

okay um let me ask you the first question um uh kishore oh okay to call you kishore otherwise um you know in 1965 singapore suddenly became a country

were singaporeans concerned about their future at that time they probably are were and also at that time since you and i are almost the same age you must be just about ready or almost ready to go to university

what was the mood of young people or students in singapore at that time regarding higher education or what's the mood of at that time it's called the university of singapore rather than nus um what's the mood in the university at that time um it would be interesting to hear your perspective well in 1965 i was in what they call free university one you know yep yep three year one that was the year when singapore was kicked out of malaysia right there were absolutely no senator who did you go to uh well at the secondary school i went to tanjongkatang technical school and then for the pre-university i went to san andreas school okay san andreas okay cool yeah so i was in san andreas school in 1965 when singapore was expelled and

the the mood was doom and gloom

and certainly and by the way i i actually since i came from a very poor family yes uh i never dreamt of going to university at all i mean i assumed that at each stage uh i was going to quit school and start working but i kept getting bursaries and scholarships that kept me going you know so i got bursary since and then through school your parents cannot afford it my parents couldn't afford it yeah hey my parents were separated by their people and uh in 1961 actually my father had gone to jail so so he could be some death so we i mean i was i was born on the wrong side street and uh so in 1966 when i finished my high school what they called hse levels right right i started working as a salesman earning 150 a month and i didn't apply for the university because we couldn't afford it right out of the blue i got the president's scholarship and the president's scholarship gave me 250 a month wow so that's how i ended up in the university of singapore mike some of my classmates uh then my classmate there's another president scholar at ethio oh yeah he had applied for oxford you see and so you got a place there and i never applied for oxford because i couldn't even dream of going there so i that's how i ended up being uh going to the university of singapore if i hadn't got the president's scholarship i wouldn't have had an education but uh when i arrived in the university the mood was uh there was a sort of awareness that there was uh challenges for singapore by the same time the university was also very critical of the government and in fact wrote an article called a question of decorum i don't know that you've seen it it's uh what's very critical of lee kuan yew that was published in the student newspaper called

[Music] the singapore undergrad and if you want to you know there's a there's another book i just published for again it's just been renewed reissued can singapore survive you can download an electronic copy okay okay great it's called what what's the title appendix you can read my essay which is very very critical of week one but that that essay actually in some ways was good for me because that's lee kuan yew and gokengsri and rajatna came

so when i graduated in 1971 and i studied philosophy

because of the president's scholarship i was bonded i had to work for the government and i was assigned to work for the ministry of foreign affairs

so but the university my university experience was absolutely wonderful for the best years of my life in the campus of the university of singapore and bogeydima because i my teachers were excellent and i made very good friends lasting friendships that still are uh and i'm still friend to the people my classmates in national the university of singapore

yeah i i i'm sure at that time many of the faculty at the university of singapore from great britain is that right yes in fact but the head of my department of philosophy was from the united states he was a can trained philosopher roland pochetti but the two pro taught me a lot john clark and colin davis were both in the uk uh-huh yeah yeah uh right well let's fast forward to today um well well there are the concern among many of the academics that the government of singapore may be leaning too much on the quote unquote practical side of education which of course is entirely understandable somehow the two pillars of singapore now nus and ntu are able to deepen their their intellectual bandwidth very very much so the fact that they are ranked so high nowadays it's not an accident

since these universities are all funded by the government it must also mean that the thinking with the policy makers of singapore have sort of made it necessary have made the necessary transformation in the way they think about education uh as you're so deeply involved with the government and of course with the lee kuan yew school how did that happen because that that that a practical minded government policy makers can actually also understand the fundamental importance of intellectual bandwidth well i mean as you know the

singapore singapore's biggest blessing is that his three founding fathers lee kuan yew gokengswe and rajar nam were as brilliant as america's founding fathers yes he's not more if not more brilliant than them actually in some ways yes and so they understood very well that if you really want to create especially after mr rajaratnam announced that singapore was going to be a global city you know because we didn't have a intellectual fell from malaysia right in 1965 we had no interland so we made the world of interland and if you're going to make the world of interland you have to have you have to develop an elite they can compete globally and they of course understood that the only way to do this was either to both send the brightest students to study overseas in the best universities so you notice that the singapore cabinet has got more graduates from the harvard kennedy school than any other cabinet in the world you know and uh at the same time he also realized the importance of developing the uh local universities but i think i would i would say this i'm i'm guessing obviously that when they put money into the singapore universities i think none of them dreamt that the singapore universities would become world-class so fast that was a bit of a surprise to them and of course now they're very proud of the fact that they're world class

