

# Campus Asia Social Innovation Field Study in Singapore Photo Journal

## Introduction

This field study was conducted as part of the Campus Asia Social Innovation Program by visiting Singapore, where the partner institution Nanyang Technological University is located. The aim of the program is to examine social challenges in our society, and to explore possible approaches through on-site observation and engagement. The field activities were programmed around two main parts: site visits and independent study.

In Singapore, social innovation is mostly shaped by collaboration among the government, the private sector, and local communities. These actors work within an integrated framework for addressing social issues. By observing these interactions and engaging with the perspectives of different social actors, this offered valuable insight into how Singaporean society and its approaches to social problem-solving.

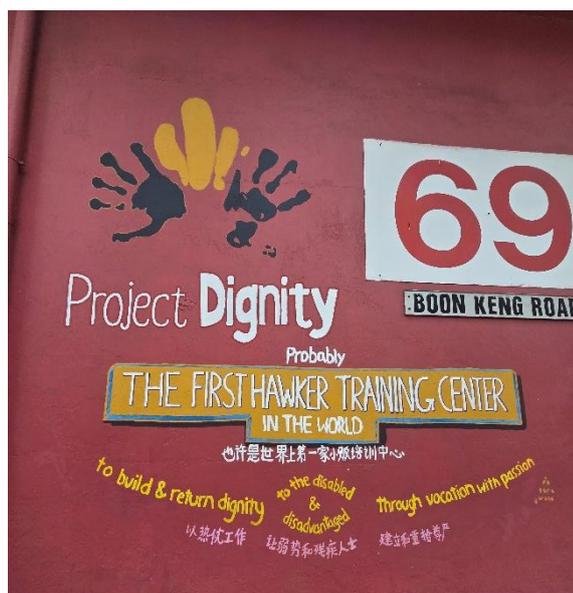
### Day 1: Arrival & First impressions

Upon arriving in Singapore, our first destination was Merlion Park. Merlion is Singapore's national symbol, a mythical creature with a lion's head and a fish's body. The lion head represents the name Singapore, derived from *Singa* (lion) *pura* (city) in Sanskrit. This etymology is traditionally linked to the *Malay Annals*, which recount the arrival of a Malayan prince who upon sighting a lion-like creature on the island, named the settlement accordingly. The fish body symbolizes Singapore's origins as a fishing village.



At the same time, the Merlion functions less as folklore and more as a carefully constructed national image. Standing in Merlion Park, this impression was reinforced by the surrounding urban landscape such as high-rise buildings, clearly controlled public spaces, and uninterrupted sightlines. Together, these elements reinforced an impression of ordered and intentional design of the city.

For the lunch, we visited Dignity Kitchen, a social enterprise that combines employment opportunities for people with disabilities with Singapore's hawker culture. Operated as hawker center, Dignity Kitchen provides job training to disabilities, so that eventually they can get a job in food center. While functioning as a private business that generates profit, it simultaneously prioritizes social responsibility by embedding training and inclusion into its daily operations.



This dual structure presents a sustainability model in which social responsibility is not separated from economic activity. On a global scale, although mobility for people with disabilities has gradually improved, employment opportunities remain limited in many societies. In this context, Dignity Kitchen serves as a meaningful platform for community building and social integration.

Moreover, the enterprise also appeared sustainable in operational terms. Rather than relying on direct government subsidies, Dignity Kitchen receives support in the form of physical space, a significant factor in a city where rental costs are as high as those in Singapore and Hong Kong. This approach allows the enterprise to maintain financial independence while still



benefiting from institutional support. In addition, the enterprise's decisions to along with continuous improvement through trial and error seem to have played an important role in sustaining the business over the long term.

## Day 2 — Lecture at NTU

### Dr. Chua Yeow Hwee (Lecture 1)

#### *Economic Expectations and Financial Markets*

In this lecture, I learned that Singapore places relatively greater emphasis on investing in skill upgrading than on providing unemployment benefits. This policy choice initially raised a question: does this emphasis encourage a “more competitive society”, while individuals are under constant pressure to perform? In response, Prof. Chua explained that Singapore’s core national asset is human capital, and therefore the country “has to be” competitive to sustain itself. He framed this not simply as an economic preference, but as a strategic necessity for a small state that cannot rely on natural resources on a scale.

What stood out most was the clarity of the underlying national strategy: cultivating globally competitive specialists across many fields. Rather than focusing only for a few strong elite, Singapore appears to pursue a broader form of skill upgrading, strengthening expertise even at the smaller units of society and industry. This continuous cultivation of specialized talent helped me to understand how Singapore maintains high standards in both economic performance and institutional capacity.



