

**2015 Preliminary Examination
GENERAL PAPER
Paper 2 Suggested Answers**

1. Why is the promise of continual human progress and improvement ‘alluring’ (line 8)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are witness to advancements ... and nearly all forms of human achievement at a rate never seen before. (l.1-3) The design of a superior kind of human being – healthier, stronger, smarter, more handsome, more enduring – seems to be in the works. (l.4–5) Even immortality may now appear feasible (l.6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is ‘alluring’ because human beings are making breakthroughs in knowledge / understanding our world at an unprecedented pace likely to endow ourselves with/ acquire better/desirable physical traits experiencing greatly increased life-span/ life expectancy <p><i>**any 2 of the 3 points</i></p>

2. What is the author’s intention in asking a series of questions in lines 9–11? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why should we care? And more specifically, why should philosophy care about failure? Doesn’t it have better things to do? (l.10–11) 	<p>The author asks a series of questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to stimulate further interest [1] OR to provoke the reader to think more deeply about the topic [1] OR to introduce the role of philosophy in an interesting manner [1] OR to pre-empt questions that readers might have [1] OR to highlight the importance of failure/ lead the reader to realise that eradicating failure is not all beneficial [1]

3. Why are the words ‘failures’, ‘errors’, ‘fallacies’ and ‘naiveties’ (line 15) in inverted commas? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any major philosopher typically asserts herself by addressing the ‘failures’, ‘errors’, ‘fallacies’ or ‘naiveties’ of other philosophers, only to be, in turn, dismissed by others as yet another failure. (l.13–15) 	<p>The words are in inverted commas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to suggest that the opposite is true [1] OR to show that they are not really failures and errors [1] OR to point out that it is incorrect/inaccurate to label them as such [1] OR

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> because the author questions the meaning/ usage of these words [1] OR not everyone may agree on the meaning of these words/ the meaning of these words are subjective [1]
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4. What is the author suggesting about the nature of philosophy in the last sentence of paragraph 2? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As it were, philosophy succeeds only insofar as it fails. (l.22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author is suggesting that the nature of philosophy is paradoxical / conflicting/ contradictory. [1] <p><i>**ironic = 0 (nature of something cannot be ironic)</i></p>

5. Explain what the author means by saying that ‘failure reveals just how close our existence is to its opposite’ (lines 24–25). Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out of our survival instinct, or plain sightlessness, we tend to see the world as a solid, reliable, even indestructible place. (l.25–27) Failure allows us to see our existence in its naked condition. (l.23–24) The failure ... could be more than enough to put an end to everything (l.30–31). ...while it may not always be fatal, failure does carry a certain degree of existential threat (l. 32–33) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are inclined/ predisposed to regard the world as a secure/ stable/ everlasting/ enduring/ unshakeable place/ think that nothing can cause the world to become unsafe/ damaged. [1] However, failure enables us to view the world/ reality in its undisguised/ true state/ situation. [1] and failure can result in danger/ risk to our lives// the elimination of/ wipe out/ humans. [1] <p><i>**Note: Award 1 mark for each of the above points. The points are independent of each other</i></p>

6. Why does the author use the phrase ‘the most self-aware or enlightened excepted’ (lines 40–41)? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of us (the most self-aware or enlightened excepted) ... (l.40–41) 	<p>The author uses the phrase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to establish rapport with the readers/ to make the readers think he is one of them. [1] OR

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> so as not to offend readers who regard themselves as among the most self-aware or enlightened/who believe that they do not need the therapeutic function of failure. [1] OR to show that there are people who do not think they 'suffer chronically from a poor adjustment to existence'. [1] OR to avoid making an absolute statement/qualify his claim about people's 'poor adjustment to existence'. [1]
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7. Explain the author's use of the word 'may' in line 63–64). [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utopias may look like celebrations of human perfection, but they are just spectacular admissions of failure, imperfection and embarrassment (l.63–65) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utopias only appear/seem to be triumphs of human ideals [1] but expose/highlight the flaws/ fiascos/ shortcomings and awkwardness/ discomfort/ uneasiness of <u>current</u> existence/ in reality/ the real world/ current society [1] <p><i>** Note: To get second mark, answers MUST contrast with <u>current</u> reality</i></p>

