

**Intra-Nation State Relations in Southeast Asia:  
An Autoethnography of the Sunburst Youth Camp  
and the Sunburst Eagles Program**  
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*Abstract:*

Official ASEAN documents show that the objectives of the Singapore Technologies Endowment Programme (STEP)'s Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program hew closely to the objectives of the ASEAN. Using autoethnography as a research method and Meta-Nation State Relations as a framework, the author as a participant examines the two programs as vehicles of Intra-State Nation relations in Asia.

The author, as a student at St. Joseph's College, represented the Philippines in the Sunburst Youth Camp in 2001. Each ASEAN member state mounted its country exhibit. The exhibits were part of the "Knowing ASEAN" seminar, which aimed to present each country "in all its socio-economic and cultural aspects." The highlight of the entire Sunburst Youth Camp was the Cultural Nite, when each country would present "traditional" dances.

In 2011, the author returned to Singapore as one of the 28 Sunburst Youth Camp alumni chosen to participate in the first-ever Sunburst Eagles Program. Sunburst Eagles is also an example of Intra-Nation State relations but for professionals.

These two programs, as well as other STEP programs, can serve as models to state actors in Asia and beyond. These state actors can use STEP programs to foster better relations with other nations.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography, Intra-Nation State Relations in Southeast Asia, ASEAN

*Background of the Study*

This seminar paper was originally titled "Singapore's Soft Power in Action: The Interaction of ASEAN Youth Leaders in the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program." What I initially wanted was to highlight Singapore's strategy of creating goodwill in the region by inviting Southeast Asian youth leaders to the city-state to participate in the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program.<sup>1</sup> Both programs are run by the Singapore Technologies Endowment Programme (STEP), a Singapore charity under the Temasek Trust (<http://www.step.com.sg/temasek/tms/step.nsf/WebkeyNew/0366>).

Three events made me rethink my paper. The first was a class exercise where our professor, Dr. Sylvano Mahiwo, had us write about the relevance of our paper in ASEAN affairs. The second was his discussion of the Meta-Nation State concept that he developed while he was a graduate student at the prestigious University of Tokyo (a school which we Japan majors look up to). Those activities made me realize that 1) the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program fit

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as SYC and Eagles Program, respectively.

right in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community pillar and 2) the two programs are rather major instances of Intra-Nation State relations in Southeast Asia. The third event was my exposure to the autoethnographic article “Curing the Disease, Healing the Dis-ease: An Autopathography” (2013). It was my first time to encounter an autoethnography. I thought that I could employ autoethnography as my method since I was an active participant in both intercultural programs.

There are similarities between STEP programs and the ASEAN. SYC’s objectives are 1) “To provide exciting opportunities for the young leaders of Asia to come together for a week of sharing” and 2) “to build understanding, bonding and goodwill throughout Asia” (<http://www.step.com.sg/temasek/tms/step.nsf/WebkeyNew/0368>). The Eagles Program’s objectives are

- Enhance leadership capabilities in the context of today’s changing global business environment
- Provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their leadership styles and effectiveness
- Inculcate a sense of giving back to society through working on a country project as well as through a corporate social responsibility (CSR) project in Singapore
- Create a networking platform for SYC Alumni across countries (<http://www.step.com.sg/temasek/tms/step.nsf/WebkeyNew/0465>)

Official ASEAN documents show that the objectives of the SYC and the Eagles Program hew closely to the objectives of the ASEAN. The ASEAN Charter states that the regional organization is “committed to intensifying community building through enhanced regional cooperation and integration, in particular by establishing an ASEAN Community comprising the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, as provided for in the Bali Declaration of ASEAN Concord II” (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2008, 2-3). It also asserts that it wants “To promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building” (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2008, 5). SYC and the Eagles Program also help the goal of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, which aims ‘to address the region’s aspiration to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented and environmentally friendly geared towards the promotion of sustainable development. The ASCC shall contribute to building a strong foundation for greater understanding, good neighbourliness, and a shared sense of responsibility” (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2009, 1).

In order to understand how SYC and the Eagles Program foster Intra-Nation State relations in Southeast Asia, it is necessary to look at the two programs through the eyes of a participant.

