



Girton150 Anniversary Dinner, 13th April 2019, Eden Hall, Singapore

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Quite a while back, I came to the sobering conclusion that whatever knowledge I had acquired from formal schooling, including at Cambridge, counted less and less over time. If at all, it was reduced to bragging rights for having attended certain popular schools or Cambridge.

But was it all in vain? Absolutely not.

The education I received at Cambridge was most relevant and appropriate at that time. It equipped me for the role that I was returning to Singapore for - in public policy. Along the way, I gained exposure to a whole new culture, cultivated precious friendships including with my Director of Studies, appreciated a different form of government and politics, and in short, experienced England first-hand.

Since then, the world has been swept by many waves of revolution; I'll comment briefly on two, that of globalisation of the market place and the advent of technology. Technology both enhances and disrupts the way we think and do things.

Despite the prevailing pro-nationalistic or even protectionist instincts of some major economic powers, there's really no turning back on globalisation of the market-place. I'm sure you can cite any number of examples, from consumer electronics to online retailing to transportation to social media. A typical professional in Singapore now has to interact regularly with colleagues or partners outside of Singapore.

Technology has enabled, if not accelerated, globalisation. It has the huge benefit of reducing interaction distances and achievement of economies of scale, not previously possible.

In this fast-changing world we are in, what then is the role of education? In Singapore, we are essentially building a DNA of life-long learning and acquisition of life-skills, as opposed to knowledge acquisition at specific points in time. We are diligently de-emphasising the preoccupation with academic results.

Hence, the way I see it and if I may, for a university like Cambridge to survive, it has to review, if not re-define its value proposition. It's no longer just about knowledge or skills acquisition during the 3-4 years that an undergraduate/post-graduate spends there. That's a given, a minimum.

It's all about forging lasting ties with fellow learners, about being part of a larger learning ecosystem that extends beyond formal schooling. The byproduct of such a network can be found in the increasingly useful sphere of contacts, across geographies and markets, long after graduation.

At the College level, this can have even greater effects, as identification, with say Girton, will form a natural anchor. Alumni can as easily connect over social as over business purposes. But purely social networks may be hard to sustain; hence, some structured efforts around mutually shared goals are desirable, if not necessary. A continual cycle of learning and networking may well be the only sustainable way ahead.

Well, this is my two cents' worth. Thank you and have a good evening connecting.

