness for what has been lost to progress, or a tendency to look back through rose-tinted lenses. But in lamenting the past, we must not ignore what has been gained. In this case, the confidence, enthusiasm, optimism and empowerment of a new generation. It has been a wonderful thing to observe.



Campbell Wilson

Campbell is the founding CEO of Scoot, the long-haul, low cost unit of the Singapore Airlines group. Born and educated in Christchurch, New Zealand, he joined Singapore Airlines in 1996 and has since worked for the airline in six countries, including a total of eight years in Singapore across two stints, 2003 to 2006 and 2011 to present. He is married and lives in Simei.

An Inside-Out View of the Academy

KANTI BAJPAI

What is it like to be a foreign academic in Singapore—an insider/outsider?

Singapore is famous for its leisure attractions, economic competitiveness and governance excellence. Much less is heard about its blossoming higher education system. As an occasional academic visitor from the mid-1990s onwards, I was aware of the city's growing intellectual strengths. Dropping in to Singapore for three or four days at a time, my time was spent not at the quays and cafes or with the economic and administrative leaders of the city, but rather in seminar rooms with foreign and Singaporean counterparts. Those rarefied visits gave me little sense, though, of what it was actually like to be an academic in the Little Red Dot.

Four years into a more permanent stay as a full-time academic here, let me share a part playful, part serious reflection on the question framing this essay.

Perhaps one of the first, and quite endearing, things I noticed is that whatever one's academic rank, ordinary Singaporeans refer to

professors as “lecturers”—and this is said with some affection and reverence. Taxi drivers take me to the “lecturer condo on Clementi Road,” not to the Kent Vale condominium. When I tell them to drive to “En-you-ess (NUS, the National University of Singapore) at Bukit Timah,” they nod and ask “You lecturer at law—or policy?” (the law school and the public policy school share the campus).

For students and the university staff, all academics are “Prof,” with the first name suffixed—so I am “Prof Kanti.” This of course is not just a Singaporean form of address; it is quite Asian, or at least Southeast Asian. Here too there is a charming disregard for rank, quite refreshing and endearing in its blending of the formal (“Prof”) with the informal (“Kanti”)—and, it seems to me, evocative of the balanced style in which the university conducts its daily business.

Fairly early on, I also noticed the Singaporean love of meetings and everything that goes with them—agendas, minutes, reports, memos, PowerPoints, spreadsheets, organisation charts, and other such accoutrements. Even the lowliest assistant professor will find herself in meeting after meeting and will quickly have a stack of supporting papers on her desk.

Meetings are part of the Singapore governance model of *kaizen* managerialism dedicated to continuous improvement; but they also leaven the day. Contrary to the general view, Singaporeans are not grim robotic administrators. At work, they congregate cheerily, gossip freely enough, laugh at their obsession with minutiae and order, and set about their business. Meetings mean a break from the monotonous, and they usually entail beverages and snacks. What could be more social—complaining good-naturedly about work, solving problems as you go, and downing tea and curry puffs?

So while everyone rolls their eyes about meetings, a good number of us, including the foreigners, secretly enjoy these appointments and revel in the bursts of laughter that mark them. Which brings me to the laughter: in India and at Oxford, we seldom laughed at meetings. We smirked and sniggered knowingly behind cupped hands; but belly laughing—no.

Another feature of Singapore university life to which the insider/outsider academic quickly acculturates is the swirl and eddy of numbers. Singapore's universities love to quantify, paying great attention to the ranking of universities, the number and quality of research publications, the expenditure per student, the professor-student ratio, the effectiveness of monies spent, and so on.

This is hardly unique to Singapore. The old management adage is if you can measure it, you can manage it. Measuring has its limits, to be sure. It is rather soulless, and can become a substitute for thoughtful, reasoned judgment; but at a moment in Singapore's history it served the university system well. I have no doubt that "playing the number's game" is one of the reasons the National University of Singapore rose meteorically from a mere teaching college to 21st position in the world league tables. If you can measure it, you can improve it, at least up to a point.

A surprise for me was the powerful fascination with the West and Western learning that one encounters in the corridors and conference halls. For all the talk of Asian values and practices as well as the rise of Asia, Singaporeans measure pretty much everything intellectual in relation to the West and are far more knowledgeable about American and European than Chinese, Indian, or even neighbouring Southeast Asian scholarship.

Part of the fascination with the West is, I believe, a post-colonial ambivalence and hybridity—rejection but also admiration of the imperium. Part of it, though, is Singapore's insistence on benchmarking against the gold standard. And Singapore not surprisingly has chosen the West, and the United States in particular, as its gold standard. This too is hardly unique to Singapore, but what is unique is the (largely) clear-eyed and self-conscious way in which the West has been constituted as the gold standard.

This brings me to another striking feature of the Singapore higher education landscape, namely, its cosmopolitanism and easy traffic with foreigners. The word “university” has within it the Latin root, *universitas* (“a whole”), and surely a university campus must attract talent from all over the world if it has any pretense to global recognition. For Singapore, bringing in and retaining foreign talent is more or less inescapable. A cosmopolitan environment is therefore vital.

What is striking, though, is the comfortable integration of so many foreigners. The number of foreigners in Singapore's universities is not inconsiderable, yet there is little resentment at their presence, even when they hold positions of authority. As a foreigner you have to adapt to Singapore's rules, ambitions, and work culture; but you are heard respectfully, there is “give” in the system, and allowances are made. By allowances I don't mean formal exceptions, but rather a social-psychological adjustment that Singaporeans fairly routinely make to allow for the confusion or awkwardness of foreigners.

As a foreign academic in Singapore, I have built my personal and professional life in a global city. Singapore provides wonderful amenities, world-class hospitals and schools, all the goods and services I could reasonably want, and communication in the English language. Most importantly, it offers an array of international cultural

products and resources—cinema, classical music, theatre, the plastic arts, museums and galleries, fashion and sports, modern architecture, and congenial public spaces.

Foreign academics like me, and their families, want a rewarding material life but also a vibrant and resonating cultural life, leisure opportunities but also aesthetic opportunities, and intellectual stimulation but also stimulation of the spirit. Singapore has understood that as a global city it must deliver a full and engaging urban life connected to the currents and flows beyond its shores—for its own citizens as well as for the foreigners in its midst. To be a foreign academic in Singapore is to live a satisfying life in this respect too, for Singaporeans have made sure that we can have our cake and our culture too.



Kanti Bajpai

Kanti is the Wilmar Chair Professor in Asian Studies at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. He has taught at the School since 2011. His research interests are international security, India's foreign policy and national security, and South Asian politics. Prior to coming to Singapore, he taught at Oxford University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and MS University of Baroda, and held visiting appointments at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC, the University of Notre Dame, the Australian Defence Force Academy and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. From 2003 to 2009, he was Headmaster at The Doon School in India.

Connecting Communities through the Arts

SHERIDEN NEWMAN

I first moved to Singapore in February 2011 to take on a full-time professional job as a performing dance artist and dance instructor with Apsara Asia and Maya Dance Theatre. My initial thought on taking the job in Singapore was: Why Singapore, why dance in Singapore?

Why Singapore?

Honestly, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into, but I knew that in many ways this opportunity was "ticking the box" of things I wanted to do to kick-start my career in dance. It was an opportunity to learn extensively by working in another country, in dance, and to learn and experience other cultures and countries first-hand.

I have been to places I never thought I would ever go. I have received opportunities to perform and represent Singapore with Maya Dance Theatre in the United States, United Kingdom, India, Sri Lanka, Dubai, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Thailand, to name a few.

But I still love the feeling when I touch down at Changi Airport upon returning from a tour overseas, because what's amazing about being in Singapore is not only the cleanliness of the country, the wonderful food, and the amazing public transport (all of which Singapore is famous for!). It's the fact that people here always have something to share that I can learn from. Personalities from different backgrounds, cultures, upbringings, heritages, life experiences, and more are all evident in the people I come across in Singapore.

Now, four years later, I am still in Singapore. It has been an incredible journey of learning about the culture and history of Singapore and beyond, and of travelling overseas and working with artists from all over the world.

Beyond Traditional Indian Dance in Multi-cultural Singapore

By working in Singapore with Maya Dance Theatre, I have had the opportunity to learn and perform an Asian dance form, the traditional, classical Indian dance Bharatha Natyam, under the Theatre's Artistic Director, Kavitha Krishnan, and Ajith Dass. Learning Bharatha Natyam has not only taught me the technicalities and the style of the form, it has also provided a cultural induction of learning about the history of where the dance form originated, with an understanding of Indian culture, beliefs and epic stories such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the customs, rituals, and dressing. The complexity of this dance form, and the beauty of the expressions, music, costumes, accessories, footwork rhythms and strong body positions, have drawn me more into it. I admire and enjoy learning and watching Indian classical dance.

Maya Dance Theatre does, however, expand the traditional form of Bharatha Natyam into a contemporary dance form in its structure, content and movement. Being with the company has been a journey

in discovering how I can derive movement and expand the boundaries from a traditional dance without disrespecting the culture or going against its values. It has brought some challenges both in creating choreographic works and in bringing an understanding of contemporary Asian Dance without touching only the surface or looking like a traditional dance dolloped on top of contemporary music or ideas, whilst collaborating with other artists. It takes time to gather thoughts and workshop ideas, whilst looking at all elements within a performance (choreography, content, costume, music, lighting, setting, stage, etc.) to bring out the idea and intention of the choreography in a contemporary manner which today's intercultural audiences can relate to.

When taking dance productions overseas, one has to be culturally sensitive in knowing which dance choreographies the audience will relate to and which ones they will not. We have to be considerate about being appropriately dressed and behaved according to the country's cultural values. However, gaining this “cultural sensitivity” is easier to grasp through living in Singapore, where each race and culture has its own values and customs. To live together in one country, the people need to respect and understand each other's cultures. I see this daily in the country and also through personal experience in the company I have worked with. Maya Dance Theatre is made up people of many races and cultural upbringings, but still we come together and enjoy the festivities of Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, and Deepavali. The most valuable and rewarding experience has been to be with people from different backgrounds and to learn from each other.

Working and Playing in Singapore

Working in Singapore has been in an eye-opener for me. Coming from Brisbane, Australia, I have seen the immense amount of time

Singaporeans put into their work and their lifestyles. In Australia, we clock in and clock out from work, usually without any overtime. A majority of Australians usually finish work by 5:30 to 6:00 pm, and shops close around the same time. Here in Singapore, where shopping malls are open until at least 9:00 to 10:00 pm and eateries even later or 24 hours, work-life and pleasure-life are more easily available anytime, day or night. The late-night work and overtime hours, which are seen as the norm here, are in some ways positive notions. Results come out faster, more work is delivered efficiently and progress is seen. The downside of this working style, I believe, is quality time for personal time, friends and family. My concern is whether there is enough emphasis on people looking after their health and well-being. Are they also spending more money on staying out and eating out? These are a few of the culture shocks which I experienced when I first arrived in Singapore.

Now, I guess I've been caught up in the "more work, lil' sleep" bandwagon, and I do see myself achieving more, although with less personal time. It is all about how I manage and balance it.

Opportunities Abound in Singapore

Despite the longer working hours, my experience in Singapore has given me amazing insights into how to relate more to the world, with different cultures and races living and working together. Working in Singapore has allowed me to expand my potential by understanding how an efficient and fast way of working can take you further and bring results in a demanding industry. To experience the different people and cultural festivities, the different foods and treats, and even the different dance and performing arts within each culture, has been more than rewarding.

Opportunities are arising in Singapore even more so today than when I arrived, as it keeps developing and building fast. The dance industry in Singapore is expanding and continuing to improve and grow. All of this has made me want to stay just that bit longer in Singapore to continue to build my dance career and build life-long friendships.



Sheriden Newman

Sheriden, a young Australian professional dance artist, came to Singapore in 2011 to take on a new job as Principal Dancer with Maya Dance Theatre and as a full-time employee in Apsara Asia. Sheriden completed her studies in ballet and contemporary dance at the New Zealand School of Dance and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. She has performed extensively in Singapore and internationally, representing Singapore and the arts with Maya Dance Theatre in events and festivals. Sheriden also teaches dance and choreographs in schools and tertiary colleges. She was part of CONTACT festival—DiverCity 2014, and created a multi-dimensional dance work as a collaborator, choreographer and performer.

You Should Hold Up the Sky of the Land Where You Live

CYNTHIA CHANG

“Why are you here taking jobs from my people?”

I froze. It was Youth Day 2011, and we were walking along the Green Corridor when my friend, a fellow educator from another school, asked me that momentous question.

On the country’s 25th year of independence, I came to Singapore as a 9-year-old. My parents were seeking a better life for our family and a better education for me. In August that year, I drew a birthday cake for this new country I lived in and won my school’s National Day drawing competition. This young country became the land of possibility to me, one that accepted me, and so began our love affair. In two decades, I had never before felt unwelcome until that fateful day walking along the Green Corridor. Perhaps it is a testimony to how accepting Singapore had always been, that I had never experienced this earlier. After all, we/this/Singapore are/is a nation of immigrants.

“Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung.”

(“You should hold up the sky of the land where you live.”)

Zubir Said (1907-1987) cited this Malay proverb to sum up his philosophy when he was composing *Majulah Singapura* (the Singapore national anthem). I learnt about this from two of my students. Arts students are a unique lot, but these two took it to a new level. Endlessly curious and deeply appreciative of their country's history and culture, these young creative talents had stumbled upon this interesting account of one of Singapore's arts pioneers. They took their own initiative to share it with their school community at assembly, on what would have been Pak Zubir's 107th birthday. As the school sang that morning, the national anthem seemed to take on a deeper significance. I thought the proverb, in the national language no less, was inspiring and posted the story on social media.

A Singaporean friend, an arts programmer who had always been supportive of my work to nurture the *gotong royong* spirit amongst the next generation of creative talents in Singapore, responded simply that this was “just what [I had] been doing all these years”. As I read those words, big fat tears rolled down my cheeks. I couldn't help it—it felt a lifetime away from Youth Day at the Green Corridor.

Learning to Serve

I choose to serve through education, here in Singapore, because I am largely a product of this system and can identify with some of the struggles youth here continue to face. I went to school in an era when Kishore Mahbubani was asking *Can Asians Think?* and school rankings were the driving force in education. In my elite secondary school, the high stakes, exam-oriented culture resulted in the routine educational practice of: if it's not in the syllabus, don't ask questions—concentrate on acing your exams. The only thing I knew for sure was that I was miserable and craved escape, finding solace in my extra-curricular activities in the band. Fortunately, my less than stellar grades landed me in a lower ranking junior college, headed by a most enlightened

and supportive principal who was a strong supporter of out-of-classroom learning. There I became actively involved in community service, albeit ad-hoc without sustained relationship building with any community. But it was here that the seeds were sown for a sense of purpose greater than myself. I participated in my college's overseas community involvement programmes, deeply impactful experiences that would later lead me to join Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Youth Expedition Project (YEP)—then a brand-new initiative supported by the forward-thinking political and social leaders of the day. The pedagogy behind the YEP is service-learning—there is a greater purpose to learning—it is to use our learning to serve others. On the other hand, the purpose for serving was to learn from those we serve. Service-learning is a form of experiential learning—when we reflect on what we experience, this learning becomes our constructed knowledge which informs our future actions, helping us to serve better and so the cycle continues. Service-learning goes far beyond charity—it calls for us to respect the community as our teachers, to keep questioning why things are the way they are, to be mindful that we do no harm out of good intentions that don't actually meet real community needs, to ensure our service upholds human dignity; empowering those whom we serve to become better able to serve themselves and others, to respect and create space for the community to have a voice, and for the student/learner/server to also have a say in what is to be learnt. This mode of learning was new to me—there couldn't have been a more polar opposite from what I had experienced earlier in my educational journey. This approach to learning resonated with my budding sense of purpose and has been one I have adapted to every community I have worked with.

The Journey is the Destination

In my decade of designing, coordinating and facilitating service-learning projects and programmes with youth and communities, we have journeyed from senior activity centres to hospitals, from schools for people with disabilities to social enterprises, from Venus Loop at MacRitchie to the jungles of Sumatra, from shelters for children of offenders to originating villages of people who have been trafficked. Through partnering communities in service-learning, students explore and act on issues of significance to humanity, engaging in real, responsible and challenging actions for the common good. As an educator, I appreciate that service-learning transforms my role. In a class of 20, the power dynamics shift from the “teacher” as the all-powerful sole repository of knowledge and arbiter of right and wrong to that of “facilitator” of the exchange of ideas and opinions between 21 minds, each a voice valid and respected in their own right. Because there is only so much one can learn about leadership in a freezing lecture theatre. At some point of time, we need to be comfortable enabling youth to take risks, developing relationships with real individuals in our communities to provide opportunities for students and community members alike to road test theories through the school of hard knocks; making decisions that have real consequences, learning to take personal responsibility for the consequence of these choices, embracing the good, the bad and the ugly of the learning process, to develop the wisdom and resilience to be able to learn, celebrate and recover from both the mistakes and the successes, in the process developing the informed judgment, imagination and skills that our better world depends on.

Passing on a Legacy

It is Teachers' Day as I write this, and preparations for SG50 are underway. As Singapore's 50th year of independence approaches, I reflect with immense gratitude on the many pioneering educators of this country who have nurtured generations of learners, including myself. Their lessons took our classrooms from the indoors to the outdoors, from within this island nation to the shores beyond it, and have nurtured my own desire and confidence to hold up the sky of the land where I live. I have learnt to make peace with my dual identities as both insider and outsider, turning this schizophrenia into an advantage when bridging communities and cultures both within and beyond Singapore. That I am who I am and do the work I do as a service-learning practitioner, is the legacy of the many educators, both formal and non-formal, Singaporean and otherwise, whom I have had the fortune of crossing paths with and who have dedicated their lives to provide my peers and I with experiences from which to make sense of the world, to grow and to discover our own individual place and purpose. In gratitude, we endeavour to pass this spirit on to the next generation.



Cynthia Chang

Cynthia is an educator and service-learning practitioner who has served at several Singapore non-profit organisations, including the Singapore International Foundation, and taught at Raffles Institution and the School of the Arts, Singapore (SOTA). Her latest endeavour is on working service-learning into a higher education institution. Born in Red Deer, Canada to Sarawakian Malaysian parents, she has been a Singapore Permanent Resident for 25 years.

Digital Animation Takes Off in Singapore

NORASET RERKKACHORNKIAT

My experience in digital media in Singapore actually began when I was studying in Vancouver Film School (VFS) in Canada, during a conversation when the teaching assistant in my 3D animation class told me that Lucasfilm planned to open a studio in Singapore. My perception had been that Asia did not have a strong market for the animation industry, as everything related to digital media and animation seemed to be happening only in North America. It surprised me quite a lot that such a big, iconic studio would open in Asia.

Initially, I was ready to head back home to Bangkok. But when I heard that digital animation was starting to take off in Singapore, I decided to look for a job there instead. I ended up joining a game company started by an alumnus from VFS. I worked there as a computer graphics artist for a few months before deciding to pursue my animation passion at Lucasfilm Animation Singapore.

After four fantastic yet busy years as an animator at the company, I was exhausted and decided to take a break. During the break, a close friend who was a teacher at a private animation school asked me to give a talk as a guest lecturer. Soon afterwards the founder of the

school offered me a job at the school, and I started working there as a full-time lecturer, teaching 3D animation to about 40 students.

While I had never taught students before, I was attracted to the education sector. The education system in Singapore offers quite a contrast to the system I'd grown up with as a student in Thailand, as schools in Bangkok are not quite well integrated with businesses and there was no genuine support for finding a job after I graduated with a degree in Communication Arts and Graphic Design. Here in Singapore there are plenty of career fairs that really benefit the students, so I see that I could give my students the skills they would need for their work and they would have opportunities to find a career in the industry after they finished their studies.

Before long, I found out that Digipen was recruiting faculty and decided to apply for a position at that far larger school. I was offered a full-time role and have now been working as an animation lecturer at Digipen Institute of Technology for about three years.

I have to give full credit to the government for convincing Lucasfilm to come here, as the studio is the pioneer in Asian digital media and their establishment in Singapore represented the first step in opening a new era for the industry in the region. Lucasfilm's success in Singapore has also indirectly persuaded other big studios to come here, as well as to other countries in Asia. I have been fortunate to be a part of this milestone, at the start of a revolutionary new era in the Asian digital media industry.

There are a number of reasons why I feel that Singapore is the right place as a hub for the digital media industry. The country can promise stability in terms of the economy, and the infrastructure is of top quality. As the nature of the animation industry is all about a rapid pace, efficiency and globalisation, effective communication

is essential and the advantage of being faster than the competition is very important. The ability to get the job done quicker, deliver work more efficiently, and even to make sure microscopic details like uploading or downloading data take place faster are details that cannot be missed. Any animation company would want to set up shop in a location where it could take advantage of all these factors. Based on my experiences during my time in Singapore, I have to admit that this is one of the best places in Asia to take advantage of all these factors in driving market expansion.

I can see in my work and in my discussions with friends in digital media that the government really wants to keep growth going in the media arts industry. There is a palpable passion for media arts in this country, and government sponsorship has contributed to the expansion of the studios as well as of the broader market. It has been a good place to live and grow as an artist.

In the almost seven years I have been here, I have also seen a transition in the industry. The increase in population has meant that the country seems less spacious, the digital media industry has become more competitive, and jobs as an artist or animator have become harder to find. One of the challenges as an artist has been the rising cost of living, as inflation seems to have led to expenses for everything from food to property getting out of reach. Our lifestyles have changed as a result, although I am hopeful that a residential zone for artists could become a solution at some point. At the same time, the influx of people from overseas gives me more people to meet, and I thoroughly enjoy mingling with all the artists here.

Singapore has given me tremendous opportunities, far more than I believe I would have had in Bangkok. The people in this industry are more open-minded and collaborative, the digital media industry is very open to new fresh ideas, and the country is willing to create more

talent. With all that has happened so far, I can only foresee that there will be further developments—and also more challenges—in the rapidly developing digital media market.



Noraset Rerkkachornkiat

Noraset graduated with a bachelor's degree in communication arts from Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand. He began his career as a 3D artist with the Bangkok-based Thai studio Imagimax, focusing on local film and animation projects and commercials. Noraset then pursued dual diplomas in 2D and 3D animation at the Vancouver Film School. He next worked briefly at Redeye studio in Singapore as a CG supervisor, then joined Lucasfilm Singapore as a character animator and went on to work on a television series for four years. Noraset also served at 3dsense Media School as an animation lecturer and animation supervisor. He currently serves as an animation lecturer and animation project supervisor at DigiPen Institute of Technology Singapore.

Value Reengineering Care for the Elderly

GLENN D STEELE JR

The Geisinger Health System and Singapore began to work together in 2010, after I was invited by the National Healthcare Group to give a seminar and to meet with board and management leadership. We were then contacted by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health and asked to host a visit here in Pennsylvania. What followed was a series of deep interactions, with many key clinical and health policy leaders from Singapore and from Geisinger engaging each other to maximise the results of caregiving to our constituencies.

From the initial interaction with Singapore's Ministry of Health, we at Geisinger saw the benefit of "long vision"—planning based on expected changes in demographics 20-30 years in the future. From our interactions with National Healthcare Group, SingHealth, Eastern Health Alliance (EHA), Jurong Health Services and other regional health system leaders, we learnt the benefit of a strategy that would achieve the right balance between individual institutional pride and succeeding in the central commitment to serve all Singaporeans better.

From our interactions with Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Changi General Hospital, Jurong General Hospital (since renamed to Ng Teng Fong

General Hospital) and National University Hospital, we have learnt the benefit of strong leadership embedded in a strong culture of service. From our interactions with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), we have learnt the benefit of coordinated care across the post-acute care continuum and combining health needs with the social needs of an aging population. From all of these experiences, we have learnt how Singapore takes the best from itself and from us to advance its commitment to its citizens continually.

What has Singapore learnt from Geisinger? At first glance, there seems to be very little about Geisinger that would attract the attention of Singapore. We are located in rural and post-industrial Pennsylvania. We are a vertically integrated system with both care-giving and health insurance, an unusual structure in the United States. We are in a place that is really hard to get to. But once people are here, we believe Geisinger presents a kind of “Shangri-La” of healthcare innovation and quality. And apparently, after a good deal of investigation, numerous leaders in Singapore, from both the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health System, also concluded that Geisinger represented one of several optimally integrated healthcare systems in the world worth studying, and in part, worth emulating.

So what have we worked on together and what have the results been? Individual value reengineering projects have begun to transform eye care, urologic and GI (gastrointestinal) care at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and cardiac care at National University Hospital. Multiple visits by Singapore health leaders to Geisinger and Geisinger leadership visits to Singapore have transmitted our version of primary care value reengineering (the Geisinger “ProvenHealth Navigator®” approach). My involvement in the AIC board has led to a commitment to positive outcomes that cuts across the many compartmentalised management structures that tend to fragment the health and social well-being of Singaporeans as well as United States citizens. Finally, and most

aspirational, we have begun an initiative with EHA to create a “Cluster of Innovation” focused on improving quality and reducing the total cost of care for a population of Singaporeans across an broad range of frequently-experienced medical challenges.

Our first-year targets have been heart failure and hip fracture. The EHA founding members, Changi General Hospital, St. Andrew’s Community Hospital, SingHealth Polyclinics, and the Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home, as well as Singapore’s Health Promotion Board, are all working with Geisinger to bring about clinical and cultural change, and to address the needs of an aging population by adopting evidence-based standardised care and reliable workflows derived from Geisinger’s ProvenCare® models. Application of the Geisinger processes to heart failure and hip fracture in the elderly has been relabelled “Valued Care” at EHA, and EHA is developing the methodology to analyse cost of care before and after the reengineering.

In the first eight months of our efforts together, the results have been remarkable. Preoperative length of stay for fragile hip patients getting to the operating room within 48 to 72 hours has increased from 6% to approximately 30%. Cost of care analyses are underway. Evidence-based care practices are beginning to be programmed into the electronic health record, enabling reliable decision support for caregivers at the point of care. We are also extending evidence-based and consensus-based practices into post-acute rehabilitation care processes. This should begin to reduce the post-acute length of stay in rehabilitation facilities below the current level of 33 days, which will reduce costs. Not only is this post-acute stay unnecessarily long, it may be detrimental to ultimate patient outcomes. Plus, it clogs the system in the acute care facility, which then backs up into other acute care hospital bed access issues.

For heart failure, the multi-disciplinary teams are devising a continuum of best practices to determine the optimal time and place to care for each patient with symptoms, which will decrease the need for both more visits to emergency rooms and frequent re-hospitalisations at acute care facilities. Once again, the improvement in care processes and optimising the location of caregiving will benefit the patients and should open up considerable acute care bed capacity for other much-needed hospital-based intervention.

Our ultimate vision, shared by Singapore leadership and Geisinger leadership, is first to be able to prove benefit by targeted efforts such as those at EHA, and then to define a systematic way to scale and generalise throughout the other health clusters in Singapore.

In summary, the interaction between our Geisinger leaders and our new friends and colleagues in Singapore has been truly inspirational. Defining long-term health goals for Singaporeans, working to incorporate learnings from others throughout the world, and actually doing the hard work to beta test key healthcare reengineering ideas nationally, is an example to us of good governance and national commitment that we in the United States should strive for. At Geisinger, we are honoured to be a part of Singapore's good work.



Glenn D Steele Jr

Glenn is President and CEO of Geisinger Health System in Pennsylvania. Before joining Geisinger Health System in 2001, he served as Professor in the Department of Surgery at the University of Chicago, and as Vice President for Medical Affairs and Dean of the Division of Biological Sciences at the Pritzker School of Medicine. Prior to that, he was Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School, President and CEO of Deaconess Professional Practice Group, and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at New England Deaconess Hospital. Glenn received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University and his Doctor of Medicine degree from New York University. He completed his residency at the University of Colorado. He earned his PhD degree in microbiology at Lund University in Sweden.

