

IPS-Nathan Lectures

Singapore: The Next Fifty Years Lecture V: Society and Identity

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Introduction

Good evening and welcome to the 5th and final lecture in the IPS – Nathan Lecture Series.

In the last two weeks, the unprecedented and spontaneous outpouring of grief and gratitude at the death of Mr Lee Kuan Yew has been a national catharsis. We have learnt that even in his passing, Mr Lee's final contribution was to bring all of us together in ways never done before, to realise that in our grieving, we rediscover our common identity.

And so it is perhaps fitting that the topic of this final lecture in the SR Nathan Lecture Series is Society and Identity. Our sense of nationhood has never been stronger than in the past weeks. When the fighter jets soar overhead and the national anthem is played on August 9, that lump in our throats will tell us who we are: One people, one nation, one Singapore.

But is it possible to more specifically define our identity, besides knowing that we have one? I jotted down a few sentences and asked some friends to identify the country which I described as follows:

We are an immigrant society, and therefore persistence and resilience are the hallmarks of our identity. We've been open to the world, but in recent years have turned more inwards and even somewhat hostile towards foreigners. We take pride in our egalitarian ethos, even though income inequality is worsening. We squabble amongst ourselves, but to foreigners we close ranks. We have a can-do attitude which can be perceived as being arrogantly proud of our exceptionalism. We tout our meritocracy as a core value even though it is starting to fray. Above all, we love to celebrate ourselves and our achievements, and how the best is yet to be.

Who are we?

The Singaporeans I asked unanimously said, of course that's us, Singaporeans.

Interestingly, another group I asked replied: of course you're describing our USA and the values behind our American Dream.

So here you have two countries, worlds apart almost in every possible way, from population and geographic size to historical origins; from political and social culture to current and future challenges; and yet the American Dream and the Singapore Dream are almost interchangeable.

Upon reflection, that is not so strange. After all, once you strip a Dream of its specific cultural context, many societies aspire for largely the same things in life. The common element between the American and Singapore Dreams is simply that both societies are audacious, brash, and young enough to believe that whoever you are, and wherever you come from, this is your land of opportunity. This is where you can achieve your personal and family dreams, and pursue a life of meaning and purpose.

But this is more the immigrant's Dream of Singapore than the Singaporean's Dream nowadays, simply because many citizens do not now feel that they can achieve anything if only they just tried. Yet it is crucial to Singapore's continuing survival and well-being to maintain, nurture, and polish this Dream, both in terms of keeping its borders open to the outside world, as well as maintaining social mobility within.

So, in tackling this final lecture, I want to ask a simple question: How do we maintain the Singapore Dream as a meaningful, purposeful aspiration for all Singaporeans for the next 50 years? What are the most critical things we must do to overcome future or already-emerging challenges to this Dream?

After some deliberation I've consolidated the various challenges and must-do's into three major, over-arching tasks. They are:

- **first**, to strengthen the cohesive diversity which underpins our identity, against a climate of increasingly narrow rigidity;
- **second**, to improve social mobility and a culture of egalitarianism, in the midst of a fraying meritocracy and worsening income inequality; and
- **third**, to build a collaborative governance style and an information-rich civil society.

Let me now deal with each of these.

First, strengthening cohesive diversity. Our immigrant origins have created mechanisms for harmonious racial and religious co-habitation, but the traditional fault lines which were successfully held together, are facing un-familiar, non-traditional pressures which may result in new cracks.

There is increasingly vocal social diversity from people of different LGBT affiliations, or alternative family norms such as single or unmarried parents, or same-sex couples. In addition there is increasing intra-ethnic diversity from immigrants or

foreign workers who may belong to the same race as defined by our traditional CMIO (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others) categories -- but hardly identify or socialize with each other. For example, new residents from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong all form their own cliques which also largely exclude the Singaporean Chinese. The same is true or even more fragmented for South Asians, whether foreign workers or new citizens.

At another level, the HDB heartland world-view, with its kopi-tiams and roti-prata stalls, is being assailed by the slick and slightly intimidating globalisation represented by Marina Bay Sands and Billionaire's Cove in Sentosa. In other words, race and class and a consensus on social issues are becoming increasingly complex and intertwined in Singapore.

