

**LAUNCH CEREMONY OF SCCCI ROVING EXHIBITION
“SOJOURNERS TO CITIZENS: THE CITIZENSHIP JOURNEY”
SPEECH BY SCCCI PRESIDENT KHO CHOON KENG
7 APRIL 2025
SCCCI BUILDING**

Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Second Minister for Law,
SCCCI Honorary Presidents, Honorary Council Members and Council Members,
Distinguished Guests,

Good morning!

1. On behalf of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI), I extend a warm welcome and my heartfelt appreciation to all of you for joining us today. We are deeply honoured to have Minister Edwin Tong officiate this meaningful roving exhibition titled “Sojourners to Citizens: The Citizenship Journey” in celebration of SG60. This is not just a historical showcase – it is also a journey of building a stronger sense of Singaporean identity and fostering a deeper sense of belonging.
2. Over the past six decades, our “Little Red Dot” has transformed from a resource-scarce island into a modern country with high international reputation. Behind this remarkable success lies the tireless efforts and unwavering determination of generations of Singaporeans in building a brighter future. This exhibition highlights an important chapter of Singapore’s nation-building journey – the campaign for citizenship. This is also SCCCI’s most historically significant mission and serves as a tribute to the contributions of our Pioneer Generation and Merdeka Generation, whose efforts have shaped Singapore for future generations.
3. Following the founding of modern Singapore in 1819, many immigrants had arrived in Nanyang as sojourners. Holding travel documents, most maintained close ties with their homeland, hoping to return to China one day. After World War II, while a small number became British subjects, the majority were still regarded as “aliens”. They had no voting rights and no representation in the legislation.

4. Faced with this challenge, SCCCI decided to take on the historic responsibility of rallying local Chinese associations in a decade-long campaign for citizenship.
 - i. First, SCCCI submitted multiple memorandums and held discussions with the colonial government over a ten-year period after WWII.
 - ii. In 1955, with the support of 73 Chinese associations and organisations, SCCCI rallied 2,000 people to hold a silent demonstration at Kallang Airport to call for citizenship rights and the removal of language restrictions in the Legislative Assembly.
 - iii. In 1957, the Legislative Assembly approved the Singapore Citizenship Ordinance, and the Singapore Government started the citizenship registration drive titled “Operation Franchise”. SCCCI rallied all Chinese associations to support this registration drive wholeheartedly and set up a citizenship registration centre at its old premise at 47 Hill Street for the public. As a result, more than 220,000 people had become Singapore Citizens during the three-month campaign.
5. Today, we are honoured to have 91-year-old Mr Chiang Chua Sam and his wife join us at this ceremony. His wife, Madam Foong Moy, was among those who registered for Singapore citizenship at the registration centre set up at the SCCCI Building back then.
6. The fight for citizenship rights is a defining milestone across generations. It marked the birth of the Singaporean identity and paved the way for Singapore’s self-governance and nation-building. Citizenship is not just a legal status or entitlement; it carries the political right to shape our nation’s future, a deep sense of belonging and mission, as well as the duty to defend our nation. Citizenship is a hard-earned privilege, won through the relentless efforts of our forefathers. We must always remember their sacrifices and treasure what we have.

7. In today's turbulent world, many countries and societies face political, economic, cultural or religious division. To sustain Singapore's multicultural society, every generation of Singaporeans must foster a strong sense of identity and cohesion. Citizenship is the bond that strengthens our national unity. The future of Singapore rests on the shoulders of every citizen – if we are willing to take responsibility, stand united and contribute selflessly, we will definitely overcome all the challenges and forge a brighter future together!

8. SCCCI is especially grateful to the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth for its strong support. Following today's launch, this exhibition will travel to schools, clan associations, libraries and community spaces, enabling Singaporeans to deepen their understanding of our history and the significance of our citizenship especially at this key milestone of SG60. Let us pay the highest tribute to our forefathers who have fought for our citizenship rights. At the same time, we urge all Singaporeans to treasure and safeguard the foundations of our nation, and work together to build a more progressive and prosperous Singapore for our future generations! Thank you!