





SINGAPORE

# Insights from the Inside

Volume III

Editor: Sue-Ann Chia



First published May 2018

Copyright © 2018 Singapore International Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

---

Published by: The Nutgraf LLP  
18 Howard Road  
#06-06  
Novelty BizCentre  
Singapore 369585  
Website: [www.nutgraf.com.sg](http://www.nutgraf.com.sg)  
Editorial Committee: Reseena Abdullah, Assistant Manager, Singapore International Foundation  
Sunitha Vijiyasingam, Senior Manager, Singapore International Foundation  
Pang Xue Qiang, Content Associate, The Nutgraf

ISBN: 978-981-11-7390-5 (hardcover)

# CONTENTS

Foreword <i>by Ong Keng Yong</i>	viii	People Centred Asean and Shared Prosperity <i>Noeleen Heyzer</i>	45
<b><u>IDENTITY</u></b>		Reflections on a Multi-Religious Asean <i>Paul Hedges</i>	49
Making Asean More Real <i>Tony Fernandes</i>	2	Supporting Social Enterprises for More Equitable Growth across Asean <i>Piyush Gupta</i>	52
Bridging Differences with Sport <i>Joscelin Yeo</i>	5	Connecting the Backstreets of Asean to the Wall Streets of the World <i>Durreen Shahnaz</i>	56
Creating More ‘Asean Enthusiasts’ in the Region <i>Moe Thuzar</i>	8	Building a Sense of Identity for Disabled Children <i>U Tha Uke</i>	60
Using Technology to Level Up Asean <i>Matthew Herrmann</i>	11	Ageing-Friendly Societies with the Right Policies <i>Yasunobu Iwasaki</i>	64
Singapore in Asean – A Celebration of Life <i>Sathish Raman</i>	15	The Power of Partnerships <i>Belinda Tanoto</i>	68
Working Together for a Better World <i>Vu Viet Ngoan</i>	19	The Value of Diverse Societies: Lessons from EU-Asean Dialogue <i>Kilian Spandler</i>	72
In Search of the Asean Identity <i>John Patrick Allanegui</i>	23	Connecting Souls, Shattering Stereotypes <i>Ayu Kartika Dewi</i>	76
Asean and Korea: Unity in Diversity <i>Kim Young-sun</i>	27	<b><u>IMAGINATION</u></b>	80
What the Void Deck Can Teach Asean <i>Roland Davies</i>	31	Forging Friendships through Art <i>Chong Siak Ching</i>	83
<b><u>INCLUSIVENESS</u></b>	35	Helping Elders Find Purpose and Value through the Arts <i>Tsai Ying-ju</i>	86
Taking the Lid Off <i>Jo Verrent &amp; Clara Giraud</i>	38	Art Represent our Dreams to Heal and Unite <i>Svay Sareth</i>	90
	41	The Power of Folktales and Storytelling <i>Wajuppa Tossa</i>	94

Deepening Asian Bonds through Food  
*Yoshihiro Murata* 98

Is there a Role for Art in Forging an Asean Identity?  
*Việt Lê* 102

In Memory of Surin Pitsuwan, a truly Asean man  
*Ho Minfong* 106

## **INNOVATION**

New-Age Education to Create the Innovators of Tomorrow  
*Taizo Son* 110

Singapore: Asean's Gateway to the World  
*Hiro Tien* 113

Strengthening US-Asean Ties through Singapore  
*Denny Heck* 116

Learning the Best from Others  
*Dedeh Suatini* 120

Tackling Asean's Water Challenges  
*Frodo van Oostveen* 123

Singapore: Among the Beacons for Biodiversity Conservation in Asean  
*Roberto Oliva* 127

A Better and Safer Asean  
*Maria Guevara* 131

How Singapore is Showing the Way for Better Healthcare in Vietnam  
*Ha Phan Hai An* 135

Improving Medical Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities in Laos  
*Bouathep Phoumindr* 139

Joining Hands to Heal the Wounds of Trauma  
*Chhim Sotheara* 143

## **INFLUENCER** 150

Shaping Minds through Liberal Arts Education  
*Pericles Lewis* 153

Building Blocks for Women's Economic Empowerment in Asean  
*Elissa Golberg* 156

Taking a Shot on Sport  
*Terry O'Connor* 160

It Takes a Village to Raise an Entrepreneur  
*Divya Patel* 164

Entrepreneurship and why it is Important to Invest in the Young  
*Sok Piseth* 168

Plugging the Skills Gap in Asean  
*Amanda Yeo* 172

Nurturing the Next Generation  
*Taweesak Kritjaroen* 176

Building More Platforms for Asean People to Interact  
*Elaine Tan* 179

How Singapore Taught us to Dream Big for Asean  
*Dian Lumban Toruan* 183

# FOREWORD

*by Ong Keng Yong*

*Chairman, Singapore International Foundation*

The culture, history and politics of the nations in Southeast Asia are diverse. Their economies and developmental experiences are different. The strength and stretch of their social fabric and resilience differ. Yet, the aspiration of the respective leaders in this region to come together and maintain a regional identity with an autonomy from major powers and an independence of action has resulted in the setting up of ASEAN on 8 August 1967, and its continuous work-in-progress.

Today, ASEAN is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world with a population of more than 630 million people and a consumer market estimated at US\$1.5 trillion. Its combined GDP reached US\$2.5 trillion in 2016. By 2030, the regional grouping will be the world's fourth largest single market. To date, the ten-member bloc is the only inter-governmental body in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN remains the platform for a range of diplomatic and economic activities that are critical to the future of Asia at a time when international order is challenged by long-term developments affecting the global geo-

political situation. ASEAN's important role in the existing regional security architecture and its vision of an open and outward-looking Southeast Asia make it uniquely placed to help shape events going forward.

Singapore has always looked beyond its small island to trade with others, attract foreign direct investment and grow its economy. As Chairman of ASEAN for 2018, Singapore aims to achieve more of the goals laid down for the ASEAN Community through implementation of the many action plans already agreed to by the member states.

Singapore leaders have stated that the focus of their country's Chairmanship of ASEAN will be on five areas: strengthening innovation and digital economy; facilitating seamless trade and movement of goods within the region; deepening services integration and reducing impediments to investment; cultivating a conducive regulatory environment; and preserving ASEAN centrality.

ASEAN faces significant challenges going forward. The regional bloc requires intensified cooperation among member states in areas such as counter-terrorism, territorial disputes, maritime security, transnational crime, irregular migration, disaster management, and energy security. ASEAN also has to work more closely with its Dialogue Partners and other peace-loving countries to preserve security and stability in Southeast Asia.

Singapore has the imagination, influence and infrastructure to tap on the inherent strength of ASEAN to enhance cooperation and collaboration

among member states and like-minded countries. This will lead to the timely realisation of the ASEAN Community.

Singapore seeks to mobilise the young and digital-savvy population in ASEAN, promote youth volunteerism through existing mechanisms as well as reinvigorate youth exchanges to increase awareness of the regional bloc and its community building efforts. These initiatives by many including non-profits like the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) will serve to strengthen people-to-people links across ASEAN. The goal is to increase interaction among the people in this region and enable them to be future ready with a global outlook and socially conscious mindset.

This book is another initiative by the SIF and its friends to promote mutual understanding. It provides thoughtful insights on a myriad of topics pertinent to the future of the region, including ASEAN identity, arts and culture, education, environment, healthcare, innovation, social entrepreneurship, sustainable development and technology. I hope the essays will contribute to building a better understanding of the regional challenges that we face, and the ways to address them together.

On behalf of the SIF, I wish to thank all the writers for their thoughtful contributions. I am sure these essays will stimulate further discussions and engagement on our future in the ASEAN Community.

# ABOUT SIF

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.

Find out more at [www.sif.org.sg](http://www.sif.org.sg)

## IDENTITY

*Defining who we are as a region is important, but difficult. Asean shares a unique multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity that should be celebrated.*

*Our sense of self is derived from our differences and shared values, which unite us. Everyone has a story to share – a corporate chief who believes in the unifying power of budget travel or a national swimmer who found friends through competitive sport.*



# MAKING ASEAN MORE REAL

*Tony Fernandes*

There's a saying in Bahasa: *Tak kenal maka tak sayang*. You can't love something you don't know. That basically sums up Asean. Despite success on the economic front, Asean does not mean much to the man in the street, at least in terms of regional identity. Asean citizens still tend to see themselves as Malaysian, Thai, Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Singaporean, but hardly ever Asean.

I, for one, am an Aseanist, but this is, sadly, not a more common position. Contrast this to the European Union (EU) where the sense of shared identity remains strong, even with the recent surge in anti-EU nationalism.

Why doesn't Asean figure as an identity despite being only nine years younger than the EU? I believe it's because Asean is not part of people's day-to-day life. To most, Asean remains theoretical, something academics talk about at conferences but which has little real world import. So what do we need to forge an Asean identity?

First, travel, and lots of it. We have to encourage the people of Asean to travel more within the region to see firsthand what Asean is and has to offer. You can read all the books, watch all the videos but nothing beats being there, eating the food and talking to the locals. That's the power of place, with immersion still crucial in bridging the gaps in understanding.

Low-cost carriers (LCCs) have an important role to play in this regard. LCCs like AirAsia have fueled aviation growth in the region, accounting for 53 per cent of the intra-Asean market share in 2015, up from 32 per cent in 2003. More importantly, tourism has been identified as one of the key focus areas for regional integration, second only to economic cooperation.

Travel doesn't only mean the logistics of getting a person from point A to point B. There is also a whole ecosystem of services that comes with travelling. If we can make it easier for someone to book accommodation, exchange money, rent cheap broadband access, make digital payments, hail a ride or even translate foreign languages, the more likely they are to travel. This is why companies like Grab and our financial app Big Pay have a role in connecting Asean.

Second, governments can make Asean more relevant to their own citizens by pushing for policies that have a real impact in people's lives. Things like lower tariffs for Asean citizens compared to other foreign nationalities like how Singapore does it with government school fees, Asean lanes at immigration – which you see in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok and Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport – or even something as ambitious as a separate, lower Asean tax tier for expatriate workers can make the concept of Asean more real.

Existing measures are patchy and have some way to go but eventually, the goal is to make the difference between an Asean citizen and another non-Asean foreign national as clear as the difference between an EU national and non-EU national in Europe.

Third, companies with a regional footprint need to live and breathe Asean. No matter how small or big the gesture, everyone can show that Asean matters. At AirAsia, we strive to reflect the diversity of Asean in our staff, from operations all the way up to top management. We often have mixed flight and cabin crew on flights, a mix that is reflected in management too. My partner Datuk Kamarudin Meranun and I are Malaysians, Group CFO Pattra Boosarawongse is Thai, Audrey Prokastama Petriny who heads Communications is Indonesian while Kathleen Tan, our President of China, is Singaporean. We also recently launched an internal exchange programme for AirAsia staff who want to work and live in another Asean country.

In this way, we ensure the message of Asean remains front and centre, and I hope that over the next 50 years of Asean, governments and the private sector can make the Asean identity a fact of life.



### **Tony Fernandes**

Tony Fernandes is the Co-founder of AirAsia, Asia's largest low-cost carrier by passengers. He studied at the London School of Economics and is a qualified chartered accountant. He has also received numerous honours for his contributions to aviation, including the Honour of the Commander of the Order of the British Empire and the Commander of the Legion d'Honneur.

# BRIDGING DIFFERENCES WITH SPORT

*Joscelin Yeo*

**I**t was three hours, twice a day, six days a week – staring down a black line at the bottom of the pool. That was the amount of time I spent training for a race that took only about two minutes.

The question I am often asked is, “What makes you wake up at 4.30 in the morning to jump into ice cold water for two hours, go to school or work and then do it again later in the day?” Not only is the schedule gruelling, some think it can drive you mad because you cannot talk to anyone when you are mostly submerged underwater. I beg to differ. Swimming may be an individual sport but it is not a lonely sport.

In my 20 years as a swimmer, I realised that swimming has taught me a lot and given me the opportunity to meet many people across nations. The effect of going to these competitions was two-fold:

1) It made me a better competitor as I raced the best from each nation. There is a term in Singapore called “*kiasu*”, and in essence, it is the fear of losing out. But sport is different. The thing about competitions is: when your sporting rivals get better, it pushes you to higher heights too. You actually improve with better quality competition.

And so, I made friends with my competitors and we shared tips and tricks with one another. This is what I love about sport: in the field of play, we are fierce competitors; but outside of it, we are a community of people who all share a common goal and have a common routine. We all want to be the best athletes we can be, we all want to win and we all wake up at an ungodly hour to jump into icy water!

Common ground is what binds us, across cultures, religions, race and backgrounds. And it is because of this commonality that we have the foundation of understanding, mutual respect and friendship. To this day, the friends I made before I was even a teenager are still my friends today.

There was a girl whom I used to race with often. She and I swam many of the same events. At that time, she wasn't able to speak English, and I couldn't speak her language. But after each race, if she won, she would console me with a hug and a rub of my back. If I won, I would do the same to her. We looked really funny in the way we communicated, but that was our common language at that time. We ended up going to school together and today, even her kids are friends with my kids.

2) It helped me better understand people from Asean and the rest of the world. Each competition opened my eyes to see the different cultures and backgrounds of the people from those nations. As I made friends with my competitors, it also allowed me to see things not only from an outside perspective but from the heart of the local people as well. This way, we foster understanding, appreciation and even tolerance towards people with different habits and ways of life.

Sport has a wonderful way of bridging differences and divides. Not only for our generation, but also for our children's generation. Sport does not just unite a nation in cheering for their own, but it brings us together as people – people who represent nations, people who have a common understanding and a common goal to be the best that we can be. We are all interconnected. The more we embrace the need for each other, the better we will all be. Sport can enable this, which is why I believe that it is important for us to build a stronger Asean sporting culture.



### Joscelyn Yeo Wei Ling

Joscelyn Yeo is the Vice President of Singapore Swimming Association. She was Singapore's national swimmer and the only athlete on record to have won 40 gold medals at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games. She retired from competitive swimming in 2007 and served as a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2009 to 2011.

# CREATING MORE 'ASEAN ENTHUSIASTS' IN THE REGION

*Moe Thuzar*

Asean member states celebrated the accomplishment of the Asean Community in 2015. At the same time, they announced that the regional grouping's community building exercise was a work-in-progress, and set new targets for the next phase of ensuring peace and prosperity for their people.

Asean's acknowledgement that its integration is a work-in-progress underscores an important reality: The success of regional cooperation is contingent on developments in the broader external environment, as well as on the internal situation and circumstances of individual members. The latter stems from the tendency to prioritise national interests over regional commitments, or the lack of alignment between national and regional priorities.

Yet, the demonstration effect of Asean is clear. This was the main motivation for countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to actively seek Asean membership in the 1990s. It is little wonder, therefore, that awareness of

and attitudes towards Asean are consistently high in these countries, earning them the description of "Asean-enthusiasts".

Even in Myanmar, where people used to have mixed feelings about the benefits of Asean membership, the continued engagement with the group had the effect of influencing, to some extent, the motivation of the former military regime to open up. A turning point for Myanmar's Asean participation can be pinpointed to 2008, when the regional bloc – under Singapore's rotational chairmanship – negotiated a coordination of humanitarian assistance to survivors of Cyclone Nargis and introduced new ways for Myanmar to work with Asean. Singapore was also among the countries that Myanmar first turned to for capacity support in preparing for its 2014 Asean Chairmanship. By then, perceptions in Myanmar towards the regional group had become as enthusiastic as those in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Much of these positive attitudes stem from perceptions of the extent to which Asean membership has benefitted the country and its citizens. This is indeed the ultimate goal of Asean integration: Providing benefits such as wider choices for education, employment and economic opportunities, and ensuring greater exchanges and contact among different communities in the region can take place in a stable and secure environment.

But a common Asean identity still seems elusive. The identification with the Southeast Asian region and the sense of belonging that comes with it is uneven across the founding and newer members. This is probably why the nature of community building is emphasised as a continuous process.

Asean has put in place many regional mechanisms to this end. A network of 30 universities across the ten member states aims to facilitate credit transfer and exchanges among the participating universities. Travel within Asean is visa-free for citizens of the regional bloc. The Asean Open Skies agreement facilitates low-cost air travel. Youth camps and educational forums enable the younger generation to learn and appreciate the region's diversity. Capacity building programmes provide valuable platforms for sharing information and linking up officials dealing with policy and governance issues in each Asean member state.

In all this, Singapore's role as a quiet facilitator of regional community building initiatives deserves more recognition. Known more for its lead role in ensuring Asean's economic relevance globally, few connect the dots between this and Singapore's role in boosting the region's overall capacity. Singapore led the launching of the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI) at the 4th Informal Asean Summit in 2000, increasing its already high number of Asean scholarships, as well as establishing training centres in the capitals of newer member countries. In addition to capacity-building activities, projects and programmes for community development in the lesser developed Asean countries have been introduced and supported by various entities including the Singapore International Foundation.

Asean community building would not be possible without a sense of belonging to the region and its principles for collective action. But this sense of belonging is premised on encouraging regional participation from different national perspectives and priorities. Thus, thinking, feeling and acting Asean does not always have to involve a collective endeavour of ten countries all the time.

National-level decisions in support of regional goals, and bilateral programmes that give effect to regional priorities, all play their part.

This *modus operandi* is worth bearing in mind. It is especially useful at a time when transboundary issues such as migration, transnational crime, climate change, human rights, as well as the exigencies of domestic agendas, influence how Asean governments continue to work together and achieve consensus on important issues.



### Moe Thuzar

Moe Thuzar is Lead Researcher (socio-cultural) at the Asean Studies Centre of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. She is also co-coordinator of the Institute's Myanmar Studies Programme. A former diplomat, she is currently working on her PhD dissertation on the history of Myanmar's external relations between 1948 and 1988.

# USING TECHNOLOGY TO LEVEL UP ASEAN

*Matthew Herrmann*

The rise of nationalism across the globe has had some very consequential impacts. New leadership in America has largely disengaged from the Asia-Pacific region and, to some extent, has focused on internal matters. Given these trends, many might believe that the era of multilateral organisations is, at a minimum, inconsequential or, at worse, completely out-of-date.

Singapore takes over the Asean chairmanship at a critical time in 2018. I think Singapore has an opportunity to demonstrate to the world the role that Asean has played, and will continue to play, in enhancing relationships across Southeast Asia. By leveraging partners in the private sector and in civil society, Asean can once again demonstrate that multilateral organisations remain relevant despite current political trends.

As the world changes, I believe there are more effective ways to engage in meaningful people-to-people interactions. This coming year provides the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) with a unique opportunity, as a

civil society partner, to foster greater engagement for Singaporeans in Asean. Moreover, given the SIF's engagement across the globe and in the region, they can tap into networks that provide solutions to some of the region's greatest challenges.

It may seem counterintuitive, but technology can and should play a pivotal role in facilitating greater people-to-people engagements. I am an Adjunct Professor at the American University in Washington, D.C. and teach a class on how technology impacts the US policy and political systems. Teaching a class that is so dynamic often requires me to learn as much from the students as they learn from me. I have come to appreciate how technology can actually bring people closer to their goals and dreams than one might realise. However, for technology to be effective at resolving challenges, one must embrace new techniques and capabilities.

Southeast Asia, like other developing parts of the globe, faces some persistent challenges like access to clean drinking water, quality healthcare as well as quality and affordable education and, balancing protection of environment with economic progress. This is a consequential moment for Singapore. As a Smart Nation, it has a unique opportunity to leverage the significant broadband network it has built in the country and position broadband access as a solution to some of these global challenges.

By utilising organisations like the SIF and partners worldwide, the opportunities appear endless. Partnerships to bring telemedicine to rural areas and developing cities would bring state-of-the-art clinical care to

patients who would otherwise go without. Technology could be leveraged to provide access to educational material that could prepare students for opportunities in higher education or job training to meet the economic imperatives in their respective countries. There are also opportunities for the sharing of cultures through technology mediums like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. These social media tools have an incredible ability to allow relationships to grow further. We've seen how social media has shaped America, Europe and even the Middle East and its ability to foster human understanding and sharing of culture.

The challenge over the coming year is to find ways for civil society and the private sector to partner with Asean, and each member country to ensure that access to broadband is available in some of these remote areas as well as growing cities in Southeast Asia. The short-term cost pales in comparison to the long-term benefits economically, socially and culturally. Inevitably, there will be implementation challenges based on each respective country's laws and regulations. While open and widespread access to broadband and material contained on it should be the goal, we need to be sensitive to the laws and ways each country allows for access to broadband and work around these challenges until the broader goal of access to information is achieved.