The average Singaporean is anxious and confused by this onslaught of what is becoming a divisive diversity. That anxiety – what social psychologists call cognitive dissonance when reality increasingly diverges from our expectations – arises when the traditional racial lens of CMIO or the traditional norms of heterosexual orientation, what social scientists call hetero-normativity, a big word, no longer seem adequate to describe a rapidly changing Singapore society.

One way to resolve cognitive dissonance is to abandon our stereotyped presumptions and expectations and simply treat people as individuals and not categories. We should consciously blur or even abolish the CMIO model's simplistically rigid racial categories, and welcome the multiple identities and more complex sub-ethnicities which is increasingly the real Singapore of today.

The CMIO model, created out of necessity in the aftermath of a racially charged road to independence, has helped to create common ground between those of different tongues and dialects, but it also has the effect of oversimplifying the diversity that is our social mix. How we define people often shapes how they behave, so the less we pigeon-hole people, the more chances we have for a cohesive diversity. Just thinking about a post-CMIO model already seeds a future paradigm shift.

Singapore is ethno-culturally more similar to New York City than to the homogeneity of Tokyo or Shanghai. The hallmark of New York's success is that so many culturally traditional or ethnically specific neighbourhoods can co-exist cheek by jowl, and even next to skyscraper icons of global capitalism. What seems to be totally unplanned and therefore chaotic has its own logic: because there are no rigid expectations, there is no clash with reality and therefore no cognitive dissonance.

Everyone is unique, everyone is quirky, everyone is rude and kind at different times, and everyone has to simply respect and even appreciate the other's difference.

This genuine form of cohesive diversity *is* messy, dynamic and defies classification, but New Yorkers, for all their amazing diversity, all love their city. Like New Yorkers, Singaporeans must also embrace each other as individuals and not as categories along the CMIO model. Without stereotypical expectations we can accept and appreciate each person as different but from whom we can learn new things. In a post-CMIO model people will have more time and space to replace old stereotypes with more nuanced complexities, reflected in more varieties of socio-ethnic identities. This is a strategic imperative not just for enriching the Singapore identity, but to continually attract the world's best talent and make this island, in the words of PM Lee, "the best city to live, work, and play".

Another way to strengthen cohesive diversity is for the majority race in Singapore to consciously overcome what one insightful non-Chinese blogger has called the mindset of Chinese Privilege, which is the attitude of a majority race towards minorities where it does not see itself as racist but acts on assumptions which are based on privileges which only it can have as the majority race. It can manifest in small ways, such as speaking in the majority-race language even when foreigners are part of the gathering, or making jokes which are racial slurs but justifying them because they were light-hearted and not malicious.

A final building block for cohesive diversity is recognition of the marginalised people whom my research assistant Andrew Yeo compared to the composer Claude Debussy's famous dictum that "music is the space between the notes", meaning that there is equal importance in what is unseen or unheard. It is the voices of the foreign worker, the single mum, and the many other silent spaces between our national notes which make our Singapore song complete and more interesting. Even though they are neither citizens nor permanent residents, the 1.5 million "permanently transient" semi-skilled foreign workers and domestic helpers cannot be an invisible community overlaying the visible Singapore, with uneasy points of contact which can become flashpoints. A society measured by the height of its skyscrapers and size of its shopping malls is in my view, the ultimate Dubai-style dystopia; far better that we measure ourselves by how we treat the marginalised and voiceless in our midst.

As the cacophony of strident voices increase in the future – the gays against the anti-gays; the born-again Christians against everyone else; the PRC Chinese against the "sua-ku" local Singaporean, the elite Delhi-born immigrant against his

uncouth Tamil neighbour – and the people in the silent spaces between the notes struggle to even make a small sound, we should not be worried, and should perhaps even pause to listen. It is just a new Singapore song in the making, not commissioned for a famous performer to sing, but created by the people themselves, from the ground up.

Second, improving social mobility and the egalitarian ethos. The path to success in Singapore has largely been through academic merit in transparent national examinations. That is the basis of what we call Singaporean meritocracy, which has its philosophical roots in Confucianism and its organisational principles in Imperial China's elite class of scholar-bureaucrats. The model has served us well in our early years.

But having already achieved the 50 year continuous growth from third world to first - over time the Singapore model is in danger of being a static meritocracy, which sieves people based on only a narrow measure of capability in single snapshots of time – examination results basically -- and from there-on creates a self-perpetuating elite class. Ironically, the original social leveller and purest form of Singapore-style meritocracy – our educational system – may perpetuate inter-generational class stratification rather than level the playing field.