Pursuing My Passion for Pasta

SALVATORE CARECCI

It feels surreal sometimes when I look back and realise that I have spent the last 27 years of my life in Singapore. Growing up in Italy, I had always had a fascination for things from the Orient but never had I imagined that one day I would be calling Singapore home.

I was formerly a deep-sea diver with the Italian Navy. My work brought me all around the world, and I was stationed in Brunei in 1977. With the long, gruelling hours of diving and the months spent living in diving chambers, I saw Singapore as a heavenly retreat. Occasional trips to Singapore gained me more friends. That was when I began to learn more about its people and culture.

When I first stepped into Singapore, I observed the vast difference of the country's demographics compared to other Asian countries. I was in awe of this tiny island that nurtured a good mix of people, deeply rooted in their cultures and traditions, and their immense passion for food. Truly living up to its name, "food paradise," local cuisines could be found almost anywhere. I developed a considerable liking for *roti prata* and satay, and I thought ginseng, bird's nest and chilli crab were just superb. The remarkable characteristics of the country, along with

the many great friends that I made, drew me closer to Singapore and its uniqueness.

Around 1985, during one of my frequent visits, I met my wife, Jessamine. It was love at first sight. Well, for me at least. I must say that it was rather challenging to court her back then, as she was not receptive to the idea of starting a relationship with a foreigner. One who does not easily give up, I showed her my sincerity and my easy-going nature, and together with my cooking, I managed to charm my way into her heart. My wife fell in love with Italy from the moment I brought her home. Only, at times, she was hit with bouts of loneliness, being away from family and friends. Nevertheless, she adjusted really well throughout the time she was there, while I continued to travel back and forth to wherever my job took me. My first son, Luigi, was born in 1988, and that was when I made a big decision to give up my diving job so that I could always be next to my family.

I love cooking. The smell of sautéed garlic with fresh ingredients thrown into the pan, and making others happy and satiated with my food, is what I enjoy the most. Most importantly, I love to dine amongst good company with good food and wine. 27 years ago in Singapore, you could only find authentic Italian food in fancy restaurants, in small elegant portions, at exorbitant prices. I believe that pasta, an Italian staple that can be paired with so many sauces, should be enjoyed by people from all walks of life, just like in Italy. Pasta should be made fresh for better taste and texture. It was not easy to find fresh pasta in Singapore back then, and almost everyone used dried pasta with preservatives when they cooked their pasta meals at home. I saw this as an opportunity to introduce pasta at its best to Singaporeans. If local staples like handmade Chinese noodles were so well liked, so could handmade pasta noodles like spaghetti or capellini. I also saw potential in ravioli, which could be perceived as somewhat similar to

local dumplings. I was sure then that more Singaporeans could grow to appreciate authentic Italian food.

Following my passion, I started a small pasta shop at Bukit Timah, with the initial plan to offer my customers a variety of fresh pasta for home cooking. It was a charming neighbourhood area where I could prospectively acquire regulars. My Singaporean in-laws were very supportive of my decision and assisted me in so many aspects. The shop had a little factory showcasing the production of handmade pasta, with just three dining tables for sampling of cooked dishes. I wanted to give my customers the real taste of Italy. The response I got was one that I did not expect. Customers who were impressed with my food kept coming back, and as word got around, more and more people started streaming in. As the demand for my fresh pasta grew, I had to expand my shop, convert it purely to dining, and set up my factory in another location. Hearty portions at affordable prices were the formula to my success.

I have an affinity for the sea, evidently developed during my career stint in the Italian Navy. The advantage of living in Singapore is its sunny weather. I can swim whenever I want. I find it calming to be near water, so there was not a moment of hesitation when I was presented with the opportunity to set up my next outlet by the Singapore River. Boat Quay, a place of historical value, located in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the Central Business District, was perfect for my business. Pasta Fresca was one of the first batch of pioneers that kick-started F&B along Boat Quay. There was no outdoor dining at that time, so I presented to the relevant authorities this new idea, and al fresco dining at Boat Quay became possible from then on. Another fond memory of the Singapore River would be the time when I imported two gondolas from Venice named Romeo and Juliet. The gondolas made their rounds in the Singapore River with two Italian gondoliers serenading and ferrying my delighted customers.

It is easy to set up an Italian food business in Singapore, but sustaining the business requires more than just good food and service. One must be able to push boundaries, be bold and take calculated risks. I have seen many Italian restaurants close due to market saturation, and my business has had its own share of similar setbacks. However, I am truly happy and blessed that till now, we are still going strong.

My sons, Luigi and Vittorio, have been raised as true Singaporeans because I believe in the good values and mindset of its people. Similar to the principles I live by, Singaporeans are hardworking, resilient and very enterprising. Settling down in Singapore was the best thing I have done in my life. There has never been a moment of regret. It is the place where my most wonderful experiences are and it has allowed me to lead a fulfilling life pursuing my passion.

It is truly a dream come true.



Salvatore Carecci

Born in Minervino Di Lecce, Apulia, Italy, Salvatore Carecci grew up with a family who owned several farming lands. His hardworking father managed the cultivation and production of olive, wheat and fruits with the assistance of the young Salvatore. Salvatore always dreamed of what it would be like to be able to see the world and, with the desire to travel and also his love for the sea, he enlisted in the Italian Navy at the age of 15. It was when he met his Singaporean wife that he decided to settle down to pursue his passion for food. Salvatore started his business in Singapore with an Italian restaurant of only three tables. He is the CEO of Pasta Fresca, which serves authentic South Italian food.

Going Green

LANCE OUREDNIK

Having been a general manager for several hotels, I have lived in numerous countries and I can safely say that Singapore is one of the most dynamic cities I have lived in, well-equipped with outstanding infrastructure and a highly talented workforce, driven by efficient, skilled individuals. What drew me to this city was more than just opening an upscale hotel, but more so introducing the Westin brand in Marina Bay, a new development which seamlessly extends from the existing Central Business District at Raffles Place.

The downtown precinct now sees numerous upcoming developments, and it has opened up a whole new lifestyle, with mixed-use developments that encourage live-work-play communities. It is an exciting time not only for the city but also for The Westin Singapore, which is the first hotel in Singapore to be situated in a mixed-use development.

The dual nature of the complex, with the hotel located within an office complex, presented some initial operational challenges during the construction phase. Each component of the building had to be looked at individually—mechanical systems and facilities had to be discussed to determine which would be separated, for example, and which would be shared between the hotel and offices. But we now enjoy a myriad of

amenities within a stone's throw from the hotel, and we have already celebrated our first anniversary.

Looking beyond building a reputation as a world-class city and a highly efficient economic environment, there has been a growing shift towards sustainable living. One of the first projects we embarked on at the hotel was a collaboration with a local renewable energy enterprise, Alpha Biofuels, and with Wearnes Automotive, a company with a fleet of luxury biodiesel-powered limousines, including two Jaguar XJ sedans. Green biodiesel fuel will be obtained exclusively from recycling waste cooking oil generated by the hotel, thereby forming a self-sustaining “waste-to-energy” loop. It was fitting that Alpha Biofuels’ Green Luxury initiative made its debut at the hotel because five years ago, Asia Square Tower 2 was constructed with cranes powered by biodiesel that Alpha Biofuels recycled from 500 tonnes of waste cooking oil, sourced from various establishments in the Central Business District.

This Green Luxury project, which began running from the day the hotel welcomed its first guests in November 2013, offers several environmental benefits. Each kilogram of biodiesel fuel used produces 65 per cent, or 4.11 kilograms, less greenhouse gases over its life cycle compared to the same quantity of ultra-low-sulphur diesel fuel, according to research conducted by the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR). The life cycle of each energy source refers to all stages of its product life, from raw material extraction through processing, distribution and disposal. Furthermore, the 7 per cent biodiesel/93 percent diesel composite that powers the Green Luxury fleet emits 95 percent less particulate matter than ultra-low-sulphur diesel fuel, according to the same A*STAR study. The project ensures that hotel’s waste cooking oil will be recycled in an environmentally friendly manner, all at a lower cost than the current price of diesel at the pump.

The hotel generates about 7,800 kilograms of waste cooking oil in a year, which will produce enough biodiesel to help power the two Jaguar limousines over the approximately 150,000 kilometres that the hotel estimates the fleet will cover each year. The waste cooking oil was initially refined at Alpha Biofuels' plant in Tuas, but the installation of a micro-refinery on the fifth floor of the hotel has allowed the entire process to be completed without leaving the building.

At the end of the day, we are committed to caring for our planet and doing more to consume less. We embrace our responsibility for environmental stewardship and continually look at ways of integrating leading environmental practices and sustainability principles into our business operations. This initiative provides an innovative opportunity for us to minimise waste and conserve natural resources while delivering exceptional guest experiences.

Singapore has, and always will, attract leisure and corporate travellers from all around the world. It is globally well connected with an exciting melting pot of cultures, and a thriving economic hub with some of the finest hospitality establishments. With all the new and upcoming developments, we are truly excited as we make our way to the forefront of global travel and tourism.



Lance Ourednik

Lance is the General Manager of The Westin Singapore, a hotel that opened in November 2013. In his current role, Lance spearheads the operations of The Westin Singapore and is driving its post-opening phase. Originally from New Zealand, Lance has more than 39 years of experience in the hospitality space. In a career with Starwood spanning 25 years, he has held appointments across New Zealand, Australia, China, Malaysia, India and now Singapore. Most recently, he was the General Manager of The Westin Mumbai Garden City. Lance also has more than 13 years of experience with the Sheraton brand in cities such as Beijing, Guilin, Xiamen and Shenzhen. A keen follower of Formula One, Lance has also travelled widely.

The Heart and Soul of Clockwork Singapore

KAVITA CHOUDHRY

Before I came to Singapore as director of the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) Southeast Asian regional office from 2010 to 2014, I knew very little about the place, except that most Indians travelling there never came back without buying some electronic gadgets.

When I landed in Singapore and took my first step out of the airport, I was surprised to see how orderly things were. I soon found that this orderliness pervaded every aspect of life, whether work or personal. Just to cite two examples, I had my belongings air-freighted to Singapore and remember being amazed at how easily and quickly everything was processed, as I got my things in less than two days after they arrived in Singapore. The government departments were also efficient—it was surprising how quickly I got my employment pass.

With this level of efficiency, it is not hard to imagine why Indian companies favour Singapore as a base for their regional or international operations, or why Indians make a beeline for living and working here.

One of the CEOs who had been on a delegation to Singapore made it a point to tell me upon his return, “You know, in Singapore, it’s

like clockwork. At meetings, we started on time, ended on time, the next meeting began on time...” That experience in Singapore left a very good impression and is consistently what I have experienced in working with most Singaporean organisations.

Having lived and worked in Singapore, my experience is of being culture-shocked by Singapore’s efficiency. The efficiency of the bureaucracy is reflected in their responsiveness. Let me share one instance. In a meeting with a senior bureaucrat, we had taken up the issue of certain categories of companies such as IT firms needing visas quickly in order to deploy personnel for urgent client projects. The representative of Singapore’s Immigration and Checkpoints Authority called us the very next day to set up a meeting to discuss and resolve the issues, making the first move before we had even contacted them.

While it is true that you could find business environments in many other countries that are similar in efficiency and productivity, there are aspects of Singapore that you cannot find anywhere, such as the confluence of cultures in Singapore. To get a feel of the “real” Singapore, you have to look beyond its order and efficiency, and dig a little deeper.

The Singapore of 40 years ago was not as it is today. It has moved swiftly from a Third World country to a First World country. But in that transition, one can lose sight of a few things. This makes it all the more important for Singaporeans and foreigners alike to be made aware of their roots. One must scratch a little deeper to see what the real Singapore is. That is why I went on many exploratory trips while living in Singapore.

I was particularly fascinated by the Peranakan culture, of which Singapore, together with some parts of Malaysia, is the birthplace.

“Peranakan” refers to a fusion of predominantly Chinese and Malay cultures that originated from and thrived in the Straits of Malacca. Peranakan houses, architecture, cuisine, dress, designs, jewellery, weddings and other traditional and culturally rich elements are no longer as conspicuous or prevalent in modern day Singapore as they probably used to be once, having been replaced by a more Westernised culture, but are carefully preserved in places like the Peranakan Museum. To a foreigner, a visit to the Museum provides a rare and captivating glimpse into the world of the Peranakans.

Another unique place to learn more about Singapore, its history and the early confluence of cultures here, is Bukit Brown cemetery. A place that combines heritage and nature, Bukit Brown is a clear demonstration that Singapore is not a soulless brick and mortar business hub. There, history beckons from the simplest brick graves of ordinary Singaporeans to the magnificent burial sites of famous Singaporeans like Ong Sam Leong on the highest hill, complete with stone Sikh guards, guardian lions, stone carvings of the 24 stories of Filial Piety and beautiful tiles.

Just one visit with the well-informed guides, and suddenly the names of MRT stations and roads come to life. That is when one understands the people, the history and the stories behind place names like Boon Lay, Sam Leong Road, Boon Tat Road, Hong Lim Park, Nee Soon and Joo Chiat. What seems like just any name suddenly becomes a person with a unique and important role in shaping Singapore’s history. This is a unique burial place with great historical significance in modern day Singapore.

Some other gems of Singapore’s early immigrant history, culture and traditions are hidden away in the Chinese clan associations. In the past year, some clan associations have started dusting off their treasures and opening them up to the public. These places offer

important insights about the history of each clan, their traditions, their contribution to cultural and philanthropic activities and their inextricable links to shaping Singapore's history.

One fine example I had the opportunity to visit is the historical Kong Chow clan association building on New Bridge Road, with four floors dedicated to the origin and migration of the Xinhui people from China's Guangdong province to Singapore. It also features exhibits on early pioneers of the community, Cantonese Opera, lion and dragon dances, masks and costumes, deities and martial arts. It houses several antique Chinese artifacts and is a wonderful place to learn about the cultures of Singapore.

India and Singapore have seen a lot of positive exchanges, especially in the business arena. But at this point, I believe the balance is tilted in the direction of Indians being more familiar with Singapore than the other way round. I hope to see more collaboration to build mutual understanding through programmes such as student visits and internship tie-ups with the Singaporean universities. In fact, Singaporean Universities such as Singapore Management University, the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University regularly send groups of students on study trips to India, and CII works closely with them to expose them to the Indian business environment, to visit factories in India and to see what some of the best Indian companies are doing. Through this we hope to enable a better appreciation of different facets of India, including its business, culture and history.

Our objective is to raise the level of awareness among Singaporeans. We are also working with a number of agencies in Singapore to bring Singapore's best practices to India. There is a lot that Singapore does that we can replicate, such as technical education, teaching skills in the

workforce, waste water recycling and water management. Singapore has given us some great examples.



Kavita Choudhry

Kavita graduated from University Business School, Punjab University, Chandigarh, with a master's degree in economics and in personnel management and industrial relations. She has worked with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) since 1995. She first served at the CII Northern Region headquarters at Chandigarh as Deputy Director. She then joined the World Economic Forum as Senior Manager for membership and government relations for India and South Asia. After returning to CII, Kavita became Director in the International Division in New Delhi, then served as Head of CII's South East Asia Regional Representative Office in Singapore. She is currently Regional Director for Europe in CII's international division in New Delhi.

Recollection: Initiation of the First Singapore Biennale

FUMIO NANJO

When I was asked to organise the first-ever Singapore Biennale in 2006, I decided to accept the invitation because I felt that we needed a major contemporary art platform with a new and international perspective in the middle of Asia. Before the Biennale, no major international contemporary art exhibition visible from outside had been held in Singapore. Even though I could not imagine how the event would turn out, I wanted to take on this challenge because I really enjoyed working in Singapore and had a good time whenever I went there. In order to make the event a success, I rented a small room near Orchard Road and went to Singapore every month for two years.

When I started working on the Biennale, I thought it was important to select a variety of types of artists, while still resorting to a comprehensive concept to bring them together. There are many different modes of expression in contemporary art: painting, sculpture, installation, video, performance, media art and even art with biotechnology. I had been enjoying them all for many years and

wanted to share them with as many people as possible. To do so, I tried to select a diverse range of styles for the Singapore Biennale so that more people would get interested in contemporary art.

On the other hand, since we were holding the event in the centre of Asia, I thought it was important to invite as many artists as possible from Asia—and especially from Singapore—to participate in the event. As a result, one-third of the 95 artists in the Biennale were Asian, including 12 artists from Singapore. We also had artists from the Middle East and Central Asia who were not commonly known in the art world at that time.

Another important aspect was where to hold the event. Because a large enough space was not available in Singapore at the time, we decided to use a number of temporary spaces.

The first site we selected was City Hall, which is one of the most significant historical buildings in the city. We felt that this old but stately venue was the best place for the exhibition. A second venue was at Tanglin Camp, which used to be a military facility. While the building was very old and needed a major renovation, it was surrounded by plenty of greenery and visitors could experience nature even in the middle of Singapore. We also used the National Museum and the National Library to exhibit fragile and valuable artworks.

The most unique sites of all were spaces in the city centre which had been transformed from religious facilities into exhibition galleries. They included Christian churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, Islamic mosques and Jewish synagogues. We originally thought we would not be able to use these former religious facilities for exhibiting art, but with strong support from the government, all the facilities accepted an exhibition of contemporary art for the Biennale. When there are many religious conflicts around the world, seeing the religious sites

collaborating for an exhibition of contemporary art gave us hope for the possibility of peace and coexistence through cultural activities.

We established the theme for the first Biennale as “Belief,” because the beliefs which vary from person to person were not only the cause of disputes but also formed the basis for peace and progress at the same time. Even though Belief can have both positive and negative aspects, it is one of the most important words for understanding today’s reality.

What is the mission of a major international exhibition such as the Singapore Biennale? I think it is to provide an opportunity for many people to share their own views freely on society, culture, technology and values in the contemporary world. Art may sometimes be for fun and pleasure, and at other times it may be a way to present critical and creative views on the world. It can also help us to recall our identity and history, which is connected with national pride and presents a very personal vision.

Many of the works at the Biennale were created in Singapore, which made them site-specific. Some passed down people’s personal histories, and some recalled the history of a specific site and event. Given the number of religious facilities involved in the Biennale, we could also see how multi-cultural Singaporean society is and how rich its history is.

Shortly after the successful conclusion of the first Biennale in 2006, I was asked to be the director for the second Singapore Biennale in 2008. This was another tough job, because the frames and visions needed to be consistent with the first Biennale while still presenting totally different experiments for the audience in the second one. I selected only three sites for the 2008 exhibition, and the theme was changed from “Belief” to “Wonder.”

The Biennale is still going on every other year, though with different exhibition spaces, concepts, themes and directors. I believe that I contributed to its start and development by showing a new experience and context of international art of today.

What is important today is “being open” and “sharing.” More specifically, it is important for us to share our precious assets, called knowledge and creativeness, so that we can live a better life. We are in the era of a “maker movement,” where each person is creating something unique. A wealth of art produces a creative society. Under these circumstances, and because art is at the core of creativity, it is important for each society and community to know what is going on in other parts of the global art scene. Indeed, art has evolved from being just a personal hobby to becoming an integral part of society. The Biennale has delivered this message from Singapore to the whole of Southeast Asia, and to the world. I hope it will continue to be very successful in the future.

Asian art is now in the midst of further development, creating new aesthetics that we have never seen before and thereby contributing to development of art around the world. Having played a prominent role in this development, the Singapore Biennale has gone beyond benefitting Singapore and now plays a key role in enhancing the world’s culture.



Fumio Nanjo

Fumio has been the Director of Mori Art Museum in Tokyo since November 2006. Born in Tokyo, he graduated from Keio University in the faculty of Economics and Letters (Aesthetics / Art History). His achievements include being Commissioner of the Japan Pavillion at the Venice Biennale (1997), Commissioner at the Taipei Biennale (1998), Member of Jury Committee of the Turner Prize (1998), Artistic Director of the Yokohama Triennale 2001, Jury Member of the Golden Lion Prize of the Venice Biennale (2005) and Artistic Director of the Singapore Biennale (2006/2008). Publications include *Asian Contemporary Art Report: China, India, Middle East and Japan* and *A Life with Art*.

A Constant Sojourn

SHERMAN ONG

Singapore has always been like another town in the south, in my mental scheme of things.

As I child I would travel down with my parents from Malacca to Singapore to visit my maternal grandfather during the school holidays. Grandpa, Second Grandma, her sister and her children stayed at a rented apartment above a row of shop houses in Geylang, next to what became Aljunied Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station.

The sojourn would include having breakfast opposite the apartment at a big hawker centre (now the open space opposite Aljunied MRT station), eating grandma's home-cooked food and spending time visiting places like the Zoo, Haw Par Villa, the Van Kleeef Aquarium, Orchard Road and the 'old' Sentosa Island.

When I was in my teens I would visit Singapore on my own and stay for a few days, exploring the city by bus. I was caught for jaywalking once but managed to get away by showing my Malaysian Identity Card.

Each visit was always a sojourn. A constant sojourn.

My parents were already mulling the various push and pull factors between Malaysia and Singapore for my further studies. Being civil servants, Singapore was one of the few options within their reach, and I moved to Singapore for my studies.

So, at 18, I left home for Singapore to chart a new chapter of my life. The sojourn became longer after my 'O' Levels, when I got an ASEAN Scholarship to study at Hwa Chong Junior College. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this same path was taken by my forefather Tan Kim Seng in the 1820s.

Tan Kim Seng and his Descendants

Tan Kim Seng (b. 1805 - d. 14 March 1864, Malacca, Malaya), a third-generation Straits Chinese (Peranakan), was a prominent merchant and philanthropist. Tan received his education in a private Chinese school in Malacca and learned English and Dutch while attending a mission school. In the 1820s, Tan came to Singapore, where he made a fortune as a trader.

A prominent philanthropist, Tan left behind memorials of his philanthropic acts in Singapore and Malacca. Tan built a road in River Valley which still carries his name—Kim Seng Road. This road led through Tan's property in the area. Several other streets, such as Beng Swee Place, Jiak Kim Street and Jiak Chuan Street, are named after his descendants. Kim Seng Bridge across the Singapore River, carrying Kim Seng Road from River Valley Road to Havelock Road, was first constructed by Tan and was named after him. The cost of building the original bridge, which was opened by W.O. Cavenagh, Governor of the Straits Settlements, was defrayed by Tan.

I didn't know about this part of my family history until later in life, when I spent more time talking with Grandpa and listening to his stories about Malacca and Singapore and the connection between these two port cities.

My maternal grandmother was a descendant of Tan Kim Seng. She was born in Singapore but was sent back to Malacca during the Japanese occupation. How my grandpa met my grandma and got married would be better left for another novella. Suffice it to say that coming from a humble background, he married into a life of leisure and excess. Not having much to do except to collect rent from properties for his mother-in-law, he spent time gallivanting and his nights frequenting the bars and dancehalls. He always used to say that he was sitting on a platter of gold and he threw it all away.

Things eventually came to a head with his wife's family and he decided to move from Malacca to Singapore. In Singapore in the mid-1950s, he drove a taxi and started a new life with a dance hostess, Second Grandma. He became a Singaporean when Singapore got her independence.

My Path in Singapore

My constant sojourn took on the opposite polarity as I started my legal studies at the National University of Singapore. During term breaks and the festive season, I would make trips back to visit my parents in Malacca, or sometimes they would come to Singapore for a few days to stay with Grandpa.

After graduation and working as a lawyer for a few years, I decided to take up permanent residency in Singapore. At that time I didn't have a particular reason other than the fact that I had family ties on both

sides of the causeway. Singapore offered me opportunities in my field of practice that I would not have had if I had remained in Malaysia.

Recently, after reading Tan Kim Seng's will in the National Archives of Singapore, I began to see the interconnections between Singapore and Malacca/Malaysia, with Singapore's success due to its location on the trade routes between East and West, after the decline of Malacca as a port city.

Tan Kim Seng started the prominent trading and shipping company Kim Seng & Co. in 1820 and became very wealthy by 1840. His grandson Tan Jiak Kim together with Tan Keong Saik and Lee Cheng Yan formed the Straits Steamship Company, the first joint Singapore-European shipping enterprise, in 1890, which eventually became part of Keppel Corporation.

For me, the narrative of modern Singapore is invariably intertwined with her past and the larger hinterland of Malaya.

In my time living in Singapore for the past two decades, I have found Singaporeans to be very practical and pragmatic. Perhaps the psyche of our forefathers, who left the Southern coast of China to eke out a better life in the new frontiers of the South China Seas, is still ingrained in our DNA.

Invariably my conversations with pragmatists in my family ring with an uncanny echo about what Grandpa said about "throwing it all away" when they realised that I abandoned my training in law, thus forfeiting the opportunity to make lots of money, and to lead a life that is full of uncertainty and happenstance, madness and greatness, laughter and forgetting, passion and love.

Perhaps I was just following my heart like what my forefathers did before me by leaving Malacca to gamble with life in Singapore. But I always kept the passion for both places alive, just like my forebears who kept a lover in every port of call, at the risk of taking liberties on their behalf.

There is a thin line between existing and living. Some people call it passion. I call it art.

So after 25 years of this constant sojourn, for me, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, “Malaysia is my country and Singapore is my city.”



Sherman Ong

Sherman is a filmmaker, photographer and visual artist. His practice has always centred on the human condition and our relationships with others within the larger milieu. Winner of the 2010 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu Photography Award, Sherman has premiered works in art biennales, film festivals and museums around the world. He is a founding member of 13 Little Pictures and also serves on the committee of the Singapore International Photography Festival and as an educator at schools and universities. His works are in the collections of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Singapore Art Museum and the Seoul Arts Centre Korea. He won the Prudential Eye Award for Photography in 2015.

The Botanic Gardens are Singapore's True Heritage

NIGEL P TAYLOR

Today, Singapore is one of the greenest of major world cities, but it was not always like this. During the 19th century, most of the island's dense cover of tropical forest gave way to shifting cultivation of gambier and pepper, which was soon replaced by low-grade secondary vegetation, which was in turn converted into plantations of new crops such as rubber and tapioca. Singapore in those days was not the clean and well-ordered place it is today, and its rural hinterland was feared both for ferocious tigers and for villages ruled by local headmen. While the hinterlands were thus not the place for secure relaxation for weary city workers and their families, subscribers of the Agri-Horticultural Society began to change that outlook in the 1860s by cultivating a garden in the Tanglin District, just on the edge of town, that was to become the renowned Singapore Botanic Gardens (SBG). A century later, SBG became the means of greening the new nation according to Lee Kuan Yew's vision, supplying plants and expertise in furtherance of the Garden City movement. Another half century later, Singapore has become the City in a Garden, with SBG remaining a beloved green civic space and with visits to the Gardens having grown to 4.5 million per year.

SBG is both a very special green space and a place with a poorly appreciated but rich heritage, closely reflecting Singapore's own history since the earliest times. The preserved rainforest, for example, reminds us of the great trees that formerly clothed the whole island. The delightfully informal English landscape, designed to exploit the "capabilities" of the site's natural features, is an inheritance from the British colonial era. The collections of exotic plants, including some Heritage Trees, are the result of global exchanges and trade. The many plant species have been tested for their economic potential, with some having changed the economic fortunes of the Southeast Asian region. Last but not least, hundreds of hybrid orchids, whose genesis was pioneered in the Gardens, have become the strongest part of Singapore's world identity and are the first plants visitors encounter upon entering Changi Airport's arrival corridors.