### *Research Questions*

This paper seeks to examine the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program as vehicles of Intra-State Nation relations in Asia. Specifically, it aims to answer the following:

1. How do the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program foster Intra-State Nation relations in Southeast Asia?
2. What are their programs and activities?
3. How can both programs help the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and beyond?

To answer these questions, various methodologies were employed.

### *Objectives*

This study has the following objectives:

1. To understand how the Sunburst Youth Camp and the Sunburst Eagles Program foster Intra-State Nation relations in Southeast Asia;
2. To explain both programs;
3. To know how both programs can help the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and beyond.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study uses Sylvano D. Mahiwo's Meta-Nation State Relations as its framework. According to him, "the Meta-nation state relations concept postulates that inter-nation state relation has been shifting from the conventional state-to-state dominated mono-channel mode of exchanges and interchange to a dynamically multi-strata, multi-channeled structure and mode of interflow between and among nation states" (Mahiwo 2011, 15). He explains that the Meta-Nation state has three parts: the supra-nation state stratum, the nation-state stratum, and the intra-nation state stratum. Each stratum of a Meta-Nation State can interact with any stratum of another Meta-Nation State. According to Mahiwo, "the basic variations of the strata or levels of international and global relations

and interactions can as follows in any order: (1) Nation state-to-nation state strata of interactions, (2) Nation state to intra-nation state strata of interactions, (3) Nation state to supra-nation state or extra-nation state strata of interactions, (4) Intra-nation state to intra-nation state strata of interactions, (5) Intra-nation state to supra-nation state or extra-nation state strata of interactions, and (6) Supra-nation state or extra-nation state to supra-nation state or extra-nation state strata of interactions” (Ibid., 15-16). The Meta-Nation State concept perfectly frames this study of SYC and the Eagles Program since they are programs that facilitate intra-nation state interactions of Southeast Asians. According to Mahiwo, “intra-nation state actors encompass both public, quasi public entities (GOs), and private or non-state entities like multi-national corporations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and individuals or groups belonging to the nation state and such players carry the nation state DNA of that country” (Ibid., 17).

### *Research Method*

Since I was a participant in both SYC and the Eagles Program, I am my own key informant. Hence, this study uses autoethnography as its primary research method. According to Adams et al (2015, 1-2),

Autoethnography is a research method that:

- Uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.
- Acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others
- Uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as “reflexivity”—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.
- Shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.”
- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity.
- Strives for social justice and to make life better.

They further add the autoethnography is made by “stud[ying] and writ[ing] culture from the perspective of the self.” Autoethnography is also created by looking at internal factors such as “our

identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences” and external factors such as “our relationships, communities, and cultures” (46).

*The Journey to Singapore, November 2001*

The year 2001 was one of the highlights of my teenage years. I was a third-year AB History student at St. Joseph’s College in Quezon City, enjoying my college years. I was busy as an editorial assistant in the Josephine Journal, the official student newspaper of the College of Arts and Sciences. Specifically, I assisted Cesar de Guzman Jr., the associate editor. I was also a student assistant at the Office of Student Affairs, then under Ms Amparo Manaligod. My program belonged to the Liberal Arts Department, headed by Mr. Ramon Felipe Sarmiento. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mailed a letter to St. Joseph’s College, asking the school to send two candidates for the Sunburst Youth Camp, an annual gathering of youth leaders in Southeast Asia. Initially I was not interested in apply, but Mr. Sarmiento and Ms Manaligod – both of whom I consider mentors in St. Joseph’s College – encouraged me to submit my application. Ms Agnes Feliza Edillon, Social Work Department Chair, also checked and approved the essay that I wrote.

In the end, Education student Crystal Rey Bautista and I were sent as representatives of St. Joseph’s College. A panel composed of CHED officials interviewed us at the Commission’s then-headquarters at the Development Academy of the Philippines in Mandaluyong. The interview question that stuck to my mind was, “What will you do if a participant from another country develops a crush on you?” My answer: “We can be friends, but with no strings attached.” After the interview, I mostly forgot about the application as I was busy with academics and co-curricular activities. It was only around September 2001 that I got the surprising good news. I was at home when my good friend and fellow History major Rowell Lobos texted me that I was chosen as one of the 10 representatives of the Philippines to the Sunburst Youth Camp for the year 2001. It was announced to the whole College Department but I was not around to hear it. I was so ecstatic! I immediately went to St. Joseph’s and visited Sr. Esperanza Vistro, SFIC, the College Dean, and my mentors and my classmates and friends.