The warning signs are clear:

- Only 40% of the students in the most prestigious primary schools live in HDB flats, in contrast with 80% of all primary school students residing in HDB flats.
- More than half of PSC scholarship recipients live in private housing, compared with only 15% of the general population. And 60% of PSC scholars come from only 2 schools – Raffles and Hwa Chong.
- 63% of university-educated fathers, 37% of those with secondary school qualifications, and only 12% of fathers with primary education or less, had children with university degrees.

No doubt, the index for social mobility is still higher in Singapore than in many other countries, including some of the famously egalitarian Nordic countries. This is comforting but no reason for complacency, especially against a background of worsening income inequality globally.

Some people have advocated that the way to redress structural inequality is to practice affirmative action for the disadvantaged group; for example, to give bonus examination points to any student whose parents did not attain university education.

This would however be the start of an unending process of affirmative actions which will only demean and discredit our meritocracy in the long run. I believe that further reforms of the overall education system can promote social levelling without undermining the principles of meritocracy nor the academic rigor for which Singapore is so well known. Let me share some of these possible measures with you:

- Ending pre-teen streaming and the PSLE exams, and having all schools teach children a continuous 10 years straight through to Sec 4, so that less academic pressure early on in life allows more time for teachers to focus on the personal development of students, which has been found to have a great influence on later academic achievements.
- Giving admissions priority on the basis of distance from homes has to also be relooked, because the most prestigious and elite schools are also located in the most wealthy parts of the island. The handful of top primary schools have 5-year waiting lists and parents or their maids queue overnight to get a place for their children. We must not forget that when the PAP came to power it took the then radical step of essentially nationalizing the entire educational system, in order to achieve its then socialist goals. Similarly radical steps need to be at least discussed, if not immediately adopted.
- Replacing the rigid, narrowly-directed GIFTED educational program with a far broader, multifaceted program which focuses on the special needs of all students, whether it be due to special talents in the arts or sciences or other academic areas, or special disabilities such as mild autism or dyslexia. There has been much talk that education must now aim to develop the full potential of every student. It is time to walk the talk. Schools in a geographic cluster can specialize in their own areas of excellence, and serve special-needs students from that cluster, whether the special needs are special talents or disabilities.
- Replacing or at least augmenting the traditional “A” level results with a specially crafted, Singapore version of the Scholastic Aptitude Test or SAT which, as the name implies, seeks to measure the inherent aptitude of a person for critical thinking, rather than just exam performance. Everyone is critical of the American SAT system, and how it is also culturally biased towards the privileged. But the American SAT, for all its faults, has been a social leveler for American high school students seeking to enter the best universities. I am not advocating that we adopt an American SAT test, but an aptitude test which is not based purely on examination performance in the past, which can be used to augment the performance-based measurements of our young. If the PSC awarded its prestigious scholarships only partly on the basis of A level grades and partly on

the basis of a Singapore-style SAT which includes psychometric tests, we may have higher hopes of President Scholars, Perm Secs, and Ministers not coming from just RJC and Hwa Chong, but from polytechnics and ITEs too.

- Examples of other easier and simpler programs include: providing student counselling services in every school, because disproportionately more students from lower-income and less-educated families have emotional and domestic problems which inhibit their academic performance; or introducing volunteer tuition services by university students for secondary schools, as part of mandatory community service modules in all our universities, which will help students who cannot afford expensive private tutors. Yet another idea which is already starting to happen, is the rotation of top principals and teachers into neighborhood schools. All these and other piecemeal measures with the same intent, can add up to create a powerful overall impact.

Besides reforms to the educational system, the civil service needs to also lead in social levelling. Recent announcements that non-graduates will be allowed to fill positions previously eligible only for graduates is a good start. But only if the most elite cadre of civil servants – the Admin Service – changes its recruitment criteria to replace academic pedigree with psychometric and other aptitude tests which create an open and level playing field, can we start to have a continuous, dynamic meritocracy where one's destiny is not already largely determined at 12 years old, reinforced at 18, and virtually fixed at 22 years old.

Third, building a collaborative governance style and an information-rich civil society. When I first entered university some forty plus years ago, the target of student activism was an obscure Latin expression, “In Loco Parentis” – which is a legal doctrine whereby certain institutions such as universities, actually assume the legal powers of a parent.