Upon arriving at SBG in September 2011, I began to carefully explore the site and all its assets. Soon I came across Symphony Lake, out of which sticks an enigmatic concrete arrow pointing northwest. I asked various long serving staff what this was, but no one knew. Much later, I came across an article in the Straits Times from December 1979, with a picture of the arrow and a sign explaining its significance. One hundred years ago, the site was where scientists measured the Earth's magnetism. The arrow points to Greenwich, London—enigma solved!

Arguably, though, I think SBG's features, which in terms of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention could be said to demonstrate "Outstanding Universal Value" and which are amongst the reasons for the Gardens' future inscription on the World Heritage list, are less hard-wired into the Singaporean memory than the personal connections that so many citizens have with the site. The Gardens have become the place where it is customary to meet friends, see boyfriends or girlfriends, be with family young and old, take exercise, or just wander in a Shangri-la

seemingly far away from the city's noise and bustle. SBG is where memories of youthful excursions with mum and dad as well as proposals of marriage and family celebrations are fondly remembered and duly recorded in photographs. Upon starting work in SBG in 2011, I was surprised upon arrival to see so many young couples in wedding gear being photographed by professionals, and I wondered where their families were. It took me a while to realise that these beautifully attired individuals were not yet newlyweds! Having now understood this cultural learning point, I am delighted that they come so regularly to adorn the Gardens. Importantly, SBG is also where the incipient republic's multi-racial culture was launched and developed in August 1959, when newly-elected Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew chose it as the obvious venue for a series of events that showed the island's ability to achieve its own identity. No wonder, then, that the Singapore five-dollar bill has the famous tembusu tree from Lawn E of the Botanic Gardens on its reverse, symbolising these elements of national culture and the Garden City movement. Preserving this great tree for future generations, using the skill and expertise of SBG's proud and dedicated staff, is a duty that one cannot take too seriously. It is equal to the duty of ensuring that everyone who enters the site has a good understanding of its history. Whenever I get a five-dollar bill in my change, I am reluctant to spend it—I like to have a bunch of them in my pocket to show people how important the Gardens are to Singaporeans!

Why does this matter? Isn't it enough that visitors can just relax and take in the view or use the familiar paths and spaces for exercise, no matter the significance of the surroundings? Isn't it possible to absorb the site's living heritage merely by osmosis, through its colours, smells, textures and gradients? Yes, of course, but then if you know what its purpose has been, of the science and plant conservation endeavour that goes on unseen behind-the-scenes, of the age of its great trees and landscape layout, then its value is immeasurably more and the

satisfaction of appreciating this lovingly preserved cultural landscape all the greater. Help in the form of interesting and informative signage, volunteer guides with engaging stories to tell, and well-briefed teachers to lead their young charges through what is a good surrogate for a truly natural environment, enables visitors to appreciate how biodiversity cannot be optional or left to chance. The young are those who will be responsible for the future of the planet. Green spaces such as the Botanic Gardens, with rainforest and myriad plantings, are the ideal places to reconnect the city dweller with the ecosystem that he exploits so easily without seeing the damage being done. Let the Gardens tell the story of being green and how we must strive to live our lives in a more sustainable fashion.

One day recently I had committed to give a tour of SBG for one of my former students, Masaya, who had but a couple of hours before he had to catch a flight home. The morning dawned cloudy and soon it began to rain, getting ever heavier. Undeterred, we set off in my buggy. I had told Masaya how busy the Gardens were every morning, but the heavy rain instead meant that they were deserted. But not quite, since rounding a corner we encountered a Dutch couple with umbrellas yet completely soaked. I asked if they would like a lift in my buggy, but to my delight they declared that the Gardens were lovely in the rain and they would continue on foot.

The World Heritage Convention is often and understandably seen as the business of the governments of the more than 190 states that are signatories. Whilst it is certainly true that governments need to deal with UNESCO, it should be understood that World Heritage is primarily for the people and especially for the “ESC” of UNESCO, which stand for Education, Science and Culture rather than for tourism-driven earnings. SBG is very fortunate in being a largely uncharged-for attraction, open to all and welcoming of all. It clearly has strengths in educational value and scientific endeavour, and a rich cultural history

which historical research has amply revealed. Now we must hope that Singapore's first bid as a World Heritage Site has the power to raise the nation's understanding of the precious green space it has in its midst and to ensure its preservation and celebration indefinitely.



Nigel P Taylor

Nigel is the Director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens. He began his career at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (United Kingdom), as a horticultural taxonomist and subsequently led a team that saw Kew Gardens inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003. He is currently working on the same objective for the Singapore Botanic Gardens. He is the author of eight books and more than 240 publications.

What It's Like to Live in Singapore

“I Want to Give Back”

RAYMUNDO YU JR

Singapore—An Anchor

I came to Singapore in January 1983, sent here by Merrill Lynch to take a look at a commercial bank they had purchased.

As business grew, my job, managing most of Merrill's businesses outside the US, required frequent and extensive travel. When you travel so much, it is always good to come back to where things are more structured, where you know your children are in a school where there are no illegal drugs, where you can be in the car and on the way home in 20 minutes after you disembark from the plane, and where you know that things work. Singapore was for me an anchor—I felt safe placing my family here while I was trying to establish myself.

Initial Adjustments

Having grown up in the Philippines, and having lived in the United States and London, moving to Singapore took some getting used to. For instance, Singapore at the time had only four television stations. I have always been a huge fan of National Basketball Association (NBA) games in the United States. So, when we first came here, I had to subscribe to a service that would deliver videotapes of NBA

games because, unlike now, I could not get certain sports channels in those days.

The Singapore skyline was also very different then. There weren't a lot of the high-rise buildings that we now see; it was more quaint. But evolution also has its advantages. We now enjoy better facilities. I find that Singapore today is one of the very few places in the world where we can enjoy a range of multi-ethnic foods, ranging from the very high-end to the food at our ubiquitous hawker centres, at all times of day or night. I can have fish-head curry and *masala* chicken today, *nasi lemak* the next. Or I can choose Chinese or very fine Japanese cuisine. This, I find, is really unique about Singapore.

Singapore's Unique Brand of Hospitality

We were very fortunate to have had colleagues who generously gave their time to help us settle in. These Singaporeans even opened the doors of their homes to us. It helped us transition to life in Singapore substantially and I learned from these experiences. That's why, from the early 90s till today, we have opened our home every Sunday to children of family friends from the Philippines who work or study here. As transients or new migrants to Singapore, they need the comfort of a home away from home. My Singaporean colleagues did this for me when we first arrived; it is only right that we should pay it forward.

“Singapore has been Good to Me. I Want to Give Back.”

In 2008, in a period of transition in my career and while considering my options, I began thinking, “Hey, Singapore has been good to me. I want to give back.” I had been involved in charities overseas, especially in the Philippines. But here in Singapore, I had not really done active charity work except in charitable giving.

At that time, Caritas Singapore, the social and community arm of the Catholic Church in Singapore, approached me. They explained that although the Catholic Church had 21 charities under the Caritas Singapore umbrella at the time, they had not touched those who were mentally or physically challenged. They offered me the choice of setting up and running a charity for either of those beneficiaries. In Singapore, there are about 60,000 people registered as being physically challenged, but I believe the actual figure could be higher, since some may not have registered. This was an important cause, and I accepted their request.

ABLE—Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations: Guiding Principles and First Steps

The mission of our charity—Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations (ABLE)—is to take people who have acquired physical disabilities, rehabilitate them, retrain them, and reintroduce them back into the workforce, within six months.

In doing charity, I am guided by these principles: we must uphold the dignity of beneficiaries; recipients have to feel empowered and co-responsible for this journey and not dependent on us for aid. With these in mind, I recruited like-minded board members who have a solid corporate resume and a passion to improve the lives of the physically challenged.

Two such persons on my Board are Mr Soh Yew Hock and Mr Quek Khor Ping. Both Singaporeans' passion for the cause of the disabled was fired in the crucible of personal tragedies—Yew Hock had polio when he was young, and Khor Ping suffered the loss of a close family member to muscular dystrophy. They are therefore very passionate for the cause of the disabled and are still serving with me on the Board

today—Yew Hock as vice chairman and chairman of the audit committee, bringing on board his expertise as a certified public accountant, while Kor Ping heads all our projects. Together with the rest of ABLE, we serve all segments of the Singapore community regardless of racial or religious backgrounds.

Centre for Physically Challenged, Respite Centre and Agape Village

We joined forces with the Handicapped Welfare Association and set up a centre for the physically challenged to train them in marketable skills such as office administration and architectural drawing. We also offer certification courses such as the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry certification, and for skills in software like Photoshop and Computer Aided Design. The Centre has so far served more than 300 clients, of which we placed more than 180 into jobs. Between October 2013 and August 2014, we provided 1,300 transportation trips and 423 rehabilitation sessions, and we achieved a job placement rate of more than 50 per cent.

In 2013, we started a respite centre for caregivers of the physically challenged, in partnership with the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Singapore. At this centre, caregivers can enjoy massage sessions, board games, cooking lessons, stress management courses and excursions. We also provide homecare services for 13 families.

There is still much to be done. Looking ahead, I am very excited about the Agape Village, a social services centre that Caritas Singapore is building in Toa Payoh. ABLE will be one of the largest tenants in a five-storey building, which will house a rehabilitation centre and a respite centre, with capacity to touch a larger pool of beneficiaries.

ABLE is qualified as an Institution of a Public Character, which means donors are able to claim tax relief for donations to this charity. For this, I am very grateful as this helps us in attracting donations and results in a higher quantum of giving, which can benefit more Singaporeans.

Partnership with Firms and Singaporeans

On this journey, we have partnered organisations that help raise funds and create awareness: BreadTalk gives two months every year for us to do fundraising at their outlets, Uma Uma Ramen donates money for every bowl of ramen ordered, and The Moving Body provides physiotherapy and training. Some corporations have also adopted us as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility efforts. I am very grateful that the Singaporean community has been very willing to open their cheque books and to volunteer their free time to partner us on this journey.

What Gives Me the Biggest Joy?

I realised that when we do charitable work, we should create an environment where the recipient of the charity feels empowered and co-responsible for the path of recovery as you take them from the fringes of society and bring them back to mainstream. When I see a beneficiary in employment, when I see them contributing to society and to their family, when I see caregivers taking a break at the Respite Centres, smiling while playing board games that is what brings me the biggest joy.

Singapore is Home

For us Singapore is home. My children, having lived for years in the United States, have come back to Singapore. My son has completed

National Service because this is home to him too. Since I first stepped foot here in January 1983, Singapore has been good to me. That's why I have always felt that I have to give back.



Raymundo Yu

Raymundo is the Asia Pacific Chairman at Threadneedle Investments and a member of the executive committee. He previously worked in various roles for Merrill Lynch International, eventually becoming Chairman for the Asia Pacific region. Raymundo has a BSc in business administration from Antoneo De Davao University in the Philippines and an MBA from the American Graduate School of Management (Thunderbird) in the United States. He serves as a member of the fundraising committee at Caritas Singapore, on the board of fellows at Thunderbird and as Chairman of Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations.

Inspiring Singapore through Art

ANDREW MEAD

January 1996. Pearson International Airport, Toronto, Canada:

I'm sitting on a plane waiting for the “de-icing” machine to clear yet another winter snowstorm off the back of the 747, excited to be making my very first trip to Southeast Asia for my job interview at the Land Transport Authority. Outside, the temperature is minus 15 degrees.

24 hours later, like every first-time visitor to Singapore, the humidity hits me like a brick. How can a place be so hot in the middle of January? Not long after, tired and jetlagged, I'm having my first “Uniquely Singapore” experience—an interview facing no less than 12 people!

It is hard to recall exactly what I said back then, but it must have been something right, as I was offered a three-year contract that was to be just the start of the most exciting and challenging 17 years of my life.

As a transit architect, my job has taken me to many places, and Singapore has been by far the city in which I have worked the longest

and the place I still consider home (I'm a Katong boy at heart). Over the years, I worked on all of the new MRT lines: North East Line, Circle Line, Downtown Line, and Thomson Line. The experiences and challenges are numerous, but a few aspects stand out.

In Toronto I had the responsibility of managing the long-running "Art in Transit" programme. After joining the Land Transport Authority, I soon learned about the fantastic artworks that were commissioned as part of the first phase of the MRT. Clearly the early leaders understood that a metro system is much more than just a means of efficiently moving large numbers of people around. It is the very heart and soul of the city, crossing all demographic and cultural boundaries, and the most intensely used public infrastructure in the nation.

Following the Toronto model, I put forward a proposal to incorporate art in all 16 stations on the North East Line, commissioning artists to create site-specific artworks that would resonate with the local community and be a showcase for the artistic talents of Singapore.

With the invaluable guidance of Constance Sheares, our curator for the programme, we invited a selection of established artists such as Chua Ek Kay, Goh Beng Kwan and Tan Swie Hian, along with emerging talents such as Vincent Leow and Ian Woo, to make proposals for specific stations.

Over the course of the next five years, together we created artworks that today adorn the North East Line. Working with Constance and the artists was a magical time, with lots of "creative friction," especially from my neighbour in Katong, Teo Eng Seng, with whom I shared numerous arguments. But through them all, the artwork got better and better. And after all these years, we remain friends, and Eng Seng's hard work and dedication created a truly outstanding artwork for Outram Park station.

The programme continued to be developed in its second edition for the Circle Line, but with a focus on younger artists and also introducing new forms of art such as video and even an interactive computer programme. Completed in 2012, this collection of artworks has added significantly to the cultural capital of Singapore.

The programme now feels like it has a life of its own. The first artworks in the third edition for the Downtown Line were unveiled in December 2013. Artworks for the rest of the Downtown Line stations are in production and the artists for the Thomson Line have already finalised their designs.

In partnership with local charity Art Outreach, the auction of original artworks raises money to provide free lessons about the ideas and concepts of the artworks at local schools. Art Outreach also provides guided tours of selected North East Line and Circle Line stations. The Land Transport Authority is right to be proud of its achievement and to showcase it to the world.

Aside from the art programme, the Circle Line offered one other unique opportunity—the chance to hold an international design competition for two of the stations. Held in partnership with the Singapore Institute of Architects, the competition attracted more than 80 entries. Judged anonymously by a panel of prominent local architects headed by Singapore Institute of Architects' former President Alfred Wong, the jury selected a small practice, WoHa, as winners. Then started another unique journey working with Richard Hassell and Wong Mun Summ to realise their vision for the two stations—Bras Basah and Stadium.

To go back to the stations today, as I did recently, reminds me of those days. The hard work, the arguments and the passion are all aspects that are necessary to create great art and architecture. The quality of

the two stations stands testament to the fact that there were plenty of all three aspects involved.

Stadium station in particular stands out. At the time, the recently completed Sports Hub was just an idea of the Singapore Sports Council. We knew nothing of the design but decided to pay homage to the old stadium by reflecting the curve of the building in the façade. The opposite side of the building is a simple line that reflects the orthogonal theatre and leisure complex next door.

Inside the station, a central skylight floods the space in a soft glow. Bringing daylight underground has always been one of my central tenements of metro station design, and Stadium station does it with such sophistication. With a photographic artwork by Roy Zhang depicting the elegance of a football player in flight, it has deservedly won several local and international design awards (as has Bras Basah station). And of course WoHa has gone on to become one of the leading architectural practices in the region.

People often ask me what I consider my greatest achievement in Singapore. I think they expect me to pick a favourite artwork or even say the art programme as a whole. It is after all Singapore's largest public art programme and continues to this day to commission the very best of artists to create site-specific artworks in the stations. But the reality is actually how I prevented something from getting built.

The entrance to Chinatown station in Pagoda Street on the North East Line was originally conceived to be a pagoda-inspired design that had numerous constraints due to the history of flooding in the area and the need to protect the integrity of the station Civil Defence shelter. Neither a good entrance nor a good design, it would have been a crime to build the proposed structure in such a beautiful street.

Working with the Singapore Tourism Board, we came up with a plan to replace the entrance building with a high glass canopy that incorporates an automatic flood barrier—a patented unique invention specifically designed for this location. The design would have not been realised without that special quality of Singapore—the ability of different government agencies to get together and solve problems. In this situation, the Singapore Civil Defence Force worked hard to resolve the fire safety requirements, the Urban Redevelopment Authority understood the vision of the high-level roof, and Singapore Tourism Board—well, they put up the money!

I write this now from Hong Kong, my home since 2013, where I am Chief Architect of MTR. It is a privilege to work for another great metro in another great city. We have already commissioned new artworks and it is exciting to see the new stations take shape.

During my last visit back to Singapore, I met up with Delia Prvacki at a gallery opening of her new work. At one point in the evening, Delia pulled me aside and said to me, “I want to tell you, Andrew, that everything you see in this exhibition is developed from the Dhoby Ghaut station artwork.” I was touched and it made me think how lucky I have been that my small role in the Land Transport Authority has helped shape the artistic journey of such a talented artist and still continues to play such a vibrant role in the artistic development of the city. Thank you, Singapore.



Andrew Mead

Andrew Mead is an architect specialising in the planning, design and construction of rapid transit stations. Andrew has been involved in the design and construction of over 100 metro and light rail stations in London, Toronto, Singapore, Dubai and Hong Kong. In Singapore, Andrew worked for the Land Transport Authority on the North East Line, Circle Line, Downtown Line and Thomson Line. He initiated and managed the Art in Transit programme, Singapore's largest public art programme. After 17 years in Singapore, Andrew relocated to Hong Kong in 2013 when he was appointed Chief Architect at the MTR Corporation.

Growing a Business and a Family in Singapore

GLENN VAN ZUTPHEN

Modern skyscrapers, bright lights, a smattering of buildings evoking the days of empire, obsession with food, clean and orderly streets. This is Singapore that many foreigners know. While these are certainly elements of my adopted home, over a decade in the city state I've come to see it as a more nuanced place... the way that one sees hidden, rich detail when looking closely at a well-crafted piece of *batik* cloth.

My relationship with Singapore began in the early 1990s during a “visa run” from Tokyo, where I was then living. At that time one could still easily get a ticket for jay-walking, traffic always flowed smoothly, Suntec City was a construction site, Robertson Quay was a backwater with godowns, Changi Airport Terminal 2 had just opened and Marina Bay was a lovely, open plot of land dotted with trees and migrating birds.

Watching the head-long rush to modernity has been nothing short of breath-taking. The result of long-term vision and a strong government with plenty of cash in the bank, Singapore has moved forward at a blistering pace. Now, global business and political leaders come

to marvel at the changes and attempt to mimic the model that has shown such extraordinary results. For those of us who live here, we see beyond the obvious to a complex and complicated Singapore *batik*.

My wife Kat and I were married on the beach at Sentosa in 2006. Now we explain to our five and eight year-olds (both born at Mount Elizabeth Hospital and attending local school) what it means to be a citizen of Singapore and how to respect and understand people and their culture and religion. I think they're starting to get it—largely because Singapore is a living, breathing model of those ideals. It's not yet a perfect model—and there are elements of life here that both Singaporeans and foreign residents would like to change—but I believe it's on the right track. Over the years we've looked at Singapore as an amazing place to live, raise our family, do business, and try to give back to the community. We always have a spare bedroom, and encourage relatives and friends (or friends of friends) to come and stay with us. We love having a steady stream of visitors who show us Singapore through *their* eyes.

Truthfully, the most difficult part of living in Singapore is the distance to our family and friends in the United States. No matter the routing, it's a 24 hour, door-to-door trip, which is tough having older relatives whom we would like to see more often. But the opportunities and lifestyle in this dynamic area of Asia have kept a hold on us.

Interesting work opportunities have played a big part in keeping us firmly rooted here. Kat's in mobile phone technology and human-centred design for emerging markets, and my business of coaching Multinational Corporation leaders and journalists to communicate effectively have grown across ASEAN. Looking around the region and world, it seems to me that the lack of such clarity in conveying ideas and information is the root of many intractable and often

costly or deadly problems. I'm really lucky to have very smart and driven clients. Whether they're a CEO, marketing head or reporter, everyone has communications challenges and it's very satisfying to help someone achieve their personal and professional development goals.

Shortly after arriving in Singapore 10 years ago and a new job at a television network, CNBC Asia, a friend urged me to apply for Singapore Permanent Residency (PR). At first glance I wasn't sure it was the right thing to do. But I filed the papers, since I could do it with the support of my employer. The arduous process of gathering documents (school certificates, tax information, company details, etc.) was not fun, but in the end, it took just 30 days to get approval from the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. Soon after, my wife and kids all got their PR too. It's a decision we have never regretted and while we have to pay into the Central Provident Fund, the flexibility of being able to change jobs freely and other perks have made the decision well-worth it.

Soon after getting the PR, some 14 of us were downsized from CNBC and I immediately found how easy it was to start my business. Having PR status helped in making the transition very easy. Additionally, since PRs are counted in the same category as Singaporeans (in the eyes of the Ministry of Manpower), having PR has allowed my company to be considered for contracts where "hiring local" was either a spoken or unspoken requirement. As many of us have seen over the years, the issue of foreign workers has become a political hot potato—especially since the last general election. I don't blame the Singaporeans for wanting to have better jobs or pay—but even my Singaporean friends admit to me that this economy would not prosper or grow as it has, without outside help. It's a very tricky balance.

Starting my media consultancy was a decision I've never regretted. Being an entrepreneur certainly has its fair share of risk. But the reward of growing a business and having to think in many different directions to make it work has been an amazing lesson in perseverance. Fortunately, with the consulting that I do, Singapore has turned out to be a great market, given the many MNCs that have based regional offices here.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to volunteer in various organisations. As board member and then president of the Foreign Correspondents Association of Singapore, we were able to bring together a diverse group of hundreds of journalists and other interested parties to offer unique and (hopefully) useful programmes. In the past several years I've been on the board of the American Association of Singapore (AAS) and am the current president. It's a dynamic organisation of more than 1400 Americans, Singaporeans and other foreigners that started here in 1917. Our mission is similar to that of the Singapore International Foundation as we bring people together with common interests and at the same time contribute to our community. Working closely with the United States Embassy, United States Navy and other American sister organisations, we host 40 events each year; some are fundraisers and others are just pure fun. AAS always supports a local charity and this year we're helping the Singapore Children's Society as well as organising events for the SG50 celebrations. I believe it's the "giving back moments" that are the most rewarding and give the deepest look into the life of this country.



Glenn van Zutphen

Hired by CNBC Asia, Glenn arrived in Singapore in 2004. A mere 12 months later, he and a group of coworkers were laid off when the network cut costs and people. That tragedy turned to triumph when Glenn started his media consultancy, VanMedia Group. A career journalist who had worked for the likes of NHK Japan, ABC Radio News, USA Today, CNN International and CNBC Asia, he designed a business that would include things he liked to do. Glenn is President of the American Association of Singapore. He is a past president of the Foreign Correspondents Association of Singapore and the Singapore Press Club. Glenn recently completed his master's degree in Digital Media Management from Hyper Island & Teesside University.

What is Singapore?

YUHYUN PARK

What is Singapore? For this quite simple question, I do not have a simple answer.

My family and I moved to Singapore from South Korea on 1 August 2011. When I first arrived at Singapore's Changi Airport, I did not expect much. I thought I would be staying temporarily in this foreign country for a couple years. We moved to Singapore because my husband was selected as a National Research Fellow and had accepted a position at Nanyang Technological University (NTU). I also got a job at NTU, although it did not seem terribly interesting to me at that time.

Why did a new life at Singapore not excite me? If you were in my shoes, you would quickly understand my feelings. In 2009, I had started a non-profit organisation in Korea called infollutionZERO (iZ). It aimed to protect children from the harmful effects of the internet and other digital technologies, such as cyberbullying, open access to obscene and violent content, and game addiction. After two years of hard work and sweat by my team and me to get this organisation up and running, iZ had begun to achieve recognition in Korean society and had built a stable operation. One of our key achievements was developing the very first play-and-learn cyber-wellness programme

for children in Korea, called the “iZ HERO Project.” On 30 July 2011 we launched the world’s first-ever exhibition teaching children about cyber-wellness issues, using interactive digital media, at the National Science Museum in Korea. I remember this launch date vividly, as it was quite an emotional day for all of my team members who were involved in the programme development. While we enjoyed a sense of gratitude, achievement and relief, we also had to say good-bye to each other with disappointment and confusion about the future of the project, because I was leaving. But I did not have time to celebrate nor be emotional. My flight to Singapore was the very next day, and I had to stay up that entire night to pack for my family. It was not very surprising that I was filled with extreme tiredness and doubt when I landed at Changi. “Great,” I thought. “Finally we started something meaningful in Korea. Now I am here in Singapore, where I do not even have a single acquaintance. What can I do here? Running a social initiative as a just-arrived foreigner? Forget about it.”

But guess what! What I have been able to do in Singapore has turned out to be even more successful than what I did in Korea running iZ. I launched the second generation of the iZ HERO Project here and opened an upgraded iZ HERO exhibition at the Singapore Science Centre in 2013, with the support of the Singapore Government. I worked with world-renowned Singaporean researchers at the National Institute of Education (NIE) on various cyber-wellness research projects. My team received two UNESCO awards: the UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for Use of ICT in Education in 2012 and the Wenhui UNESCO Award for Educational Innovation in 2013 in recognition of the iZ HERO Project. In 2014, I started a social initiative to empower children with digital leadership, jointly with SingTel and TOUCH Cyber Wellness, and the programme will be expanded to Southeast Asian countries together with UNESCO and SEAMEO from 2015. I also successfully started science outreach programmes for youth and the general public through NTU.

How could this ever have been possible within three years of arriving in Singapore, especially for someone who started from tiredness and doubt? Was I just good in what I do? I do not think so.

Going back to my original question, *What is Singapore?*

I believe it is neither economic nor political status that defines and characterises a nation. Rather, a nation is characterised by the values that it upholds and the people who manifest those values. Along the way, the Singapore that I described has been characterised by the people I have met since I arrived and the values that they have demonstrated.

Shortly after I arrived in Singapore I met Dr Angie Khoo, a top researcher on cyber-wellness at NIE. Her office was decorated with birds and souvenirs from all around the world. With a bit of caution, I introduced the iZ HERO Project to her. As a newcomer in Singapore, I did not know what to expect from the conversation. After attentively listening to my explanation, her first remark was, “Oh, this is what I have been looking for. I have some extra funding that can help start this programme here in Singapore.” Can you believe it? Actually, I could hardly believe the openness and trust that she gave me. We have become good friends since then. And I later realised through friendship that along with wanting to help me and my programme, even more importantly she had a deep heart to help Singaporean children and their families. She has worked tirelessly with me through every challenge that I have faced here, and she has shown wonderful responsibility and accountability in everything she has done. It was Angie, then, who helped unconditionally to make all things possible for Singaporean children and who was so important for the success I have found in Singapore.

She is not the only person who has amazed me. I have continually found a similar openness, trust and accountability in the many people I have met at every level, whether they are government leaders, professors, businesspeople, non-profit leaders, teachers or students. They have indeed been iZ HEROes for me.

And now, we are in the midst of preparing for Singapore's 50th birthday. Did you notice that I am talking about Singapore using "we," rather than "they" or "you?" Now, I am a community member in Singapore. Just as Singapore gave me great opportunities, I am hopeful that it can similarly support opportunities for people from neighbouring nations. With the values that individuals here uphold, I believe that this small red dot, Singapore, can be a nation that can powerfully exert a positive influence on other nations by being a vibrant hub that connects East and West, North and South. So, what is Singapore?

Singapore is my other home now.



Yuhyun Park

Yuhyun co-founded InfollutionZERO, a non-profit organisation in Korea focusing on raising public awareness of infollution (information pollution), providing digital citizenship education initiatives for youth and shaping public policy on internet safety for children. In 2013, she was selected as an Eisenhower Fellow (Multi-Nation Programme) as well as the first Ashoka Fellow from Korea in recognition of her leadership in society. She is currently Director of Academic Projects at Nanyang Technological University. She completed her doctoral studies in biostatistics at Harvard University and worked as a strategy consultant and senior analyst in media industry at the Boston Consulting Group.