8. Why does the author argue that 'we will be virtually perfect and essentially dead' (lines 71–72) if science solves all our problems? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we will be perfectly healthy, live indefinitely, and our brains ... will work like computers (l.69–70) but I am not sure what we will have to live for (l.71) our being essentially failing creatures lies at the root of any aspiration (l.73–74). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is because human beings will be faultless/ unblemished/ flawless/ have the best attributes when science solves all our problems. [1] (<i>**perfect = 0 → lifted</i>) However, this will cause us to lose the motivation to live/ to have nothing to strive for/ no goals/ ambition to work towards. [1] <p><i>** Note: Must make explicit link to 'virtually perfect' and 'essentially dead'</i></p>

9. What does 'biological failure' (line 81) refer to and why have we 'pretended not to see it' (line 83)? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No matter how successful our lives turn out to be, how smart, industrious or diligent we are, the same end awaits us all: 'biological failure'. (l.81) The 'existential threat' of that failure has been with us all along, though in order to survive in a state of relative contentment, most of us have pretended not to see it. (l.81–83) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author is referring to death [1] and we ignore/avoid confronting/discussing the fact that it is ever present/always there [1] to remain seemingly happy and satisfied/ so that we can live in relative/apparent bliss. [1]

10. What is the author's intention in comparing Tolstoy's Ivan in paragraph 9 with Bergman's Block in paragraph 10? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how to approach the grand failure, how to face it and embrace it and own it – something poor Ivan fails to do (l.87–88). Block is faced with grand failure ... does not hesitate to engage Death head-on ... does not flee, does not beg for mercy (l.90–92). 	<p>The author's intention is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to contrast their differing attitudes towards death. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to highlight importance of embracing death like Berman's Block instead of trying to avoid it/ fleeing from it like Tolstoy's Ivan. <p>** Note: Answers <i>MUST</i> show comprehension that 'grand failure' refers to death – learning from failure etc = ZERO</p>

11. Using material from paragraphs 4 to 6 (lines 34 to 57), summarise why the author believes that failure is important.

Write your summary in no more than 120 words, not counting the opening words which are printed below. Use your own words as far as possible. [8]

Failure holds immense importance for human beings because ...

From the passage		Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure is the sudden explosion of nothingness into the midst of existence (l. 34) 	A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when it happens, there is an abrupt/ unexpected sense of emptiness/ void in our lives and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> start seeing cracks in the fabric of being (l. 35) 	A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we realise that life is/ humans are not perfect.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that is precisely the moment, when properly digested (l. 35–36) 	A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When we have come to terms with this// assimilated/ absorbed/ processed this fact,

From the passage		Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> failure turns out to be a blessing in disguise (l. 36–37) 	A4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the misfortune of failure becomes something good/beneficial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For it is this lurking, constant threat (l. 37) 	A5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The persistent/ continual danger of failure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that should make us aware of the extraordinariness of our being (l. 37–38) 	A6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes us appreciate/treasure our existence/ realise how remarkable/ unusual our existence is
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the miracle that we exist at all when there is no reason that we should (l. 38–39) 	A7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and that we are alive despite the circumstances/ adverse circumstances/ circumstances indicating that it should have been otherwise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing that gives us some dignity (l. 39) 	A8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This knowledge/ understanding gives us self-worth/ self-esteem/ self-respect/pride.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> failure also possesses a distinct therapeutic function (l. 40) 	B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure has clear/ evident healing/ curative properties,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of us ... suffer chronically from a poor adjustment to existence (l. 41–42) 	B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (inferred) enabling us to come to terms with reality/ life and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we compulsively fancy ourselves much more important than we are (l. 42) 	B3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (inferred) stop having a false perception of self-worth/ an inflated ego// we realise that we are not as great as we think.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> behave as though the world exists only for our sake (l. 43) in our worst moments, we place ourselves as being like infants at the centre of everything (l. 43–44) expect rest of the universe to be always at our service (l. 44–45) 	B4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (inferred) Failure also makes us less self-centred/ selfish/ egocentric/more considerate to others/ learn to co-exist with others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We insatiably devour other species, denude the planet of life and fill it with trash (l. 45–46) 	B5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (inferred) and care more about our environment/ be more environmentally conscious/ be less environmentally destructive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure could be a panacea against such arrogance and hubris (l. 46–47) as it often brings humility (l. 47) 	B6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure makes us less prideful/ conceited// reduces our sense of self-importance. [Note: <i>humble</i> = LIFT]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our capacity to fail is essential to what we are (l. 48) 	C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our ability to fail is vital/ important/ indispensable to our existence/ lives/ makes us human.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is crucial that we remain fundamentally imperfect, incomplete, erring creatures that there is always a gap left between what we are and what we can be (l. 49–51) 	C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (inferred) and for us to constantly strive for improvement/ to do better.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatever human accomplishments there have been in history, they have 	C3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human achievements/ successes were due to our quest to overcome