I was summoned to the CHED once again to be briefed and to meet my fellow Filipino delegates. There were actually several meetings. I remember seeing a guy but he suddenly was replaced by Joker Brent Balitaan, a veterinary student at Gregorio Araneta University Foundation. The one Joker replaced had to yield his spot because he could not get a passport because of a

discrepancy in his name on his birth certificate. Even if I was sympathetic to that guy, I heaved a sigh of relief. I too still had no passport and my birth certificate had a discrepancy as well. But fortunately my parents had my name on my birth certificate corrected in 1998. When the list of Filipino delegates was finalized, we all met with CHED officials, specifically Dr. Lydia Valenzuela. I distinctly remember her telling us that no one among us should resort to grandstanding during the camp since we were all equals. Aside from me and Joker, those who made the cut were Eric Ganaden of Far Eastern University, Aila Avanez and Leanne Dela Cruz of Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Makati (now University of Makati), Lherilyn Villeza of De La Salle Dasmariñas, Lorelei Panganiban and Alain Miranda of Holy Angel University, Blesse Calma of Tarlac State University, and Fritzefer Lee of College of the Holy Spirit.

We were told to prepare for three important components of SYC: the country seminar, the country booth, and cultural night. For the country seminar, we had to make a presentation on Jose Rizal since the seminar would be about the national hero. The country booth did not really take up much of our time because it would be set up in Singapore. The presentation for the cultural night was very grueling because we had to practice “traditional” Filipino dances. Luckily, Lherilyn was a dancer with Cordillera dances as her specialty. Our initial practice venue was the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Makati. We had to move to Far Eastern University because there were concerns about the “authenticity” of the dances that had been taught to us. An FEU staff member or faculty member then intervened and taught us “authentic” Filipino dances. There was even an ugly scene at FEU where the Makati instructor berated us and our CHED escorts for choosing the FEU instructor over him. The issue was resolved judiciously and immediately by our CHED escorts, and allowed the FEU instructor to continue coaching us.

After many practices and briefing sessions with the CHED, we were given our Singapore Airlines tickets. Afterwards my family and I went to SM Sta. Mesa to shop for the things I would need to bring to Singapore. I readied myself for my adventure

### *First Time in a Foreign Country*

SYC 2001 lasted for nine days, from November 6 to November 14. Our flight to Singapore was in the morning of November 6. It was my first trip overseas trip so I was rather emotional when I bade goodbye to my family and my friends. The SYC delegates from the Philippines arrived in

Singapore before lunch. It marked my first time in a foreign country. I could not hear anything because my eardrums expanded while I was up in the air. A van from STEP came to fetch us at the airport and brought us to the RELC International Hotel, the venue of many SYC activities. The first thing that impressed me was the cleanliness of Singapore. We had lunch at the hotel from 12:30pm to 1:30pm. Being quite naïve at that time, I was amazed to find out the similarity between the “Singapore” noodles that we ate and the pancit we Filipinos have. The “Singapore” version of pancit was more spicy, though. Each participant received an SYC kit consisting of official maroon SYC shirts, a jacket, the programme, notebook, etc. SYC 2001 was Myanmar’s first SYC. It was the first when all ASEAN member countries sent participants (James 2007, 7).

Singapore, being the host country, has always had the largest delegation. It had 45 delegates. There were 10 delegates (five males, five females) from other countries. All in all, there were 135 delegates from ASEAN member countries (<http://www.step.com.sg/apps/step.nsf/Webkey/0109>). One of the first foreign delegates I met was Ervin Yeo, a Singaporean. He helped me bring one of my suitcases. All delegates from each ASEAN country were given rooms. Each room was occupied by one Singaporean and delegates from other countries. I was assigned to Room 38, with Singaporean Darius Wee Da Yang and Vietnamese Tran Nam Hung as my roommates. Speaking of Darius, there was initially an awkward moment between us when we did not understand one another. What made the moment worse was we were with a large group of Singapore and Philippine delegates. We all stood there in the hall silent. The awkwardness, however, faded since we bonded during the entire camp especially at night.

