

Contents

Editor's Note	004	Speaking to One Another Sheila Pakir	072
New Compasses, New People			
Feeding Singapore Beyond SG100 Allan Lim	010	The Virtualisation of Singaporean Identity Sheryl Foo	078
Know Thyself, Know Thy Nation Bernise Ang	014	The Maker Movement Veerappan Swaminathan	084
Stories of a Smart Nation Cheryl Chung	020	<hr/>	
New Maps for a New World			
Bold and Innovative Government (BIG) Daniel Lim Yew Mao	024	Beyond a Scarcity Mindset: A Letter from My Future Self Aaron Maniam	090
Enduring and Endearing Companies Fang Eu-Lin	030	21 st Century Girls: Cultivating Creative Confidence with Tech Ayesha Khanna	096
Places of Courage Grace Sai	034	Pulling the World to Singapore James Chan	100
Effecting Change through Intimate Networks Kia Jie Hui	038	What, No Flying Cars Yet? Juliana Chan	106
A Singapore in Permanent Beta Kwok Jia Chuan	044	To Infinity and Beyond Kenny Leck	110
Technology and the Public Good Liu Feng-Yuan	048	Asia's Centre of Gravity for Internet and Mobile Platforms Nick Nash	114
How Might the Next Phase of Governance Look? Lewis Liu	052	Financing the Social Revolution Robin Chan	118
The Dream of the Sharing Community: A New Social Contract Melissa Kwee	058	The Next Stage of Engineering Innovation Roger Liew	122
Ageing—the Sunrise Industry of our Little Red Dot Muhammad Nadjad Abdul Rahim	062	<hr/>	
What Should We Reclaim?			
The Singapore Design Brief Olivia Lee	066	In Praise of Everyday, Small Futures Adrian Kuah	128

The People as Our Future: Resilience as a Society Cassandra Pee	132	(Re)Writing Our Stories Thia Shan Zhi	192
As One Eugene K B Tan	138	Restoring Our Capacity to Give Tong Yee	196
At the Crossroads Once Again Farah Cheah	142	Singapore's Next Big Thing is Small Vaughn Tan	202
What We Don't Talk About When We Don't Talk About Immigration Grace Chua	146	Reimagining "Singaporeans" Vernie Oliveiro	206
Trust Jeremy Au	150	Night Markets Zakir Hussain	210
Going Slow to Go Fast Kenneth Goh	154	
Made in Singapore Natalya Twohill	158	Vision and Vulnerability	
Singapore—A Sporting Nation Nicholas Fang	162	Leading in a Changing and Complex Singapore: High Alignment, High Autonomy Chong Yong Cong	216
Bearing Fruit: The Rise of Singapore's Civil Society Ow Yeong Wai Kit	166	Why I Worry. And Why I Hope. Ervin Yeo	222
Planting (for) the Future Philbert Gomez	170	Pasar SEAnglish—Pax Singapura? Joshua Ip	226
Of Dogs and Demons Rishi Budhrani	174	The Art of Innovation in the Legal Sector Mahdev Mohan	230
Putting the Multi Back into Multiculturalism Mohamad Saiful Md Anuar	178	The Neighbourhood School Malminderjit Singh	236
Bridges Across Stormy Waters Saleemah Ismail	182	International Law Natalie Morris-Sharma	242
To be Rojak is to be Singaporean Shermay Lee	186	That Rainbow Phua Mei Pin	246
		
		About the Editor	251

Editors' Note

Milestones provide a useful opportunity for celebrating past achievements. Last year, Singapore marked its 50th birthday, took stock of past successes and came together in a medley of celebrations – both government-organised and ground-up. This collective drive not only created a strong sense of national pride, it arguably also strengthened the notion and core of nationhood in Singapore since it involved active citizen participation in nation-building. For a young Singapore – city, state and nation all at the same time – fostering a collective identity and deepening a sense of belonging among citizens is an important social adhesive in an increasingly uncertain world.

Equally important, though, the momentum of reflection should be carried forward once the dust settles on the celebrations; to stimulate more ground-up initiatives that will involve a broader base of society participating in the country's future.