Paths of Memory, Identity, and Belonging

BOEDI WIDJAJA

I was looking forward to a sense of ease, of being home, the moment I received my Singapore citizen card in 2012. It did not happen. Instead, latent emotions from decades of displacement surfaced. The newly acquired identity underscored my familiar sense of non-belonging. American realist painter Chuck Close perceptively said that a work is entirely discovered through its process. In this case, I mistook process for object (the card), national identity for nationality (a label), and journey for destination (home), and I paid a big emotional price for it.

For the longest time, I couldn't decide where home was: my country of birth, or the city I grew up in. Born in Solo, Indonesia, I first arrived here in Singapore at the age of nine, together with my elder sister, to escape from ethnic tension. We were without our parents and moved between four Singaporean families in the first five years. To date, I have moved more than 15 times across three cities, with 13 of the moves having taken place in Singapore.

Then, art happened, and helped me home. In the same year that I became a Singaporean, The Substation, the oldest independent art space in Singapore, commissioned me to work on *Path. 1, The White*

City. It was the first artwork in *Path*.—an ongoing series where I used art-making to look into issues surrounding home, origin and identity in the context of a porous Asian global city. As of 2014, I have produced six *Path*. artworks. They were at once personal and social, factual and imaginative. They were also transformational, helping me root for the future through a recasting of the past.

Path. 1, The White City referenced the involuntary *tabula rasa* I experienced when I first arrived in Singapore. I knew only Bahasa Indonesia then. My only experience of time-space was of a small town where human-pace *becaks* (trishaws) on dirt roads were a common form of transport. It was a culture shock upon touchdown to travel on long, unbending, straight roads. The city was like a white void that I could not enter, and urban meanings were completely lost to me.

The same void was restaged as I covered The Substation gallery walls with blank paper. Except the city was no longer the unknown Other of the past. During the exhibition period, visitors, friends and family were invited to mark the paper by hurling graphite-coated balls at it, and I drew their lines while dodging projectiles. The collective act of mark-making opened up many conversations between me and the audience. Across two weeks, the gallery was transformed—its whiteness had been covered with innumerable individual marks and lines, bringing into remembrance the diverse connections that were made between the artist and his city. *Path. 1* was a visceral revelation for me—my home is rooted in and nourished by communities.

More opportunities to make and present *Path*. in diverse settings came up after that first exhibition. *Path. 2, 3, 4, and 5* took place respectively in Gillman Barracks, Singapore's new visual art cluster; a soon-to-be-demolished government housing apartment in Teban Gardens, one of the oldest residential estates in Jurong in western Singapore; a conserved shophouse in Geylang, Singapore's busiest

red-light district; and, as part of The U Factory, an experimental pop-up space for art, architecture, design, craft and food. Though largely unplanned, sharing *Path.* works in different parts of Singapore, with different communities, became an important aspect of this series.

My most recent work in this series is *Path. 6, Unpacking my Library.* 书城. It was commissioned by the Esplanade, one of the world's busiest art centres, and was presented as a three-month-long solo exhibition comprising drawings, installations, video work, workshops, conversations and performance art. As the exhibition coincided with major festivals in the Esplanade's calendar, we were expecting visitors from all ages and walks of life. It was an exciting development in the series, whereby *Path.* became public art.

Path. 1 was my first live art. Live art is art that is made in the presence of, and sometimes with the participation of, the audience. It means yielding control, expecting unpredictable outcomes, and exposing vulnerabilities. In visual art, an object often buffers between artist and audience, but live art is an engendered situation of facing each other. Many of the subsequent *Path.* works were live art. An introvert by nature, I had to overcome significant innate resistance to integrate live art into my works. However, I sensed that *Path.* could only be meaningful if I brought in the people in the city to unearth, investigate and address those deep-seated issues together with me.

Art-making needs the largesse of the society. While my name is attached to *Path.* as its artist, it was a journey that would have been impossible without support from my fellow art-makers, including collaborators, curators, programmers, fabricators and the audience whose presence and participation completed the works. Two years and six artworks ago, *Path.* was birthed from a seeming void. The series has since taken various forms and travelled places, connecting to different people. If *Path.* was to help me navigate better through this city, to

mark it as home, then its routes have accordingly meandered beyond usual paths.

I had thought that *Path.* would come to an end once I arrived at my destination. I was sure that with each work, I would get closer to home. I am not so sure now. Even as the initial urgency that started *Path.* has grown fainter with the making of each work, other impulses, happier ones, to continue the series, have emerged. It has now led me to think of home as a never-ending process of drawing closer to a country, a society and its communities. Chuck Close's words resonate once again: "Illumination comes only through making. As I make my home here, I would like to explore the brighter paths that I see ahead."



Boedi Widjaja

Boedi was born in Surakarta, Java, Indonesia, and lives and works in Singapore. Trained as an architect, he spent his young adulthood in graphic design and turned to art only in his thirties. Boedi often uses mark-making, drawing and human interaction as methods in his practice. The artistic outcomes are conceptually-charged, ranging from drawings to installations and live art. Recent accolades include being named one of 11 ArtReview FutureGreats Asia (2014); Highly Commended Award at the 31st UOB Painting of the Year (2012); First Prize in the LTA Art Competition—Beauty World Station (2012); and Grand Prize (Sound Arts) at Bains Numeriques in France (2012).

The Blue-Eyed Mandarin Speaker

JIM ROGERS

Ah, Singapore! We still get people asking things like: Isn't that in China? Is it an airline? Where's that? Etc.

Then there are the ones trying to be cool and sophisticated: Too boring. No chewing gum. Too restrictive. Etc.

In all candour, I first visited in 1985 during the Pan Electric crisis when I rushed to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to buy stocks. I left aggravated when they closed the stock exchange fearing "The foreigners will sell if we don't close it." So much for this foreigner who came to do the opposite!

I did visit more afterwards, including during my two drives around the world. Except for an overly protected banking system, I liked what I found.

Fast forward to 2005—20 years after my first visit. I had been writing, lecturing and broadcasting since the 1980s that everyone should teach their children and grandchildren Mandarin. Then I had a daughter of my own in 2003. We found a Chinese governess in New York, but it

became clear we really needed to be in a Chinese-speaking nation if we were serious.

We spent three summers trying out various cities, including Singapore, which was only an afterthought the first year. We were here only three weeks the first time, but were so interested, we also included Singapore the second year and again in the third. When our daughter Happy got into Nanyang Kindergarten from the waiting list, there was no question. We had been planning to return to New York for another school year—had even paid the private school fees—but Nanyang is not the sort of place where one says “Thanks, but could you please hold the place another year or so?” Fortunately we had more or less decided anyway. Off to New York to pack more and return.

We had already put our house on the market and a buyer appeared at the end of 2007. Oh, my! What now? Even though I knew it was the top of the market, I had seller’s remorse. I knew I would never live in such a great house again. I even considered backing out rather than selling my daughter’s birthright.

Singapore called, so I sold and the die was cast.

So how has it turned out! Fabulous! Our second daughter, Baby Bee, was born here in March 2008 in Gleneagles Hospital. Happy is loving Nanyang. My wife Paige and I are over the moon at our move. I loved and love New York City, but whenever I go back, I am delighted we moved from a Third World city to the First World.

Our prime motivation was for my girls to speak Mandarin and to know Asia to prepare them for the 21st century. So far, so good.

Happy has won nationwide Mandarin speaking contests two years in a row. If I watched a movie where a blue-eyed child was the best Mandarin speaker in a nation which is 75 percent ethnic Chinese, I would ridicule it as I walked out. Yet it has happened twice. Perhaps it is because we are immigrants so we push our children more. In any case, anyone wondering if children can pick up Mandarin here should know it can be done!

Paige and I were also looking forward to the rigorous, demanding and advanced education in Singapore so much so that we set out to meet all the set requirements needed to get Happy into Nanyang Primary School—one of the most demanding schools. She got in and all of us are delighted, but I had no idea what I was doing! Happy had more homework in her first three years than I did in twelve in the United States. I still worry the system will burn kids out, but she has been in the top five in her classes and is a Prefect so she is adapting and thriving—so far at least. I, for one, find the testing system has been corroded by the bureaucracy in that all test answers must be answered in the Ministry of Education way. The education is terrific, but someone needs to realise there is more than one way to answer a question correctly. The Ministry of Education says they are working on it!

The Minister of Education is also clearly working on reforming the rigidity of the Primary School Leaving Examination, which has terrorised Singaporeans—including me now—for many years. He seems to be changing (slowly) the questionable system whereby only Ministry of Education-approved answers get credit on tests.

Baby Bee is thriving at Nanyang Kindergarten and has developed a marvelous stage presence like her older sister. She will enter Nanyang Primary School in 2015.

Paige and I have developed full lives in Singapore. We have found many friends here, although not many are expats—perhaps because we have been here so long. We are perplexed at the occasional view that Singapore is boring. The restaurant scene and night life compare favourably with most cities in the world. We attend concerts and plays as often as we did in New York. There are not so many offerings as in New York, but we could never attend all of them anyway in New York. My main observation is there is too much to do in Singapore!

I have few complaints and even they are minor. I wish Singapore were more bicycle-friendly, but it is becoming so. I wish everyone spoke good English and good Mandarin, but there are always language variations in every city in the world. I wish my mobile phone worked better when I travel, which is totally absurd for what is such a modern city in so many ways. I am often embarrassed when I find myself explaining how my Singapore mobile is difficult to connect. So no real complaining from us, especially given how easy it is to live here. There is great education (despite the corroded testing system), great healthcare, terrific infrastructure, lots to do, and everything works!

All four of us are ecstatic to live in Singapore!



Jim Rogers

Jim, a native of Demopolis, Alabama, is an author, financial commentator, adventurer and international investor. After attending Yale University and Oxford University, Jim co-founded the Quantum Fund, a global-investment partnership. Jim then decided to retire—at age 37. While continuing to manage his own portfolio, Rogers also served as Professor of Finance at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business. In 1990-1992, Rogers fulfilled his lifelong dream of motorcycling 100,000 miles across six continents. Jim embarked on a Millennium Adventure in 1999 and travelled for three years on his round-the-world journey. Jim is also the author of *Investment Biker: On the Road with Jim Rogers*; *A Bull in China*; *A Gift to My Children*; and *Street Smarts: Adventures on the Road and in the Markets*.

Making Singapore My Home

ODILE BENJAMIN

My journey began 25 years ago on New Year's Day 1989. I was 17 years old, and I met my future husband Douglas at a party in London. He was fascinated by my Middle Eastern heritage, and I by the fact that he was a third-generation Singaporean who did not look Asian.

I had heard of Singapore but had never met anyone from that part of the world before. I quickly ran home after the party and opened an atlas to try and locate Singapore on the world map. Back in those days, Google was not even thought of, so the research took quite a while. Eventually, I managed to spot the name, but the island itself was so tiny that one needed a magnifying glass to detect it.

A long-distance friendship ensued, with Douglas having moved back to Singapore and me living in London. Two years later, Douglas finally mustered enough courage to ask me out on a date during one of his visits to London. Less than a year later, Douglas proposed to me during a holiday trip I took with my family to Singapore, and before I knew it, we were married in London. I found myself packing my bags to move to a tropical island I knew very little of and to make it my new home.

It was the summer of 1992, and the first thing that struck me was the extreme humidity, which took its toll on my energy levels and on my long, curly hair.

Singapore was quite a modern city then by Asian standards, but there was very little in terms of a cultural life, especially for someone who came from London. There were only four television channels, and the country's strict censorship laws banned satellite television until the late 1990s, when cable television made its modest debut. I was very lucky that most of my husband's family lived here, and we spent most of our free time together.

Not many expatriates had moved here yet, and I was therefore often stared at on the streets. I quickly learned the term "*ang moh*," which means white person. For the first time ever, I found people fascinated by my "fair" skin, "double eye lids," and thick eyebrows, all of which, I later found out, women here are obsessed with.

I had general difficulties communicating, not quite understanding the peculiar and fast-paced "Singlish" dialect with its "*lahs*" "*mahs*," and "*leh*s" at the end of every sentence. On one occasion, a taxi driver, who could not comprehend my English accent, could not decipher the address I was giving him, while I could not understand what he was asking of me. After much gesticulation and sign language, he decided that it would be easier to drop me off at Newton Circus and pick up another passenger instead. It was nightfall and I was stranded, hot and desperate to get home. Luckily, I had a large brick-sized mobile phone (with terrible reception, despite a very long retractable antenna), and a kind man came to my rescue and helped explain to my husband where to come and find me. I quickly learned that if I was to integrate, I needed to incorporate key phrases into my vocabulary such as: "can or not?" (short for "is it possible?"), "why like that?" (short

for “what is the reason?”), “how now?” (short for “what should we do?”), “aiyoh” (“oh dear”), and “okay lah” (“alright then”).

It took a bit of time, I missed my family, friends and the food I was used to, but soon enough I adapted and Singapore became home. Our four children were born here under the best possible medical care. My children, fourth-generation Singaporeans, attended what many consider to be some of the most reputable schools in the world, and they have benefitted from growing up in a multi-cultural and harmonious society. My son is today proudly serving in the military, doing the compulsory two-year National Service.

Over the last two decades, I have witnessed Singapore grow from a simple island to a flourishing world-class city. 22 years ago Singapore made international headlines for a law it passed banning chewing gum. Today, all eyes are on Singapore for its progressive ideas, urban development, technology and research, medical care, efficiency, cleanliness and safety, making it one of the most sought-after cities in the world. We have an almost infinite choice of renowned restaurants and gastronomic delights on our shores, a thriving cultural and arts scene with a wide choice of theatre and musical productions, pop and classical concerts, museums and art galleries, and an amazing nightlife. Not only do we have a very large expatriate community choosing to make Singapore their home today, but financial institutions, medical companies and technological centres are also opting to plant roots here.

But it was not smooth sailing all the way. In the third quarter of 1997, we started feeling the effects of a recession. The Asian financial crisis, one of the worst financial meltdowns Asia had seen in decades, lasted until 2001. Just as we were about to start to see the light of recovery, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome was upon us in 2003, infecting hundreds of people and making us prisoners in our own homes.

Singapore was known as a shopping haven, and our family's business was in retail and distribution of luxury and lifestyle brands across Asia Pacific. Needless to say, our business struggled and we needed to re-strategise, with a long-term view of creating a business we could fully control and expand beyond the shores of Asia. My husband identified a gap in the market for affordable luxury. Hence, Raoul the brand was born, and we opened our first store in the second half of 2002, offering men's shirts and accessories. The store concept was modern and cool, with products made of the best materials from European mills but selling at affordable prices.

We faced much scepticism from local market players, as we were going where no other local brand had succeeded before. However, our customers liked what we were offering and soon enough stores started mushrooming, with a wider product offering. By 2009, we felt that we were ready to expand beyond Southeast Asia and decided to test the women's product in Europe. The European press loved us, and we decided to make a go of it. A great deal of work went into rebranding and understanding the challenging needs of the international markets, not only in terms of product development but also logistics and distribution. With a great team in place, headed by my brother-in-law Samuel, we opened our first showroom in New York in 2010. It was soon followed by another showroom in Milan, to service the European and Middle Eastern markets. Today, the brand is in some of the best stores across the world. The most rewarding part has been the pride expressed by Singaporeans when they see our product overseas, for helping to put Singapore on the fashion map.

It has been a beautiful journey so far, from a personal and professional perspective, and I feel like I have thrived and grown with Singapore. It is my home and I could not possibly imagine living anywhere else.



Odile Benjamin

Odile was born in Beirut, Lebanon and raised in Lebanon, Italy and England. She moved to Singapore in 1992 after marrying Douglas Benjamin. She joined FJ Benjamin in 1993 as a brand manager, before making the switch to the Creative & Licensing Division. There, Odile handled the licensing and worked her way up to divisional CEO of the Creative & Design Division. Odile is jointly responsible for the creation and development of the Group's own house label Raoul. She has been married for 20 years and has four children. In her spare time, she enjoys baking, reading, music and spending time with her family. Odile attended the London School of Economics. She is fluent in English, French and Arabic, and is conversant in Italian, Spanish and Hebrew.

Visitors Made Singapore Special

AMANDA BROOKS

Between 2007 and 2011, my family and I had the privilege of living and working in Singapore. I was the British Deputy High Commissioner, leading the drive to strengthen the trade and investment relationship between the United Kingdom and Singapore. While my husband and I had both lived overseas before (albeit only for a couple of months in my case), this was our first overseas posting as a family. As we prepared to leave the United Kingdom, there were two things that people consistently said to us. First, we were going somewhere safe. Second, they would definitely come and visit. And in many ways, these two oft-repeated phrases set some of our expectations for the four years that followed.

Going Somewhere Safe

For most—if not all—nationalities arriving in Singapore, seeing advertisements with the slogan “Low crime doesn’t mean no crime” must be something of a surprise, even when safety had been much mentioned by others. Why would the government put such an emphasis on crime existing? It certainly seemed odd to us. While we’d never been the victims of a crime, we were safety-conscious. But like many

who have come before us—and have arrived since—we quickly fell into a pattern of behaviour that seemed incredible. Not automatically locking the house doors when we were in the house. Indeed at times leaving them wide open, worrying only about the mosquitos that might enter.

But in our first month in Singapore, we had a sharp reminder of why the slogan existed. We were living in temporary accommodation while some work was being done on the house in which we would live for the next four years. One Saturday night, in the run-up to Christmas, the three of us were all at home. My husband was getting ready to go out running, having been inspired by watching the Singapore marathon the previous weekend. (He completed it the following year!) Our small son was getting ready for bed. And I was flitting from room to room trying to bring some semblance of order to the end-of-day chaos. Almost every light in the house was on. There was no chance anyone could think the house was empty. But every door was unlocked.

A sudden yell from my husband broke the cosy atmosphere in the house. When I went to check why, he was chasing someone across the garden—a man he had found in the living room when he had come downstairs. The man hurdled our neighbours' garden fence and disappeared. Fortunately, he had left empty-handed. A long evening with the police unfolded, while they swabbed the house for fingerprints, had dogs seek the intruder's scent, and took statements. We were lucky. But it did teach us a valuable lesson and one that we repeatedly told others—generally to looks of shock. Low crime really didn't mean no crime.

Other Visitors—Expected and Unexpected

Singapore might be many miles from London, but it often didn't—and doesn't now—feel far away. Many of the promises to visit that were made as we left London were kept. I think we saw more of some friends than we might have if we had stayed in London! Many visitors brought with them the odd gift of something British that we hadn't been able to find in Singapore. (The list of what we couldn't find was pretty short by the time we left Singapore, with more and more British brands becoming available over the four years.) The same is true being back in London. I meet a remarkable number of friends from Singapore as they pass through on a regular basis. I see more Singaporean restaurants opening here, and so Singapore never feels that far away.

But we definitely had more unexpected visitors in Singapore. We were fortunate to live in a wonderful black and white house and soon learnt that these came with a wide range of unexpected visitors. We became used to those sightseers who would drive through the gates up to the house, to take photos on a Sunday afternoon. One visitor was brave enough to knock on the front door; she had lived there as a child with her family in the 1950s. Her visit brought a sense of the house's history to our family. I'd like to think that in 50 or so years, our son might do the same. Then there was the over-enthusiastic road sweeper who would drive through from time to time. Occasionally, he went as far as to drive right under the porch, leaving behind a half-mile trail of the decorative black and white stones that should have been in the porch. A family expedition to retrieve and reorganise them would follow his visit.

Without doubt, the most amazing visitors were the wildlife. Despite living in the middle of a world-class city, close to Orchard Road, we benefitted from a little corner of wilderness that is most precious and I hope will be preserved for generations to come. For me, it was

what defined “Uniquely Singapore.” The three entertaining hornbills, which would sit outside our study window on the banana tree every morning, squawking to each other as loudly as they could. The noise of the geckos and nightjars that were the sounds that we fell asleep to each night—which I still miss—along with the thunder and lightning that often interrupted our sleep.

For the first year or so, there was a large monitor lizard that would stroll through the garden from time to time. Fortunately, we had the doors closed the day he decided he would quite like to watch television and had his nose pressed against the patio doors. My husband had learnt the hard way that it wasn’t a good idea to get in his way when he was provoked. Trying to shepherd the monitor lizard away from the garden fence and next door’s barking dogs, my husband was rewarded by being lashed across his legs by the lizard’s tail. The bruises that developed on his legs made it clear how painful that experience had been. He never got quite so close to another monitor lizard, even when walking round Sungei Buloh, one of Singapore’s wetland reserves.

And then there were the snakes. We rather liked the snakes, which perhaps makes us unusual. There was a lovely green whip snake which used to watch us quite closely when we were in the swimming pool. But many of our visitors from the United Kingdom were much less keen. Our ability to find a snake—usually harmless—in the garden with which to terrify them could be rather entertaining—if a little mean! But even we were unhappy with a series of small cobras appearing right in the middle of our son’s play area outside. The big ginger cat that had adopted us at that stage had no such fear as she tackled them!

Expectations Met?

The expectations that I said were set before we had left the United Kingdom for Singapore were definitely met. But we did learn some lessons along the way, not least:

- feeling and being safe in Singapore means not being foolish and acting in a way you wouldn't at home; and
- being prepared for an influx of visitors—expected and unexpected—is essential.

The reality is that our expectations were far exceeded. We all took away great memories of Singapore, and not just the food and the shopping—great though both of these were. We had an amazing time. We'll be back (to visit) again soon.



Amanda Brooks

Amanda Brooks has been Director of Innovation at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the United Kingdom since September 2013. Her responsibilities include creating a good environment for innovation and supporting the innovation ecosystem, for example, through the Technology Strategy Board. Previously, Amanda led on industrial strategy and growth policy for two years, was Deputy High Commissioner and Director of Trade and Investment in Singapore for four years, and led the United Kingdom's effort on multilateral and regional trade negotiations for three years. She has an MBA from Imperial College.

Singapore: A Model City

STEPHEN RIADY

Relocating to Singapore

My family and I moved to Singapore in 2004 after spending 15 years in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was one of the first economies to recover from the Asian financial crisis that hit the region in 1997. Hong Kong was doing well at that time, while Singapore was relatively quiet. The government wanted to make Singapore the best city in which to work, play and live. By 2015, Singapore would have the Integrated Resorts, Gardens by the Bay and other iconic attractions. Many people who saw that vision of Singapore asked themselves if they believed it. I believed that vision, so I decided to moved here.

After I moved to Singapore, people continually asked me, “Why did you move to Singapore? Isn’t Hong Kong better?” My response was that the Singapore government has a good track record. This was not my first time in Singapore. I grew up here. Coming back was not easy. I had to adjust my expectations. When I applied for permanent residency for the first time in December 2012, for example, I had to prepare the documents, go on the internet and get a queue number for the interview. After the interview, I expected that I would get my PR in two to three weeks. The lady that interviewed me said, “Okay, please

wait...we'll let you know in six months.” I think this makes Singapore unique. I see a desire to try to be fair to everyone.

Doing Business in Singapore

In Singapore, unlike many other countries in the world, you can get things done without too much hassle. This is especially important for businesses. The system in Singapore makes it simple for anyone to set up a company, file taxes and apply for licenses. The legal framework is clear and transparent. The bureaucracy is responsive and efficient. As a business person, you do not face the problem of having to navigate layers of bureaucracy and red tape. This creates a safe and predictable environment to do business.

During the time I have been here, we have grown our business significantly. The question we had when we started out was how big we could become. After seeing the government's vision to transform Singapore to be the best city in which to work, play and live, we saw an opportunity to play a role in Singapore's urban transformation. We tried to see how we could fit into this vision. My dream was, and still is, to be in the top three in one sector. In the property market, we are already in the top 10.

Family, Education and Society

Despite its cosmopolitan population, family is still the basic unit of society in Singapore. The family is a pillar of emotional, social and financial support. Unfortunately, in many societies around the world, the family institution is breaking down. Divorce rates, pressure at work or separation of children from parents lead to the breakdown of the nuclear family. I am heartened to see that there is a strong awareness of family values in Singapore. It is within the family environment that an individual's physical, emotional and psychological development

occurs. This is important to nurture the next generation, as well as to build a more caring, cohesive and resilient society.

As a melting pot of different cultures, races and ethnicities, Singapore has various places of worship to meet the needs of its population. People do not have to travel far to reach their place of worship, practise their faith and bond with members of their community. Having lived through turbulent times in Indonesia, I think we are fortunate to have a society where different races and cultures can live peacefully and harmoniously, underpinned by mutual respect for others' beliefs and practices. This allows people to carry out their cultural traditions and heritage while living together in one society.

The education system has changed a lot since I was a student here. During my time, we had to learn by heart. We had to memorise to get a good mark in exams. We were told that to get a good job, we had to excel in math and science. This system has its merits but the environment today calls for a more broad-based and wholesome education. Over the years, I have seen the education system evolve to one that rewards talent, not just exam results. This encourages students to think outside the box, find new ways of solving problems and pursue their biggest talents. This has made Singaporeans well-qualified and sought-after internationally for their mastery of skills, work ethic and values.

What Next

As we see in many industrialised societies around the world, people are seeking more experiential and aesthetic value when buying a good or service. Products as well as services increasingly distinguish their offerings through aesthetics, adding emotional value to practical use. The simple pleasure of enjoying a cup of coffee is now much more than just a cup of coffee, it is about the ambience, environment and

status. A city has to be more than what it was 10 or 20 years ago. It has to be lively, liveable and full of options for its residents to work, live and play.

We are seeing this in Singapore as the economy develops and the society becomes more educated and affluent. More people choose to spend their free time at the theatre, museum or watch a game at the new Sports Hub. They may also want to go to the park for walks with their families. Singapore today is a vibrant city, replete with a wide variety of entertainment and recreation choices, including lively artistic activities. Singapore is also a host to many international events which give the society greater exposure and understanding of new trends and happenings. There are not many cities in the world as liveable as Singapore.

If anyone has the ability to create a world-class city-state in a short period of time and lead by example, it would have to be Singapore.



Stephen Riady

Stephen Riady is the Executive Chairman of diversified real estate company OUE Limited. He also serves as Executive Director of Auric Pacific Group Limited. Among his other appointments, he is the Chairman and Executive Director of Lippo Limited, Chairman of Lippo China Resources Limited and Hongkong Chinese Limited. Stephen holds a master's degree of business administration from Golden Gate University in the United States and an honorary degree of doctor of business administration from Napier University in the United Kingdom. He was conferred the *Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government and awarded Ernst & Young's Strategic Investment Entrepreneur of the Year in 2007.

Making an Impact with Empact

PETER YANG

The first time I volunteered with a non-profit was when I was a student attending university in Shanghai, where I helped a social organisation called AIESEC. The organisation brought foreign students to China for internships and sent Chinese students overseas for internships, and working with them was the start of my developing a social conscience.

After graduation, I stayed in Shanghai initially and worked for a large consulting firm. They soon sent me to London, and then after just a year in the United Kingdom I moved to Singapore to work on city and community building, as part of the firm's advisory service to the government. Even though I was originally assigned to work here for three months, I ended up spending six years with the firm, advising the government on various infrastructure projects.

While I was working at the consulting firm, I decided I wanted to get back into community work and started volunteering at a hospice. Even though it was something I wanted to do, I wasn't trained as a social worker and felt totally helpless when I was assigned to assist a patient with only one month to live. That experience made me reflect deeply on what I could do that would contribute the most to the community.

Setting up Empact

As I looked around at various types of volunteering opportunities and how I could have the greatest impact, I realised that using my skill sets would generate far more value than ad hoc activities. Several social organisations asked me to use my finance skills to help them with setting up their accounting structures, and that planted the seed of an idea.