Technology has the ability to transform engagement around the globe and notably in Southeast Asia. As the Chair of Asean in 2018, Singapore is uniquely situated to help facilitate this development within Asean. Moreover, the SIF and its partners are also positioned to leverage their global connections

to foster greater people-to-people engagement while tackling some of the region's most daunting challenges.



### **Matthew Herrmann**

Matthew Herrmann is Senior Advisor at the Roosevelt Group representing a wide range of clients on strategic planning, strategic communications, base realignment and closure and Indo-APAC policy matters among others. Prior to this role, Matt served as Chief of Staff to Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo. Matt is also an Adjunct Professor at American University.

# SINGAPORE IN ASEAN - A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

*Sathish Raman*

Singapore is always special in many ways. It is not just No.1 in ease of doing business, but also has the best in class infrastructure, education, culture, food, language and diversity. The true strength of Singapore is that it embraces oneness, togetherness and instills a sense of belonging to anyone walking through its doors.

Singapore and the Asean region share some very unique characteristics. Multi-cultural, aspirational and vibrant, these countries represent a confluence of people and opportunities within and outside the region.

An economically integrated, socially responsible and sustainable Asean community augurs well for the region. Singapore can help leverage the rapidly emerging digital economy to promote holistic socio-economic growth leading to greater regional harmony.

Singapore is also all about strategic positioning and long term thinking, with a focus on achieving the highest level of efficiency. I vividly remember my meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam who came in his own car, spent quality time with the Indian CEOs in my delegation with the action points being followed through professionally by his team. This epitomised the highest degree of simplicity in a politician and the world-beating efficiency of his team compared to anywhere else in the world.

Being a part of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), a non-government organisation that is playing an active role in India's development, one of our aims is to link multiple stakeholders across the globe and project India as a stable and dependable partner. CII has a close relationship with Singapore that started several decades ago, during the time of former Prime Minister of Singapore, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

To connect with international partners, a series of trade fairs, seminars, overseas missions and conferences are held to actively engage various stakeholders. Such cross-cultural exchanges are always a necessity to integrate people of different styles, ethnicities and cultures together.

This is also evident in the work done by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), a global institution meant to connect and bridge people and opportunities. The depth of work done by the SIF in key areas like health, education, skills building, youth and arts & culture in countries like India is a fitting testimony to the leadership role played by Singapore to bring people together and develop lasting friendships.

The aspiration for a higher quality of life, the increasing role of technology that will impact the future of work and the socio economic opportunities can all be effectively leveraged with Singapore forging deep partnerships globally for the benefit of not only its nation but for greater benefit of Asean and its people.

With rising standards of living, a high quality of education, good housing, safe water supply and sanitation, high quality medical services and one of the best investment destinations for foreign firms in the Asia, Singapore is a forerunner among developed nations and sets an example for the developing countries who are on an aspirational path.

By embracing globalisation, free market capitalism, health, education, and pragmatic policies, the country has been able to overcome its geographic disadvantages and become a leader in global commerce. More importantly, Singapore creates jobs for not just its population but also aspires for inclusive growth by catering to the economic needs of as many people in Singapore as possible.

Social harmony and heritage are what make people call a country their home. Singapore is unique as it remains a home for people from different races and ethnic backgrounds. A land of multiculturalism, there is festivity and celebration at different parts of the nation throughout the year. These celebrations bring out the different facets of the country and its people. Similarly, we hope to see the same people-to-people connections within Asean.



### **Sathish Raman**

Sathish Raman is the Regional Director of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) - Southern Region. CII is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation, which works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, government and civil society.

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR A BETTER WORLD

*Vu Viet Ngoan*

Vietnam-Singapore Friendship Association (VSFA) was established in September 2014 with the purpose of contributing to the promotion and expansion of traditional friendship, mutual understanding between Vietnamese and Singaporean residents, and improving the bilateral relations for the benefits of peace, cooperation and socio-economic development in each country and the region as well.

Since its establishment, the VSFA has been expanding its activities through local provincial branches. VSFA currently has three branches at the provincial level, consisting of Hai Phong, Vinh Phuc and Ho Chi Minh City. In 2018, we set up another four provincial branches, increasing to seven local VSFAs nationwide, to cover all activities concerning cooperation between Viet Nam and Singapore. Over the years, we have held different events in Viet Nam and Singapore to strengthen the understanding between the peoples of both countries, through four main areas such as cross-culture exchanges, education and training, business and investment promotion, and volunteering activities.

Cross culture exchanges are crucial to building ties. We find that it is the best way to help improve understanding between people from different countries through exposure to each other's music, art, language, cuisine and even social habits. It is soft diplomacy at its best, building bridges by sharing cultural experiences.

So, in coordination with the Vietnam Embassy in Singapore, we sent a delegation from the Vietnam National Academy of Music to hold a performance in Singapore on the occasion of Viet Nam's National Day. We also organised activities in Viet Nam, such as art displays and Singaporean film festivals in Hanoi, which received high appreciation from Viet Nam and Singapore audiences.

We also encourage interactions between business leaders. To promote investment opportunities, we successfully organised a delegation of about 200 enterprises and businesses to visit Singapore in March 2017 to explore business opportunities. The visit, co-organised with the Vietnam Embassy in Singapore and the Vietnam Business Club, helped improve relations between business communities of the two countries. It was especially beneficial to small companies who had opportunities to better understand the investment environment in the two countries.

Apart from cultural exchanges, volunteering activities are also critical in connecting people. For example, through such activities, children in remote areas receive warm and meaningful gifts and support. This emphasises the importance of sharing towards less advantaged people to build a community for a better society. In previous years, when it is near our traditional Tet holiday (Vietnamese New Year), VSFA together with the Singapore Embassy in Hanoi,

will organise a charity visit to disadvantaged children in Ba Vi, a rural district in Hanoi. During the visit, we would offer donations in terms of money, clothes and food to help the kids have a better and warmer Tet.

In January 2018, VSFA and the Singapore embassy also organised the Vietnam-Singapore Friendship Charity Run to raise funds to build a primary school in the remote area of Ban La in Tuyen Quang district. The run raised about US\$80,000. To better realise our mission, VSFA has deepened the cooperation with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) through signing a Memorandum of Understanding in March 2017. The MOU lays the foundation for long term cooperation and affirms our commitment to further strengthen cross-cultural understanding and people-to-people ties between Singapore and Viet Nam. This will be achieved through more collaboration on projects and initiatives over the coming years that engage leaders from both communities in the promotion of social innovation and entrepreneurship, arts and cultural exchange, and volunteer cooperation.

Cross-cultural exchanges should not be limited at a bilateral level. It should be conducted across Asean. In this regard, SIF Connects! – a series of overseas events organised by SIF to connect Singapore with global communities – is truly a platform we can use to foster stronger friendships in the region. To build a common house in Southeast Asia, we need to make an effort to bond on different levels.

It is clear that Viet Nam and Singapore share a common mission and vision, hence it is important that VSFA and SIF have closer cooperation for better

understanding between the people of both countries. We look forward to building greater bonds with our Singaporean friends and working together towards common goals for a better Asean and world.



## Vu Viet Ngoan

Vu Viet Ngoan is the President of Vietnam-Singapore Friendship Association (VSFA) and Head of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Team. He has over 30 years of working experience in the economic and financial sectors of Viet Nam, having served as Chairman of the National Financial Supervisory Commission, Vice Chairman of the Economic Committee of the National Assembly, as well as Chief Executive Officer of Vietcombank.

# IN SEARCH OF THE ASEAN IDENTITY

*John Patrick Allanegui*

**A**long Roxas Boulevard in Manila stands the Asean Garden, which few Filipinos are aware of, a small park with a few artistic monuments and benches under the shade of trees. The park is on the outskirts of the cultural center of the Philippines, adorned by the flags of Asean countries blowing in the midday wind.

The presence of the park is an indication of Asean's 50th anniversary being celebrated in Philippines, a founding member of the regional bloc. But it also reminds me of something more personal. In late 2014, my colleagues and I teamed up to create the Asean Youth Dialogues, an initiative that aims to educate young people about Asean integration and its implications through a series of educational talks across the Philippines.

Our fascination then with Asean integration went beyond the usual buzzwords surrounding migration, economic borders and political differences. Among the conversations that emerged was the possibility of sharing a

common regional identity with an aspiration to build a more cohesive and inclusive community.

Defining who we are as a region is an important but difficult task to accomplish. We have to see beyond our differences and personal biases to figure out the shared values within Asean. During the dialogues, we realised that youths will play an important role in taking the first step towards developing a regional identity. And forging cultural understanding is one way of moving forward towards that goal.

Looking at the stark differences in culture, religion, history and political ideologies in different Asean states, it's initially hard to imagine sharing a common regional identity. Yet the social landscape dominated by the youth and developments in mobility and technology presents an opportunity for greater cultural understanding among Asean members.

Today, the younger generation are increasingly mobile and tech-savvy. Travelling and seamlessly crossing neighbours' borders have become a must to discover new places and opportunities in neighbouring states, leading to greater understanding of each other's history and culture. Social media has also become a platform to connect and foster relationships with people across the region.

Over the past few years, many exchanges among Asean governments and educational institutions have also contributed to the growth and development of youth and professional networks working towards common advocacies.

There could be a more concerted regional effort to better achieve this goal by discussing the uniqueness and commonalities in culture and history of each country in schools. This way, young people may develop an early interest and take pride in the region's attributes.

It is without a doubt that such developments can bridge the gaps of cultural differences within the region. In time, the rapid movement of Asean citizens across the borders and the growth of networks will pave the way to greater solidarity among the region's people. Yet, such solidarity should not reduce the characteristics of Asean into a standardised bloc. Asean shares a unique multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity that should also be celebrated.

Imagining ourselves as one Asean identity does not mean ignoring our differences in languages, ethnicity, religion and everyday experiences. As Asean envisions its future with a common identity, the citizens, especially the younger generation, should continue to take note of the region's diversity. They should also be open to the fact that their regional counterparts may have common and sometimes different characteristics in understanding their sense of self. This diversity doesn't have to be a bad thing. In fact, diversity is also a source of strength, with many communities able to see past their differences and embrace shared histories and values.



## John Patrick Allanegui

John Patrick Allanegui was a Convener of the Asean Youth Dialogues in the Philippines and Malaysia. He was educated at the Ateneo de Davao University and Ateneo de Manila University. His works have appeared in national and international media outlets, books and journals.

# ASEAN AND KOREA: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

*Kim Young-sun*

When I was working as a Korean Ambassador in Indonesia, a friend told me that once I can interpret the meanings of smiles of Indonesians is probably when I truly understand the Indonesian people. Appreciating intricate cultures and customs is not easy, but it forms a basic foundation for a genuine friendship.

There is a saying that goes, *'tak kenal, maka tak cinta'*, which means you cannot love someone if you do not know that person. In a similar way, for a true partnership between Asean and Korea, deep understanding and people-to-people ties are prerequisites. For Asean and Korea, this is already well on its way with the impressive number of people-to-people exchanges that stands at 10 million as of 2017. This means about 27,000 people of Asean and Korea visit each other daily. Also, Asean is the number one travel destination for Koreans. However, now we need to go beyond mere quantity, to achieve more meaningful people-to-people engagement between the two regions.

Asean and Korea share similar underlying values and sentiments such as filial piety and other family-oriented traditions. Nevertheless, they also have differences – Asean having a diversity of cultures while Korea remains a very homogenous society. For Asean and Korea to strengthen their relations, their people need to accept and embrace the diversity of each other's cultures. Singapore, with just a population of 5.7 million, is a country rich with cultural diversity. The nation sets a good example of how unity can be realised with diverse cultures, backgrounds and traditions coexisting in harmony. It annually celebrates Racial Harmony Day in July, and respects diverse cultures and religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Singapore reflects well the Asean motto of "Unity in Diversity".

For Asean and Korean cultural exchanges and understanding to be sustainable, reciprocity is needed. While Korean culture is widely accepted by the Asean people with K-drama and K-pop leading the Hallyu or Korean Wave, there are great opportunities for Asean culture to become popular in Korea. Asean travel destinations and cuisines are already popular among the Korean people, but there are many other aspects of Asean culture and heritage that could perhaps stir an 'Asean Wave' in Korea. In this regard, the Asean-Korea Centre carries out a wide array of Asean awareness programmes every year such as cultural exchanges and workshops to develop trade and tourism. With the newly established Asean Culture House in Busan, this effort will be further intensified.

A greater emphasis should be placed on youth programmes to deepen cultural ties and understanding. Perceptions tend to be formed at an earlier stage in

life, and becoming exposed to new cultures at a young age will allow the youth to embrace differences more easily. Nurturing the young leaders of Asean and Korea to understand and accept each other's cultures will create a solid foundation for a more sustainable friendship, which will also contribute to strengthening the Asean-Korea partnership.

With Singapore taking over the Asean Chairmanship in 2018, we should take note of its special role in the Asean community-building process. Not only does Singapore lead the way in realising “Unity in Diversity”, but it is also a leading country in advanced technology. The digitalisation of economies creates greater interconnectivity around the world, which can also be seen as a new cultural phenomenon. This will bring greater opportunities, as well as new challenges to Asean. With Singapore's focus on innovation and digital economies as Asean Chair, Singapore and Korea will have many areas of cooperation in this new era of digitalisation.

Both countries are technology savvy, with a suite of electronic services for consumers. In the area of electronic payments for instance, only about 20 per cent of all payments in Korea are made with cash – among the lowest in the world, according to the Bank of Korea. Similarly, Singapore is also looking to go cashless. With the city state pushing the digital wave in Asean, there is room for more collaboration between Asean and Korea. This will bring more smiles all around.



### **Kim Young-sun**

Kim Young-sun is the Secretary General of the Asean-Korea Centre. Prior to this, he served as the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Indonesia from 2011 to 2014. He received a bachelor's degree in political science at Seoul National University, and a master's degree from Keio University in Japan.

# WHAT THE VOID DECK CAN TEACH ASEAN

*Roland Davies*

A few years ago, a professor of sociolinguistics introduced to me the concept of ‘keyhole’ words – terms that exist in every society which would offer insight into a community and culture. ‘Void deck’ would be one of the terms I would pick for Singapore. I’ve never heard it used anywhere else and thinking about what it means is a fascinating angle on the country’s culture, society and politics. You look into, or through, that word and understand something about Singapore’s housing system and how that relates to the country’s ethnic and religious make up, its culture and history.

Originally devised, it seems, as a sheltered play area for children, the open public spaces have been a feature of the carefully mixed housing developments since the 1970s. They have been described as ‘community living rooms’, a place for casual encounters and the playing of games as well as more formal community events or weddings and wakes. They represent one of the many ways that Singapore works on community and communal relations, part of

the cultural glue that binds the country together alongside Singlish and a love of discounts.

The void deck isn’t the right answer for every fractured community. Where relationships are broken, there will be many steps to take before people can come together in community living rooms. But what Singapore does prove is that with sustained effort, leadership and through practical approaches to back up the symbolic and the rhetorical, multi-racial, multi-cultural communities can live together harmoniously.

There is a healthy degree of paranoia underpinning this effort. Memories of more troubled times in the country’s own history as well as a quick look around the neighbourhood are reminders that the current state of affairs cannot be taken for granted. The country cannot become complacent, there is always more work to be done.

The line in the Singapore Constitution – *constantly to care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore* – needs to be realised in policy and practice at all levels of society with the ‘soft’ approaches of cultural or community engagement backed up by the force of law.

Someone explaining how the British Council works used the example of how people who make poetry or music together are much less likely to want to fight each other. Similarly, this is how trust building works in society too, how people come to respect and understand each other. In the void deck, that trust building might be through music, table tennis or a game of chequers,

the everyday activities that people do together and which bind them into communities.

The result of such daily interactions is exemplified by a comment a colleague made when asked about race in Singapore. She said: “I have lots of friends from different races, it doesn’t cross my mind, they’re just Singaporeans.”

The country might not yet have reached the ideal of perfect harmony – Singaporeans themselves recognise that racism does exist – but it is a work in progress and the city state does work very hard at bringing its diverse ethnic and religious groups together and building tolerance and respect.

At the same time that Asean is trying to forge closer ties between member states, the leaders might also pay attention to their knitting at the level of regions and communities, towns and village where the fault lines around religion and race are all too evident. There are unfortunately many examples where unity and harmony are under severe stress within communities across the bloc. The leaders of Asean, in their pursuit of prosperity, might usefully reflect on the void deck concept and what it means to be “just Singaporean”.



### **Roland Davies**

Roland Davies is the Director at the British Council in Singapore, where he oversees its activities across English language, Education and the Arts. From North Wales, he is trained in history and education management, and has worked in cultural relations in Brazil, Japan and South Korea.

## **INCLUSIVENESS**

*In Singapore, temples sit alongside mosques, and churches rub shoulders with shrines. In Myanmar, children with physical and intellectual disabilities discover a sense of belonging and purpose in a first-of-its-kind care centre. Being different can be odd and difficult, but it can also be beautiful and strong. Inclusivity is about celebrating differences and bringing others who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised together – so diversity is turned into strength.*



Amelia Tan is a 16-year-old student with mild autism. She has been learning various art media at Very Special Arts Singapore since 2008, and enjoys drawing self-portraits as well as sketches of her sisters and friends in her unique imaginative Manga style. The Pathlight School student is also a member of Artist Development Programme since 2014.



A woman and a person with disabilities are the superheroes in this manga-styled illustration. The heroine and her sidekick are cheered on by crowds on the side as they fight against discrimination. The artist alludes to the need for the public to know and honour the rights of women and people with disabilities – an aspiration for an inclusive Asean community.

# TAKING THE LID OFF

*Jo Verrent & Clara Giraud*

There is a phrase in English – taking the lid off a can of worms. Often things are difficult and complex, and sometimes we prefer not to talk about them - they are the can of worms. When we take the lid off the can, we acknowledge that the conversations will be tricky, but equally that we need to bring them out into the open in order to make change happen.

Singapore, a city of huge surprises, has many cultures cohabiting and a turbulent past. Might the efforts in bringing together cultural communities in the last century have pushed Singaporeans to celebrate similarities rather than difference? Does this mean that diversity and the inherent differences involved are the ‘can of worms’ that now needs to be tipped onto the table and fully discussed?

The content of Kaite O’Reilly and Peter Sau’s theatre project “And then I disappeared...the Singapore ‘d’ Monologues” tackles aspects of such difficult, but essential, conversations. Each monologue is delivered by a different

character - fictitious but all based on real interviews with disabled people in the United Kingdom and Singapore. They draw on the need to go beyond what are referred to as the charitable or the medical models of disability where disabled people are seen as objects of pity, or just objects of medical curiosity. The monologues also question the constant drive for productivity and ‘added value’ – is there not more to life than increased profit?

Perhaps the most exciting things to witness are whispers of change around the edges of such work - seeing disabled artists and leaders in the making: Peter Sau, Lee Lee Lim, Tandem Project artists edge forward in confidence. The work seeks to shift perceptions in Singapore, particularly within the arts sector – creating exceptional art that happens to be made by disabled artists, rather than work that draws audiences based on misplaced sympathy.

We were privileged to have witnessed this shift when we had the opportunity to attend the Arts and Disability Forum 2016 in Singapore. Organised in partnership by the British Council, the National Arts Council Singapore, the Singapore International Foundation and our hosts the National Gallery Singapore, the three-day forum aimed to raise awareness on how the arts and culture can shape an inclusive society, as well as bridge the arts and disability sectors through cultural exchanges between Singapore and UK.

We also saw first-hand the collaboration for O’Reilly and Sau’s theatre project which was funded by our programme Unlimited – the world’s largest commissions programme for disabled artists based in the UK. The research and development period for this work brought together expertise from the

UK and Singapore in complementary ways. The UK artists brought in-depth experience of creating inclusive and accessible performance: visual languages (sign language, both Singaporean and British; as well as visual vernacular) and spoken languages (English, Mandarin, Singlish, Welsh) as well as captions and audio descriptions which all came together as part of the aesthetic of the performance rather than an added dimension just for access purposes.

Still, more could be done to make the arts more inclusive. In Singapore, the majority of people making decisions about arts and disability are non-disabled. What might happen if more organisations, board and committees considered inviting disabled people to be involved as active and influential organisers instead of just passive recipients?

As Unlimited goes on to support O'Reilly and Sau's collaboration to create a new theatre production which will premiere in Singapore in May 2018, we look forward to observe further opportunities unfold for disabled artists and cultural leaders in Singapore and beyond. There is a real opportunity for Singapore to take the lid off the can and propel this newfound desire for authentic engagement forward within Asean.