From the passage		Suggested rephrase
been possible precisely because of this empty space (l. 51–52) • It is within this interval that people and individuals, as well as communities, can accomplish anything (l. 53–54)		failure/ better our performance. <i>[Note: focus must be on ‘closing the gap’ and this point is about society or humanity in general]</i>
• the spectacle of our shortcomings can be so unbearable that ... (l. 55)	C4	• The display/ manifestation/ demonstration of our faults/ deficiencies/ weaknesses can be so intolerable/ agonising
• it shames us into doing a little good (l. 55–56)	C5	• that it makes us embarrassed enough to do something useful
• it is the struggle with our own failings that may bring out the best in us (l. 56–57)	C6	• and this enables us to show/ exhibit our finest/ greatest qualities. <i>** Note: C4-C5-C6 build on one another and apply more to individuals</i>

Total = 20 points

Mark scheme

1–2 points	1 mark	6 points	4 marks	10–11 points	7 marks
3 points	2 marks	7–8 points	5 marks	≥ 12 points	8 marks
4–5 points	3 marks	9 points	6 marks		

12. Costica Bradatan argues strongly in favour of failure. How applicable are the author’s observations to you and your society? Illustrate your answer by referring to the ways in which you and your society regard failure. [10]

OBSERVATION 1

The observation that ‘**Failure allows us to see our existence in its naked condition. Whenever it occurs, failure reveals just how close our existence is to its opposite.**’ (lines 23-25) OR ‘**... failure does carry a certain degree of existential threat.**’ (line 33) is very applicable to the Singaporean society. Past failures to keep our society safe forced us confront the precariousness of our lives. When we fail to defend our country, our survival as a people comes under threat. Even when facing various crises and emergencies and in times of disaster, we realize our vulnerability and the fragility of our lives.

- Singapore’s vulnerability during WW2 was due to failure of security/military defense resulted in the Japanese Occupation. In addition, the MacDonald House bombing from the Konfrontasi era further reinforces the author’s observation.
- Such costly lessons are not easily forgotten and post independent Singapore has implemented various policies to better safeguard ourselves against such failures.
 - NS and SAF(3G SAF) - Singapore’s defense budget will increase by 5.7% in nominal terms to \$9.5b for fiscal year (FY) 2015 ... IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly reports that defense expenditure will increase as a proportion of GDP for the first time since 2009, rising from 3.2% of GDP in 2014 to 3.3% for 2015
 - Importance of National Education and Total Defence – Military, Civil, Economic, Social & Psychological
 - Singapore is now better prepared and reacts quickly to terrorist threats (e.g. prevention of JI threat of bombing after 9/11; two youths arrested for links to ISIS)

- Singaporeans' vulnerability to threats and dangers. These accidents and disasters show just how close our existence is hanging by a thread at times.
 - Eg. MI185 crash in Palembang, Indonesia in 1997 (human error/failure)
 - Eg. SQ006 accident in Taipei, Taiwan in 2000 (human error/failure)
 - Eg. hijacking of SQ117 in 1991(failure/security lapse at point of embarkation – Kuala Lumpur – by 4 Pakistan People's Party members. But Singapore's Commandos mounted a successful rescue operation and killed all terrorists)
 - Eg. SARS (initial failure/difficulties in managing the spread but quick action by govt and healthcare sector contained the epidemic) and dengue epidemics (failure of people in keeping a clean environment)
 - Eg. sudden deaths of avid athletes/marathoners eg. Thaddeus Cheong ('failure' in providing immediate aid in some cases has pushed organizers to step up on-site first aid care and to require participants to declare health status pre-event)