and they realize that you cannot really become a global city unless you have all the attributes of a global cities not just about the technical manufacturing or banking or things like that you also have to have uh an intellectual environment you know so you need universities you need concept halls you need museums they understood all that

and therefore they are prepared to invest in universities

so if i may follow up on that well singapore early on it's in its kind of vision it it is you know designed to be a global city so part of that is what you said is bring your own citizen up to that global elite standard so they are able to interact with the world and now that singapore we can pretty much evidently say singapore has achieved that and one thing that it's ought to do is to bring its uh other people from less developed countries to its standard such as you know asean countries students from asean countries and education is the critical piece to that how do you see this is a contentious topic but how do you see singapore to balance the need to educate its own people to bring them to to to to the global higher standard as as well as the need to to make itself a local magnet for the region well i think certainly the the university does some of it but at the same time i think the singapore

how do you say politics in singapore is the same as politics anywhere in the world of course if the university is funded by the state then clearly it's got to meet the needs of its citizens first and that's why the role of nus and ntu has always been to educate the singapore population but at the same time at the graduate level uh especially at the masters and phd level they realize that they have to bring in talent from all over the world that's right and in some specific areas like the lee kuan yew school where i was uh the dean uh the mission of the lee kuan yew school was not not just to train the future leaders of singapore but to train the future leaders of asia and beyond so what happened is that when the lee kuan yew school was set up mckenzie did a pro bono study for actually did it for mr lee kuan yew on how to create a world-class school of public policy in singapore and one of their conclusions is that we should train the global elite so the classroom the lee kuan yew school 20 of the students were from singapore 20 from china 20 from india 20 from southeast asia and 20 from the rest of the world that was like an ideal composition of course you never get it exactly right but so unlike the rest of the university which trained primarily singaporeans the lee kuan yew school actually primarily trained

ratio foreign to undergrad as well or that's mostly for graduate students um lee kuan yew school is only a graduate school oh okay it's only for graduate students we have undergraduate just masters and phd students i see i see

okay so so in the since the beginning of the year school eurovision the school's division what makes singapore this local magnet to train asians leader therefore uh you didn't have to really uh deal with the the complexity of balancing local education needs and the kind of training this international talents yeah and also we had to raise a lot of money because you know the the man who was played a critical role in the founding of the one year school

the man who actually played a critical role was dr tony tan of course yes yes minister of education he told me that it's very difficult to fund the school of public policy because in a business school you can charge very high fees that's right customers pay high fees for a business school when they get an mba they get a higher salary so they can pay off first when you in a school of public policy when you get it and join the government you're not going to get high salaries so as a result of that fundraising was a very critical part of my job team and the good news is that within 13 years when i was dean we managed to raise an endowment of 500 million singapore dollars which made us the third best endowed school of public policy in the whole world after the fifth and number one is princeton number one in total size was the harvard kennedy school they had a billion dollars for i think a thousand students number two was a then called the woodrow wilson school but now it's lost its name the princeton school of public policy they had 600 million dollars for 200 students per capita they were the richest school and we uh we had 300 million dollars for 300 students so per capita we were the same as howard kennedy school and we were only uh [Music] less than 10 years old and we oh wow so we are one of the most successful fundraising campaigns in history yep that's right that's impressive and you're right the thing this donor was dr lee kashing who gave us 100 million singapore dollars that's right and of course pick up our government give us a matching grant so so you reach 300 million right away or 200 million 200 million okay yeah 100 yeah yeah um

probably the following question is something that i'm sure lingers in lots and lots of people's mind um just a few decades ago china was not a major player globally or even regionally

and especially in southeast asia say three decades ago today it is um and the trade between asean and and with china has of course surpassed that of europe this last year which i'm sure shocked the europeans quite a bit yeah um so in other words the importance of of dealing with china understanding china comprehensively culturally politically militarily just about everything else is important for the entire southeast asia and of course your public policy school must concern yourself quite a bit about that but perhaps so should nus as a higher higher education institution which should produce many of the singapore if not asean leaders in the coming decades

how do you think nus or even ntu need to deal with that letting their their products which is their students really appreciate and understand china comprehensively well i think the study of china has always been an important priority for singapore and that's why as you know dr go kings we set up the east asian institute the originally called the east asian institute for philosophy i think but now it's the east asian institute that's the one that uh chung young men was running until recently and now bert hoffman a former world bank officials running but whatever papers they used to produce on china they used to be read very carefully by the cabinet of singapore uh including mr rico and you and so but they have also other departments studying china's economy uh china's history you know one gang who was taught in singapore too as you know yep he's fantastic by the way it's been an important part of the work of both uh nus and ngu