## Jo Verrent & Clara Giraud

Jo Verrent is the Senior Producer for Unlimited, the world's largest commissions programme for disabled artists based in the UK. Clara Giraud has been working as an Arts Producer since 2009. In 2014, she took on the role Project Manager at Artsadmin and works closely with Jo Verrent on Unlimited.

# PEOPLE CENTRED ASEAN AND SHARED PROSPERITY

*Noeleen Heyzer*

Asean represents one of the most dynamic and promising region in the world today. It has the potential of becoming a major growth engine contributing to Asia's pivotal position in the global economy. However this economic potential can only be unleashed if there is a social foundation that invests in people and their capabilities. In other words, there can be no economic transformation without social transformation to achieve a people-centred Asean as articulated in the Asean Charter.

A people-centred Asean requires a new economic model that is not just based on technical innovation and rapid economic growth, but also sustainable and inclusive growth that brings shared prosperity. Improving labour market conditions, as well as strengthening labour laws and rights of workers can yield valuable results. It is an important first step towards improving the quality of growth and people's lives, building future skill sets, increasing income and harnessing our human potential.

Inclusive and socially sustainable growth models need to pay special attention to women in the labour force. Gender inequality remains a major issue in many Asean countries, and advances in education have not translated into equal economic opportunities. Across Asean, women in employment is about half to two-thirds that of men across Asean. Women also earn less, about two-thirds of what men earn, in manufacturing jobs in Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

We need the implementation of region-wide standards to improve skills training opportunities and working conditions for women. This means introducing structural reforms aimed at eliminating discriminatory employment, and ensuring equal employment opportunities and earnings for women. It means implementing international agreements to end all forms of discrimination against women as a matter of human rights. It also means the provision of effective child and elderly care, and measures to promote work-life balance. Otherwise we are devaluing half of our human potential and creativity.

It is time to leverage the changing global and digital economy, which is increasingly shaped by disruptive technological innovations. Better access to the Internet will transform businesses, but how do we ensure that women benefit from this revolution? Currently there is a gender divide in access to technology, with data showing that Internet use is higher for males than females in almost all age groups globally. Closing the gap in "E-quality" is essential. As more businesses engage in new technological frontiers, we need to increase investment in girls' education and encourage them to enter

these non-traditional jobs for women. As Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook reminds us, “Women remain dramatically underrepresented in technology fields. They’re missing out on opportunities and the world is missing out on their ideas”.

Another important aspect of inclusive and sustainable growth is the movement of people. Migration flows in the region could be very effective in tackling structural demand-supply imbalances between Asean countries, contributing to economic growth and reducing social disparities in labour income. International migration also provides a source of income for the migrant’s household, as well as a source of foreign exchange for the sending countries.

The Asean Economic Community (AEC) introduced mutual recognition agreements of job qualifications and skills to facilitate the free movement of skilled labour as one of the core elements to create a single market. However, for the AEC to take root, the region has to move beyond provisions for freedom of movement for skilled workers across the region, and deal with the more difficult issue of managing migration flows of the unskilled and semi-skilled. Millions have travelled across Asean often undocumented, and many work illegally with no protection in the face of terrible exploitation and abuse.

Currently this issue is addressed under the Asean Declaration of Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. This is weak and inadequate. What is needed is an integrated system of managed labour movement based

on a common framework across the region where such workers can more easily and safely respond to changes in labour demand.

Asean was born out of regional security concerns with Singapore as a founding member. But it grew to promote region wide economic and social prosperity. It can now become a major hub of dynamism by setting common standards, closing the development and skills gaps within and across Asean countries, and deepening regional cooperation to pursue a new model of inclusive and sustainable growth. This will provide shared prosperity and improve social cohesion and human security for all – my hope for our shared destiny.



### Noeleen Heyzer

Noeleen Heyzer served as the United Nations’ Under-Secretary-General from 2007 to 2015, the highest-ranking Singaporean in the UN during her term. She was the first woman to head the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), since its founding in 1947.

# REFLECTIONS ON A MULTI-RELIGIOUS ASEAN

*Paul Hedges*

As somebody coming from a Western, or more particularly British, background it is clear at once that the interreligious nature of Asean's societies is deeper, more inbuilt and natural. Of course, Asean is diverse and some places have a preponderance of one religion. Nevertheless, in much of the region, one sees religions living side-by-side and it is clear that this is part of an accepted heritage. Old temples sit alongside old mosques, and old churches rub shoulders with long established shrines. Whereas, in much of the world, situations of religious diversity are described as “new” or “unparalleled”, they have been the norm in the Asean region for centuries if not millennia. Naturally, over time the particular mix of religions has changed, and shifting demographics have made some more pervasive at different times and in different places than others. But such interreligious co-mingling is still the norm.

This is exemplified in situations like the workplace. In Singapore, it is in my experience almost taken for granted that an extended lunchtime is needed

on Fridays to accommodate Muslims who wish to attend Friday prayers. Likewise, one can see prayer mats in various places in stairwells and other areas which can readily be left undisturbed from day-to-day. In a Western context, while religious equality is enshrined in law, suggesting that some “special exception” was needed for Muslim colleagues would often be met with mumblings and discontent, while there would surely be complaints about the use of space for impromptu prayer, let alone leaving prayer mats in situ for daily use.

While developed over many centuries of interaction, today's situation in Asean is not entirely a by-product of the diversity that dwells within. Singapore in particular has carefully cultivated interreligious coexistence, partly through ethnic or race lines, via various measures. The coexistence in public housing, for instance, is carefully mixed and regulated to ensure that the four recognised races (Chinese, Indian, Malay, Other) live alongside each other. There are also legal measures in place to ensure religious coexistence and harmony. Indonesia, meanwhile, as a modern nation state is based upon the Pancasila principle which recognises many legitimate religions within a nation that is predominantly Islamic. Its ideology is that Indonesians have more things binding them together rather than separating them along lines of language, ethnicity, race, or anything else.

Of course, Asean is far from an interreligious haven of peace and harmony. Especially around certain festivals, there will be posts on social media about the mess made by joss sticks and burning joss papers, while hostility and violence on largely ethno-religious lines is prevalent in some areas. Winds

of change are also blowing across the world that threatens the relative harmony and coexistence of Asean. Religious identity politics, which draws sharp boundaries of insider and outsider and has harsh exclusive rhetoric, is growing in many parts of the world. The repercussions are already being felt in many places and a resistance to it is also in place.

In conversations with religious leaders, interfaith activists, and government and community leaders, they are well aware of the dangers posed by rising religious rhetoric. There is unfortunately no easy answer. The language and emotions of hate, fear and division run deep in the physiology and psychology of humans, harking back to our ancestral past and evolutionary heritage. The calm and reasoned words and behaviour of coexistence and harmony must fight old instinctive habits and urges.

Yet, compared to many places across the globe, Asean has resources and leaders prepared to tackle these issues. As someone originally an outsider but living now inside the region, I certainly hope to play a role in the years ahead alongside my local colleagues and friends, ensuring the finer traditions of the Asean region win out against the ideological divisions some wish to bring in.



**Paul Hedges**

Paul Hedges is Associate Professor of Interreligious Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He has worked for other universities in Asia, Europe, and North America and publishes widely in interreligious studies, religious studies and theology.

# SUPPORTING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES FOR MORE EQUITABLE GROWTH ACROSS ASEAN

*Piyush Gupta*

**S**ustainable and equitable growth is not just a pertinent issue of our time, but an increasingly pressing one. The geopolitical events of recent years – the Arab Spring, Brexit and the unexpected Trump victory – were fuelled by a singular discontent around income inequality and economic livelihoods.

Over the next few years, technology will exacerbate this problem further. Today's technology already makes it possible to run global-scale enterprises without creating global-scale infrastructures. And it is notable that the top ten tech companies in the world have a market capitalisation of some US\$4 trillion, but collectively employ only 200,000 people. Unless this issue is addressed, the coming wave of job displacements and the concentration of

wealth in fewer hands will give rise to more social angst not just globally, but also closer home in Asean.

In my view, the scale of the issue is one that governments cannot tackle alone. Private sector companies can play a meaningful role in partnering governments to uplift communities. While chequebook philanthropy, as in traditional donations to charities, has a place in society, the more scalable and sustainable solution lies in nurturing businesses that have social impact. How can Singapore foster the development of social entrepreneurship in Asean?

### **Encourage Singapore companies to lend support further afield**

A few years ago, in conjunction with Singapore's 50th year of independence, the bank established the S\$50 million DBS Foundation to support social enterprises. From the start, our vision was to scale our impact, working with an entire ecosystem of partners such as tertiary institutions and government agencies, to impact social enterprises across many parts of Asia.

As an example, DBS Foundation, in partnership with NUS Enterprise, has been organising the DBS-NUS Social Venture Challenge Asia for a few years now. Winners of the challenge receive seed funding, grants and mentorship. Last year, the competition received over 1,000 submissions across Asia. The social innovations that took the limelight were all very impactful, and included a social enterprise that empowers Bhutanese women to achieve financial independence through their artisanal hand-woven products and a

crowd-investing web platform that connects small-scale farmers in Indonesia with retail investors.

### **Closer collaboration, dialogue and exchange between member states**

Globally, there is now a strong sense of urgency to combat climate change and its impact. However, that same clarion call is not evident when it comes to tackling income inequality issues. One reason is that income inequality lacks a burning platform that can rally people today. With income inequality being one of the multiple areas that social enterprises tackle, Singapore can do its part to change that.

One way is by creating platforms that bring together various parties to foster greater dialogue and closer collaboration. A case in point is the Asean Social Entrepreneurship Forum hosted in 2016 by the Ministry of Social and Family Development and Social Enterprise Association Singapore, which brought together government officials, thought leaders and practitioners across Asean member states.

### **Develop Singapore into a regional hub for impact investing**

Singapore is one of the places where large amounts of capital gather. It is the world's second-largest wealth management centre, the third-largest financial market centre, and perhaps the number one commodities hub. This positions the country well to also be a regional hub for impact investing –

generating specific beneficial social or environmental effects in addition to financial gains.

In 2017, DBS worked closely with IIX (Impact Investment Exchange) to issue the world's first social sustainability bond to be listed on a stock exchange. Singapore was chosen as the listing venue. The US\$8 million Women's Livelihood Bond impacts the lives of over 385,000 women in Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

We hope Singapore can facilitate more investment in sustainable causes to uplift communities across the region, become a regional hub for impact investing and encourage closer collaboration within Asean for more equitable growth in the future.



### Piyush Gupta

Piyush Gupta is Chief Executive Officer and Director of DBS Group. Since helming the Singapore-headquartered financial services group in 2009, he has helped steer it through numerous accolades, including "World's Best Digital Bank" by Euromoney, "Asian Bank of the Year" by IFR Asia and "Safest Bank in Asia" by Global Finance for nine consecutive years.

# CONNECTING THE BACKSTREETS OF ASEAN TO THE WALL STREETS OF THE WORLD

*Durreen Shahnaz*

Having grown up in Bangladesh and the Philippines, and later moving to the United States before settling in Singapore almost 13 years ago, I've found that this city of diversity and understanding is a true crossroads between the East and the West. It is the only place in the world where I can publicly wear a saree or a dress without anyone batting an eyelid and where I can truly embrace all of my different heritages. As a global citizen and entrepreneur who has wrestled with the unbearable gap between the Wall Streets of the world and the impoverished backstreets of underserved communities, I've also found Singapore to be a wonderful place for building bridges and pathways to a better world.

Singapore's position as a global leader of higher education was a critical factor in my becoming a professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, where I had the privilege of teaching Social Innovation and Change to future government leaders from around the world. Later, when establishing my current company, Impact Investment Exchange (IIX), where we build inclusive markets by mobilising investment capital to scale up development solutions across Asia, Singapore was also an obvious choice for our head office. Benefitting from Singapore's financial and legal infrastructure, credibility and connections in the region, IIX has since 2009 provided investment readiness services and raised investment capital for impact enterprises across Asia, raising over US\$75 million collectively and benefitting over 15 million lives through its various investment platforms and innovative financial products.

For years I had dreamed of combining finance with social good – engaging mainstream investors across Asia, tapping on their wealth to scale up development solutions for the most underserved communities. Thus, IIX pioneered the impact investing space in Asia, effectively combining social and environmental good with financial returns. However, bringing impact investing from the margins to mainstream still remained a challenge.

A watershed moment came in 2015, when IIX conceptualised the Asean-focused Women's Livelihood Bond (WLB) – an innovative bond structure offering financial returns while creating social impact. It offers investors both scale (by pooling together a group of borrowers) and liquidity (by being tradable on a stock exchange) – both were lacking

in existing impact investment deals, deterring participation from mainstream investors.

The WLB was conceived as a powerful solution to mobilise capital at scale for women-focused enterprises and integrate low-income, marginalised women across Asean into the traditional capital markets. The goal was to have the mainstream investors participate in impact investing and unlock capital for the world's most underserved communities, thereby building a bridge between these two seemingly disparate worlds. Thankfully, we achieved the goal.

Turning the WLB into a reality was of course no mean feat, and we knew we couldn't do it alone. It truly took a village of stakeholders – from the Rockefeller Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, to law firms Shearman & Sterling and Hogan Lovells, and banks DBS Bank and ANZ Banking Group – to make the bond happen.

A true labour of love, the WLB was launched in July 2017, mobilising US\$8 million from investors and offering an annual coupon of 5.65% over a four-year period. It was also listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX), offering investors liquidity and heralding Singapore's emergence as a hub for impact investing. The WLB was the world's first impact investing instrument to be listed on a stock exchange.

Most notably, the WLB received over 60% of its investment capital from Asian investors. This made the blood, sweat and tears all worthwhile – the fact that

we had managed to get wealthy Asians to invest back into the backstreets of Asean, that we had fostered understanding, empathy and trust between seemingly disparate communities across the region, and that we could tap on Singapore's unique resources to make all of this happen.

The WLB is just the beginning. We are now replicating the WLB and also continuing to grow IIX's equity crowd funding platform, Impact Partners, to solve other pressing social and environmental issues across Asean and connect investors with deserving organisations. With its diverse heritage, incredible infrastructure, and well-connected positioning at the crossroads between Asia and the world, we're grateful for Singapore's invaluable role in our journey of building bridges of empathy and trust between the Wall Streets and the backstreets, and look forward to Singapore's continued leadership in the impact investing space.



**Durreen Shahnaz**  
Professor Durreen Shahnaz is Founder and CEO of Impact Investment Exchange (IIX) and IIX Foundation, which build inclusive markets by mobilising capital for social and environmental solutions. Born in Bangladesh, she has built a global career, including stints at Morgan Stanley (New York), Grameen Bank (Bangladesh) and the National University of Singapore.

# BUILDING A SENSE OF IDENTITY FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

*U Tha Uke*

The idea to do something for disabled children in Myanmar was seeded when I worked in Malaysia and Singapore in the mid-1990s. I was a physiotherapist at Malaysia's Spastic Children's Association of Penang and the former St. Luke's Hospital for the Elderly in Singapore – now known as St Luke's Hospital (SLH), before coming home to Myanmar in 1998.

Two years later, in 2000, the Eden Centre for Disabled Children (ECDC) was set up in Yangon. It was the first non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation for children with physical and intellectual disabilities to open in Myanmar.

ECDC provides children with disabilities equal access to opportunities so that they can grow and lead an independent life with dignity. We started with two staff and 14 children. Today, we have grown to 60 staff and over 185 children enrolled in the day care centre where we provide basic rehabilitation such as

physiotherapy and occupational, hydro and speech therapy, special education and social care services.

As the head of ECDC, I am frequently asked what motivated me to establish this organisation. I always joyfully share my three years of working experiences in Singapore and Malaysia, which not only inspired me to start ECDC but also gave me the training and skills to do so.

I had worked for two years at SLH at Bukit Batok, Singapore. It is a caring, empowering, accepting, appreciating environment and it nurtured my worldview and vision. Dr Eileen Aw, former head of the SLH, encouraged us to learn as much as possible and dream big – so that we could return to our country and replicate similar services for our own people. After working two years in SLH, I was convinced that I was called to serve children with disabilities back in Myanmar.

I used to tell my Singaporean friends that Singapore is “second to heaven”. There are many ways that Singapore has contributed to build inclusive communities, for example through accepting everyone on equal terms under the rule of law. What really impressed me was how barriers – physical, environmental and also attitudinal – were broken down for persons with disabilities in the Singapore community.

When I was in Singapore 20 years ago, I saw a diverse society co-existing harmoniously. People of different ethnicities, such as Chinese, Indian, Malay, European and Singaporean were living and working together. Everybody has

their own identity, contribute to society and live a life without discrimination. Even those with disabilities have accessibility and a place in society.

After nearly two decades in my journey serving persons with disabilities in Myanmar and also sharing information and experiences with other Asean countries, the key challenge facing these children in this region has become clear: It is an identity issue. They face hurdles in their quest for identity and their place in society. Children with disabilities in Asean communities are facing challenges not only to access their fundamental human rights such as education, health, participation and information, but also to engage with other community members in their daily lives.

Singapore has contributed towards building more inclusive communities by making their rights real, and is a model for other Asean communities. Sharing is an effective way to empower others. I have learned from both Malaysia and Singapore in the last 20 years. Those experiences are still a driving force for me through my lifelong dedicated journey to serve children with disabilities in my country.

Children with disabilities are my role models. I see the beauty of childhood and humanity in their faces – love, kindness, empathy and patience are present in their daily lives, which heal the family and society. To make embracing diversity in our Asean community a reality, as extolled in the Asean Community Vision 2025, we need to include disability issues as an essential discourse in all sectors.



### U Tha Uke

Tha Uke established the Eden Centre for Disabled Children in 2000, the first non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation for children with physical and intellectual disabilities in Myanmar. Before that, he worked as a physiotherapist in Malaysia and Singapore. He lives in Yangon with his wife and son.

# AGEING-FRIENDLY SOCIETIES WITH THE RIGHT POLICIES

*Yasunobu Iwasaki*

Modern medicine may have to change its role in healthcare systems confronting an ageing society. Hospitals today have well-trained doctors and state-of-the-art medical equipment so that they can treat almost all diseases. In an ageing society, however, disease patterns have changed. Instead of a single disease that can effectively be treated in hospitals, the elderly simultaneously have more than two chronic diseases or physical disorders. Those diseases and disorders are not immediately life-threatening, but eventually, they could cause patients to be bedridden. Hospitals are not designed to effectively deal with these chronic diseases that require different types of care.

According to the World Health Organization, a country that has more than seven per cent of their population aged 65 and older is called an ageing society, and more than 14 per cent becomes an aged society. Most of the European countries took more than 50 years to move from ageing to aged societies. On the contrary, Asian countries have taken a much shorter time to become aged

societies. For example, Japan, whose elderly accounts for more than 25 per cent of its population, took only 26 years from 1970 to 1995.

Some Asian countries started several projects to tackle ageing issues very early. Japan started a long-term care insurance system in 2000, different from the national medical insurance system, and spent 9 trillion yen, or US\$80 billion, in 2015. Some Asean countries have also launched programmes to support seniors. In Thailand, where the elderly will account for more than 14 per cent of its population by 2025, it started the National Plan for Older Person in 2002. Singapore has adopted different measures. The country with 5.6 million residents is restructuring its healthcare service system based on six medical clusters – providing hospital care to nursing home services and home care. The project is expected to be completed by 2035 when the population could grow to 6.9 million people, with more than 20 per cent made up of the elderly.

The type of elderly care needed has also evolved, as seniors today are different from previous generations. They are healthier and less vulnerable compared to the same age group decades earlier. A study in Japan revealed that the walking speed of those aged 65 to over 80 was 20 per cent faster in 2002 – compared to 20 years ago in 1992. Even though the elderly are in better shape, they also have smaller support networks as family structures evolve from extended to nuclear types. More elderly are also living alone.

Therefore, there are two aims that governments and communities have to achieve in an ageing society. First, it is crucial to keep the elderly healthy for as long as possible. Governments should initiate the promotion of

physical activities and improve dietary habits to extend residents' healthy life expectancies. Second, communities should prepare measures to support the frail elderly not only physically but also socially, including spiritual support, until the end of life. Communities and local governments may have to provide elderly care services such as helping individuals to bathe, eat and clean their homes. Social activities such as conversations with others are also important ways to support the elderly emotionally. Hence, elderly care should be community-based.

