

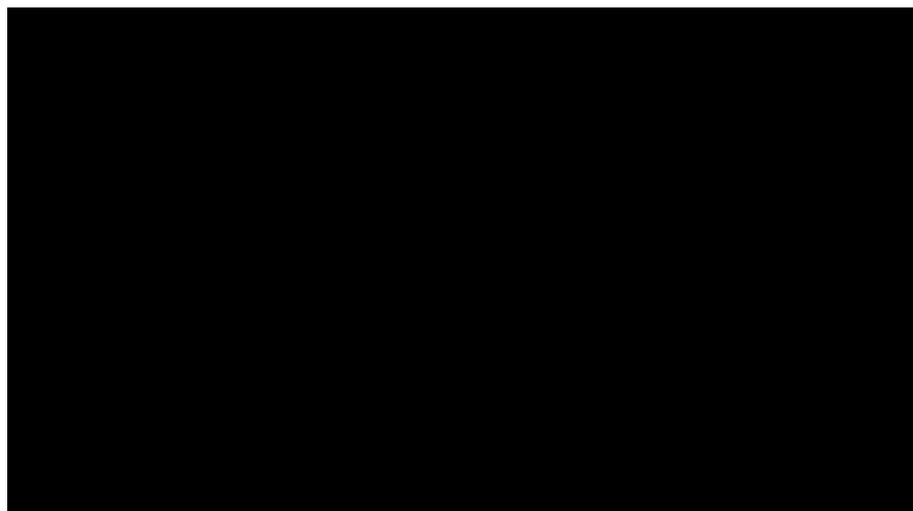


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IPS-Nathan Lectures by Mr Lim Siong Guan: Lecture III - “The Way of Hope”, 14 November 2017

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Mr Lim Siong Guan’s speech

Setting the Foundations for a First World Society

Thank you for coming to this third and final lecture in my IPS-Nathan series on “Can Singapore Fall?”

In my last lecture entitled “The Fourth Generation”, I expressed the hope that that generation would have much to celebrate at SG100, but also said that we cannot simply leave it entirely to them to make the Singapore of their time for themselves. Certainly, there are many things that they can, and should, do for themselves. Each generation must solve its own problems. But some things require the work of a generation or more to bring about. For these kinds of things, we must start to work on them now, to be in time for that future. A Gracious Society, an important ideal for the First World Society Singapore should aspire to be, is such a thing. It would be a society that makes Singapore stand out from the rest of the world. It would be one that our Fourth Generation will be proud of, and benefit from, because we have moved in our generation to lay the groundwork for them to flourish and prosper 50 years later.

A Gracious Society, because of its spirit of other-centredness, will induce better relationships among people and the different sectors of society, including organisations and the government. There is scope for the public sector to exercise greater sensitivity towards the people in its communications. Similarly, there can be greater attention to employee engagement in businesses and organisations, better service to customers, and greater instinctive concern for issues like income and socioeconomic divides.

I know there are already many initiatives for people to help each other, and be kind to each other. There have been many occasions where people spontaneously reach out to help others in trouble. In times of need or crisis, many Singaporeans have shown that they will extend their heart and hand to others. But what we need is to have graciousness in the day-to-day, as an essential feature of our character as a nation. This is culture: an integral part of our make-up as a people.

The Way of Hope

For Singapore to sustain a Gracious Society, we would need to continue to grow, and remain sovereign and independent. Because only by being sovereign and independent, can we exercise choice in how we want to run our society and how we want to lead our lives, and how we want to make the future for the generations to come. We would need the continuing capacity to defend ourselves, and we need to be able to earn our own keep. We do this by honouring ourselves and our talents, and by honouring our loved ones, neighbours, society, country, and beyond — by giving our best in whatever we do. This is the focus of my lecture this evening: how should we think of our economic development and progress, in the context of building a sustainable Gracious Society? How do we create hope for ourselves today, and, even more so, for the coming generations? I call my lecture today “The Way of Hope”. And if we continue as we are without changing, I can only call our course, “The Way of Missed Hope”.

To get to the future we desire, we need to have grit and resilience to stay the course. But haven’t you heard this before — in the newspapers and on television? Am I saying anything new?

In fact, our citizens and students in schools are not short on advice. Sometimes, it is for them to have grit and resilience, and most recently, it is new skills, innovation and entrepreneurship. But to what purpose? For future jobs and personal success? That is important, but no one can guarantee that! How do we inspire and unite our people towards this new path, for a cause greater than ourselves?