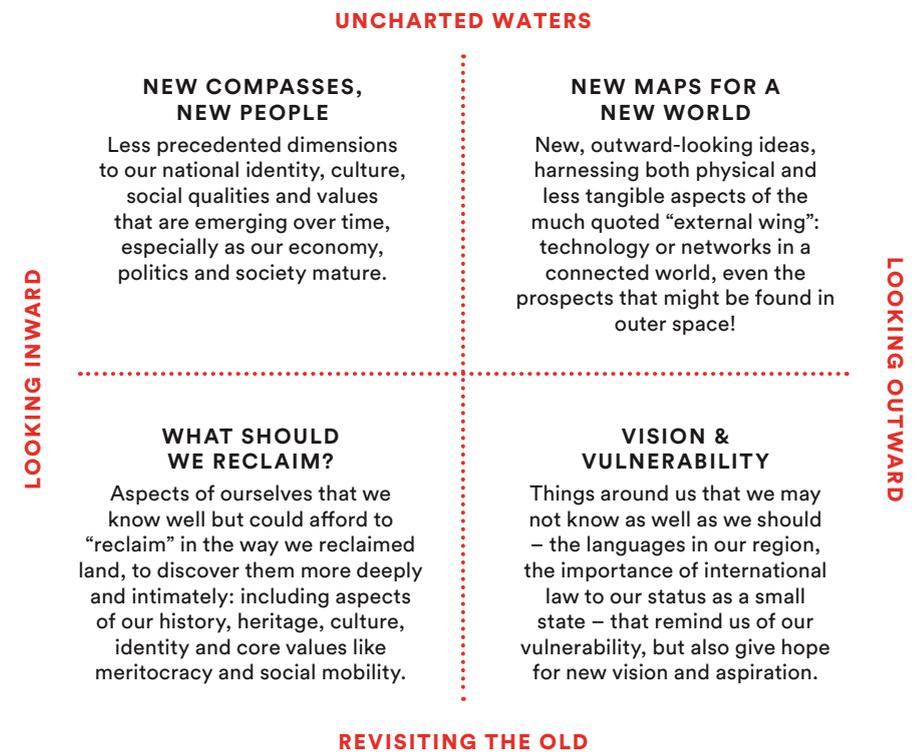
It was with these considerations in mind that the idea of *The Birthday Book* first took shape. When some friends and I initially brainstormed the idea for this book, we were clear about a few principles that would guide the shape and form of the publication: we wanted to engage a wide cross-section of society to solicit diverse views on our collective future; we wanted to engage young and emerging voices who would be stakeholders of Singapore's future for a long time to come; and we envisioned the book not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle to catalyse a movement to think critically about Singapore's next chapters. We wanted the book to become a lasting presence, published each year around National Day, with the number of contributors intentionally congruent to Singapore's age (51 this year, 52 next year, and so on).

Drawing on these initial animating principles, *The Birthday Book* is a collection of views, expressed through essays with multiple styles. Besides essays written in a formal tone, we have contributions that include the recipe of a local dish, a letter from the future and a design brief. The diversity in the submissions reflects the breadth of the contributors' backgrounds, an essential ingredient that enriches its content. The 51 contributors comprise literary personalities, academics, journalists, entrepreneurs, civil servants, academics and a stand-up comedian, among others.

In a bid to solicit the views of younger Singaporeans, most, if not all, of the contributors to the book are 45 years of age or younger.

Regardless of their background, all contributors were given a single and common prompt: "What is Singapore's Next Big Thing?" Rather than having an overarching theme, this prompt, which is the single thread that binds together all submissions in this book, amplifies the diversity of responses. We plan to change the prompt each year, so that we continually explore different facets and dimensions of our country.

The essays in the book are organised within the framework of quadrants below. The vertical axis compares the essays on whether they deal with old issues in Singapore or if they point out new scenarios. The horizontal axis contrasts between essays that deal with Singapore's internal and external considerations.



Interestingly, among the 51 essays, a majority address Singapore's internal considerations (the two quadrants on the left). This is natural, I think, given the national introspection taking place after SG50. Even so, it is telling that a substantial proportion of contributions still deal with Singapore's regional and global opportunities and challenges, acknowledging the continued relevance of the nation's external environment to its future.

Within each quadrant, the many voices in the book, each writing in their personal capacity, capture the layers, textures, nuances and contrasts about Singapore. This has helped create an interesting interplay between the different pieces and reflects the richness of views brewing within the Singapore society. Some pieces speak directly to, echo or rhyme with one another (Juliana Chan and Roger Liew on science and technology, for example; or Daniel Lim and Liu Feng Yuan on the future of government; or Natalya Twohill and Veerappan Swaminathan on Singapore's "maker" culture). Others take different, even opposing, views (Phua Mei Pin, Rishi Budhrani and Jeremy Au have different perspectives on trust and hope). Some of the pieces adopted a more meta-approach and speak to the value of capturing different stories and perspectives, as Thia Shan Zhi did.

The pieces in each quadrant are deliberately arranged alphabetically, according to the first of each writer's names to be listed (these could be individual names or family names, in different cases). This is admittedly unconventional, but we thought an arrangement not based on a forced clustering of ideas would do most justice to the breadth and diversity of the pieces. Whether you read the book sequentially, dip into different portions on your work commute or discuss sections with friends and family, I hope you will find interesting, serendipitous connections within and across the different quadrants.

From its inception, *The Birthday Book* has been the labour of love of a group of people and not just an individual. My close friend Aaron Maniam, with whom I brainstormed the original idea, helped me to develop an abstract concept, hatched in a cab ride, into a reality. I've been grateful for his advice in the initial ideation stages of the book, as well as his creative and visionary essay.

The Birthday Book would not have been possible without the efforts of the contributors. All 51 worked patiently, within a tight timeline (the entire process, from conceptualisation to publication, took all but three months), to produce innovative, insightful and thoughtful responses to the prompt. I hope that,

through this publication, each of them gets a platform to advocate their voices and opinions to a broader audience and contribute to the future of Singapore.

Ethos Books and its editor, Ng Kah Gay, believed in the idea of the book from the outset, providing trustworthy and reliable partnership and counsel every step of the way. In particular, Kah Gay took over some of the administrative and back-end responsibilities for *The Birthday Book*, which allowed the writers and me to focus on ensuring that the content was ready within the tight timeline.

Last, but not least, a vote of thanks must go to you, the reader, for supporting this project and for according the content in this book thoughtful consideration. *The Birthday Book* is meant to be a birthday gift from young and passionate Singaporeans to the nation. I trust that you will find it worth treasuring.

Malminderjit Singh
August 2016