Each country needs to take unique approaches based on their respective geographical structures, population densities, transportation systems, etc. For example, elderly care in Singapore is related to city planning. The city must incorporate places and communities where the elderly can enjoy physical activities and conversations. On the other hand, in some rural areas in Japan, transportation is crucial. There are many villages where only few elderly people live. As most are too old to drive cars, local governments must provide transportation to enable access to hospitals and long-term care services.

As Asean countries grapple with an ageing population, policymakers must keep in mind that elderly care should be supportive rather than obtrusive. People who are frail still want to keep their autonomy.



### Yasunobu Iwasaki

Yasunobu Iwasaki is President and senior surgeon at Anshin Hospital, an orthopaedic specialty hospital in Kobe, Japan. He received his education in Kobe University and Singapore Management University, and his research interests include advocacy marketing in healthcare organisations and decision-making processes of surgeons.

# THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

*Belinda Tanoto*

**T**he power and potential of partnerships can never be underestimated. Even the most successful social programmes reach only a small fraction of those in need. Bridging this gap to reach a transformative scale requires new strategies that extend beyond the boundaries of any single organisation. We need to find new forms of collaboration within and across sectors – perhaps even across countries.

Our experience at Tanoto Foundation has shown that only when we share and leverage each other’s knowledge, experience and resources, can we efficiently address long-term issues such as poverty, inequality and access to quality education. Partnerships can unlock multiple benefits, including increased capital, diversification of risk and expanded capacity. Over the years, we have gained invaluable insights on how to build effective, sustainable and meaningful partnerships.

## **Invest upfront to align goals**

Most organisations underestimate what it takes to build an effective partnership. Oftentimes, they do not invest enough time and energy upfront to understand each other's priorities, align interests and agree on a common agenda.

When Tanoto Foundation was discussing strategic partnerships to further our work in early childhood development, we discovered that each funder and non-profit organisation had a slightly different definition of the same issue – some focused on stunting and malnutrition, while others focused on early childhood education and parenting best practices. These differences are easily ignored when organisations work independently, yet working together requires that we take the time to understand each other's priorities, resolve differences and identify commonalities.

## **Create a safe space for honest feedback**

Imagine trying to improve an education system with 50 million students, 2.6 million teachers, and 250,000 schools spread across an archipelago of more than 900 inhabited islands. The Indonesian government is investing as much as they can, including setting aside 20 per cent of the state budget for education, and has achieved near universal access to basic education. Yet, schooling is not the same as learning and much can be done to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

Given the vastness and complexity of the system, no single organisation can achieve quality education for all. Consequently, our foundation has reframed our approach. Instead of only implementing initiatives that have specific goals and metrics, we have also begun leveraging our reputation as a catalyst to encourage others to collaborate.

For example, in partnership with Djarum Foundation and Asia Philanthropy Circle, we examined the work of social funders and non-profit organisations active in education, identified opportunities that are most suitable for investment and formed coalitions. We hope that by having honest discussions on what worked and what didn't, organisations can accelerate their growth to provide more effective programmes in the future.

## **Nurture an ecosystem of stakeholders**

Changes involving people and communities take time and require cooperation from all fronts. This is what makes the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) both exciting and challenging. The UN SDGs have the potential to eradicate pressing problems such as poverty and lack of access to basic needs by 2030. A critical first step is ensuring that key indicators reflect and address realities on the ground – which we are doing with the UN Development Programme.

Using these contextualised indicators, the next step is to encourage other actors – businesses, non-profits, local grassroots leaders and local governments – to work together and contribute to achieving the SDGs. Only

when multiple stakeholders are involved can we ensure that efforts are not only effective, but also sustainable.

I particularly admire the Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) spirit of finding new forms of collaboration. For example, the SIF's Singapore International Volunteers visit overseas institutions regularly where they share their knowledge and collaborate with people on the ground to drive positive social change in communities. I've seen the impacts of their efforts in healthcare and education, which is a shining example of the value of true partnership.

The need for partnerships is as real as the problems they intend to solve. This is more acute in Asean where various communities have, at different times, dealt with political instability, legacy policies inhibiting economic growth, and social factors such as gender discrimination. What we need is a shared vision and a truly collaborative approach to forge a path towards building a truly integrated and inclusive society.



### **Belinda Tanoto**

Belinda Tanoto is a Trustee and guides the strategic direction of the Tanoto Foundation, which helps alleviate poverty through education, empowerment and enhancement of lives. A passionate Social Activist, Belinda has been spearheading the foundation's investments in rural schools in Indonesia since 2009, specifically in school leadership, teacher training and literacy.

# **THE VALUE OF DIVERSE SOCIETIES: LESSONS FROM EU-ASEAN DIALOGUE**

*Kilian Spandler*

I grew up in a small village in the deeply conservative German state of Bavaria, which is not exactly a place where you would find much appreciation for diversity. My interest in learning other ways of life actually came from popular culture, as my parents passed on a fascination for music and literature to me.

Later, studying political science in an old German university, I realised there is a rich tradition in political theory and philosophy that appreciates differences between people and their unique conceptions of reality. Paradoxically, this richness did not really translate into the way in which we were taught International Politics, which was still highly Eurocentric in many ways. So I was longing for a more direct engagement with different cultures throughout my student years.

Travelling together with my wife was one way of doing that. Part of her family are Chinese emigrants to Indonesia, which is why China and Indonesia were obvious places to start. Southeast Asia has definitely become our favourite destination and learning about how people deal with multicultural realities has always been part of the allure. To me, the region is living proof that crossing borders and redefining identities is an existential part of human history and inevitably shapes our societies to this day.

The other way of broadening my cultural horizon was establishing platforms for exchange. When I had just begun writing my doctoral thesis, in which I studied the EU and Asean from a historical perspective, I was soon frustrated that there were not a lot of opportunities to interact with other young people with an interest in both regions. This led me, in 2013, to co-found the European Union-Asean Perspectives (EUAP) Dialogue, a project group under the umbrella of the Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs and International Relations (IFAIR), a German non-governmental organisation. EUAP provides a series of events fostering exchange between students and young professionals from European and Southeast Asian countries.

Through online workshops, delegation visits and public events, the participants discuss current political, economic and socio-cultural topics ranging from environmental challenges to gender equality. They then formulate common views and policy recommendations, which they discuss with politicians, academics and other civil society representatives. Having grown through the years, EUAP is now one of the most important initiatives for transnational dialogue between the two regions.

What impressed me most is the keen interest among youths of both regions to learn from one another. The Dialogue is never about constructing an artificial consensus or imposing one's view on the other. While the participants want to identify common struggles, they are also sensitive and respectful towards individual perceptions and differences stemming from the unique political, economic or socio-cultural challenges that frame the issues in both regions.

This is important for two reasons. First, it shows that building the transnational dimension of interregionalism requires mutual learning. While politicians often seem to be using concepts such as people-to-people connectivity as rhetoric buzzwords without much substance, and the EU often remains the teacher while Asean is expected to listen, projects like EUAP demonstrate mutual learning in practice.

The second reason is that transnational dialogue strengthens intra-regional ties as well. It connects civil society actors from across Southeast Asia and makes them realise what they have in common with their European counterparts, but also which parts of their experiences and political demands may be specifically Southeast Asian. In this way, it can help Southeast Asian civil society shape the region's 'normative power' in world politics by promoting a regional vision of societal inclusion that others, like the EU, can take inspiration from.

In 2017, Asean and the EU celebrated 40 years of partnership. Using this opportunity to take stock of the relationship, policymakers and academics have argued that cooperation should move beyond the historically strong

economic ties and focus more on socio-cultural issues. Recently, politicians from the two regions have found that they face similar challenges, such as a perceived pressure from migration and the instrumentalisation of religious differences by populist and violent groups. The task of managing diverse societies has thus become a common project for European and Southeast Asian governments.

Civil society needs to be part of interregionalism, not least as a corrective to government-led discourse, which tends to view cultural heterogeneity and social mobility mainly as a security challenge. I am convinced that we need the contribution of organisations like the Singapore International Foundation and IFAIR to remind decision-makers of the positive value of diversity.



### **Kilian Spandler**

Kilian Spandler is an Executive Board Member of IFAIR, a non-profit organisation which aims to make young voices heard in international relations. He was their Regional Director for South and East Asia from 2014 to 2016, and is currently a Visiting Researcher at the School of Global Studies in Gothenburg, Sweden.

# CONNECTING SOULS, SHATTERING STEREOTYPES

*Ayu Kartika Dewi*

I was once a primary school teacher on a remote island of Indonesia. Ten years before I arrived, there was a riot between Muslims and Christians, with thousands of casualties. After the riot, the government segregated the Muslim from the Christian villages. I happened to be deployed to the Muslim village.

One afternoon, when there was a rumor of possible riot, my students came running to my house in panic and told me, “Ma’am, please be careful of Christians! They will burn down our houses!”. When I told them that the riot was far away, they replied that “the riot will fly here!”. They had never even met any Christian in their lives, and they didn’t even understand the meaning of riot, but they had so much hatred and anger towards Christians. I believe this was also the situation on the other side of the fence – with Christians being angry with Muslims. So I knew something needed to be done.

After I returned from my deployment on this island, I met with a few friends and shared my experience. We all had the same concerns. All of us came from different backgrounds, but one thing united us: We had participated

in the same student exchange programme held in Singapore. I was part of the Singapore International Foundation Asean Fellowship programme in 2004, where I experienced being a minority and felt deep gratitude whenever I received help by those in the majority.

We realised that the student exchange opened our eyes and changed our lives. We became better people after experiencing a different way of life and interacting with people with different cultures and belief systems. We realised that those who have travelled and experienced being a minority are usually more tolerant, more understanding and believe in diversity.

Therefore we agreed to start a student exchange programme to promote tolerance and understanding towards diversity in Indonesia. Called SabangMerauke, it was a slight twist to the usual student exchange programmes – rather than doing an inter-nation exchange, we did an intra-nation exchange programme.

During the school holidays, we bring kids from all over the country to stay with host families who are of different religions and ethnicities. And we prioritise engaging kids from post-conflict areas. The idea is so that they can experience diversity and hopefully shatter any stereotypes that they hold. Once they return to their hometown, they can be peace ambassadors.

SabangMerauke was launched in 2012, and the stories of the past five years have been wonderful. We have Apipa, a Muslim kid from Kalimantan, whom we placed with a Chinese Christian family. During the first few days, Apipa

was scared. But after more interactions, they became very close. Apipa now calls them Ayah and Ibu (Dad and Mum).

We also have Firstly, a Christian from Rote Island, whom we placed with a Muslim family. After the programme, she said, “Now I know that being a Muslim is not equal to being a terrorist”. And we have the story of Wayan from Bali, who was told by his community to “not befriend people from outside of Bali. They’re not nice”. We paired him with a Javanese Catholic family. Today, Wayan can’t speak about his wonderfully kind host parents without teary eyes.

We believe that these interactions will open their minds and hearts, and help them see that we are more alike than different. This social exchange is important to ease fear, because it is natural for human beings to be afraid of what we don’t understand. We will continue to do this, because we believe that acceptance of diversity cannot only be taught in classrooms – it has to be felt and experienced.

I am very proud to say that my student exchange experience in Singapore has left a lasting impression in my mind; that interactions at people-to-people level are absolutely important in fostering greater tolerance, empathy, and solidarity.



### **Ayu Kartika Dewi**

Ayu Kartika Dewi is the Managing Director of Indika Foundation, a social enterprise that empowers Indonesian organisations with a focus on character building and tolerance. In 2012, she co-founded SabangMerauke, an organisation that runs interregional student exchange programmes in Indonesia. SabangMerauke aims to instil the values of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

## IMAGINATION

*Trapped in a refugee camp, an artist finds his freedom in art. Through storytelling, a teacher transports the audience to a world of folktales. The realm of imagination in arts and culture has no limits, and can be leveraged to better communities and foster greater understanding. No matter our history, background or circumstance, we can always imagine a bigger, kinder and better world. If we can dream it, we can do it.*



Charis Loke is an illustrator and educator based in Malaysia. She makes pictures that evoke a sense of wonder and curiosity, believing that art matters, stories matter, and the two can bring people together. She enjoys bringing to life fantastical worlds that are rooted in real world cultures or issues. Charis also works on community arts and culture projects with Arts-ED Penang. Her work can be found at <http://charisloke.com>.



A storyteller conjures visions of myths and legends as an audience gathers for a communal meal. This piece draws upon the traditions of oral storytelling and food in the region. It is also a homage to Chua Mia Tee's painting, "Epic Poem of Malaya" (1955).

# FORGING FRIENDSHIPS THROUGH ART

*Chong Siak Ching*

Since the opening of the National Gallery Singapore in November 2015, we have played host to many of our neighbours from the Southeast Asian region – from tourists to state dignitaries. Located within a country that has benefited from being a geographical locus of economic, political, and cultural intersection for the region, and as a young institution, the Gallery continues to engage in conversation with our neighbours about how we present the art of our neighbours and ourselves.

The Gallery is a space that allows and encourages an encounter with a fluid and forming notion of Asean identity. We believe that art can help us better relate to one another across distinct languages and cultures. Art has the unique ability to evoke instinctive, emotional resonance across traditional divides. When applied to a concept of identity, it also presents an alternative route for discussion that goes beyond politics or economics.

In the National Gallery's inaugural exhibition *Between Declarations and Dreams*, centred on the art of Southeast Asia from the 19th Century to the present, the curatorial focus of the exhibition places art from across the region in dialogue, categorised not by national boundaries, but by thematic and developmental parallels in artistic style. This exhibition comprises the Gallery's collection of works from artists across the region, as well as loans of significant works from both private and institutional collections in Southeast Asia and beyond. Without these loans and collaborative efforts, the ambitions of the Gallery to build a collection and presentation of the best art from the region would fall short.

Indeed, it is the friendships forged towards the goal of presenting Southeast Asia that remain the most meaningful interactions in our journey. These friendships extend beyond the strategic, and are often born out of a sincere shared interest. A fond anecdote brings me back to my personal friendship with Doris Ho, the daughter of Philippine artist Anita Magsaysay-Ho. Soon after my appointment at the Gallery and making the connection regarding Doris' famous mother, the personal friendship translated into an institutional one with the loan of key artworks by Anita Magsaysay-Ho for the landmark exhibition *Reframing Modernism* from March to July 2016.

This exhibition, organised jointly with Centre Pompidou, Paris, extended the notion of Southeast Asia even further by placing art from the region – from artists such as Le Pho, Cheong Soo Pieng, HR Ocampo and Magsaysay-Ho – in conversation with known masters of modern art such as Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse and Vassily Kandinsky. Such endeavours to position

Southeast Asia as a region connected with global artistic movements, are underpinned by the need to isolate key shifts and trajectories in our shared regional history, which in the process solidifies a notion of regional identity.

This exhibition was the Gallery's first international collaboration, drawing from over 200 works by modern artists from Southeast Asia and Europe. In examining how artists working in different global contexts approached modern art and modernism in the 20th century, it also helped strengthen the concept of a shared identity – between regions as well as within Southeast Asian countries.

Presenting art from Southeast Asia is a task that requires regional effort, and is based on mutual understanding, trust, and respect for the integrity of the distinct cultural identities of our neighbours. Art galleries and museums provide platforms for showcasing the ways that the different cultures of Asean diverge and converge. As we move towards increasingly fluid and contested notions of identity, art can be a means of tracing the continuously adapting and evolving means through which Asean conceives and presents itself internally, and to the world.



### Chong Siak Ching

Chong Siak Ching is the Chief Executive Officer of National Gallery Singapore and heads Singapore's Visual Arts Cluster, which comprises the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore Tyler Print Institute and the National Gallery Singapore. She is also Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Republic of Chile.

## HELPING ELDERS FIND PURPOSE AND VALUE THROUGH THE ARTS

*Tsai Ying-ju*

In 2002, I met a senior, Ms Yang, at a local elderly center in Taipei. Then, she was 74. I was working in theatre arts and wanted to collaborate with the elderly in the same theatrical context, as part of an arts project called History Alive. Ever since our first meeting, it has been a friendship that lasted 16 years and counting.

Today, Ms Yang is 90 and still actively participating in the History Alive. She pursues theatre with passion. Even when she broke her leg during an acting course in 2017, she returned to the classroom before she recovered fully from the injury. When asked, she shared: "Living up to this age and still having a job, I feel very fulfilled and happy."

History Alive is derived from Elders Share the Arts (ESTA) in New York and was seeded in Taiwan in 2005 in collaboration with Shin Kong Life Foundation and Godot Theatre Company. It is a cross-generational community theatre programme that shares elders' life stories in schools and on the stage. The

programme aims to bridge generational gaps between the elderly and the young. Through interactions between the old and young, we wish to change stereotypes against elderly people.

Many developed countries in Asia, including Japan and Singapore and Taiwan are facing rapid ageing population. While most Asean countries are relatively young, it is inevitable that many will soon have to face the problems of aging population as birth rates fall. History Alive is an example of how societies can engage a growing proportion of seniors through the arts.

Instead of retiring and fading away from society, many seniors choose to remain healthy, able and relevant. One of our successes in the last ten years was when Taiwan's Ministry of Education adopted History Alive into their national education plan and rolled out the programme to 130 schools across the country.

In the past 13 years, the programme has grown tremendously. Apart from making adjustments according to the participants' needs, we also initiated a storytelling course to train the elderly to speak about their own stories independently and make friends with one another. In addition, we introduced an acting course to prepare them for stage acting and engage in plays that involve children.

To encourage more diverse participation, we introduced the no-age-limit "Happy Classroom" project that allows both families and friends to share precious time with each other through creative arts activities in the

outdoors and museums. Meanwhile, to spread the reach of the project, we also train programme leaders for History Alive. There are currently 92 people participating in the training programme. They often create impact by introducing story-telling workshops for the elderly and children in their neighbourhoods.

Projects like History Alive offer a wide range of opportunities for both seniors and youths to enjoy the arts together, fostering greater inter-generational understanding and a more caring community.

Through the arts, I witnessed how seniors like Ms Yang gave new insights to what it means to grow old. She is full of life, energy and drive. She achieved and established a paradigm shift about growing old, and showed us that reality can be different from stereotypes.

Seeing how her life has been changed had inspired me to continue my work. Today, as the director of the History Alive programme, I have learnt so much – from observing a need in society, finding creative solutions towards solving the problem and the importance of finding joy and fun in the things we do as we continue to grow. I now see my main mission in life as an educator, using the arts to bring communities together and to challenge the existing stereotypes of age.

After participating in the Arts in Eldercare Seminar 2017 in Singapore, I realised that if localising History Alive has proven to be feasible in Taiwan, it is also possible for the programme to flourish in other cultural contexts. I

hope that seniors across cultures and geological boundaries can find purposes and value through engaging the arts.



### Tsai Ying-ju

Tsai Ying-ju is an Actress, Teacher and Director. She received her education from Taipei National University of the Arts. She has worked at Godot Theatre Company as an Acting Teacher, and joined Project History Alive, an initiative to serve the elders and children through art.

# ART REPRESENT OUR DREAMS TO HEAL AND UNITE

*Svay Sareth*

Art plays a crucial role in developing a country, and is created from dreams to build a better world. My first contact with art was at a refugee camp, when I was just six years old. To escape the violence of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, my family and I spent 13 years living at Site Two, a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodia border.

Site Two was the largest evacuation camp for Cambodian refugees, where more than 200,000 Cambodians stayed. This is how I spent my days at the camp: In the first half of the day, I went to school to study; and in the other half, I attended art school, where humanitarian workers conducted art classes.

At that time, I did not know what being an artist meant. I didn't even know the word yet. I only knew that I love to express myself through drawing on paper. I found a sense of freedom in it.

Looking back, I lost 13 years at the refugee camp, controlled by something that was not my choice. But it taught me that freedom is the most important

thing in life. Being forced to stay at the refugee camp, I lost my freedom – freedom to create, freedom to travel, freedom to think.

Today, I am using art to make sense of the 13 years I spent at a refugee camp. I live and work in Siem Reap as a contemporary artist, and channel the struggles of my past into my art.

What does it mean to be a contemporary artist in Cambodia? To me, it's about sharing with the audience what my vision for the future is. Creating contemporary art in Cambodia is a way for me to cure my heart and to cure myself. By doing so, I also help to cure others.

In 1992, together with other former refugees, we helped set up a non-profit art school, called Phare Ponleu Selpak, which means “the brightness of the arts”. The contemporary art scene in Cambodia is young, but growing, and I hope the school will give the space and energy to young artists to continue to create art.

I have discovered through my experience that to make art is to heal. I believe that art, too, can unite people such as those living in Asean, which is a diverse place. Asean people have rich cultural traditions and heritage and practise a wide diversity of religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. Although relatively small in geographic terms, the group's members encompass a spectrum of languages, traditions and cultures.