We need to have the imagination to think differently, and the spirit and energy to make the change.

The Gazelle and the Lion

There is an old African saying which goes, “Every day the gazelle wakes up knowing that if it can’t outrun the fastest lion, it’s going to be somebody’s breakfast. Every day the lion wakes up knowing that if it can’t outrun the slowest gazelle, it will go hungry.” We may wonder, when we think of Singapore, whether we should see ourselves as the lion or the gazelle.

The first thing to observe is that, whether we are lion or gazelle, every day when we wake up, we had better be running. And second, while we, as Singaporeans of the Lion City, might naturally think we should be like the lion, it happens, this time, to be the wrong answer.

There is a big difference whether we run as number one or number two. The lion in the African saying, as number two, need only follow whatever way the gazelle goes, so long as it keeps up its alertness and its stamina. The gazelle, as

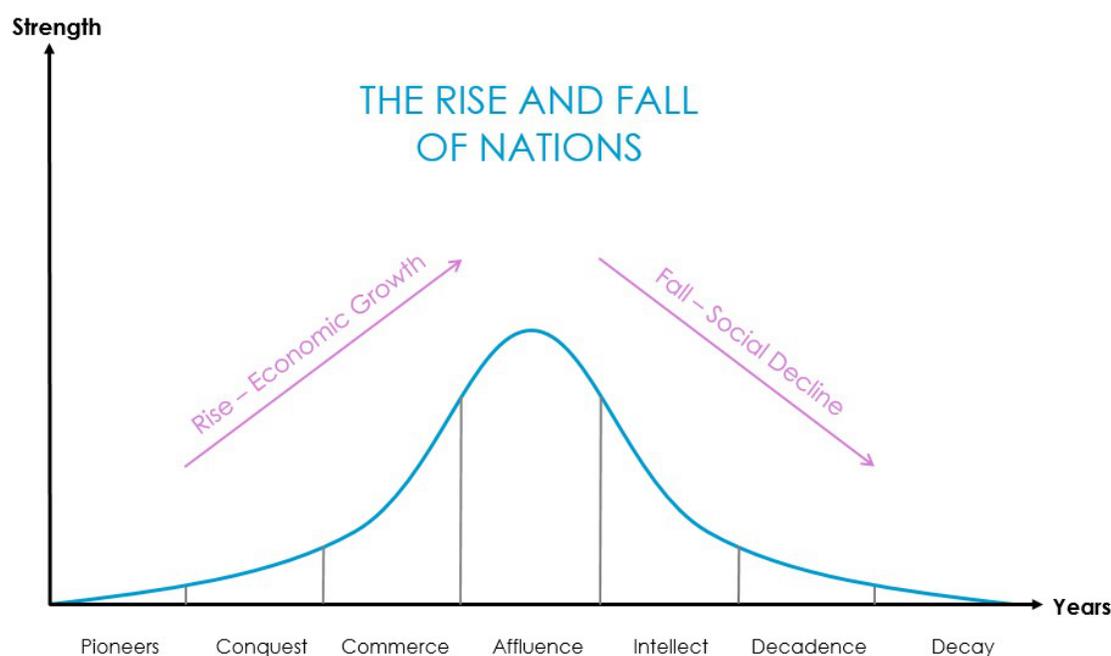
number one, needs not only to run fast, but has to continually assess whether there is a route it can take which the lion cannot follow. So while physical stamina is critical for both lion and gazelle, mental agility is especially critical for the gazelle. I believe Singapore is unique in the world in our geography and our demographics. To have a number two frame of mind is the way of mediocrity and perhaps even disaster.

Singapore is known for some of our unique handling of wicked problems, by learning from best practices elsewhere and the pitfalls to avoid, and adapting our solutions to local conditions. In turn, our provision of public housing to the majority of our population, Central Provident Fund, and healthcare system are policies that are often studied by others overseas.