The Singapore state has not assumed the same level of paternalism over its citizens, but it has come close, making decisions which might elsewhere be individual responsibilities. Whilst this has been widely accepted in the past 50 years, a paternalistic governance culture may need to change to a collaborative model in the future. This is already happening with the abundance of debate about directions facing Singapore in the post-LKY era. However, such a governance culture of participatory democracy can only work if the institutions of civil society can be actively engaged in decision-making.

For that to happen, civil society players need access to that lifeblood of robust discussion: freely available and largely unrestricted information. Information is the

oxygen without which civil society players suffocate in their own ignorance and resort only to repetitive drumming of their causes, but without the ability to really engage with their own members, with other players, or with government. Access to information is an existential imperative for civil society to perform its functions responsibly and knowledgeably.

The currently unequal access to information is called by academics, “information asymmetry” and one of the reasons all governments are averse to sharing information is not just because of the sensitivity of secrets, but because information is power, and asymmetry between seeker and owner of information shapes their relative power relationship.

To rectify this imbalance, some civil society activists have called for a Freedom of Information Act or FOIA. This would require open access to and declassification of all government archives after 25 to 30 years, and almost unfettered access to information about oneself at any time.

So should Singapore simply adopt a Freedom of Information Act? Just joining the bandwagon is not by itself meaningful. Of the 99 countries which have FOIA legislation are such beacons of liberal democracy as Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, China, Pakistan, Thailand, Russia, Yemen, and all the “Stan’s” of Central Asia. The reputations of these countries for good governance are so questionable that one must wonder whether their own FOIA are actually devices to smoke out and track potential dissidents.

Of course, most Western liberal democracies do have effectively functioning FOIA, but while it has redressed information asymmetry, the downside is that it also exacerbates the adversarial relationship between civil society and government. Whilst this may be the underlying basis for a check and balance system in Western political cultures, it does not encourage a collaborative governance style. It can even be dysfunctional for the conduct of diplomacy and general statecraft, which must often require total confidentiality between parties. Just witness Hillary Clinton and her whole debacle about her private email system, which was her response to unfettered access of all government information in the United States by citizens.

One possible way to redress information asymmetry within a collaborative governance culture is to legislate a Code on Information Disclosure which is not legally enforceable but morally binding, and sets out the principles by which ministries can or should not protect information, and the importance of open sharing of information for a civil society. Ministries would be required to employ independent

Access-to-Information Officers such as retired judges, to evaluate and give written replies to information requests. Media attention and public pressure would serve as leverage in cases of non-compliance with the Code, or where there is controversy. Hong Kong, I understand, has a system similar to what I have described, and it may behoove us to study that with more depth.

But with more information equality, there will inevitably be more and different interpretations of data, of events, of history itself. Official narratives, such as the controversies surrounding Operation Coldstore, will be questioned and debated by generations of new historians. The young possess a certain oddly dispassionate objectivity towards history compared to many of us for whom the past 50 years was filled with deep emotion and very personally partisan perspectives. The young don't take our version of history as the gospel truth; they want to discover the facts themselves and make up their own minds. This is healthy, because the attribute of critical enquiry and continual search for the truth, will stand the next generation in good stead as they transit to becoming the leadership generation.

Rather than consider such re-assessments of history to be revisionism which has to be prevented, we should accept that information equality will inevitably lead to such questioning. But we should also have confidence that history, through the collective wisdom of time and millions of people past, present and future, will accurately and fairly assess the enormous contributions and legacies of our past leaders, including Mr Lee Kuan Yew. We should trust in our young people enough to allow space for them to develop their own opinions. In the end, our future leaders of Singapore should be bold enough to own the future rather than simply defend the past.

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History comprises both the universally experienced, historically momentous events and the small, personal milestones of each person. In this way, SG50 is a special year of meaning for me because on one hand, whilst we collectively commemorate our fifty years of independence and simultaneously mourn the death of the first and last of our founding fathers, I shall also celebrate the arrival of my first grandchild. Such is the cycle of life, of persons dying and babies being born.

My grandson due next month, and who will be 50 when Singapore celebrates its 100th anniversary, can only say he was born a few months after Mr Lee passed away. But even for my children, who are young adults, Mr Lee was always more a legend than a real person. Few young people today have ever known him other than as the textbook father of independent Singapore. My eldest son's only memory of Mr Lee

was when he and his wife visited my family on the funeral of my father, some 16 years ago when Ren Hua was only a teenager and Mr Lee was already 75 years old.