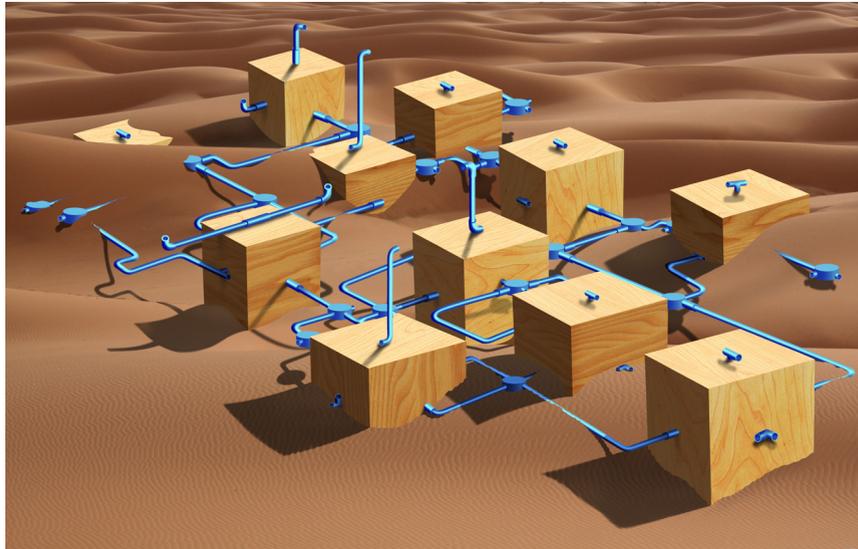
I believe diversity is our strength. To maintain Asean unity, we must first acknowledge the differences of each member state and make efforts to accommodate those differences because unity cannot serve the interest of some particular members at the sacrifice of others.

Singapore aims to foster closer ties among artists in Asean through programmes and activities focusing on the arts, heritage and culture. For instance, in 2016, I was an artist-in-residence at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art. The programme is a platform for discourse, experimental practices and artistic exchange in Southeast Asia. Through this, artists participate in sharing cultural experiences – an especially wonderful way to strengthen bonds of friendship among each Asean member and support efforts for Asean integration.

I have interpreted Asean in an artwork, titled “Dream” (see artwork on the next page). In it are ten boxes connected by PVC pipes in the middle of the sea of sand. Facing the same wave of the sand, all the boxes do not stay and stand in the same way. This is the reality of Asean's structure today. Each box represents each Asean country and the PVC pipe represents the interactivity between nations, the sea of sand shows that we are a part of a constantly changing and evolving world and that despite the difficulties, we should always move forward together.

I hope art can play a part to realise the Asean dream. Art can represent many realms – cultural, social and economic – and by organising art exhibitions,

festivals, fairs and art stages, we can give a lot of energy, possibilities and support to elevate Asean artists to the world scene.



“Dream” by Svay Sareth



### Svay Sareth

Svay Sareth lives and works in Siem Reap, Cambodia. He was born in 1972 in Battambang, Cambodia during a period of political turmoil and violence that would last until he was 18 years old. His works in sculpture, installation and durational performance are made using materials and processes intentionally associated with war – metals, uniforms, camouflage and actions requiring great endurance.

# THE POWER OF FOLKTALES AND STORYTELLING

*Wajuppa Tossa*

**M**y discovery of the power of folktales and storytelling came from my work at Mahasarakham University. I founded the university’s Storytelling Project in 1995, with an aim to revitalise the use of local dialects and folktales in northeast Thailand (Isan) and to engender pride in local cultural heritage inherent in the tales passed down for generations. With the help of Fulbright Foundation that sent Dr Margaret Read MacDonald to train the students, the three-year project (1995-1998) produced many undergraduates who collected, adapted, and told folktales from their own communities.

I found several benefits of folktales and storytelling. First, it could change attitudes of people towards local dialects and heritage. The university students from my project went on to tell folktales to schools in 19 provinces, encouraging the teachers to guide their students to collect and tell folktales in local dialects. Eventually, the students and their teachers became aware of the power of their own local dialects and folktales, and many could retell folktales in dialects.

Second, folktales and storytelling can have long lasting impressions on people. After the project was over, I continued working on training more university students via the two courses that I taught - Children's Literature and Independent Study in Literature (Folktales and Storytelling) until I retired recently in 2015. Each year that I taught, students would collect folktales from their communities to share and produce picture books from the folktales they collected. After graduation, many returned to the university for an annual meeting to share their work experiences with the graduating groups. Those who had taken my courses encouraged the graduating group to do the same as they found that folktales and storytelling techniques they learned could apply to their jobs. Many of my former students still seek my advice on the use of folktales and storytelling in their lives.

Third, folktales and storytelling takes us to many lands – literally. I have been to many countries in the world because of my work with the university's Storytelling Project, and in the process, collected many more folktales from other parts of Thailand, Asean countries and around the world. With the support of Dr MacDonald, I was able to share my experiences and folktales that I have collected in the Singapore International Storytelling Festival in 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2007. I was also invited to tell stories in other festivals in Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Norway, Iran, United Kingdom, South Korea, India, Australia, the United States and Romania.

Fourth, folktales and storytelling are attractive to young people in Southeast Asian countries. In 2003 and 2009, I was invited to be a facilitator of a workshop

titled, “Managing the Integration of Culture into Development Programs” organised by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation and Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA). Joining this programme, I shared many folktales from my culture and learned many more from young people who participated in the workshops. The young people were attracted to the folktales and some have become great storytellers. They continued sharing their folktales in their work.

Finally, folktales and storytelling can foster mutual understanding. During the period of 2009 to 2015, the years of preparation to integrate the Asean community, educational institutions in Thailand were urged to help students better understand their Asean neighbours. One of the measures that educators used was to share folktales of all Asean countries. Many schools organised storytelling programmes with the emphasis on Asean folktales. Mahasarakham University also held an International Storytelling Festival in 2013 with the theme of Tales from Asean countries.

In conclusion, folktales and storytelling are powerful in many ways. They can be used as an instrument to change people's attitudes, as well as have long lasting retention in people's minds and behaviour. Folktales and storytelling are applicable in people's lives and take us on wondrous journeys to many lands. And most importantly, folktales and storytelling are effective means of creating mutual understanding among people of various national and cultural backgrounds.



## Wajuppa Tossa

Wajuppa Tossa is a Storyteller, whose works have been presented at Thailand's International Storytelling Festivals and in other international storytelling festivals around the world such as the Iranian International Storytelling Festival and the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, to name but a few. A retired English-language and Literature Lecturer, she seeks to revitalise Isan dialects and folktales among young people and engender pride in local cultural heritage through her works.

# DEEPENING ASIAN BONDS THROUGH FOOD

*Yoshihiro Murata*

In every Asean nation, rice is a staple food – a food culture that binds all ten member nations, some of whom are also major rice suppliers to the world. That is why the emblem on the Asean logo is ten padi stalks bound together in friendship and solidarity.

Rice also connects the rest of Asia. In Japan, rice is a primary industry, one that we are extremely grateful for. It is with rice that our culture begins. Rice can not only be repeatedly cultivated, it also provides sufficient calories and does not cause allergies. Rice is truly a treasure from the gods.

There is a rice dish for every Asian palate: sushi in Japan, tteok or rice cakes in Korea, nasi lemak in Malaysia and chicken rice in Singapore – my favourite dish in this city state. But there is also a ubiquitous rice dish that is present in almost every Asian cuisine – fried rice.

As a chef, I find food fascinating. It does not just serve as nourishment or enjoyment, there is also a communal vibe to a meal. Food brings people and communities together, sharing and savouring a common heritage.

For instance, we all eat the same rice, just with different seasonings or ingredients. By sharing our common food heritage, we realise the similarities that we have with each other in Asia. Food also has the ability to extend its influence beyond each country and continent.

I was inspired to be a chef from the French cuisine that my mother made when I was a child. She went to a diplomat's house to learn how to make such food. During special occasions, she would make me food like oyster chowder, gratin or galantine (a French cold dish of de-boned stuffed meat). After a while, my impression of a treat was French food. It is perhaps why the first country I went to further my culinary skills was France.

Even as French food inspired me, Asian food is also appealing to western countries. In the past few decades, I have been spreading awareness and appreciation of Japanese food to the rest of the world. It was for this reason that I set up the non-governmental organisation, Japanese Culinary Academy, in 2004.

I have also been part of Singapore Airlines' International Culinary Panel for two decades, helping to forge greater appreciation for Japanese cuisine through the inflight menus. Such efforts were rewarded in 2013 when

washoku – traditional Japanese cuisine – was added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

Traditional Japanese cuisine is made without fats and oils. Instead, we use Dashi (bonito flakes and kelp flavoured broth) which absorbs the flavours (umami) of kombu and bonito flakes to create different tastes - saltiness, sweetness, sourness and bitterness - in our cuisine. This is unlike other countries whose signature dishes centre around the use of fats and oils.

When Japan was invited to the World Gourmet Summit held in Singapore 20 years ago, top chefs around the world uniformly presented dishes along the principles of no butter, no cream and less oil. Cuisines from different countries were moving towards being less heavy. That was the moment I knew that the world would sit up and take notice of Japanese cuisine.

We are what we eat. Japanese are one of the longest-living people in the world and that cannot be separated from the food that we eat. But everyone has a different idea of what is healthy eating. As Asians, what is good for our health can only be achieved by eating and preparing food in a way that is compatible with our genes.

Food is nutrition for the body as well as the heart, serving as a cultural connection with others. My hope is that food can deepen bonds among Asean and the rest of the Asian countries, just like how the padi stalks in the Asean logo are bound together.



### **Yoshihiro Murata**

Yoshihiro Murata is the Chairman of the Japanese Culinary Academy and Japanese Heritage Ambassador as certified by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, which promotes Japanese arts and culture. Born as the elder son of the Kikunoi family operating the long-standing Kikunoi Restaurant in Kyoto, he is owner chef of the Kikunoi in Kyoto and Tokyo.

# IS THERE A ROLE FOR ART IN FORGING AN ASEAN IDENTITY?

*Việt Lê*

The role of art in forging an Asean identity is crucial in expressing both individual voices and a collective vision. Asean’s motto of “One Vision, One Identity, One Community” suggests that cultural, social, political and economic unity can be an effective platform. Yet how do we forge unity amidst regional diversity?

Among the five founding Asean nations in 1967 (alongside Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand), Singapore has been foundational in the development and support of a “Southeast Asian” arts identity locally, regionally and internationally. I’d like to ask two interlinked questions: What is the role of art, and what is the changing identity of Singapore and Asean?

### **Art’s Part, Art’s Partners**

For the first question, art as creative expression is a powerful way to see the world through another’s eyes. The arts are also a form of soft power and

diplomacy. From the individual to the institutional, art can be an agent of mutual understanding and profound social change.

Over many engagements with Singapore through the years, one of my first “official” visits was as an invited participant of a three-day international symposium in May 2008 hosted by the Singapore Art Museum entitled “Modern and Contemporary Art Practices in Vietnam.” The “first of its kind” symposium and subsequent publication was held in tandem with the exhibition *Post- Đổi Mới: Vietnamese Art After 1990*.

This unprecedented tracing of art history drew both regional and international connections. Vietnam is intimately tied to its Asean counterparts then and now. Among the later five to be part of the current group of ten Asean nations, Vietnam joined in 1995 (Brunei Darussalam in 1984, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999). At the symposium, I learnt that the foundations of art history and history can be challenged: we are forging new identities omitted from the canons or from dominant geopolitics.

For researchers, artists, and curators alike, Singapore is a crucial resource in supporting Southeast Asian art in terms of art collections, exhibitions and scholarships. Emerging and established Southeast Asian artists are given a regional and international platform – Art Stage Singapore (a highlight of Singapore Art Week), the Singapore Art Prize, and so on.

Through art, many transnational partnerships are sustained. I see these “platforms” ranging from collections and scholarships to regional exchange, art/research residencies and exhibitions. Art is a catalyst for comprehending as well as re-envisioning the myriad histories and trajectories within and without Southeast Asia—potent visions of polyphonic voices.

### **Forging Identities, Shifting Identities**

Art is intimately tied to economic growth—the rise of many Southeast Asian art markets and movements is connected to flows of commerce and capital. This relates to my second question about (shifting) geopolitical designations and identities – one area that cultural studies and postcolonial scholars continue to debate. What is the usefulness of national and regional affiliations in an age when borders are at once increasingly porous and policed?

Yet, according to 2016 World Bank data, Asean as a whole comprises the world’s third largest market with about 630 million people, and is a major global economic power (one of the top five with a combined GDP of \$2.6 trillion). Although the constructs of what constitute “Asia” and “Southeast Asia” are continually shifting and are being contested, these figures suggest that such concerted connections have significant real-world impact.

Writing as a Vietnamese American refugee working in Asia and Europe, the “American Century” is purportedly over. By this I don’t mean Western hegemony in general, but specifically the *longue durée* of “the American Century” as it was framed, in which the United States gained international

ascendancy post-World War II, and sought to keep its political, economic and cultural might throughout the 20th century through hot and cold wars, through hard and soft power, through arsenals and arts.

The American Century has been displaced by “the Pacific Century” in the 21st century. As the Pacific Century takes center stage, Asean nations have a vital role to play in shaping an ethical geopolitics. Hence art has a critical role in shaping not only Asean identity but also forging a vision of humane community—at once unified and divergent. Facing challenges, we are the faces of change.



### Việt Lê

Việt Lê is an Artist, Writer, and Curator whose work focuses on trauma, modernity and popular cultures in Southeast Asian diasporas. He is Assistant Professor (Visual Studies) at the California College of the Arts. His art and research has been featured at H Gallery Bangkok, the Shanghai Biennial, and the Tate Modern.

# IN MEMORY OF SURIN PITSUWAN, A TRULY ASEAN MAN

*Ho Minfong*

As a former Secretary-General of Asean, Dr Surin Pitsuwan was a well respected and well-known Thai academic who taught at Thammasat University, as well as a leader of the Thai Democrat party, a foreign minister of Thailand, and a member of the World Refugee Council.

He was also a devout Muslim from Southern Thailand, father of three outstanding sons and husband of a lovely and learned Thai Muslim lady. He was as fluent in English as he was in Thai, giving countless speeches with the rhetorical cadences reminiscent of the Quran that he had imbibed while studying it in Arabic.

Heartfelt as these few sentences are, writing them has been difficult for me, simply because I have had to use the past tense. Surin was one of my dearest and oldest friends, someone I had known for over 30 years – ever since we were both graduate students in the US. He was the only friend who’d held both my first child and my first grandchild as babies, in his arms. That he has

died - of a sudden heart attack in late 2017 - does not distance him, but it does make my memories of him weighed with a poignancy they didn't have before.

Surin and I first met as graduate students in the US. With the easy camaraderie of students far away from home, I had invited him to stay at our apartment (my husband John and I were newlyweds then) when he was at Harvard and I was at Cornell. Surin was easy to know and to like, and he became almost like a big brother to me.

I remember once, I found a used desk on campus which I wanted to buy. It was an old monstrosity, metallic and heavy, but Surin helped me bring it home. We painted it with a thick coat of beige paint, and replaced the ugly metal handles with wooden ones. By the end of the day, I had the glossiest, most beautiful desk.

Surin and I would often take long walks on campus and up the hill to the old observatory. One spring evening, we paused at the hilltop, and I remarked how lovely this spot would be for a mosque. He looked at the panoramic view in the wilds of upstate New York and nodded, as if in approval. Then, to my amazement, cupping his hands around his mouth, he started to sing. Loudly. I recognised it as The Call to Prayer. His voice was impassioned yet gentle, solemn yet joyous, absolutely compelling.

Like his voice, he was a compelling public figure. In September 1999, as the Asean Chair, he led the efforts across the various Southeast Asian governments and the UN to bring about peace and security in East Timor. And when

he served as Asean Secretary-General from 2008 to 2012, his advocacy of “flexible engagement”, radical as it was in the context of the old Asean policy of cautious “principle of non-interference”, is also proving to be relevant.

The last time I saw him was just a month or two before his heart attack. As my little granddaughter toddled on the grass in our garden in Ithaca, Surin regaled us with light-hearted stories of Kim Il Sung and Hillary Clinton, but also voiced his deep concern about the plight of the Rohingya refugees who had been forced out of Myanmar.

Not for the first time, I wondered how such a complex man, with so many different layers in his background, could be so effortlessly comfortable wherever he was, and with whomever he was with. Prince or peasant, rich or poor, young or old, Surin had a way of being keenly aware of the differences between people, while always accepting – even celebrating – such differences.

Was it his unusual boyhood where he noted profound differences in people and accepted diversity? He used to tell stories of growing up in rural Thailand, when he'd walked barefoot to a classroom in a Buddhist monastery, wearing the standard school uniform; and then in the afternoon running home to change into his Malay village clothes to focus on Islamic studies in his grandfather's madrasah. And later, was it during his stints as a student in the US and Cairo, that he became so sensitive to the nuances between Christianity and Islam?

Surin was Thai and yet very cosmopolitan, a country boy and yet urbane, a devout Muslim yet respectful of Buddhism and Christianity, intellectual yet pragmatic. Like so many of us within the Asean community, Surin embodied so many different facets of Asia – culturally, linguistically, politically. He was as complex as he was authentic, at ease with who he was, as much as he was at ease with the multi-faceted world around him.



### Ho Minfong

Ho Minfong is an award-winning Singaporean Author, who was born in Burma to Chinese parents and grew up in Thailand. She studied in Taiwan and the US, and has worked in Laos and Cambodia. Her works are generally set in Southeast Asia. She is a skilled gardener and an inordinately proud grandmother.

## INNOVATION

*Without innovation, we would not survive or thrive. Innovators are bold pioneers who introduce new ideas, products or methods. When you innovate, you make mistakes. But these are mistakes that would make us grow and become wiser. From new teaching and training pedagogies to creative programmes, innovation creates new possibilities and improvement.*



# NEW-AGE EDUCATION TO CREATE THE INNOVATORS OF TOMORROW

*Taizo Son*

As the rate of technological advancement increases, we start to hear that many jobs will be replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robots, and that children today will take on vocations that do not exist yet. Because of this general sentiment, I believe that people are now interested, more than ever, in what skills we should teach our children and what kind of education is necessary.

Looking back, we can see that our definition of “necessary” skills has changed based on the needs of society. For example, in the 19th century, we used horses to travel long distances, and hence, the skill to operate horses was necessary. Meanwhile, in the 20th century, automobiles became the predominant mode of transportation and hence the ability to operate cars became a requisite.

Today, research and development of automated cars is advancing, and we can only assume that the ability to operate AI will be a necessary skill in the 21st century.

What is “necessary” in education is similarly changing. Reading, writing and arithmetic, was considered basic education in the 19th century. In the 20th century, the necessity became “accurate memorisation of vast amount of facts”. Currently, however, with the development of AI, knowledge can be obtained by anyone at anytime.

In such an age, the traditional form of education which values the transfer of information is becoming obsolete. What will be more important are what are called “non-cognitive skills”, also referred to as the 4Cs – creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. These skills cannot be taught, and therefore, the most important thing will be to design such an environment in which these skills are organically acquired.

I have created such an environment – one in which there are multiple activities children can get engrossed in, with adults to guide and support them and also peers to have fun with. I have called this space a “Seed Accelerator for Kids” in Japan, and this environment is fundamentally different from a typical school where teachers teach the children.

It is a place where adults help the children do whatever they wish to try. There is no set curriculum, and the interaction starts with the adults trying to understand what the children truly want to do. It has now been over half a year since we started this endeavor and everyday, I am struck by the growth of the children. In so many instances, I have been shown undeniably that the thinking, “this is not possible since they are children”, is a false preconception made by adults.

Education always vividly reflects the social constructs of the times and regions. In Japan and in many developed nations, I cannot help but sense the naysayers' feelings that "society or organisations will not change no matter how hard one tries", "my voice or my vote will not change anything", or "it is never beneficial to be different from the norm, so it is better for me to keep my head down". When the future should be equal to all and also equally unknown to all, the possibilities are limitless. I believe this sense of resignation is a serious challenge that our developed world currently faces.

Meanwhile, in emerging markets, there are many people whose eyes sparkle with a sense that "our future is bright and I will write my own future". I feel that emerging markets will give birth to great innovation. Because, one of the most important mindsets for an innovator is their belief that "the world is programmable, changeable with my own hand". I have personally benefitted from this thought, and I believe that unleashing this mindset as early on in life as possible will greatly affect the course of one's life.