OBSERVATION 2

The author argues that **'To experience failure is to start seeing cracks in the fabric of being, and that is... the moment when, properly digested, failure turns out to be a blessing in disguise.'** OR The possibility of failure **'should make us aware of the extraordinariness of our being: the miracle that we exist at all when there is no reason that we should. Knowing that gives us some dignity.'** (lines 34-39).

This observation is **definitely applicable and relatable to the Singapore narrative** because our nation was born of failure, and did experience failure in its infancy. This makes our current success even more amazing to behold.

- Independence was thrust upon us because of the failed merger with Malaysia. LKY famously described the split as "a moment of anguish", and his grief is immortalized in the video recording of his interview with members of the press after the split was announced. He, and many of the PAP (including Dr Toh Chin Chye, S. Rajaratnam and Mr. Ong Pang Boon), felt that it was a disaster and that separation was not the right thing to do.
- Not only was our independence a result of failure, we still experienced strained race relations, and the failure to live harmoniously together resulted in race riots in the late 1960s - early 70s after independence.
- The knowledge of our uncertain and tumultuous beginnings make for an even more striking contrast with Singapore's considerable economic growth and development today, as well as her racial harmony. It is something that all Singaporeans can be proud of.

However, it may not be as applicable in modern day Singapore where anything other than the absolute best is considered a failure, and the cost of failure is seen to be high, the perceived enormity of failure may be too "indigestible" (unacceptable) for people to bounce back from, contributing to the increase in stress and anxiety related mental issues, and to high suicide rates. There is no "dignity" in failure, only shame, and the desire to escape it.

- 901 people were arrested for attempting suicide in 2014, and the suicide rate has fluctuated over the years in the 400 range (415 in 2014)
- The most recently publicized case of suicide involved a straight-As student committing suicide because of two B grades at O levels (The New Paper, July 27 2015: 'Straight A student commits suicide over O-level results, mum takes her own life months later'). Her perception of herself as a failure because of B grades, her inability to accept less

than stellar results, led her to find a permanent way out of living instead of deriving greater appreciation of life, developing and growing from failure.

Nevertheless, there are positive signs that at least some Singaporeans are starting recognize our lack of resilience in coping with failure, and our unhealthy and extreme definition of failure, and are trying to be more change this. More and more we see greater emphasis on multiple pathways and a more varied definition of what it means to succeed. We can see this observation is at least becoming applicable, if only for small groups of individuals.

- E.g. The Yellow Ribbon Project success stories: There are many ex-convicts whom by society's definition have 'failed in life', who have nevertheless managed to learn from their past mistakes, mend their ways, and in their own way assimilate back into society and become successes. Society has come to celebrate their success stories, which are made all the more significant because of them having 'failed' before.
- Eighteen Chefs' Benny Se Teo is an ex-convict, who struggled with drug addiction (and failed) many times in his youth. His first few business ventures after his rehabilitation and freedom also failed, but he kept going. He now owns a franchise and is committed to hiring ex-offenders and youths-at-risk. <http://goo.gl/3G9lpu>
- Glenn Lim, former drug addict and wayward youth, now successful motivational speaker, youth counselor, organizational consultant and curriculum developer. A champion of social enterprises
- Adam Khoo did poorly at PSLE and ended up in neighbourhood school where he continued to fail by society's standards. He was infamous for misbehavior, poor results and addiction to arcade games. However, he reflected on his life and managed to change its progression. He topped NUS and became self-made millionaire at 26, a best-selling author ("I Am Gifted, So Are You") and corporate trainer.
- Other 'failures' who bounced back from setbacks to inspire others: eg. Aishah Samad (2003 SEA Games bronze medallist had all 4 limbs amputated due to severe bacterial infection); Dr William Tan (contracted polio at 2, paralyzed from waist down, survived Stage 4 chronic lymphocytic leukaemia); Jason Chee (navy serviceman who lost both legs and left arm after a ship accident)
- These individuals accepted the "failure of their bodies" and managed to succeed in carving out a definition of success for themselves.

