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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The Loss of the ‘World-Soul’?
Education, Culture and the Making of the Singapore Developmental State, 1955 – 2004

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2011

Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of education in the formation of the Singapore developmental state, through a historical study of education for citizenship in Singapore (1955-2004), in which I explore the interconnections between changes in history, civics and social studies curricula, and the politics of nation-building.

Building on existing scholarship on education and state formation, the dissertation goes beyond the conventional notion of seeing education as providing the skilled workforce for the economy, to mapping out cultural and ideological dimensions of the role of education in the developmental state. The story of state formation through citizenship education in Singapore is essentially the history of how Singapore’s developmental state managed crises (imagined, real or engineered), and how changes in history, civics and social studies curricula, served to legitimize the state, through educating and moulding the desired “good citizen” in the interest of nation building. Underpinning these changes has been the state’s use of cultural constructs such as
Confucianism and Asian values to shore up its legitimacy.

State formation in Singapore has been very successful, as evidenced by its economic prosperity and education has played a key role in this success. However, the “economic growth at all costs” ethos comes, arguably, at a price – the potential loss of zeitgeist, or the loss of the “World-Soul”. Nation building in the sense of fostering a sense of rootedness and belonging to the country in its citizenry – the “World-Soul” – had to be relegated to the backburner in the relentless pursuit of economic development, in order to sustain and legitimize the developmental state. By harnessing the educational sphere for its economic growth objectives through the discourse of crisis, the developmental state gained political legitimacy in the eyes of a citizenry increasingly accustomed to educational mobility and material wealth, even if at the expense of political freedoms.
Acknowledgments

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...

- Hebrews 12: 2 (King James Version)

Writing this dissertation has been a trying, but also a rewarding learning experience. It has been a long journey. I am greatly indebted to all who helped me along the way. The dissertation originated from an eureka moment back in January 2000. Therefore, I would like at the onset to give thanks to God for being the source and inspiration of this thesis.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Associate Professor Ruth Sandwell, my thesis supervisor, for her interest in my thesis topic, even though she does not know much about Singapore. I deeply appreciate her quick response and detailed feedback on my drafts despite her very busy schedule. With the benefit of hindsight, what appeared initially to be harsh comments turned out to be the major building blocks of my thesis. The thesis would not be in its final form without her critical comments and guidance. I owe her an immense intellectual debt.

I thank my thesis committee members for their willingness to be on my committee. I am thankful to Professor Ruth Hayhoe for introducing the methodology of ideal types. Her knowledge of East Asian culture proved invaluable in helping me fine-tune my analyses and interpretations. I thank Dr. Mark Evans for his interest in my study, and his very useful comments on the civic and citizenship education aspect of my thesis. In particular, I thank him for his suggestion to include a brief overview of the literature on citizenship education. To Associate Professor Karen Mundy, I deeply appreciate for her comments on a very early draft of my thesis proposal, which I wrote as a term paper for the Comparative, International and Development Education introductory course. I am especially grateful to Karen for re-scheduling the talk by Professor Andy Green so that he could attend my final oral defense.

I couldn’t have asked for a better external examiner than Professor Andy Green. I thank him for the glowing examiner’s report, which demonstrated not only an understanding in the concept of the developmental state, but also on Singapore’s education and society as well. I am grateful and touched for his presence at my final oral defense. To Dr. Roland Sintos Coloma, my internal examiner, I thank him for his comments and questions during my final oral defense, as well as for his interest on my thesis topic.
The research and writing of my thesis was made possible by the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies Travel grant, which funded my two research trips to Singapore. I am also deeply thankful to the guaranteed minimum funding provided by OISE, as well as the OISE Graduate Students Conference Travel grants and GSA conference funding that made it possible for me to present different parts of my thesis at various academic conferences. I especially like to thank my home department, Theory and Policy Studies in Education, for the Berta Vigil Laden Travel Fund which enabled me to present one of my thesis chapters at AERA 2010 conference in Denver.

I was fortunate and blessed to be selected as a Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Singapore in 2009. I am deeply grateful to the National Library Board, Singapore for this generous funding, which granted me the space and time to do my research and writing. I would like to thank Leander Seah for telling me about this fellowship, and also for his suggestions on my thesis title.

Arising from my stint as a Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow, a part of Chapter 3 of my thesis was published as an article entitled “Education for Living: Epitome of Civics Education?” in BiblioAsia, Vol. 7, Issue 3, July 2010, a quarterly journal of the National Library, Singapore. It has been reproduced with permission from the National Library Board. I would like to place on record my deepest thanks and appreciation to the National Library Board for granting me the permission to reproduce this article in my thesis.

I would also like to thank Gwee Li Sui for graciously allowing me to reproduce his poem ‘A Chinese Parable’ in my thesis. This poem was a godsend – it encapsulated perfectly what I wanted to say for my thesis, and provided its title.

It would be amiss if I failed to mention the tremendous help that Mdm Azizah Sidek provided during my research fellowship stint at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Singapore. I thank her for retrieving the many primary and secondary sources for my study, which was a great help in my research and writing. I also thank Mr Tim Yap Fuan at the NUS Central Library and Mr Lee Ching Seng, the former Head of NUS Chinese Library, whose knowledge of the relevant primary sources proved to be most useful in my research. And over at the NIE library, I am grateful to Ms Pauline Ang for her assistance in answering my many queries and requests, as well as allowing me access to Singapore textbook collection in the
library. I would also like to thank the staff at National Archives, Singapore, especially Ms Grace Tang, for their assistance and support.

The original inspiration in January 2000 was an idea for a term paper on history education in Singapore for an elective Comparative Educational Policy course at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. I thank Associate Professor Jason Tan (NIE) for encouraging me to pursue this topic, and for introducing me to the field of Comparative and International Education. I am also grateful to Jason for writing the letter of recommendation for my PhD application to OISE.

I subsequently developed this term paper into a major paper for my Master of Educational Management program with the University of Western Australia, which I did as a part-time student in Singapore while being a full-time high school history and social studies teacher. I thank Dr. Alan Pritchard, my major paper supervisor for his comments and guidance, and for encouraging me to consider doing a PhD. The other UWA professor I owe a debt of gratitude to is Professor Tom O’Donoghue, as he was the one responsible for introducing me to the field of history of education through one of his course readings.

Over the course of conceptualizing my thesis topic, there were many who offered invaluable advice and suggestions. I thank Professor Gary McCulloch, Brian Simon Professor of History of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, Associate Professor Craig Campbell at the University of Sydney, Professors Joseph Farrell, Kathy Bickmore, Daniel Schugurensky and John Portelli for replying my many emails to them as on my thesis topic even before I started my PhD program. Their comments and suggestions proved useful when I was developing my thesis proposal. I would also like to thank Joe Farrell for encouraging me to apply for the collaborative CIDE program. As well, I thank John Portelli and Daniel Schugurensky for their interest and advice on my thesis topic through the term paper I wrote for their courses at OISE.

I continued to receive comments and suggestions from many professors after my thesis proposal was approved. I thank Professor Gopinathan of NIE for his comments on my thesis proposal. Members in the H-Asia listserv, especially Dr. Ian Welch, offered helpful suggestions, of which I am most grateful. I am also thankful to Professor Wing On Lee, Dean of Education Research at NIE, Associate Professor Benjamin Wong of NIE, Dr. Ed Vickers of Institute of Education, University of London, Dr. Ting-Hong Wong of Academia Sinica, Taiwan, Professor
Kerry Kennedy and Associate Professor Greg Fairbrother of Hong Kong Institute of Education for their advice and suggestions. Finally, I thank Associate Professor Ang Cheng Guan for his willingness to be my mentor when I was an exchange student in NIE. I regret not being able to show him any of my chapter drafts, and hope that he will be pleased with my final ‘product’.

Many other people helped me in my thesis journey in one way or the other. I thank Vernon Chan, Wanda Tse and Junjie Huang for editing some of my chapters, and paraphrasing several of my long quotations. I also thank Pamela Low and Hong Yee for helping me photocopy some of the textbooks for my study.

The academic community at OISE and beyond made the thesis writing process a much less lonely one. I thank the thesis support group led by Ruth Hayhoe for the intellectual support, and especially to Kirk Perris for coordinating the meetings. Thanks too to Alison Norman for her advice on how to navigate the history of education program, from the comprehensive examinations to the final oral defense. I also thank Yawei Cui for his advice on how to format the thesis. Annick Corbeil was the first OISE person I met in Toronto. I thank her for showing me around Toronto back in September 2004, and for being such a gracious host when I visited Montreal in the summer of 2006. Beyond OISE, the Citizenship and Democratic Education Special Interest Group at the Comparative and International Education Society provided excellent intellectual support. I especially thank Doyle Stevick and Anatoli Rapoport for making me feel welcome at the CANDE SIG.

I am thankful for the friendships that were made since I arrived in Toronto. In particular, I thank the people who helped me organize the Toronto Singapore Film Festival over the years, many of whom became good friends – May Ho, Rebecca Hu, Audrey Ooi, Pamela Foo, Kenneth Lam, Tracy Qin, June Kim, Emile Dirks, Anna Chen, Priscilla Poh, Maureen Soh, Brandon Wee, Wan Ting Gan, Katie Cooper, Liyan Chin, Angela Teo, Shuxia Tai, Nelson Wei Tan, Arnold Wee, Wai Min Lee. I hope the festival will continue even after I am not around in Toronto. I also thank Kim Larsen, John Ng, Jack Lee, Wesley Chiang, Jing Shen, Jennifer Hompoth, Jing Guo, Bing Qing, Jeremy Lim, Sarah Tellis, Donna Kay Kakonge, and Cuijie Chen for their friendship. I remain deeply grateful to Wai Yin and his wife for helping me to settle down in Toronto when I first arrived in late December 2004, as well as for their prayers.

My church family in Toronto and Singapore were a constant source of spiritual support. I thank the leaders and members of the small groups I attended in Faith Community Baptist
Church and New Creation Church in Singapore, as well as Toronto City Church, for their friendship and prayers. I especially like to thank Joseph, his wife Evelyn, “Mommy”, Hubert Joseph, Lisa and Dominic, Suzyo Chilongo, and Nicholas Yee and Fiona Wong for their friendship and the good memories.

Of all my friends I made in Toronto, I would like to single out Vincent Chua for special mention. Vincent and I have very different personalities, yet we became close friends in Toronto. I thank him for his friendship, the many intellectual discussions we had, as well as for the fond memories of the times we spent together in Toronto. I wish him well in his faculty position over at the National University of Singapore.

To Kelvin and Anna Sng, I thank them for their friendship and for including me as an unofficial part of their family as the de facto ‘godfather’ of their two lovely sons. Keagan and Kyran are a constant source of joy. I regret not being able to know Kyran, as I left Singapore to go back to Toronto when he was only a few months old. I hope to meet all of them soon.

I owe a tremendous debt to my family, who loved me unconditionally and believed in me. I thank Auntie Maisie for always remembering me in her prayers. I am grateful to Grandma for her love. To Mom and Dad, I thank them from the bottom of my heart for supporting me in my doctoral studies, even though they have very little clue of what I am researching and writing on. I also thank them for giving me a new laptop last year as my birthday gift to replace the previous one that had crashed. I trust that Mom and Dad, Auntie Maisie and Grandma will be delighted to know that I have finally arrived at the end of my PhD journey.

I would not have completed my thesis if not for the prayers and support given by Jouie. Her constant reminders and “threats” got me back on track whenever I slackened off in my writing, of which I deeply grateful. I also thank and cherish her companionship and the many fond memories we had over the years. I hope that we will have many more in the years to come.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to place my deepest thanks my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. His grace provided the strength for me to finish the thesis. All glory and praise to His name.
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Dedicated to the memory of the late Mr. Phua Cheng Tong and Emeritus Professor R. Freeman Butts, as well as to all the history professors and teachers who taught me over the years
Chapter 1
Education and the Developmental State: The Importance of Culture

Said the Premier: For a lifetime I have sought only the common good and with bare hands wrought a kingdom, whose vast wealth now stands testified by pagodas, innumerable, sundried as the blades of grass — a permanent fortune locked from the barbarians of the warring dune by the joining of walls. So long as we strive, we shall enjoy our fruits; and he will survive who works on diligently — for Work is Life. God gave them the hands, I have given them tools; and none starves in this kingdom except the fools. Our magistrates are just and good law is praised. Our governors are wise and the stores are raised. Here are the foundations for millennial peace! Is there more a people will desire than these?

- from the poem *A Chinese Parable* by Gwee Li Sui

Singapore is regarded an economic success story, with Manuel Castells, an eminent sociologist, calling it “the quintessential developmental state”. Despite its impressive economic achievement, Singapore is engaged in an ongoing struggle to identify its core values. Indeed, forging a sense of national identity has been a preoccupation for the Singapore Government over the past four decades. As part of this process, the national education system has been assigned a central role in socializing students into their roles as future citizens in the developmental state. This dissertation examines the role of education in the formation of the Singapore developmental

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1 This poem was first published in Gwee Li Sui’s *Who Wants to Buy a Book of Poems* (Singapore: Landmark books, 1998). It is also found on [http://gweek.wordpress.com/1998/09/01/a-chinese-parable/](http://gweek.wordpress.com/1998/09/01/a-chinese-parable/) (assessed on 30 July 30, 2010).

2 Manuel Castells, ‘The Developmental City-State in an Open World Economy’, BRIE Working Paper 31 (Berkeley 1988), p. 4. The concept of the developmental state is complex and historically informed, and will be discussed later in the chapter.
state, through a historical study of education for citizenship in Singapore (1955 – 2004), where I explore the interconnections between changes in history, civics and social studies curricula, and the politics of nation-building. It provides a historical study of citizenship education in Singapore, in which a comparative study of history, civics and social studies curricula, and the politics and policies that underpin them are examined.

Since Singapore acquired self-government in 1959, and subsequently independence in 1965, its various civic and citizenship education programs have been put in place, only to be dismantled later and replaced with yet other programs. What then are the civic and citizenship education programs (and their aims) that have been introduced over the years since 1955? What then is the nature of citizenship education in Singapore? Why are these programs and curricula constantly “dismantled” and replaced with newer programs? To what extent do ‘crises’ (real or perceived) affect the politics and policy that underpin these curricular changes? And how important is the role of education policy via citizenship education in Singapore’s nation building? Undergirding all these questions is the core question of the relationship between education, in particular citizenship education, and the developmental state.

The study begins in 1955, as that was the year for the *Report of the All Party Commission on Chinese Education*. One of the key recommendations of the report was the introduction of the teaching of civics in Singapore schools. That is identified in this study as the starting point for civics and citizenship education in Singapore. This dissertation goes on to explore the relationship between the politics and educational policy, and the subsequent impact on the history and citizenship education curriculum and textbooks. It must be noted that this is a historical study of education for citizenship in Singapore’s *schools*. Higher education (post secondary education), adult education and the military are examples of other contexts of
citizenship education which I will not be exploring here. A historical study of citizenship education in Singapore provides the perspectives to help to better frame and elucidate the issues and questions on citizenship education in Singapore today. This will provide an interesting case study of forging national identity through education in a state that transformed itself from a weak to a strong and successful state in a short span of time.

Singapore is a small island-city republic of about 684 square kilometers, with a total population of about 3.5 million people in 2004, \(^3\) of which 76 percent is Chinese, with a 13 percent Malay Muslim minority and a 9 percent Indian (mostly Tamil) minority. \(^4\) It is surrounded by two Muslim states, Malaysia and Indonesia. Political leaders constantly remind Singaporeans of the fragility of ethnic relations. The state’s perception of fragility in Singapore’s social fabric, as well as a deep sense of vulnerability in Singapore’s economic and geo-political milieu, accounts for its pervasive role in citizenship education for nation building. \(^5\) That the same political party, the People’s Action Party (PAP) has been returned to power in successive elections with landslide victories demonstrates the pervasiveness of the hegemonic ‘survivalist’ state discourse among the general public. \(^6\)

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\(^3\) By 2010, Singapore’s population has swelled to 5 million, largely due to immigration.

\(^4\) The remaining two percent or so of the population are made up of Eurasians (European and Asian descent) and other races.

\(^5\) I will elaborate on Singapore’s vulnerabilities in subsequent chapters, especially in Chapters 3 and 6.

Existing scholarship in East Asia in general, and Singapore and Hong Kong in particular, tend to treat history education and citizenship education separately. 7 Most theses on history education and social studies in Singapore tended to focus on pedagogical aspects of history teaching and the perceptions of teachers and students regarding these two disciplines. 8 Nonetheless, there were some undergraduate honours theses submitted to the National University of Singapore, which sought to elucidate the use of history by Singapore leaders and the historiography of the history of Singapore. 9 Like the literature on history education, many of the academic works which make reference to civics and citizenship education developments in schools are generally philosophical, theoretical or pedagogical in nature. 10 In the case of Singapore, history education remains a key component of citizenship education in schools. A


study of citizenship education in Singapore therefore needs to incorporate both history and citizenship education.

Both citizenship and citizenship education are contested concepts, and because of competing definitions, conceptualizations and contexts of what the term citizenship entails, citizenship education is often not easy to define. Broadly speaking, citizenship education places strong emphasis on “civic education” which involves the students learning about the country’s political, legal and economic systems, their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how their government works. Kennedy reiterates that this kind of civic knowledge “is interdisciplinary and integrated while the values must be firmly embedded in a vision that focuses on the good of all rather than the selfish demands of individuals”. Civics also teaches students about decision-making and leadership. In short, citizenship involves participation in and awareness of the benefits, privileges and responsibilities of community life. The process develops decision-making skills, values, attitudes, information and understanding to allow young citizens to actively participate in society.


Historically, national education systems played an important role in citizenship education, particularly in education for nation building\textsuperscript{14}, and in the rise of the nation state. In doing so, citizenship education “act[s] as a vehicle of social integration through the transmission of culture”\textsuperscript{15} – a socializing function and the maintenance of social order. Over the past few decades, citizenship education in the West has largely shifted its focus from the forging of national identity to an emphasis on the cultivation of democratic and civic values.

In contrast, citizenship education in East Asia stresses moral and communitarian values as well as national identity. An emphasis in education for the purpose of forging national identity is hardly surprising, given the relative youth of many Asian states, in particular, those that came into being following decolonization in the decades following the end of World War Two. The East Asian conception of citizenship education has a long history, which is rooted in Confucian tradition. Education was valued highly throughout Chinese Imperial history, with the long tradition of imperial examinations (\textit{keju}) from the Han Dynasty, which were based on Confucian classics. It served two functions, “self cultivation and recruiting of ‘men of talent’ to administer the affairs of the state”\textsuperscript{16} The focus was on cultivating one’s moral values as opposed to civic values of the West. Moral education thus has a long history in East Asian and Chinese intellectual tradition. In this context, Cummins argues that the West tends to emphasize education for democracy and civic values\textsuperscript{17}, while Asia emphasizes “‘good’ citizenship, moral

\textsuperscript{14} Andy Green, \textit{Education, Globalization and the Nation State} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{17} William K. Cummins, S. Gopinathan and Yasumasa Tomoda (eds.) \textit{The Revival of Values Education in Asia and the West} (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988).
education, and the range of values associated with these aspects of civics”\textsuperscript{18}. In other words, citizenship education in East Asia, of which Singapore is part of culturally, emphasizes the cultivation of moral values for nation building.

**The Developmental state and Education**

The theoretical starting point of this dissertation is the relationship between education and state formation. According to Andy Green, state formation refer[s] to the historical process by which ‘states’ or ‘nation states’ are formed or reformed. In its broad sense ‘state formation’ encompasses the achievement and maintenance of national/state sovereignty; the construction of national public institutions and economic infrastructures; and also the popularization of the notions of citizenship, statehood and national identity which bind it together.\textsuperscript{19}

More specifically for Singapore, state formation refers to the evolution of the developmental state, which derives its legitimacy from promoting and sustaining economic development. As the developmental state concept is central to the study, it is necessary to unpack and define what it is. To do so, we have to begin with the historical context of Japan and East Asia after the Second World War.

In the decades following the Second World War, East Asia emerged as the engine of economic growth in the world. The stellar economic performances of Japan, and the four Asian Tigers, or Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs) of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore astounded many economists and scholars, who became interested in whether there


\textsuperscript{19} Andy Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State*, p. 31.
was an East Asian model of development that could be exported to other developing nations. Many reasons were proffered by scholars to account for this spectacular economic growth, touted as an economic miracle. These include cultural reasons in the form of Confucianism and Asian values as well as other factors which can be broadly categorized as explanations derived from neo-classical economic theory, the Japanese-centred argument, as well as American hegemony and statist explanations. The outlining of the various factors accounting for the success of the East Asian economies sets the context for understanding the developmental state, as well as the role and relationship of Confucianism and Asian values to the state.

Proponents of the cultural factor behind the rise of Japan and the NIEs assert that “both Japan and the newly industrialized countries of East Asia belong to the broad area of influence of Sinic civilization, and there can be no doubt that Confucianism has been a very powerful force in all of them.” This argument was first articulated by Edwin Reischauer in his seminal essay “The Sinic World in Perspective”. Building on Reischauer’s pioneering work, Berger and Hsiao go on to state that “Confucian ethics, as reflected in government leadership, competitive education, a disciplined workforce, principles of equality and self-reliance, and self cultivation, provides a necessary background and powerful motivating force for the rise of East Asia.” This is echoed by Ezra Vogel, in his seminal work *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia*, where he outlines four Confucian institutions and cultural

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practices responsible for the East Asia economic miracle – a meritocratic elite, a competitive entrance examination system, the importance of the group, and the idea of self cultivation.\textsuperscript{24}

Similarly, Tu Wei-ming argues that “the social and cultural capital that has sustained the economic dynamism of Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons has been at least commensurate with Confucian ethics, if not thoroughly Confucian in nature.”\textsuperscript{25} One key Confucian trait he notes is “the centrality of the family in East Asia, not only as a basic social unit but as a metaphor for political culture”. While Tu acknowledges the considerable variation in Chinese, Korean and Japanese family structures and functions, he notes that “the family’s supreme role in capital formation, the classic Confucian vision that ‘only when families are regulated are states governed’ (stated in the opening passage of the \textit{Great Learning}) is still taken absolutely seriously in East Asian political culture.”\textsuperscript{26}

Confucian values and ethics were thus regarded as a key to the economic success of Japan and the Four Little Dragons (later referred to as the Four Tiger Economies) prior to the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The Singapore government for instance, embarked on a concerted effort to promote Confucianism in Singapore society via the mass media and the curriculum in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{27} Associated with the promotion of Confucian values is the discourse of Asian values in the late 1980s and early 1990s.\textsuperscript{28}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{24} Ezra Vogel \textit{The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), Ch. 5.
\textsuperscript{25} Tu Wei Ming \textit{Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity} (Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 10.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 8
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., Chapters 14 and 15.
\textsuperscript{28} In an interview with Fareed Zakaria, Lee Kuan Yew denied the existence of an Asian model for economic development. Nonetheless, there was constant refrain to Confucian conceptions of society throughout the interview.
The valourization of Confucianism as a key to the economic success of Japan and the NIE is in striking contrast with its demonization at the turn of the 20th century. Max Weber, in particular, argued that capitalism was incompatible to China:

The Chinese in all probability would be quite incapable... of assimilating capitalism which has technically and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area. It is obviously not a question of deeming the Chinese “naturally ungifted” for the demands of capitalism. But compared to the Occident, the varied conditions which externally favored the origin of capitalism in China did not suffice to create it. 29

In other words, Weber regarded Confucianism as antithetical to modernity and economic development.

By the turn of the twentieth century, China was reduced to a semi-colonial status, as the Western powers defeated China repeatedly from the time of the First Opium War in the early 1840s. There was widespread disillusionment with Confucianism especially on the part of Chinese intellectuals, as it was seen was the key factor that retarded China’s modernization. This culminated in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which rejected Confucianism wholesale, seeing it as “incompatible with science and democracy”. The view that Confucianism was responsible for China’s inability to modernize “has been the consensus of the Chinese intelligentsia... since the May Fourth Movement in 1919”. 30


The economic success of Japan and the East Asian Tigers after the Second World War renders “the thesis that the Confucian ethnic is incompatible with the spirit of capitalism… untenable. On the contrary, … the Confucian ethic … may actually have helped industrial East Asia to develop a different form of modern industrial capitalism”,31 one that is more communal and less individualistic. However, such an argument fails to account for why Confucian societies before World War Two were unable to achieve the spectacular economic growth attained by these same societies after the war.

Besides the classic Weberian thesis that Confucianism was responsible for the failure of East Asia to modernize, another criticism of the Confucian argument is that it ignores the differences and variations in Confucian (or Confucian heritage – a term that is often used) societies.32 Moreover, it is problematic to conflate the cultural and the Confucian explanation, as since Thailand and Malaysia have been able to attain a significant measure of economic success, yet they are not Confucian heritage societies. As pointed out by Stubbs, “Thailand has been heavily influenced by Therevada Buddhism, which is a different form of Buddhism from that popular in China and Japan. And, most significantly, Malaysian society is predominantly Muslim.”33

While the neo classical and statist explanations focus on the role of the state and the market, the Japanese-centred argument for the success of the East Asian economies demonstrates the importance of historical perspective. One strand of the explanation argues that the Japanese

32 This was acknowledged by Tu (1996).
33 Stubbs (2005), p. 11-12.
colonial experience in Korea and Taiwan, although it was repressive, laid the bureaucratic, infrastructural and economic foundations for their later economic success. However, Singapore and Hong Kong only experienced brief periods of Japanese occupation during the Second World War. It was the British colonial legacy in these two cities, rather than the Japanese, that provided the foundations for their subsequent economic prosperity.