When I was detained by Mr Lee under the ISA I was only 24 and he was already 53 years old – in his fearsome, intimidating prime of his life. When I joined the board of GIC, which he chaired, I was 44 and he was 72; when he inaugurated SMU's Ho Rih Hwa Lecture series, named after my father, I was 50 and he was nearing 80. Such is the age gap that most of the people who worked with him have passed on and those who worked directly under him have long retired. To the extent that in our initial years Singapore was almost synonymous with Lee Kuan Yew, he defined our national identity and we looked towards him for signals on how to behave, to think, to view ourselves. He said Rugged Society, and that was our identity during my generation's youth. As nation-building gained traction and we started to embrace ourselves as a people, a society, and a nation, we started to experiment with our own personal markers of identity. Today I daresay Singapore comprises multiple identities.

We commonly describe a national identity as something constructed from tangible markers such as Singlish or durian or chicken rice, or intangible values such as pragmatism or tolerance, or whatever. If we put that all together to sculpt a single, proverbial Merlion identity, I think it will be iconic and recognizable more to foreigners than to us. The Merlion, I think, we have never really adopted as our identity because it is artificial, and any identity is not a static snapshot of a people, frozen in time.

It is a continual and never-ending work in progress of an evolving people. Our identity may have started more as a rojak salad than as an artificial Merlion but over time even the rojak salad will evolve further, with new and unusual ingredients (like a Saladstop menu, I should add, to plug my son-in-law's company) While the Merlion remains an un-natural and static animal.

Identity is what you are attached to, what you would fight for, what you care about. In a previous lecture I proposed that we develop a uniquely Singaporean Human Development Index which would measure our overall 'wellbeing', besides only having GDP as an indicator. These intangible markers which measure our progress as a nation, will in part also form our identity, because it will give heft and weight and shape to what we value. We must put in place a framework for this fluid discussion to take place, to be mapped and to be expressed.

Whilst Singapore's identity is rooted in its immigrant heritage, and that open-ness should always be a cornerstone of our sense of self and underpin our receptivity towards those from other cultures, we should not feel lost if we are not able to define a single common identity. We are all identities in creation, and the end result will not be uniform. Instead, by sharing stories of who we are, we find resonance with each other. These collective stories can kindle of sense of "being Singaporean", even if we cannot articulate or pin down specifics.

And so I'd like to close not by defining the Singapore identity but by simply sharing with you my personal journey as a migrant to these shores. My father was a fourth-generation Singaporean, with his forefathers working as boat-builders in Tanjong Rhu. They built the tong-kangs or deep-bottomed bumboats and barges which ferried goods and people between Singapore and the hundreds of ships which made Singapore the pre-eminent port in Asia since several hundred years ago.

But I was not born here, did not study nor live here. I received my naturalized citizenship by a technicality – because my father was ambassador of Singapore to Thailand and our home since childhood became *technically*, sovereign Singapore territory. So for several years as a teenager I raised the flag every morning at our hastily erected flagpole on *technically* Singapore soil, and eventually I qualified to be a citizen. But my first extended stay in Singapore, for more than a week or so at a time, was at the age of 20 when I came here for National Service. Not ever having lived here, I wanted to see what it was like to be a Singaporean.

During NS I was taunted by some as "jiak-kan-tan" which means "eat-potato" and is a derogatory term for someone who has lost his roots and apes the West – much like a banana in Asian-American slang. Though I can do a decent Singlish by now, my natural accent is between English and American, and my Mandarin has no dialect overtones.

Although I studied at Taiwanese and American universities, I finally graduated from Singapore University. So what is my identity? I'm not sure; and I will always remember that Mr Lee Kuan Yew once told me to my face that the only smart thing I ever did was to marry a Singaporean..... Because he was wise to know that through Claire, I would find a sense of home.

I have lived and worked in this country since 1972: altogether 43 years. I met my wife here, my children were all born and grew up here. My simple answer as to why I chose to live and put down my roots here, is that here I do not feel a stranger. In Thailand where I spent my childhood I spoke Thai but was always an outsider. In

Taiwan and in America I learnt much and made good friends, but I was a stranger in a strange land. However, Singapore's multitude of races and cultures made me feel no longer alien. Perhaps that is also what makes other new migrants decide to settle in Singapore – the fact that they could create their own identities here.