We, of course, have to be both smart and humble to learn from everyone everywhere, but we have to think for ourselves the best way and create our own smart way — **we need to think as a leader and not a follower.**

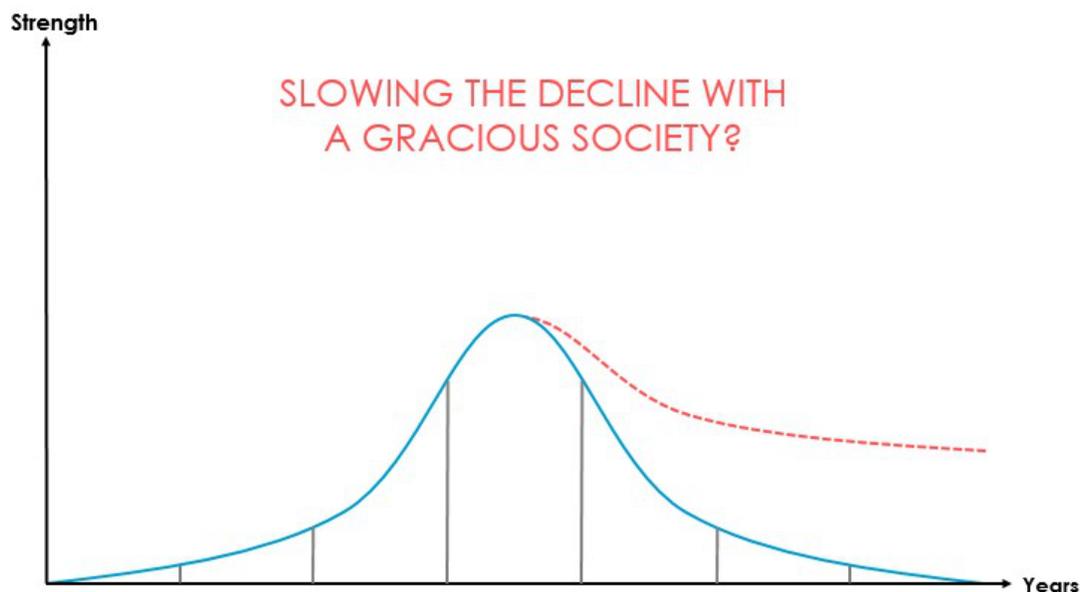
Thinking Graphically

Let me set out the line of my thinking by way of a graph, starting with the reference in my first lecture to the essay “The Fate of Empires” by Sir John Glubb.

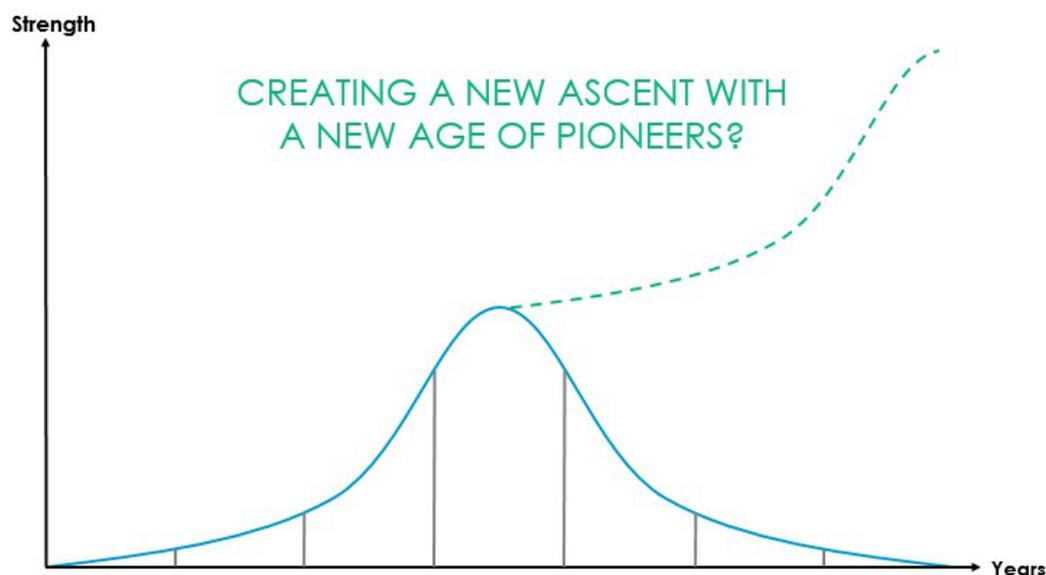


The X axis represents time, the life of the nation, while the Y axis represents the strength of the nation. The seven segments represent the seven stages in the rise and fall of nations referred to by Glubb, so you start with the Age of Pioneers, then the Age of Conquests, the Age of Commerce, the Age of Affluence, the Age of Intellect, the Age of Decadence, and then the decay. The Age of Affluence, of course, is the time where the nation is at its strongest. You can refer back to [my first lecture on the IPS website](#), for details on the specific stages. But what I would like to emphasise is the Age of Affluence, whereby economic growth is accompanied by complacency and apathy, which in turn catalyse social decay.