I continued to explore various options and was finally hit with a burst of inspiration. On the one hand, social organisations usually cannot attract talented people such as lawyers and accountants to assist them. On the other hand, a number of friends with exactly these skill sets wanted to volunteer their time. What was missing was a way for skilled volunteers like these friends to find out about organisations in the charity sector that needed their help, and for these social organisations to translate their needs into project briefs that would attract professional experts. I could see that both sides needed help, so I decided to become a capacity-builder for non-profits and promote skilled volunteerism.

Without thinking very much about it at all, I decided to quit my job and set up Empact. At first, I was entirely on my own and just volunteered my time to help a variety of social organisations. I started talking more with the social organisations I volunteered with to find out about what they did and what help they really needed. Gradually, I started linking people I knew from some of the law firms and accounting firms I used to work with to the social organisations that needed them the most.

One of the major challenges, of course, was funding. I found out that the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre had a New Initiative Grant, and I put together a proposal for funding. Three months after I sent in the application, I received the delightful news that the grant was approved and I quickly hired my first staff.

Helping NGOs

Our work at Empact focuses mostly on helping social organisations with their day-to-day needs, and we've accomplished a lot already. Along with helping social organisations with their accounting and legal needs, we've done projects ranging from market research and setting up HR infrastructure, to conducting governance reviews and assisting with strategy. We have also worked with grant-makers to conduct due diligence and evaluate the impact of programmes before they give money.

Even though we haven't done much marketing, social organisations have found out about us through word-of-mouth and we've had plenty of requests for assistance. We have also taken a collaborative approach to expand our outreach, working with the Economic Development Board to reach out to international organisations and with the National Council of Social Service to reach out to local Voluntary Welfare Organisations.

Creating Impact through Empact

While we've only been operating for a fairly short period of time, we've had good feedback and feel we're making a difference.

Despite working entirely with volunteers, we've been able to provide high-quality accounting, advisory, human resources and legal services, as well as other ad hoc support. At times, it has been a challenge to make sure our volunteers deliver high quality services and meet the real needs of the social organisations we're supporting. Our clients keep coming back for more and they ask for two or three services rather than just one, so it's clear that we're meeting their needs effectively.

One of the new services we've developed more recently is our mentoring programme. Senior staff from the companies that were sending us volunteers told us they wanted to help out more, so we started linking them up with leaders in the social organisations as mentors. When we did a mid-term review recently, the C-level volunteers told us they found that contributing their knowledge made them feel good about giving back to society, and they found it refreshing to get out of their normal identity.

One volunteer who is the global head of infrastructure at a large multinational, for example, mentored the head of a coffee shop social enterprise through a 10-month programme. While people usually see him as a lawyer, he said he discovered through mentoring that he has lots more skills, such as people management and strategy, which he can contribute.

These successes don't mean everything has been smooth sailing, and we have faced some challenges along the way. One is funding, since articulating the value proposition is rather difficult. Compared to social organisations that help children or the elderly, for example, offering accounting and legal services doesn't give us stories that touch peoples' hearts and convince them to donate money. It has also been difficult to find staff who want to work for a social enterprise like Empact, so we've occasionally struggled to find the people we need. That said, we've been very fortunate to develop a strong network of committed supporters and to find people willing to work at Empact to make a real difference.

A lot of people still ask me why I quit my job for a career that's so difficult, since it's not something that a lot of people do. While I realise I have chosen a more different path than many others, I have no regrets about giving up higher pay since working with Empact enables me to

make a real difference in people's lives. By making Empact work and changing peoples' perceptions, we can change conversations about what's possible and shape the community for the better.

I feel very fortunate that I've been able to stay in Singapore and make a difference in the community. I see Singapore as the perfect mix of East and West, blending the best parts of what I found when I lived in China and the United Kingdom before moving here and keeping me connected with both. I hope that social enterprises will become the norm in the future and one day every enterprise will be a social enterprise, caring for both the social outcome and the bottom line. Creating Empact has had a positive impact on the social organisations we help, and I'm looking forward to expanding it even further so I can keep making a positive difference in the community I now call home.



Peter Yang

Peter is the Founder and Executive Director of Empact. He has extensive experience in advising social enterprises and non-profit organisations in realising their mission. Prior to founding Empact, Peter was a senior manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he advised public and private sector clients throughout Asia on financing their large infrastructure projects. For many years, Peter has been an advisor or volunteer to various non-profit organisations. He first experienced the non-profit sector during his university days, when he was a member of the pioneer national committee that was responsible for setting up AIESEC in mainland China. Over the years, Peter has dedicated a significant portion of his time to working with different sectors to create community engagement programmes.

What is There Not to Love about Singapore?

RODRIGO MARTINEZ

It has been already three years since I made that one decision that would impact our lives forever, and in even more ways than we could have ever imagined. The decision nonetheless came with a very high emotional burden, as it meant that our lives would be radically changed and that we would have to “break the kettles and sink the boats” in order to succeed!

The decision we made was to move to Singapore. The decision was not something we had planned for, and it was totally unexpected, not only for ourselves, but also for our friends and families. They were taken by surprise and were concerned when we gave them the news. They asked us, “Do you know anyone in Singapore? Where do you plan to live? What kind of work or business activity will you develop in Singapore? Where will Tomas and Hector go to school?” All we could answer was, “We don’t know.”

We did not have the answers to their questions, but we had a divine peace in our hearts. It was a peace that moved and compelled us to take a leap of faith, knowing that whatever was ahead of us, and whatever the resulting outcome, it would be for the better. And that

is precisely what we found here in beautiful Singapore. We found a much better life.

A better life is something we all strive for, and of course we all have our own personal definitions of a better life. For us, a better life first and foremost meant being able to raise our kids in a safe country. It also meant providing them with a world-class high-quality education and allowing them to grow up in a culturally diverse and rich environment—an environment of religious tolerance and racial harmony, and a society where they can rise as high as their dreams if they work hard enough.

As for myself, it also meant being able pursue new and even greater business success in the world's most dynamic and business-friendly environment. I saw it as a business environment where all the key ingredients to foster successful global enterprises are in place: a strategic location, political stability, ease of doing business, a globalised economy, a skilled and productive labour force, an exemplary and efficient tax system, comprehensive IP protection, and an honest and open-minded government that stands for integrity, excellence and service.

I have found that Singapore has precisely all the ingredients that a serial entrepreneur like me is looking for. It has a business environment that has motivated me to share within the start-up and innovation ecosystem experiences from my own entrepreneurial journey of having built and successfully sold two large tech start-ups—STI Internet, Brazil's 4th largest ISP, and hpG, the world's largest free web hosting service in the Portuguese language—thus helping the current generation of aspiring entrepreneurs in Singapore to achieve their own business success.

I've spoken on many occasions such as ACE Entrepreneurship Week and Singapore Management University's Entrepreneurship Lunch Talk. I've participated as a judge at the Youth Entrepreneurship Symposium pitching competition organised by nEbO, the junior membership of the National Trades Union Congress. I've given keynote speeches, including at Nanyang Technological University's Ideasinc. And I am mentoring entrepreneurs such as in National University of Singapore's Innovventure Technopreneurship Bootcamp. It is very motivating to see the current generation of entrepreneurs assimilating what I've imparted and looking forward to applying it to their own businesses. I have also started a new venture, working with local partners here in Singapore, and am working to connect that successful new venture to the world. All these opportunities are something which I am very grateful for and that give me great pleasure. Thank you, Singapore!

For my wife Angela, it meant that all her natural creative artistic talents would finally be able to bloom, in a vibrant arts scene where the arts are valued as an important component of a multi-cultural society. It is an arts scene formed out of the diversity of the many local talents as well as from internationally renowned and aspiring artists, some of whom we have appreciated in the many galleries and museums such as the iconic ArtScience Museum and the Singapore Art Museum. After a long pause and thanks to being here, Angela has now finally gone back to painting, one of her life-long passions, knowing that she also has her place in Singapore's buzzing and ever-expanding arts scene.

We all found what we were looking for, each in our very own way, even in unexpected ways. Most importantly we found a much better life for Tomas and Hector. What a blessing it is for them to attend Blangah Rise Primary School, a government school that is very well equipped both in the hardware (infrastructure) as well as the software (human capital), committed to nurturing them holistically and gracefully to

become confident learners and caring leaders. What a blessing it is to see them grow up and spend their most precious years, the years when they are absorbing knowledge and culture at an outstanding rate, in such a diverse and successful country, a country that we gratefully call home. For us that is priceless!



Rodrigo Martinez

Rodrigo is a Chilean internet pioneer who founded and sold two of the world's largest tech startups: STI Internet and hpG. In Brazil, Rodrigo was honoured with iBest's TOP3 New Entrepreneur and TOP3 Internet Entrepreneur awards. He serves as a mentor, speaker, judge and strategic advisor across the different startup ecosystems in Southeast Asia and beyond. He is passionate about fostering entrepreneurial success. Rodrigo is a natural pattern finder, problem solver and self-made autodidact.

Reflections on Working in Singapore

DOYLE G GRAHAM

My wife and I had spent a week as tourists in Singapore in 2001, but nothing in that experience predicted that six years later I would return to live and work there for seven years. A chance lunch with Dr Robert Kamei, the Vice Dean for Education at the new Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, resulted in an opportunity to be part of this adventure. Having served as Dean of Medical Education at Duke University School of Medicine (1987-1992), I appreciated the advantages inherent in starting a new school without the encumbrances of tradition, and I was attracted by the educational values Dr Kamei and I shared and his vision to employ team-based learning in medical education.

During my previous term as dean at Duke, I had initiated the Advisory Dean System through which the institution sought to nurture the development of human values in medical students and to help them retain the idealism that brought them into medicine. I was able to help structure a corresponding effort at Duke-NUS, the Advisory College System, engaging local science and clinical faculty as College Masters. My primary role thereafter was to serve as Director of the Body and Disease Course, the major course in the first year of the Duke-NUS curriculum, for six months each year. My outstanding colleagues in

this venture, all from SingHealth, worked hard to master team-based learning (now dubbed Team-LEAD at Duke-NUS), learning on the fly with the early classes. The members of the starting class of 26 students were mature, hard-working, strongly motivated learners who tolerated our stumbles and helped us grow. Over the years the Body and Disease Course became a laboratory for educational innovation.

Living in Singapore was my first experience in urban living and in living without a car. Given Singapore's excellent public transportation and my pleasure in taking long walks, my adjustment was easy. I soon found myself reveling in the natural beauty of Singapore, not only the botanical gardens and numerous parks and reserves, but also the roadside rain trees and overpass bougainvillea that added shade and beauty to what could have been a concrete and steel jungle. Having lived most of my life in the southern states of the United States, I was struck by the multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious mix of people who co-exist in Singapore and the expectations for mutual tolerance and respect that pervade this country. When my teaching colleague and dear friend, Dr Janil Puthuchear, was elected to Parliament, my appreciation for the thought and effort that had gone into preventing corruption and creating a social safety net for Singapore's citizens was further enhanced. Imagine, a rich country where no one is impoverished by a serious illness, where there is work for almost all seeking work, where places to live, even home ownership, are available for even the most humble. Even more striking, and greatly appreciated, was the fact that my wife and I could go anywhere on the island without feeling in danger.

My occasional consultations with colleagues on problem cases in neuropathology and the opportunities I had in teaching pathology trainees gave me an appreciation for the high quality of medical practice in Singapore. But my real instruction in the excellence of Singapore medicine lay in my experiences as a patient in several

practices in Singapore General Hospital. I received high quality care from competent, compassionate physicians who never failed to meet my needs, despite the crush of heavy patient loads. As a skeptical Westerner, my experience with Eastern medicine through acupuncture for cervical spondylosis was eye-opening and very helpful, with continuing, long-term benefits.

During my time at Duke-NUS I did continue my research in Parkinson Disease and greatly enjoyed the vibrant Singapore research community. While I appreciate that a small country must spend money on its future with care, I was struck by impatience with the pace with which scientific discoveries can be developed into clinically useful treatments and preventative measures, concentrating on short-term outcomes rather than long-range results. I feel that the pressure on Singapore's scientists is severe, and it concerns me for two reasons. First, I have seen some scientists driven to conduct high-risk experiments with small chance for success, rather than to take the step-wise approach that more often, even if more slowly, results in results that can be trusted. Second, though I know of no instance of this in Singapore, pressure for results can increase the chance that scientists will engage in fraud. Training physicians who can bridge between basic discoveries and clinical applications is the primary mission of Duke-NUS, an effort that must not be diluted with the pursuit of other, laudable goals, such as provision of increasing numbers of physicians for patient care.

Until my retirement from Duke-NUS in early 2014, I often wished that many aspects of life in Singapore could be scaled up and incorporated into life in the United States, particularly its safety and its efforts on behalf of its poorest citizens. But, I found discomfort with the treatment of foreign labourers by inadequately regulated private contractors. Housing in crowded dormitories and travelling in exposed truck beds recalled my discomfort with the treatment in the United States of the Mexican nationals brought in each fall to harvest cotton in my native

Texas during my childhood. Indeed, the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor is a severe problem around the world, one that cries for attention and resolution.

I have now resumed my retirement, tremendously enriched by my years working and living in Singapore. For my wife and me, and for the grandchildren we have introduced to Singapore, our worlds have grown from immersing ourselves in this culture. We made wonderful friendships, which we shall nurture over the years, and we shall follow developments at Duke-NUS and in Singapore medicine and biomedical science with great interest. I shall always treasure my recognition as Emeritus Professor by the National University of Singapore.



Doyle G Graham

Doyle received his MD and PhD degrees from Duke University. After service as a major in the United States Army Medical Corps he rejoined the Duke medical faculty in 1973. He was promoted to Professor of Pathology in 1986 and appointed Dean of Medical Education in 1987, where he served a five-year term. He later served as Chair of the Department of Pathology at Vanderbilt University. In 2007 he came out of retirement to join the founding faculty of the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore. He retired in 2014, at which time he was honoured by the National University of Singapore as an Emeritus Professor.

Making the World a Better Place through Martial Arts

CHATRI SITYODTONG

The mixed martial arts academy I started up in Singapore officially opened its doors in January of 2009, but when I truly reflect on its beginnings, I am taken back much further than that. Growing up in Thailand, I was drawn to the art of Muay Thai (Thai boxing) at a very young age. I fondly remember the days of my youth spent training at the Sityodtong Muay Thai Camp in Thailand. The Muay Thai World Champions that also called the camp home were my childhood heroes. In between training sessions, I would sit and listen to them talk, hanging on their every word. The Grandmaster of the Sityodtong Camp, Kru Yodtong Senanan, would often sit with us and share his wisdom on life and living. We were his children, and he taught us all how to live in this world. Sure, he taught us the art of Muay Thai, but more importantly he taught us how to be good people. The lessons I learnt through Muay Thai and Kru Yodtong Senanan became the founding principles by which I have lived my life and for the academy.

As a lifelong martial artist, the academy is my way to share my greatest passion with the world. I believe that through the practice of martial arts we can make the world a better place. I started the academy to

fulfill a mission of ensuring that each and every student experiences positive change.

There is a saying in Thailand that when you drop a pebble into a pond, the ripples can be felt all the way to the edge of the pond. In January of 2009, the little pebble was dropped into the pond. I could never have guessed just how big the ripples would become.

Although a large piece of my heart will always remain in Thailand, I knew that Singapore was the perfect home for an academy. Having spent considerable time in Singapore on numerous business ventures, I knew that Singapore was also the country that I wanted to settle in. I fell in love with Singapore's vibrant cultural diversity, world-class efficiency, delicious food, and so much more. The only thing that was missing from Singapore was a world-class martial arts academy. I believed that a new academy could fill this void. More so than in Thailand, where Muay Thai is the national sport, I believed that the people of Singapore could greatly benefit from a martial arts academy that would deliver authentic training in the world's most effective martial arts disciplines.

In the beginning, we started small. I called up my very first Muay Thai teacher in Thailand and one of my childhood training partners from the Sityodtong Camp. During my time spent in the United States, I had begun training in the art of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). I called up my BJJ instructor, a BJJ World Champion from Brazil, and I told him of my dream and vision for an academy in Singapore. He agreed to come to Singapore. Together, we worked day and night laying the mats and hanging the punching bags to create what would become the very first Evolve Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) academy.

We opened with just a few students, and we were thrilled! Although there was a familiarity with Muay Thai, BJJ and MMA, very few people

in Singapore had ever experienced authentic training under World Champion instructors. Slowly but surely, our student body began to grow. Students started bringing in their brothers, sisters, friends, cousins, parents and children.

The academy has since grown into a true martial arts family. We, like Singapore, are a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We are from Singapore, Thailand, the United States, Brazil, Japan, the United Kingdom and many other countries. We are dentists, pilots, students, labourers, doctors, bankers, logistics specialists, entrepreneurs, CEOs and more. We are old, young, fit, not-so-fit, tall, short, athletic, goofy and everything in between.

We are all united by a common cause. Together—students, instructors, fighters, World Champions, and staff—we are on a mission to achieve greatness within. The power of martial arts is not limited to within its walls, but rather splashes out into the world across all areas of our lives—family, friends, business and more.

On a daily basis I receive news of students who have remarkable and inspiring stories. Recently I heard the story of Hsien Hwee, affectionately known as “Milo.” Abandoned by his parents, Milo was an angry, troubled youth who found himself at the Singapore Boys’ Town home. Through our Community Outreach Programme, Milo was invited to train at the academy. He learnt the values of discipline, hard work, sacrifice and teamwork. Inspired by his training, he turned his life around and his future is now brighter than ever.

I heard the story of a middle-aged man with failing health who lost 20 kilos and feels better now than he did in his 20s. I was told of the depressed teenage girl who was bullied mercilessly by her peers until she found the academy and developed the self-confidence to confront

these bullies. I heard the story of the high-powered business executive who had turned to alcohol to deal with the mounting stress in the office, but has found a new and healthy way to deal with the daily stresses of life. I read the headlines on the local sports page and found the story of another student who shined at a martial arts competition.

I hear these remarkable stories and it confirms what I have always believed, that martial arts are a platform for unleashing human potential. My teacher, Kru Yodtong Senanan, once said, “The best attract the best. The best produce the best. It is the irrefutable law of success.” This is how we nurture talent at the academy.

It has been a crazy journey since we first opened our doors, and I am truly proud that it has become the place that I dreamt it would be. The academy is a magical place where everyone is family. Martial arts has indeed inspired positive change in people and elevated them to new heights. I believe that our journey has only just begun, and I look forward to seeing even more people set the world on fire with their passion and dreams.



Chatri Sityodtong

Chatri is an entrepreneur and martial artist from Thailand. With more than 25 years of martial arts experience as a student, fighter, instructor and coach, Chatri is a certified senior Muay Thai instructor and also holds a Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. He is the Founder and Chairman of the Evolve Group. A motivational speaker, Chatri has given peak performance talks at Fortune 500 companies and has also been a featured speaker at TEDx and other business conferences. Chatri also plays an active leadership role in the community. He serves on the Board of Directors of Project Sunshine, and he is also active with both Boys Town Home Singapore and the Singapore Children's Society. Chatri holds an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BA from Tufts University.

Teaching Everyone to Create a Delicious Fusion of Flavours

ANNETTE LANG

My food obsession began at a young age, as part of a family treated to gourmet cooking courtesy of a great chef—my mum! Throughout my working career in Australia, I found myself taking on roles involving food—from buyer to head designer (and taster, of course) of food for gifts sold to major Australian department stores such as David Jones, Myer, Grace Bros, Kmart and Target.

My husband and I arrived in Singapore in 2002 with the expectation of staying two years, but we fell in love with the culture, the amazing variety of food, and the easy and safe lifestyle that is essentially Singapore, and ended up staying far longer. We became permanent residents without any hesitation whatsoever.

After having my first child in 2003, I was told that my sugar levels were high and I had health risks. The same thing happened again after having my second child in 2005. By 2007, I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Eating healthy food and living a healthy lifestyle were not just questions of how, they were absolute necessities. Making a healthy

food environment became part of the family's daily meal programme, and I embraced it with gusto and courage.

This adjustment to my health changes seemed easy enough. My passion for cooking good, healthy, uncomplicated food made me realise how much I had to offer people in the area of food management, food preparation, and training. Given that Singaporeans love food as a national pastime, it made sense to contribute my knowledge to the already-existing food culture.

There were two major catalysts for creating the Expat Kitchen cooking school. The first was that when we arrived 11 years ago, little Western food was available in Singapore and ingredients were not easily sourced. Not only did the choices on offer lack “real” Western taste, but obtaining a healthy low-fat meal was close to impossible and prices were exorbitant.

The upside was that we had a wonderful selection of Asian cuisines to choose from at great prices, although they all also contained lots of oil and sugar. I felt, and still feel, that it's the comfort of simple home-cooked meals that makes us truly happy.

After a while, I was craving for a simple steak and salad. I needed to go back to the food of my roots in order to stay on track with my eating habits. To do this, I invested many hours training my helper to serve super-tasty family-style food, which subsequently was also highly praised by my guests at dinner parties. After taking the initiative and also training my friends as well as their helpers to prepare uncomplicated meals, I realised that teaching cooking could be a niche business that I would be happy to run.

The second reason for creating Expat Kitchen was that I wanted to share my love of non-fussy, unpretentious, family-style food that does

not need to cost too much or be difficult to cook at home. Since locals and foreigners alike enjoy eating, experimenting, learning to cook, and trying exotic cuisines, it made sense to share the food love around.

I created Expat Kitchen in July 2007 to give everyone the opportunity to excel in gastronomic capabilities and prepare Western meals for their families. With well over 8,000 students having completed courses over the past seven years and having educated them by sharing insights into eating properly, I have designed the classes for anyone (and really I mean anyone), from the more sophisticated “foodies” amongst us where cooking is a passion to the beginner who always wanted to learn cooking and decides to take the culinary journey to domestic divinity. We bring like-minded people together to share good food and a memorable, practical cooking experience in the shortest possible time.

I’ve had a multitude of memorable students in the class. One of them was a helper I taught, Tess, who showed passion and foresight when it came to cooking and was an absolute delight to teach. She was not only enthusiastic and excited about discovering good quality cooking, she was interested in what was being taught. Attentive and always asking the right questions, she was always taking notes and offering food suggestions when I asked for substitutes or required alternatives when food allergies might have been an issue. It was a pleasure having her in the class and an honour to present her with the basic certificate. She went on to do Intermediate and was invited back to do our ‘New’ Master class.

Frankie was one of the students who made the most progress. She started out as a total novice who knew absolutely nothing about cooking and couldn’t even boil an egg! Frankie started with the basic course and embraced everything with gusto and excitement. She would run into each class telling us about everything she had practised

and how impressed her family was by the new meals she was putting on the table every day, and by her brand new repertoire of recipes. It wasn't long before Frankie had done all our courses and gained the confidence to start to mix ingredients, spices and seasonings together on her own. Frankie is forever sending us wonderful food pictures via Facebook and impressing us with the gourmet meals she is now producing.

These days, thankfully, worthy Western style food and boundless Western produce is easily available in Singapore, which is reflective of Singapore's changes and how Singapore has developed such an amazing cosmopolitan nature. Likewise, being able to select from such a vast melting pot of food choices at hawker centres, shopping malls and rows of shophouses, as well as in some of the best international restaurants in Southeast Asia, all let us choose from an incredible variety of food and eat well on a daily basis.

Immigrants and working expats are constantly bringing their culinary skills into the local environment, creating some of the finest fusion cuisines on offer. As a result, I have adapted many of my recipes to suit Singaporeans' ever-broadening tastes. Night after night, we are constantly confronted with global gastronomy boasting countless diverse flavours. Expat Kitchen continues to evolve its repertoire, just as Singapore continues to be at the forefront of the food revolution.



Annette Lang

Annette and her husband arrived in Singapore in 2002 with the expectation of staying two years but fell in love with the culture, the food and the easy and safe lifestyle, and became permanent residents. Throughout her working career in Australia, she found herself taking on roles involving food—from buyer to head designer for Australian department stores. Annette founded Expat Kitchen cooking school more than eight years ago and has taught students how to create family meals with Western food while living in Asia.

Sharing Singapore's Boundless Natural Treasures

SHAWN LUM

Singapore is acclaimed for being a clean and green city-state. The deserved accolades perhaps overshadow another interesting fact—much of Singapore's greenery is not entirely urban. The island nation's natural habitats, tiny as they are, support a staggering level of biodiversity, one of the highest in the world on a per-unit-area basis. There are many things that Singapore has achieved, and perhaps one of the most challenging has been the ability to maintain nature areas in the face of a population that has almost tripled since independence in 1965.

As someone who was not born here but who has come to call the island and the region home, I am heartened to see that I am just one of many foreign-born residents in Singapore's wonderfully diverse nature and environment community. I became a volunteer with the Nature Society (Singapore) in the early 1990s. By then, the Nature Society's membership had grown tremendously since its early colonial era years, with a support base reflecting the island's demographic diversity. I was one of many non-Singaporeans in the Nature Society

and was made to feel completely at home—nature appreciation is a very inclusive activity. Even the foreign-born community was a potpourri of nationalities. We were British, Japanese, Indian, American, Danish, Dutch, German and more, but we were a small component of a thoroughly Singaporean non-governmental organisation. We were, regardless of country of birth, united by a love for nature and driven by a keenness to see it preserved for the benefit of everyone.

The resonance of any particular issue, the opportunity to contribute to that issue, the feeling that one is helping and in the process becoming invested in one's local community, and feeling accepted for who you are and not being treated differently for being foreign or local—I think that these generally make one keen to contribute to a cause in one's adopted home. For me the issue was nature conservation and awareness-raising, and the Nature Society was the place that welcomed me and made me feel at home. Today, I volunteer in the Nature Society alongside a very committed group of volunteers. Anyone who wants to celebrate and share Singapore's natural heritage is part of our multi-hued extended family. Some of the Nature Society's most active volunteers read like a mini United Nations, hailing from Singapore, Great Britain, Malaysia, Australia, the United States, China and India. We drop our nationalities when together. Studying, sharing and protecting plant and animal diversity is our shared bond.

I am an educator, and for someone like me, being given opportunities to learn and to share what I've learned with others has great appeal, and that is another reason I have found my time in nature conservation so rewarding. Our teachers have been local nature experts, most of them Singaporean or long-time residents here, and the involvement of an international group of enthusiasts adds skills and knowledge picked up from around the world with the purpose of making Singapore a better place for people and for nature.

The local expertise in nature is astounding, and the commitment and tenacity of my colleagues such as Dr Ho Hua Chew and so many others has been an inspiration to me. How can we bring more people to discover the natural world and derive meaning and enrichment from it, as Dr Ho and others have done? If we could, the quality of life of more than five million people would increase dramatically, I believe.

My fellow members and I have learned, and continue to learn, from anyone willing to share experiences and insights into nature: friends from Singapore for whom fireflies were a common sight, plentiful enough to catch and place into a glass jar, where they produced enough light to read by; people who know the medicinal uses of many wild plants; people who know the calls of innumerable local songbirds. Older men have shared stories of how they used to row sampans to fishing and crabbing grounds in rivers that no longer flow out to the sea, or of the local fishing villages that used to line the East Coast.

These stories are powerful, riveting and poignant. Even though I didn't grow up here, I have enough experience in wild places to imagine what Singapore's nature areas were like before. I have borrowed, or rather have been given, the gift of a Singapore sense of place by the many people who have shared stories with me. I can listen to tales of "last time" and imagine myself being a player in some of them. Memories of my Hawaiian childhood are no less vivid than they were before I left home. However, I feel as if I have been granted a second set of memories, Singaporean ones, and of the biodiversity that thrived here. And ultimately, the voices in these visions of a Singapore past are those of forests, mangroves and coral reefs, and the cacophony of the teeming tropical nature that inhabited them.