Another strand of the argument views Japan as both the engine of economic growth and model for economic development in the NIEs. This is also popularly referred to as the “Japanese” or “flying geese” economic model. The NIEs emulated the Japanese experience, and also benefited from Japanese aid and foreign direct investment from the 1960s.

Like the Japanese-centred argument, the American hegemonic explanation requires historical perspective and understanding of the region. This explanation was popular amongst Marxists, neo-Marxists and those on the leftist camp as the economic success of Japan and the NIEs undermined the claims of the dependency theorists. The World-System theorists likewise sought to explain the economic prowess of East Asia as the result of American hegemony, of which Japan and the NIEs were among the chief beneficiaries. That countries like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were regarded as the main line of defence against the onslaught of communism, which were exacerbated by events such as the establishment of the Peoples’

35 Stubbs, Ch 1, Ezra Vogel, The Four Little Dragons, Ch 5.
Republic of China and the Korean War, accounted for the massive amounts of American aid and investment (and military assistance) to these countries.

However, the American-hegemonic argument, like the Japanese-centred one, is insufficient to explain the economic “miracles” in Hong Kong and Singapore, as neither city was a direct recipient of American aid. This brings us to the explanation proffered by Stubbs, who argues that

[it was] the geopolitical history of East and Southeast Asia [that] had a major impact on the economic success of the ... ‘miracle’ economies... The series of hot wars that preoccupied the region from the Second World War onwards, in conjunction with the all-encompassing Cold war, significantly shaped the political and economic institutions that emerged in the[se] ... highly successful Asian economies.38

The argument that the Cold War was a major factor in the economic miracle of Japan and the East Asian Tigers, while convincing, can be viewed as a re-statement of the American hegemonic explanation. Even Stubbs admits that “as a result of ... the Cold War, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were significant beneficiaries of American assistance as the US sought to retain its dominant position.”39

The neo-classical economic, or the free market explanation posits that “unfettered markets are more effective in promoting economic development than governments, which are incapable of making fully informed decisions”.40 Thus, the East Asian countries achieved spectacular economic growth because of their governments’ market oriented development

39 Ibid, p. 14
policies. Edward Chen, a leading economist on East Asia argues that “state intervention is largely absent. What the state provided is simply a suitable environment for the entrepreneurs to perform their function”. A suitable environment would include features such as having a highly educated and skilled labour force, a stable political climate, high personal savings rates and the ability to attract foreign investment. The NIEs are therefore regarded as “capitalist havens” and “capitalist paradises”.

The neoclassical argument about the pivotal role of free markets and the limited role of the state came under fire by the “statists”, who contend that the state played a central role in the economic development of these NIEs. Chalmers Johnson in his book, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, is regarded as the originator of the capitalist developmental state concept, whereby “the state’s role in the economy is shared with the private sector, and both the public and private sectors have perfected means to make the market work for developmental goals”. In other words, the economic growth and development is “state-led”, in order to achieve the “strategic goals” of capitalists. Drawing upon the existing concepts of ‘market rationality’ and ‘plan rationality’, Johnson proposes the notion of ‘plan ideological’ to distinguish between the

command economies of the USSR and Eastern Europe and that of Japan. The latter would be ‘plan rational’ while the former, ‘plan ideological’. Jeffrey Henderson and Richard Appelbaum go on to assert that “state policy and influence … [is] the single most important determinant in the East Asian economic miracle.”\(^{46}\) They take Johnson’s conception a step further, by introducing the concept of ‘market ideological’ to take into account the rise of neo-liberalism since the Reagan-Thatcher era.

The widely read World Bank research report, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, aimed to strike a middle ground between the statist and the free market positions. On one hand, it concluded that “In large measure the HPAE [High Performing Asian Economies] achieved high growth in getting the basics right”\(^{47}\) which supported the neoclassical economists’ arguments. But on the other hand, “In most of these economies, in one form or another, the government intervened – systematically and through multiple channels – to foster development, and in some cases the development of specific industries,”\(^{48}\) giving credence to the key role played by the developmental state.

In short, “behind the economic performance of the Asian Tigers [and Japan] breathes the dragon of the developmental state”.\(^ {49}\) The East Asian Tigers (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong


\(^{48}\) Ibid. p. 5

and Singapore), together with Japan and China, thus fall under this category of ‘developmental’ states. Drawing from Chalmers Johnson and various other scholars, Manuel Castells succinctly defines the developmental state in the following way:

A state is developmental when it establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by development the combination of steady high rates of economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy.50

At the heart of the developmental state is political legitimacy that is attained through the solving of crises by the state.51 In other words, the developmental state arose out of the crisis of survivalism, and is perpetuated by the generating and solving of crises.52 Economic development is the means to attaining the end of nation building and the legitimation of state power.53

The central role that crisis plays in the formation of the developmental state corresponds to the three factors posited by Andy Green that account for accelerated state formation. The first is the existence of external threats and crises, second the occurrence of major political upheavals such as revolution or struggle for independence, and third “state-led programmes of reform to


It is now widely acknowledged that education plays a significant role in state formation. Like Japan, which “was one of the first societies to treat education as a tool of national development”, Singapore is a classic example on how education plays a pivotal role in state formation.

While there has been a plethora of scholarship on the role of education in the Singapore developmental state, the literature tends to emphasize the role of education in promoting economic development. The cultural and ideological dimension of the role of education and the developmental state has been relatively neglected. As this dissertation will argue, the history of citizenship education in Singapore is essentially the history of crisis management in the context of a developmental state. In a developmental state, the “good citizen” is one who imbibes the state's crisis discourse concerning the economy and becomes a productive worker.

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59 Masaki Abe, ‘The Developmental State and Educational Advance in East Asia’, in *Educate*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2006), pp. 6-12. Abe’s is one of the few works which touches on the cultural and social process that education plays in a developmental state.
Looking at Singapore, this dissertation will demonstrate how the “good citizen” is being created through the state's active manipulation of cultural values such as Confucianism and Asian values, as well as through systematic changes in history, civics and social studies curricula. By harnessing the educational sphere for its economic growth objectives, the developmental state gains political legitimacy in the eyes of a citizenry increasing accustomed to educational mobility and material wealth.

The focus of this dissertation is thus on the role of moral and social education – in the form of civics and history education – in the formation of the Singapore developmental state. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural and ideological dimensions in the role and relationship between education and the developmental state. By generating and solving crises, the state enhances its legitimacy. The discourse around crises would provide us with an understanding of the culture of the developmental state, while education policies (in the form of changes in civics and history education) playing the ‘mediating’ role between crises and the developmental state.

Methodology

This study has relied on mainly on published primary sources in the form of government documents, speeches and curriculum materials. A key primary document to elucidate the historical crises came from the verbatim records of the Singapore Legislative Assembly and Parliament as they pertain to education. I also consulted education reports such as the All Party

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60 Ideally, I would like to also examine the classified government documents in the Ministry of Education and the other government departments as it pertains to education as well. However, Singapore does not have a process of declassification of government documents like that of the UK, USA, Australia and Canada. The unpublished government documents are most likely to remain classified in the foreseeable future. Historians working on the post-1965 history of Singapore are all faced with this limitation, and one way to get around it is to use the published documents.
Report on Chinese Education that was tabled to the Legislative Assembly in 1956, and subsequent reports like the Goh and Ong Reports of 1979. Relevant English and Chinese newspapers provided the media responses to the education issues of the day, particularly before the Singapore government’s restrictions on press freedom since the 1970s. Speeches made by the Prime Minister on education, and relevant speeches by the Ministers of Education over the years were examined as well. All these materials are available in the public domain. The Singapore Malaysian Collection at the National University of Singapore Central Library has all these materials, and so does the National Library of Singapore. The two volume memoire by Mr Lee Kuan Yew provides an insider’s perspective from the person largely responsible for making Singapore what is today.

As for curriculum documents, I examined the syllabi for history, social studies, religious education, and civic and moral education, and their textbooks. These syllabi and textbooks are found at the library of the National Institute of Education, where I was an exchange student in 2007. However, the collection textbooks and teaching materials before 1980 were incomplete, partly due to the low emphasis put on history in the first decade of Singapore’s independence. As such, I had to rely on the syllabus documents and whatever textbooks I could find.

My experience as a History teacher and NE Officer at the Ministry of Education have provided me with an understanding of how educational policy and curriculum are formulated, as

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61 I will elaborate on the Goh and Ong Reports in Chapter 3.


63 The low status and emphasis on history was a deliberate one, and will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

64 For this reason, the earlier chapters of my dissertation (Chapters 2 and 3) make no mention of teaching materials, focusing more on the syllabus and textbooks.
well as the ideology that underpins them. I brought this knowledge into the reading of these primary sources. At the same time, I am well aware that my own bias as a former “insider” could also be a bane as well. Thus, throughout the dissertation, I was conscious of my personal bias, and allowed the conceptual framework to guide me in the reading the interpretation of the evidence.65

The post 1965 history of Singapore is only just beginning to be written.66 Nonetheless, there is a growing secondary literature by political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and educational researchers at the National Institute of Education.67 The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (a think tank on Southeast Asia) publishes a yearly country review, in which there are chapters on Singapore. The yearbook on Singapore published by the Singapore government is another useful primary source material.

65 The issue of bias is something faced by historians and all scholars alike. Most historians resolve this dilemma by being aware of their own bias, and striving to read and interpret the past in its own terms, and not how they would like to see it. I view my conceptual framework as an ideal type, providing the useful heuristic in the reading of my sources. See Ruth Hayhoe, “The use of ideal types in comparative education: a personal reflection”, Comparative Education, vol. 43, no. 2 (May 2007), pp. 189-205 and Max Weber, Sociological Writings (W. Heydebran Ed.) (New York: Continuum, 1994).

66 One of the best Ph.D theses on Singapore education in recent years is Wendy D. Bokhorst Heng’s ‘Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore’. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation submitted to OISE/UT, 1998.

Overview of subsequent chapters

With the introductory chapter providing the theoretical framework, Chapter 2 sets the context of the British colonial experience and decolonization for the rest of the study. Prior to the Japanese occupation, the British colonial administration largely neglected education, and was uninterested in state formation. After the Second World War, the British began to place some emphasis on establishing a unified educational system. The twin threats of nationalism (decolonization) and communism to the British right to rule prompted this change in educational policy. This presented itself as a crisis for the struggle for legitimacy and state formation amidst decolonization. Education played a central role in this nationalist struggle. The main contention was the divide between the English and Chinese stream schools. The All Party inquiry on Chinese Education and its subsequent report will be examined in this chapter. Key recommendations of the report include the teaching of civics education, Malayanization of the curriculum, and bilingualism. This All Party report had a far reaching impact on the subsequent educational development of Singapore.

In Chapter 3, I put the case for the crisis of national survival as the key to understanding the relationship between citizenship education and the state during this period. In August 1965, Singapore was ceded from the Federation of Malaysia to become an independent and sovereign state. The government of the People’s Action Party (PAP) had to forge a new nation overnight, something they had not planned for. In any case, Singapore’s merger with Malaysia was short-lived, tumultuous and traumatic. The PAP government and the Malaysian Federal government clashed over differences in their vision for Malaysia, and relations between the two governments reached a nadir with the outbreak of racial riots in August and September 1964. This accounted for the crisis of survival and the state’s management of it was manifested in the concept of
multiracialism as the founding tenet and the bilingual language policy, which had implications for the civics and history curriculum, and allows us to explore and explain the constant changes that were introduced to them. The status of history declined, while civics education was emphasized, with major changes taking place in the primary civics curriculum as reflected in the Education for Living program – the flagship citizenship education program.

With the increasing affluence of Singapore arising from its rapid economic growth, the crisis of survival discussed in Chapter 3 made way for the crisis of morality and culture (deculturalization) in Chapter 4. The Singapore government – and Lee Kuan Yew in particular – was concerned with the onslaught of what they considered as permissive Western values encroaching upon the indigenous Eastern/Asian values which were considered to have a very high value. The government’s official rhetoric of Asian Values and the emphasis on moral education was to act as ‘cultural ballast’ against the influences from the ‘decadent West’ and Western individualism. This provided the context for the Asian Values discourse that underpins the Moral Education Review, leading to the introduction of a large number of moral education programs, Religious Knowledge as well as History and Social Studies. At the heart of the issue was the state’s attempt to forge and articulate a Singaporean identity, and the role of citizenship/moral education in attaining this goal.

Chapter 5 discusses how this crisis of legitimacy is played out through the intensification of the Asian Values discourse as an ideological bulwark for the PAP’s legitimacy. The crisis of legitimacy was presented as a crisis of national identity, and hence the “shared values” project which is an articulation of national identity by the PAP state. The Singapore government regarded Religious Knowledge (RK), and in particular Confucian Ethics (an option within RK) as the apex of the moral and civics education program. The RK program was scrapped in 1990,
and the government cited the rise of religious extremism as the main reason for this. However, events such as the sharp decline of electoral support for the PAP, as well as the detention of alleged ‘Marxist conspirators,’ suggests that the PAP was concerned over a crisis of legitimacy in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{68} The crisis of legitimacy, as well as the articulation of national identity, were manifested in the discussion and debates over the demise of RK, as well as the public consultation exercise over the introduction of ‘shared values’ (which was introduced due to the failure of RK). While the PAP changed its authoritarian style to a more consultative one, this ‘softer’ governance style was undergirded by its desire to maintain and perpetuate its hegemony over the city-state. The introduction of ‘shared values’ led to revisions of the civics, history and social studies curricular. However, the shared values project, ostensibly as a national ideology which is underpinned by Asian Values and the encouragement to learn one’s ethnic roots, eventually faded into obscurity as the crisis of legitimacy and national values was solved and managed.

Chapter 6 continues the narrative of national identity articulation in the introduction of the ‘National Education’ (NE) program. The conceptualization of the NE program was a top-down one, from the office of the Prime Minister. The events surrounding the launch of NE to schools seem to suggest that it was more of a knee-jerk reaction to a crisis of supposed historical amnesia amongst young Singaporeans, rather than a reasoned and thought out strategy. The state regarded this historical forgetting as inimical to the fostering of a national identity. Though NE was not merely about history, the implementation of NE focused initially of telling the Singapore

\textsuperscript{68} By 1980, the PAP was used to winning all the seats in Parliament. Thus, the loss of even one Parliamentary seat was regarded as a crisis. The ‘Marxist conspirators’ did not pose an immediate threat to the PAP regime. However, the developmental state’s obsession with economic growth meant that it would regard any alternative ideology as a threat to its legitimacy, and hence had to be done away with.
Story, the state’s version of Singapore’s history, obliterating other histories. The implementation of the NE program in the non-formal curriculum bears out the state’s concern and almost obsession in presenting its version of Singapore Story. In particular, I examine the National Education Exhibition as an example of the state’s construction of the Singapore Story as a narrative of triumph over adversity and crises.

Finally, Chapter 7 examines the implementation of NE in the formal curriculum, beginning with and going beyond the Singapore Story narrative. NE took on an increased importance and relevance with the September 11 attacks, the arrest of the Jemaah Islamiyah extremists, and terrorist threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists. This chapter thus makes the case of a crisis of national security and social cohesion as the framework to understand the trajectory of NE. The state regarded the maintenance of racial harmony and social cohesion, and promoting inter-ethnic understanding and intermingling, as its major political socialization aims in NE. By doing so, the state hoped that NE would provide a social and psychological “bulwark” against the onslaught of dangerous and radical ideas (read as political Islam). This is because any alternative ideology, especially political Islam, would be detrimental to Singapore’s continued economic growth, and hence a threat to the legitimacy of the Singapore developmental state. The Singapore state, with its security and surveillance apparatus, thus assumed greater control in order to combat this threat to national safety and security. NE became inscribed to the security and social cohesion rhetoric that assumed increasing importance in the post September 11th world, and it provides the ideological support (in socialising the students) for the further curtailing of the already limited rights of citizens, ostensibly in return for greater public security.
Chapter 2
Education, the Colonial State, and the Crisis of *Merdeka*¹

The two decades following the Second World War were eventful years in Singapore history. This chapter will examine Singapore’s political history between 1955 and 1965, and its impact on citizenship education. Singapore went from being a British Colony, to self-government in 1959, being part of Malaysia in 1963, and finally independence in 1965. Singapore thus went through several transitions over this decade, from colony to self-governance to being part of Malaysia and finally to independence. This decade was considered one of the most eventful periods of Singapore’s history. The same period was also fraught with crises, student unrests, strikes and racial riots. What was the impact of these political transitions and political struggles on citizenship and history education in Singapore?

This chapter outlines the triple challenges of nationalism, decolonization and communism in this period, which saw the end of British rule, and the struggle amongst the various political parties to lead Singapore. Education played a central role in this nationalist struggle. The main contention was the divide between the English and Chinese stream schools. I will examine the All Party inquiry on Chinese Education and its subsequent report. Key recommendations of the report included the teaching of civics education, Malayanization of the curriculum, and bilingualism. This All Party report had a far reaching impact on the subsequent educational development of Singapore.

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¹ *Merdeka* is a Malay word denoting ‘freedom’ or ‘independence’
The Colonial Legacy and Education in Singapore

Before going any further however, it would be useful to recount the history of Singapore prior to 1955, to set the context for the period under review. For the most part of its recorded history, Singapore was a British colony. The colonial legacy of the British, especially with regards to their education policy towards Singapore, provides the background to understanding the social and educational problems in Singapore in the 1950s.

Modern Singapore began on February 6, 1819, when Thomas Stamford Raffles of the English East India Company acquired the island as a trading post for the company. Prior to the British landing in Singapore, it was a tiny fishing village with fewer than two hundred people, mostly Malays. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 confirmed Singapore as a British possession – dividing present day Malaysia and Indonesia into British and Dutch spheres of influence respectively. In 1826, the Straits Settlements comprising Singapore, Penang and Malacca were created, and they were governed by the East India Company in India. Singapore eventually became the administrative seat of the Straits Settlements. The Sepoy Mutiny in India in 1857 marked the end of the East India Company, which was abolished in the following year. India became a British Crown Colony, and the Straits Settlements continued to be administered by British India until 1867, when the Settlements were transferred to the British Crown. Singapore remained the administrative seat of the Straits Settlements, and subsequently for British Malaya as well when the British extended their influence there. In effect, Singapore was the centre for British Malaya till World War Two.

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2 Singapore was technically under the Dutch suzerainty as it was part of the Johore-Riau sultanate which was under the Dutch influence. Raffles exploited a succession dispute by unilaterally installing the rival clamant as Sultan and concluding a treaty with him to cede Singapore to the East India Company. See C. Mary Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989 rev. ed.), Chapter 1.
The excellent geographical position of Singapore, and its free port status saw the rise of Singapore as the choice port of call in the region. With the opening of the Suez Canal and the advent of steam ships, Singapore became a key entrepot port in international trade. As historian Edwin Lee puts it, “Trade and commerce were the driving force behind all life in Singapore… it was the object of government and it set the style of government, even of the law”. The bustling port of Singapore attracted traders and immigrants from China, India and the surrounding regions in search for work and a better life. The Chinese soon outnumbered the Malays, the original inhabitants of Singapore, becoming the largest ethnic group in Singapore. Nonetheless, colonial Singapore exhibited the traits of a “plural society” as described by Furnival:

Probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples – Europeans, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines.

The British colonial government practiced non-interference towards Singapore’s multiracial population, and this policy was extended to education and schooling as well. And education became divided along racial lines, with the emergence of four separate systems of schooling – English, Malay, Tamil, Chinese, “with each modelled after education in their respective homelands”. What this led to was “the establishment and hardening of linguistic, racial and

5 Wendy Bokhorst-Heng, ‘Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore’, p. 133.
economic divisions… with each community preoccupied with their own ethnic and motherland issues”.

From the onset, education was given scant attention by the East India Company. While Raffles had a grandiose vision of education in his “Singapore Institution” dream, subsequent administrators did not share the same vision. The establishment of the Straits Settlements as a Crown Colony did not provide the impetus for education and schooling, as education was not their top priority, since the objective of British rule in Singapore at this time was trade and not settlement (as opposed to the settler colonies of Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia). The British colonial government lacked a consistent and coherent educational policy in Singapore until after the Second World War.

The Straits Settlements, and Singapore, were regarded as a trading colony by the British rulers. This meant that unlike the settler colonies, state formation was not a priority, and thus, there was no impetus for mass schooling. The only vernacular schools that received full government funding were the Malay schools. However, the rationale for state funding can be found in the telling quote below from the 1884 Straits Settlements report on Education:

Thousands of boys are taken away from idleness, and whilst learning to read and write their own language, to cipher a little, to know something of geography, to write Malay in the Roman character, and to take an active interest in physical exercise and manly sports, they at the same time acquire habits of industry, obedience, punctuality, order, neatness, cleanliness and general good behaviour … After a boy has been a year or two at school, he is found to be less lazy at home, less given to evil habits and mischievous adventure,

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6 Ibid., p. 139.
7 While ‘Singapore Institution’ failed to materialize, it became the forerunner of Raffles Institution, one of the premiere schools in Singapore till this day.
8 This brief account of Singapore’s education history to 1955 draws largely from the works of Harold E. Wilson’s Social Engineering in Singapore and Wendy Bokhorst-Heng’s ‘Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore’.
more respectful and dutiful, much more willing to help his parents and with sense enough not to entertain any ambition beyond following the humble home occupations he has been taught to respect.9

In other words, “[e]ducation appears to be closely linked with an attempt to mould an ideal [Malay] citizen, and with the need to maintain a certain level of social stability in the colony”.10

With regards to English schooling and education, the main objective was to “supply candidates for nearly the whole of the subordinate appointments under Government in the Colony and Native Sates and for clerical and other appointments in mercantile houses”.11 While the colonial government supported vernacular Malay education, they feared that mass English education could be detrimental to their rule:

The objections to teaching English in all the Malay schools would be (1) that the cost would be very great; (2) that it would be impossible, at once, to obtain teachers with the necessary qualifications; (3) that as pupils who acquire a knowledge of English are invariably unwilling to earn their livelihood by manual labour, the immediate result of affording an English education to any large number of Malays would be the creation of a discontented class who might be a source of anxiety to the community.12

As Bokhorst-Heng summed up succinctly, “Access to English needed to be managed in close tandem with the administrative needs of the colony. Anything more than that would certainly result in social instability” 13 To this end, English schools were mostly established by missionaries. Few schools were established by the colonial government.

With regards to Indian and Chinese education, the colonial government adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude, primarily because the Chinese and Indians were regarded as transient workers, and as such, the British felt little responsibility for their education. Until 1935, no Tamil schools were registered, and none received any governmental assistance. And the 1938 Straits Settlements annual departmental report showed that the colonial government’s expenditure on Tamil education was only 0.5 percent of its total expenditure on education.\(^\text{14}\) Needless to say, these schools “were mostly staffed by teachers from India, and closely followed the curriculum and administration of schools in India”.\(^\text{15}\) The Chinese schools fared no better in the same report, with only 4.2 percent of total education expenditure by the colonial government.

The earliest Chinese schools in Singapore were established by philanthropists, and the language of instruction was in the various Chinese dialects. The 1911 revolution saw a change in medium of language to Mandarin. Initially, the British left the Chinese schools alone. However, due to the heightened political activity in the Chinese schools following the 1911 revolution in China and the May 4\(^\text{th}\) movement, the colonial government reversed its stance. The British were concerned that many Chinese schools came under the influence of the *Kuomintang* (Nationalist Party), the ruling party of China from the late 1920s to 1949, as it would potentially weaken their hold on the Chinese in Singapore.\(^\text{16}\) In 1920, it instituted the Registration of Schools Ordinance which required all schools and their teachers to be registered. At the same time, the colonial government introduced a grants-in-aid scheme for Chinese schools, which aimed at limiting the


\(^{15}\) Bokhorst-Heng, ‘Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore’, p. 137.

\(^{16}\) Straits Settlements, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Report*, 1917, p. 235. While the Chinese schools adopted the syllabus and textbooks from China, there were no institutional links with their counterparts in China, both before and after the Second World War.
political influence of China on the schools. One of the key conditions to receive the grant was to use dialects and not mandarin as the language of instruction. Most Chinese schools reacted strongly against this and did not register. Harold Wilson aptly sums up the attitude and policy of the British towards Chinese education prior to the Second World War:

The fluctuations of Government policy towards Chinese education – which revealed first of all a lack of interest, then a desire for control through inspection and reward, later the suspension of grants as an economy measure, and the final resumption of grants with unacceptable conditions attached – tended to create in those pre-Pacific War days a climate of uncertainty and scepticism (sic) which goes far to explain the almost universal distrust displayed by the Chinese community towards the efforts of post-war administrations to restructure the school system in the light of newly perceived social and political ends.  