In my second lecture, I suggested that, if we could work deliberately at becoming a Gracious Society as the prevailing social culture of Singapore, we could ameliorate the effects of social decay. In graphical terms, this is what I am thinking:



There's the red dashed line, so therefore instead of a fall right down to the bottom, we fall more gradually, and we never reach the bottom. The question is, can we avoid the decline? I don't think we can avoid it altogether, but I believe that we can certainly mitigate the effect if we figure out a way to start a new Age of Pioneers and thereby create a new dimension of Economic Growth. What I mean in graphical terms is the following:



If we can discover a way to start a new S-Curve, is there a possibility for us to think in this way? And what we are doing there is, of course, just taking the same curve, starting from the Age of the Pioneers. What we are asking ourselves is, is there a way of conceive of an Age of New Pioneers? Bearing in mind that the pioneers are the ones who break off from the way things are to create new possibilities, because they conquer new lands and think of new ways of getting things done.

Thus, if we were to combine the new ascent with the decay —hopefully, with this idea of a Gracious Society— we end up with the orange dashed line as shown in the following graph:



So that is the concept, and we have to work on both diminishing the decay with a Gracious Society, which I had presented in the last lecture. Now, what I would like to discuss this time round is, is there a way to conceive of the green dashed line so that we end up with the possibility of a new rise. This represents new hope and possibilities for the generations to come. But what is this new ascent like?

New Age of Pioneers

I had mentioned in my first lecture my belief that Singapore had survived and succeeded in its first 50 years of independence for two reasons: First, being a people and a government who **Honour our Word**: we are trustworthy, reliable and dependable. Government policy development is consistent and even predictable. We deliver on our promises, observe the rule of law, and uphold intellectual property rights. We are prepared to learn fast and work hard. Trust is the defining characteristic. Secondly, we **Honour Each Other** as citizens and as human beings. We recognise and appreciate our differences, and make space for each other with respect to race, language, culture and religion. Diversity is the defining characteristic; being a Gracious Society would be an enhanced aspect of this.

Honouring Innovation, Excellence, and Outwardness

But I believe these two aspects of honour, honouring our word and honouring each other, will not be good enough to assure our continuing survival and success. I would like to suggest a third essential aspect of honour for creating a new economic ascent, and that is that we need to be a people who honour Innovation, Excellence and Outwardness. In this aspect of honour, Opportunity is the defining characteristic. It has to do with the way we create opportunity, identify opportunity, develop opportunity, and pursue opportunity. Let me explain.

By **Innovation**, I mean any creation, invention, or improvement that has practical value. We need to welcome new ideas and new ways of doing things. We need to continually think about incremental improvements and also step innovations. Someone has remarked, “If you can’t explain how you are innovating, then you are not innovating.” I recognise that Singaporeans have been encouraged to innovate for years. But what does it really mean for the ordinary Singaporean when he or she is urged towards “innovation”? Some might perceive it as a technical matter best left to the professionals, some may simply see it as a threat to their “Old Economy” jobs.

What I am talking about is a need for a *culture* of innovation. By **culture** I mean the spirit of innovation to be an integral part of our character and personality as a nation and a society. I do not think we are there now, nor do I think there has been a deliberate, conscious, national effort to get to such a cultural transformation.

Let me give you an illustration. Some months back I visited Block 71 at Ayer Rajah. *The Economist* magazine has referred to Block 71 as the heart of Singapore’s technology start-up ecosystem and the world’s most tightly packed entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is an exciting place of youthful energy and enthusiasm. During my visit, I asked one of the very excited members of one of the start-ups what is the greatest problem the person faced, expecting some technical or business issue they have confronted. Instead, the simple answer I got was, “My mother”; the person had done well in university and could easily have got a well-paying job; the mother simply cannot understand why the person is in a start-

up — the rewards are uncertain; even the lifespan of the start-up is uncertain. Parents naturally want their children to be safe and secure.

When I was in Israel recently, I asked “What do Israeli mothers wish of their children?” The answer I got was, “Twenty years ago, Israeli mothers wish their children to be doctors or lawyers. Now they wish their children to be CEOs of start-ups.” Start-ups and innovation have become an integral part of Israeli culture. We can say the same of Finland and Estonia. Singapore has to get there and be exceptional in our own way.