Innovation will continue to accelerate in the 21st century and our world will change into something we cannot even imagine. In such an unpredictable world, what we need are innovators who can create their own future.

# SINGAPORE: ASEAN'S GATEWAY TO THE WORLD

*Hiro Tien*

I was born in East Malaysia and raised in Brunei. The island I reside on, Borneo, is across the ocean from Singapore. With the Brunei currency pegged to Singapore's, it naturally made the city-state a place that I visited frequently as a kid. However, I really only got up close with Singapore when I started my e-commerce start-up in college.

I signed up for a business plan competition, Startup@Singapore, by the National University of Singapore in 2012/2013 and was blown away by the quality of competitors and judges who were veteran entrepreneurs. While we did not win the competition, I was inspired to think bigger and view the world, rather than just Southeast Asia, as a business playing field.

In Brunei, we do not have a very developed start-up culture. It's very traditional – we start a business, hire people and pay them a salary. But what I learnt at the Singapore competition showed how a start-up should function – the constant pursuit of innovation and new ideas, the need to build a team



## Taizo Son

Taizo Son is a serial Japanese Entrepreneur. He is the Founder of Gungho Online, one of the most successful online gaming companies in Japan, which held its IPO in 2005. He also heads Mistletoe, Inc., a venture capital firm specialising in start-up investment.

of talents to expand the business and the extensive ecosystem of support necessary for success.

A key inspiration from Singapore was also the message of internalisation. With a relatively small domestic market of 5.6 million people, local businesses are constantly encouraged to go global and expand overseas. Brunei, with a population of only 450,000 people, is even smaller and it is critical to enter international markets for greater reach.

As a start, Singapore helps to open doors to opportunities overseas. My start-up got incubated at a Bruneian tech incubation center in 2012. At that time, it was co-managed by NUS Enterprise. Once again, I was impressed by the quality and opportunities provided. One example that stood out for me was the chance to go on a Bay Area Silicon Valley trek, as NUS has an overseas college programme in Silicon Valley.

We visited Stanford University in California for the ASEAN Silicon Valley Entrepreneurial Network Conference where renowned speakers such as marketing guru and venture capitalist Guy Kawasaki spoke. I was also able to network with technology accelerators such as Plug and Play Tech Center. These experiences expanded my knowledge and opened my eyes to the possibilities in the entrepreneurship world out there. My home country, Brunei, provided me with most of these opportunities through the incubation programme, but Singapore played a critical supporting role through partnerships and collaborations to foster entrepreneurship in the Asean region.

When I returned to Brunei, I continued building and diversifying my businesses while keeping a close relationship with professionals from Singapore. As a country with no natural resources, unlike oil-rich Brunei, Singapore strikes me as an extremely resourceful nation with highly educated and trained professionals. I've always been impressed by Singapore's positioning as a gateway to international markets for the region. Events such as DEMO Asia for startups and CommunicAsia for the information communications industry are some of the events I've participated in, and they certainly don't disappoint.

As I reflect on my career and future plans, Singapore served as an inspiration for my desire to grow both personally and professionally. Wanting to help Brunei diversify its economy, I decided to get educated again. I applied to Stanford Graduate School of Business and was accepted for their two-year, full-time MBA programme.

My connection with Singapore goes beyond professional relationships. As I travel the world, time and again I find myself referring to Singapore as a starting point to introduce the two countries I come from. My professor at Stanford would reference Singapore and its magnificent and world-renowned Changi Airport. My American classmates would immediately recognise Singapore as the gateway nation in the East.

Singapore's success would certainly continue to serve as my source of inspiration as I continue my learning journey as an entrepreneur. With its well-established position in Asean, I believe Singapore can nurture the start-

up culture beyond its shores, connecting new businesses in the region with key partners to drive their growth.



### Hiro Tien

Hiro Tien is an Entrepreneur from Brunei Darussalam, who has years of experience running technology, retail and entertainment businesses. He started his first web company as a first-year undergraduate at the University of Brunei Darussalam, and in his third year, founded an e-commerce start-up that raised six-figure investments.

# STRENGTHENING US-ASEAN TIES THROUGH SINGAPORE

*Denny Heck*

As the Member of Congress representing the 10th Congressional District of Washington State, it is my responsibility to represent my home area in the U.S. Congress and to the world. One of my goals when I entered Congress was to focus on foreign policy issues, particularly in Asia, a region very important to my district in the South Puget Sound area of Washington State. Situated at the doorstep of some of the most significant trade routes, Washington State's ports mark the gateway between Asia and the United States. Our proximity to Asia makes it a major player in Pacific trade, as it is along the Great Circle shipping route – the shortest maritime journey from Asia to western North America.

With that in mind, Singapore seemed like an obvious place to focus that interest: A close security partner, home to one of the busiest container ports in the world, and a critical hub for many of Washington State's global businesses – including aerospace and technology companies. As a major banking hub, it also seemed like a good fit with my assignment on the House Financial Services Committee, which had jurisdiction over those matters.

In the U.S. system, the executive branch has primary responsibility for foreign relations, but the legislative branch is a co-equal branch of government, with distinct responsibilities in its own right, and I believed it was important that Congress not stand idly by as the rest of the U.S. government was moving to strengthen engagement with Southeast Asia. So I set about restarting the Singapore Caucus, working together with my friend, Representative Bradley Byrne from Alabama, and we formally re-chartered the Caucus in March of 2015.

It quickly became clear that there was a great deal of interest in both the US-Singapore relationship and Southeast Asia as a whole that had not previously been served, as the Caucus grew rapidly and now has 60 members as of this writing. Our timing was fortunate, as the reformation of the Caucus coincided with Singapore celebrating 50 years of independence in 2015 and marking 50 years of bilateral diplomatic relations between the United States and Singapore the following year.

The Singapore Caucus has led an effort to pass a congressional resolution marking those historic occasions, hosted briefings for members of Congress and Congressional staff, and facilitated dialogue between Members of Congress and high-level visitors from Singapore, both in the United States and in Singapore itself, where I led a congressional delegation in the spring of 2017.

Through my work on the Singapore Caucus, I've had the great pleasure of growing to understand Singapore better as a place, and not only as a partner. The United States and Singapore share important common founding principles—we are multiracial, pluralistic societies which honor merit and the rule of law.

Singapore's incredible success over the last 50 years is a testament to the strength of those ideals and of the Singaporean people.

Those common principles also mean that we're facing a lot of the same challenges. In a diverse society, how do you ensure every citizen can reach for opportunity, regardless of race, color, or creed? How do you build industries and train workers so that they can fearlessly compete in an interconnected and rapidly changing world? How do we maintain an international order which has allowed both the United States and Singapore to prosper? We have sometimes taken different approaches to those challenges. But that's what allows study and understanding to yield genuinely useful insight.

Singapore's tenure as Asean chair presents a further opportunity to deepen and expand both bilateral cooperation and the work that we do together across the Asia-Pacific region. I have said before that there is no future for America on the global stage if it does not come to terms with how it is going to face Asia. There can't be a coherent relationship with China without also having a coherent relationship with the nations of Asean. And there can't be a relationship with Asean if we do not have a strong relationship with the thought leader among the Asean nations – and that is Singapore. I look forward to seeing what our two countries will achieve together.



### Denny Heck

Denny Heck is an American Politician who has served in the U.S. House of Representatives since 2013. Previously, he founded several businesses and a non-profit television network covering Washington State government. He also served in the Washington State Legislature and as Chief of Staff to Washington State Governor Booth Gardner.

# LEARNING THE BEST FROM OTHERS

*Dedeh Suatini*

**M**aking connections with others in the world allows us to be inspired, forge meaningful relationships and stay relevant in this rapidly changing global landscape. As a first step, we can all start by linking up with our neighbours in Asean.

When I was a Principal of Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 11 (SMAN 11), a public senior high school in Bandung, Indonesia, I believed in finding opportunities for these connections to take place so students and teachers can learn from others who come from different cultures, backgrounds and education.

This started in 2011 when we cooperated with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) for two years. We had two programmes: The Next Generation Leadership Programme from Marine Parade Leadership Foundation for students, and the Integrated Teacher's Programme for teachers.

The programmes were impactful. For the first programme, students established friendships and connections with international students as they lived together for two weeks in Indonesia. They engaged in many team-building activities, and learnt each other's culture from both sides.

This was also a wonderful experience for the students. When they become leaders in the future, they will remember the experience, understand the importance of cross-cultural exchanges and continue to be connected with each other. This is how different countries can progress together.

For the second programme, teachers learnt how to better teach students and adopted many methods shared by professional teachers from Singapore. This included the use of technology to engage students and enhance how we taught in the classroom.

Such collaborations have been very beneficial, leading to our school becoming the first digital school in Indonesia. Teachers and students now use digital technologies for teaching and learning, and also for examinations. When the Indonesian government made a rule that final examinations had to be computer-based, our students had an advantage as they were already familiar with digital tools. They did well and achieved high rankings.

After completing these programmes, I thought it was a waste if they did not continue. So I asked the SIF to continue the teachers' programme used in SMAN 11 Bandung for other teachers in schools around Bandung. I also

approached the Bandung City Education Bureau to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the SIF to run the programme.

The new two-year programme was designed to train 50 best teachers in Bandung. We hope that they will eventually share what they learnt with other teachers in Bandung. To motivate the teachers, the SIF also arranged to send 25 teachers who regularly share their experiences with other peers to Singapore for further learning. This cross-cultural connection brings Singaporeans and Indonesians together to share ideas, skills, resources and best practices in education. Over time, I believe this will raise teaching standards and bind our communities together.

After I finished my stint as principal, I was asked to help West Java Province open a senior high school for long distance learners. To start this new school, I needed good teachers who could not only teach but also develop the curriculum and teaching materials. Naturally, I tapped on the 25 best teachers trained by the SIF to help me. It made my job easier because of the training these teachers had gone through.

I realised how collaborating with others, like the SIF, has brought about many benefits for the Bandung City Education Bureau, West Java Province Education Bureau, teachers, students and myself. Through these connections, we learnt the best from each other, supported one another and made meaningful relationships for the future.

Wherever I go, this remains an important learning point for me: The connections we make can help us improve ourselves. And in making connections with our Asean neighbours, we can improve the region too.



### **Dedeh Suatini**

Dedeh Suatini is an Educator in Indonesia. Trained as an English Teacher, she was the Principal of Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 11 (SMAN 11), a public senior high school in Bandung, and was credited for the turning SMAN 11 into the first digital school in Indonesia. Since then Dedeh has been appointed Coordinator of the Long Distance Learning Program for SMA in West Java Education Office and is currently the Principal at SMAN 14 Bandung.

# TACKLING ASEAN'S WATER CHALLENGES

*Frodo van Oostveen*

**W**ater is more indispensable than we appreciate, and the economics of water are often irrational. Most of our water use is hidden. There are countries that use more water in a day than they use oil in a year. Are we able to see opportunities for (human) innovation, driving a new era of 'smart' water use in Asean?

You hear at every global water summit, including during Singapore International Water Week, that it's time for more diversity and cross-sector collaboration. However, the water sector is still very conservative which could slow down progress. We need to walk the talk and collaborate across sectors, topics and generations. We also need to design a process to achieve sufficient water quantity of acceptable quality for communities in Asean.

Singapore is a good example as it shows that you can't solve water challenges in isolation. It requires leadership, good governance and education to ensure that citizens have access to sufficient water of acceptable quality. In

most of the water programmes I have been involved in, there is a tendency to approach the water challenges purely from an engineering perspective. However, it became clear that other elements – such as shared aspiration, business case thinking and involvement of non-water experts – are needed to turn the water challenge into an opportunity.

During my time as chairman of the Singapore-Netherlands Water House (platform for collaboration), I experienced the true value of bringing different stakeholders together to discuss and solve water challenges. We need to understand the competitive ground and the nature of working together, but in the end, there is always a common ground that provides the basis for fruitful collaboration. So why is it so hard to collaborate to make a bigger impact?

Based on my experience in Singapore and Myanmar, and the experience of my two fellow partners of The Water Agency from Australia and the Netherlands, I've identified the following gaps for water collaboration in Asean:

1. **Knowledge sharing:** It's difficult to find accurate, actual and comprehensive information about water challenges such as water quantity and quality. Asean is a young community and has good access to an online infrastructure so there should be more exchange between local practitioners from Asean countries and with international practitioners (Community of Practice – CoP). And it is crucial to have local ownership. Rather than focusing on content development, there should be more focus on skillset development e.g. how to use technologies, visual design tools, and how to facilitate and ask the right questions. #WaterCoP

**2. Matchmaking:** We need to bring the right people into the process at the right time. There should also be more focus on the design of the process – for example, carefully selecting complementary teams of professionals and leaving spaces for unique expertise that you had not thought of beforehand. A sustainable solution requires solid technical expertise, committed stakeholders from various disciplines (technical/non-technical), an inspiring space to meet in person, and seizing the right moment. #WaterHub

**3. Capacity building:** We should bring in young professionals at all stages of project implementation. Introducing the younger generation of water leaders to different sectors, and developing diverse skillsets (presentation techniques, technology, financial engineering, marketing etc.) are crucial to making a positive difference. #WaterAcademy

Ensuring sufficient water quantity of acceptable quality for communities in Asean requires a mix of tools and working together with key stakeholders. A robust roadmap methodology provides better impact and availability for investment as well. As we all know, water challenges cannot and should not be solved in isolation.

Singapore is the ‘living lab’ to drive these roadmap interactions. Singapore provides thought leadership, a solid eco-system and funding to inspire young water leaders. However, it could benefit from more overseas ‘on the ground’ experience to make a sustainable long-term process work outside of Singapore. Roadmaps can help to connect different Asean countries and make a bigger impact, with the help of international water professionals.

Singapore, in partnership with the Singapore-Netherlands Water House and The Water Agency, can play a crucial role to be that network orchestrator for the Asean water sector. What is required are tri-sector athletes or champions, a roadmap process with shared milestones, and more focus on knowledge sharing, matchmaking and capacity building.



### Frodo van Oostveen

Frodo van Oostveen is Co-Founder and Managing Partner of The Water Agency, a network orchestrator for the international water sector. He was the chairman of Singapore Netherlands Water House and worked at ABN AMRO Bank for eight years. He is currently also advisor to AsiaP3Hub (hosted by World Vision) and pursuing a Master of Tri-Sector Collaboration at Singapore Management University (SMU).

# SINGAPORE: AMONG THE BEACONS FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN ASEAN

*Roberto Oliva*

**T**he strength of Asean comes from the strength of its member states. The Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) came as a result of the weaved strength of the ten-member countries. Under the Asean Socio Cultural Community (ASCC), ACB was established as a regional mechanism to implement initiatives for the protection and conservation of the region's rich natural treasures.

Asean is very rich in biodiversity. Three countries in particular – Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines – are mega diverse countries. Singapore prides itself as a “garden city”, a place where the leaders and citizenry are cognisant of the importance of the environment and biodiversity. Singapore blooms as a small state where nature thrives in abundance. Many who visit the country would find it odd how both nature and progress can coexist in the small city-state.

In August 2017, the Asean community staged the Asean Biodiversity Heroes Award Programme as a commemorative activity for Asean's 50th Anniversary Celebration. The award programme recognised ten outstanding individuals who had contributed significantly to biodiversity conservation and advocacy efforts in their respective countries and the region.

From an indigenous community leader who is protecting Papua's forest to a national scientist who is championing coastal resources management, the inaugural Asean Biodiversity Heroes Award honours inspirational individuals who have risen to the challenge of curbing biodiversity loss and preserving Asean's common heritage.

Singapore participated in the award programme by nominating Professor Leo Tan Wee Hin, Professorial Fellow and Director (Special Projects), Faculty of Science, National University of Singapore, for championing biodiversity outreach and education. His nomination is a fitting recognition of Singapore's emphasis on environmental education, which has translated to informed decisions and efforts to protect and conserve the environment.

Singapore's focus on biodiversity conservation is evident in how nature is an important part of urban planning. Since independence in 1965, Singapore restored ecological connections through the establishment of gardens enveloping the city – manifested through vegetated walkways and garden breathers in urban setups. This resulted in the conservation as well as re-emergence of locally known extinct species of flora and fauna.

Currently, there are two Asean Heritage Parks (AHP) in Singapore – Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. The AHP is one of Asean’s flagship programmes for biodiversity conservation, a protected area of high conservation importance that preserves a complete spectrum of the region’s representative ecosystems. Aside from these two AHPs, Singapore Botanical Gardens (SBG) is one of the favorite destinations for most tourists. The SBG is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first botanic garden in Asia to be recognised on the list. A visit to the SBG is mesmerising with the richness of its flora and fauna. It reflects the nation’s strong political will to embrace nature in its national development plans and projects.

A milestone for the nation’s commitment to biodiversity conservation is its known leadership in urban biodiversity. This includes the earlier green policy of turning Singapore into a garden city, and more recent programmes such as Active, Beautiful and Clean Waters where catchment areas can also be used for recreation. In recognition of Singapore’s contributions in the development of the City Biodiversity Index, a monitoring tool to assist local authorities to evaluate progress in urban biodiversity conservation, it was renamed the Singapore Index on Cities’ Biodiversity, or Singapore Index.

Singapore’s commitment to excellence is clear in the discussions of the ACB Governing Board and the Asean Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (ACB’s technical working group). The city-state shares insightful contributions on the policy and technical mandates of ACB. Singapore’s biodiversity officials go the extra mile in making sure that plans and

programmes are not only practical, but best practices can also be replicated in the region.

In sharing Singapore’s experience, it clearly shows its citizens’ tenacity, dedication and commitment to excellence. The ACB is now a regional center of excellence in biodiversity conservation, partly due to Singapore’s shared insights which formed the foundation of ACB’s very existence. We continue to take the cue from the city-state. Just as Singapore showed a strong commitment to conserving biodiversity, the ACB hopes to do the same for the Asean region.



### **Roberto Oliva**

Roberto Oliva is the Executive Director of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB). He was the Assistant Minister of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines, and is one of the pioneers of environment law in Southeast Asia – drafting numerous natural resources laws and legislation.

# A BETTER AND SAFER ASEAN

*Maria Guevara*

**O**ne Vision, One Identity, One Community are the hallmarks of Asean nations. This statement is the motto that defines Asean. But what also defines this part of the world is its incredible diversity, richness in history, multi-ethnicity and heterogeneity. Finding the balance between embracing variety and enhancing strength through unity is the challenge. For Asean, it is critical indeed to do so.

Asia Pacific is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world, affected not only by natural disasters but also pandemics/epidemics. Despite its archipelagic set-up, the risks of disease transmission are huge considering the fluidity of movement of its people, porousness of its borders, and sheer scale of its population. Then there's the impact of climate change, deforestation, loss of land cover and biodiversity, all leading to a worsening of hydro-meteorological events as well as a higher probability of emerging infectious diseases in the region, including increasing resistance of already known diseases. Such risks I've seen first-hand taking its toll in the region the last few years.

Unfortunately, the great disparity in the economies and degree of development between the nations of Asean adds to the region's vulnerability to the rapid transformation of an epidemic into pandemic proportions, and even into a humanitarian catastrophe. It means systems and capacity are not always in place to stem the impact and respond in a timely and efficient manner.

How then to harness diversity and turn connectivity into a solution instead of a problem? With Asean's "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" motto, there is a collective willingness to ensure that protection and response is a unified goal. The idea of one identity as being all-human, of one and the same humanity, drives the spirit of compassion to help 'our neighbour' and therefore, 'ourselves'. It is this concept of singleness of community that should lead to ensuring individual health security and therefore collective security. These are the unifying forces of Asean. For Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), this principle of humanity underlies our understanding of humanitarian action.

The two most dramatic emergencies during my recent term as regional representative were Typhoon Haiyan which ravaged through the Visayas in November 2013 and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2015. In the Philippines, while international support poured in to assist, including MSF, the true first responders were its own community, the real silent heroes. Alongside them was Asean. Despite a very limited scale of early response, Asean was there on the ground with the local community, and they stayed on for years, as exemplified by the Asean Assistance for the Recovery of Yolanda-Affected Areas in the Philippines. This staying power is one

of its assets, the continuing commitment to its neighbours, the larger Asean community.

Ebola support from Asean was less than robust but different Asean states did extend in their small way a hand in terms of human or financial support, as well as technical experience and skill. Capitalising on these strengths in spirit and varied regional resources should be the focus of Asean, further extending such capital to the immediate emergency response phase.