### *SYC Day Two (November 7, 2001)*

Our breakfast was very early, at 6:15am. We left at 7:15am to go to our first destination: Outward Bound Singapore. It was where we would really interact with delegates from other countries. All the delegates were divided into eight groups for this event. I belonged to Group Seven. My group mates were Chhun Kumbopha (Cambodia), Mai Tuan Viet (Vietnam), Vu Than Xuan (Vietnam), Pannee Leeladee (Thailand), Sivadone Daokhan (Laos), Lim Choon Ewe (Malaysia), Amal Hayati Binti Abdul Khalil (Malaysia), Muhammad Ferdien (Indonesia), Mohamad Rahmat Bin Abdul Wahab (Singapore), Sim Tsin Chwen Jacqueline (Singapore), Abdul Halim Bin Haji Moh D Ja’afar (Brunei), Thaw Zin Naing (Myanmar), and Aye Aye Mon (Myanmar). I was particularly pleased that the delegate from Brunei could speak a few Filipino phrases.

I remember that we were there at Outward Bound Singapore to establish rapport and to build trust. There would be no better way than placing your life in the hands of the group that you belonged to. One activity that really helped build trust was where we were tied together and blindfolded. We had to rely on one another to reach the destination. Afterwards, SYC delegates were more comfortable with one another.

#### *SYC Day 3 (November 8, 2001)*

I was excited to wake up in the morning because we would go to the National University of Singapore (NUS), one of the best universities in Asia and in the world. I was impressed by the campus, thinking it probably looked like universities in Japan, the United States, and Europe. It was also my first time to see a computerized campus map. All SYC delegates, except those from the Philippines, were in their junior or senior high schools. The visit thus exposed us to the program offerings of NUS. The efficiency of NUS was seen when they immediately produced the graduate school brochures when we asked for them. The American staff member at NUS was particularly happy to talk with the Filipinos because it had been a while when someone talked like her. We also went to the Singapore Science Centre after our lunch at NUS. Unfortunately, I fell asleep inside a hall because I became drowsy due to the 3D images being shown.

Our nights also became increasingly busy because of many activities. On Day 3, Julia Gabriel of the Julia Gabriel Speech and Drama Centre taught delegates how to present during our country seminars. That lasted from 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

#### *SYC Day 4 (November 9, 2001)*

The day's activities consisted of visits to Singapore Technologies companies, specifically ST Kinetics and Jurong Shipyard. ST Kinetics is an arms manufacturer and is supposedly the supplier of the Philippines' Presidential Security Group. What made the visit interesting was we were able to handle the high-powered weapons (not loaded, of course) and even had the opportunity to use them in an enclosure. I was lucky to hit all the targets, mainly because my eyesight then was still near perfect. At Jurong Shipyard we were told to wear our protective gear all the time lest a stray metal object fall upon us. It was interesting to see one of the busiest ports at work.



*SYC Day 5 (November 10, 2014)*

One aspect of Day 5 caught us by surprise: that we had to wear our school uniforms for the country seminar in the morning. Why were we surprised? Because we were not told that we had to bring our uniforms. Our solution then was to wear our national costumes, which we had been saving for the Philippine booth. Our decision I think was for the best since we presented our National Hero to other peoples. Other delegates were amazed at our “school uniforms” but we told them those were our national costumes. They were also very impressed with Jose Rizal. A delegate asked how come he had such a long name. My fellow Filipino delegates all looked at me for the answer. So I had to explain to other Southeast Asians the “racial” and family background of our National Hero.

In the afternoon, each ASEAN member mounted its country exhibit. The exhibits were part of the “Knowing ASEAN” seminar, which aimed to present each country “in all its socio-economic and cultural aspects” (<http://www.step.com.sg/apps/step.nsf/Webkey/0097/>). They were particularly interested in many aspects of the Philippines, just like the “traditional” clothes of the peoples of the Cordilleras. I went over the booth of the Myanmar delegates. I asked the difference between the names “Burma” and “Myanmar.” The chaperone of the Myanmar delegates, Madam Khin Swe Win, informed me promptly that “Burma” only referred to the Burmese ethnic group.

We had to visit the Night Safari afterwards. This was particularly nice because we were able to see different animals at close range, courtesy of a special kind of glass barrier. The day was not over, however. We still had to practice for the cultural night.