okay okay

um yeah that's um so at the undergraduate level and and generally speaking

how does nus or even ntu uh make sure that their students have that understanding i mean it's okay to do it it's obviously doing it at the new school and but the undergraduates is the impressionable group of youngsters how do we make sure that they understand that or do they understand that well i think they do and but of course the priority for singapore number one is asean yes so the nus has stepped up a campaign to send its students to spend some time in asean countries and us and nus has set up something very successful for the nus overseas colleges and they tend students to spend some time in colleges in the us and also colleges in china and colleges in asean and that that is one way of making sure that the nus graduate doesn't just credit with an awareness of singapore but is aware of the larger geographical environment

if i may ask you a question um you know we would talk about kind of where the us is at now i would like to talk about to get your thoughts on the future of the u.s right one thing that you mentioned to us and also we also found other faculty members telling us something similar is within the cabinet you see many uh western trained cabinet members hks or oxford uh ox cambridge right um yeah there's still in a way a perception that a us if you can get into those schools you'd go there rather than going to i mean of course if you have scholarship that's even better

do you see in the future aus kind of come overcoming that perception how would anyos do that or do you see that continue to be the trend and this is like the u.s competition with university in the west and then we look east there's a northeast there's competition with qinghua and beida what's your view on the future competitiveness of the us and how it should compete well i think you're right in fact many of the top graduates in singapore go to study in oxford and cambridge and harvard and yale and if you look at the cabinet the prime minister studied in cambridge and harvard you know and so on and so forth but there are some faculties in singapore that still attract the best high school graduates from singapore they they go overseas so the school of medicine for example right right if any uh top graduate has a choice between nus school of medicine and an overseas school of medicine will pick nus school of medicine and similarly a law graduate uh he has a choice between nus law school and overseas law schools who pick the nus law schools so they get the top of the top graduates so some faculty still do that successfully

and so by you but you're right i mean in some faculties let's say economics they will go and study in top universities in u.s and uk will that change over time it's possible but i think increasingly the government is trying to see whether it can encourage something when studying in beijing and chinco but a few have gone but not many right but that will change slowly yeah do you uh you know obviously we can tell from if we look at the let's say dial back 30 years ago and look at the faculties at nus most of them will be trained from a western university oxford cambridge they brought back not only the knowledge but also the the way of doing academics the way of studying academics doing research and they bring back the culture as well so this kind of uh culture that's brought back by overseas students has been an important uh factor of

changes and and looking ahead how do you see that particular elements uh continue to influence uh singapore and also i'd be curious to get your thoughts on china as you know china has already had so many overseas students uh in the us in europe and in singapore as well

sorry so what was your question again so the question is how do you see those overseas student body uh will change the culture of their of their mother country going forward under the current global uh situation where you see you know there used to be a lot more chinese students in the us than now and and for singaporean students the ones we talked to they're now more inclined to go to uk rather than going to the us because they don't perceive u.s as a very safe place or or you know they they worry about being discriminated do you think that will have an influence uh impact on um sort of the the future uh society in singapore well i mean i still see lots of singaporeans going to the top universities in the world like harvard or yale or stanford or princeton or colombia i think that that will still carry on i think because they're still i mean at the end of the day they're still the greatest universities so the attraction will be there uh i don't see them i mean but the second league i think american universities will suffer a lot uh in the past the second tier universities will also get lots of students but now increasingly they'll say why why am i paying so much money for second tier american university so then some may stay in singapore look for other alternatives i don't know whether they'll go to uk or australia or whatever but they'll always look for opportunities but i think you're right some may also go to china increasingly