With its strong economy and drive for innovation, coupled with robust education and health infrastructure, Singapore is well-placed to lead the region in these efforts. Expertise already exists, for example, among members of Singapore's medical community who are part of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), with whom I have had the pleasure to serve as part of the Advisory Group on Reform of World Health Organization's (WHO) Work in Outbreaks and Emergencies with Health and Humanitarian Consequences. Innovation of ideas in leadership, global governance and health policies are also being cultured and further developed in the country.

The Asean region has commendable goals but requires consistent leadership. As the 2018 Asean Chair, Singapore is well-poised to lead and be a model for change and improvement of health for all, within and without the Asean borders.



### **Maria Guevara**

Maria Guevara is the Senior Coordinator of the Attacks on Healthcare for Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders. She was the MSF Regional Humanitarian Representative in Asia from 2012 to 2017, and has worked in the field in both emergency and stable settings in Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Philippines, amongst others.

# HOW SINGAPORE IS SHOWING THE WAY FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE IN VIETNAM

*Ha Phan Hai An*

In May 2017, a medical mishap shook Vietnam. Eight people died after undergoing kidney dialysis treatment at Hoa Binh Province General Hospital, west of the capital Hanoi. The victims were among 18 patients who were receiving dialysis treatment at the hospital.

Vietnamese authorities launched a criminal investigation, which later showed that the water used in the dialysis was the cause of the incident. The rest of the patients who survived reported feeling ill and breathless after dialysis. The mishap has become one of the worst medical incidents in Vietnam in recent years, and has further strengthened the need for a standardised kidney haemodialysis treatment for healthcare professionals.

As a nephrologist, senior lecturer at Hanoi Medical University and head of the Kidney Diseases and Dialysis Department at Viet Duc University

Hospital, my interest is to improve the survival rate of kidney transplant and dialysis patients – especially those who have been infected with the hepatitis B or C viruses.

I believe that Vietnam is at a point where the country is seeing an urgent need to improve its healthcare system, and this is where we can learn and cooperate with other countries – within Asean and around the world.

We launched a project with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) in January 2018, which was the first training course for standardised kidney haemodialysis care in Hanoi. The SIF brought in medical professionals from Tan Tock Seng Hospital to share insights and impart ideas, skills and resources to us.

The two-and-a-half year project will enhance the training of Vietnamese caregivers to ensure healthcare practices are safe for kidney patients, and update caregivers on the current standards of care in haemodialysis.

A standardised kidney haemodialysis programme will help raise the standards across hospitals and clinics in Vietnam, and train doctors and nurses so that healthcare professionals are adequately equipped with the right skills to treat patients.

This reminds me of another partnership Vietnam had with France more than 30 years ago. When I first started working in medicine at Hanoi Medical University in 1989, there was a lack of haemodialysis machines in hospitals.

We were helpless, and could not provide adequate treatment. But we worked with institutions in France, which provided resources and support to better develop renal care in Vietnam.

Healthcare is also more than just hospital care. Today, in Vietnam, our healthcare system is more focused on centralised institutions such as hospitals, instead of primary care at home or in the community. Going forward, we need to develop and raise the standards and quality of primary healthcare.

As the first line of care in the community, primary care professionals are often the first point of contact with patients. In this regard, there is much to learn from Singapore where primary care is provided through its islandwide network of outpatient polyclinics and clinics run by private general practitioners.

In Vietnam, such clinics are not as accessible to the public nor as well equipped, leading to patients opting not to visit them. Instead, they prefer to seek treatment in hospitals, resulting in hospitals being overwhelmed by too many patients. The aim, we hope, is to train doctors, nurses and technicians, so that they can provide healthcare at the community level.

My parents are doctors, and had always planned for me to follow in their footsteps. I couldn't understand at that time and resented the long years I spent in medical school and training. But today, I understand my calling and found motivation in being a doctor. I come across many patients with diseases

that were discovered too late – at their end stages. If you can keep them alive, try to do something for them – that gives my work a purpose.

My hope is that by establishing connections and working with developed countries like Singapore, especially through the sharing and exchange of medical knowledge, research and resources, the quality and standards in Vietnam and the region will improve for the better.



### Ha Phan Hai An

Ha Phan Hai An is a Nephrologist from Vietnam. She is also the Head of the Kidney Diseases and Dialysis Department at Viet Duc University Hospital in Hanoi and a Senior Lecturer at the Hanoi Medical University. She is active in education, clinical research and health promotion for the community.

# IMPROVING MEDICAL REHABILITATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN LAOS

*Bouathep Phoumindr*

**T**oday, many wealthy Laotians travel abroad to places like Singapore to receive medical treatment. These individuals may have the money to do so, but most people living in Laos' rural areas cannot afford such treatment.

People with disabilities are most vulnerable, and require access to mainstream healthcare services. Medical rehabilitation will provide them with the tools to attain independence and self-determination, and is thus crucial in helping patients reach their full potential in life, especially people with disabilities.

But Laos still lacks doctors who specialise in rehabilitation treatment. According to the 4th Population and Housing Census 2015 conducted by the Lao Statistics Bureau, more than 160,000 people in Laos have some form of disability. The number is expected to rise, and so would the demand for rehabilitation and assistive health technologies.

As the Rehabilitation Medicine Vice Dean in the Faculty of Medical Technology at the University of Health Sciences (FMT-UHS), my goal is to improve the medical rehabilitation capacity of doctors in Laos so that everyone, no matter their background, can get access to affordable healthcare. It is my responsibility to mentor the next generation of doctors in physical medicine.

In 2016, the FMT conducted a four-week training for ten medical doctors from central and provincial hospitals in Laos. These young medical doctors have an important role to play in the future of rehabilitation medicine in Laos. After the training, the ten doctors will organise seminars in their respective hospitals to share their knowledge, creating a network for physical rehabilitation medicine. It will hopefully improve patients' access to medical rehabilitation services.

But such efforts within Laos alone are not sufficient. Partnering with other countries in Asean is another way to improve and advance healthcare expertise in the region. In 2017, the Singapore International Foundation facilitated a collaboration between Laos and Singapore to design a programme to raise the standards of physiotherapy education in Laos. Called "The Physiotherapy Education Upgrade Project", this collaborative effort will support the curriculum of FMT-UHS bachelor's programme in physiotherapy. It will equip the teaching faculty with the skills and knowledge to deliver an enhanced curriculum and increase the awareness of updated physiotherapy methods and treatment in Laos.

A group of Laotian physiotherapists, rehabilitation nurses and orthopaedic doctors will participate in a series of training workshops, lectures and symposiums carried out by SingHealth, Singapore's largest healthcare group. By the end of the project in 2018, the aim is to substantially enhance the programme's curriculum with the latest physiotherapy and pedagogical methods.

As of 2017, medical volunteers from SingHealth have so far successfully trained 136 Laotian professionals. In 2016, the Singapore volunteers also ran a symposium on "Evidence Based Rehabilitation" for doctors, nurses and physiotherapists from six central hospitals to raise awareness of rehabilitative care in Laotian healthcare communities.

These programmes will also spark a ripple effect locally. For example, a core group of 25 Laotians will eventually become experts, equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver this enhanced curriculum. This team will go on to train at least 30 physiotherapy students a year. Upon graduation, each of these 30 physiotherapists will treat at least ten patients per month, enabling around 3,600 patients a year to regain some level of physical functioning to reintegrate back into society.

My dream to become a doctor started when I was about eight or nine years old. When I was a medical student, I learnt to talk to my patients and their family members to create good relationships. I spent a lot of time speaking with them. From that experience I developed a teaching topic that explained the importance of communication between doctor and patient.

I always say that as doctors, we are second to patients. Patients are our number one priority and we need to listen to them to provide better health services. Beyond communication and listening skills, my hope is that Singapore can continue to set up close collaboration in medical and healthcare services with other Asean countries.



### **Bouathep Phoumindr**

Bouathep Phoumindr is Head of Rehabilitation Medicine Department and also the Vice Dean of Faculty of Medical Technologies, University of Health Sciences in Laos. She received her education from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

# JOINING HANDS TO HEAL THE WOUNDS OF TRAUMA

*Chhim Sotheara*

In the 1980s, I heard on the news that the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore visited a school and encouraged Singaporean students to have friends from other countries. He was referring to Singaporeans who had the opportunity to study overseas, as he believed that foreign friends could help the country in the future. This statement caught my attention, as I was also dreaming of having an international friend, such as someone from Singapore.

That friend came into my life in 1999 when I went to study in Australia. There, I met a Singaporean psychiatrist, Dr Angelina Chan, at the Liverpool Hospital in Sydney, where we later became friends. It was also this friendship that has helped my current organisation, my country and me. Dr Chan and her Singaporean team sacrificed their time, money and energy to help improve my organisation's knowledge about mental health so that we can provide better services to our people. My organisation, Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Cambodia (TPO Cambodia), is a non-governmental mental

health association that provides care for traumatised Cambodians at the grassroots level.

I grew up during the time of the Khmer Rouge regime and witnessed first-hand the shocking mental effects of war on my country's people. Given the trauma that was around me, I chose to specialise in psychiatry and later became one of Cambodia's first ten psychiatrists. I have been blessed to help heal the psychological damage many Cambodians suffer as a result of our history under the Khmer Rouge regime. But I cannot achieve everything alone.

Dr Chan and her team assisted TPO Cambodia to set up Mental Health First Aid Cambodia (MHFA) and join the international network, MHFA International. This MHFA programme is very important for low-resource countries like Cambodia, enabling us to train more people on mental health first aid, so that we can help other people who suffer from mental health crises before they are referred to mental health professionals.

My Singaporean friend and her team also taught psychiatry to psychiatric residents at the University of Health Sciences in Cambodia for several years at their own cost. Those residents have now become psychiatrists and are in the mental health practice in Cambodia. So my Singaporean friends have contributed to building mental health human resources in Cambodia too.

In addition to the support from Dr Chan and her team, I also had the opportunity to get in touch with the Singapore International Foundation

(SIF) in early 2000s. The SIF sends Singaporean experts overseas to empower international communities to become catalysts for positive change across different fields in their own countries, including that in Cambodia. For instance, the SIF sent mental health professionals to provide knowledge and training to enhance the quality of my organisation's child and adolescent mental healthcare services. This allowed my counsellors to understand normal and abnormal development of children and adolescents, as well as learn methods of addressing mental health issues in children, adolescents and their families. Currently, we are exploring a new partnership with the SIF to help train TPO therapists train in family therapy, as well as in geriatric psychiatry.

Although Cambodia has developed in many ways since the Khmer Rouge genocide, we still lag behind in prioritising mental health service development. This may be due to the lack of human resources, good leadership in mental health and understanding about mental health among policy makers in Cambodia. Therefore, the external help from Singapore is very important in rebuilding mental health services in our country. It is not just Singapore, but also other Asean members who are more developed than Cambodia that can also have a role in helping their regional neighbours in mental health as well as in other fields.



### Chhim Sotheara

Chhim Sotheara is Director of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation. He is one of Cambodia's first psychiatrists who graduated after the Khmer Rouge genocide. He received the 2012 Human Rights Award from Fordham University, USA and is the winner of the 2017 Dr Guislain Award for breaking the stigma on mental health.

## INFLUENCER

*An entrepreneur started Cambodia's first toy store and created jobs for hundreds of youths. An educator led a community service project turning old school buildings into a new library. These influencers are leaders, spearheading change to better the livelihoods of those around them. Not about money, position or authority, great influencers build trust and relationship to motivate and mobilise others.*



# SHAPING MINDS THROUGH LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

*Pericles Lewis*

**A**t Yale-NUS College, we have been proud to host model Asean conferences for student delegates from around Southeast Asia. We organised these events with the aim of helping students better understand the importance of diplomacy through experiential learning. I warmly remember the visits of students from all over the region and the photos taken with the interlocking handshake characteristic of Asean.

When I was a student, I too participated in a similar event – the Southern Ontario Model United Nations (UN) Association. At that time, I was role-playing the China representative and was tasked to negotiate with the other members of the Model United Nations (UN) to further my country's interests. That experience was particularly enriching for me as it came during the period of Deng Xiaoping's campaigns to 'break the iron rice bowl'. I learnt how to analyse issues from multiple perspectives and formulate solutions for complex problems. It also helped me develop a deep interest in Asia that has stayed with me till today.

In a way, the international collaboration between Yale University and National University of Singapore (NUS) also helps to create greater focus on Asia. The partnership realises a common goal of creating a new model of liberal arts education in Asia, for the world. It has played an important role in Singapore's efforts to become an education hub for Southeast Asia and the world. Our curriculum and pedagogy, built from scratch by the inaugural faculty, seeks to draw on the strengths of established liberal arts traditions, while introducing our students to the diverse intellectual traditions and culture of Asia and the world.

In any education system, it is important to emphasise the breadth of knowledge that will help students to see the world's problems in a broader context. We should seek to answer the question: What must a young person learn in order to lead a responsible life in this century? We find that an interdisciplinary approach works best – ranging from current issues and history, philosophy and social thought to science, among many others. These help students build up a broad worldview and enable them to understand issues from different disciplines and across cultural contexts. We must also encourage the development of engagement and interpretation – skills that are central to the study of international relations. Lively exchanges of ideas amongst a diverse student body make for many little Asean or even UN discussions on a regular basis.

We also understand the importance of having programmes outside of the classroom that would enable students to have a global approach in viewing today's world issues and sharpen their education and skills in the 'real world'.

We have programmes that provide our students with an opportunity for experiential learning in a global classroom. For our first year students, some of them worked in a laboratory on a specific research topic, others conducted environmental fieldwork in a tsunami-affected region, or investigated the impact of migration on urban centres in the region. As our students see the world and interact with their peers, they start to develop a global outlook on issues.

I always like to share with my students the saying of the English poet John Donne: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” Although Singapore is only a small island at the edge of a great continent, its engagement with the broader world has been a model for many larger nations, and the friendship of the peoples of Asean bodes well for the education of future generations.



### Pericles Lewis

Pericles Lewis is a Professor of Comparative Literature and serves as Vice President for Global Strategy and Deputy Provost for International Affairs at Yale University. From 2012 to 2017, he served as Founding President of Yale-NUS College, a collaboration between Yale and the National University of Singapore.

# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ASEAN

*Elissa Golberg*

**I**t’s no secret: when women participate on an equal footing as men in the formal economy, societies prosper. Numerous studies have shown that when women’s incomes rise, so does the wellbeing of their households and communities. But, despite these established facts, policymakers and the private sector still struggle to foster a mutually reinforcing ecosystem of policies, regulations, programmes and work cultures that can bridge the gender gap. This misses a critical opportunity to build more prosperous, healthier, and equitable societies. We can do better.

In Canada, where I live, we know we’re not there yet. Women still lag behind men in representation in politics and executive positions, in securing equal pay, and in sharing household duties. Violence against women persists, and is especially high for indigenous women. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made. Women now occupy an equal number of seats as men in the

Federal Cabinet, women surpass men in post-secondary enrollment, and more women than ever are in the labour force.

Progressively, rigid gender barriers and stereotypes are being overcome, not least due to policies such as parental leave which allows men time to care for infants – an approach that is good for our economy, families, and human dignity. The current Canadian Prime Minister has made women’s empowerment a priority at home and abroad, declaring himself and his government feminist.

Likewise, Asean countries are making important strides to enhance the rights of women and girls, including in the area of economic empowerment. All members have adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and have made significant headway towards implementing it through local laws and policies.

So, how can we accelerate progress on women’s economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, further positively transforming Asean societies? A holistic approach that addresses a range of obstacles women face is needed. This includes:

- Eliminating sexual and gender-based violence
- Strengthening women’s rights organisations
- Building public sector capacity for gender equality
- Addressing gender-gaps in education and skills development
- Promoting women’s economic rights including land, labour, inheritance and property rights

- Supporting women in the labour market through practices that facilitate personal and professional obligations like affordable child care, lactation spaces, flexible work hours, or safe methods to travel to and from work
- Improving financial literacy for women, and equal access to capital, markets, digital technologies and business development services

Across the region, we can identify and repeal discriminatory legal barriers that impede women’s rights to title, land tenure, and inheritance, and that entrench inequality in the marketplace. Civil society advocacy and dialogue with government can help.

Greater emphasis can be given to education for girls and fostering an enabling context for women-led businesses to grow. Why not inspire girls and young women to pursue non-traditional professions in trades, finance and science? These enable access to high-growth job opportunities. Likewise, facilitating access to financial services beyond micro-credit, and eliminating discriminatory behaviour by investors so they see past the gender of the entrepreneur to the merits of the company and product would be game-changers. Moreover, since women often lead small, local businesses, we should think about procurement and supplier diversity, so women can get into national and global value chains.

Singapore and Canada can help accelerate women entrepreneurs’ access to a more equitable share of business ownership and investment in the region, including by supporting coaching, mentorship, and policy interventions. We both recognise this as vital to eradicate poverty, and to foster inclusive,

prosperous, and peaceful societies. Mindful of our own biases and gaps, we can nevertheless share our respective strengths in regulatory practice, technology, and trade facilitation, and can support institutional strengthening and capacity building. Above all, we can consistently promote a view of women as “persons” of equal contribution, potential, and value to our economy.



### Elissa Golberg

Elissa Golberg is Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy at Global Affairs Canada. She has held several senior Canadian government roles including Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, has been a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader, and has published articles on fragile state and public policy related matters.

# TAKING A SHOT ON SPORT

*Terry O'Connor*

“**Y**ou miss 100 per cent of the shots you never take,” so goes the quote by Canadian ice hockey legend Wayne Gretzky, hailed by some as the greatest hockey player ever. While I personally prefer football, being born and raised in Liverpool, England, the saying echoes what I have always believed – that sport and physical activity are critical to character building for success.

In this instance, the saying encourages people to take a chance at doing something and succeed or fail trying – but at least they tried. You cannot succeed at something you never attempted. Similarly, organisations should also take a shot on sport, especially those that have an impact on youths. When companies give back to the community through sport, we would like to believe we are playing a part in creating a better tomorrow. The youth academy of the famous Dutch football club Ajax, for example, is literally called that – De Toekomst or ‘The Future’.

Youths are an integral part of the future. In this Asean region, which has a large population of youths, laying the seeds for their success early reaps exponential returns down the road. Inspiring talent and getting them involved

in the community they belong to needs to start from a young age. This conversation is not the sole responsibility of football or sporting associations, but must take place on a broader spectrum and involve corporates, educators, policymakers and the community at large.

The Joseph Schooling narrative has helped open the eyes of the Singapore public to what is possible. As a young boy, he met his idol Michael Phelps and subsequently surpassed his childhood hero to win gold at the Olympics. During his stunning performance at the 2016 Rio Games, the nation shared in the satisfaction of a long-cherished dream finally fulfilled, made possible by the unyielding support and conviction of his parents.

This same principle of nurturing play and inspiring youths early lies at the heart of COURTS' corporate social responsibility initiatives. From 2011 to 2015, the company was a title sponsor of the COURTS Young Lions, supporting the under-23 youth football team and creating opportunities for them to conduct football clinics for primary, secondary and tertiary students.

In more recent years, our partnerships with organisations such as Liverpool Football Club and Masters Football Asia have enabled us to bring international footballing legends to Singapore's shores, connecting them with delighted local fans. Spreading the joy to other Asean countries, we brought these football stars to Malaysia and Indonesia where COURTS also operates.

These sessions provide mentorship in international footballing practices for primary and secondary students – as well as the special needs community,

with the participation of Singapore's very own Special Olympics football team. Such encounters, similar to Schooling's meeting with Phelps, help bridge the gap between achieving the realistic and the impossible.

Through COURTS' youth training academies and similar initiatives to build a supportive eco-system, I've seen countless youths delighted with the glimpse into international sporting standards through their encounters with veteran athletes. In my opinion, meeting one's idol provides unrivalled fuel for one to excel.

Looking ahead, Schooling and Singapore's success has opened the door for new and broader conversations to take place – what kind of community and systemic changes are required to nurture and inspire Singapore talent? How can the public, private and not-for-profit spheres work together to provide a supportive eco-system that makes it acceptable – aspirational even – to carve a professional future out of sport?

Perhaps we stand today on the cusp of a new generation of athletes whose efforts will underpin Singapore's bedrock of national spirit. We've certainly seen that from Singapore's best away Games showing at the 2017 SEA Games. I believe we need to take a real shot at collaborating to improve available support and actively create opportunities to inspire and aspire – in a bid to foster sport as a fundamental point of national pride. More targeted investment, multi-sectorial collaboration and a spirit of openness and inclusivity are needed. Otherwise, we may never truly know the heights that Singapore, my beloved adopted home, can scale.