*SYC Day 6 (November 11, 2014)*

This day was devoted to the Island Treasure Hunt, but it was essentially a free day for delegates. We were all divided into several smaller groups. My group mates were Daniel Soon Hui Xiang (Singapore), Evien Tan (Singapore), Lim Choon Ewe (Malaysia), Le Phuong Chi (Vietnam), and Dyg Siti Reyhanah bte Hj Yakob (Brunei). The Island Treasure Hunt basically made us go around the city-state and exposed us to many of the sights. I marveled at the transportation system of Singapore. I thought it was very easy to go around the city.

I particularly enjoyed the Botanic Garden because the flowers were quite exquisite. One rather awkward moment happened when a Singaporean said that she had a Filipino “auntie.” I excitedly talked with her about her auntie but soon found out that the “auntie” was a domestic helper in Singapore. I have never discriminated against people on the basis on employment, but this episode

was rather sensitive because of the Flor Contemplacion incident in Singapore. The Flor Contemplacion case was even a recurring mood dampener to us Filipinos especially when we heard the word “Changi,” which we associated with Changi Prison.

#### *SYC Day 7 and Day 8 (November 12-13, 2001)*

The main activity of Day 7 was the day trip to island resort of Sentosa. I was impressed with Sentosa, so much so that I bought the pasalubong for my family there. The night was dubbed “Free and Easy” because we could roam around the city-state. Leanne, Blesse, Lheri and I went to Little India and Mustafa to buy more pasalubong.

The morning of Day 8 was devoted to visits to PA, Marine Parade Community Centre and Ulu Pandan Community Centre. We were briefed how the People’s Action Party worked. We Filipinos were particularly curious at the dating service offered to Singaporeans. We would later know that this effort wanted to raise the low birth in Singapore.

The highlight of the entire SYC was the Cultural Nite, when each country would present “traditional” dances. It was my first time to wear a *bahag*, but the other Southeast Asians loved it so much I wore it for the rest of the evening. What struck me about the presentations was Singapore’s presentation, because it was a combination of Chinese, Malay, and Indian traditions – which was rather fitting because of the multicultural character of the young country.

The dinner included dignitaries from the embassies of the ASEAN member countries. The Philippine consul expressed her pride in our participation in SYC.

#### *SYC Day 9 (November 14, 2001)*

Day 9 was the hardest day for us delegates because it was time to say goodbye. To soften the blow, my roommates and I exchanged souvenirs and name cards. Darius gave me a mug with the words “Singapore is a fine city” emblazoned on it. It was very difficult to say goodbye at the airport.

#### *The SYC Spirit Revitalized: Preparing for the Sunburst Eagles Program*

Upon my return to the Philippines, I immersed myself immediately in academics. My fellow Filipino SYC delegates initially stayed in touch but eventually most of us lost contact with one another. The last time we met together was at an event hosted by CHED. I think it was very difficult for us to communicate because we lived far from one another. The only one who lived near me was

Fritz. Another factor was that we were busy building up our careers. The last time I saw my fellow Filipino delegate was in 2003. I accidentally bumped into Alain in Landmark in Makati City and we talked for a while.

STEP, however, continued to communicate with all SYC alumni via email. I received an email about a forthcoming book on the anniversary of STEP and that one Filipino SYC alumna would act as intermediary between Filipino SYC alumni and STEP. Come 2011, John De Roza of STEP emailed all of us by asking us to apply to the first Sunburst Eagles Program. The Eagles Program was specially made for SYC alumni. Initially called Sunburst Leaders Program, it had the following aims:

- a) Enhance the skills of our SYC Alumni leaders through a formal leadership development program
- b) Provide a platform for you to re-connect with each other and strengthen the relationships built up since 1998
- c) Provide a platform for you to net-work with academic and business leaders in Singapore (De Roza, personal communication, June 29, 2011).