This is a cultural change and a mindset change, and not simply a case of encouraging innovation. As just one example of how we need to change our natural frame of mind, let me refer to the matter of focusing on high grades and awards. In Singapore we are inclined to pile accolades on people who have achieved top grades or got gold medals, and leave others unnoticed and unmentioned. But if we want people to be innovative, which requires them to try more and to learn from failure, we have to recognise people for their effort and not only for their success — have they tried their best in exercising their talents and abilities is the critical question, and not whether they got the gold medal.

I remember asking a friend whose son had taken part in the Rio Olympics but who did not win any medals there, as to what his son was thinking now. He said his son was seriously thinking whether he wanted to spend another four years training and sacrificing other things he could spend his time on. What would weigh heavily on his son’s mind was whether he would be recognised for trying rather than recognised only if he won a medal. Would society think him stupid, or praise his conviction and his tenacity? This is a severe cultural challenge for changing values in society, to value best efforts, as opposed to disproportionately rewarding the super As and gold medals. Nor do we want to simply give everyone a medal for participating. There can never be enough airtime and public recognition to go around for every individual. At the same time, there needs to be far more awareness in society on how to notice and nurture the best efforts of others around us.

Excellence

Next on “Excellence”. To me there is only one definition of excellence, which is to be the best we can be. Excellence is not just the next standard in a grading from satisfactory to good to very good and so on. To me, after very good should come “**outstanding**”, rather than “excellent”. Excellence, to me, is a measure of performance against potential. We have to move away from what appears to be a prevailing attitude on the part of many workers in Singapore — as had been written up in The Straits Times— an attitude of “satisficing”, which means “aiming to achieve only satisfactory results because the satisfactory position is familiar, hassle-free, and secure, whereas aiming for the best-achievable result would call for costs, effort, and incurring of risks.”

When we avoid “trying our best”, by simply doing what is good enough, we are in fact cheating ourselves of what is possible given our individual talents and abilities. This is not just something for government to do, but something which depends very much on the attitude of the individual Singaporean towards work and life. The call often heard for work-life balance is understandable, but regrettable if it is a call to be allowed to *not be* excellent, to *not do* the best possible and to *not be* the best possible. The government can provide incentive schemes and the infrastructure, but it cannot supply the passion and conviction.

I was speaking to someone who said he had heard so much about the start-up environment in Singapore, so he decided to go for a drive around Block 71 on a Saturday night — he found the whole place dark, something he would never find in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. I quote this not to fault the Singaporeans, but for Singaporeans to realise others are not like us.

Outwardness

Finally, about “Outwardness”. Some years back, I was in Shanghai and decided to take the opportunity to speak with CEOs of Singapore companies which had substantial operations in China. One of them was planning to expand his network of stores in China. I said that would be a wonderful opportunity for Singapore students to get internship opportunities for exposure in China. He said he would be prepared to take many of such students, but, “You know,” he added, “they tell me ‘Beijing OK, Shanghai OK, Xi’an Not OK.’” In other words, Singaporeans want to go where things are familiar and predictable. They are not adventurous to try new things and work with the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable. They are not curious to confront what they do not know and to learn from every situation.

This is a serious problem. Often when I am asked what is my best advice for young people looking for their first job, I say, “Chase the opportunities, don’t chase the money.” Money is what you get for what you already know and what you already can do. Opportunities are what allow you to build your future with expanded knowledge and experience. “Don’t chase the money; let the money chase you.”

Another point about Outwardness. No foreign investor brought to Singapore by the Economic Development Board (EDB) is in Singapore for the Singapore economy. They are all here to use Singapore as the base to reach out into the region or globally. Singapore companies which want to grow and expand should similarly position themselves well to go into the region and the world. By all means use Singapore as the test bed for new ideas, but the end goal cannot be Singapore.

The world's largest economies by 2050 are likely to be China, India, the United States, and ASEAN, in descending order. In other words, three of the four largest economies will be in Asia, with Singapore more or less geographically at the centre of them. It would be silly of us not to recognise the opportunity this represents, especially as we also note our major racial composition to be Chinese, Malay and Indian. But this opportunity can only yield value if Singaporeans are outwardly oriented and not inwardly focused.

I quote you yet another example. There was someone who had worked with me in the Civil Service many years ago who one day decided to leave for another career which involved working in a variety of other countries. After 10 years the officer decided to return to Singapore. The officer found a job with a well-established firm, but wondered why the firm needed to so many expats in senior positions. After a year, the officer remarked that “all the expats are required.” If the firm had a new business opportunity in an unfamiliar part of the world, the expat was more than likely to say, “When do you want me to go?” The Singaporean, on the other hand, is more likely to say, “Let me consult my wife,” who, after consulting Google Search, is more than likely to say, “Too dangerous — don't go.”