Comments

Scope for personal anecdote about overcoming failure and lessons learnt

- GCE 2012 Paper 2 Report
 - Many dismissed the author's views as unscientific and certainly not to be found in Singapore, whilst others offered powerful personal testament to its effectiveness, such as the candidate who recounted how favourite music was played continually to his grandmother who was suffering with Alzheimer's and she eventually remembered her grandchildren's names. **This illustrates another fruitful approach to the application question – an apt personal anecdote can add a different dimension to what can so often be an impersonal, unengaged response.**

OBSERVATION 3

The author's observation that 'Failure could be a panacea against ... arrogance and hubris, as it often brings humility.' (lines 46-47) may not be entirely applicable to the Singaporean context. Failure only brings about humility if people are willing to admit

mistakes and change for the better. If people are obstinate, they may dig in their heels and refuse to acknowledge mistakes, or try to shift the blame to others.

- Examples - Singapore companies or government bodies refusing to acknowledge the severity of problems/issues/mistakes through the use of euphemisms:
 - 2011 Flooding -> Initially described by PUB as “ponding”
 - Current train repair works -> “urgent / unscheduled maintenance”
 - Problems in the new DBSS projects, new condominium projects – Failure to deliver quality products and no one is taking responsibility
 - 2012 SMRT Bus Driver strike -> on the first day of strike, initially described by all major local newspapers as “wage dispute”, “protest”, “action”, and (the icing on the cake) “episode”.
 - 2014 Workplace Happiness Survey -> “under happy” (in between “happy” and “unhappy”)
 - Gushcloud Singtel fiasco – failure to adhere to ethical standards during the promotion of one of Singtel’s services. Gushcloud had its influencers launch a smear campaign against their competitors StarHub and M1. When found out, both parties tried to shift the blame to each other in the beginning before proof came out that a Singtel employee had told Gushcloud to badmouth its competitors in the advertising for the service.
 - WP’s failure in the management of Aljunied Town Council’s funds/lapses in financial protocols – no humility was shown when the issue came to light. Instead, the WP was very defensive, trying to minimize blame, and circumventing issue in parliament.
- The use of euphemisms may suggest that instead of admitting failure or acknowledging the severity of situations, there is a tendency to downplay them in order to minimise backlash and criticism, which in no way serves as “a panacea against... arrogance and hubris” or “brings humility”.
- While some higher-ups have acknowledged the inappropriate use of some of these terms (e.g. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan criticised PUB’s use of the term “ponding” to describe the 2011 flooding), the fact that the euphemism was even used in the first place already suggests a particular unremorseful, defensive attitude.
- While the train operators always do apologise for the inconvenience to commuters whenever the trains break down, the continued use of “urgent maintenance / unscheduled maintenance” may suggest the admission of failure is mere lip service; more a move to placate Singaporeans’ ire, rather than a genuine expression of remorse.
- Also, the consequences of such failures are usually too light a slap on the wrist to motivate the companies involved to improve. Thus, there is no humility, and arrogance/hubris is allowed to continue existing. E.g. Telco outages and blame on technical failure, no compensation for consumers. The fine they have to pay is small change. MRT breakdowns the same as well as well – penalties are usually peanuts. After failures, no clear mending of ways is seen.
- Examples
 - BreadTalk’s soya bean fiasco. Failure of the company to be honest. Videos and complaints went viral and company had to apologize and tell the truth.
 - Escape of Mas Selamat. Failure of the security forces to keep watch. Failure of persons-in-charge to take responsibility. Failure of the govt to provide explanation.
 - Increase in foreign worker deaths and exploitation of foreign workers. Failure of

companies/employers to look after the welfare of employees. Some employers have been named and shamed for ignoring the sick, abandoning the ill and providing poor living conditions. Govt has stepped up efforts to ensure that employers provide a safe working environment and clean living quarters for their workers.