This new leadership program revived and revitalized the SYC spirit in me. I thus applied. John happily informed us that a lot of fellow SYC alumni responded positively to the call. Fortunately, I was one of the few chosen for the program now dubbed Sunburst Eagles (De Roza, personal communication, September 28, 2011). On October 11, 2011, Chan Min Li of STEP informed us that the objectives of the program were “Energize, Achieve, Galvanize, Lead, Empower, Soar” - thus Eagles. We were also told that the program would take place in the National University of Singapore University Town from December 6 to 9, 2011. We also had to accomplish two things first: answer the Emergenetics Questionnaire and plan our country project (Chan, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

On November 9, 2011, John released the names of the 28 participants of the first-ever Sunburst Eagles Program. Aside from me, the delegates from the Philippines were Rolly Caidic, Loise Charise Set, and James Escaño (De Roza, personal communication, November 9, 2011). I was the only Filipino delegate from SYC 2001. James and Loise immediately contacted me and we planned to meet for the country project. The four of us met at the Mall of Asia to plan our country project. We came up with “‘Pinoy Ako, Pinoy Tayo Project’ (I am a Filipino, We are Filipinos Project) An Interactive Web-based Platform for Character Development and Multi-Cultural Awareness of Filipino Students” (Caidic, personal communication, December 5, 2011).

### *The Sunburst Eagles Program*

I arrived in the NUS University Town before lunch time on December 6, 2011. Like in 2001, I was impressed with the university. The U Town was a new addition to the campus. I met Loise, Rolly, and James again in NUS. Min Li and May Ling gave me my room key, my Sunburst Eagles kit, and my Eagles shirts.

I was billeted with Feng Fumin (Singapore) and Ahmad Gamal (Indonesia). Gamal, a lecturer at the University of Indonesia, was the first foreign Eagle we met. We proceeded to Seminar Room, the main venue of the program, after lunch. We met Anne Yeo and Loh Teck Kwang, the main facilitators of Sunburst Eagles. We were welcomed by Prof. Leo Tan, chair of STEP. I was made a member of Group 4. My group mates were Pyseth Seng (Cambodia), Abel Li Xiangqin (Singapore), Marya Abdul Malek (Singapore), Parin Tanawong (Thailand), Pham Thi Thi Huong Hayley (Vietnam), and Vanida Luangthepxayavong (Laos). There were no participants from Myanmar because SYC alumni from that country did not answer John's invitation. There were 25 Eagles all in all.

As previously explained, the acronym Eagles means Energize, Achieve, Galvanize, Lead, Empower, Soar. The acronym was adopted because "eagles with their defining characteristics such as vision, resiliency, courage, power, and strength, are a symbol of leadership" - things that Sunburst Eagles should imbibe (<http://www.step.com.sg/temasek/tms/step.nsf/WebkeyNew/0465>).

We discovered that the program was quite intensive and packed. The results of the Emergenetics were given to us. I learned that I am 75% social, meaning I love to interact with other people. That result was not really surprising, but rather strengthened what I already knew. Our first night was spent preparing the presentation of our country project.

On December 7, 2011, we had our team building model session. We were asked to create a tower using spaghetti noodles. We were also asked to set personal goals we wanted to attain. The thing I wanted then to achieve was to finish my Master's Degree at De La Salle University in April 2012. We were challenged to fulfill these goals. Luckily, Sunburst Eagles spurred me to do that. I did graduate from DLSU in April 2012. The first corporate leader to share his experience with us

was Dr. Tan Chi Chiu, chair, Lien Centre for Social Innovation. What I remember from his talk was how his group was able to help the Philippines recover from disasters.

We went to Shines Outdoor for our outdoor activity. We were challenged to overcome the obstacles of the three-storey tower. I was quite nervous about the activity because I did not have an active lifestyle. I thought other Eagles were also quite unsure about the activity. It also seemed that it would rain that afternoon. Bao Yue Koh (Singapore) commented that Singapore is a lightning-prone area. I also joked that if something happened to us the ASEAN would disband. I saw the competitive spirit of my groupmates during the activity. Abel spurred me to go through the obstacles to get the yellow ribbons for our team. I thought afterwards that I could do anything if I could finish that obstacle course.

Before dinner, John challenged us to become leaders in our countries. We promised that we would do our best to do so. Julia Koh (Singapore), my SYC batchmate, touchingly told us that we Eagles are special and we can do great things. As per usual, we still worked on our country project after dinner.