Please do not get me wrong. It is good to be consulting our spouses and to think about the needs of our family, always. There is nothing wrong with the Singaporean's decision to not go, and to prefer instead the security and comfort of Singapore, but the Singaporean must then also be prepared to accept that his economic value to the firm is not as high as the expat's.

Trust, Diversity, and Opportunity

My formula for Singapore to be able to start a new age of pioneers and make a new economic ascent that breaks away from the past is to go beyond “honour our word” and “honour each other” to “honour innovation, excellence and outwardness”; I can summarise these three legs of honour as Honour Trust, Honour Diversity, and Honour Opportunity.

But to get value out of this, we have to understand it as a matter of culture — of the way we think and act and live as Singapore and Singaporeans. And because culture takes time to shape or reshape, it is an intergenerational challenge which needs leadership and consistency of effort and behaviour, and action now.

The Power of Culture – Values Lived Out

Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School has pointed out that financial results are a “lagging indicator” of a company's health. “They tell you what you've just done. They don't predict the future. Culture is a leading indicator. Culture predicts the future.” She adds that culture is “more important in some ways than strategy,” and that “If you're not thinking about building your culture for survivability and sustainability, then you're not leading.” These are tough words, but nonetheless words of wisdom. I believe that what Kanter says of business applies just as much to nations. Gross Domestic Product and employment figures are a lagging indicator. National culture predicts the course of progress and development of countries.

Bearing in mind that culture refers to the collection of values which are lived out in the thinking and behaviour of the people in a company or country, [let us now listen to Mr Jack Ma](#), Founder and Chairman of Alibaba Group, who spoke of the power of values in a message to the Honour International Symposium 2016.

A little while ago, I was wondering about the meaning of honour, because as you see, Jack Ma himself was saying that honour is such a difficult word, and he had a difficult time trying to get the Chinese character which conveys the point. My answer is that, if we were to understand the deeper meaning of honour, just ask ourselves: what is the difference between liking and loving? We know very often that people use the word “love” as meaning “like a lot”, but that is part of the degradation of the use of words, until we lose their deeper meaning. If you say you like someone or something, it means there is some feature in that thing or there is some characteristic of that person which appeals to you. “Liking” is actually thinking about yourself. “Loving” is thinking about the other person, to say that if you love the other person, what can I do to make the other person more comfortable? What can I do to make the other person happier?

So, loving is really thinking about the other person. That is the same idea behind honour, that if you say, if you honour someone, you are thinking about the other person rather than thinking of yourself. And this is what this idea of building a Gracious Society is about. In fact, the fundamental idea behind a Gracious Society is thinking about other people, and treating other people as fellow Singaporeans, and as human beings.

Lessons from Finland and the Grameen Bank

Let me go on to speak a little bit more about this culture of innovation, excellence and outwardness, because this is what I believe Singapore needs to build up. One might say that culture needs to evolve on its own, but I am afraid we don't have the time because technology and the world move too fast. Modern Singapore was never a product of pure chance or “natural evolution”. And we are not alone. Finland, for example, has recently carried out a total revamp of its education system to build it around a firm belief in entrepreneurship as the future for Finland. Students are taught skills for entrepreneurship. These skills are not just “hard technical skills” — which tends to be the way skills are often narrowly understood in Singapore. Rather, these skills also involve a heavy dose of “soft skills” which includes skills in leadership, in project management, and in working as a team. I am told that a project for students equivalent to what would be Primary Six in Singapore could be to set up a bank!

Finland today has the highest number *per capita* of what are referred to as unicorns — start-ups worth more than USD1 billion each. Despite having a population slightly smaller than Singapore's, it has its sights on producing four Nokia's, the hugely successful cell phone company that had unfortunately missed the turning on smart phones but is seeing a resurrection of its fortunes with new technological developments. Finland is also the home of the very popular mobile game “Angry Birds.” These successes have allowed the Finns to look at the target of four Nokia's as believably achievable. Singapore must find our own way to promote a *culture* of innovation so that it is life for us; what we are, and not just something we do.