OBSERVATION 4

The author argues **‘that there is always a gap left between what we are and what we can be. ... It is within this interval that people and individuals, as well as communities, can accomplish anything.’** (lines 50-53) OR **‘The capacity to fail... is what makes [achievement] possible.’** (lines 78-79). This may be applicable to only some aspects Singapore, as seen from the huge contrast between what the country was like at independence in 1965 and our varied achievements now, half a century later. We were spurred on to work even harder to achieve success after our failed merger, growing from strength to strength.

- The lyrics to this year’s national day song-writing competition winning entry ‘These are the Days’ aptly reflect the sentiments of this observation: there was a time “When all we could believe was all we had to give”, but “Now what we only dreamed is what we live” – it draws attention to the stark difference between all we did not have in the past, and how we have closed the gap between our aspirations and our desired reality.
- This is also evident in the great progress the Malay community in Singapore has made in terms of achieving an equal standard of living. Historically, there has been a gap between living standards of Malays and other races, indicating a failure to provide equal standards of living for all citizens. The government has worked hard to close the gap by implementing various policies e.g. free education for Malays as well as self help groups like MENDAKE and MUIS.
- This year, in Straits Times, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim says that Malays “have done well for themselves” <http://goo.gl/Sijzel>
- Mr. Masagos Zulkifli, on being promoted from Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs to full Minister, said:
 - “It is good to see more and more Malays doing very well in education, doing very well in all fields of their professions and even in Government” <http://goo.gl/R8VoZP>
- The Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) commissioned a perception study in 2011 on the Malay/Muslim community.
 - “The survey found that the community was satisfied with the direction that the country is taking and was optimistic of the progress made by local Malay/Muslims over the last five years.” 76% indicated confidence in the community’s prospects over the next decade (2011 – 2021)
 - There were also indications that there were some areas to work on (e.g. many Malays felt there was still a gap when it came to cost of living, competition for employment against foreigners, compared to other Singaporeans) <http://goo.gl/hqyqhl>

However, this approach to failure has taken on an unhealthy nature in modern Singapore as a whole, where our competitive nature, and our culture of comparing with others and keeping up with appearance (the Chinese notion of ‘saving face’) has led to many endeavours devolving into a rat race – jobs/careers, education, the pursuit of material indicators of financial success

- This leaves little room to accommodate any failure, because no one dares to even allow a gap to be created in order to be filled. Continuous, sustained success has become the norm, as citizens are trapped in a never-ending cycle of one-upmanship.

In fact, a favourite descriptor of Singaporeans is the Hokkien/Singlish word '*kiasu*', which literally translates as 'scared to lose out (to others)' (i.e. fail).

- Our fear of failure and our unwillingness to appear to have failed can be seen in various aspects of our life
 - E.g. The pursuit of the 5Cs (Cash, Car, Condo, Credit Card, Country Club) to signal wealth and power, and to appear successful.
 - The growing number of young couples (with little spending power) splurging on weddings and incurring debt, which can sometimes amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars in order to appear successful.
- Education
 - All schools chasing awards/achievements in order to appear to be good schools
 - SYF – distinction so common it is now the norm, the desire to succeed and the fear of failing to achieve have driven performing arts groups to put in ever more effort to achieve distinction.
 - Billion dollar tuition industry that support the education system thrives on parents' willingness to invest/spend in/on their children in order to avert failure in schools, and to get into 'branded' schools.
 - The 2014 Household Expenditure Survey found that families spent \$1.1 billion a year on tuition - almost double the \$650 million spent a decade ago and a third more than the \$820 million spent just five years ago.
 - The Department of Statistics, which polled more than 11,000 households between October 2012 and September last year, released the latest survey in September.
 - The average household spending on tuition rose from \$54.70 a month 10 years ago, to \$79.90 in the latest survey.
- Our Singapore Success Story, while born of failure, may also ironically have contributed to low tolerance of failure in our paternalistic government, who feels the pressure of maintaining its enviable track records. Thus, failure for Singapore is largely perceived to be not an option (siege mentality), and the government stresses this fact.
- The price of failure may be too high to accept. We are constantly reminded that Singapore is vulnerable and cannot afford to make a wrong move.
- Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore's ambassador-at-large:
 - "... clear common understandings of our circumstances, chief of which is the inherent irrelevance of small states in the international system and hence the constant imperative of creating relevance for ourselves by pursuing extraordinary excellence" <http://goo.gl/3G9lpu>
- Other than our national reserves, Singapore has no hinterland or other assets to fall back on if we fall behind economically.
 - As of 31 March 2014, the Official Foreign Reserves managed by MAS was S\$343 billion and the size of Temasek's portfolio was S\$223 billion. It is the size of the Government's funds managed by GIC that are not published. What has been revealed is that GIC manages well over US\$100 billion. Further, our reserves are a strategic asset, and especially for a small country with no natural resources or other assets. They are a key defence for Singapore in times of crisis, and it will be unwise to reveal the full and exact resources at our disposal.