An open-ness and acceptance of foreigners – and indeed, of other Singaporeans who may be different from the mainstream in various ways – can perhaps become a defining characteristic of our identity. We can create our own identities even as we inherit certain common characteristics.

Singapore is my home because whoever I was, or am now, or want to be, I feel I can be that person here. However, this statement of pride is not universal. I am fortunate because I am a privileged, Chinese, heterosexual, male businessman. Can other persons, whose music is the silent spaces between the notes, also believe what I just said, so that we can honestly declare that cohesive diversity – this delightful oxymoron – is the unique marker of the Singapore identity? For the sake of the next 50 years, I fervently hope that we can, and will.

I now come to the end of my journey, a humbling exercise in discovering my own ignorance as I tried to speak on a wide range of topics. It has been almost one year since I was asked to be the first SR Nathan Fellow, and 6 months since the first lecture. I shall henceforth forfeit my title as temporary professor – my life goal -- and return my faculty card to the NUS Registrar, and hope my SMU colleagues welcome me back. And I can finally return to my favourite past time, as some of you have known, of watching consecutive and quite forgettable movies on long haul flights.

I would like to thank several people during the past few months.

First, to IPS: its Director my old friend Mr Janadas Devan, who was not completely honest when he said that this would be a simple thing you could do in your spare time. I would like to thank the Committee for the Nathan Fellowship for making me their first victim, and Mr SR Nathan, who took the risk of asking me to be the first Nathan Fellow, despite my lack of academic credentials and my reputation – quite undeserved of course -- for always putting my foot in my mouth. Thank you for your trust and I hope I have not dishonoured you. Good luck to the next victim ... I mean the next Fellow.

To my research assistant, Andrew Yeo, thank you for being available 24/7 and for passing on many of the quite scatological and almost defamatory comments about me on social media after each lecture.

Andrew is a poster boy of the new Singaporean success story: poor student in a neighbourhood school, failed his Poly exams, clawed his way into a SIM distance learning university, but did so well that London School of Economics accepted him for a Master's degree in social policy. In my view, IPS is lucky to have him and he will be a real asset wherever he goes. And I am proud that at least in Singapore, we do have an open enough system, and we do have young people who are not the paragons of typical success stories, and Andrew truly has my respect for that.

To my children, all five of them, thank you for organising get-togethers with your peers so that I can understand how younger people feel about things, and not pretend that I am a young person. As only you know, everything that we do together as a family brings us that much closer and stronger, and the dinner conversations where you all gave your views, have contributed much. To my fiercest critic, strongest supporter and best friend: my wife Claire, thank you in particular for never mincing your words.

And finally, to the many of you whom I reached out to during these months for your views, who read and commented on the lectures, and whose views I may have shamelessly borrowed, or who wrote to me after attending a lecture or reading an essay – thank you so much for being part of this journey. Just simply knowing that all of us are out there, each trying in our own ways to make this a better Singapore – is very comforting.

Over the past half year I have put forth a range of ideas, some possibly crazy and some possibly workable. I hope I have not offended anyone and I apologise if I have. The ideas themselves are not that important. What I hope to have done, however, and which I hope will last long after tonight, is to encourage people to think their own thoughts and put them out there in the marketplace of ideas, so that in this messy exchange of voices and opinions, we all learn something from each other.

In the next 50 years – the Singapore after Mr Lee Kuan Yew -- the line between leader and follower will start to blur; we will not just be disciplined and unquestioning followers. Our leaders will walk amongst and not ahead of us; they will be part of, and not simply lead, the national conversation. Other people may march to their own drumbeat and at their own pace. We may look from the outside, to be less orderly and consensual than in the past. After all, civil society is not a disciplined army; it is not an organized orchestra producing the soothing melodies of a lovely symphony. It is a loud cacophony of voices, of disorganized aspirations, of an exciting market place of ideas.

But I certainly hope that what will never change from one generation to another, is the passion to make this country continue to succeed, to be proud of who we have been, are, and will be, and to revel in the cohesive diversity that makes us all Singaporeans – whatever that word may mean to each of us.

The 13th century Persian poet Rumi once wrote something which should speak to each of us. He wrote,

“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean, in a drop.”

In other words, you and I are not cogs in a machine, or grains of sand, or drops in the ocean. In each of us is the whole of Singapore. Each of us represents the collective identities and histories which make up our ocean and on which we shall continue our journey together.

Thank you for these many hours of sharing. Good night and be well.