I had the opportunity recently to hear Professor Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladeshi social entrepreneur, banker, economist, and civil society leader who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for founding the Grameen Bank and pioneering the concepts of microcredit and microfinance. He said every human being has two parts, the selfish part and the selfless part. The world tends to keep feeding the selfish part. The fundamental reason why Grameen Bank has succeeded when the great majority of institutions who have tried microcredit and microfinance have failed is that the philosophical foundation of Grameen Bank is feeding the selfless part of the human being.

Professor Yunus shared that the great majority of Grameen Bank loans had gone to women and that a critical way in which those who had succeeded through the Grameen Bank loans had spent their new-found income was to provide their children a good education. He then heard that a good number of these children, after completing their formal education, had lamented that they could not find jobs. On hearing this, he told them to stop complaining about not having jobs, but instead to set up their own businesses. The children responded that they did not know how to do so. He told them to go and learn from their mothers. This is entrepreneurship in real living —people who have to do things for themselves and imagine possibilities for themselves, rather than waiting for somebody to create the jobs for you.

Values and Soft skills

Let me quote another example of how critical values and “soft skills” are. I have a friend in Israel who is now retired. When I met him recently, he told me he was going around schools in Israel to set up robotics clubs. I know many schools in Singapore too have robotics clubs. I asked him what they did in his clubs. He said all the members had to go through lessons in social responsibility. I would never have expected such a need for members of robotics clubs. He explained that robots have to benefit society, so members of robotics clubs have to be trained to think about benefits to society. He added that another lesson members of robotics clubs had to learn was how to cope with failure. He explained that the robotics club members were all targeting at taking part in international robotics competitions; most of them would never win, so it is essential that the students learn how to cope with failure.

Singapore needs to do likewise in emphasising values and “soft skills” in our schools, in higher education and continuous learning, and in society at large, if we hope to be a nation of enterprise and innovation. But we need to recognise that values and soft skills cannot be taught the same way as hard skills, they have to be demonstrated, practised, and absorbed in daily life, not just by children and students, but by community leaders, public servants, employers, parents, adults, everyone. Academic results are simply not good enough. Being trustworthy and being willing to think, try, learn, lead and serve are possibly even more important. To deal with a future which is uncertain while quickly changing, we need to realise that the relevance of particular hard skills may well be limited to a few years, while that of most soft skills are likely to be beneficial for a generation at least.

Reaching Out to Singapore's Potential

Singapore needs to succeed ahead of other nations *not* as a matter of pride or ambition, but as a simple matter of surviving despite the odds against us. What countries can be depends on just three factors, namely, geography, demographics and technology. Technology can make up for, but just to some extent, the physical limitations of geography. Similarly technology can make up for, again just to some extent, the human limitations of demographics. What technology cannot do is to substitute for smart immigration, productive work attitudes, and efforts to maximise the

development of human talents and abilities.

Well-conceived economic policy can produce the greatest benefit from an optimal mix of the factors of geography, demographics and technology. But how much of such economic policy may actually be implemented depends on how much room there is to do so within the realm of domestic politics, where the degree of openness and sense of urgency of Singaporeans to such change will decide how much of the good ideas may be adopted. It is a supportive combination of political culture, innovation culture, excellence culture, outwardness culture and change culture that will make the future for Singapore.

Singaporeans need a strong sense of self-confidence and courage that come from much trying and learning from doing. However, self-confidence and courage cannot be built up by talking or lectures, but by active learning, and failing, and improving, and trying again. Will parents allow schools to give assignments where answers are not clear, results are not certain, and which their children will not only find difficult, but may actually fail to get to the final targets?

I was speaking to a school principal recently where she lamented that her school organised trips for their students to spend time in a kampung in Malaysia for the experience of a new environment to help develop enterprise and self-confidence, but many parents had refused to grant approval for their children to go. She asked how I would deal with such a situation. I said if I were the principal, I would meet all these parents and tell them that the ever-evolving and uncertain future would require their children to be able to cope with new experiences and unfamiliar situations; by not allowing their children to go, they are actually denying their children new skills in self-confidence and courage which could only be developed by living through the experience, and they are thus disadvantaging their children as compared to those who were going.

Confidence in overcoming our limitations

I have now spoken over three lectures on the theme “Can Singapore Fall?” Of course Singapore can fall. But we can choose to organise ourselves so that we have little reason to fall. I once met a Swiss professor who is familiar with our universities in Singapore. I asked him —as Singaporeans so often do when we meet expats and foreigners— what we can do better. He responded, “That is the problem with you Singaporeans. You are very capable in many fields. But you don’t know it or do not accept it; you don’t build upon what you already are capable of to produce new ideas and try new ways.” I take the professor’s words to heart. If we think we can, we can!