Post World War State Formation and Education

The British returned to a changed Singapore and Malaya in 1945 following the Japanese occupation of Singapore. The Atlantic Charter guaranteed the right of self determination and government of all territories, setting the stage for decolonization in Asia and Africa. More significantly, the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia shattered the myth of white invincibility and superiority in the region. Following the Japanese surrender, the French and the Dutch were challenged by nationalists in Vietnam and Indonesia, resulting in wars of independence in both countries. The British were also not immune from the tide of nationalism in Malaya and Singapore. Their plan to introduce a Malayan Union met with strong opposition from the

17 Harold E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore*, p. 63. The Chinese schools were sites for the political battles between the ruling Guomindang (Nationalist Party) and the Chinese Communist Party.

18 Indonesia’s struggle for independence ended in 1949 with US threatening to withdraw the Marshall Plan to the Netherlands if they do not withdraw from Indonesia. Vietnam continued to be embroiled in war against the French, and later civil war till 1975.
Malays, resulting in the inauguration of the Federation of Malaya in 1948. That same year also saw the declaration of the Emergency – a 12-year struggle against the Communist insurrection in Malaya.

Following the return of the British, Singapore was separated from Malaya to become a separate British Crown Colony. This was to have serious repercussions in the subsequent history of Singapore. Like Malaya, Singapore was soon faced with the threat of the Communists. It was in this context that the British introduced their Ten Year Plan for education in Singapore. The key principles of the plan were as follows:

1) that education should aim at fostering and extending the capacity for self-government, and the ideal of civic loyalty and responsibility;
2) that equal educational opportunity should be afforded to the children of both sexes and all races:
3) that upon a basis of free primary education there should be developed such secondary, vocational and higher education as would best meet the needs of the country.

It must be noted that there was no immediate plan for the British to decolonize at that point in time. Due to the pre-war policy towards Chinese education by the British, the Chinese community responded cautiously to the plan. On one hand, they welcomed the second and third principles of this policy, “because they suggested that universal and, more importantly, free primary education would be instituted”. This marked the first time that the colonial government aimed to provide mass schooling to all; it was a departure from post war educational policy. However, the Chinese community was concerned with the first principle, seeing it “as a
way of directing their loyalties away from China”. They were also concerned that the education program proposed to introduce the compulsory study of English in the third year of primary school, fearing that English would be established as the lingua franca in Singapore. Finally, “they feared that this program would threaten the autonomy of Chinese schools in development and curriculum design”. The Chinese community was further frustrated by the Registration of Schools Ordinance of 1950, as they saw that as a loss of autonomy for the Chinese schools.

The Ten Year Plan signaled a departure from the neglect of vernacular schooling before the war. Education was now a priority for the British in Singapore, as they needed to articulate a vision of state formation to counter the utopian communist vision of the Malayan Communist Party. To this end, the British allowed for limited elections in the Singapore Legislative Council beginning in 1948. The following decade was an eventful one for Singapore, with the advent of mass politics and Chinese student activism in the middle schools, allegedly with Communist links. Nonetheless, the legacy of colonial rule, resulting in a population that is racially and linguistically divided, as well as economically stratified, together with its policy on education and schooling, provides the context for understanding the decade that followed.

1955 witnessed the first general elections for Singapore’s Legislative Assembly, following the recommendations of the Rendel Commission a year earlier. It was the first competitive multi-party elections in the history of Singapore, which was “keenly and cleanly

22 ibid.
23 ibid., p. 127.
contested”. The Labour Front emerged victorious with 13 of the 25 elected seats in the newly constituted Legislative Assembly, and was invited to form the government.

At the opening of the Legislative Assembly on 22 April 1955, the newly formed government outlined its objectives, chiefly that it will seek “the early attainment of complete internal self-government and union with the Federation of Malaya and will direct its efforts to achieving these immediate ends”. As the Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report noted,

> the policy of the Government is to aim at equal treatment for all schools and all teachers in those schools. The foundation stone of the policy will be a six year course of free primary education for all children. Technical education, which the Government regards as of paramount importance for the economic development of Singapore, will be expanded as rapidly as possible…”

During the debate over the Governor’s address, opposition assemblymen took the government to task on its election campaign promises on education. People’s Action Party (PAP) Assemblyman Lee Kuan Yew cited the Labor Front’s campaign promises on education:

> The Labour Front’s Policy on education is a free compulsory schooling for all children, in English or vernacular schools, for the first six years as a matter of first priority. Thereafter scholarships or grants may be provided in deserving cases.

Lee questioned why education was not compulsory for all school children and whether vernacular schools were included in the government’s education policy, and accused the Labour Front government’s educational policy of becoming diluted. This was echoed by fellow PAP

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24 Colony of Singapore Annual Report 1955, p. 2
25 Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report (thereafter referred as SLAD), 22 April 1955, Col. 6
26 SLAD, 22 April 1955, Col. 9.
27 SLAD, 26 April 1955, Col. 62.
Assemblyman Lim Chin Siong, who charged that “[t]he present education policy [is] a colonial education policy. Therefore education in the mother tongues of the people is not respected and encouraged by the Government.” Lim called for it to be replaced with a “democratic education policy which will respect and encourage the full development of the mother tongues of the peoples…”. 28

Assemblyman John Ede questioned the policy of equal treatment to all schools

Does it mean that the Government will give equal grants-in-aid to all the schools… or that it will bear equal expenditure per pupil in all schools? Does it mean that there would be equal salary scales and allowances to married teachers as to single, women teachers in Chinese, Tamil and Malay schools as in Government English schools? 29

He also questioned the silence on secondary education, opining that “the present is an indication that the Government will devote its main attention to 100 per cent attendance at primary schools only. Such a bottom-heavy policy… would be disastrous.” 30

In his reply, the Minister for Education reiterated the government’s policy on education and sought to allay the concerns raised by the opposition assemblymen:

it is the Government’s aim to mete out equal privileges and rights to all schools, be they English, Chinese, Malay or Indian schools. There is no question of Government trying to stop the development of any vernacular languages, and the difference between English and vernacular schools should be looked into and will be the subject for consideration … as soon as possible. 31

28 SLAD 27 April 1955, Col. 111.
29 SLAD 27 April 1955, Col. 92
30 SLAD, 27 April 1955, Col. 95
31 SLAD 27 April 1955, Col. 118
The aim of the Labour Front government to attain equality of treatment to English and the vernacular schools, and the concerns raised by the opposition, have to be understood in the context of the increased unhappiness of the Chinese community over the state of Chinese education. The Chinese middle schools students in particular had demonstrated over a National Service Ordinance and clashed with the police just a year earlier.

Known as the May Thirteenth incident of 1954, it involved some 900 students from Chinese schools demonstrating against the colonial government for drafting them into military service. Students clashed with riot police, and about 50 were arrested and charged. In the subsequent days, around 1000 students barricaded themselves inside Chinese High and Cheung Cheng High School in protest. The result was that the colonial government gave in to the students demands and dropped the military draft. This was seen as an anti-colonial victory by the Chinese students and those in the Chinese community.  

All Party Commission and Report on Chinese Education

While the assemblymen were debating the Governor’s address, workers in the Hock Lee Bus Company, who were members of the communist-infiltrated Singapore Bus Workers’ Union (SBWU), staged a major strike to protest against their dismissal. This strike had the support of a significant number of Chinese Middle School students, who joined the workers at the picket lines. Serious rioting ensued in May 1955, prompting an emergency session of the Legislative

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33 See Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, Chapters 9 & 11 and Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau, ‘From Colonialism to Independence, 1945 – 1965’, in Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee (eds) *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 117-149. By the 1950s, the Communists had infiltrated the unions such as the SBWU and the Chinese Middle Schools, which partly accounts for this alliance between the
Assembly. The new Labour Front government threatened with the closure of Cheung Cheng High and Chinese High Schools, which led to a ‘sit-in’ by the students. The government then rescinded its threat to close these schools.

Consequently, an All Party Committee, chaired by the Minister of Education was formed “to investigate the situation in Chinese schools in Singapore and to make recommendations for the improvement and strengthening of Chinese education in the interests of Chinese culture and orderly progress towards self-government and ultimate independence”. Mr Lee Kuan Yew attempted unsuccessfully to get the Assembly “to review the whole policy of English and vernacular education in Singapore in order to formulate a considered linguistic policy for an independent Malaya”. But he was successful in persuading the house to delete the words “in Singapore” at the end of the original terms of reference for the committee, opining that the independence of Singapore should not be divorced from that of Malaya.

students and the workers as part of the alleged Communist subversion. However, the view of Communist manipulation of the unions and Chinese Middle Schools has been contested by recent scholarship, which views the Chinese student activism as part of anti-colonial movement to get rid of the British. See for instance Huang Jianli, ‘The Young Pathfinders’; Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and its Pasts (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), Chapter 7.

34 SLAD 16 May 1955.


36 SLAD 25 May 1955, col. 274. Amongst the members of the committee was Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore (1959 – 1990) and currently the Minister Mentor.

37 SLAD 25 May 1955, col. 262-274.
The Chinese community generally welcomed the announcement on the forming of the All Party Commission, as did the Chinese press. The *Sin Chiew Jit Poh* for instance, urged members of the Chinese educational circles to submit memoranda to the All Party Committee. Not surprisingly, the English press was less enthusiastic in welcoming the establishment of the committee, emphasizing instead the need to quell the student unrest following the Hock Lee Bus riots. Indeed, Wilson remarked that “the announcement of the establishment of an All-Party Committee, and its purpose and terms of reference, received wide coverage by the news media…. Its deliberations were followed with considerable interest, and its report awaited with undisguised impatience.”

The All Party Committee sought the views of all the stakeholders involved, visited schools and received memoranda from individuals and organizations. It also consulted the relevant government departments in Singapore as well as Hong Kong.

After eight months of deliberation and investigation, the All Party Committee published its long awaited report in February 1956. Lee Kuan Yew’s suggestion that the All Party Report had to also review English and vernacular education was confirmed in the report of the All Party Committee:

In our scrutiny of the various memoranda submitted to us, we found many references and exhortations to the Committee that it should not treat Chinese education by itself but that whatever recommendations we make should be applicable to the various races and that in

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38 For instance, see *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商报), 19 May 1955.
40 *Straits Times*, ‘Big Probe on Schools: Govt sets us all-party inquiry committee’, 19 May 1955.
41 Wilson, p. 193.
42 Wilson, p. 207. Wilson’s account is arguably one of the best on the work and report of the All Party Commission on Chinese Education. See Wilson, pp. 189-217.
fact there shall be equal treatment for Chinese, Malay, Indian and English education without any reservations.  

The report was to have far reaching consequences on the Singapore education system. It is commonly acknowledged that the bilingual education policy today can be traced to the recommendations of the All Party Report on Chinese Education. The Report recommended bilingual and trilingual education, with “Bilingual Education in the Primary stage, and Trilingualism in the Secondary stage”. More significantly though, the report went beyond the aims of the Ten Year Plan to articulate the nation building role of education, recommending for the ‘Malaysanization’ of textbooks, the teaching of civics and “proper text-books on civics prepared for use in all schools”, and that “a Pan-Malayan Text-books Committee with educationalists representative of all major races should undertake the task of overhaul of school textbooks”. Underlying all that was the consensus that “one of the main aims of the Education policy is to develop a common loyalty to Singapore” and Malaya. The ultimate goal was “that through the furthering [of] the interests of education… everyone can assist in the overall aim to build a nation out of racial groups with different cultural backgrounds and languages… and [that] progress towards self-government and independence [can be] achieved”.

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44 See Wendy Bokhorst Heng, ‘Language and Imagining the Nation’, and H. E. Wilson, Social Engineering in Singapore

45 All Party Report, p. 50. Bilingualism refers to English and the vernacular languages (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)

46 Colony of Singapore Annual Report 1956.

47 All Party Report, p. 48. Independence here refers to independence from the British, and not complete independence, as Singapore’s destiny was seen to be tied with that of Malaya’s.
In general, responses to the report by the Press were favourable, although they differed in their emphasis on various aspects of the report. While the English Press focused on whether Chinese schools could accept governmental control, the Chinese press focused on the recommendations which called on equality of treatment for all language streams and the proposal for trilingual education. The Chinese educational community expressed reservations over the proposal for trilingual education for secondary schools, arguing that Chinese schools already had bilingual education, and thus the teaching of an additional language (Malay) would increase the burden on the students. They suggested that the trilingual education recommendation should be tried out first in the English schools to see if it was feasible. The most scathing criticism of the report came from the Singapore English Teachers’ Union (Chinese Schools), which criticized the All Party Committee for being “blind to the western-consciousness that has permeated the educational system in English schools” The Union condemned the Report as “a shameless piece of colonial prudery”, and called on the government to ignore it. Apart from this derisive remark, the responses to the All Party Report were on the whole positive.

**White Paper and Education Ordinance**

The Government’s response to the report was swift. Recognising that the All Party Report “could not cover the education system as a whole”, The Minister of Education tabled a

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48 *Straits Times*, ‘Will Chinese Schools Now Accept Control?’ 8 February 1956.

49 *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 February 1956.


51 S T, ‘Teachers Hit out at All-Party Report on Schools’, 10 Feb 1956. *Nanyang Siang Pau* also reported it on 10 Feb 1956 under the heading Union extremely disappointed with Report’
White Paper on Education Policy,\textsuperscript{52} which was debated in the Legislative Assembly on 5 and 12 April 1956.\textsuperscript{53} The White Paper outlined the twin problems that the government had to tackle: “to reconcile [the] elements of diversity which arise from the multi-racial structure of [Singapore’s] population … [and] to cope with the phenomenal increase in the population of school going age”\textsuperscript{54}. It also reaffirmed the nation-building role of education mentioned in the All Party Report:

The future of Singapore depends on the triumph of those forces which are trying to build Singapore or Malayan nationalism, and it is in our schools that the foundations of that nationalism must be built. It must be stated here categorically that \textit{the main aim of this Government’s education policy is to build a Malayan nation}. The Government will not support any school which lacks this emphasis on a common Malayan loyalty, which is so essential if our plural society is to be integrated into a single nation.\textsuperscript{55}

The common consensus was that Singapore was an indisputable part of Malaya, which was at the brink of independence.\textsuperscript{56}

The White Paper summarized the key recommendations of the All Party Report, adopting most of its recommendations. It agreed that “syllabuses and text-books must be Malayanised as quickly as possible”, and informed the Assemblymen that “the Government has already set up a joint committee representing all types of school to draw up syllabuses for Singapore and to make

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[52]{White Paper on Education Policy, Cmd. 15 of 1956. Legislative Assembly Sessional Paper (Singapore, 1956).}
\footnotetext[53]{5 April 1955 was the original scheduled date for debate on the White Paper. However, Members of the Assembly voted to postpone the debate to 12 April. See SLAD 12 April 1955 Col. 1875-1880.}
\footnotetext[54]{White Paper on Education Policy, p. 4}
\footnotetext[55]{ibid. Emphasis added.}
\footnotetext[56]{Malaya became an independent nation from the British on August 31\textsuperscript{st}, 1957.}
\end{footnotes}
recommendations for the writing of textbooks”.57 As a key step to the Malayanization of the syllabus, the White Paper noted “that steps should be taken to remove the causes of the frustration felt by the Chinese community and by Chinese teachers because of past discrimination against the Chinese schools”.58

In the debate on the White Paper, Mr John Ede, the Member for Tanglin, while welcoming the introduction of Civics in schools, preferred the term “citizenship” to civics. He opined that “Civics implies abstract book knowledge, while Citizenship suggests the living world around us, an object of wonder to both the teacher and taught”.59 Other than Ede, no further concerns were raised regarding civics teaching.

The main criticism raised by opposition assemblymen on the White Paper centred on the policy of language and language teaching in schools.60 In particular, Mr Lee Kuan Yew remarked that “instead of making the emphasis on Asian languages the White Paper has made the emphasis on the English Language”.61 Lee continued his criticism of the White Paper at a later sitting of the Assembly, with the main charge being that there was no acknowledgement of “Malay as the common national language of the country”.62 Central to Lee’s argument was the

57 White Paper on Education Policy, p. 6. Singapore’s 1956 Annual Report stated that “a general syllabus and textbooks committee with separate sub-committees for each subject was formed to draw up [the] syllabuses and to arrange for the publication of text-books for use with them. (p. 117)
58 ibid., pp. 4,5.
59 SLAD 12 April 1956, Col 1904.
60 See ibid, col. 1844-1944.
61 Ibid, col. 1915.
62 Ibid, 5 September 1956, col. 71-2. The PAP continued this stand even when they assumed power. However, after Singapore’s independence in 1965, the status of Malay declined as the government changed its emphasis to the use of English language. Thus, the PAP’s criticism was later turned on its head.
critique that the assurance of the equality of treatment to all schools was more rhetoric than substance. Nonetheless, the motion on the White Paper was passed by the Assembly. Clearly, there was agreement and consensus over the key principles spelt out by the White Paper. What the opposition had misgivings about were the fine details. Lee Kuan Yew’s criticism of the omission of Malay as the national language in the White Paper revealed the PAP’s aim of wanting Singapore to be part of Malaya. Like the rest of the Assemblymen however, Lee agreed with the key principles as laid out in the White Paper.

In April 1957, the government introduced the Education Bill in order to realise the recommendations of the White Paper. The Education Minister stated the objective of the Bill:

The aim … has been… to see that [students] are given an education in conformity with the Government’s education policy to fit them to become responsible citizens of the territory under the care of teachers with good education, professional training and personal integrity, and in premises which conform to the highest standards the community can reasonably afford.63

While Mr Lee Kuan Yew agreed in principle with the Labour Front government’s education policy, stating that “any government which wishes to mould a Malayan nation must sooner or later come to grips with the problem of moulding the minds of future generations of Singaporeans and Malaysians”, he went on to add that “it is clear from the All-Party Committee on Chinese education that the right of an elected government to decide educational policy cannot be fettered”.64 At the same time, he expressed similar reservations made by the assemblymen on the concentration of power with the Director of Education in the Education Bill, and supported

63 SLAD 24 April 1957, col. 1525.
64 Ibid., col 1551.
the call for the Bill to be sent to a Select Committee. The Education Minister acceded to the request.

After more than half a year of deliberations, the Select Committee submitted its report, and the Minister for Education accordingly moved the motion for the Assembly to adopt the report. He reiterated the purpose of introducing the Education Bill: “Government is laying the foundation stone for the education of children of all communities in Singapore without discrimination whatsoever”. The Bill was passed by the Assembly and the Education Ordinance thus came into effect. S. Gopinathan summed up the significance of the Ordinance, arguing that it marked the beginnings of “the creation of a national system of education”.

Introduction of a common Civics Curriculum

With regards to the All Party Report’s recommendations on the teaching of civics, the White Paper stated the government’s intention “to introduce formal Civics teaching into all schools in 1957 if suitable Teachers’ Notes are ready in time. Meanwhile it will plan a course on Civics as an essential part of the teacher-training course”. However, it also noted the limitations of a formal civics curriculum, emphasizing the importance of setting a personal example by the teachers and parents. In particular, it declared that “[n]o teacher can teach Civics effectively unless he himself constantly practices the civic virtues; if he does practise them, then

65 Ibid, col. 1551-1554.
66 Ibid., 18 November 1957, col. 2781.
68 Ibid.
little formal teaching of Civics is necessary”. 69 One wonders if the introduction of a formal civics curriculum amounted to an indirect admission of a lack of civic virtues amongst the teachers by the government of the day!

A caveat has to be made regarding the recommendation for the introduction of a formal civics curriculum for all schools. This was more applicable to English medium schools, which did not have a formal Civics subject in the curriculum. In contrast, Chinese schools placed considerable emphasis on the teaching of civics and moral values. 70 For instance, the 1956 edition of the primary school civics textbooks took the self as the starting point, followed by family, school, and society. 71 Textbooks for the lower primary civics were embellished with colourful illustrations, with the text kept to a minimum. 72 The values inculcated included loving and respecting one’s parents, siblings and teachers, as well as good habits like the tiding the bed and the schoolbag. 73 For the upper primary, learning points and discussion questions were included for every topic, which were presented in the form of stories. As in the lower primary civics, the emphasis was on the teaching of moral values and character building. 74

69 Ibid.
70 Lau Wai Har, interview by the Oral History Centre in 1994, National Archives of Singapore, Reels 5 and 6. Dr. Lau was educated in both Chinese and English schools, and was in charge of developing the Education for Living syllabus. I will discuss EFL in the next chapter.
71 See Editor’s Preface in 沈百英, 鲍维湘 (eds), 《公民》 (Civics) (Singapore: Zhong hua shu ju, 1956). This series contacts eight volumes.
72 See for instance ibid, book 1 and 2.
73 Ibid. Book 1.
74 Ibid., Books 3 to 8. Subsequent civic and moral education textbooks adopted this story telling format.
Malayanization of curriculum: Civics compared with History

The passing of the Education Ordinance necessitated a major revision of the school curriculum to ensure a common curriculum for all language streams. Malayanizing the curriculum was another major goal of this curriculum revamp. The introduction of a common civics syllabus was the clearest evidence of the Malayanization effort in the school curriculum. By December 1957, the syllabus for Secondary School Civics was completed. The syllabus aimed “to stimulate an interest in contemporary civic problems and to provide the opportunities to discuss them fully and without prejudice” and to instill “understanding and sound judgement rather than emotion to the solution of political problems”.75 A cursory look at the secondary school Civics curriculum outline is instructive:

Living Together in the Community
Specific Needs of the Community
Public and Social Services
How the Public Services are Paid for
How the Community Governs itself
Law and Order
Defence
Communications
Commerce and Industry
Information Services
The Freedom of the Citizen
The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens

75 Syllabus for Civics in Secondary Schools (Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1958), Foreword by Director of Education.
The Importance of Racial, Religious and Cultural Co-operation

Singapore and its relations with Other Countries

International Organizations\(^{76}\)

From the syllabus outline, we see an attempt to balance rights and responsibilities, education for democracy and nation building/state formation. This was acknowledged by the Director of Education in his foreword: “The danger for Singapore is that there will be too many who think only of ‘rights’; the hope is that there will be more who are conscious of their responsibilities”.\(^{77}\) The syllabus begins with the individual and the community and ends with such international organizations as the United Nations. From local to international, the Civics syllabus was a good example of a Malayanised curriculum.

In contrast, the History Syllabus for Primary and Secondary Schools was not as successful in Malayanisation. The general aims of the history syllabus failed to allude explicitly to the teaching of local history:

(a) To enable the child to understand something of his own and his country’s place in the story of mankind in historical times
(b) To give some knowledge of those past influences, religious, political social and economic which affect the child’s life
(c) To give some background to the understanding of present institutions and problems.\(^{78}\)

History was to be taught starting from Primary three. Topics on Singapore and Malaya formed a small part of the primary school history from Primary three to Primary five, and it was not as fleshed out as such other topics as the “Lives of Great People” and “World History from about 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1000”. The emphasis of primary school history was evidently on world

\(^{76}\) Ibid., pp. 1-4.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., Foreword by Director of Education.

history (Primary 5) and the lives of ‘great’ historical personalities (Primary 3 and 4) such as Abraham, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Asoka, Julius Caesar, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Sun Yat Sen, Florence Nightingale, Gandhi and so on. It was felt that Primary school history was best taught through stories:

The stories and topics… are indications only of the type of subjects which should stir the imagination of children. For each class the stories should extend from the earliest times to the present day. [They]… should take into consideration the early civilization of man and … trace human progress though the Ages rapidly – his development and his struggle for existence. This should be brought out through the use of famous men and women, their deeds, discoveries and settlement… Vivid incidents to illustrate historical characters are more suitable than full biographical accounts…

While less emphasis was placed on the history of Singapore and Malaya at the lower primary levels, the history syllabus for Primary six devoted a substantial amount of time (two terms) to the teaching of “The History of Singapore and Malaya from the earliest times to 1948”. On the whole however, the Primary school history tended to focus more on world history and great historical personalities.

Even in Secondary school history, World and Asian History is given precedence over local (Malayan) history. It is only in Forms IV and V that 2 Malayan history courses are taught together with the history of the British Commonwealth and the history of China. Again, more was written in the syllabus outline on the latter than the former (Malayan history). The section on

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79 See ibid, pp. 7-8 for the full list. There was an attempt to balance the ‘great’ personalities from the East and the West.
80 Ibid., p. 1.
81 Ibid., p. 9.
“the Cultural background of the Peoples of Malaya” was essentially a course on the religious and cultural traditions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Confucianism. While the syllabus still had a strong emphasis on World and Asian History, it was a departure from the previous ones in English and Chinese schools, in which the former “looked exclusively to Britain and the [latter] almost exclusively to China”.