### **Terry O'Connor**

Terry O'Connor is the Executive Director and Group Chief Executive Officer of COURTS Asia, one of Southeast Asia's leading electrical, IT and furniture retailers. He and his wife Janice have been actively involved in charity, such as raising funds for breast cancer awareness and the underprivileged in Singapore.

# **IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE AN ENTREPRENEUR**

*Divya Patel*

**G**rowing up, I often heard the saying “it takes a village to raise a child”. I finally saw the saying come alive – for entrepreneurs – when I set up an incubator for Social Entrepreneurs at the Impact Hub in Singapore in 2014. Over the course of two years, we worked and incubated over 30 social entrepreneurs in Singapore and saw them turn their ideas to reality, build stronger business models and scale their ventures further with the support of relevant funding.

Through this and subsequent experiences of working with social entrepreneurs, I realised that one of the things they need most to thrive is a safe space to exchange ideas, make mistakes, learn, be inspired and grow further. For this safe space to work well, it requires like-minded peers who are driven, passionate and purposeful; mentors who believe in their dreams and offer meaningful advice; and role models who will inspire and uplift them during discouraging times. As they grow their business by expanding

into new markets, the community that this safe space creates will also be the source of new networks and relationships to tap on.

The creation of this safe space is aided by programmes like the Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Young Social Entrepreneurs. The participants from this programme come from multiple countries across the globe, bringing with them ideas to address social issues and make the world a better place. They are able to learn not only from the business classes during the programme but also from each other's experiences.

The programme also brings them on overseas study visits, providing them a broader regional perspective and opening their mind to new ways of addressing social problems and making a deeper impact. And with ongoing support of mentors through the course of the programme, they will improve their business model and learn how to pitch for the much needed investments and grants to grow their ideas. Most importantly, through this programme, they are able to build deep friendships and be part of a community of changemakers who will support each other and work towards a common purpose of making this world a better place.

Apart from this programme, Singapore also has multiple accelerators, incubators and corporate schemes that are based here but are supporting social entrepreneurs from the region. Most of these have a cohort-based model that accepts international participants and works with them between four and six months to strengthen their ability to scale their businesses. However, one of the issues with these physical programmes is that they

have a finite life and often end with no significant opportunities for the participants to continue their collaborations.

To help social entrepreneurs take their ventures to the next level, it is imperative that we start building strong digital platforms with an active and highly engaged regional community of social entrepreneurs to accelerate cross border collaborations and make high growth possible. With digital economy and e-commerce as key focus areas for Singapore as the Asean Chair in 2018, we should do more to build up digital connectivity. For instance, an online networking platform for entrepreneurs will stay active beyond any physical programme and is an optimal tool for reflections, peer-to-peer support and a repository of learning content. A digital community can also scale, connect and add participants at numbers that will not be possible for a physical community.

As ventures look to grow beyond borders, they will be able to lean on this regional online community for advice and local partnerships. Similarly, when it comes to fundraising, they can get information on funders in multiple countries as well as feedback from stakeholders in countries where they want to expand. More importantly, as this will be an organically growing network, social entrepreneurs can continue their journey with the support of a passionate community – improving their understanding of not only their own social problem but of issues faced in other countries. This will provide them opportunities to work collectively towards the co-creation of new ideas and paradigms. Giving a twist to the age-old saying, it takes a village to raise an entrepreneur.



## Divya Patel

Divya Patel leads partnerships and programmes at Ashoka Singapore-Malaysia, a non-profit organisation that leads the field in social entrepreneurship. She previously set up Singapore's first incubator for social enterprises, which took more than 30 social entrepreneurs from idea to pilot/operations and fundraising. In addition to her deep passion for changemaking, she has a strong corporate background through almost ten years of experience at IBM, where she was responsible for setting up their Innovation Centre in Singapore.

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO INVEST IN THE YOUNG

*Sok Piseth*

I grew up in Cambodia in a complicated time when the country was emerging from its civil war. My family had a small family business. But in 1996, my dad lost his business. I was about 12, and I saw my mum crying almost every day.

That was a turning point when our lives changed. New clothes that we used to have during the New Year, we did not have any more. Nice food that we used to eat, we did not have any more. We had little, but it taught me to make the most of every circumstance. I was also fortunate my parents believed in education and sent us to school all the way to university.

After I graduated, I wanted to be an entrepreneur, like my father. I believe entrepreneurs can help the country's economy grow in the long term, create jobs and also contribute back to the community through corporate

social responsibility programmes. Today, entrepreneurship is paving the way for economic growth in Cambodia, and we should continue to provide opportunities for the young to start businesses.

About two-thirds of the population in Asean is under 35, which means that the labour force is full of potential. While it is good for the region, it also means more competition. At the same time, the global trend of business disruption due to rapidly changing technology also offers opportunities for youths today to start their own businesses. And the support network is there, such as start-up hubs, coworking spaces and incubation centres.

I participated in the Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) International Student Symposium in 2005, a three-day event which brought youths across Asean countries together. This was the first time that I used my passport to travel abroad, and it also marked the start of my affinity with Singapore. Before this, I had only known about Singapore through TV dramas. After the symposium, I got to know a lot of international friends as well as SIF alumni in Cambodia, who allowed me to work with them on community projects. I am thankful for the experiences, as I learnt how to manage projects and network.

In 2006, I had the opportunity to participate in a McKinsey Business Plan Competition, where my business plan to sell educational toys was awarded the Bronze Medal at the competition. One year later in 2007, I turned that idea into reality.

Then, I was 22 when I first started my business selling toys in Cambodia. Called Toys and Me, it was Cambodia's first toy store. I faced challenges and obstacles, but I have grown stronger, more courageous and mature. Today, the toy business is running smoothly in the market with four branches in Phnom Penh.

One business led to more. In 2011, I founded two other companies. One of them is G Gear, which is the distributor of LG Electronics in Cambodia. Currently, the company has seven retail outlets in various cities in Cambodia, and also expanded to include mechanical and electrical engineering services from drawing to installation. The second is Biz Solution, a software development company. Together, we have created around 400 jobs for Cambodian youths.

This was achieved within ten years of my business career. At times, the challenges of a competitive business environment make me tired and exhausted. But seeing my staff grow with my business makes me happy. Some people in the team joined when they were university students, and have been promoted to the company's management. I have also seen them go on to build families and have children. All these inspire me and I am glad to be part of their journey in transforming their lives.

Based on my experiences, I believe we should not scrimp on educating our young and encouraging them to be entrepreneurs. This will solve many problems and create jobs. It is not only important for a developing country like Cambodia, but also Asean as a whole.



## Sok Piseth

Sok Piseth is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of G Gear Company, a distributor of LG Electronics in Cambodia. As a member of the Asean Business Advisory Council (ABAC), he is an active young Entrepreneur and has founded three businesses since 2007.

# PLUGGING THE SKILLS GAP IN ASEAN

*Amanda Yeo*

**M**illennials, who make up more than half of Asean's total population, have demonstrated great desire in embracing new technology – from artificial intelligence to the Internet of Things – which has changed how industries operate. However, some higher education and training institutions in Asean and perhaps to a lesser extent, Singapore, have not been able to equip graduates adequately with the skills that growth industries need.

The skills gap continues to widen between degree holders and the jobs available today, as employers are demanding more output across different job scopes from the people they hire. Asean universities, in particular, have not been able to keep up with the needs of industries in the region, leading to constant criticisms of the quality and type of graduates produced. To move towards a technology-driven and knowledge-intensive economy, a new balance has to be struck between practical and theoretical knowledge, and the application in higher education institutions.

As a Malaysian who studied in Singapore at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, I am of the opinion that Singaporean universities fail to develop students holistically. While they prepare students well for academia, they do not sufficiently prepare students to be career-ready. They remain imprecise in aligning their programmes and majors to the needs of the ever-changing economy. Students may be geared to theoretically solve most problems on paper, but often they would struggle to solve real-life work problems as they may not be equipped with the necessary skills to do so.

In Singapore, although the government focuses on innovation and developing the workforce as drivers of future economic growth, there is inadequate focus on teaching soft skills such as collaborative and adaptive abilities in universities. Instead of developing such skills, the national SkillsFuture movement seems to focus more on hard skills such as capturing, translating and interpreting data through data analytics and machine learning, and generally pays less attention to transferable skills across different jobs. In addition, Singapore's reliance on foreign workers and its low productivity growth trigger an "urgent need to re-orientate its education and training policy and to moderate the pace of industrial policy change." Thus, the orientation and pedagogy of Singapore's higher education institutions would need to continuously evolve to keep up with the demands of an innovation-driven economy.

To adapt to the rapidly changing demands of modern work, education systems across Southeast Asia must change from top-down rote learning to having greater emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For instance, rethinking the content and course material would help converge the

curriculum towards global learning and industry needs. Teachers can also act as facilitators in activities designed to raise students' awareness of multiple perspectives, thus developing critical thinking skills among millennials.

Students should be given opportunities to have internships locally or abroad as part of their curriculum too. This would not only allow millennials to acquire the right technical skillsets, but also acquire valuable practical experience and a better understanding on what industries require of them. When universities place more emphasis in comprehending the latest trends, undergraduates will become more curious, creative, collaborative, agile, adaptable and willing to take risks. To integrate new media literacy effectively, the region has to transform its higher education ideology so that students can gain these crucial skills and experiences to cope with new technologies and emerging jobs in coming years.

With more than 16 per cent of the Singapore population and 65 per cent of the Asean population being dominated by millennials, raising higher educational standards and skill levels among millennials ought to be central to this region's agenda. Higher education institutions in Singapore and Asean need to collaborate with both public and private sectors to develop a new education and employment ecosystem that equips millennials with not only relevant skillsets, but also the capacity and confidence to confront regional issues with a bold can-do attitude. This would be crucial towards gearing Asean for more growth and integration in the region.



### Amanda Yeo

Amanda Yeo is the Publicity Executive Secretary of the Democratic Action Party based in Sabah, Malaysia, where she researches social issues and organises campaigns. She is also a part-time associate for the Asean Economic Forum. She has a master's degree in International Relations from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

# NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION

*Taweesak Kritjaroen*

When I visited Singapore's rooftop farm Comcrop in 2013, I was struck by its social innovation in urban vertical farming. Located above the shopping mall Scape in the middle of the city centre, it helps to alleviate Singapore's land scarcity for growing crops. Singapore has turned a problem into an opportunity.

Interestingly, Comcrop is managed largely by young entrepreneurial farmers. In the process, the younger generation in Singapore is made more aware of the constraints facing the country and the steps taken to solve these issues.

In another visit to Singapore, I also spent time with the Community Service Project at Chen Su Lan Methodist Children's Home which provided me a great opportunity to learn how to foster care to boys and girls between 5 and 21 years old who come from needy and disadvantaged families in Singapore. The experience inspired me to propose and organise a meaningful community service project at the Children Foundation in Thailand two years later.

These projects that focus on the youth made me realise the importance of education and nurturing children. The more children have the opportunity to learn and grow, the more competent they are to help the country when they become adults. This realisation motivated me to be a teacher so that I can have a chance to transfer good ideas and shape students' attitudes to become civic-minded citizens.

I strongly believe in nurturing the next generation. I come from a poor family, and my parents did not have the chance and opportunity to graduate from primary school. I was the first in my generation to graduate from university, with the help of opportunities like scholarships. Having been blessed with opportunities, I believe it is important to extend the same helping hand to others.

It is important to invest in human capital early so that the young develop an attitude of contributing back to society. Hence, when I started work as Associate Dean at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) in 2011, I was inspired to develop programmes with a focus on social responsibility. Now, I teach a Corporate Governance and Social Responsibility course for MBA students and believe businesses should have an element of social responsibility.

On my own, I constantly push to incorporate more social work in school. For instance, I initiated the community service project for my students to learn real-life experience. As part of the KMUTT's orientation programme today, students are required to spend two days doing voluntary work to give back to society. Through this, my Thai students have helped fundraise for a school that caters to students with disabilities and helped renovate old school buildings into new libraries. Hopefully, these will be experiences that they would remember for life.

I have visited Singapore several times since 2000 – the year I went on a six-month fellowship with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). Singapore has been my role model for investing in its only resource – its people. Over the years, I found that the country has continuously evolved in infrastructure development to build a conducive living environment and effect positive social change. It has also developed a leading role in supporting and strengthening the societal pillar in Asean. For instance, programmes organised by the SIF, such as the Asean student forum and community service projects, show the country's commitment to sustainable development and social work. I have been inspired to walk the talk too in my work as an educator.

The long journey that I have been walking with the SIF for almost two decades portrays the transfer of human resources development across borders. One student who receives a wonderful experience can continue to pass on learning opportunities to other students. With the hope of scalable collaboration between Singapore and Thailand, I strongly believe that this friendship will broaden the next generation's perspective on building a more cohesive and socially responsible society. Our future will certainly be better if many hands and hearts pave the way for stronger action to build a stronger Asean community.



### **Taweesak Kritjaroen**

Taweesak Kritjaroen is an Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Management and Innovation at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Thailand. He is trained in Political Science and earned his master's degree and doctorate in Public Administration and Public Policy from the University of York, United Kingdom.

# BUILDING MORE PLATFORMS FOR ASEAN PEOPLE TO INTERACT

*Elaine Tan*

**T**his year, as Asean celebrates 51 years of its establishment, I reflect on how the people of Asean can be part of a participative and socially responsible community with equitable access to opportunities for all. The Asean Foundation, which I've headed since January 2014, has brought diverse groups together working on different themes from rural development to women's economic development. It is about forging friendships with like-minded people, who may not have connected without these community forums.

There is a sense of satisfaction in knowing that these community forums have helped to bridge the gap in information and understanding on Asean's cooperation on the issues being discussed. These platforms include the S. Rajaratnam Endowment-Asean Community Forum Series. It gathers civil society to participate in and benefit from the process of Asean integration and community building. So far, we have brought together about 80 participants from civil society in Asean on two occasions. Another forum is the Asean

Learning Series and Policy Engagement on Agricultural Cooperatives (ALSPEAC) that was initiated in 2017. It is designed as a learning exchange to encourage strategic alliance among farmers' cooperatives, policy makers and the private sector.

Such initiatives seem to be rare as evidenced from participants' feedback. Dr Khin Muang Win from the Community Development Association of Myanmar, who attended the Second S. Rajaratnam Endowment-Asean Community Forum in Singapore, remarked how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can build better lives for Asean citizens through cross-border initiatives. *"This is what the community forum is about: how could we work together instead of just doing it on our own? We are learning how to do it together under the Asean umbrella,"* he said.

By making connections possible, more engagement is envisaged leading to more collaborative efforts. Cross-border initiatives can become the norm. Mr Jamon Mok, Founder and CEO of the social enterprise Backstreet Academy, attended the Asean Conference on Social Entrepreneurship in Singapore. He noted: *"While social enterprises may work within the same sectors, the way our businesses operate in each country may differ. This conference has encouraged a lot of cross-border knowledge exchanges and also forged friendships, promoting a robust social entrepreneurial ecosystem."*

Looking ahead, the Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together is a good place to start identifying key issues that NGOs can work on. It is a roadmap that articulates Asean goals and aspirations in the next ten years, encouraging

multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagements. A recent survey revealed the challenges for Asean from now till 2025, with the top two concerns listed as corruption as well as climate change and natural disasters. These two challenges are aptly reflected in the Forging Ahead Together blueprint for Asean.

In tackling such challenges, it cannot only be a project of governments as governments of the day may not necessarily see the bigger picture. Everyone in Asean has to take ownership, and our work as NGOs is to promote a sense of community within the region. The key is to engage youths under the age of 30, who make up half of the population in Asean, through a more interactive manner and to give them opportunities to participate through frequent interactions.

Such interactions are crucial as feedback from our event participants suggest that there is still inadequate people-to-people exchanges and connectivity in Asean. Many local and national groups are not familiar with developments in Asean. People-to-people exchanges help participants understand Asean priorities and develop an Asean identity. More platforms have to be established, like what the Asean Foundation has done, to bring more people together through various forums. Appreciating Asean is a lived experience, which can be heightened by trips to neighbouring countries and building bonds between people.

This gap in people-to-people exchanges needs to be filled, strengthening links and interconnections with grassroots initiatives, exchanging information and

knowledge, building capacity and working together. These are prerequisites to building a strong Asean Community.



### **Elaine Tan**

Elaine Tan was appointed the Executive Director of the Asean Foundation in Jakarta in 2014 – the first female in the role. Previously, she worked at Yayasan Sejahtera in Kuala Lumpur, headed UNIFEM (now UN Women) in Cambodia and Timor-Leste, and served at the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta.

# HOW SINGAPORE TAUGHT US TO DREAM BIG FOR ASEAN

*Dian Lumban Toruan*

As a 21-year-old from Indonesia, I had so many concerns before I went to Singapore for the Singapore International Foundation-Asean Fellowship programme – from living together with fellows who were faceless to me at that time, to studying at a Singapore university with the rigorous curriculum. However, through the thick (and sometimes) thin, I got to know my Asean fellows well and learnt more about their countries.

Some fellows had endured significant challenges because of past civil wars in their home country. Others were always cautious in conversation due to the absence of democracy in their country. And there were some others who were so privileged that they had difficulties understanding the context of growing up in a challenging environment. But over the course of five months, we grew to understand one another, as individuals and as citizens of neighbouring countries.

We were fortunate to stay in a landed house with seven fellows, and living next door were the other eight fellows. Looking back, I don't remember any clash

of cultural values that caused bumps in our relationships. Oddly, although we came from different countries, we shared similar values and cultural characteristics, which we only found out as we got to know each other better.

Not long after the first month into our fellowship, we began to forge close bonds. And like many other Southeast Asians, we enjoyed spending time together by chatting late into the night, learning each other's traditional dances, cooking various Asean food and occasionally celebrating each other's birthdays. It was simple fun.

Unfortunately, a few times, two neighbours found it annoying and called the police without informing us first. For most of us, it was a shock, because back home occasional home gatherings are acceptable, and neighbours would come in person if they thought the gatherings disturbed the peace. It was a reality check of living in Singapore. Through that experience, we were reminded that although we felt at home with one another, we were still living in a community with a different way of life.

While that incident showed the distance among some neighbours, Singapore remains a very open community. Living in Singapore gave us the chance to experience the economic power and political stability of a developed country – where the line between the nation as an Asean country and as a global hub was blurred. There is an invisible spirit that drives its people to do their best in everything, not just within the region but in the international arena too. As citizens of a small country, Singaporeans realise they need to excel in the global competition.

The country's confidence motivated the fellows and I to have bigger dreams for ourselves and our countries. The chance to witness what could be created through years of steady progress, and the newfound drive that motivates me to work harder to contribute to my country's development was the biggest gift the fellowship gave me.

Leaving the comfort of Singapore was not easy for some of us. When the time came to say our goodbyes, it hit some fellows hard that they had to go back to their daily lives, which included a lack of freedom of speech, civil unrest or legal uncertainty. But we also left the country with a richer understanding of the region and what it means to be part of Asean.

It is not easy to understand Asean as an idea, with a complex web of relations between ten different nations that are in varying stages of economic or political development. It takes time to build a contextual understanding – how we are different yet alike. The fellowship provided a valuable platform to connect people and communities in Asean.

Just like a chopstick is more useful as a pair than on its own, imagine what ten Asean countries can achieve together if they combine their strengths and resources – within the region and on the global stage. My hope is that all of us will dream big for our countries and, in turn, work towards a stronger Asean.



### **Dian Lumban Toruan**

Dian Lumban Toruan is a Public Relations Professional with years of experience in private and government sectors. She holds a B.A. in Design from Institut Teknologi, Bandung and recently obtained a master's degree from Georgetown University, under the LPDP scholarship from the Indonesian government.

Singapore takes over the chairmanship of Asean in 2018, at a time when maintaining the region's unity and centrality is increasingly important against the backdrop of geopolitical flux. Within the ten-member grouping, unity is coalescing with increasing people-to-people exchanges. As a result, an Asean identity is forming. But what is it?

In the third volume of *Singapore: Insights from the Inside*, we capture the stories of these relationships and the search for an "Aseanist". Contributors from 20 nationalities give their take on diverse topics on Asean – from education to entrepreneurship, arts and culture to sport, youth to elderly. They include academics, artists, business leaders, diplomats, doctors, social entrepreneurs and thought leaders. Together, they produce 50 essays, illustrations and artwork that showcase Asean's diversity as well as idiosyncrasies, and what makes the region tick.

With Asean's motto - One Vision, One Identity, One Community - this book weaves one compelling narrative that is engaging and entertaining, focusing on five key issues of identity, inclusiveness, innovation, imagination and being an influencer.



**Singapore  
International  
Foundation**  
for a better world