As someone involved in nature conservation, I work with my friends in the hope that children growing up today will be able to share with others, like those who recounted their accounts of nature with me, a

sense of excitement and wonder over Singapore's boundless natural treasures. There need not be only a "last time" for nature, as a diverse group of people are working to ensure that there will be a "next time" for nature in Singapore, too. In our more optimistic moments, we dream that the "next time" will be even better than the present.

Nature conservation involves sharing the experience of nature with others. Increased visitor-ship to nature areas is seen as evidence of a heightened interest in nature amongst the general public. Today, visitor density in nature areas can rival that of popular shopping or dining hotspots. How do we as conservationists get around the conundrum of wanting to expose more people to the amazing riches of Singapore's natural places without diminishing the very thing that we aim to preserve? This perhaps requires an altogether different kind of love for nature.

In 2001, as the effort to hold off the planned reclamation of the Tanjong Chek Jawa area of Pulau Ubin was in its early stages, I was part of a group of Nature Society volunteers who regularly led people on walks to Tanjong Chek Jawa to raise awareness for its preservation. After one of the walks, I sat on the granite shelf that overlooked the sprawling Tanjong Chek Jawa lagoon, chatting with walk participants. One of them thanked me for bringing her and her husband for the walk. She continued, "I really loved Chek Jawa, and I hope it is conserved. But I will not return here." Such was her feeling for the place that she would be happiest in the comfort of knowing that the habitat was conserved, rather in having to repeatedly visit the site. "*That* is the true conservation ethos," I recall thinking at the time. And for that I have to thank a Singaporean couple for teaching me.



Shawn Lum

When Shawn arrived in Singapore, the country was celebrating its 25th birthday. A two-year research stint got extended a bit, and Singapore today is celebrating its 50th birthday. Tropical biodiversity, great friends and now a family have kept Shawn, a biology lecturer and nature volunteer, rooted to Singapore, but so too does a sense of purpose: Singapore has so much it can do to help protect the priceless and amazingly delightful biodiversity of the region. Shawn's work in Singapore has been primarily as a member of the education community and as volunteer with the Nature Society (Singapore), which he has served as President since 2008.

Singapore Overseas

My Relationship with Singapore

RIDWAN KAMIL

Singapore and I have been in a relationship for more than 20 years.

We first met in 1994, when I was an undergraduate. I had been selected as a Singapore International Foundation-ASEAN Fellowship scholar, and my stint as an exchange student in the National University of Singapore (NUS) was the first time I had ventured out of Indonesia. Singapore was unlike anything I had experienced before—a new way of life, another culture different from my own. It was my first taste of the world beyond my home.

My lessons in Singapore did not just come from the semester of study at NUS or the introductory programme by Singapore International Foundation (SIF), which was comprehensive and which introduced me and the other SIF-ASEAN scholars to Singapore's policies, strategies and way of life. Everything I encountered in Singapore and the people I interacted with on a daily basis were learning experiences to me. I think my greatest takeaways were Singapore's systematic and well-organised urban design and its innovative use of technology.

In hindsight, I think this first encounter with Singapore helped ready me for my professional and political careers by broadening my perspectives and preparing me to learn from and collaborate with communities in the more than 150 cities I've worked in and visited over the subsequent years.

As an architect, I was based in New York, San Francisco and Hong Kong, and I have worked on major projects across the globe—some of which brought me back to Singapore. I was involved in urban development projects there, the biggest of which was the Marina Bay Waterfront Master Plan, a six-year plan for developing the area which is now known as Marina Bay. I also pitched my designs for the JTC Corporation's Biopolis Master Plan and for an area in Punggol. Throughout the years, Singapore—from its well-designed parks and walkways to its innovative architecture in developments such as the Esplanade and Gardens by the Bay—has served as my reference point for building a modern city-state.

And building a livable city of the future is my mission now as Mayor of the city of Bandung.

Bandung is Indonesia's third-largest city and is unique because it is a city of youth. 60 per cent of the population is under 40 years old. It is a well-connected generation and the people are very active on social media. In fact, Bandung is ranked number six in the world in terms of Twitter usage. My team and I need to be creative so that we can engage and interact with Bandung's people—to discuss their views, complaints, questions and suggestions. This is why, in addition to my physical campaigns on the ground, I've taken to Twitter to reach my constituents.

And what do we talk about? As Mayor, I think the greatest challenge I face is instilling a progressive mindset in the people of Bandung. We

have introduced, through social media and ground campaigning, an initiative called Bandung Fun Days to galvanise the community into improving its way of life and transform Bandung into a more livable city. Monday is “Free Bus Day” for students, to promote the use of public buses instead of private transport. Tuesday is “Non-smoking Day,” to encourage people not to smoke at least one day a week. Wednesday is “Sundanese Day” when we promote the use of our local language and celebrate our culture and customs. Thursday is “English Day,” because all of us are encouraged to use English in our daily communications. Friday is “Bike to Work Day,” and Saturday is “Culinary Festival Day” because Bandung is known as one of Indonesia’s top culinary destinations.

Although the innovations I am bringing to Bandung are doubtlessly inspired by the many other countries I have lived and worked in, I must say that my Singapore experience continues to guide me, especially in the areas of governance, urban development and the use of technology.

We are preparing 1,000 hectares in Bandung to be turned into the Silicon Valley of Indonesia, for which some ideas were sparked by the concept of the Biopolis in Buona Vista. This is the reason I have asked my team to visit the Biopolis to gather insights and best practices. I am currently in talks with the Singapore Government for collaboration on strategies for innovating Bandung’s public service through the concept of “e-governance” as well as an environmental cooperation agreement, and we are sending deputies to government courses in Singapore to learn more about administration. Most recently, I have introduced a new law to fine people who litter in Bandung—a leaf I took from the book of Singapore, the “Fine City!”

I am living proof of the benefits that an international exchange programme like the SIF-ASEAN fellowship can bring, and I see it as

a long-term investment that benefits cross-cultural relationships by nurturing the young leaders of the future. When I was a student in Singapore, I made friends from around the world and deepened my understanding of their cultures. Now, as Mayor, I've come to see how important this understanding is when collaborating with other governments and global communities.



M Ridwan Kamil

Ridwan is Mayor of the City of Bandung, Indonesia. He was previously Principal at PT Urbane Indonesia and a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at the Institute of Technology Bandung. He received the 2013 Urban Leadership Award from the Penn Institute for Urban Research. He holds a master's degree in Urban Design from the University of California, Berkeley and studied architectural engineering at the Institute of Technology Bandung, where he was made a Singapore International Foundation-ASEAN Fellow in 1994. Ridwan is married and has two children.

Insights from a Conservation Scientist in Singapore

MADHU RAO

Following several months of gruelling fieldwork in the dense tropical forests of the Gunung Leuser National Park in neighbouring Indonesia, I landed at the plush Singapore airport with a backpack bursting with muddy boots and grimy field clothes. That was back in 1995, 20 years ago, when I was researching the effects of selective logging on orangutan behaviour. The shiny airport and all its astonishing conveniences were bewildering, although admittedly I did not pay too much attention. I was a student, had places to see and work to do, and this was just a stopover, a transit point in my student life. Back then, I never imagined that Singapore would be my home at a later point in my life. I was training to be a conservation biologist. Yet after doctoral research and professional opportunities took me to South America, the United States and the United Kingdom in the intervening years, I ended up returning to the city-state in late 2006.

This time, I came to stay not with a backpack but with a family in tow. This time, I was forced to pay some attention.

It was certainly exciting to return to the heart of the Asian tropics and live in one of the most progressive countries in the world. With a superbly efficient airport and most work-related destinations only a short flight away, travel was going to be a pleasure and jet lag a thing of the past. Besides, there were all those coral reefs in the neighbourhood waiting to be explored. Could there be any snags to this perfect move to Singapore?

Actually, there were three things to worry about, I reasoned. The first was related to an unambiguous reality: Singapore was and would always be small. Could I cope? The second was related to the fact that it was highly urbanised and hence must be limited in its offerings of wild and natural places to wander. The third was more whimsical. Would I get used to “super efficiency” and not be able to live anywhere else in the world? These and other questions swirled in a big cloud as I settled into an expatriate existence on a tiny island that in my mind had lost most of its forests before 1990.

Focusing on Conservation

My primary occupation as a scientist with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), an international non-government organisation, means that I am steeped in the grinding realities of implementing conservation in Southeast Asia. Applying science to solve conservation problems within a context of weak governance regimes and changing socioeconomic context is challenging. Yet this is the core part of my work-related responsibilities. The magnificent biodiversity in this tropical region is at risk from the juggernaut of economic development. A cocktail of factors, from escalating commercial-scale exploitation of wildlife to brisk deforestation driven by production of commodities and infrastructure development, has meant that the region is losing its species and forests at a pace unprecedented in scope and scale. Living

in Singapore, I was inevitably drawn to thinking about the linkages—how was it all relevant, and did Singapore have any role to play in stemming the loss of biodiversity in the region.

Some answers were more straightforward than others. From changing consumption patterns and actively supporting regionally-linked conservation issues to penalising offending private sector interests and clamping down on the transit of endangered wildlife, Singapore could significantly and positively influence regional conservation if the appropriate mechanisms could be identified. More than anything else, exemplary governance, an inherent characteristic of Singapore, could itself be an inspiration for many countries in the region and beyond.

Bringing the Conservation Message to Students

Along with working to solve these issues in my role at WCS, I also took the opportunity to share these thoughts and experiences with Singaporean students when I became a lecturer at a university here. And in my interactions with students, I focused on two delicate points: first, that science in itself is inadequate to solve real world conservation problems; and second, that the urgency of the situation gives regional economies only a brief window of opportunity to get it right, by conserving biological wealth while making progress on human development. I was hoping to enthuse my students to explore these problems further, and at a more basic level to promote the realisation of the contrasting context with Singapore.

While I am not sure to what extent I initially succeeded in motivating students during my guest lectures and supervision of honours thesis students at the university, I was unexpectedly assisted in my endeavour by the haze in 2013, which brought home that very same point in an inescapable manner. For the first time in several years, it was a

relief to fly out of the smog and into uncharacteristically cleaner air in Beijing. For the first time in years, vulnerability reared its ugly head.

A year later, fires were raging again and the Pollution Standard Index (PSI) dominated conversations. Along with bringing the issues home to my students once again, an unprecedented trans-boundary haze bill ready for deployment highlighted how much Singapore could do and gave us another topic for discussion.

Moving Forward

Nine years on, Singapore continues to make new strides, with changes such as its first marine national park off the Sister's islands and a shiny new natural history museum. Smooth-coated otters are showing up in various places. Could Singapore be on its way to becoming an urbanised city state teeming with wildlife? That would be going well beyond Singapore's aim to be a city in a garden and in fact would be a treat for wildlife enthusiasts.

What can I expect moving forward? That nothing will remain the same. That some things will not change. That there will be continuous innovation and unceasing improvements, as there have been over the past nine years with the development of world-class sports facilities, Gardens by the Bay, innovative centres for learning, trail-blazing routes under the sea, and some other unexpected and pleasant surprises along the way. Over the coming years, I see my role as perhaps similar to a pollinating bee, bringing in regional conservation experiences and taking outward the possibilities for resolution.

And what about the concerns I had upon moving here? Nine years on, I seem to have reconciled my doubts about my ability to cope with the size issue, despite some sporadic bouts of restlessness. There are always some wild places to wander about or new walking routes

to explore. Given that I haven't actually left, I cannot offer true insights into the last area of concern except to state that almost every single time, regardless of my destination, returning home feels exceptionally good.



Madhu Rao

Madhu is a regional advisor with the Wildlife Conservation Society, an international conservation non-governmental organisation, and helps coordinate the Asian Species Action Partnership, an IUCN Species Survival Commission initiative focused on averting extinctions of critically endangered vertebrates in Southeast Asia. She has been a visiting fellow at the School of Biological Sciences, Cambridge University, United Kingdom, and is adjunct faculty at the Department of Biological Science, National University of Singapore. She has been involved in developing and implementing science-based conservation projects focused on addressing threats to endangered species and natural ecosystems within protected area systems in Southeast Asia and China. Her research interests include protected area policy, the exploitation of wildlife and human-wildlife conflict.

Culture that Connects and Binds

KAMSIAH KAMARUDDIN

When I try to characterise the relationship between Singapore and Malaysia, the phrase “ties that bind” comes immediately to mind. This phrase aptly describes our relationship, as we have unbreakable ties. The relationship between our two countries is one that cannot be broken, because of our shared past, our shared experiences and our similarities.

Here, I would like to make a distinction between the government-to-government relationship, and people-to-people relationships. On the government-to-government level, I believe that our relationship is better than it has ever been before. On both sides of the Causeway, the new generation of leaders has taken a more pragmatic approach in managing our relationship. The historical “baggages” of our respective pasts do not feature as prominently as they had in earlier generations.

Understanding through Travel

As for people-to-people relations, it has always been very good. But of course, there is always room for growth in our understanding of each other. It is sometimes easy to take each other's cultures for granted,

since we are so similar, and sometimes to feel that there is no mystery, nothing more to learn about each other. Being such near neighbours, one would have thought that many Malaysians would have visited Singapore, and vice versa. But the reality is not so.

Though Singaporeans visit Malaysia in numbers, I can safely say that most of the time they visit Johor Bahru or Kuala Lumpur, but may not be familiar with the offerings of places further away such as Kelantan or Trengganu. So, the interactions between our communities are quite limited. As a result, Singaporeans may have misconceptions about each other based on having seen only a limited portion of the country.

So, even though we are so near, we should not take our relationships for granted. We need to take the time to learn about each other, to discover our similarities and celebrate our differences. And there is no better way to learn about a country than by travelling there, and experiencing more of it first-hand. We may begin our journey with preconceived notions or perceptions about that country or its people, but when we get under the skin of that country, we often discover the ways in which we share a common humanity.

Now, with the ease of travel, I am optimistic that we can build greater understanding between our communities, people-to-people. To have greater cross-cultural awareness, I recommend that young people go beyond their comfort zone, travel to foreign lands to experience other cultures. Travelling not only helps us get to know another people, but to know ourselves as well.

Understanding through Art

Sharing each other's arts and culture can also bring about a better understanding between the peoples of two nations. One good example is a programme called the CausewayEXchange, led by Shawn

Lourdusamy, a Malaysian. Shawn brings artists from Malaysia to Singapore, artists from various segments of the arts—writers, people from theatre, performers, visual artists, martial arts exponents, and so forth. For the fifth edition in 2014, this multi-disciplinary arts festival lined up a 10-day programme including performances, workshops, art exhibitions, productions and comedy as well as talks by famous personalities such as Lat, a Malaysian cartoonist, and other notable literary writers. This cultural celebration for audiences of all ages and backgrounds facilitates greater exchange and awareness between people of both countries and helps us gain a better understanding of our neighbours through their artistic works. The CausewayEXchange alternates between Malaysian and Singaporean offerings from year to year. Through an exchange of arts and culture, I believe we can bring about greater understanding of each other.

Similarly, one of the highlights of my stay in Singapore has been my involvement in a programme in which the Malaysian High Commission partnered with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF)—the Little by Little programme. Through the programme, I have had a wonderful opportunity to interact with youth in Singapore, which I otherwise might not have been able to do in the course of my work. Little by Little is a monthly series of cultural exchanges where SIF partners the international community in Singapore to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures, to bridge Singaporeans with other communities around the world. In one Little by Little session, we shared insights into Malay dances and presented a live demonstration of the Balqis, a contemporary and fast-paced traditional dance. Little Arts Academy students, in turn, presented a piece of Indian contemporary fusion dance which they had choreographed.

Through the Little by Little programme, I had a fantastic opportunity to get to know Singapore through its young generation. Personally, I feel there is little else that can make you feel closer to a country than

spending time with the youth of that country. These young people were so very positive and optimistic, we went away warmed by their attitudes. I gained so much from this experience that I am bringing along colleagues to join me for the upcoming sessions. This truly has been a most rewarding part of my time here and will remain one of my best memories of my time here in Singapore.

Programmes like Little by Little demonstrate how the arts can enable the international community in Singapore to share and promote the appreciation of different cultures, and enrich the lives of young people. We also work with other institutions such as mental health institutions and with schools and other organisations to promote cultural understanding. I believe that such interactions are very important because, while we do learn about each other's histories in the schools, there is still much that can be gained from personal interaction. For this reason, we regularly welcome visitors to Singapore from Malaysia, whether it is schoolchildren, *kampung* folk or any of the many who visit.

Looking ahead, I see the dynamics of the Singapore-Malaysia relationship changing and developing, especially as the population of Singapore is enriched by the addition of peoples who are not from this region. There is already a diaspora of Singaporeans in Malaysia, and also of Malaysians in Singapore. We share the same history, languages, dialects, religions, and even familial ties. But many of the new immigrants in the Singaporean population do not share the same background or history, and they may not have gone through the same things that the earlier communities had. It remains to be seen how the new dynamics will develop and play out in the days ahead.

I have often asked Singaporeans, *What is the Singaporean identity?* And so far, no one has been able to tell me an answer which is similar to the others. I do not see this necessarily as a negative thing, but

it is a true reflection of the Singaporean identity at this stage of its formation. Malaysia too, is forming its identity. We share this journey of both seeking an identity. We can share this journey together and build a deeper understanding of each other.



Kamsiah Kamaruddin

Kamsiah is a career diplomat who also has the distinction of being the spouse of another diplomat. Currently Deputy High Commissioner of Malaysia to Singapore, she has served at the Malaysian Embassy in Bangkok and various departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Malaysia. She also followed her husband on his first posting to Argentina and his tour as the Malaysian Consul-General in Los Angeles. Her husband is currently the Malaysian Ambassador to Turkmenistan. Kamsiah is the proud mother of five daughters who love travelling and exploring new places. Her hobbies include reading, collecting and up-cycling old stuff, cooking and gardening. Kamsiah is a passionate armchair archaeologist and aspiring historian.

Revolution Project— Singapore and Melbourne

ANDRIA HUTCHINS

I moved to Singapore in 2006 on a two-year contract, thinking I'd be back in Australia right after it ended. Only seven years later did I finally return home, with my partner and our two-year-old daughter in tow.

In my time there I founded Revolution Project Singapore, a social enterprise which provided training and experience for 64 retail studies students from Northlight School and raised more than \$10,000 for local children's charities. This project became the model upon which I built Revolution Project Melbourne, a social enterprise that supports long-term unemployed young people.

The SIF YBA connection

A lot of what I did in Singapore was rooted in my first stay there in 2003, on the 12-week Young Business Ambassador (YBA) programme sponsored by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). I was one of two of the last Australian YBAs, as the programme was retired after that. It was a fantastic way to get an in-depth understanding of the

Singapore-Australia relationship and was a large part of the reason I moved back to Singapore.

The start of Revolution Singapore

In 2006, I moved to Singapore to take up the role of Director of Public Affairs with the Australian High Commission. During the YBA Programme I had developed a connection with United Nations Women (then UNIFEM), where I did my YBA work placement and volunteered as an editor afterwards. I was invited to join its executive committee when I moved back and quickly became involved in that community again. Through those connections I was encouraged to start Revolution Project Singapore.

I had an idea about using pop-up shops that sold pre-loved designer fashion to provide training for young people. I had always loved trawling through recycled clothing shops in Australia and the United Kingdom. Someone who heard about my idea told me that Northlight School, a terrific Singapore secondary school that provides vocational education to young people who have failed their Primary School Leaving Exam, needed some help with fundraising. So in 2009, some friends and I ran a one-off pop-up shop for Northlight where we raised \$6,000.

It was clear that beyond the fundraising, the biggest benefit the students derived was the experience of retailing. Teachers told me that their students would often go out on work attachments and come back less confident than before they went because the experience was quite daunting for these students, who had self-confidence issues. But in our pop-up shop, students learned to serve real customers to high standards, and were trained in the ins and outs of retailing in a positive learning environment. So, I decided to do a series of pop-up shops every few months, with a shift in focus from fundraising to providing quality training for the students of Northlight. The Northlight teachers

were incredible, attending the weekend events, video-taping what was happening in our shop and using it to train their students throughout the year. This was how Revolution Project Singapore began.

The money that was raised from the shop was donated to Sanctuary House, a children's charity that provides crisis accommodation and care for at-risk babies and children. The students were thrilled to see that they were making a difference for someone else. Northlight School also used part of the proceeds for a bursary fund for students who needed financial assistance.

From the start, I never really saw where it would all go. It was just something I wanted to do, as I firmly believed it could make a difference, and it was a lovely surprise when it fell into place.

Supportive relationships

When I moved to Singapore the second time, I was struck by how easy it was to make friends. Through my work at the Australian High Commission, my YBA connections and the Revolution Project, I met a lot of people in the social enterprise sector in Singapore, and I was amazed by their drive, creativity and helpfulness.

I was also involved with Social Innovation Park and often attended their weekend Pop and Talent Hub (PaTH) Market, where I was usually the only *angmoh* (Caucasian) among all the people from the social enterprises in Singapore. I made some fabulous friends through that network, and we still stay in touch and help each other to this day.

Revolution continues in Melbourne

In 2009, as I prepared to return to Melbourne, I donated the remaining stock and fittings for Revolution to the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations' (SCWO) charity shop. I arranged for SCWO to work with Northlight on some of their pop-up sale events, so students could continue to get some retail experience.

One of the hardest things about leaving Singapore was saying goodbye to all that. I did think that was the end of Revolution. But when I moved back to Australia, I quickly realised I wasn't quite finished with it yet. Reading the newspapers, I found myself noticing issues that I probably wouldn't have had the same level of interest in or the same concern about before my Revolution experience in Singapore: rising youth unemployment, the challenges faced by early school leavers, and the efforts being made to reach out to socially-disconnected young people.

My partner and I ended up volunteering with a youth mentoring programme at our local secondary school, something I probably would not have considered doing before I went to Singapore. The issues are universal. As the economies of the world are restructuring and as industries are changing, young people—especially early school leavers who do not have experience or training—are finding it increasingly difficult to secure meaningful employment.

I started talking to people about Revolution Project Singapore and how it had worked, and soon clothes were arriving at my house from friends and strangers. Then someone offered us a vacant retail space in the Docklands, Melbourne, which we could use for free, thanks to the Docklands Spaces project supported by the City of Melbourne. So, after only a few months, we were relaunching the Revolution Project, in Melbourne.

Revolution Project Melbourne is still in its pilot stage, and we have recently moved to an online business model, which is proving quite successful. It is aimed at training young people aged 16 to 24 who have been out of work for two years or more. Our success is measured through the employment and training we provide to these young people as well as their ability to find and hold a job after completing the programme.

Two homes

I feel really privileged, because most expatriates who leave Singapore wonder whether they might ever come back. But I know we will always return, because Singapore is our family's second home. My daughter, Sofie, was born in Singapore. Her father is Singaporean and his parents live there. Sofie loves the place. The other day she asked me, "Can we please get everybody that we know in Melbourne to move to Singapore? Because I really love my grandma and granddad in Melbourne, but I want to live in Singapore. So they will have to come and live there too."

We're conscious that kids can forget very quickly, so each time we return to Singapore we take the time to visit and enjoy all the things she loved in her first two years there, like *kueh dada* and *kueh lapis*. At some point in our daughter's future, we'll be back there as a family, I'm sure. Having two places to call home, we are quite lucky, really.



Andria Hutchins

Andria is a tertiary-qualified journalist with more than 25 years' experience in marketing and communications. Over the past 15 years, her career has focused on leading teams to deliver media and marketing programmes that promote Australia's engagement with international audiences, including for Australian Volunteers International, ABC Radio Australia, the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games and the Australian High Commission in Singapore. In 2003, as a Singapore-Australia Young Business Ambassador, Andria undertook work placements with Shaksfin Asia and UNIFEM Singapore. Andria then continued volunteering with UNIFEM Singapore from her home in Melbourne, Australia. In 2006, Andria moved to Singapore to become the Director of Public Affairs with the Australian High Commission. She stayed for six years, returning to Australia in 2012.

Singapore, the Compassionate

HARUHISA TAKEUCHI

The Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 was one of the worst disasters in the history of Japan. It is therefore most heartening to note that the level of assistance and support from the international community was also unprecedented.

After the earthquake struck, Singapore expressed its compassion, solidarity and support to the devastated areas in a swift and decisive manner. Among countless expressions of compassion was the donation from the people of Singapore, through Singapore Red Cross, to build four centres in the devastated areas. Three centres are already in operation, and the fourth and the largest centre is due to be opened in early 2015.

These centres are: Taro Support Center, Miyako City, Iwate prefecture; Shichigahama Toyama Nursery School, Miyagi prefecture; Community Center, Soma City, Fukushima prefecture; and Multipurpose hall, Rikuzen Takata City, Iwate prefecture.

I had a chance to visit, albeit briefly, two of these centres in December 2013. Everyone I met was grateful to the generous donation from

Singapore, and I could see firsthand that the centres were serving the communities well in their path towards recovery. It was winter and it was cold, but my heart was filled with the warmth of humanity.

Taro Support Centre: Red and White

Taro Support Centre is situated in Miyako City, in the coastal area of Iwate prefecture. The centre was opened in November 2011 to support those who have lost their homes in the disaster and were living in the temporary accommodation. When I visited the centre, there were groups of people conversing, making origami and exercising. The neatly done building has a red stripe on its white façade which symbolises Singapore. At the entrance of the building, one can see the plaque that recognises the generous support from Singapore Red Cross. On the walls of the main function room, there are also pictures of the Merlion, Marina Bay Sands and other landmarks of Singapore.

Shichigahama Toyama Nursery School: “Lion Park”

Shichigahama is situated about 20 kilometres from Sendai City, facing the Pacific Ocean. Due to the damage incurred in the earthquake, Toyama Nursery School was forced to close for two years. However, with generous support from Singapore, the school was reopened in May 2013. The town of Shichigahama then put forth a public appeal for a name that would represent the school’s deep bonds with Singapore and the name “Lion Park” was selected to become the new nickname of the school.

Ever since I arrived in Singapore in October 2013, I keep on meeting Singaporeans of all walks, and I repeat, all walks, who had in their own way expressed their compassion to Japan and the Japanese people. We will always remain grateful to Singapore and the people of Singapore for their generous support.

In conclusion, with our deepest gratitude to all the compassionate Singaporeans, congratulations on the 50th anniversary of your independence! My country, Japan, very much looks forward to working together, walking together with Singapore and learning from each other for many years to come.



Haruhisa Takeuchi

Haruhisa Takeuchi was born in Washington DC, United States. After his graduation from Hitotsubashi University in Japan, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His previous appointments include Director-General, Intelligence and Analysis at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006-2008), Ambassador of Japan to the State of Israel (2008-2011) and Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs (2011-2013). Ambassador Takeuchi arrived in Singapore in October 2013.

Born in Malaysia, Raised in Singapore, Worked in India, and Still *Kiasu*

ANDREW YIN

As a foreigner who works in India, I am often asked, “Where are you from?” For me, as a foreigner who grew up in Singapore almost his entire life, there’s just no straight answer. I was born in Malaysia, where a greater part of my family still resides, but I would like to consider myself to have been brought up in Singapore, where I have my fondest memories of my first love, childhood friendships and adolescence. And if your career is the one determining force which shapes your entire life, then so much of what I have today is owed to this country and her people, who have embraced the same principles and virtues that her founding fathers espoused: equality, commitment, and above all else, hard work.

Let me explain what I do for a living. I use water hyacinth, which is the most prevalent aquatic weed in India, to make sanitary pads to equip rural Indian women with hygienic and affordable menstrual protection. It started in February 2012, when I decided to sign up for a competition organised by the Singapore International Foundation that I learnt about through my school Nanyang Technological University’s

online learning portal. Thankfully, we won the competition, which has enabled us to carry our dream of delivering impact to the most disadvantaged women in rural India forward. About 312 million women in India are still living without access to hygienic and effective means of menstrual protection till this day.