**Education Policy under the new PAP administration**

Following successful All Party talks in London in April 1959, the British granted Singapore self governing status (with defence, foreign affairs and internal security remaining under the British). The first general election for the self governing state of Singapore was held in June 1959, in which the People’s Action Party (PAP) swept the polls, winning 43 out of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Lee Kuan Yew, secretary general of the PAP became the first Prime Minister of Singapore, a position he was to hold until 1990.

The PAP campaigned on a platform of building a Malayan nation, believing “that a Malayan nation must ultimately emerge because that is a historical necessity” and “an essential part of the struggle to build a Malayan nation is to bring about the merger of Singapore and the Federation.” The form of Malayan nation they espoused was one where there would be “equality between all races, between educational and language groups. In short equality of opportunity for education and employment to all Singapore citizens... when we say equality we

83 Ibid, Foreword by Director of Education.
85 Ibid.1, p. 17.
mean no privilege for anyone over another”\textsuperscript{86} This was in line with the general policies of the previous administration.

Education played a major role in this nation building effort. The PAP desired to have a unified national education system to aid this nation building effort. As their 1959 election manifesto explained,

If the overwhelming majority of our school children were in only one type of school then much of the complexity and difficulty of formulating a unified education policy would be easily ironed out. If only the four education streams were convergent instead of being divergent then much of the anxiety, stresses and strain that confront us in the task of nation-building could be easily dispelled.\textsuperscript{87}

Mr Yong Nyuk Lin, the first Minister for Education in the PAP government subsequently echoed that by affirming that the Singapore Government’s education policy “is to be based on common syllabuses and content, although the languages of instruction may be different” and to aim at “uniting the different peoples, and encouraging loyalty for Singapore”.\textsuperscript{88}

Emphasis on racial equality was to be an important cornerstone of the PAP’s education policy, with schools providing “the immunity against the communal virus” – a repudiation of privilege or superiority of any ethnic group.\textsuperscript{89} Moreover, the PAP saw as “the foremost aim of [its] education policy to train the children in our schools so that they can become useful citizens who can adapt themselves into the construction work of re-orientating our economic policy.”\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87} The Tasks Ahead Part 2, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Straits Times}, 7 June 1960.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid 1, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid 2, p. 3.
The PAP declared its main task to be that of “infusing into our multi-racial society the spirit of belonging to a nation”, as well as “to re-organise our economy”.\textsuperscript{91} Education policy thus had both nation building as well as economic aims (employability).

The assumption of power by the PAP thus did not signal a complete break in educational policy. Even during the election hustings, the PAP signaled that they would adopt the All Party Report on Chinese Education as the blueprint of their subsequent educational policy, stating that “[t]he recommendations of the 1955 all-party report on Chinese education will be vigorously implemented and the teaching of Malay be carried out in all schools”.\textsuperscript{92} There is a sense that the PAP felt that the Malayanization of the school curriculum was not carried out adequately by the Labour Front government, charging that the existing school textbooks were not locally written.\textsuperscript{93} It therefore proposed a revision of the school curriculum, emphasizing “the study of languages, mathematics and scientific subjects” to achieve the goal of nation building and “the task of economic and social reconstruction”.\textsuperscript{94}

Once assuming power, the PAP wasted no time in outlining their educational policy. The speech by the Yang Di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State) at the opening of the new Legislative Assembly clearly spelt out the new government’s education policy:

The Government’s policy on Education is based on three main principles. Firstly, acceptance of the 1955 All-Party Committee Report on Chinese Education of the Singapore Legislative Assembly. This provides for equal treatment for the four streams

\textsuperscript{91} PAP, The Tasks Ahead Part 1, p. 8


\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 2, p. 3

\textsuperscript{94} The Tasks Ahead Part 2, p. 10
of education in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Secondly, acceptance of Malay as the national language. The Government will encourage the learning of Malay by non-Malays, at the same time revitalising Malay education itself. Thirdly, the curriculum will be revised so that emphasis will be on practical subjects such as mathematics and science, to meet the needs of an industrialized society and on the study of languages of our country.95

The end goal was “a common Malayan consciousness for the four language-streams of Education”.96 To ensure equal treatment for all four language streams, the PAP government embarked on a massive school building program, creating “integrated schools” whereby students of different language streams studied at the same school building. On the third principle, the Minister for Education stressed that the emphasis on mathematics and science was “not intended to scrap subjects like history or geography, if only to give a good general and rounding-off in education”.97

With regards to implementing the All Party Report’s recommendation on standardized textbooks, the Prime Minister reiterated the rationale for doing so at a speech to teachers and principals, and warned that “if we continue the past practice… we can talk about the Malayan consciousness for the next 20 years and still get nowhere.98 By the end of 1960, the revision of syllabuses for all the primary and secondary school subjects was completed, and was ready for implementation the following year. The government claimed that “the syllabuses are entirely

95 SLAD, 1 July 1959, Col. 11.
97 SLAD 17 July 1959, Col. 179.
98 Straits Times, 9 December 1959.
Malayan in content and would ensure that the textbooks which would be written would also be Malayan”.\(^9\)

**Revised History Syllabus: Attempts at localization**

Looking at the revised 1961 history syllabus, one notices more Malayan content than the previous 1958 syllabus. Topics on imperial history like “Commonwealth History” and “the development of liberty and responsibility” were deleted from the curriculum for Secondary III and IV levels, and the section on “History of Malaya” in Secondary IV had more topics than the previous syllabus – an increase of 3 more topics.\(^1\) However, Wong and Apple noted that the syllabus was “outsider centred” in that “topics on Singapore and Malaya were always entwined with those of their neighbouring areas, such as Siam, Annam, [and] Cambodia.”\(^2\) Malayan history was also categorized under western imperialism, as in the example below:

European Dominance in Southeast Asia

(a) British East India Company

(i) In India and Burma

(ii) In Malaya

1) The Straits Settlements
2) The Federated Malay States
3) The Unfederated Malay States

(b) French Revolution and Napoleon, the French in Southeast Asia


\(^2\) Wong Ting Hong and Michael Apple, “Rethinking the Education/State Formation Connection: Pedagogic Reform in Singapore, 1945-1965”, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2002), p. 294. See also Wong Ting Hong, *Hegemonies Compared: State Formation and Chinese School Politics in Postwar Singapore and Hong Kong* (New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), Chapter 5. Wong referred to the Chinese version of the history syllabus instead of the English one. This is understandable as his emphasis was on Chinese schools. Wong regarded the history syllabus as an evidence of the desincization of the Chinese schools, in order words, a de-emphasis of China and greater focus on Malaya – which is Malayanization seen from the perspective of Chinese schools.
(c) Americans in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{102}

The history of Malaya and Singapore could not be taught without references to the external events and the histories of the region and western imperialism, which made the task of Malayanizing the history syllabus a difficult one.

The revised 1961 history syllabus came under scathing attack from the Final Report of the \textit{Commission of Inquiry into Education in Singapore}, otherwise known as the Lim Tay Boh report. Criticisms range from the syllabus having too wide a scope to the unsuitability of the topics, which made history too difficult for primary school students. For the upper primary and secondary levels, “there is a tendency to cram the pupils for the Examinations”. Teachers made no attempt “to choose the topics from the point of view of their suitability for the pupils for whom the course is designed”. The report also criticized the textbooks for containing “too many details of dates, places and strange names…[which] were [un]suitable for primary school pupils”.\textsuperscript{103} Other shortcomings of the history syllabus include poor teaching methods, lack of reference books, and the content of the textbooks as well as the language being set at a level beyond the intellectual ability of the students.\textsuperscript{104}

To solve these shortcomings, the report recommended “a drastic overhauling of the syllabus and textbooks used and a complete change in the methods of instruction”.\textsuperscript{105} The report also called for history to be “presented in a manner that is interesting to the pupils”. This meant

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Syllabus for History in Primary and Secondary Schools} (1961), p. 3. \\
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Commission of Inquiry into Education Singapore: Final Report} (1964), p. 34. \\
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. p. 34.
\end{flushleft}
that “more audio visuals aids should be used in classrooms and children should be encouraged to dramatise scenes from history”.  

For primary school history, this meant a drastic reduction in the scope of the syllabus. Other proposals include the scrapping of history workbooks, clear guidelines in the syllabus, a more informal style of teaching for lower primary history, and an increase in topics on Malayan history for upper primary students.\textsuperscript{107} The report likewise recommended that secondary school history to be “drastically revised” and the syllabus scope curtailed.\textsuperscript{108} The proposed scope and sequence of the secondary history syllabus were as follows: “…for Secondary I, the history syllabus should cover a general survey of ancient and medieval history. The Secondary II syllabus should cover modern history”.\textsuperscript{109} As for upper secondary history, the report suggested the provision of an “integrated two-year course on the history syllabus for the Cambridge School Certificate or Secondary IV Examinations”.\textsuperscript{110}

\textbf{Ethics as Civics}

Between 1959 and 1966, besides civics, citizenship education was also taught as \textit{Ethics} which had as its objective the inculcation of “ethical values such as politeness, honesty, perseverance and kindness”.\textsuperscript{111} The \textit{Ethics} syllabus had its beginnings in 1955, when an Ethics
and Religion Committee was formed “to study the question of moral instruction for Singapore schools”. The committee recommended that religious knowledge or ethics should be taught in all schools as part of the curriculum. The then Labour Front government concurred with the recommendation. The Ethics syllabus was completed by 1958 and implemented the following year. Students were given a choice to either take a course in religious knowledge or ethics. It is interesting to note that Ethics was also referred to as ‘Rules of Conduct’. The purpose was clearly “to lay the foundations for character development in young children” through inculcating moral values and right conduct, and not just civic values per se. This is especially so in the lower primary topics, which included concepts such as cleanliness, tidiness, politeness, obedience, family relations, self-control, courage and honesty. Also, the basic syllabus in primary schools was supplemented by four volumes of stories which would illustrate 'right conduct'.

Nonetheless, looking at the aims and objectives of the Ethics syllabus, we see a strong emphasis on Malayanization and the inculcation of citizenship values. For instance, one of the objectives was “to lay a sound foundation for good citizenship”. Other objectives that related to Malayanization and citizenship teaching include the understanding of “one’s duty towards others

113 Ibid. The PAP government continued to regard religious instruction was seen as a vehicle for the inculcation of moral values. This is most evidently seen in the short-lived Religious Knowledge program during the 1980s. See Chapters 4 and 5.
117 Ibid, pp. 4-10. These topics pertained more to moral and character values and conduct.
and to the State”, as well as “foster[ing] Malayan consciousness and common loyalty to the State in thought and action”.\textsuperscript{118} Civic concepts such as loyalty, love of country, law and order and citizenship were included at the upper primary levels.\textsuperscript{119} This is further developed in secondary schools with topics like social responsibility, liberty and anarchy as well as rights, power and responsibility.\textsuperscript{120}

However, moral and character values and conduct remained the mainstay of the secondary Ethics syllabus, as seen in the introduction to the secondary Ethics syllabus, which stressed “the good examples of the teachers in their daily conduct and on the close vigilance on the conduct of pupils entrusted to them”.\textsuperscript{121} Even so, the Ethics syllabus contained substantive aspects of civics education, particularly in the secondary level. The topics covered in the Ethics syllabus formed the blueprint for the subsequent Civics syllabus for primary and secondary schools that was formulated and implemented after Singapore’s independence. At the end of the day, right moral conduct was regarded as the foundation for being a good citizen, since the acquisition of good “social habits and qualities” would “make [the students] better citizens”.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, pp. 10-14.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., pp. 16-25.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, p. 1.
From Self-governance to independence

Like the Labour Front government, the PAP government was soon faced with unrest from the Chinese school students and the trade unions, which were backed by the pro-communist faction of the PAP. Matters went to a head with the split of the PAP, with the pro-communist faction forming the Barisan Socialis (Socialist Front) in 1961. The ensuing two years witnessed a battle for political supremacy between the PAP and the Barisan Socialis; the main contention being that of merger with Malaya. The PAP won “the battle for merger”, winning more than 70% of the vote in the referendum on merger.123 In the merger agreements, the PAP government sought for autonomy over labour and education from the Malaysian federal government in Kuala Lumpur. According to historian Tan Tai Yong,

… education was particularly important as Lee wanted to maintain English as the medium of instruction in Singapore. He knew that once education came under the purview of the Kuala Lumpur government, he would be hard put to replace English with Malay, and his support for the Chinese schools, which was so politically important for the PAP, would have to cease.124

Lee explained the importance of the PAP government retaining the control over education in one of his radio broadcasts in 1961, “Chinese parents who want their children to go to Chinese schools want to be assured that the present policy of equal treatment of all streams of education will go on”.125

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123 The nature of the referendum remained controversial, as it was not a simple ‘yes-no’ vote, but a choice between three versions of merger with Malaysia. In other words, the voters were not offered a choice to vote against merger. See Tan Tai Yong, Creating “Greater Malaysia”: Decolonization and the Politics of Merger (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 86-117.
124 Ibid, p. 80.
Singapore became a state in the newly formed Malaysia in September 1963 and the PAP defeated its rivals in the general elections. However, Singapore’s merger with Malaysia was short-lived and tumultuous. The PAP government and the Federal government clashed over differences in their vision for Malaysia – the former calling for a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ which called for equality of all races with no preferential treatment for the Malays, while accusing the latter of practicing Malay supremacy. Matters went to a head by the second half of 1964, with the PAP taking part in the Federal Elections in Malaysia, and the outbreak of racial riots in September. In August 1965, Singapore became an independent state on its own. That the racial riots left a deep psychological scar in the PAP can be suggested from the adoption of multiracialism and the constant refrain about the importance of racial harmony following Singapore’s independence.

Conclusion

During the colonial era, the British adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards educational policy in Singapore. With the exception of Malay education and some English schools, the other vernacular schools were very much left on their own. This was partly because the chief purpose of British rule in Singapore was trade and not settlement. It was only after the Second World War that attempts were made at establishing a coherent and unified educational system. Nonetheless, their Ten Year Plan for education was not well received by the Chinese community as they saw it as an attempt to control and destroy the ethos of the Chinese schools. The commission of the All Party inquiry on Chinese Education, and its subsequent report, marked the beginnings of a unified education system in Singapore. The report’s recommendations had a far

126 For a more detailed account on Singapore’s interlude in Malaysia and its eventual separation, see Albert Lau, A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998).
reaching impact on the subsequent educational development of Singapore. It was clear from the report that Singapore’s future was seen to be closely linked to Malaya.

As both the Labour Front and the PAP administrations regarded Singapore as part of the Malayan nation, educational policy was aimed at that goal. Thus, Singapore’s merger with Malaya when it became a member of Malaysia in September 1963 did not witness any drastic changes in educational policy or curricular orientations. Despite the many political transitions and political struggles, and unrest in the decade between 1955 and 1965, building a Malayan nation remained the constant goal. Whether that goal was translated into the syllabuses for history and civics was another matter altogether. It was apparent that civics was more successful than history in having a Malayanized curriculum, which meant that despite the rhetoric of history for state formation, school history was not a good vehicle for nation building. This was to remain the case in the immediate aftermath following Singapore leaving Malaysia to become a sovereign and independent republic.
Chapter 3
Crisis of National Survival: The Sudden Birth of a Republic and the Rise of the Developmental State

[The ends of policy are immutable. They are, first, to achieve prosperity for the Republic and her citizens and second, to ensure the survival of the Republic as an independent sovereign state.]

- Dr. Goh Keng Swee, ‘When the old generation disappears…’, The Straits Times, 26 September 1984

On the 9th of August 1965, Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia to become an independent and sovereign state. Whilst independence was greeted with joy by nationalist leaders in Africa and Asia, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, wept on national television, referring to it as his “moment of anguish”.1 It took him a full twenty minutes to recover his composure.2 Singapore was, in the words of historian Edwin Lee, an “unexpected nation”.3 Hitherto, neither Britain, Malaysia nor the Singapore government believed or imagined that a fully independent Singapore was possible. Singapore’s leaders had to forge a new nation overnight, something they did not plan for or even envisage. As discussed in the previous chapter, Singapore’s interlude in Malaysia was short-lived, tumultuous and traumatic. The PAP government and the Malaysian Federal government clashed over differences in their vision for Malaysia, and relations between the two governments hit rock bottom with the outbreak of racial riots in Singapore in August and September of 1964.

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1 Transcript of A Press Conference given by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at Broadcasting House, Singapore, at 1200 Hours on Monday 9th August, 1965.
3 Edwin Lee, Singapore: The Unexpected Nation (Singapore, ISEAS, 2008).
The supposed trauma experienced by the PAP leaders, chiefly by the Prime Minister, over Singapore’s separation from Malaysia cast a long shadow over the subsequent history and politics of this new nation.\textsuperscript{4} What ensued was a discourse of crisis of national survival, which was aptly summarized by the late Professor Michael Leifer in his book \textit{Singapore’s Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability}; “[t]he government of Singapore … has never taken the island-state’s sovereign status for granted; a supposition which has been registered in a practice of foreign policy predicated on countering an innate vulnerability”.\textsuperscript{5} What then are the perceived vulnerabilities? Tim Huxley describes them as Singapore’s “small size, lack of natural resources, ethnic diversity and location between larger neighbours”.\textsuperscript{6} As such, the state plays a pervasive role in citizenship education for nation building in Singapore. This is driven by a deep sense of vulnerability in Singapore’s economic and geo-political milieu and the perceived fragility in Singapore’s social fabric, which shaped the identity of the new republic, and the educational policies that followed.

This chapter examines the civics and citizenship education programs that were introduced in first fifteen years of Singapore’s independence. This period witnessed rapid economic, political and social transformation of Singapore. What was education’s role in Singapore’s metamorphosis? Why were there constant changes in the civics and history curriculum? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{6} Tim Huxley, \textit{Defending the Lion City: the Armed Forces of Singapore} (Allen and Unwin, 2000).
Multiracialism: founding tenet

Once he had regained his composure at that same televised press conference, Lee proceeded to spell out the Singaporean society his government envisioned:

We are going to have a multi-racial nation in Singapore. We will set the example. This is not a Malay nation; this is not a Chinese nation; this is not an Indian nation. Everybody will have his place: equal; language, culture, religion. This was the Government that believed in multi-racialism and brought Singapore away from chauvinism into multi-racialism...we will achieve it in Singapore... we unite, regardless of race, language, religion, culture.7

At the opening of the first session of Singapore’s first parliament, Singapore’s head of state reiterated the same aim of a multiracial society. In his speech to Parliament, he called for “a tolerant society, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-religious, welded ever closer together by ties of common experience into a satisfying society, satisfying both for the indigenous peoples and for those of migrant stock who came during the period of British rule”.8

In order to ensure that multi-racialism and the equality of all races were safeguarded, a Constitutional Commission was appointed by Parliament. This commission was chaired by the Chief Justice, with the Speaker of Parliament as Deputy Chair, and its members were appointed from the various ethnic communities in Singapore. The Minister for Law, Mr. E. W. Barker, in announcing the establishment of this commission in Parliament, emphasized that multiracialism was “a dire necessity” for the survival of Singapore “in the midst of turmoil”.9 Echoing the Prime Minister and the Head of State, he stated that “one of the cornerstones of the policy of the

7 Transcript of A Press Conference given by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at Broadcasting House, Singapore, at 1200 Hours on Monday 9th August, 1965.
8 Parliamentary Debates Singapore: Official Report 8 December 1965, Col 5-6
9 Parliamentary Debates 22 December 1965, Col 429.
Government is a multiracial Singapore”, and underscored the fact that Singapore was “a nation comprising peoples of various races who constitute her citizens, and our citizens are equal regardless of differences of race, language, culture and religion”.10

The Law Minister proceeded to outline the terms of reference of the Constitutional Commission. The main objective of the Commission, as stated earlier, was to look into how the equality of all racial, linguistic and religious minorities would be safeguarded in the Constitution. The Commission was also tasked “to ensure that no legislation which… is considered likely to be discriminatory against any racial, linguistic or religious group” would be enacted, and to think through and recommend the avenues and channels of redress that “should be provided for any citizen or group of citizens who claim they have been discriminated against by… the government or… [any] public body”. 11 After several months of deliberations, the Commission presented its report in to the President of Singapore on 27 August 1966. Parliament subsequently debated the report from 14 to 17 March 1967.

The report of the Constitutional Commission upheld the aim of multiracialism propounded by the government:

We believe that a person, whether he is a citizen or not, who belongs to a racial or a linguistic or a religious minority in Singapore will have all his rights as a member of such racial or linguistic or religious minority adequately safeguarded if his fundamental rights as an individual, and as a citizen if he is one, are entrenched in the Constitution, and if those fundamental rights are enforceable by the Courts… 12

10 Ibid.
11 ibid., col 429-430.
The aim was the “eventual realisation under a democratic system of government of a united, multi-racial, multi-cultural society.” 13 While the government disagreed with some of the recommendations of the commission, in particular over property rights and the creation of the office of an Ombudsman, it found “most of the recommendations … acceptable in their entirety”. 14

What was the motivation behind the adoption of multiracialism in Singapore? Why was the Singapore government so bent on ensuring that the equal treatment of all races was safeguard in the Constitution? Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s speech in Parliament during the debate on the Constitution Commission’s report provides us with the answer. His long speech read like a lecture to the Parliamentarians on the fundamental divide over the vision of Malaysia held by the PAP government and the Malaysian Federal government, which he saw as accounting for the short-lived, tumultuous and traumatic experience of Singapore in Malaysia. He emphasized that “[m]ulti-racialism is a tenant which has been espoused by every responsible political party from the very beginnings of party politics in Singapore”, and accused the “extreme philosophies of political forms of government based on ethnic, religious and linguistic loyalties” for almost destroying the societal fabric in Singapore. 15 Lee was of course alluding to the racial riots which took place in September 1964, as well as the conflicts with the Federal Government, as well as with the ethnic Malay extremists in the ruling United Malay National Organization. The Prime Minister expressed hope that the Commission’s report and recommendations, when

13 Ibid.
15 Parliamentary Debates 15 March 1967, Col. 1284.
implemented, would deter and prevent politics based on ethnic, religious or linguistic ties, which could potentially destroy the fledging republic. At the end of the day, ensuring Singapore’s survival was topmost in Lee Kuan Yew’s mind.

This was the context where Ong Pang Boon, the Education Minister, reminded teachers that “there is no place for racial chauvinists and religious obscurantists in our society”. Speaking at the Teachers Training College graduation ceremony just months after Singapore’s independence, Ong was alluding to the racial riots that took place in Singapore in September 1964, as well as what the PAP government saw as the politics of race by the Malaysian Federal government.

Survivalist discourse and Education

Thus, the government regarded its multiracial vision as not only a matter of ideals, but also one of national survival. Apart from Singapore’s momentous interlude in Malaysia, the subsequent announcement by the British in 1967 of its intention to accelerate the withdrawal of their troops in Singapore further exacerbated the economic and security problems facing the new republic. The survivalist discourse was underscored by the Education Minister, who expressed the government’s view that the “major consideration must necessarily [be] for [Singapore’s] survival”. To this end, Ong called on Singaporeans and teachers “to lay greater stress on the impressionable minds of young Singaporeans the idea that to progress and prosper they have to

16 Ong Pang Boon, Speech at the Teachers Training College graduation ceremony at Victoria Theatre on 12 November 1965.
learn not to depend on others”. Ong further exhorted that a “multi-racial society based on equality and justice for all can still succeed and there need not be intolerance and bigotry”, which highlighted the close link placed by the government between multiracialism with the nation’s survival.

Prime Minister Lee drove the message of survival home during his speech thanking the head of state for the opening of Singapore’s first Parliament:

For [Singapore], survival has always been hazardous. We tried to make it less so by seeking the larger framework of Malaysia, but it was not to be. We are on our own… in the centre of an extremely tumultuous arena of conflict. In the words of another cabinet minister, “[Singapore is] engaged in a massive exercise for survival and to succeed calls for a certain degree of self-restraint and self-sacrifice”. The people of Singapore were therefore called by its leaders to sacrifice for the sake of the country’s survival. The extract of a speech by Ong below aptly illustrates this:

Our young Republic faces a number of problems, one of which is our long-term survival as an independent nation. To help solve this problem, our Republic needs people with the spirit of loyalty to the State, and the readiness to undergo rigorous training that will serve the country in good stead. Our country needs people who are physically robust and mentally alert, people who are well disciplined collectively as well as individually. Our ability to survive and prosper as individuals depends on our ability to survive as a nation and on our readiness to promote the collective interests of people as a whole.

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Speech by Mr Lim Kim San, Minister for Finance at the Singapore Manufacturer’s Association Luncheon on November 19, 1965,
The discourse of survival featured prominently in the Education Minister’s speech. The new republic faced a crisis of “survival”, as the government described the situation, and it needed “the courage and determination” of Singaporeans “to overcome…” the “kind of problems” that the new nation faced. Education was a key to ensuring Singapore’s survival as a nation.

Besides the role of “education for national unity and tolerance in a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society”, the underlying emphasis of the new republic’s educational policy was to “meet the needs of [Singapore’s] industrialization”. The Education Minister declared in Parliament in December 1965 that “[w]ith the emergence of Singapore as an independent and sovereign State, the necessity to use education as an instrument to weld national unity and to build a nation out of its heterogeneous population has become urgent and unavoidable.”