December 8, 2011 was quite memorable. The academic in me was interested in Dr. William Koh's talk on situational leadership. The NUS professor was indeed a very good teacher, explaining to us that leadership styles are not applicable in all situations. The corporate leader STEP invited Ms Sharon Au, strategist of MediaCorp's Media Business Group and a famous celebrity in Singapore. Her story was quite inspirational because of the roller-coaster quality of her life. She decided to pursue a college degree at Waseda University in her late 20s, at the height of her career. She was actually reluctant to share her experiences with us because she said she was "intimidated" by our backgrounds. Her worries were quite unfounded. The night of December 8 was the busiest because we had our mock presentations and last-minute presentations.

There were three highlights during our last day, December 9, 2011. The first was the presentation of our country projects to Mr. Ong Boon Hwee, director of STEP. The Philippine Eagles chose me to present our country project. I was quite nervous but John was very happy about all the presentations, including the Philippines'. He even told me I had a strong, loud voice. The second highlight was the CSR project of all Eagles. People with special needs were brought to the U Town and we bonded with them. Interestingly, their caregivers were Filipinas. Truly, Filipinos are found everywhere! The third and nostalgia-inducing activity was our homecoming to the RELC to join the cultural nite (now dubbed "A Evening with SYC") of SYC 2011. We were introduced to the

current crop of SYC delegates as alumni. The event triggered a trip down memory lane for us Eagles, especially those who are not in Singapore.

### *Insights and Parting Thoughts*

My SYC and Sunburst Eagles experience are both memorable, but they are also different. With regard to SYC, I looked at Singapore and people-to-people interaction through rose-colored glasses. In 2001, I saw Singapore as a sort of prosperous and orderly paradise. Everything that I saw was amazing. In 2011, on the other hand, my glasses lost much of their rose-colored tint. I believe it has something to do with the fact that I was able to stay in Singapore before and after the duration of Sunburst Eagles. During that period, I saw the less desirable aspects of Singapore society like grime and poverty. The much-vaunted clean toilets were absent when I went to Bras Basah bookshops. It was disconcerting to see poor people beg for money outside Novena Church, where my good friend and fellow Josephine Betty Bandayrel heard Mass and prayed the Perpetual Help Novena. It is an eyesore in a country that is well known to be rich. My Singaporean Eagle friends tell me that the gap between the rich and the poor is wide. I still believe that Singapore is a beautiful city. At least now I can look at it more holistically.

SYC and Sunburst Eagles are indeed examples of Sylvano Mahiwo's Intra-Nation State relations, and in turn, contribute to international relations of ASEAN. SR Nathan, former president of Singapore, himself acknowledges the important role of SYC. According to him, "I am particularly pleased that it [SYC] continues to actively promote its mission of cultural exchange and foster bonding among the participants who have come from all over the region" (James 2007, 5). Ms Ho Ching, former chief of Singapore Technologies, is glad that SYC delegates and alumni have managed to forge ties "across national boundaries, race, cultures, language and religions" (James 2007, 7). During SYC 2001, Ambassador Ridzwan bin Haji Dzafir of Singapore said that SYC is "an avenue for our participants to experience the richness of our ASEAN community, exchange ideas and learn from one another" (James 2007, 19; <http://www.step.com.sg/apps/step.nsf/Webkey/0031/>). He added that "What is most important of all, is that, inm [sic: in] the one week that you will be spending your time together with about 135 participants in SYC 2001, the strong ties of friendship amongst you will be knotted. And I can ensure you that in the years to come, many of you will become re-acquainted whether in business or government circles"

(<http://www.step.com.sg/apps/step.nsf/Webkey/0031/>). Indeed, my ties with my SYC batchmates may have been dormant, but they are definitely not broken.

In many ways, Sunburst Eagles is a fulfillment of the ambassador's prophecy. It is also a program that is an example of Intra-Nation State relations since it is an advanced form of SYC, but this time for SYC alumni who are professionals. But this time, we 25 Eagles are more bonded given the small number of delegates. During the program, we were able to bond outside NUS and got to know one another better. I can safely say that I am close to at least most of them. I believe that social media has allowed us to easily stay in touch with one another.

SYC has expanded to include other Asian countries such as South Korea, China, India, and Bhutan. Eventually, Sunburst Eagles will also include SYC alumni from non-ASEAN countries as well. These two programs, as well as other STEP programs, can serve as models to state actors in Asia and beyond. These state actors can use STEP programs to foster better relations with other nations, since SYC and Sunburst Eagles have proven to be an excellent training ground for intercultural communication – a skill greatly needed today by all peoples.

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