yeah actually the my my high school river valley high school now has a small percentage of students great after they finish their pre u2 would go to beijing or to study yeah that would not happen when when at my time yes of course yeah yeah max well i guess the me or just to insert a bit background about myself so that you can understand where it came from i was born in china around 90 early 90s uh studied after high school i went to canada and i've been i studied i did my undergrad in university of toronto so it's my master and then i worked for u.s companies right so i as a chinese as a chinese i still have my chinese passport uh when i look at my future i sort of see i have to almost vow my loyalty to one side or the other uh singaporeans singaporeans of my generation i think they are lucky that they don't have to make choices like i do uh how do you see this generation of singaporeans like people around my age in their 20s or 30s uh how do you see them after graduating from university what qualification should they be having that the previous generation probably do not need to have like how is education supposed to shape a new generation of people that's different from the past well you see the the big you're right the singaporeans are very lucky they don't have to choose because when i was young uh a lot of my classmates just dreamt of migrating and leaving singapore because singapore's future looked very bleak and they didn't see much hope for singapore right so a lot of my classmates actually did migrate and did leave singapore but nowadays uh i think most young people who prefer to come back and work in singapore you know because the opportunities here are better now than and and life is better safer in singapore than in many uh uh american cities so absolutely and canadian cities so there isn't that much of a brain drain from singapore as there used to be uh in the past and uh they then and also if you're young and entrepreneurial you realize that the asean region is also going to do very well so that's another reason to come back to southeast asia so when they see startups like brab and you know kojak

and others doing well they say okay maybe i can also do that in singapore so uh unlike young people from china they got to decide whether they want to spend their future in china or in the west uh i don't think singaporeans need to make that choice right few people working overseas for some years and then coming back to singapore right and one thing you just mentioned is you know people today come back to singapore because there are they see a lot of opportunity there for growth uh by saying opportunity for growth i'm sure you don't mean just to serve the five million people on the island right really you are covering the whole uh asean asian if not the the whole world in singapore that's right so i i would assume you know part of the vision that the education system has to build into its students mind is this ability to understand people with very different background which happens to be part of singapore society yeah right uh yeah do you do you see that's going to continue to be a competitive advantage for singaporeans and what you described i mean singapore very early on is where we must have our students understand its neighboring country as well and other cultures as well as our own to be able to deal with them uh is that trajectory going to continue or do you see that shifting

no i think the the i see i mean i see singapore very committed to educating its people both about singapore and the region you know and the world beyond because singapore sees that its future is tied to the rest of the world so i don't think singapore will become a narrow nationalist place

in that sense an open society is that awareness uh with the top elite the government policymaker or is that like across the society that understanding

i think across society across society the awareness that the opportunities are in the region right so so there wouldn't always there is no say populated foundation for thing like made in singapore or singapore first the people are aware that they have to be integral we are too small we have to we no we can't do that there's no space for populism in singapore that's right right right right right how do you use darshan go ahead go ahead you finish here no it's for for us who i mean it was a former singaporean he knows singapore and i spent some time studying in singapore and i came to realize all this kind of fantastic uh trace of this country of its nation it almost feels like if everyone else if every country in the world have the same mindset within a much more peaceful place and that's also i think you know this cooperation framework is something you've been advocating as well but unfortunately you know people on the other on either side uh don't tend to think like people in the middle like singapore uh

how will that change and will singaporeans singapore students or singapore's future education play a role in advancing that or will singapore just be looking at the trend of history and kind of writing on the trend do you see singaporean students or like its education somehow help to educate the world in terms of understanding the importance of and and the skills of living with each other well i think singapore is very modest to what his ambitions happen singapore is not going to try and move the elephants us and china it's just going to be careful take care of itself try to be helpful here and there but singapore understands his limitations very well as a small country so right now he's sending very clear signals he wants to be a good friend of the united

states and a good friend of china but he won't try to intervene and say let me teach you how to get along that would be stupid for support right right not to other asian country either no

um i don't have any more questions except i would like to ask you not on education but your view about the future of asean since you're you're a world expert in diplomacies and in geopolitics that would also help us understand singapore better and also in our writing of about nus which is an important part of singapore well i mean that's an easy question to answer since i co-authored a book

it's called the asean miracle i'm sure you can get it from your library okay okay and i spent a lot of time in that book explaining why asean is so fundamental and so important to singapore uh so i am a passionate believer in asean and if you read that book you'll find i explain how asean has converted southeast asia from the balkans of asia to one of the most peaceful and prosperous regions of planet earth you know just to give one statistic in the year 2000 japan's economy was eight times the size of asean wow now in the year 2020 japan's economy is only 1.5 times bigger than asean by 2030 asean's economy will be bigger than japan right so it's it's it's a no-brainer so that's a tremendous opportunities in asia for singapore

okay i'm i don't have any more questions max do you uh no i think we we have uh gathered quite a bit of insights from kishore thank you very much for your time it's we know it's very late for you so we will let you go and probably have i don't know if you have more interview tonight but uh hopefully not i don't know i have to get up i need to give a lecture so i have to go to get ready now okay okay thank you very much and uh thank you for sending me this book ah thank you safely yeah thank you thank you thank you okay goodbye