To this end, technical education was emphasized, as evidenced in the MOE’s Addendum to the head of state’s address to Parliament, in which he stressed that the government would stress “scientific, vocational and technical education”. The government also set about to expand schooling access at the secondary and post-secondary levels, which would mean building more schools, as well as to improve educational quality through the expansion of secondary and post-secondary schooling.

It was clear that the educational policy of the new state was aimed at serving the needs of the country’s industrialization, which was seen as the key to Singapore’s survival. Particular
emphasis was placed on technical and vocation education, with workshop facilities set up in secondary schools and “a vocational guidance plan… introduced for primary school leavers”. However, this focus on technical education ran contrary to the “traditional prejudice against technical and vocational education” by the public, who preferred the conventional academic education route. The Education Minister thus had to make great pains to appeal to the public and to parents on the rationale and advantages of technical and vocational education. While promising the forming of “a Ministerial Committee to give overall direction to this switch towards technical and vocation education”, Ong urged parents to “encourag[e] their children to take up technical training in preference to an academic education”.

The emphasis on technical education was not new, as “the government has emphasized technical and vocational education since 1960…. [to] meet … the manpower needs of our industrialisation programme”. What was different this time round was the intensification of industrialization, and hence the need to focus on science and technology education. A couple of years after independence, the Ministry of Education continued to reiterate the same aims of emphasising science and technology education:

In support of our Republic’s rapid industrialisation, the aims and content of our educational system were oriented towards science and technology… A major reorganisation of our secondary school system was started in 1968, laying unprecedented

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Speech by the Minister for Education, Mr Ong Pang Boon, at a dinner given in honour of Inche Ghazali Ismail, M.P. for Aljunied at the Peja Lebar Community Centre on Friday, June 14, 1968 at 7.45 pm.
32 Parliamentary Debates, 12 December 1968, col. 146. The emphasis on technical and science education was fulfilling PAP’s election manifesto of 1959.
emphasis on technical education. This was necessary in order that the state of industry in Singapore could advance.\textsuperscript{33}

The importance given to education to meet the needs for industrialization in Singapore meant that the existing curriculum for mathematics and sciences had to be revised.\textsuperscript{34}

Apart from the training of workers for Singapore’s industrialization effort, education also played a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and nation building:

The other great task in Singapore is that of evolving a common multi-racial and multi-cultural society… With… independence, came the task … of forging a united nation out of many races or communities which have been brought together by colonial rule. Our objective in Singapore is the evolution of a multi-racial society out of our cosmopolitan population… In this evolution we have assigned education to a key role.\textsuperscript{35}

One of the ways to inculcate “character building, leadership training, and inculcating patriotism” was through greater emphasis on extra-curricular activities such as sports and uniformed groups.\textsuperscript{36}

Nonetheless, a major tenet in the fledging republic’s nation building efforts through education was the intensification of bilingual education. The government believed that “[b]ilingualism must be emphasized in schools if [Singapore was] to build a multi-racial society with a national identity”.\textsuperscript{37} To this end, the Education Minister announced in November 1965 that the teaching of a second language would be mandatory in all schools in the following year.

\textsuperscript{33} Parliamentary Debates, 17 October 1972, col. 117. Parl Sec Edun (Ahmad Mattar)


\textsuperscript{35} Extracts of speech by Minister of Education, Mr Ong Pang Boon, Head of Singapore Delegation to the 15\textsuperscript{th} Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, October 15 – November 20, 1968.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Straits Times}, ‘Curriculum of schools likely to be revised’, 17 February 1966.

\textsuperscript{37} Parliamentary Debates, 12 Dec 1968, col. 146-147.
Prior to that, the teaching of second language was already made compulsory in primary schools after the PAP came into power in 1959. “The compulsory second language scheme is in line with the Singapore Government’s plan to train youngsters to be fully equipped to grow up in a multi-lingual and multi-racial society”.38 Ong explained the purpose of bilingual education for nation building:

> Singapore is to be a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society where all peoples enjoy equal status and political rights... The breaking down of the language barrier, inimical to racial unity, must be further intensified to strengthen the foundations of a multi-racial nation. It is in the schools that we must intensify our efforts.  

Theodore Doraisamy, Principal of the Teachers’ Training College, Singapore, provided a succinct summary of the government’s reasoning behind bilingualism: “The rationale behind bilingualism is to achieve a breakthrough in the monolingual tradition of the past, so that understanding among different races can be promoted and the goal of nation-building brought closer to achievement”.  

The bilingualism that was implemented in schools was what Bokhorst-Heng described as an “English-knowing bilingualism”. 41 This sets the context for the subsequent civics and citizenship education curriculum and programs. The government encouraged the use of English as a medium of instruction for math and science in the vernacular schools from 1966, while the

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39 Ong Pang Boon, Speech at the Teachers Training College graduation ceremony at Victoria Theatre on 12 November 1965.
40 Doraisamy (ed), p. 129.
‘mother tongue’, especially Chinese, was being used for civics education “in English-medium primary classes for pupils whose second language is Chinese”. 42 The government intended for history to be taught in Chinese for the Chinese students in English-medium primary schools by 1970 as well. In other words, English for the ‘head’ (economy) and the mother tongue for the ‘heart’ (social sphere). The government believed that the mother tongue was the best medium to teach moral and civic values, as well as to instil loyalty and sense of belonging to Singapore. This was something they would elaborate on and reiterate in subsequent years.

Owing to the bilingual education policy and the privileging of the English language in the teaching of math and science, parents increasingly chose English stream education over the vernacular streams in their desire for their children to get a head start. Between 1959 and 1978, the number of students enrolled in the Chinese stream declined from 27 223 to 5 289 students. The same period witnessed an increase in the English stream students, from 28 113 to 41 995 students. 43 Enrollment in Malay and Tamil streams fall sharply as well, leading to the closure of Malay and Tamil stream schools by the beginning of the 1980s. The educational landscape was thus radically altered by the English-knowing bilingualism policy, ostensibly for the purposes of economic development. 44

To inculcate patriotism and national consciousness in the new nation, daily rituals like flag raising and lowering ceremonies, accompanied by the singing of the National Anthem were

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42 Parliamentary Debates, 12 Dec 1968, col. 146-147. The government intended for English to become the medium of instruction for math and science, while the ‘mother tongue’ was deemed as the language of instruction for civics and history.


introduced in all schools in early 1966. Concerned that “many schools do not have a large
enough playing field or assembly hall for this purpose and even these facilities would not be able
to carry out this ceremony daily because of the tight curriculum”\(^{45}\), the Education Minister came
up with the idea of a “loyalty pledge” to be taken daily. He had two versions of the pledge
drafted and sent to Mr S. Rajaratnam, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was previously the
Minister for Culture, for comments:

I pledge my allegiance to the flag of Singapore, and to the country for which it stands:
one sovereign nation of many free-loving peoples of one heart, one mind and one spirit,
dedicated to a just and equal society.

I proudly and wholehearted pledge my loyalty to our flag of Singapore and to the honour
and independence of our Republic whose banner it is. We come from different races,
religions and cultures, but we are now united in mind and heart as one nation, and one
people, dedicated to build by democratic means a more just and equal society.\(^{46}\)

The first version of the pledge bears striking resemblance to the US pledge of allegiance,
especially in its emphasis on the flag as well as the ideals of liberty and justice (“just and equal
society”). In any case, Ong felt that the second version was “too long but does convey to a
certain extent the multi-racial character of our country”.\(^{47}\) Rajaratnam replied with his suggested
version of the pledge, in which the reference to the flag was dropped:

We, as citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves to forget differences of race, language and
religion and become one united people; to build a democratic society where justice and
equality will prevail and where we will seek happiness and progress by helping one
another.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{45}\) “Flag Raising Ceremony”, Letter from Mr Ong Pang Boon to Mr S. Rajaratnam, 2 February 1966

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Letter from Mr S. Rajaratnam to Mr Ong Pang Boon, 18 February 1966.
This version was to form the basis of the finalized version of the pledge, which has been recited by all school children from August 1966 to this day:

We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation.49

Through this daily ritual of reciting the pledge, and the flag raising and lowering ceremonies, the government hoped “to inculcate patriotism and national consciousness”,50 as well as to instil the principle of multiracialism in all students from their earliest years.

The government’s vision of an ideal Singapore citizen in a multiracial society was beginning to take shape. In a speech to school principals in late August 1966, Lee spelt out his vision of an ideal citizen:

What is the ideal product? The ideal product is the student, the university graduate, who is strong, robust, rugged, with tremendous qualities of stamina, endurance and at the same time, with great intellectual discipline and, most important of all, humility and love for his community; a readiness to serve whether God or king or country or, if you like, just his community.51

In Lee’s mind, the ideal Singapore citizen should be “healthy, robust, rugged and with a sense of social cohesiveness and discipline; of belonging to a community”.52 The ideal Singaporean had to be “healthy, robust and rugged” in order to overcome the challenges faced by the young republic, and to ensure the success of Singapore’s industrialization effort. The alternative would be to perish. This “rugged” citizen ideal resonated with the government’s survivalist discourse in

49 Memorandum from Director of Education to all school principals, 18 August 1966.
52 Speech by the Prime Minister at the Vigilante Corps Recruitment Campaign at Tanjong Pagar Community Centre on 10 December 1966.
the aftermath of Singapore’s separation from Malaysia. The government later extended the concept of “rugged” citizen onto society at large, envisioning “a rugged, disciplined and productive society… hav[ing] a determined people… who think in terms of multi-racial well-being”. Education was to play an important role in developing a “rugged” and disciplined individual and society. In sum, the idea of a “rugged” society represented the desired values and ethics that would facilitate industrialisation and economic growth, while the vision of a multiracial society ensured the social cohesion for economic development to take place.

**Civics Syllabus: Urgent necessity**

In the same speech to the school principals, the Prime Minister expressed the concern that “our community lacks in-built reflexes – loyalty, patriotism, history or tradition… our society and its education system was never designed to produce a people capable of cohesive action, identifying their collective interests and then acting in furtherance of them”. In November 1966, the Prime Minister commented on “[t]he absence of a sense of social and civic responsibility in many of the pupils in today’s mass produced schools, manned by mass-produced teachers”. It was clear that the Prime Minister felt that the school curriculum was inadequate in preparing students to be loyal and patriotic citizens. And while Civics was already taught in schools before Singapore’s independence, it did not produce students imbued with the “social and civic responsibility” that Lee desired. As Ang and Yeoh conclude, this was partly

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53 Speech by Inche Mohd. Ghazali Ismail, Political Secretary to the Ministry of Education, at the opening of Mattar Primary on Tuesday, 21 May 1968, at 7.30 pm.
54 Lee (1966).
because Civics “received inadequate emphasis because it was a non-examination subject and also, there was no proper syllabus and textbooks for Civics teaching”.  

The Prime Minister’s comments set off a quick response from the Ministry of Education. The following month, in December 1966, the Education Minister announced that his Ministry was planning “to launch a comprehensive programme of moral education and civic training in Singapore’s schools”. In his own words “character building and inculcation of civic consciousness among the young hold the key to the future of the young Republic”. The Prime Minister’s remark on the lack of civic responsibility was cited during the Education Minister’s press announcement. It was apparent therefore that the Prime Minister’s concern over the Civics teaching contributed in no small way to the major revamp of the civics syllabus. An eleven member Civics Training Subject Committee (1966-1973), chaired by the acting head of the Department of Education of Nanyang University, leading educators, principal of Teacher’s Training College and other school principals was set up to draw up the civics program, which would include the syllabus and methods of implementation. The committee wasted no time in coming up with the syllabus for civics entitled ‘Civics in Secondary Schools’, drafted in Chinese. While all secondary schools received the Chinese edition of the civics syllabus by August 1967, “[t]he English version was only available in June 1968”. It was hardly surprising that the

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56 Ang Wai Hoong and Yeoh Oon Chye, ‘25 Years of Curriculum Development’, p. 88. The authors mistakenly give the impression that there was no prior civics syllabus, when in fact, there was an existing proper Civics syllabus known as Ethics. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the Ethics syllabus.


58 Ibid.

59 Ang and Yeoh, p. 89. Ang and Yeoh held senior positions at the MOE, and therefore had access to the Ministry’s documents. However, their narration of the civics syllabus focused on the secondary level, and hardly mentioned the primary civics syllabus.
Chinese edition of the syllabus came out before the English one, as the Civics Training Subject Committee was comprised mainly of Chinese educators and professionals. 60 The final English version of the syllabus included both the primary and secondary levels. 61

Even before the new civics syllabus was finalized, the Education Ministry was already in a hurry for schools to implement the new civics program. The MOE came up with a temporary civics syllabus in the meantime, and the Director of Education in a memorandum to all secondary school principals gave the instruction “to implement the scheme without delay”, citing “a lack of a sense of social and civic responsibility in many of the school children”. 62 While it was evident that the Education Ministry placed considerable importance in the new civics program, it begs the question of why the revamp of the civics program only commenced a year after Singapore’s independence. A plausible explanation for this could be that Singapore’s political leaders still harboured the hope of reunification with Malaysia in the first few months of the republic’s independence. Chan Heng Chee argued that “from the statements of the Singapore leaders, it would appear that from August 1965 to mid-1966 they still considered reunification to be inevitable and desirable”. 63 She came into this conclusion from studying all the official speeches in that period, which revealed “a studious reluctance on… the leaders to use the term ‘nation’ in reference to Singapore. Instead, the terms ‘community’ and ‘society’ were

60 The predominance of Chinese educators and professionals on this committee reflected the government’s philosophy that the mother tongue was the best suited for the teaching of civic and moral values. However, the composition of the committee, being predominantly Chinese, casts some doubt on the government’s espoused multiracial policy.


62 Ang and Yeoh, p. 89.

preferred". It was only in July 1966 that the term ‘nation’ appeared in the public discourse. As civics education in Singapore was intimately linked to nation building, this accounted for the delay in introducing a new civics program and syllabus.

As more attention was given to the secondary civics syllabus, we will discuss that first. The Secondary Civics syllabus “reflected the concern of the authorities to develop in children a sense of national identity”, as reflected in the introductory paragraph of the secondary school civics syllabus: “At the outset of our nation-building, it is imperative that civic training be continued in our secondary schools for promoting harmony, co-operation, unity and mutual help among all races with a view of establishing a just and equal democratic society”. In short the secondary civics syllabus “aimed at fostering in Singaporean pupils a sense of social and civic responsibility”, as well as “a love for their country and its people”.

Christine Han argued that “from the time the PAP took office, moral education and citizenship education have been viewed as an integrated activity; moral values and ‘right conduct’ were regarded as essential to being a good citizen”. She provided a succinct summary of civics syllabus:

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64 Ibid.
65 Christine Han, p. 85.
66 Primary and Secondary Schools Civics Syllabus, p. 20.
69 Christine Han, p. 86.
Civics was made compulsory for all schoolchildren, and the syllabus was organised along six main themes: the individual, the family, the school, the community, the nation, and the world. It was to be taught in the mother tongue, which is generally deemed to be Mandarin, Malay and Tamil for Chinese, Malay and Indian pupils respectively. Values like patriotism, loyalty and civic consciousness in the context of a multiracial society were emphasized. The syllabus content within the six main themes covered concepts like character development, rights and duties, and racial harmony. Students were also introduced to Singapore’s constitution, the structure and working of the government, parliament and legislation, international relations, Singapore’s neighbouring countries, the United Nations, amongst other topics.

However, Han referred to the Moral Education Report of 1979, and not the Civics syllabus document for her analysis and conclusions. It is clear even from a quick scanning of the civics syllabus that the six themes that Han mentioned applied only to the secondary school civics syllabus. This suggests that the civic education program was initially more focused on the secondary level, with the primary civics syllabus introduced later. Nonetheless, Han rightly pointed out that “[c]itizenship education was not confined to the classroom. Formal lessons were supplemented by extra-curricular activities, particularly those of uniformed groups such as the National Cadet Corps, the National Police Cadet Corps, the Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts”.

The haste in which the syllabus was drafted affected the writing of the textbooks and its implementation. It was no wonder that the writing of the secondary civics textbooks was fraught
with problems from the onset. With the introduction of the secondary civics syllabus in August 1967, three Chinese textbook writers from the MOE were tasked “to work full-time under the supervision of the Advisor to the Editorial Board at the Singapore University”.\(^{74}\) The Chinese Edition of the Secondary Civics textbooks was made available to schools by February 1969, which meant that each textbook took only four months to write. The textbooks were then translated into English by July 1969. Nonetheless, the decision to teach Civics in the mother tongue in all schools resulted in MOE directing the Assistant Inspector (Chinese) “to write a simplified Chinese version of the Chinese textbooks to cater to CL2 students” in August 1969.\(^{75}\) These simplified Chinese civics textbooks were completed by October. On the other hand, the English civics textbooks were never used due to the government’s decision to use ‘mother tongue’ in the teaching of civics. Since the MOE was closely involved both in the planning as well as designing of the civics syllabus, the textbooks adhered closely to the syllabus document.\(^{76}\) They were rolled out to schools “based on directives issued by the Ministry to buy and use the textbooks”.\(^{77}\) However, there was no pilot testing of the textbooks, and “all the time available was devoted to the writing of the text with no provision to prepare and retrain the teachers to use the textbooks at the time of implementation”.\(^{78}\) Despite these problems, the

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\(^{74}\) Ang and Yeoh, p. 89.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 90. CL2 students refer to Chinese students in English medium schools who studied Chinese as a Second Language.

\(^{76}\) The government was likened to parents and school principals. See Chang Kok Peng (ed), *Citizen Reader 1* (Singapore: Pan Asian Publications, 1969), pp. 5-9. This is an early indication of Confucian thinking in the civics curriculum.

\(^{77}\) Ang and Yeoh, p. 90.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.
secondary civics syllabus and textbooks published at this time were used in schools until the early 1980s.

Since the secondary civics syllabus purportedly built on primary civics, it would be instructive for us to also take a look at the primary civics objectives. Like the secondary civics, emphasis was on “character formation, good habits, moral development and citizenship responsibilities to stimulate patriotic feelings and aspirations in our children and make them staunch citizens”. However, the primary civics syllabus objectives were more fleshed out than their secondary counterpart, with concepts such as the environment, relationships, living in a multi-racial society, self-discipline and character building. Reading the objectives, it is clear that the focus was on duties of a citizen, rather than rights. This can be seen in phrases like “limits of personal liberty” and “fulfil their responsibilities as loyal and useful citizens” in the objectives. The approach adopted was a practical one; daily rituals such as flag raising and lowering, the singing of the national anthem, and the recitation of the national pledge, which were introduced to schools prior to the implementation of the primary civics program, were incorporated into the civics training program.

The primary civics syllabus was organized around twelve topics for each level, with the exception of primary three which had thirteen topics. The topics included patriotism, cleanliness, tidiness, politeness, obedience, punctuality, honesty, friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, safety and fairness – an emphasis on moral and character development at the lower grade levels. At the upper primary, greater emphasis was placed on inculcating civic values and responsibilities, as

79 Primary and Secondary Civics Syllabus, p. 1.
80 Ibid.
seen in topics such as loyalty, justice, respect for law and order, citizenship and public spirit. In the same vein as the secondary civics, the medium of instruction was in the mother tongue. However, the primary civics had different textbooks to choose from, unlike the secondary civics.

A striking feature in the Civics syllabus and textbooks was the haste in which it was conceived, drafted and implemented. This was clearly meant as the solution to the Prime Minister’s observation of a supposed lack of civic responsibility amongst school children. As discussed in the previous chapter, the aims of civics for both primary and secondary level were based on a previous Ethics syllabus, with the idea that the desired good citizen would be imbued with the right moral values and conduct. The revamp of the Civics syllabus was thus one of form and expediency (to mollify the Prime Minister) rather than substance. Another interesting caveat was that it was only after the possibility of re-merger with Malaysia was out of the question that the teaching of civics became a necessity. Despite the haste in coming up with the syllabus, the secondary civics syllabus lasted for more than a decade. On the other hand, the primary civics syllabus was a short-lived one. It was replaced by Education for Living in 1973, which combined civics education with history.

**History Syllabus: Declining importance**

In contrast to the attention given to civics education, the government placed less emphasis on history education. In the wake of Singapore’s separation from Malaysia in 1965, the prevailing national sentiment and ideology was one of political and economic survival. With the recent tumultuous past of the 1950s and 1960s fresh in the minds of the citizens, the main

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81 Ibid, pp.
82 See Chapter 2.
pressing task for education was to support Singapore’s economic development as well as to foster national identity. The events of the 1950s and 1960s were not taught as it was felt that the next generation would pick that up from their elders.

Like all ex-colonies, Singapore has inherited a legacy of colonial historiography, which obliterated its pre-colonial past. Adeline Sum’s study on historiography and history writing in Singapore concludes that the pre-colonial history of Singapore was regarded as insignificant by the British, as “[t]he existence of only a few hundred indigenous people and the absence of any sophisticated form of society on [Singapore] in 1819 (when Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore) gave her an appearance of a tabula rasa”. The pre-independence history of Singapore was portrayed essentially as a colonial history which valourized the role of the British in transforming Singapore from a small fishing village into a thriving port. This arguably accounted for the lack of a unified objective in history teaching in the different language streams, especially the English and the Chinese.

83 Lee, *New Bearings*


85 Adeline Wai Fun Sum, “History-Writing in Singapore”. National University of Singapore, Department of History, Unpublished Honours thesis. (1991), p. 24. As the National University of Singapore was based on the UK model of higher education, the honour theses were of graduate school quality. Some of the honour theses were even published in reputable refereed journals.

86 Jacinta Poh Choo Tan, “The Teaching of History in Singapore Schools (1959 – 1980)”, National University of Singapore, Department of History, Unpublished Honours thesis, 1983, p. 5. This was not surprising, as there was no unified curriculum during the colonial era.
From the onset, Singapore’s history was seen to be “inimically related to that of Malaya”. With the attainment of self-government in 1959 and the merger with Malaysia in 1963, attempts were made to move away from colonial history by Malayanizing the syllabus and textbooks, which met with mixed success. The little changes that occurred were the highlighting of regional and Malayan history, since there was as yet no separate Singapore history, as it was subsumed as part of the history of Malaya.

The attainment of independence in 1965 did not provide the impetus for the writing and teaching of a separate Singapore history. Historian Albert Lau argues that “the past was initially neglected as Singaporeans searched for meaning and for their destiny in the present and in the future rather than in the colonial past”. Here, Singapore differs greatly from her counterparts, who summoned history to bolster their anti-imperialist and subsequent nation-building efforts. For Singapore, “history could be a strong disintegrative force” as it had an immigrant multi-ethnic population, “each possessing their own pasts” and “attached to their respective place of origins”. This explains the choice of Raffles as the founder of Singapore. Rajaratnam contended that propagating a Singaporean history prior to 1819 might alienate members of the multi-cultural fabric of Singapore; therefore, the appearance of Sir Raffles became regarded as

the start of Singapore’s history, and “the pre-colonial past became [portrayed as] a pre-historic dark age”.91

The choice of Raffles reflected the positive view of colonial rule. The Singapore leaders saw colonialism as “the modernising force which had transformed the non-western world”.92 Through colonial rule, “originally primitive and backward economies were developed through technological, professional, administrative expertise provided by Europeans”.93 This valorisation of colonialism is in contrast to the other ex-colonies’ antipathy towards colonial rule. Indeed, Singapore lauded her colonial legacy. According to the Prime Minister:

We deem ourselves to be amongst the fortunate few who can afford to be proud of their past, with no desire to rewrite or touch up the truth. It is a short history, 150 years, but long enough for us to value our association with the British people.94

The progressive legacy wrought by colonialism as viewed by Singapore’s leaders fitted in with the modernising ethos in post-independence Singapore. Political and economic survival was the prevailing national sentiment and ideology.95 History was seen as hindering progress, and as such, could not be a source of direction for a modern technological society. Devan Nair, one of the key leaders of the PAP, emphasized that the progression of modern society was based on

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93 Address by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to the University of Singapore Democratic Socialist Club on “An Exercise in Political and Economic Modernization”, 23 September 1968.
94 Ibid.
95 Alvin Tan, “Allowing Dissonance”, p. 15.
examining and overcoming the problems of the present rather than modelling the future upon societies of the past.\textsuperscript{96}

As for the immediate past, Hong and Yap argued that it “had no worthwhile or discernable purpose for the future”.\textsuperscript{97}

For 20 or 30 years, we did not see much around us worth preserving. Colonialism, corruption, racialism, poverty, unemployment and squalor were clearly not worth preserving… A good deal of what we saw around us in the late 40s and early 50s merited destruction. And in order to create the Singapore we know today, my generation set about destroying what had to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{98}

The perceived irrelevance of history by the government and the public was reflected in the low priority given to the teaching of history. As Ong Pang Boon recounted,

History has no immediate practical use. It does not tell us about the future. It does not help us compute our way through life. Thus in schools, history together with geography, is being pushed out of the curriculum to make room for more immediately attractive and useful studies.\textsuperscript{99}

Subjects like mathematics, science and technical studies were deemed as “useful subjects” in producing the “technically proficient workforce” to meet the needs for Singapore’s

\textsuperscript{96} C V Devan Nair, \textit{Not by Wages Alone: Selected Speeches and Writings of CV Devan Nair, 1959- 1981} (Singapore: National Trades Union Congress, 1983). Devan Nair was to become the Third President of Singapore from 1981 to 1985.