I am now based out of a village in a remote part of rural India, where I work with my partner organisation, Aakar Innovations, to create the world's first 100 percent biodegradable sanitary pad, which is effective, low-cost and made out of water hyacinth, the aquatic weed that costs local economies millions of dollars each year to eradicate.

When I first introduce myself to local Indians, I almost always say that I am from Malaysia, and I wait for a few seconds to gauge the person's response. When I see confusion on their faces, I immediately say, "Singapore." The instant I say that, there is this look of knowing, usually accompanied with a smile or whisperings among their peers. For the longest time, I never pried further.

Recently, though, I started to ask, "Why do you smile when I say that? Have you heard of Singapore?"

I asked a group of ladies in the village about their perspectives on Singapore. "It's really clean," or "tall buildings everywhere" were the common answers, even though they have actually never been to or seen Singapore. So, one might ask, how do they know? As it turns out, word in a village travels fast, and you will almost always hear a story or two about how there is a child from a family who did well enough to study, work and eventually live in Singapore—the ultimate dream for a good number of them. To think that not every Indian wants to go to the United States or a European country anymore truly marks Singapore as a cut above the rest. And it reminded me that if

you work hard enough, not just in Singapore but anywhere else in the world, you can still live your dream.

While working here, I also noticed that when people know that I am from Singapore, they lean in more when I speak and my opinion is more sought after. Somehow, being from Singapore bestows upon you a kind of privilege not extended to your peers from other countries. And I think a lot of it boils down to the Singaporean work ethic that has truly defined us on a global stage.

I haven't found anywhere else with people like Singaporeans, whose uniqueness probably stems from a generation of *kiasu-ness*; the colloquial way of saying that we hate losing. As a result, Singaporeans excel, because there is just no alternative in a country as small as Singapore but with a dream as big as anywhere else. But more importantly, individually, this unique trait has honed our survival skills, which allow us to fend for ourselves, adapt quickly to new circumstances and emerge better than before.

I draw on my experience in India as an example. The things you may have heard about India are true. There are a good number of people who live below the poverty line, homelessness is a problem, and clean water is still unavailable in many places. India, as it turned out, was unlike any place I had ever been. Needless to say, it is definitely not Singapore. It was overwhelming for sure, but I think at some point, my instincts must have taken over. My local partners were initially very worried about my stint in India, and with good reason. I look vastly different from the locals, I could not speak the local language, and I had never been away from home for as long as I have been to work, let alone in a country like India.

Against all odds, I survived, and even thrived. I would like to think I did better than what anyone, myself included, would have expected

and I think it's because my time in Singapore trained me well for it. Because I was afraid of "losing out," I worked harder than anyone else. The scepticism shown towards me by my partners eventually became trust. They trusted me to do things on my own, without having to look over their shoulders every time to see whether I was following or catching up. Because I was afraid of losing "face," I went into meetings more prepared than anyone else. My partners like to think of it as paranoia, but I tell them, this is the Singaporean work ethic at its finest. And I am proud to say that, because of it, we come out of meetings with our stakeholders more confident than harassed every single time. And now, you can really tell that they appreciate and value me, all because I was afraid of "losing."

And people say, Singapore has nothing to call its own? I beg to differ. Singapore's ability to survive even in the toughest of times, from the very beginning, is unique. As a nation, I think that because Singaporeans are so afraid to lose, we will remain stronger and more viable than ever.

So when people say Singapore is an exception, not the rule, you should find no malice in that statement. In fact, be proud that that is true. Singapore is a fine exception indeed.



Andrew Yin

Andrew is an aspiring entrepreneur who co-founded IMPad, a social enterprise that seeks to equip rural Indian women with affordable, hygienic and effective sanitary napkins that are made using an aquatic weed, water hyacinth. He also works with a leading social enterprise in India in the field of menstrual hygiene management as the content and marketing strategist. A strong advocate for social justice, Andrew regularly volunteers at a club that teaches life skills to members of the intellectually-impaired community, in order for them to achieve healthier, independent living. Andrew is currently commuting between his work (India) and studies (Singapore) as he pursues a dual degree business programme in Nanyang Technological University.

Connected-for-Good in Singapore

LYNNA CHANDRA

The headlines in the news here in Singapore report every alternate day on the ever-rising property prices. Every day we see an increasing number of Ferraris and Lamborghinis zipping down the streets. And lately, I find myself constantly saying, “What! Is that the price of the main course?!” So has the world descended upon the Garden City in search of wealth and material fulfillment, and in the process squeezed out its soul? Has Singapore become a city filled with cold and disconnected souls?

On the surface, it looks like this is the direction it is heading, and fast. What I have found over the past decade, however, is a very different side to the story.

Rachel House—A Service Built on Friendships

In 2005, after losing a dear friend to cancer, I started on a journey that led me to the most awe-inspiring group of people I have ever met and to life-affirming experiences that may perhaps shed a different light on the “cold and disconnected” Singapore.

After Rachel Clayton passed away, I began to wonder how people with life-limiting conditions would spend their last days if they were bereft of financial means. The answer I found online, that many would spend their last days suffering in pain, broke my heart. The unalleviated pain I witnessed when walking through the pediatric wards of the public hospitals in Jakarta, where I travelled to in search of “ground evidence,” shocked me into action.

Rachel House was thus born in 2006 with the vision that no child should ever have to die in pain.

Without knowing where to start, I approached Rachel’s oncologist in Singapore for guidance. Dr Ang Peng Tiam kindly introduced me to Dr Rosalie Shaw, who opened the world of palliative care to me and welcomed me into the hospice community in Singapore.

From the beginning, it was as if I had walked into a beautiful cocoon of kindness in the world of death and dying—one which most would associate with pain and suffering. The hospice community in Singapore embraced me and celebrated the crazy idea from a novice like me of starting what would be the first pediatric hospice in Indonesia.

Dr Shaw, who had been living in Singapore for almost two decades and was at the time a consultant with the Department of Palliative Medicine for the National Cancer Centre, sat with me over many cups of coffee at the KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital and patiently guided me through the complex world of healthcare and palliative care. Ann Choo, who was the Chief Operating Officer of HCA Hospice Care at the time, shared with me the “backroom” of a hospice operation and helped me prepare the standard operating procedures and staffing requirements, including drafting the job specifications for us!

Singapore quickly became not only the place I returned home to after a week's work in Jakarta, but also the place where I found answers and solutions to the many challenges and obstacles we were encountering in those early days of building Rachel House. At each step of the way, the hospice community would rally behind us and offer their full support. The then head nurse of Dover Park Hospice, Edward Poon, would spend his weekends in Jakarta to provide training to our nurses at his own expense.

In 2008, as we completed the recruitment of the first medical team, our friends here in Singapore recommended that it was time for an organised education programme to be planned for the pioneering pediatric palliative care team. Dr Shaw introduced us to the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), which had just completed a similar training programme in Vietnam. With the support of the hospice community once again, a team of Singapore International Volunteers was assembled to support a two-year SIF-led pediatric palliative care training programme. At the launch ceremony of the project in Jakarta, we were introduced to the wife of the Singapore Ambassador to Indonesia, Mrs Gouri Mirpuri, who took us in under her wing and gave us her wholehearted support throughout her remaining tenure in Indonesia. The web of kindness from our Singapore friends spread beyond its border.

Today, close to 2,000 lives have been touched by Rachel House's palliative care service. The friendships forged with the Singapore hospice community, both in the early days and later through SIF, remain the strongest reason for Rachel House's success. It is difficult to imagine where we would be today without our Singapore International Volunteer friends like Dr R Akhileswaran and Amy Lim, who have made themselves available to us whenever we needed help.

Discovering the Community for Good

In December 2011, after spending most of our time helping build the capacities of communities regionally, my husband and I decided to look onshore and move our attention to Singapore. This decision, which coincided with our efforts in the area of impact investments, has opened up a whole new world for us.

We found, to our pleasant surprise, that kindness and generosity exist in Singapore beyond the palliative care community. Almost anywhere we go, we have found groups of wonderful people with generosity of spirits who are ready to give their time and skills in service of others. All this in our own “backyard!”



Lynna Chandra

Lynna is an ex-investment banker who ventured into the not-for-profit world in 2006 to establish Rachel House, the first pediatric palliative care service in Indonesia for children from the marginalised communities. She co-founded Absolute Impact Partners in 2011 with the mission of alleviating poverty by creating equal access to essential services and providing equal opportunities to all. Lynna is an Ashoka Fellow and serves on the Board of the International Children's Palliative Care Network to advocate for better access to palliative care for children all over the world. She also serves on the boards of Bamboo Capital Management and Ashoka: Innovators for the Public (Singapore) Limited.

Loving Singapore

KYOKO HASEGAWA

Perhaps I fell in love with Singapore at first sight. Cool shopping malls and hot humid weather, fancy restaurants and the smell of hawker stalls, gorgeous cars, heavy traffic, and many different religious temples—the contrasts of this country attracted me a lot.

I had not known much about Singapore until I first visited in 2005. I only knew it for investment and as the hub of Asia. Both are true, but I also discovered a very rich human culture—the melting pot of Asia. Perhaps I am attracted because of the way Singaporeans think and work. Their mindset is unique. They are not afraid of modifying their original plan to reach their goal. They have the courage to take a chance. They are always ready to make a new bridge to other cultures. Their way of working seems not necessarily efficient in the sense of time and budget that Japanese would think of, but it raises the possibility of evoking further development. I could not help adopting it. Perhaps I am obsessed about Singaporeans. I find joy and excitement talking with them. I find happiness and fulfillment working with them. They have the culture to accept others, so I find comfort being with them. Their intelligence and warm hearts made me realise how I want to live the rest of my life. They changed my life.

My story with Singapore started at Spotlight Singapore in Tokyo in 2006, the year of the 40th anniversary of Singapore-Japan diplomatic relations. The event was held in Tokyo to promote business between the two countries, using arts and culture. I mainly worked on Singapore's cultural presentations, including making a short film to introduce Singapore, coordinating the venue for the concert, and setting up the visual art exhibition. I had had enough experience by then to be a liaison between the two cultures.

However, planning for the event was a bit shocking. Although the aim of the event was clear, the path to the goal was not. When we Japanese plan an event, we like to think from step one to step 10. Once we actually start working on it, we go step by step and never skip anything. While I was working on Spotlight for several months, I often felt that we were not sure what would happen a few steps ahead. The whole process seemed like an organic creature. New ideas were brought up and discussed, even if we knew that we might have to step backwards. The Singaporean team kept wanting something new and different, as if they were seeking something better even though the goal had been set. The path was rough, requiring much energy and enthusiasm, though it was rewarding in the end. Spotlight succeeded and was much better than we had expected. I do not say which is better, the Singaporean way or the Japanese way, but the Singaporean way was eye-opening to me. I learnt the result could be better than planned.

One other thing which Spotlight brought to my attention was underprivileged children in my own society. The Singapore team explained how they try to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds in their society, and they were organising a child-help-child concert called ChildAid. Soon after, I found out that there are more than 30,000 children who stay at children's homes in Japan because of domestic violence, neglect, financial problems, parents'

divorce and other reasons. Many of these children have difficulties in expressing their feelings, thoughts and hopes.

The first small step I made with my friends in Japan was to give art workshops to them, which is still an important element of our activities today. We believe that the confidence and courage that the children gain from an arts learning experience will help them to face the challenges and realities of the outside world once they leave the protection of the homes. Since then, our activity has grown like an organic creature. Listening to the voices of these children, we conducted camps to take them to Singapore in international cultural exchange programmes supported by the Little Arts Academy, which offers multi-disciplinary arts training for children in Singapore.

One of the events we saw in Singapore was ChildAid, and we heard our Japanese children saying that they wanted to be recognised like the performers in ChildAid. They simply wanted to get praise from the others and to make it known that they exist. In 2009, after we founded non-profit-organisation Little Creators, we started to organise ChildAid Asia. Its first edition in 2011 showcased talented Singaporean children. During the summer in 2013, we sent an underprivileged violinist to Singapore for forty days to study music and English. She is dreaming of going back to Singapore to finish her music study in college. When the third ChildAid Asia was held in January 2014, Japanese society finally started to realise what we are trying to do. It was a privilege to have Her Imperial Highness Princess Akishino as the guest of honour as well as to receive a message from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Little Creators still has a lot to do to make sure our underprivileged children are not left behind by society. However, we feel we can do it because Singaporean friends are always behind us.

Now, it is about time for Little Creators to start giving back to Singapore. We set up Little Creators Ltd in Singapore in March 2014. The two main objectives are to promote more cultural exchange programmes for children and youth between the two countries, and to run a “Happy Pancakes” café together with RICE Ltd in Orchard Central to provide job training and living support to Singaporean youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. The proceeds are used for cultural exchange programmes. Our new adventure in Singapore has started.

Perhaps I am lucky that I met people in Singapore who accept me. Perhaps it is a miracle that I could cement the friendships across the sea. Perhaps this whole thing is meant to be. Colin Goh, CEO of RICE, and his team have stood by Little Creators and me all the way, and I believe that they will be with us throughout this new adventure. This friendship is a treasure, and it is all we need.

What I am sure about is that Singapore and its people will love you back if you love them. I am the evidence.



Kyoko Hasegawa

Kyoko is the Founder and Director of Little Creators, a non-profit organisation in Tokyo, Japan. After studying art history, Kyoko worked as an independent producer, manager and coordinator in both visual and performing arts fields. Based in Tokyo, she has imported and exported artworks as well as experienced setting up a museum and theatres. She also writes articles on art for magazines and translates plays for theatre.

Singapore and the United Kingdom: Reflections

ANTONY PHILLIPSON

Many times during my posting in Singapore as British High Commissioner I have been asked what the main purpose of my role is. In answering, I invariably refer to a comment from a former Singaporean High Commissioner in London who told me that there was a “deep reservoir of goodwill” between our countries, but we should do more to exploit it.

A few weeks after I arrived here I noted in a report to London that there was, indeed, scope to do more together. Not only was there that deep reservoir, but there was a ready agenda, spanning what we in the Foreign Office call prosperity and security issues.

I also noted that my posting would likely conclude just before a seminal moment in Singapore’s history, the 50th anniversary of independence on 9 August 2015. That, to me, made it an ideal time to reflect on what the United Kingdom-Singapore relationship meant to us, and how we could ensure that it would be fit for purpose going forward.

Three years on, I think much has been achieved, and I remain as convinced as ever that there is scope to do much more, to our mutual benefit.

The context for the relationship is important. Although all eyes are on 2015, a key moment in the journey to the events of 1965 came on 31 August 1963, when Singapore declared its independence from the United Kingdom just before joining Malaysia on 16 September.

That is more than just a footnote, it is a reflection of our shared history, one that reaches back almost 200 years to the arrival of Stamford Raffles on this island in 1819. Whatever else that might mean for our relationship now, it gives us a unique starting point for discussion, as does the sense of familiarity between us. There is much here to set the British visitor, whether here for business or leisure, at ease. Apart from the widespread use of English, many of our companies and universities are well established; our art, culture, and musical offerings are here, whether it's British bands at the Esplanade, exhibitions from the Royal Academy, or Shakespeare in Fort Canning Park. Our Premier League football excites as much passion and interest as anywhere in the world.

Perhaps most important are the links between our people and our livelihoods. Singapore is home to over 30,000 British nationals, around 1,000 British companies, and billions of pounds of United Kingdom investment from companies like Rolls-Royce and GSK. United Kingdom companies are helping to build Singapore's rail infrastructure and iconic venues like Gardens by the Bay.

But it's not just one way. I hope that the United Kingdom feels just as welcoming to the 6,500 Singaporeans studying there. Singapore companies are certainly sending a clear signal, as we continue to attract around two-thirds of their investment in Europe.

So that's the context. What is the agenda? In Singapore in 2012, Foreign Secretary William Hague set out his vision for Britain in Asia. He said that we are "looking East as never before...setting our country firmly on the path to far closer ties with countries across Asia over the next twenty years."

It was no accident that he delivered the speech here, and he made clear that the relationship with Singapore sits at the heart of this agenda, noting that "openness to ideas, enterprise, and innovation; cultural soft power and an ability to work cooperatively with other states are among the greatest attributes for success in today's world, and Singapore has these in abundance."

Since 1965, Singapore has established itself as one of the great success stories of Southeast Asia and, indeed, the world. It may be a little red dot on the map, but through that dot moves a considerable portion of the world's shipping and cargo; in that dot is one of the great financial centres of the 21st century; in that dot exists great energy, ambition, culture, art, scientific excellence and much more besides. All this serves to make Singapore one of the most dynamic and exciting cities in the world.

It also gives a ready sense of where we can, and must, work together for the future livelihoods of all our people. The sectors where Singapore is most active are sectors where the United Kingdom continues to offer world-class expertise, goods and services.

It's not only on the "prosperity" agenda that we are so closely linked. As United Kingdom Defence Secretary Philip Hammond emphasised at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2014, we place great importance on our membership of the Five Power Defence Arrangements, and the continued presence of a Ministry of Defence facility at Sembawang has been vital in underpinning important operations in this region in

the past year. Maritime security, and ensuring that we can maximise the opportunities of cyberspace whilst managing and mitigating the threats, are just two more areas where we have worked closely together.

The bottom line is that in a networked world, where the challenges we face are complex and require agile, innovative solutions, it is vital that we turn our shared heritage and interests into common purpose and, more importantly, common action. Making that a reality is the main focus for me and all of my colleagues at the High Commission working with important partners like the British Council and British Chamber of Commerce, who celebrated their 60th anniversary in 2014.

I noted recently at the annual celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's birthday party that it was the high level visits that did the most to enhance the sense of friendship between us. In September 2012, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge received a fantastic welcome in Singapore. In 2014, President Tony Tan Keng Yam made the first-ever State Visit to the United Kingdom by a Singaporean President. Throughout the planning and preparation, we were focused on using that visit to showcase the strength of the relationship between us, one of friendship, partnership and respect; and to highlight the agenda on which we could work together for mutual benefit, for the good of all our people, in the years to come.

Above all, we used it to exploit that reservoir of goodwill between us, at the same time as keeping it full to the brim.

I am very conscious that the thoughts above are very much from an official perspective as High Commissioner. That's because this is a pretty all-consuming role, and that has been the dominant theme of my time here. But I would end by noting that I have loved every minute of it, in large part because of the welcome accorded to me and

my family from the very start. It has been a privilege to serve here as High Commissioner, and we will certainly never forget our time, and friends, in Singapore.



Antony Phillipson

Antony Phillipson has been High Commissioner to Singapore since April 2011. Antony began his career in the Department of Trade and Industry, where his posts included Private Secretary, then Principal Private Secretary, to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. In 2000 he was posted to the British Embassy in Washington as First Secretary (Trade Policy). In 2002 he moved within the Embassy to become Counsellor (Global Issues). From 2004-2007 he was the Prime Minister's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs and in 2007 he moved back to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office as Head of the Iran Coordination Group.

Creating Deeper Thinkers through Art

ESTHER JOOSA

For about 27 years, I have lived and worked in Singapore, spending a good half of my life here. In my nearly three decades here, I have been introduced to, immersed in, struggled with—and made peace with—the different aspects of this country and its culture, in my roles as student, wife, mother, educator, artist, and art educator, using art to empower individuals, but especially the disadvantaged and disabled. Now, Singapore is the place I consider home and a place in which I strive to work towards a better future.

Through my inter-ethnic marriage, I have gained entry into different communities and cultures. Through my husband, I have learnt to see the world through different eyes, and also learnt that in the essence of humanity we are the same. These are priceless experiences.

I have also come to see that Singaporeans work extremely long hours and always seem to be in a rush. In the rush, we have little time for reflection. We also tend to insulate ourselves and fail to give time to each other to really listen. The pace of life also causes us to look at things on the surface. We usually want to learn the “right answers” the quickest way, instead of taking time to understand and

internalise knowledge. One way this kind of thinking is manifested is the over-reliance on academic supplementary assessment books to help children “learn”. Knowledge is not internalised. I believe that if children are given more time to process and understand information and make this knowledge their own, we will have better and deeper thinkers here.

Indeed, one flipside of the Singaporean “efficiency” is that we tend to prefer systematic categorisation and compartmentalisation rather than holism. In my years as an educator, I have encountered this mindset many times. I suspect that this tendency to classify arises from the “assessment book” mindset, where answers to questions have to be “a,” “b,” “c,” or “d,” with no berth for alternative answers, nor for probing or respectful dialogue.

Having said that, I must add that Singapore’s way of life has played an immensely important part in my journey and led me to strive for a balanced view. Living a long distance away from my native country, the Netherlands, where everything is very liberal, has allowed me to see that not everything that is liberal is good or beneficial. In the Netherlands, we enjoyed free schooling, liberal viewpoints, subsidies for the arts, and subsidised education. In such a well-cushioned environment, it is easy to take things for granted. Here in Singapore, I have often had to strive to be ahead of the curve. This, I realise, is a good thing. It has fed my desire to harness the power of art as a way to strike a balance in life and to create new pathways for a better future.

I see in art an opportunity to build a greater sensitivity to others, and a chance to build a more reflective society.

Art contains a symbolic language that transcends beyond borders and is a way for the individual to communicate. To me, the value of

art lies in the various dimensions it provides to shape the identity and agency of the person behind it. Through artistic mediums, the artworks become stories that contain their feelings, their emotions, what they want to communicate, and what they want people to see. This way of looking at art requires people not just to learn to “read” the art, but also to learn about the lives of the artists behind the art.

The creation of art also allows artists to reflect on themselves and their identity. Through art you are able to reflect on who you are, and this is what everyone needs. We all need to be heard and recognised. Simultaneously, art makes us stop and listen to the artist within us. It forces us to acknowledge the role of creativity in giving shape to our existence and pay attention to thoughts, ideas, and emotions. I see art as a way to build bridges between people—connecting parents and children, families and friends, local and world communities.

Most importantly, art allows us to build bridges between vulnerable populations and the rest of society. I often hear it said that through art we “give voice to the marginalised.” But it is only when others are willing to “read” or to “listen” to them that we can truly say we have empowered through the arts. This listening should be done without prejudice or preconceived notions, without brandishing the “authority” to tell others what to do or who to be.

I learnt this lesson first-hand during the first workshop I conducted in Singapore for people with Down syndrome many years ago. Though the participants had the ability to draw and paint, they did not know what they should draw. So finally, I found myself instructing them to draw anything, even if it was “A for Apple.” As they all drew big apple trees, I recognised that this was something they could understand within their educational context. I was very upset with myself because I had failed to connect. I was determined to undo the damage I had done. Subsequently, I followed the participants and took photographs

of their daily lives, and at the next workshop I used these photos as visual triggers. The resulting artwork they produced was amazing. This experience led to my art practice and PhD research. It convinced me that, because art is about the artists, their stories and their lives, I should gain entry into their lives by first listening to them.

Through visual art, it is possible to form deep emotional connections with artists. By looking and listening, it is possible to see how their pieces convey their stories, emotions and thoughts. I was able to experience this when I worked with the Singapore International Foundation on one of their regional capacity-building projects as a specialist volunteer on art workshops in India for beneficiaries of the Buds of Christ, a non-governmental organisation that works with persons living with HIV there. Through art, the project aimed to empower these people to overcome stigmas associated with the illness and lead better lives with strength and determination.

On my first trip there, I conducted a workshop involving the creation and use of masks, which was documented in a short film by fellow Singapore International Volunteer lensman Arun Ramu. I discovered that the members were very receptive to ideas and immediately understood that each mask was meant to symbolise their individual identities. What was most beautiful was that, when we were explaining about the masks and started touching the faces of the people, their tears began to flow. It was such a beautiful moment. These were people who came from very challenging and difficult backgrounds, and we could see their struggles depicted in the masks they produced. What I treasured most from that experience was their enormous courage. Though they were living under a death sentence in their body, they were forward-looking, embracing everyday with vigour. I learnt so much from my experiences there. Subsequently, as I returned, I was no longer a stranger but found I was part of their lives.

Over the many years since I arrived in Singapore as a stranger, I have found a new home. To make our nation even better, I believe we need to work hard and creatively to give our future generations the knowledge and ability to understand and embrace each other. I believe that through the arts, people can truly connect and find a common platform on which they can build deeper friendships and understanding, all with mutual respect for one other.



Esther Joosa

Esther is an arts practitioner, researcher and consultant. Married to a Singapore citizen, she is the mother of three young adult sons. Originally from the Netherlands, she has embraced life in Singapore. Her work with young children and disadvantaged communities in Singapore and in the region has been published and exhibited. As the Founder of Arts of the Earth, her work scope focuses on art education as creative pathways that build bridges and nurture dialogue and coherence about diverse views.

What Attracts Me about Singapore Colleagues?

HOANG THU HIEN

Professional, enthusiastic, responsible and warm-hearted are the words that spring to mind when I look back over the last several years, when staff from Singapore International Foundation (SIF) worked with me to set up work exchanges and when Singaporean trainers conducted a series of training workshops on special education at the National College for Education (NCE) in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Working is Always Placed Ahead

I started working in the International Relations Department of the NCE in 2008. My task is to implement the international cooperation, exchange and links with international partners for my institution.

The NCE is an educational institution providing training at the college level for teachers in early childhood education and special schools. After completing one project on Early Childhood Education and arranging study attachments for teachers from NCE to Singapore, we continued working with our friends in Singapore to carry out a new project on Special Education.

I had a valuable chance to work closely with many Singaporeans during the project. They come from different working places in Singapore, but they have similar attitudes and ways of working. Work is always placed first. They focused on working without attention to their personal needs.

To begin the new project, the Singaporean team and I kept in contact regularly. They came directly to meet me and my colleagues to discuss specific information so they could reach a holistic understanding of our requirements and look for the most appropriate partners to meet our needs.

Although I felt a little confused and worried that the programme could not be conducted when staff in Singapore changed partway through the project, all the information was transferred very carefully, so the newcomer could manage and come up with the tasks and activities on time. In spite of the interruption, the project started in 2010. It meant that we had two years to plan the work exchange and to follow up on the project until it was carried out.

In addition, I got more interested in Singapore when my colleagues and I did a study attachment in Singapore. We visited several educational institutions in Singapore. Watching them working and sharing with them about education, we felt that Singaporeans are very hardworking. Walking past the office buildings, lights were still turned on after 7 pm. This is our dinner time in Vietnam.

Real Emotions without Oral Expression

To understand the real needs, and in order to develop the project for special education for children with disabilities, the team included SIF staff, Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) trainers and NCE staff who worked together to conduct surveys by visiting the

families of children with disabilities. They were very careful when they communicated with parents of the children, so that they could fully understand the situations and difficulties of the children. The Singapore staff felt so touched to see how families of children with disabilities coped with the obstacles they faced. They tried their best to design a project that was appropriate to the context of Vietnam. The project covered six areas and was divided into three phrases. The first phase focused on Assessment and Evaluation and Early Intervention. The second phrase included Curriculum Development and Teaching Methodology, and the last one discussed Centre and Programme Management and Parent-Teacher Relationship Development.

During the first training workshop, there was a mother with an autistic son who directly met me to ask for some advice from the trainers. I did understand that the trainers were not responsible for personal questions outside of the workshop's topic. However I shared her questions with the trainers. They agreed to meet the mother in the afternoon. I could not forget the mother's emotion when she listened to the trainers guiding and explaining the activities for her son in order to help him sleep better. She followed those exercises for her son, and after only three days, her son slept well again.