The geographical limitations we face will always be with us, and climate change will no doubt pose new challenges. But if we choose to confront these adversities directly, take confidence in what we already have and know, learn from everywhere but think for ourselves, refuse to be put down by others or to put ourselves down, choose action over talking, and move with purpose and urgency, I am confident that we will surprise even ourselves.

Winning as Both City and State

We are both city and state, so winning a good future for ourselves must be winning both as city and state. While one to three per cent economic growth may be the new normal for developed economies of nation states larger than us, it is highly questionable as an acceptable new normal for us as a city when other cities are growing at a significantly faster pace. How can Singapore be satisfied with one to three per cent when cities in the region and elsewhere could be growing much faster? Jakarta is probably growing at a rate of something like 10 per cent, [Ho Chi Minh City at eight per cent and Kuala Lumpur at six per cent or more](#).

Higher economic growth will give us greater options in dealing especially with the social challenges coming upon us particularly from a rapidly ageing population — indeed Singapore has been identified as a super-ageing society — and a diminishing indigenous workforce. To get higher growth rates requires higher productivity — which we can get through a drive for innovation, excellence, and outwardness — but also a larger workforce, if we are prepared to recognise our need for it.

When I was Chairman of the EDB, I met the CEO of a large global company which had set up a significant research centre in Singapore. However, it had also recently set up a substantially larger research centre in Shanghai in the same field. So I posed the question point-blank to him as to whether he was going to close down the Singapore centre in favour of the Shanghai centre. His response was highly instructive. He said, “We go to wherever the talent is.” What this means is that if Singapore does not seek to attract and take in whatever beneficial capability and people are available from outside Singapore, in addition to developing the talents and abilities of Singaporeans as best we can, the enhanced economic activity will not happen, and our signal to the world will simply be, “It is OK.” But is it *really* OK?

Of course we must always insist that when a Singaporean is most capable of taking on a job, the job must go to them and not to a non-Singaporean. This is meritocracy at work. Meritocracy is the smartest way by which a small nation like

Singapore can make its future from the human capital available to us.

The smallness of Singapore should also be used to our advantage in terms of speed and experimentation, but it must be experimentation with a view to scaling up for the world outside Singapore. Technology is a matter of life and death for us, as it must be for all small nations, so every Singaporean student must know technology. At the same time, Graciousness is what would make Singapore a great place to live in, and give meaning and purpose to the eternal striving for survival that is Singapore’s fate. Being a Gracious Society would unlock what David Halpern has referred to as “the hidden wealth of nations” where the extent to which citizens get along with others independently drives both economic growth and well-being.

Much of what we can become depends on us, the citizens. It is a choice of whether to “die” in due time, on account of complacency and apathy, or to live well because we act in good time to do the things which will take a long time to establish. Culture takes time to shape, but culture also becomes the foundation of strength which cannot be easily broken. What we need most of all is not maps — no one else is in our position, and no one else’s map will get us to where our strengths can get us to. We have to move forward with our own compass of values, to honour our Word, to honour each other, to honour innovation, excellence and outwardness.

The Honour Circle

I close with what I call the Honour Circle: start with honour-driven individuals, who will do all they can with their talents and abilities. This builds to honour-driven families, where children grow in self-confidence and strong values they imitate from, and practise with, their parents and siblings. We then go to honour-driven communities, of which Gracious Society is a key feature. Next we have honour-driven organisations which may be businesses or civic organisations, where superior leadership allows people to be the best they can be and do the best they can in pursuit of innovation, excellence and outwardness. Finally we have the honour-driven nation where culture and values and clear leadership in government and our national institutions create the foundation for honour-driven individuals to thrive and be the best they can be.



THE HONOUR CIRCLE

Singapore Need not Fall

In summary, we can look forward to a thriving, successful Singapore if we:

- Maintain our nation brand value of integrity and trustworthiness
- Use our diversity in race, language, culture and religion for synergistic effect
- Have facility with technology and continuous change
- Focus on identifying, developing and harnessing talents and abilities at all levels
- Release the energy and imagination of the young to be involved in national life
- Take Advantage of the rise of Asia, the Internet and the middle class
- Urgently establish a culture of innovation, excellence and outwardness

Thank you, and my very best wishes for a future we must try to see clearly, choose deliberately, and build now, so that our grandchildren and great grandchildren can still call Singapore home where they have the best chances for being the best they can be!