\textsuperscript{97} Lysa Hong and Jimmy Yap, “The Past in Singapore’s Present, \textit{Commentary} (11, no. 1, 1993), p. 33. Hong is a historian who is keenly interested in studying the historiography of Singapore.

\textsuperscript{98} C. V. Devan Nair, 18 Feb 1981, Debate on Presidential Address, Vol. 40, column 132.

\textsuperscript{99} Ong Pang Boon, “It is Necessary to Preserve Our History”, \textit{Speeches}, 5, 3 (September 1981). Ong was the Education Minister up till 1970.
industrialisation and economic development. The stress was on the future, rather than the past.

According to Rajaratnam,

We do not lay undue stress on the past. We do not see nation-building and modernisation as primarily an exercise in reuniting the present generation with a past generation and its values and glories. This sort of nation-building could be disastrous for Singapore’s future. A generation encouraged to bask in the values of the past and hold on to a static future will never be equipped to meet a future predicated on jet travel, atomic power, satellite communication, electronics and computers. For us the task is not one of linking past generations with the present generation, but the present generation with future generations.

The emphasis on science and technology education thus resulted in the lower emphasis placed on the teaching of history and other arts subjects like English Literature and Geography. Nonetheless, this cannot adequately account for the eventual merging of primary school history (and geography) with civics to form Education for Living. The answer lay in the policy of bilingualism – in particular, in MOE’s decision to use the mother tongue in the teaching and inculcation of values and national identity.

The Education Minister made the announcement during the 1968 budget debates that primary school history would be taught using the mother tongue:

… a start has been made this year to use Chinese as the medium of instruction for civics in English-medium primary classes for pupils whose second language is Chinese. It is intended that the same arrangement will apply to History in 1970…

Bilingualism must be emphasized in schools if we are to build a multi-racial society with a national identity… For … children whose second language is Chinese or Malay or Tamil, it is … logical to use the second language for teaching subjects which have affinities with their own language and culture, subjects such as History and Civics.


101 S. Rajaratnam’s speech at the Sixth Asian Advertising Congress, 1 July 1968.

102 Speech by the Minister for Education, Mr Ong Pang Boon, on 12 December 1968 at the resumed debate on Annual Budget Statement of the Minister for Finance.
As discussed earlier in this chapter, the government believed that the best medium to teach moral and civic values, as well as to inculcate a sense of belonging and loyalty to Singapore was through the mother tongue. Like Civics, the teaching of history fulfills this role as well. This explains the decision to use the mother tongue for the teaching of history, especially in the primary school.

Mindful that this change would inconvenience students from the English medium schools, especially to the Chinese students of these schools whose Chinese were weak, the Education Minister assured MPs that the scheme would be implemented gradually, so as to “obviate undue hardship on the part of pupils and teachers”. He further reassured MPs that “a committee has been formed to make a careful study of the content and vocabulary of the textbook in History for Primary schools as well as the difficulties encountered by teachers and pupils”. The Education Ministry involved history professors from the University of Singapore in this effort. What came out from this was a revised primary history syllabus which focused on the history of Singapore. The original syllabus and textbooks were in English, but as primary history was taught in the mother tongue, the textbooks were translated. Schools used these textbooks from

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104 ibid, col. 888.

105 In discussing the revised primary history syllabus, Professor Wong Lin Ken argued that the purpose of history education is to teach students the fundamentals of citizenship by imbuing them with a sense of national identity and loyalty to their country. At the same time, history education also ingrains within students the moral, social and political values of society. See Wong Lin Ken, ‘The New History Primary Syllabus: Purpose & Scope’, in Journal of the Historical Society (December 1971), pp. 16.
1970 to 1974.\textsuperscript{107} These textbooks “celebrated the success of the various immigrant ‘races’ which settled in … [Singapore]… partly to extol the virtues of hard work, perseverance and the rewards which come with them”.\textsuperscript{108}

However, the choice of mother tongue as the language of instruction for primary history caused considerable difficulty for Chinese students in the English medium schools. This led to considerable difficulties in the implementation of the revised primary history. English medium primary schools were subsequently given the flexibility to use English as the medium of instruction instead of mother tongue for the teaching of history.\textsuperscript{109} Nonetheless, the primary history syllabus proved to be shortlived. It was merged with civics and geography to form a new subject, \textit{Education for Living}, which was to be taught in the mother tongue.\textsuperscript{110}

The Education Ministry’s decision for subjects like Civics, History and Geography to be taught in the mother tongues of the students was part of its effort to strengthen the bilingual policy at the primary level, particularly at the English medium primary schools.\textsuperscript{111} The idea was to increase the exposure of students in the English medium schools to the mother tongue (and the students in vernacular schools to English). The introduction of \textit{Education for Living} was thus an

\begin{itemize}
  \item See Jacinta Tan, ‘The Teaching of History in Singapore Schools (1959-1980), pp. 31-38. She provides a good account of the revised primary school history syllabus and textbooks, and argues that the textbooks were well written.
  \item Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng, Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore, p. 184.
  \item We will discuss \textit{Education for Living} later on in the chapter.
  \item Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng, Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore, Chapter 5.
\end{itemize}
MOE effort to lessen the workload for students, as well as to give more time for language learning.\textsuperscript{112} As Lim and Gopinathan argues,

> One consequence of this pressure of the bilingual policy was that subjects like History and Geography at the primary level became vulnerable. The functional division of languages led logically to a consideration of whether it would not be more appropriate to teach History and Geography in the mother tongues. The next step, to integrate History, Geography and Civics and to make them non-examinable was made palatable by the reasonable argument that the core primary school curriculum should concentrate on the essentials.\textsuperscript{113}

The essentials refer to the languages, math and science. History, like the other humanities subjects, was a non-essential and hence, dispensable.

The 1970s thus saw the decline of the status and popularity of history as a school subject, especially at the primary level. The decision to merge history with civics was seen by some as a doing away with history by the MOE. For instance, Dr Chiang Hai Ding, a historian and a MP, was “perturbed by the decision of the Ministry of Education to scrap history from the curriculum”.\textsuperscript{114} He regarded \textit{Education for Living} as “a course in community-living and not designed for nation-building… [and] therefore no substitute for history”.\textsuperscript{115} Chiang called for the reinstatement of history as a subject in primary schools, while retaining \textit{Education for Living}, to provide “the cultural ballast” as well as “to engender … civic consciousness”.\textsuperscript{116} Chiang further

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\textsuperscript{112} Since math and science were taught in English, primary school students in the vernacular streams did not benefit as much as those from the English streams.
\textsuperscript{114} Parliamentary Debates, 25 February 1975, col. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. col. 80.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. The idea of “cultural ballast” will be discussed further in the following chapter.
\end{flushright}
elaborated on how history would provide this “cultural ballast”, through teaching the child “his roots, the cultural antiquity and the richness of the lands from whence his forefathers came”.117 He repeated the call to reinstate the teaching of history a few years later, arguing that learning the collective histories of the different ethnic communities in Singapore would lead to an appreciation of “the contributions of the people who settled” in Singapore, resulting in the “dream of a common future”.118 Nonetheless, Chang’s repeated calls went unheeded by the MOE, which felt that the *Education for Living* syllabus was sufficient for the teaching of history in primary schools.

Those who welcomed the phasing out of history in Primary school had a different view. An MP called it “a wise move on the part of the Ministry”, and indicated “the increase in the number of passes…. [as] a clear indication of the wisdom of this move”.119

While history teaching at the primary level went through great changes, there was little change at the secondary level. A possible reason to account for this is that at the Upper Secondary and Pre-University levels, the syllabus content and history courses in general are geared towards preparing students for the two major examinations, ie. the ‘O’ and ‘A’ level examinations.120 As the two major examinations (the ‘O’ and ‘A’ Levels) were administrated by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, which developed the syllabus, the examinations and was responsible for the grading, this circumscribed the ability of MOE to make

117 Ibid., col. 79-80
118 Ibid, 14 February 1977, col. 68.
120 These refer to the General Certificate of Education Ordinary and Advanced Levels conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.
major changes in the secondary history syllabus. In contrast to secondary history, which was an examinable subject, civics in both primary and secondary levels and primary history (and later Education for Living) were non-examinable. The stated reason for making primary school history non-examinable was purportedly to lessen the workload of the students, especially Chinese students in English language streams who could not cope with history being taught in Chinese. Singapore History was taught at the Upper Secondary level under the History of Malaya – an optional subject. At the Lower Secondary levels, world history was taught, the emphasis being that of the Asian environment.

Nonetheless, in both primary and secondary levels, “History was treated as an academic subject that could be displaced in a crowded curriculum to make room for more important or useful courses”. History was seen as peripheral to preparing a skilled workforce for Singapore’s industrialization efforts. At the same time, history was unable to perform the role, as in most countries, of fostering patriotism and national identity. History as a school subject thus became marginalized in the 1970s.

Towards a more systematic Curriculum Planning and Development

The discussion on the changes to the civics and history syllabuses revealed the ad hoc and unsystematic nature of curriculum planning and development. This was especially so in the revising of the civics curriculum. Dr. Ruth Wong, the founding director of the Institute of Education, strongly criticized the way curriculum development was done in the 1960s “as a kind

122 See Parliamentary Debates, 23 March 1970, col. 887. Civics have always been a non-examinable subject.
of one-shot exercise”, with a lack of clear objectives. She further lambasted the way syllabus revision was done, calling it a cut and paste job, where “parts which were deemed unsuitable or obsolete were ‘cut’ out and new topics were ‘pasted’ in, provided these were contemporary or had local significance”.  

As a result, “the Minister for Education set up the Advisory Committee on Curriculum Development under the chairmanship of the Director of Research [Dr. Ruth Wong]” in September 1969. The Advisory Committee was responsible for determining the objectives of education and ensuring that the subject objectives reflected these overall goals while being practical to students. The Committee would also reevaluate how subjects were included or excluded from the curriculum. Finally, the Advisory Committee was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the new curriculum.

Officially inaugurated in 1970, the ACCD comprised officials from MOE and universities, teachers college staff, school principals and teachers. It “undertook a re-examination of the goals, aims and objectives of education in Singapore.” More specifically, 

The Advisory Committee mapped out a basic strategy to address the issues noted earlier; this was composed of analysis of the socio-political context of curriculum change, of the needs of students, society and the world, of objectives for education in official statements, and interpretation of the objectives in operational terms.

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125 Ibid., p. 17.
126 Ibid., pp. 45, 46.
127 Ruth Wong, p. 17.
The following year saw new standing committees on curriculum development being appointed. The curriculum framework they proposed was objective-oriented and supplemented with activities and manuals to engage students. At the same time, it was flexible, giving teachers the freedom to select topics most relevant for their classes and principals the liberty to organize time-tables that fit their students’ needs. The proposed curriculum framework also stressed the significance of inter-disciplinary learning in order to demonstrate to students the complex relationships found in society.\textsuperscript{129}

The setting up of the ACCD marked the shift from an ad-hoc to a systematic “and conceptually grounded curriculum planning [and development] strategy”.\textsuperscript{130} ACCD came up with curriculum innovations such as the Primary Pilot Project, “a syllabus for the integrated teaching of English, Mathematics and Science” in primary schools.\textsuperscript{131} Another major assignment for the ACCD was to conceptualize and develop the Education for Living (EFL) syllabus.

**Education for Living: Epitome of civics education?**

Developed for the purpose of social and moral education, it integrated *Civics* with History and Geography. This was deemed as necessary to “help pupils to understand and live under the changing conditions”.\textsuperscript{132} EFL aimed to inculcate civic and patriotic values to students

\textsuperscript{129} Ruth Wong’s unto each child his best, pp. 160, 161.

\textsuperscript{130} Lim and Gopinathan, p. 67. ACCD was superseded by the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS) in 1980. CDIS in turn was discontinued by the mid 1990s, and its role subsumed into the Curriculum Planning and Development Division in MOE.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 69.

through an appreciation of Singapore’s economic development and its geography, which underscored Singapore’s nation building. Another of EFL’s end goals was to enable students to “be able to live in multi-racial and multi-cultural society in peace and harmony”, through an understanding of the relationships between humans, society and the world. It is interesting to note that the EFL syllabus also aimed to introduce students to the best of Eastern and Western values. However, there was to be a change in orientation towards the end of the 1970s when the West was demonized and the East valorized.

Like Civics, EFL was taught in the mother tongue. According to government documents, the government believed that “Asian moral and social values, and the attitudes such as closeness in family ties, filial duties and loyalty (could) be conveyed and understood better in Asian languages”, and that pupils would become more aware of their cultural roots and develop a stronger sense of nationhood “if they knew their own language”.

Christine Han challenged this assumption:

The insistence for moral and civic values to be taught in the mother tongue raises questions, first, as to whether there is a necessary link between language and values and, second, as to whether there is a conflict between attempts to build a nation and the fostering of ethnic culture and identity through an emphasis on ethnic values and languages.

Introduced to all primary schools in 1974, the instructional materials for EFL came in the form of 12 textbooks, which works out to two per grade level, with accompanying teachers’ guides. The themes covered in the syllabus include the following: our family, our life, our

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133 Ong Report (1979), p. 3.
135 Christine Han, pp. 86-87. This assumption continues to this day. See Bokhorst-Heng,
school, our culture, our environment, how our people earn a living, our public services, our (role) models, our society, our community, our country, our world, and our moral attitude. The chapters in the textbooks were written in the form of short passages, like previous civics textbooks, with discussion questions at the end of each passage. While the EFL syllabus was organized more systematically than the previous primary civics syllabus, it covered most of the content of the previous syllabus, as well as topics associated with history and civics.

Dr Lee Chiaw Meng, the Education Minister was at pains to explain why “the teaching of civics and moral education” was not “an examination subject”. This was because “[Singapore’s] examination system is … too examination-oriented. By adding another subject, we could make matters worse. They might learn it by heart without really wanting to know why certain things ought to be done”. Moreover, the EFL syllabus had to cover a lot of content, since it incorporated civics, history and geography.

It was clear that the MOE meant for EFL to be the epitome of the civics curriculum. The MOE’s Addendum to the Presidential Address at the opening of the fourth Parliament bore this out:

Moral and civics education is mainly taught through the subject Education For Living (which is a combination of Civics, History and Geography) in the pupils’ mother tongue. The aim of the subject is to inculcate social discipline and national identity and to imbue in pupils moral and civic values.

The addendum conveniently ignored the presence of the existing civics syllabus for secondary schools, giving the impression that civics was only taught at the primary level.

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136 See Education for Living textbooks.
137 Parliamentary Debates, 26 March 1975, col. 1000. COS debate
138 Ibid, Ministry of Education Addendum to Presidential Address, 8 February 1977, col. 40.
It was therefore little wonder that an MP suggested that MOE extend “Education for Living to the secondary schools and that the historical development of Singapore, in particular, the periods of crises and hardships be included in the curriculum… [and] should be taught as a compulsory subject in the secondary schools”. 139 The Senior Minister of State for Education in reply said that in secondary school, subjects like Civics, History and Geography carried on the role of EFL in the teaching of values. 140

By 1976, MPs were raising concerns with Education for Living during the annual budget and Committee of Supply debates. Chang Hai Ding, who championed the teaching of history in schools, in acknowledging that “[patriotism] is… included in our Education for Living”, 141 argued that “the misbegotten subject Education For Living” was unable to inculcate patriotism amongst students. 142 Another MP criticized Education for Living in becoming “neither a civics lesson, nor an Education for Living lesson but in many schools, it has become a second language lesson”, and called it “a failure”. 143 There was a call for “Education for Living [to] be taught by Education-for-living teachers, not by second language teachers”. 144 One MP even sarcastically called it “Education for the Living”. 145 The Senior Minister of State for Education did not

139 Ibid, col. 90.
142 Ibid, 14 Feb 1977, col. 68.
143 Ibid., 23 March 1976, col. 830.
address the criticisms of EFL in his reply. He merely reiterated the aims of EFL, “to inculcate moral and ethical values in our young pupils”, \(^{146}\) and gave an overview of the EFL topics.

The criticisms of EFL by MPs were echoed by Leong in his study on youths in the army, where he argued that the teaching of EFL in Chinese essentially became a second-language lesson rather than a civic one. Students in the English stream of the English-medium schools would be more focused on deciphering the language rather than contemplating the message of the lesson because of their predilection towards English learning. Another reason for the ineffectiveness of the teaching of EFL in Chinese is that only teachers proficient in Chinese could teach it, which could result in the concepts being taught within a language lesson framework instead of through a civics lesson paradigm. \(^{147}\) In short, Leong was highly critical of EFL, contending that “the explanation of aims is couched in generalities”, of which “[s]ome of the generalities are nebulous in character”. \(^{148}\)

EFL was introduced as a subject with integrated Civics, History and Geography at the primary level. This supposedly lessened the student load for English stream students. At the same time, EFL was taught in the mother tongue, which was in line with the government’s belief that the mother tongue was best suited for teaching of cultural and civic values. MOE clearly meant for EFL to be the key subject for the inculcation of citizenship and moral values, patriotism and national identity in primary schools. That the proponents of EFL called for the

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\(^{146}\) Ibid, 23 March 1976, col. 855.

\(^{147}\) Leong Choon Cheong, *Youth in the Army* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1978) p. 9. Leong was examining the problems faced by the conscript soldiers, and found that the failure of bilingual education was one of the contributing factors. Leong’s criticism of EFL meant also that bilingual education was not working as well as it should.

\(^{148}\) Leong, *Youth in the Army*, p. 8.
subject to be extended to the secondary schools, disregarding the existing secondary civics syllabus, demonstrates how MOE succeeded in making EFL the epitome of civics education in the eyes of the public. In other words, EFL had become regarded the de-facto subject for civics and citizenship education. Nonetheless, EFL fell short of reaching its objectives. In reality, EFL became another avenue for the teaching of the mother tongue. This was one of the contributing factors for its eventual demise.

Demise of EFL and Civics

Leong’s criticisms of EFL found resonance with the report published by the Education Study team, or more popularly known as the Goh Report, as the team was chaired by Dr Goh Keng Swee, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence. While the report found most of the EFL textbooks “useful in inculcating useful (sic) attitudes”, they regarded “a good deal of it… [as] irrelevant and useless…[and] are of little value in inculcating moral beliefs in children”. The Goh Report had more scathing words for the secondary civics syllabus:

Much of the material taught relates to information, some useful, others of little permanent value. For instance, it seems pointless to teach secondary school children the details of the Republic’s constitution, much of which is not even known to Members of Parliament. It is better that children are taught simple ideas about what a democratic state is, how it differs from other system of Government and what the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democratic state are.

149 This is akin to how ‘National Education’ (NE) is seen as synonymous with citizenship education in Singapore today. See Chapters 6 and 7.


151 Ibid.
The Education Study team led by Dr Goh was commissioned by the Prime Minister in 1978 to conduct a major review of the problems in Singapore’s education system. A reading of Singapore’s Parliamentary Hansard in the 1970s reveals that many aspects of Singapore’s education were heavily criticized by the MPs during the annual Committee of Supply debates – the criticisms over EFL were but one of the many items over which MPs had issues with the MOE. What prompted the review was the high dropout rate following the implementation of mandatory bilingual education – which the Goh Report termed as “educational wastage”.152 The major recommendation of the study team was streaming according to English language ability at Primary three. This was to have major implications on the subsequent educational landscape in Singapore. The resultant education structure was referred to as the “New Education System”.153

While the Goh report commented on EFL and the Civics syllabus, the teaching of civics was not the main subject of the Education study team. The Prime Minister’s open letter to the Education Study team, which was published in the Goh Report, reflected his thinking on the role of education in general, as well as civics and citizenship education in particular. In the letter, the Prime Minister pointed out that the Goh Report did not touch on moral and civics education. His view was that a good citizen should be “guided by moral principals” and imbued with "basic common norms of social behaviour, social values, and moral precepts which make up the rounded Singaporeans of tomorrow”.154 Thus, “the best features of our different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups must be retained… No child should leave school after 9 years

152 See ibid.


without having the ‘soft-ware of his culture’ programmed into his subconscious”. This is reminiscent of his speech in November 1966 where he decried the lack of social and civic responsibility in school children. Lee’s concern was evidently on the moral upbringing of students, and not so much on civic and democratic values. And he apparently found the existing civics education programs wanting in the teaching of moral values. This was reflected in the criticisms of EFL and the secondary civics syllabus in the Goh report.

In response to the Prime Minister’s concerns about moral education, in October 1978, the Deputy Prime Minister appointed Mr Ong Teng Cheong, the Minister of State for Communications and Acting Minister for Culture, to head a team of parliamentarians to “examine the existing moral education programme in schools”. The objectives of this Committee were as follows:

a. To identify the weakness and strengths of the existing moral education programmes in schools.

b. To make recommendations on the content of moral education programmes and teaching methods to be used in both primary and secondary schools.

c. To make recommendations on the selection of suitable teachers to carry out moral instructions in schools.

Unlike the Education Study team, which had no terms of reference, the Moral Education Committee had specific guidelines. First, it had to determine the best ways in which to instill within students desirable moral values (honesty, industry, respect for family, cleanliness and thrift). Next, it had to reassess the existing Education for Living Program in primary schools and

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155 ibid., v.


157 ibid, p. 1.
the Civics syllabus in secondary schools. The Committee also had to make recommendations on how to select teachers who could teach the moral education program in schools.\textsuperscript{158}

The Moral Education Committee released its report in July 1979, and it was popularly referred as the Ong Teng Cheong, or Ong Report. The Ong Report observed that “Civics and EFL are two different and distinct programmes handled by two different subject committees”, resulting in the lack of continuity and reinforcement of “the inculcation of desirable moral and social attitudes in Primary and Secondary Schools”.\textsuperscript{159} This was because “each committee works on its own, each with a different approach and emphasis”.\textsuperscript{160}

For the EFL syllabus, the Moral Education Committee found it to be “on the whole quite appropriate and acceptable”. Nonetheless, the committee concurred with the Goh Report’s criticisms of EFL, citing examples in the syllabus of the shortcomings of EFL in instilling “important moral concepts and values”. The Ong Report also criticized the nature of EFL, a combination of History, Civics and Geography, as “irrelevant to moral instruction”. I would even argue that by using the phrase “so-called” to describe social studies topics and concepts”, the committee demonstrated disdain for social studies and civics, seeing it less important to moral education. With regards to the “moral concepts” in the syllabus, the Ong Report expressed the view that the concepts like “love for school”, “service” and “duty” that were taught at the lower primary level were “highly abstract and may pose difficulties… conceptually,” and suggested that “[t]hey should be deferred to a later stage”. The committee also felt that it was “too early to

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
introduce situations involving moral conflict solutions”.\textsuperscript{161} With regard to the EFL textbooks, the committee found that

at the lower primary level, EFL textbooks are adequate, although some lessons ought to be replaced with more suitable ones. In particular, more lessons in the form of traditional stories or well-known folk tales should be included in the text to convey the desired moral values and concepts. At the upper primary level, the textbooks are dull and unimaginative, and it is doubtful that they can arouse the interest of the pupils. The link between the moral concepts being conveyed and their relevance in terms of the pupils’ experience is tenuous.\textsuperscript{162}

Like the Goh Report, the Ong Report was more critical of the secondary civics syllabus: The syllabus included too many topics that were only indirectly relevant to the teaching of morality, and the learning of these ideas would take class time away from more deeply exploring key issues, such as citizenship. Topics were repeated from grade to grade, which would result in monotony and student disengagement. Lastly, some subjects of the syllabus were much too advanced for students.\textsuperscript{163} As for the Civics textbooks, they were found to be “generally dull and somewhat factual and dogmatic… There is also insufficient illustration of the desired moral values… through the use of stories… Where this is done, it is… boring and unimaginative”.\textsuperscript{164}

In short, the Ong Report criticized the “[t]he present moral education programme [as] inadequate and ineffective, particularly in the case of the Civics programme in the secondary schools”.\textsuperscript{165} The only saving grace was in the objectives for EFL and Civics, which were

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\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, pp. 4,5. \\
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, p. 5. \\
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, p. 4. \\
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, p. 5. \\
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, p. 8.
\end{flushright}
deemed “appropriate and relevant”. In the light of the strong criticisms from the Moral Education Committee, its recommendation came as no surprise:

It is recommended that the present EFL and Civics programme be scrapped and replaced by one single programme covering both the primary and secondary levels under the charge of a single subject standing committee. The subject should be called “Moral Education” and it should confine itself to moral education and discipline training of the child.

Thereafter, the affective aspect of civics and citizenship would be found in moral education, while the more cognitive domains would be covered in social studies and history.