Understanding what the trainers did for the participants in Vietnam was so meaningful. When I visited them in the AWWA centre, I also felt really touched by what they contribute for their children. They train the children thoroughly, from how to develop daily skills through to how to get knowledge. Children were taken care of very carefully and were taught very practically. Children learnt how to buy the food they want and how to pay for it. All these things attracted me and made me think about how they trained us in the workshops. The way they managed children was very structural and organised. Considering all aspects of AWWA, I recognised that services for children with disabilities are really well supported. My colleagues and

I greatly appreciated what the Singapore trainers and educators did for the children.

Persistence to Overcome the Difficulties in Working

When they came to Vietnam to work, they also encountered a lot of difficulties, but they were very conscientious about doing all the tasks assigned. I remember a time when one staff shivered because the weather in Hanoi had changed abruptly and was so cold. Hanoi is so hot in summer, and in winter it is so cold. It is very different from Singapore. However, she and the other Singapore trainers adapted to the changes very well.

There was another time when bad weather resulted in their flight from Singapore not being able to land in Hanoi, and they had to fly on to Ho Chi Minh City, wait 11 hours and fly back. Moreover, working at the NCE, they walked upstairs to the fifth floor every day without a lift. I saw that they were tired, but in front of the class, they became very enthusiastic to teach and explain the topics to the participants.

The trainers we worked with have been developing a very nice picture that symbolises making friends for a better world. The values that we picked up from working with our Singaporean counterparts created lifelong learnings for me and my colleagues. We believe that what Singaporeans have done and what they bring to our world is very admirable.



Hoang Thu Hien

Thu Hien has been with National College for Education since 2005 and is currently an International Coordinator for the Department of Scientific Research Management and International Relations as well as an English teacher for Deaf students. She previously worked as a reporter at the Weekly Tourism Newspaper and as an English teacher in American International College in Hanoi. Thu Hien has a BA in English Language from Hanoi University of Foreign Language and a BA in Special Education from the National College for Education. She lives in Hanoi, with her husband and two children.

The Start-up City for Social Entrepreneurs

PRUKALPA SANKAR

As I sit here in the bustling New Delhi airport, waiting for a flight that will take me to Singapore, I feel a slight burst of nostalgia. I still remember the first time I boarded a flight to Singapore. That flight also happened to be the first international trip of my life.

I grew up in a traditional middle class family in South India. The “Indian Middle Class” is the name given to the class of society that was born because of privatisation of traditional industries in India during the 1990s. Middle class families form the largest chunk of the urban population in India and are characterised by working parents who generally have corporate jobs, a high emphasis on education, and a healthy disregard for “businessmen.” My family was no different.

At a very early age, I set my hopes on going to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to study biotech engineering. The IITs are the dream college for any Indian middle class student. Every year, about 400,000 students appear for the IIT-JEE exam, an exam that leads to admittance being regarded as tougher than entrance to MIT or Harvard. Only about 4,000 get admitted.

I was lucky to be one of those 4,000. Six days after the IIT-JEE results were released, however, I received an email from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore admitting me to the prestigious chemical and biomolecular engineering bachelor's degree programme, with an affirmation that my study would be partly sponsored by the Singapore government.

Until that day, I had never really seriously considered going abroad for my bachelor's degree. Yet, the website of NTU Singapore, its beautiful campus, the plethora of extracurricular activities, and programmes such as the “Minor in Entrepreneurship”—all at a reasonable cost—seemed alluring. I spent the next month consulting professors, seniors and industry professionals. Should I choose to remain in India and go to an IIT or step out into the global world?

The advice was clear. The IITs would offer me a wonderful engineering education, incredibly smart classmates, a globally recognised brand and a close-knit alumni network. On the other hand, NTU would offer me some great internship opportunities, better extracurricular programmes and, possibly, a better environment to explore myself and figure out what I loved doing. Somehow, the chance to explore myself beyond just my field of study won my heart, and the choice was made—I would go to Singapore. That decision changed my life, possibly forever.

Upon reaching NTU, I plunged into the plethora of opportunities available to students in Singapore—extracurricular activities, internships, research and coursework. I held a variety of leadership positions as an elected member of my school club and as vice president-projects of AIESEC in NTU. AIESEC is the world's largest global student's organisation, and it is well known for fostering youth leadership and creating socially responsible citizens.

For the four years before I joined the organisation, the projects team had been focusing on the issue of HIV/AIDs awareness. By 2011, the reason for the existence of the project had waned due to the huge spike in awareness levels in Singapore. In my term, my mandate was to shut down the HIV/AIDs project and start a new project to meet a more pressing need. The project needed to be able to excite high quality members (“potential employees”), engage external sponsors (“attract funding”) and benefit society at large (“create value”). And thus began my tryst with entrepreneurship.

Having just completed the Minor in Entrepreneurship Programme in NTU, I didn’t think twice before proposing that we focus on social entrepreneurship as a theme. During my two-year term, we began to organise city-wide symposiums to expose students to the theme of social entrepreneurship. These events gave me a chance to network with Singapore’s successful social entrepreneurs and investors. As a young and restless mind, these interactions left a long-lasting impression on me and planted the seed of social entrepreneurship in me.

In the second year of my term, we set out to organise the Singapore Entrepreneurship Challenge to bring global and local interns to innovative startups in Singapore. The Singapore Entrepreneurship Challenge started out as an idea in my head and culminated as an annual month-long event at NTU, involving well over 200 startups each year. The joy of entrepreneurship comes from the moment that a seedling of an idea turns into reality!

By the time I reached my final year in NTU, I had been exposed to a multitude of opportunities—a year and a half of part time research under an MIT professor, internships at ExxonMobil and Goldman Sachs, and a multitude of extracurricular activities. However, the unadulterated joy of seeing my ideas translate into reality was addictive.

In my final year, my classmate, Varun Banka, and I decided to found a startup. Having grown up in the developing world and having been exposed to the workings of the developed world during university, we started SocialCops, a tech social startup to power decision-making in healthcare and public infrastructure by using data from the grassroots.

As first-time social entrepreneurs, we found footholds in the Singapore entrepreneurship ecosystem that proved incredibly important in our journey. In Singapore, the synergistic efforts of a multitude of organisations such as SPRING Singapore, venture capital firms, the Singapore International Foundation and The Hub Singapore have resulted in the creation of a thriving ecosystem to support budding entrepreneurs and mentors to support them.

As students, we participated in competitions such as the Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs programme, which were invaluable in providing us with mentors who became instrumental in growing the company.

The seed grants available to us were instrumental in allowing us to kick-start the business and carry out our initial pilots. Upon graduation, we moved to India with the initial seed capital to grow the business. Eight months later we raised US\$320,000 in our first institutional round of funding, with participation from United States-based 500 Startups, Frost & Sullivan managing director Manoj Menon and Google India managing director Rajan Anandan. Coincidentally, our first investor happened to have been a speaker at one of the events I had organised during my university days.

Sometimes I wonder how things would have been different had I not been exposed to the thriving ecosystem and industry in Singapore. Would I have even considered a startup? If I had, would I have had the

resources to sustain it? Would I have become a social entrepreneur at all?

It has been 14 months since I moved to New Delhi to build the local team in India for SocialCops. More often than not, I long for the Singaporean *kopi* (coffee) and half-boiled eggs that the aunty at the hawker stall would thrust into my hands. Singapore was a wonderful home to me for four years, a home that has become an integral part of my life personally and professionally, and I always look forward to going back.



Prukalpa Sankar

Prukalpa is the co-founder of Social Cops, a technology data company that powers the world's decision making via data collected from the grassroots. The organisation uses mobile phones and technology to turn citizens into human sensors, to create a layer of social data to aid data-driven decisions in civic issues, public health and education. She previously worked in Goldman Sachs and ExxonMobil. She studied Engineering and Entrepreneurship at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and is currently based out of New Delhi, India.

A Fellowship for Good

KANLAYA KAMPAN

When I was in my fourth and final year of university at Thammasat University in 2001, I applied for the Singapore International Foundation (SIF)-ASEAN Student Fellowship programme. I thought it would be interesting to study in another country, and to learn more about its culture and way of life. After being interviewed by the SIF Director, I was accepted into the programme.

This SIF-ASEAN Student Fellowship brought students from different ASEAN countries to Singapore for a four-month semester to study in a local university. The time of living and learning together allowed us Fellows to get a better understanding of one another's cultures and to make friends with student leaders from ASEAN countries. During this time in Singapore, we were looked after by Singaporean student hosts as well as a local host family who organised activities for us.

Learning about New Cultures

My host family was an Indian family. It was my first time encountering Indian culture, as we don't have many Indian people in Thailand. Learning about their culture and beliefs was very interesting. My host family was Hindu, and their religion was different from what I was familiar with in a mainly Buddhist Thailand. For the first time, I learnt

about Deepavali and its importance, and that it was ultimately about the universal theme of the triumph of good over evil.

Another highlight was my experience of Singapore National Day at the National Stadium. At the Stadium, I soaked in the amazing atmosphere, watching the people enjoy themselves in high spirits as they welcomed the President. It was a completely new experience as we do not have National Day celebrations of this nature in Thailand, though we do celebrate the King's or Queen's birthday. All of this was fascinating to me.

Making Friends across Borders

During my stay in Singapore, I initially felt that people seemed quite business-like, though they were friendly. But within the university and the hostel where we stayed, I soon made friends. Because I was a foreigner, the students in the university were very friendly and helpful. I stayed in the Prince George's Park Residences during the first year that it was opened. Everyone was new in that place, so there was real camaraderie. We helped each other, regardless of where we were from.

I bonded very well with the other Fellows, and we took part in lots of activities together. My greatest experience was when we would cook together during the weekends. I think I cooked more when I was living in Singapore than when I was back home in Thailand! But my friends liked my cooking, especially the *tom yam goong*, green curry and Thai desserts. My best friend, from the Philippines, would prepare Filipino desserts, and that was also when I first tried *adobo*. Other ASEAN Fellows who could not cook would buy food to bring along. Those weekends were like an ASEAN food festival.

Friends for Good

The Fellowship programme played a significant role in forming friendships that have lasted through the years. It went a lot deeper than just learning about each other's food culture. These friendships eventually resulted in many collaborations to do good for society. Though we completed the programme years ago, the Fellowship alumni still remain in touch and continue to partner each other to do charity work. Many of our alumni stay in touch through social media.

As Fellows, through the years, we have worked together informally on charitable projects such as providing funds for schools, donating books to a library, a feeding programme for orphanages, and raising funds for charitable donations. These were important, but we also hoped to do something that would have a more lasting impact.

Building Infrastructure for Education

In June 2012, I was appointed as SIF representative in Bangkok. At the appointment ceremony, I had the chance to meet with representatives of the Singapore Thai Chamber of Commerce (STCC), which was formed and headed by a group of Bangkok-based Singaporeans.

I presented the project that SIF Fellows planned to do as a first activity after I became SIF representative to STCC chairman Winston Doong. I proposed a project to redevelop one building in a school in a town called Ban Phi in Phetchabun Province, which had been affected by floods. The principal and teachers there had tried to renovate and reconstruct it but were limited by a lack of funds. They did not have a place to conduct their mass activities.

As a Thai citizen, I felt I needed to do my part and leverage my connections to help build infrastructure for education in Thailand,

which I saw was lacking in some places. I felt that waiting for a budget from the government would have taken very long, but if every one of us could do a little, we could pool whatever resources we had and start from there. I wanted to find a speedy solution for the needs of this school.

We were very fortunate that the STCC found our proposal in alignment with their intentions to improve education in schools in Thailand. The kind support from STCC yielded a large donation for this project, and we were able to proceed with the project to renovate a building for the school. I coordinated between the principal and the STCC, managing the documentation process, money transfers and fund raising. The physical construction was managed by the school itself.

Finally, the school had a properly renovated building with a concrete floor. The staff and student body could now use the building for their formal activities.

Planning for More Good Work

Moving on, I continue to try to connect Thai Fellows and Singapore citizens through regular activities where we can get to know one another better and replicate the good relationships I enjoyed during my time in Singapore. I am hoping that we can create activities that help serve communities, create awareness for social issues and gather resources to meet needs.

The alumni have a menu of ideas for future charitable activities, such as reaching out to schools, orphanages and hospitals. These are ideas in the pipeline that will come to fruition, as we have the will to collaborate and work together with the Singapore community in Bangkok to build a better world.



Kanlaya Kampan

Kanlaya was born in Petchaboon province in the north of Thailand and lived there until she finished junior high school. She moved to Bangkok to study in Triam Udomsuksa School, then graduated with a bachelor of arts in political science from Thammasat University. After graduation she worked with a Japanese trading company, rising from Junior Sales Coordinator to senior management in internal audit and quality management system assurance. She completed a master of science in Supply Chain Management from Assumption University and continued working with the same company. After nearly 11 years at the trading company, she set up and currently runs her own business in wellness solutions.

Harnessing Cross-Causeway Friendships for Good

— MOHD SOUFFI MOHD RADZI —

Only a kilometre-wide strait separates Malaysia and Singapore. Yet, the emotional distance between our two peoples can sometimes seem much greater. Until recently, my perspectives on Singapore had been vulnerable to a sense of hastened familiarity, anecdotal incidents gathered through hearsay, and views or memories talked about by people on both sides of the border. Both countries share an intertwined history and cultural roots. Hence, it is almost inevitable that we have accumulated both good and regrettable memories through our years of vibrant history. Malaysia is strategically positioned in the centre of the most exciting region but it is Singapore that garnered an international reputation for sustained economic success. It is true that the “Look East Policy” is the cornerstone of national development but we can’t help but look often to the South.

But over time, my frequent trips to Singapore allowed me to experience the country and its people personally instead of relying on what people were saying, and my views of our relationship began to evolve. I have since realised that Singapore is more than a neighbour down south with impressive economic success. Instead, I see a

community which harnesses its rich melting pot of talent to build a liveable, sustainable city.

And I see this city-state connected to Malaysia via two linkways which I imagine as vital “arteries” channelling people and goods between our communities. But for our relationship to be strong, we require more than just physical connections. We need other kinds of “arteries” to move hearts as well, since we share far more common ground than we may think. In this regard, I am fortunate to have known the Singapore International Foundation (SIF)—a connection that has helped change my views of Singapore.

The people of the SIF opened my eyes to the exciting work they are doing to build a better world. With them, I had a chance to learn about projects where individuals bring their diverse expertise together to advance meaningful causes through social enterprise. This is an intent that aligns closely with my own values as a development economist. I began to think about how my work might be more directly connected to addressing local or global challenges through meaningful collaboration.

For this reason, I volunteered to be the bridge between our two communities as SIF’s representative in Kuala Lumpur, to promote better understanding, enable collaborations, and build friendships between Singaporeans and Malaysians. Thankfully, I am not alone in thinking this way, as I realise that there is currently an appetite in Malaysia for discussions on the multi-layered and ever-shifting facets of Malaysia’s relationship with Singapore.

This is, therefore, an opportune time. One of the avenues I wish to explore as an SIF representative is how we can use social entrepreneurship collaborations as a bridge between the people of our two communities. With better understanding and collaboration,

we can do more to harness the power of friendships to build a better world. Ultimately, there are benefits from all sides if we, on both sides of the Causeway, learn to appreciate the dependence and influence we have on each other.

As it turns out, it was the SIF that shaped my rewarding experience of Singapore. Now I can't wait to return the favour.



Mohd Souffi Mohd Radzi

Souffi is a nature-loving financial professional and entrepreneur. After completing his degree in financial engineering, he devoted the first few years of his career to a few entrepreneurial ventures while travelling the globe. He subsequently joined a boutique consulting firm in Kuala Lumpur, delving into development and economic advisory to the public sector. He now works as a management consultant with Frost & Sullivan. He strives to bind insights gained from both public and private consulting into action that addresses social challenges and was left feeling empowered after partnering with Singapore International Foundation (SIF). He is an alumnus of the SIF International Student Symposium in 2006.

Together We Will Build a Better World

ZHOU JI

My connection with Singapore has left an indelible impact on me thrice over.

The first instance was when I came to live and work in Singapore in 2010 under the Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Young Business Ambassador (YBA) programme. The experience of living and working in another culture impressed upon me the importance of building cultural understanding and cultivating friendships across national borders. When I returned home to Shanghai, I made it a point to remain connected with the friends I had made through SIF.

The second instance was upon my appointment as an SIF representative in Shanghai, in May 2011. In this role, I saw myself as a facilitator, a connecting bridge, building friendship and understanding between peoples of two cultures and two nations. I organised events in Shanghai and arranged for delegates to make company visits both in Shanghai and in Singapore.

Since the time I first became involved in cross-border relationship-building, I have seen an increase in the number of YBA alumni as well

as the establishment of the Alumni Association. And understanding the value that these connections can bring, I have always wondered what other meaningful ways we can use to harness the power of these friendships to affect society positively. I felt that through the power of friendship and international connections, such as the ones that the YBA network afforded, we could make a positive contribution to our world.

This brings me to the third instance of how my Singapore connection impacted my life. It was in May 2013, when I was reappointed to the role of SIF representative for a second term. During my reappointment ceremony at the SIF Connects! Shanghai networking event in May 2013, I shared my belief and sounded a challenge to all guests and YBAs present, to join hands and participate in activities that will build a better world. I shared my hope that in addition to career advancement, we would also be concerned about the needy within the community, give attention to societal needs and take an active part in giving back to society.

As luck would have it, at that event I made a connection to Lydia Ang, a Singaporean manager at CapitaLand Hope Foundation (CHF), who was then based in Shanghai. She had been invited by SIF to network with the Friends of Singapore community. In our conversation, she talked to me about the volunteer expedition that CHF was organising to aid in relief efforts in the area affected by the Sichuan earthquake. I learned that CapitaLand was donating money and partnering with an non-governmental organisation, Habitat for Humanity (China), to provide disaster relief for families who had been affected by the earthquake. In support of the victims, they were organising an international volunteer expedition to construct safe homes that could withstand earthquakes in Tiantaishan Town. I was heartened to see that Singapore-based CapitaLand, through its philanthropic arm CHF, took the initiative to contribute to the communities it operates in.

Lydia invited me to consider participating in this effort and offered to connect any YBA who wished to participate in the volunteer activities.

This was a momentous connection, as through her, a few of us YBA alumni had the opportunity to participate in this international relief effort for Sichuan earthquake victims.

Together with two other volunteers whom I had met through the YBA programme, Tang Zhong Hui (Chinese YBA, 2004) and Rebecca Koh (Singaporean YBA, 2013), I journeyed for two and a half hours from Chengdu to Jihong village (纪红村) in Tiantaishan Town (天台山镇), situated about five kilometres from Lushan county, at the epicentre of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

As all three of us were city-dwellers, I had some misgivings about whether we would be able to complete our task successfully, because we had never experienced this kind of work. But we were very keen to have this once-in-a-lifetime experience, and my Singaporean friend, Rebecca, said she treasured this opportunity as she would otherwise never have had a chance to experience rural life in China first-hand.

So, with a sense of mission, we pressed on and spent three intense days helping the local people rebuild their lives, which had been ravaged by the earthquake. Though the work was not without its challenges, we persisted in the rebuilding efforts. We removed debris, constructed temporary shelters, dug trenches to make room for earthquake-proof foundations, transported possessions and household goods to suitable shelters, restored housing facilities, and made home visits to cheer the residents.

At the end of the three days, looking at the successful temporary shelters, the deep foundations we dug for new housing, and the villagers smiling with joy, I realised that our efforts brought more

than just temporary shelters and infrastructure to the community in Sichuan. I saw from the villagers' bright smiles that through our efforts, they experienced care and support from the larger community outside of their own, and it added to their confidence in facing the future. The local children also had a chance to interact with the world outside their village. These were some of the positive effects which sprung from the friendship we shared.

In the course of our volunteer work, we were deeply touched by the needs of the local residents. My encounter with one particular lady who was living in poverty caused me to consider this question very deeply: what could we do to help this community move forward? One of the ways was to create jobs for them, so they could have a better chance at survival and sustaining a livelihood. It motivated me to do more, and I believe that my partners felt the same way. Rebecca shared that her time in the mountains with the villagers and with the other volunteers inspired her to continue volunteering in the future. This was very heartening, as I saw that the good that corporations like CapitaLand and organisations like SIF are able to achieve can have a long-term ripple effect.

Through this shared experience of living and working together towards a common and worthy goal, we volunteers deepened our friendship and mutual understanding, and became more familiar with our peers and other volunteers. In the process of contributing to the community, we have grown. This earthquake relief effort was a first foray for YBAs into disaster relief work. I think it is an excellent start, and I am sure we will continue to build upon it. I am thankful to have been a part of it. This is the third instance of how my Singapore connection has marked me for life.



Zhou Ji

Zhou Ji is a graduate of East China Normal University with a bachelor's degree in Economics. He worked in the finance department of the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank for four years, then spent eight years with Shanghai Electric Group's finance department. In 2010, Zhou Ji participated in the Singapore International Foundation's Young Business Ambassadors (YBA) Programme and had a three-month stint in Singapore where he was attached to DBS Bank as an analyst. He was appointed as SIF representative in Shanghai in 2011, and reappointed in 2013. In the same year, Zhou Ji set up his own consulting firm, Paralake Partners.

Pay It Forward

DIMAS HARRY PRIAWAN

“Hello, is this Dimas Harry Priawan? I am from Anglo-Chinese School Independent. Congratulations, you are accepted!”

I can vividly remember the short phone call 14 years ago, when I was still a student in Jakarta. I knew that my written test and interview went well, but I could still not dare to imagine that I would get a scholarship. I felt a sudden euphoria. I wanted to jump and shout but obviously I could not, as I was still inside an English enrichment class. A friend beside me asked what was wrong and I replied, “Nothing is wrong. I am good. Terribly good.”

A few weeks later, I was at the Soekarno-Hatta airport. On the one hand, I was excited to be boarding an airplane for the first time. It does sound silly nowadays, when a flight ticket could be as cheap as a meal at McDonald’s. But back then, I knew that a flight ticket was still out of my family’s financial reach. On the other hand, I was really scared and sad to leave my family. I wanted to cry, but that would look silly in front of the other nine scholars. I said my last goodbye to my family, and right at that moment, I had this feeling that I would be going on a long life-changing journey.

On that day, 29 October 2001, I was 14 years old, and definitely still struggled to speak English fluently. After the exciting 90-minute flight, I finally landed not just in Changi Airport but also in one of the most developed nations in Asia. I was flabbergasted by the level of development that Singapore had achieved. I truly enjoyed the bus ride from Changi to Dover, overlooking Singapore's southern coastline, and the weird durian-shaped building that was still under construction. I was certain that Singapore was living proof for people who believe that "the sky is the limit."

At the end of 2002, I opted for a two-week Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) (ACS (I)) Work Experience programme at the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). PSA was about to launch a new website, and I was tasked with digitising its web architecture framework. It was a rather simple task, but that was when I learnt the real meaning of teamwork, responsibility and discipline—three values that are crucial for success.

After ACS (I), I received scholarships and continued my studies at Anglo-Chinese Junior College, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Universiteit Twente in the Netherlands. The defining moment came when I was elected as the president of the NTU Students' Union in my final year of undergraduate life. Apart from finishing my Final Year Project, I had to work with more than a thousand subcommittee members in managing a seven-figure budget for providing for the welfare of 24,000 undergraduate students. The experience was immense, from having conversations with all three Singapore Prime Ministers to mediating students' conflicts personally. All those experiences and achievements would definitely help me in my life and career. However, I knew that the greatest gift that I had ever had was the opportunity that Singapore had given me to discover and pursue my dream.

Back in mid-2010, I was about to graduate from NTU and had a hunger to pay it forward. I had a discussion with five other Indonesian NTU alumni about starting an education programme for talented Indonesian high school students from underprivileged families. We agreed that the programme should not just be based on financial assistance. The programme should give them an opportunity to discover and be nurtured to fulfil their potential and dreams—just like what we received while in Singapore.

We rolled out Scholar4ID in June 2011 and started providing a three-year education programme that consists of overseas exposure trips to Singapore, one-month professional internships in Jakarta, mentorship and scholarships. We organised a selection process of background checks, essay submissions, seven written tests and interviews. It was not surprising that the programme was a reflection of what we had been through personally. Since the formation of the programme, we have given awards to 15 recipients in Pontianak (West Borneo), Solo, and Klaten (Central Java), and gathered close to 300 supporters, donors, volunteers and pro-bono teams across the world.

Through Scholar4ID, I have had thousands of inspiring moments and I would like to share one of them, a story about Hedi Suryadi, one of the first five recipients of Scholar4ID from Pontianak.

Hedi had good results in the written test, although he was not one of the top five candidates. Yet, we decided to interview him, for two reasons. First, we knew that he had gone through a lot of struggles since he was young. Second, while everybody else went out during written test breaks, he stayed inside the classroom and continued studying. He had a fondness for biology and told us everything he knew about it, from A to Z. Yet, he did not know who Taufik Hidayat (an Indonesian badminton superstar) was, although he clearly stated that he loved to play badminton. When we went to his wooden house

and spoke to his mother, we were convinced that Hedi had probably been deprived of information and inspiration for a long time.

Hedi and the other four recipients landed at Changi airport in mid-2012. It was their first time going abroad and taking a flight. They had opportunities to meet Indonesian students in NTU, The National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University, and Singapore Institute of Management. We taught them essay-writing and interviewing skills. Finally, we brought them around Singapore, from Orchard Road to Gardens by the Bay. The following year they had a one-month internship in Jakarta in PT Summarecon Agung (an Indonesian property developer), with jobs ranging from managing corporate social responsibility events and editing a video to preparing for their final presentation to the Director. In their final year, Hedi and the rest were mentored by young members of the Indonesian diaspora in Singapore.

In Singapore, we wanted to expose them to possibilities and help them to believe that nothing is impossible. In Jakarta, we wanted them to learn about discipline, teamwork, and responsibility, the crucial values for success. It was a long and tedious process, but we believe that developing someone does not happen overnight.

Recently, I received a Facebook message from Hedi. He told me that he received two full government scholarships to study physics in University of Gadjah Mada in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. He explained that he wanted to study really hard to get scholarships for a master's degree in the field of renewable energy in either the Netherlands or Germany, the two powerhouses for renewable energy studies in Europe. He further explained that he would like to do a PhD in Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the holy grail of science and technology.

At that instant, I felt the same euphoria that I had 14 years ago. I could not stop being amazed that someone who could not recognise the greatest Indonesian athlete three years ago is now able to finance his own undergraduate studies and, most importantly, lay down his future path explicitly—something that I was not even able to do when I entered NTU. I thought that I wanted to inspire him, but instead, he has inspired me over and over again. Hedi is living proof that what humans need the most is opportunity. Never stop dreaming!



Dimas Harry Priawan

Dimas arrived in Singapore at the age of 14 after receiving a scholarship to study in Anglo-Chinese School (Independent). He subsequently received additional scholarships to study at Anglo-Chinese Junior College and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). In his final year in NTU, he was elected as the Students' Union President. He worked in the semiconductor industry for three years before obtaining a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in Universiteit Twente, the Netherlands. Along with five other Indonesian NTU alumni, he started Scholar4ID in 2011. Dimas is now back in Indonesia and is working for a technology start-up.

The best way to find out what Singapore is really like is to learn from *insiders*.

In this second volume of *Singapore: Insights from the Inside*, 50 individuals from around the world who have lived, visited, studied or worked in Singapore share their stories about what makes Singapore tick, Singaporean idiosyncrasies, the surprises they found, and their involvements and contributions to the local community. From academics and healthcare professionals, diplomats, leading business people and social entrepreneurs, to talented artists and students who have taken their learnings from Singapore back home, you'll learn and even be entertained by the insights from the multitude of people who have uncovered Singapore's *head, heart and soul*. This book will surprise and amuse you as insiders share their perspectives on *what is Singapore*.



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