### Dr. Gary Lit (Lecture 2)

#### *The Untold Stories of the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore—Reflections, Recollections and Retrospections*

Dr. Lit's lecture addressed the traumatic history of Japanese imperial rule in Malaya and Singapore during the period beginning in 1942, drawing attention to painful narratives that remain less visible in everyday life. Importantly, the lecture did not aim to denounce Japan or Japanese people, but to illuminate the broader violence of war itself—how quickly ordinary life can be overturned, and how long its wounds can remain. The lecture's notion was to ensure that generations who did not



directly experience war can still recognize its consequences and avoid repeating similar choices. In this sense, I agreed with the idea that spaces for shared historical learning are necessary to reduce informational asymmetries between people from former colonial powers and those from formerly colonized societies.

At the same time, I found myself reflecting on how memory work can be approached from the perspective of the formerly colonized country. It is understandable that resentment may form, yet I believe one productive direction is to shift attention from direct anger to documenting how communities preserved culture and practiced resistance under extreme conditions. This perspective became clearer to me during a previous Campus Asia exchange in China, where many provincial museums actively archive wartime films, poems, music, and other artistic materials transmitted across generations. Those archives felt valuable not only as fragments of culture, but as records of lived spirit and everyday survival under occupation. By comparison, I have the impression that cultural archiving of this kind is less developed in Korea and Singapore, and that strengthening these practices may be an important shared task for both societies.

### Day 3 — Visiting Singapore City Gallery

At the Singapore City Gallery, I was able to see how deliberately Singapore has been developed through long-term planning. What surprised me most was learning that the Central Area represents only about 2% of Singapore’s land area—approximately 16 km<sup>2</sup>—. In other words, many of Singapore’s major attractions, business districts, and urban experiences are concentrated within a single city of Tokyo, which made the city feel even more intensely “city-centered” than Hong Kong in my perception. The gallery also highlighted that Singapore’s planning (URA Master Plan) is reviewed every five years and guides development over the next 10–15 years, which helped explain why construction and renewal projects are so visible across the island. Having visited Singapore about seven years ago, I could personally sense this ongoing evolution—particularly in the expanded MRT system and the fact that some familiar areas had been closed or reshaped as part of longer-term redevelopment.



## MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan is a statutory land use plan which guides Singapore’s development over the next 10 - 15 years.

It is reviewed every five years and translates the broad long-term strategies of the Long-Term Plan into detailed plans.

The Master Plan shows the permissible land use and density for developments to guide the development of land.

<p><b>LEGEND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RESIDENTIAL</li> <li>RESIDENTIAL WITH COMMERCIAL AT 1ST STOREY</li> <li>COMMERCIAL &amp; RESIDENTIAL</li> <li>COMMERCIAL</li> <li>HOTEL</li> <li>WHITE</li> <li>BUSINESS 1</li> <li>BUSINESS 1 - WHITE</li> <li>BUSINESS 2</li> <li>BUSINESS 2 - WHITE</li> <li>BUSINESS PARK</li> <li>BUSINESS PARK - WHITE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RESIDENTIAL / INSTITUTION</li> <li>HEALTH &amp; MEDICAL CARE</li> <li>EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION</li> <li>PLACE OF WORSHIP</li> <li>CIVIC &amp; COMMUNITY INSTITUTION</li> <li>OPEN SPACE</li> <li>PARK</li> <li>BEACH AREA</li> <li>SPORTS &amp; RECREATION</li> <li>WATERBODY</li> <li>ROAD</li> <li>TRANSPORT FACILITIES</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAILWAY</li> <li>MASS RAPID TRANSIT</li> <li>LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT</li> <li>UTILITY</li> <li>CENETERY</li> <li>AGRICULTURE</li> <li>PORT / AIRPORT</li> <li>RESERVE SITE</li> <li>SPECIAL USE</li> <li>PLOT RATIO BOUNDARY</li> <li>UNDERGROUND ROAD / STRUCTURE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.8 MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE PLOT RATIO</li> <li>4.3* BASE PLOT RATIO</li> <li>MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE WHITE QUANTUM</li> <li>MINIMUM BUSINESS (B) PLOT RATIO</li> <li>CONSERVATION AREA</li> <li>NATURE RESERVE</li> <li>NATIONAL PARK</li> <li>MONUMENT</li> </ul>
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Key plan showing distinctive districts

## Final reflection

Over the three days, this field study deepened my understanding of social innovation as something produced through relationships rather than isolated individual projects. I realized that sustainability is not achieved through singular initiatives, but through the continuous alignment of institutions, communities, and individual agencies. This perspective encouraged me to think more critically about my own society, particularly on how ethnicity and history are either institutionally supported or overlooked. The trip therefore strengthened my view that multicultural coexistence is a continuing condition that requires design, maintenance, and recalibration through civic engagement.