Nevertheless, although many Singaporeans do shy away from failure, the Government is perhaps slowly recognizing that failure is inevitable, and is trying to

change Singaporeans' perceptions of failure, to accept it and to be resilient enough to get back up and close the gap between failure and aspiration after a fall.

- This year, the government has released many YouTube videos featuring Singaporeans who demonstrate resilience, getting back up after a fall – so the gap between failure and success is demonstrated, and it documents how some Singaporeans have succeeded in closing that gap.
- E.g. “Eddie’s Singapore Spirit”... “Jun Yuan’s Singapore Spirit” YouTube videos used during the Lego lesson guidance period. Jun Yuan opened a Bak Kut Teh stall, but had to close down due to manpower issues. Instead of giving up after the failure of his business, he bounced back and became an app developer, developing an app (11th Hour) to reduce inefficiency and food wastage in the F&B industry.

OBSERVATION 5

The author is advocating that we ought to face ‘biological failure’ (line 88), that is death, head-on, so that we can accept this inevitable end and as a result, take better ownership of our lives and learn to lead our lives in a happier and more blissful manner, instead of being bitter and resigned to our fate. The author believes that it is only when we can accept this inevitable ‘failure’ that we can better cherish our lives and live more meaningfully. **This observation is not so applicable to the Singaporean society.**

- Singapore is a conservative society and death has always been a taboo subject. The issue of death often brings about much doom and gloom, and thus most people avoid discussing it so that they do not need to face their ultimate fear: the fear of dying ... the finality of their existence.
- Eg. Hungry Ghost Festival – much superstition about death, life after death and ghouls become even more apparent during the Lunar 7th month when people believe the spirits from the underworld roam. The superstitious avoid swimming and other more ‘risky’ activities for fear of allowing the spirits to claim one’s life/soul
- Eg. due to discomfort with confronting death and the dying, many people protest against hospices built near their homes
- Eg. prospective residents of an upcoming Build-To-Order residential project in Sengkang were up in arms regarding the building of a Chinese temple with a columbarium next to their estate
- Eg. Exit International, the pro-euthanasia group from Australia, has tried and failed on several occasions to seek permission from the government to engage Singaporeans on issues of dying with dignity. It seems that our society is not ready to openly discuss such issues.

However, with the rapidly ageing population, more people are now more willing to talk about death and how to face it / prepare for it and being aware of the choices they can make. While the stigma surrounding death still remains in Singapore, this observation is SLOWLY becoming more applicable to our society. Even the government has recognized the need for more open discussions on end-of-life matters. People are gradually more open to talk about such issues and to dispel the stigma surrounding the subject matter of death.

- More publicity and awareness of the Advance Medical Directive Act (passed in 1996) in Singapore. More and more people are now making an informed decision to sign up, being aware of the document and the conditions, and thinking about ethical and legal issues surrounding end-of-life care for terminal illnesses.
- More people are also aware of other legalities with regards to appointing a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA).

- The scandal involving Mdm Chung Khin Chun who was cheated of her money by former Chinese tour guide Yang Yin, whom she appointed her legal guardian and gave LPA, has created awareness of the danger of not being adequately protected and prepared for old age when one's physical and mental faculties are failing.