Conclusion

During the first decade or so of Singapore’s independence, the Singapore government was chiefly concerned with the survival of the newly independent state. Rapid industrialization and promoting social cohesion via the principle of multiracialism became the chief strategies that the government adopted. The result was accelerated economic growth, which propelled Singapore to a status of one of the Four Little Asian Dragons. In contrast to the decade prior to independence, there was social and political stability and order. Singapore did not merely survive. It thrived; the developmental state arose amidst of the crisis of national survival. The ruling PAP gained tremendous political mileage and legitimacy as a consequence, and this helped them to win all Parliamentary seats in successive general elections until 1980.

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166 Ibid, p. 4.
167 Ibid., p. 8.
168 This was a popular term in the 1980s to refer to the four tiger economies of East Asia – South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.
169 Of course, the boycott and eventual resignation of the opposition MPs within a year of Singapore’s independence helped to create this one-party Parliament.
Looking back at the period between 1965 and 1980, the government regarded it as Singapore’s golden age. However, it was not a golden age as far as education and schooling were concerned. As an MP commented:

[The Education Ministry] seems to be undergoing changes [ever] so often that the result is chaos, confusion and puzzlement to everyone. Even those in the Ministry are confused as to what they are supposed to do. Worse, in schools the policy changes so often that principals and staff do not know exactly what is really required.170

This aptly summed up the state of history and civics education in the decade or so after Singapore’s independence. The industrialization of the economy, and the policy of bilingualism led to English becoming the language of government and business. Mathematics and science subjects were emphasized, and these were taught in the English language. As a consequence, the period witnessed a steady decline in the enrolment of vernacular stream schools vis-à-vis English stream schools.

In contrast to math and science, the use of the mother tongue to teach history and civics meant that in practice, these subjects were seen as less important despite the constant mention of civic and moral values in the official rhetoric. History in primary school was a victim of the bilingual policy, as it was merged with civics to become EFL, which was regarded as a subject to teach moral and civic values. It was no wonder that some saw history as being withdrawn from the primary school curriculum. Eventually, EFL, together with Civics, were scrapped, as they were deemed inadequate for the teaching of moral values. Another criticism was that EFL lessons were used to teach Chinese. The assumption of using bilingualism for values teaching was thus rendered problematic. At the same time, the government was more concerned with

170 Parliamentary Debates, 26 March 1975, col. 979.
moral rather than civic and democratic values; the existing civics curriculum was therefore found wanting. The answer to the inculcation of moral values was to be found and discovered in ‘Asian’ values.
Chapter 4
The Crisis of ‘Deculturalisation’ and the Invention of ‘Asian Values’

The term ‘Asian values’ became popularized in the political discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. The most vocal proponents of Asian values were Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s Mahathir Mohammed and their deputies and government officials, as well as post-Tiananmen Chinese leaders.¹ Most notable of all these three strands of the Asian values debate is the “Singapore School”, which “comprises leaders who have articulated a defence of the Singapore regime, either in their personal or official capacities.”²

In a nutshell, the Asian Values argument was advanced on cultural, economic and state sovereignty grounds. The cultural argument states that Asian cultures and traditions are inimical to Western liberalism. The economic argument posits that a strong paternalistic government is needed for rapid economic development, and liberal democracy could impede economic growth.³ Thus, the advocates of Asian values argue that liberal democracy is not applicable to Asia, and they stress ‘good governance’ and traditional ‘Asian values’ such as filial piety and obedience to rulers. Finally, the state sovereignty argument contends that without a strong and authoritarian government to preserve national unity, centrifugal forces of religion, race and ethnicity would potentially tear the countries apart. The racial and religious riots in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in the 1960s are cited as evidence to support this argument.

¹ Errol P. Mendes, ‘Asian Values and Human Rights: Letting the Tigers Free’ (Ottawa: Human Rights Research and Education Centre 1996),
³ See Langlois (2001), Ch 1.
This chapter traces the origins of the Asian Values discourse in Singapore, and its relationship to and impact on the civics and history curricular in Singapore. Having overcome the crisis of survival in the first decades of its independence, the Singapore government was now concerned with the onslaught on what they regarded as permissive Western values (American popular culture) encroaching on the desirable Eastern/Asian values. The government’s official rhetoric of Asian Values was presented as a solution for the crisis of “deculturalisation” ostensibly due to the influences from the ‘decadent West’ and Western individualism.

Throughout the 1980s, there was constant talk of Confucianism and Asian values by the Singapore government. This period is regarded by some scholars as the ‘Asianising Singapore’ phase of the young republic’s history. The Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched in 1979, was commonly regarded as the beginning of this Asianising phase of promoting Asian values. However, the antecedents of Asian values went back earlier than that.

**Origins of ‘Asian Values’ in Singapore**

It is difficult to pin down the exact origin of the term ‘Asian values’ in Singapore’s public discourse. The earliest known reference to ‘Asian values’ was in a seminar organized by the University of Singapore on 15 November 1975 entitled ‘Asian Values and Modernisation’. Two of the papers in the seminar attempted to define the term ‘Asian values’, which was summed up as follows: “(i) the predominance of a strong group solidarity and paternalistic employer-

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4 Raj Vasil, Asianising Singapore, Chapter 5.

employee relationship, (ii) mutual assistance and community life, and (iii) the extended family system”.  

Mr S. Rajaratnam, Minister for Foreign Affairs, during the closing speech of the seminar, expressed “serious doubts as to whether such a thing as ‘Asian values’ really exists”.  

He went on to argue that the discourse around ‘Asian values’ was “merely a convenient way of describing the heterogeneous, conflicting and complex network of beliefs, prejudices and values” in Asia.  

Despite Rajaratnam’s initial misgivings about ‘Asian values’, he mentioned the term ‘Asian values’ several times in the rest of his speech. The main point of his speech was that both Asian and Western values had to be reassessed with regards to their efficacy to support modernization.

The Foreign Minister’s speech made the headlines in the following day’s Straits Times, Singapore’s main English daily. Entitled ‘In eyes of many Asians, to be modern is to ape ways of the West – The Phoney S’poreans’, the Straits Times article focused on Rajanatnam’s criticism of “the two grades of Westernized Singaporeans”.  

In Rajaratnam’s words, “[t]he lower grade consists of those who keep up with the latest fashions and other superficial aspects of Western life”.  

Rajaratnam had harsher words for “the higher grade of Westernized Singaporean”,

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6 Seah Chee Meow (ed) Asian Values and Modernization (Singapore University Press), p. xii. See also pp. 1-40. This book is a compilation of the papers presented at the seminar on Asian Values and Modernization held on 15 November 1975.

7 S. Rajaratnam, ‘Asian Values and Modernization’ in Seah Chee Meow (ed), Asian Values and Modernization, p. 95. It must be noted that Rajaratnam was formerly Minister for Culture.

8 Ibid.

9 Straits Times, 16 November 1975, p. 1

calling them “an even sorrier specimen of phoniness”. The serious implication of being Westernized was underscored in Rajaratnam’s warning that “Western values as propagated by the liberal establishment will be fatal not only to modernization but to the survival of Third World countries like Singapore”. It is interesting to note that Rajaratnam’s speech did not make the headlines in the Chinese dailies, which suggests that his speech was mainly targeted at English speaking Singaporeans.

The Straits Times went on to publish an editorial a few days later, which underscored the importance that the government placed on Asian values:

Without a national identity firmly rooted in history and tradition, with the need to sever political and to dilute emotional ties with the homelands of our forefathers, without any acceptable alternative to the acquisition of technical and managerial skills from the West, with the economic and political compulsions to keep the Republic open as one of the crossroads of world trade and communication, is it any wonder that the Singaporean, especially young Singaporean, is often bewildered and bewitched by extraneous influences?

It was undoubtedly a long rhetorical question, but it demonstrated the state’s concern about the decadent influences of the ‘contemporary West’ – a demonization of ‘Western values’ by conflating that with the worst of American popular culture and its excesses such as “hippyism, a libertine pre-occupation with self-gratification, the cult of living for today and for myself and to hell with others”.

11 Ibid.


This idea of being corrupted by decadent ‘Western’ values was presented as a national crisis by none other than the Prime Minister himself before the term ‘Asian values’ appeared in the national discourse. In a speech at the 1972 Singapore’s Teachers Union’s anniversary dinner, Lee Kuan Yew warned of “becom[ing] completely deculturalised and lost” if Singapore “fail[ed] to… preserve what is best in our respective cultural values”. The national crisis was that of “deculturalisation”, and the solution was found in the inculcation of the desired moral and cultural values.

The issue of ‘Asian values’ resurfaced during the Presidential Address at the opening of Singapore’s fourth Parliament in January 1977. Concluding his address, President Benjamin Sheares emphasized that:

We have to formulate our way of life, taking what is best from the West and fitting it into the Singapore context. We must not allow our values and our philosophy of what is good government to be overwhelmed by the standards and norms of the contemporary West, regardless of their relevance to our social, economic and political conditions, simply because, for the time being the West have the material abundance and technological superiority.

The Addendum of the Ministry of Education to the Presidential Address drove the message home. It stressed that “[g]reater effort will be made to ensure that pupils imbibe the tried and tested Asian cultural and moral values”. The rationale given echoed Lee Kuan Yew’s deculturalisation rhetoric mentioned earlier:

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15 Speech by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the Singapore Teachers’ Union Dinner, 10 November 1972.
16 Wendy Bokhorst-Heng, ‘Language and Imaging the Nation in Singapore’, pp. 186-198. A major tool in this effort to ‘preserve’ the Asian values was in the teaching of the mother tongue.
17 Presidential Address at the Opening of the first session of the fourth Parliament, Parliamentary Debates, 8 Feb 1977 Col 18.
18 Ministry of Education’s Addendum to Presidential Address, 8 Feb 1977, Col 40. Emphasis added. The MOE did not explain how and why these ‘Asian values’ were “tried and tested”. 
While pupils will learn and acquire more and more knowledge of science and western technology and be proficient in the English language, they will be taught not to adopt the life styles and values of the West that are alien and pernicious to Singapore society.

Similarly, the Ministry of Culture’s Addendum spelt out its cultural policy aiming “to promote a better appreciation of our cultural heritage” so as to “provide our young with the necessary cultural ballast against the erosion of traditional norms and values”.\footnote{Ministry of Culture’s Addendum, 8 Feb 1977, Col. 42.}

In the subsequent debate on the Presidential Address, some of the backbenchers questioned the Ministry of Education’s aim to imbibe Asian values. An M.P. requested the Education Ministry to spell out the values and how they were to be taught, since “they appear to have already identified the tried and tested” Asian values, as implied in the phrase “the tried and tested”.\footnote{Debate on Presidential Address, 14 Feb 1977, Col 72.} The Member for Kampong Chai Chee, Mr Fong Sip Chee, went a step further, criticizing both the Ministries of Education and Culture for making no attempt in the Addenda “to list out what those values, culture and traditions are”.\footnote{Ibid, 16 Feb 1977, Col. 200.} He also sounded a concern that the promotion of ‘Asian values’ might result in greater resentment and anti-establishment sentiments from the public “not so much due to the lack of understanding of our national problems… but due to our own fault in not understanding [the people]”.\footnote{Ibid.} Fong further wonders “[j]ust what are those values and traditions that are so vital to our survival as a nation?”\footnote{Ibid.}

In his reply, the Minister for Culture revealed the government’s thinking on Asian values and cultural ballast:

\footnotetext[19]{Ministry of Culture’s Addendum, 8 Feb 1977, Col. 42.}
\footnotetext[20]{Debate on Presidential Address, 14 Feb 1977, Col 72.}
\footnotetext[21]{Ibid, 16 Feb 1977, Col. 200.}
\footnotetext[22]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[23]{Ibid.}
Cultural “ballast” implies a firm and sound rooting in traditional cultures... We should select and retain those cultural elements that have a broader appeal to all... The awareness of our cultural past together with the forging of a distinctive Singapore identity will help provide our young with the necessary ballast against the inroads of undesirable Western influence... Our duty is to try to preserve and promote the good [traditions and customs] while at the same time keep down or do away with the bad ones.24

The Senior Minister of State for Education further explained that the concept of Asian values was “a convenient way of referring to the variety of norms, practices and beliefs inherent in the cultures, traditions and customs of Asia”.25 In other words, the government referred to these norms and beliefs as “tried and tested Asian cultural and moral values”. Exactly how and why they were so was moot.

Earlier in the Culture Minister’s reply, he echoed the demonization of the West made by Rajaratnam more than a year earlier:

We must learn to adapt to the imperatives of an industrial society without losing our cultural values. At the same time, we have to reject life styles and values of the West that are alien and pernicious to our Singapore society... To allow these undesirable elements of Western life styles into our society is to invite ruin and disaster for ourselves.26

And what were the “undesirable elements of West life styles”? The Minister listed a few examples: “permissiveness, communal living, hippieism, drug taking, abhorrence for hard work and urban violence”. This echoed Rajaratnam’s claim that “[c]ontemporary Western values... are very much against authority and social discipline”.27

24 Ibid, 22 Feb 1977, Col. 369, 370. Emphasis added
25 Ibid. 23 Feb 1977, Col. 390.
26 Ibid. 22 Feb 1977, Col. 369, 370.
27 Rajaratnam, in Seah, p. 99.
The “tried and tested” Asian values were thus presented as a “cultural ballast” against the “undesirable” Western values. In the words of the Goh Report, it was the fear of “losing the traditional values of one’s own people and the acquisition of the more spurious fashions of the West”. At the heart of the issue was the state’s attempt to articulate and forge a Singaporean identity – one that was Asian as opposed to “Western”. This was one of the main issues that was addressed by the Moral Education Committee.

The Moral Education Report revisited

The Moral Education Committee took the cue from the Prime Minister’s comment on the Goh Report on what constituted a good citizen as the basis on their proposed moral education syllabus:

The litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and cooperate in a civilised way. Is he loyal and patriotic? Is he, when the need arises, a good soldier, ready to defend his country, and so protect his wife and children, and his fellow citizens? Is he filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding, humane, and responsible? Does he take care of his wife and children? And his parents? Is he a good neighbour and a trustworthy friend? Is he tolerant of Singaporeans of different races and religions? Is he clean, neat, punctual, and well mannered?

From the qualities listed above, the Prime Minister thus underscored the importance of moral education in producing good citizens. The Committee outlined three broad areas to be covered in the proposed syllabus: “personal behaviour, social responsibility” and “loyalty to the country”.

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28 Goh Report, p. 5.

29 Other than the major education review, the other two major manifestations of Asian values were the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, and the introduction of the Special Assistance Plan whereby nine Chinese secondary schools were chosen to teach English and Chinese supposedly at the same level.

30 Goh Report, p. iv-v

31 Ong Report, p. 9. The committee also drew examples from moral education programs in Taiwan, Japan and Russia.
The committee further outlines what would be covered in these three broad areas. It is worth quoting at length their recommendations, as many of the points below are found in later education programs:

a. Personal Behaviour:
   i. Habit Formation:
      Manners, Hygiene and Cleanliness, Safety, Diligence, Dignity in Labour, Courtesy, Punctuality, Thrift, Physical Fitness
   ii. Character Development:
      (a) Personal:
      Integrity, Honesty, Self-respect, Honour, Courage, Incorruptibility, Perseverance, Faithfulness, Patience, Humility, Spirit of Inquiry, Obedience, Self-discipline, Temperance
      (b) Altruistic Characteristics:
      Filial Piety, Respect for elders, Loyalty, Tolerance, Love and Humanity, Kindness, Forgiveness, Trust, Impartiality.

b. Social Responsibility:
   i. Sense of Belonging to the Community:
      Civic Consciousness, Respect and Care for others, Care for Public Property, Respect for law and order, Safety, Harmony, Group-spirit, Love for the School, Co-operation, Friendship, Neighbourliness, Generosity
   ii. Respect for Cultural Heritage:
      Understanding and appreciation of one’s cultural heritage, Understanding of and respect for others’ cultures and beliefs

c. Loyalty to the Country:
   i. Love of Country:
      Sense of national identity and commitment, Protection and upholding of the democratic system, Defence of our Country, Patriotism, Loyalty, Justice and Equality
   ii. Spirit of Nation Building:
      Appreciation of the efforts made by our forefathers in building the nation and their contributions to national development; Understanding the progress of Singapore and the pioneer spirit, Understanding the internal and external threats to Singapore’s survival and prosperity.
The above points demonstrated a Confucian worldview of ‘cultivation of self, managing one’s family, governing a nation, peace under the heavens’ (修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下).\textsuperscript{32} This is further evidenced in the committee’s recommendation that the primary (elementary) level “should concentrate on the formation of good habits and the development of sound character and qualities required for the child to live in harmony in his immediate social environment ie. The home and the school”.\textsuperscript{33} This relates to the cultivation of self. For the secondary school level, the committee proposed a greater emphasis on “responsibility to society and nation”,\textsuperscript{34} corresponding to “governing a nation”. To drive the message home, the recommended moral education program was to emphasize “the inculcation of the desired Eastern and Asian moral concepts, values and attitudes so as to help in the preservation and strengthening of our cultural heritage”.\textsuperscript{35}

In addition, the committee recommended the mother tongue to remain as the medium of instruction for primary and secondary levels:

This is because through the preservation and transmission of Asian moral values and cultural traditions can be carried out using an alien language ie. English, it will not be as effective as the mother tongue. In the process of translation, distortions are likely to occur as it is subject to individual interpretation. Children… will be able to understand the moral concepts better if they are taught in the mother tongue, which is closely linked with the dialects which most of them speak at home.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} These are the key Confucian concepts of ‘The Great Learning’ (大学). See Wing-sit Chan (trans. and complied), \textit{A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy} (Princeton N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 84-94.

\textsuperscript{33} Ong Report, p. 9. Harmony (和) is a key Confucian concept.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p. 10.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
This assumption was to remain a cornerstone of the PAP government’s thinking about the teaching of civics and moral education for primary school till this day.

It is clear from the areas outlined by the committee (also known as the Ong Report) that citizenship education and moral education were conflated. Concepts such as “civic consciousness”, “respect for law and order” and “understanding of and respect for others’ cultures and beliefs” fall under citizenship education. This is even more so for the concepts outlined under “loyalty to the country”. From the points and concepts mentioned under the area of “social responsibility” and “loyalty to country”, we can see the worldview of the PAP state by the end of the 1970s. This was to remain unchanged in the following decades.

The Ong Report necessitated a major overhaul of the existing civic education syllabuses for primary and secondary schools. However, “there is nobody in the Ministry [of Education] capable of developing the recommendations of [the] Committee into a curriculum and writing text books and teaching material”. Bernard Chen, one of the moral education committee members, recommended Father Robert Balhetchet to lead this effort, which Dr. Goh concurred, citing his “distinguished academic record in theology and philosophy”.

A moral education program project team thus was formed under the leadership of Father Balhetchet to design the new curriculum. The MOE conducted a survey in Secondary schools “to

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38 This will be elucidated in subsequent chapters.

39 Letter by Dr Goh Keng Swee to Mr Ong Teng Cheong, in Ong Report.

40 Ibid. Father Balhetchet was a Jesuit priest who was ordained in Singapore.
determine the value patterns of the Singapore student” as Balhetchet felt “it would be necessary to know the existing values of students before embarking on the design and writing of a course”. The work of Father Balhetchet and his team resulted in the introduction of the *Being and Becoming* program, and also indirectly led to the *Good Citizen* program.

As the syllabus and textbooks for moral education would not be ready the following year (1980), the MOE requested that schools emphasize the moral aspects of the existing EFL and Civics syllabus for the time being. To prepare teachers to teach moral education, The Institute of Education commenced a moral education program for all its trainee teachers from January 1980.

**Being and Becoming**

Originally conceived as a comprehensive moral education program for primary and secondary levels, the *Being the Becoming* program took shape by the second half of 1980, and was pilot tested in Bukit Merah Secondary School in January the following year. The reason for the school’s selection was because “it has students of both sexes, an English and a Chinese stream, and an academic as well as technical streams”. Balhetchet however, felt that the school was picked due to its proximity to the Ministry of Education. Just a few months later, in April

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41 Dr Robert P. Balhetchet, “Preface”, in Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, “Being and Becoming” Moral Education Programme for Singapore Schools (Primary and Secondary levels): The Programme and the Package, *Being and Becoming: Teacher's Guide* (Singapore: Longman, 1986). Father Balhetchet originally wanted primary school students to be included in the survey as well. This was not done. See *Straits Times* “First of Dr Goh’s Wise Men: Father Balhetchet, Man of the People”, 17 September 1979.


44 *Straits Times*, ‘Moral Education scheme for more schools next year’, 20 April 1981.

45 *Straits Times*, 21 Jan 1982.
1981, the MOE decided to extend the program to more primary and secondary schools the following year. By August, the program – otherwise referred as Balhetchet’s plan – was regarded a great success in the pilot school.46

The Being and Becoming program was “guided by the philosophy that moral justification and behaviour must be guided by the ‘common good’”.47 Balhetchet spelt out two fundamental objectives of his moral education program:

1. To produce truly responsible persons who act not out of impulse… but only after careful and deliberate consideration of studied options in the light of truth and good as befits a rational man.
2. To educate students in relationships… moral decisions will always be taken in the context of a relationship of one kind or another.48

Drawing upon the recommendations of the Ong Report, Balhetchet outlined a six-step plan49 to develop moral education – self, family, school, neighbourhood, nation and world – which adhered to the Ong report’s recommendations in the elements of personal behaviour, social responsibility, and loyalty to country.50 Each of these steps, or modules, are taught in graduated units: 1) knowledge and respect, 2) understanding and acceptance, 3) concern, care and love, 4) helpfulness and co-operation, and 5) relationship.51 Drawing upon the values clarification approach, the program introduced students to the five stages for making ‘responsible choice’:

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49 See Straits Times ‘Classes in moral education next year’, 27 November 1980 and ‘Twin Role Leads to Dilemma for Balhetchet’, 5 August 1981. Balhetchet refers to it as “widening circles of relationships”.
50 Christine Han (1996) made a similar observation.
51 CDIS, Being and Becoming: Teacher's Guide, p. 3.
recognising options, evaluating options, taking a decision, taking a stand, and living one's convictions.\textsuperscript{52}

Balhetchet developed a comprehensive teachers guide for both primary and secondary school, replete with detailed lessons plans and instructions.\textsuperscript{53} Each lesson plan specified the topic, theme and objective, and each lesson begins with a “trigger activity” aimed “to create awareness of or draw the students to a particular area or topic that will be the subject of discussion and learning, in order to stimulate interest, discussion or interaction”.\textsuperscript{54} Having the students to discuss and interact in groups represented a departure from the didactic method that teachers were used to. The discussions and interactions were means to allow students to reflect on the lesson, resulting in “action for change”. In the unfolding of the lesson, the teacher had to review the action points made.

The six steps or modules of Balhetchet’s program again demonstrate the conflation between moral education and citizenship education in Singapore. Generally speaking, the first two of the modules (self, family) fall under moral education, while the last two (nation, world) were citizenship education concepts.\textsuperscript{55} Unfortunately, Balhetchet was unable to develop the modules for nation and world for the upper secondary moral education, as it was decided that religious knowledge was to be taught at that level. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. p. 2.


\textsuperscript{54} CDIS, \textit{Being and Becoming: Teachers Guide}, p. 6. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{55} School and Society fall within moral and citizenship education domains.
Nonetheless, Balhetchet came up with a comprehensive module for “nation” and the “world” for his primary school moral education program. The “nation” module aimed to lead the student to a consciousness of his belonging and identity within the context of his own country and to introduce him to still wider applications of ‘civic-consciousness’ and the principle of the ‘common good’ on a national scale.56

The module was divided into four sections compromising “the national symbols”, “our government/the institutions of government”, “civic-consciousness and the principle of ‘common good’” and “synthesis of the condensed module on ‘nation’”. Detailed background notes were provided for the teacher on the topic of national symbols like the national flag, national anthem, nation flower, nation coat of arms, the pledge and the merlion. For the topic on the government, the description of the three branches of government, as well as the names of all cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament were provided.57 Building on the “nation” module, the “world” module aimed “to create an awareness of an interest in the countries and events of the ASEAN region”.58

There is a general consensus that the Being and Becoming program was the most comprehensive moral education program up to that date.59 For instance, Eng Soo Peck commended the program for “its enunciated philosophy, its postulations of a conceptual frame and the development of a basic organising scaffolding for treating moral concepts and the clear

57 Ibid., pp. 124-147.
58 Ibid., p. 159. ASEAN refers to the Association of South East Asian Nations, a regional grouping formed in 1967 with Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore as its founding member nations.
articulation of an approach in teaching a particular value leading to making a crucial decision vis-a-vis behaviour”. 60

On the flip side, Balhetchet’s moral education plan encountered resistance and criticism even before the commencement of the pilot testing in Bukit Merah Secondary School. Principals attending a three day workshop on moral education expressed concern “that primary school children may be too young to make rational choices”.61 Some principals were also concerned that values were not taught explicitly. Even when the pilot testing at Bukit Merah Secondary School was regarded as a huge success, there remained fears “that the free expression encouraged… would reveal a student’s family problems to other students”, and this “openness could aggravate the student’s problem and feelings”.62 Moreover, “some teachers might not be qualified to handle the problems of students from broken homes”.63 For the Being and Becoming program to achieve its desired outcomes, a “moral environment” had to be created in the classrooms and schools. This needed the total support from the principal and all members of the teaching staff in the school. It was hardly any surprise that the program was criticized as being “demanding on both students and teachers”.64 Intensive teacher training was needed – the basic course to prepare teachers required 30 hours. 65

60 Eng (1989), p. 8
62 Straits Times, 5 August 1981.
63 Ibid.
64 Straits Times, 18 September 1981.
65 Balhetchet, “Preface”.
Given the intensive training needed, some teachers were uncomfortable with the ‘group interactions and discussions’ method suggested in the program, preferring the didactic method. These teachers also “felt that the programme was ‘biased’ in favour of the Western values system, and inappropriate to the local context.” The teachers saw themselves “both as elders and as keepers and transmitters of traditional values” such as respect for elders and filial piety. Hence, they disliked the prospect of being challenged and questioned by their students through group discussions and interactions, as these would threaten their authority and role, and also potentially diminish their students’ respect for them. The program was nevertheless eventually introduced to all secondary schools by 1985, with accompanying workbooks published by 1990. Owing to the concerns and criticisms of Balhetchet’s moral education program, the MOE decided to come up with an alternative syllabus for primary schools.

**Good Citizen**

In September 1980, the MOE approached Mr. Wong Ying Leong to prepare a primary school moral education program that could be implemented in all primary schools the start of the following school year. Since the school year in Singapore begins in January, this meant that Wong and his team only had four months to develop the syllabus and come up with the teaching materials and textbooks. His team managed to come up with the syllabus within a month, and by

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67 Christine Han, Education for Citizenship in a Plural Society, p. 94
68 Ibid.
the end of 1980, the resulting *Good Citizen* (好公民) program was ready to be implemented in all Primary One and Two classes in January 1981.\textsuperscript{69}

With that in place, the MOE proceeded to make the public announcement of this new program:

> From next year, a new subject, moral education and social studies (Mess), will replace EFL... A new series of textbooks, called Good Citizen, has been developed by the Education Ministry for use in Mess lessons... the Good Citizen textbooks would be used in all primary and full schools, initially for children whose mother tongue is Chinese.\textsuperscript{70}

Due to the brevity of time in preparing the syllabus and textbooks, the Malay and Tamil versions of the *Good Citizen* were not ready to be implemented until at least a year later. Teaching the *Good Citizen* in the mother tongue was in line with the Ong Report’s recommendation, which reflected the government’s thinking “that ethical and traditional values can be best put across on the mother tongue”. This, however, did not sit in well with some teachers. Some English medium teachers wanted to teach moral education, but could not because of the language restriction, leaving them feeling frustrated.\textsuperscript{71} Nonetheless, the MOE went ahead with rolling out the *Good Citizen* program despite misgivings from these teachers.

The *Good Citizen* curriculum package comprised teachers’ guides as well as textbooks and workbooks for students. The original intention was to publish twelve volumes of teachers’

\textsuperscript{69} *Straits Times*, ‘Awareness of the self and the world’, 18 September 1981. It is worth noting that Wong was involved in the production of the Education for Living program. See Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{70} *Straits Times*, ‘Classes in moral education next year’, 27 November 1980.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., ‘Moral Lessons: Why some teachers are frustrated’, 5 December 1980
guides, textbooks and workbooks, which worked out to two for each grade level. Additional materials were published later on for the monolingual and extended streams. The program had a three-fold objective:

- To teach the student awareness of the individual, the family, school, society, the nation and the world
- To help the student understand the relationship between himself [or herself] and each of these and his responsibilities towards them;
- To make him [or her] a good citizen, showing concern and love for the human race, the nation and himself.

The above objectives demonstrated once again that the role the state envisioned for moral education was that of nation building. Hence, moral education in Singapore was largely synonymous with citizenship education. The choice of the program name, Good Citizen, further underscored this.

Like Being and Becoming, the Good Citizen program was built around the six steps/relationships – self, family, school, neighbourhood, nation and world – recommended by Father Balhetchet. However, “while Dr Balhetchet focus[ed] on one relationship a year, Good Citizen modif[ied] the timing”, as the MOE felt “to teach one area a year is too narrow… [they] suggested an integration”. The Good Citizen thus introduced the concepts of self, family and school in Primary 1 and 2. Students in Primary 3 and 4 also learnt about school and society,

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72 See ‘Editors’ Preface’ for all Good Citizen textbooks.

73 See “Editors’ Preface”, Good Citizen 7A, 7B, 8A, 8B.

74 Ibid., ‘Awareness of the self and the world’, 18 September 1981. The objectives are also stated in the editor’s preface of all the Good Citizen textbooks.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.
in addition to the first three areas. Finally, “primary 5 and 6 pupils will be taught about the nation [Singapore] and the world”. 77

The press was quick to extol the virtues of the Good Citizen program. For instance, the Straits Times informed readers that unlike the Being the Becoming program, which was depicted as “more comprehensive, complex, experimental and demanding on both teachers and students”, the “Good Citizen is a more straightforward course. It is less ambitious in its goals and less involved and complex in teaching”. 78 Also, the Good Citizen program did not require special training to teach it. This was regarded as the program’s strength vis-à-vis Being and Becoming. 79

The newspaper continued to give examples of the strength of the Good Citizen program:

The techniques used [in Good Citizen] are a combination of direct moralising through story-telling, together with discussions and other classroom activities which get children to play an active role.

Students have colourfully illustrated textbooks which are the springboard to discussion. The pictures illustrate moral families and good habits and feature key points of Singapore life… 80

This echoes Christine Han’s observation that “the Good Citizens text comprises short narratives with moral themes. These passages describe approvingly and in story form such virtues as helpfulness, caring and providing support for one's parents, dedication, selflessness and patriotism”. 81 The narratives in the Good Citizens text where undoubtedly shorter than the EFL ones, and questions were asked at the end of each story. However, the Good Citizen text was not

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Christine Han, pp. 95-96.
a radical departure from the EFL, as it built on the story-telling format used in the EFL textbooks.\textsuperscript{82}

While the \textit{Good Citizen} program was simpler than \textit{Being and Becoming}, the \textit{Straits Times} claim that “Good Citizen encourages student-teacher and student-student discussion and aims to get children active in the classroom” was problematic. In the same article, the newspaper described two \textit{Good Citizen} moral education classes. One had “a brief discussion”, while in the other “the teacher seemed to be doing more talking than the students”.\textsuperscript{83} Eng Soo Peck made a similar conclusion, observing that there “was a tendency for teachers to ‘tell’ pupils so that the immediate outcomes of the lessons were limited to pupils’ ability to know and understand the concepts”.\textsuperscript{84} According to Christine Han, the mother tongue teachers tasked to teach the \textit{Good Citizen} syllabus were “generally considered conservative in terms of their values and teaching style”.\textsuperscript{85} It was hardly surprising, therefore, that these teachers preferred the didactic method instead of the student-centred focus that the Ong Report recommended. Another reason for teachers preferring this approach was the haste in the planning and development of the program, resulting in no pilot testing prior to its implementation. This contrasted starkly with \textit{Being and Becoming}, which had a long trial period in schools before its eventual roll out. The haste in implementing the \textit{Good Citizen} program meant also that there was inadequate time to train teachers in time for this new syllabus.

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\textsuperscript{82} See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Straits Times}, 18 September 1981.
\textsuperscript{85} Christine Han, p. 96.
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In addition, Han opined that “occasionally, topics related to citizenship are raised”.\(^86\) She cited one instance of a citizenship related topic – a passage on “Polling Day”\(^87\) – to illustrate her point. I argue that citizenship topics were not taught “occasionally”. Firstly, she did not mention that the \textit{Good Citizens} program was also built around the same six relationships as \textit{Being and Becoming}. The latter three relationships – society, nation and world – are domains covered in citizenship education. Secondly, she failed to refer to the objectives of the \textit{Good Citizen} program, which were clearly aimed at citizenship education and not moral education per se. Finally, to better ascertain how often topics on citizenship are raised, it would be necessary to examine the published syllabus materials – the textbooks – something that Han did not do. This will reveal that there was substantive coverage of citizenship topics in the \textit{Good Citizens} program.

As previously mentioned, the \textit{Good Citizen} program for primary one and two emphasized self and family; school and society were the focus of primary three and four; and primary five and six students were taught about the nation and the world. Although the Primary One and Two \textit{Good Citizen} syllabus emphasized self and the family, students were introduced to the idea of the nation right from their first year of school. For instance, the \textit{Good Citizen 1A} textbook had a passage on “The School and National Flags”,\(^88\) whereby students were taught Singapore’s national flag, an important national symbol.

\(^{86}\) Ibid.


With the stress on society and school for the primary three and four Good Citizen program, more topics related to citizenship would be expected. And this appeared to be so. Several passages touched on the multi-racial and multi-religious nature of the Singaporean society. The primary three textbooks and four textbooks contained passages about racial and religious festivities such as the Chinese New Year, Chinese Mid Autumn festival, Hari Raya Puasa89, and Hindu festivals such as Thaipusam and Deepavali.90 These passages highlighted the importance of racial and religious harmony. Other passages which underscored racial and religious harmony drew attention to living in harmony with one’s neighbour irregardless of their race, playing with children of different ethnicities in the playground, understanding other’s religious customs pertaining to funerals, and the Muslim call to prayer.91

Reading the Good Citizens textbooks for primary five and six, one cannot help but be struck at the sheer number of passages that brought up citizenship related topics. This should be hardly surprising, as these two grade levels emphasized nation and the world. Besides the passage on “Polling Day” that Han mentioned, students were taught and introduced to topics like Singapore’s past, its pioneers, the multicultural nature of the country, Singapore’s national day, the national anthem and flag, its Presidents – past and present (including a passage on the late President Benjamin Sheares), its political leaders, the importance of national service, the role of

89 ‘Hari Raya Puasa’, otherwise known as ‘Eid ul-Fitr’ in the Middle East, is a Muslim holiday marking the end of the fasting month, or Ramadan.
Members of Parliament, public utilities, and the role of the military and police.\(^\text{92}\) There were also passages that highlighted civic values and consciousness, such as encouraging good behaviour in public places, taking part in community activities, and helping the disadvantaged.\(^\text{93}\) In addition, students were also introduced to Singapore’s neighbouring countries – Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, China and India – as well as ASEAN and the United Nations.

Thus, the evidence suggests that there was significant coverage of citizenship related topics in the *Good Citizen* program. The effectiveness of the program in achieving its objectives was another thing altogether. As shown earlier, scholars were in agreement that the implementation of the program was not as good as it was made out to be.\(^\text{94}\) Besides the criticism over the didactic teaching approaches, there were other deficiencies in the program. For instance, the sequencing of the *Good Citizen* textbooks appeared haphazard compared to the EFL ones. Textbooks of the latter were organized around themes like “our country”, “our family”, “our schools” and “our life”, with the chapters found under those themes,\(^\text{95}\) while *Good Citizen* textbooks did not clearly indicate such themes in the contents page. Instead, what we see is the list of chapters in each *Good Citizen* textbook. It is apparent therefore that the *Good Citizen* program was hardly an improvement over the EFL, especially in terms of teaching methods and content. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the *Good Citizen* program fared well in inculcating


\(^{93}\) See *Good Citizen: 5A*, Chapters 7, 8; *Good Citizen 5B*, Chapters 7, 8; *Good Citizens 6A*, Chapters 6, 7; *Good Citizen: 6B*, Chapters 4, 5.


\(^{95}\) For instance, See *Education for Living 1A, 1B textbooks* (in Chinese).
Asian moral concepts via the stories found in the textbooks, as it “grew out of the earlier civics syllabi and drew heavily for illustrative material from Chinese myths and legends”.  

**Moral Education syllabus**

Due to the long gestation period in coming up with the moral education framework, it took a longer time then usual for MOE to come up with the Moral Education Syllabuses for Primary and Lower Secondary levels. The established practice was to release the syllabus to the public before the textbooks were published. What was unusual in this case was that the syllabus document was published only after the implementation of the *Good Citizen* and *Being and Becoming* programs. Hence, we are discussing the moral education syllabus after having described and examined the two programs.

The finalized moral syllabus document, a summary of both moral education programs, outlined the topics to be covered in primary and lower secondary levels:

- **Self**
  1) Self awareness
  2) Personal Motivation
  3) Concern for others

- **Family**
  1) Identity and Belonging
  2) Building the Family Community
  3) Family Life Education

- **School**
  1) The Institution
  2) Relationship

- **Neighbourhood**
  1) Environment
  2) Relationship

Nation/Society
1) National Consciousness
2) Social Consciousness

The syllabus document adhered to Balhetchet’s six step moral education framework, as well as the recommendations put forward by the Ong Report. It was, however, short on details – merely listing the topics and teaching content to be covered. Important elements, such as the aims and objectives were absent. This was probably because they were already found in the existing moral education programs. Another major omission was the absence of any mention of ‘world’ in the syllabus, despite that fact that the Good Citizen program taught world issues.

However, the most glaring omission was the exclusion of the Upper Secondary levels from the syllabus document. Why was this so, since the Ong Report’s recommended moral education syllabus was for both the primary as well as secondary levels? Why was the Being and Becoming program not extended to the Upper Secondary levels? The answer lay in the introduction of Religious Knowledge as a subject for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Ordinary) Level Examinations, the most controversial of the moral education programs.


Religious Knowledge

The decision to introduce Religious Knowledge can be traced to the Ong Report’s recommendation that “[r]eligious studies help to reinforce the teaching of moral values. The Education Ministry should review its policy to allow mission schools greater flexibility in implementing their religious education programmes [sic].”\(^\text{99}\) Prior to the official announcement of Religious Knowledge, mission schools had already been offering Bible Knowledge as an examination subject in the ‘O’ levels. Similarly, Islamic Religious Knowledge had been offered in Malay medium schools.\(^\text{100}\) There was thus a historical antecedent for the teaching of religious knowledge in Singapore’s schools. What was new in this case was the expansion in the variety of subjects offered – Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies and Confucian Ethics were introduced as well.\(^\text{101}\)

The first hint that the Education Ministry would be introducing Religious knowledge came from its addenda to the Presidential Address at the Opening of the Fifth Parliament of Singapore:

Religious Education, in the form of the study of an individual religion or the comparative study of religions, is being encouraged as an ‘O’ level examination subject. Papers on Christianity and Islam are already available for the Cambridge General Certificate of Education ‘O’ Level Examination… The Ministry is… considering Hinduism and Buddhism as other options. The syllabi for these two papers have been prepared and

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99 Ong Report, p. 12.
101 Sikh Studies was included later on. Bible Knowledge, Hindu Studies and Sikh Studies were taught solely in English, students who chose Confucian Ethics and Buddhist Studies had the option of learning it either in Chinese or English, while Islamic Religious Knowledge was taught in both Malay and English. World Religions was initially offered as one of the options, but it was subsequently abandoned.
textbooks are being prepared. However, it will take several years to produce good textbooks and teaching materials and to train teachers in their effective use.\textsuperscript{102}

Nonetheless, Jason Tan notes astutely that “hardly any public debate or consultation took place prior to Goh’s announcement about the new subject”.\textsuperscript{103}

On 16 January 1982, Dr Goh Keng Swee, the Deputy Ministry and Minster for Education made the official announcement of the introduction of Religious Knowledge during a Schools Council meeting. Goh regarded “religion as probably the best and most dependable way of producing honest, upright citizens”, thereby “sav[ing] Singapore from be[coming] a nation of thieves”.\textsuperscript{104} While acknowledging the success of Father Balhetchet’s moral education program, Goh was concerned that it would take way too long to see if Balhetchet’s program “will produce good results”.\textsuperscript{105} He further expressed “reservations about a secular moral education alone – minus all religions – because he knows of no country in the world which ha[d] a secular moral education programme [sic] that has been successful”.\textsuperscript{106} Believing that religious education would make the difference, Goh cited his own education in a Christian mission school:

… my personal testimony… as one who was educated in a mission school, Anglo-Chinese School…. But at least when they’ve gone through a course on religious

\textsuperscript{102} Ministry of Education, Addenda to Presidential Address at the Opening of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament on Tuesday, 3rd February, 1981, Col. 18.
\textsuperscript{103} Jason Tan, p. 608.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Straits Times}, ‘The Goh Plan to save Singapore from becoming a nation of thieves’, 17 January 1982. The article mentioned Goh’s recounting of instances of theft in the army, and him telling the Prime Minister “that the schools are turning out a nation of thieves and that something must be done about this in our education system”.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. Professor Wang Gungwu suggests that Goh was “too impatient with the slow pace of educating (or re-educating) a human being”. See Tan Siok Sun, \textit{Goh Keng Swee: A Portrait} (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2007), p. 8.
knowledge, most of them will leave school believing it’s wrong to lie, cheat and steal. Many now do not.\textsuperscript{107}

Interestingly, Jason Tan observed that “Goh neglected to mention the recent widespread media publicity given to the prevalence of social snobbery at that same school”.\textsuperscript{108}

An Education Ministry Report that was tabled at that same meeting offered further reasons in support of the introduction of Religious Knowledge. These were summarized in the \textit{Straits Times}:

Singapore, which lacks a firm, well-defined ideology, needs religion. Without it, citizens will be left fumbling for values and this may lead to a drop in moral standards…. religious knowledge can do the job. It will be a compulsory non-examination subject… However, students who want to offer it as a subject in the GCE “O” level examination may do so… Secondly… religion has served mankind as the basis of individual and public morality for the past few thousand years… the learning of religion is one of the best ways to produce a moral person…. Thirdly… religious knowledge is a fitting culmination to the study of moral education, which will be taught from Primary One to Secondary Two… And finally, the report sees religious knowledge as a means of combatting the mounting social and moral problems plaguing a nation.\textsuperscript{109}

Reading this, as well as Goh’s comments, one can conclude the raison d'être for the introduction of religious knowledge was to arrest the perceived drop in moral standards.

Dr. Tay Eng Soon, the Minister of State for Education, emphasized and reiterated the Education’s Ministry rationale for introducing Religious Knowledge at a television panel discussion:

Historically, the objective of education has always been to produce upright and moral citizens. It was only in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, with so much emphasis on science and technology and the need to understand and master these subjects, that education had been

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid. Jason Tan observed that “Goh neglected to mention the recent widespread media publicity given to the prevalence of social snobbery at that same school”

\textsuperscript{108} Jason Tan, p. 608.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{The Sunday Times}, 17 January 1982.
given a more pragmatic slant... the danger of a purely materialistic and scientific
education was that it only educated the brain.  

The other members in the television panel were a prominent academic, a Parliamentary Secretary,
a Catholic School principal, and the Legal Aid Bureau Director. A conscious effort was made to
ensure that the panelists represented the major ethnic groups of Singapore. All of them were
unanimous in supporting the government’s plan to introduce Religious Knowledge. Dr. Tay went
on to elaborate on the danger of only educating the brain:

You will make a person very skilled, very practical; he is all intellect but he may have no
heart. And I think this is a frightening prospect. We may produce in the future,.generations of young men and women who are very expert, for example, in manipulating
the computer but who may have no feelings of warmth towards their fellow men or no
concern for their fellow men.  

Having supposedly solved the ‘crisis’ of ‘educational wastage’, the government now
presented the need for religious knowledge as a key solution to a moral crisis. This tied in to the
official reasoning behind the ‘cultural ballast’ and ‘Asian values’ rhetoric. The televised panel
discussion was also one means for the government to assuage the concerns that were raised over
the introduction of Religious Knowledge.

From the onset, there was opposition to the introduction of Religious Knowledge. One of
the main opposing voices was Father Balhetchet. Even before the official announcement of
Religious Knowledge, he presented a paper entitled ‘Moral Education Programme for Singapore
Schools: A Project Proposal’ at the Education Ministry’s ministerial committee meeting (chaired
by the Education Minister), in which he argued that atheists and agnostics could also “lead a

111 Ibid.
moral and upright life”. While he admitted that “religion can… reinforce moral living”, he contended that it “can … be in conflict with… desirable values in certain civilizations”. The upshot of his argument was that “morality and religion are not necessarily and essentially linked”.

At the same Schools council meeting where Dr Goh made the announcement for Religious Knowledge, some of the school principals expressed concern over the haste in which the program was introduced. There were also concerns that some of the over-zealous teachers might go overboard to proselytize during religious knowledge classes. Dr Goh acknowledged the concerns, but he “felt that the programme should proceed despite the reservations expressed”.

Besides the educational fraternity, reservations over the introduction of Religious Knowledge were also expressed by some of the Parliamentarians. Other than the fear of conversion that had already been expressed by the principals, an MP raised the issue of the difficulty of implementing the Religious Knowledge syllabus. Replying to the MP’s questions in Parliament, Dr. Tay made the reassuring response that safeguards would be in place to ensure that teachers would not use Religious Knowledge classes to convert their students. He reiterated the Education Ministry’s stand on the teaching of the subject:

In the teaching of these subjects there will not be any religious practice or worship in the classroom. It is the express intention of the Ministry that the classroom should not be used as a place for converting any one from one faith to another. So we look upon the teaching of Religious Knowledge as the teaching of a subject which is linked to the ‘O’

113 *Straits Times*, “Religion ‘must not replace moral education’”, 16 June 1981.


level examination which can be offered for the ‘O’ level, and which is acceptable for pre-
University admission.\textsuperscript{116}

Religious Knowledge would thus be “like studying Shakespeare”.\textsuperscript{117}

In implementing Religious Knowledge, the government regarded “the teaching of
religion as a social science subject, aimed at promoting understanding of religion as a distinctive
way of interpreting experience”.\textsuperscript{118} The following brief synopses of these subjects bear this point
out:

\textbf{Bible Knowledge}

The course is intended to help pupils understand and appreciate the significance of the
life and teachings of Jesus Christ through the study of the Gospels and the Acts of the
Apostles. Pupils are taught the background on the birth and childhood of Jesus, the
significance of His teaching, including the parables, His ministry, miracles, trial, 
crucifixion, and resurrection, and the rise of the early church.

\textbf{Buddhist Studies}

The course is intended to help pupils understand the life of the Buddha, His teachings and
the growth of Buddhism, and to acquire the qualities of moral awareness, social
responsibility and psychological maturity. Pupils are taught the life of the Buddha,
general teachings of the Buddha, the significance of the basic observances and festivals,
moral codes of behaviour, and the spread of Buddhism

\textbf{Confucian Ethics}

The course is intended to help pupils understand Confucian values and beliefs, and the
historical development and moral relevance of Confucianism. Pupils are taught the life
and experiences of the architects of the Confucian heritage, the importance of self-
cultivation, the different Confucian forms of life and the network of human relatedness,
and the historical development of Confucianism.

\textbf{Hindu Studies}

The course is intended to help pupils understand and appreciate the basic tenets of
Hinduism, acquire some basic moral precepts, and understand the underlying philosophy
of the Hindu tradition. Pupils are taught the Hindu way of life, the Hindu contribution in
art, sculpture and literature, selected epics and legends, Hindu philosophy, and the
significance of deities, temple, rituals, ceremonies and festivals.

\textbf{Islamic Religious Knowledge}

The course is intended to help pupils understand the basic tenets of Islamic teaching,
appreciate the historical development of Islam, and acquire right values that will lead to

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. col. 1084.

\textsuperscript{117} See \textit{Straits Times}, 6, 7 and 10 December 1983.

\textsuperscript{118} Gopinathan, ‘Religious education in a secular state’, p. 22.
moral uprightness and meaningful living. Pupils are taught the foundation of Islamic beliefs, the devotional practices, moral codes of conduct and a brief account of the early history of Islam.

**Sikh Studies**

The course is intended to help pupils understand and appreciate the lives and teachings of the Sikh Gurus, understand the fundamentals of Sikh history, culture and ethics, and acquire desirable moral values and codes of behaviour. Pupils are taught the philosophy, writings, lives and teachings of the Sikh Gurus, background knowledge on the Sikh scriptures and beliefs, and the significance of Sikh rites, ceremonies and festivals.  

Furthermore, the government engaged the help of overseas academic specialists instead of theologians in the development of curricular materials. For instance, “the consultant for Buddhist Studies was a professor from the University of California and the Hindu Studies consultant was a professor of English and Indian Literature at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education in India”.  

Of these, Confucian Ethics deserve special mention.

In the initial announcement on the introduction of Religious Knowledge, Confucian Ethics was not mentioned as one of the options. It was the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, who made that suggestion to Dr. Goh, and after spending “many of his wakeful hours and sleepless nights running the issue over his mind”, Goh decided to include Confucian Ethics as one of the options for Religious Knowledge in February 1982.  

In the press briefing on the introduction of Confucian ethics, Goh emphasized that the government was not interested in promoting Confucianism as a political ideology. It regarded Confucian ethics as “a code of conduct which governed the behaviour of an honorable man or gentleman”. Goh gave some insight into the PAP political ideology: “Confucius believed that unless the government is in the

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122 Ibid.
hands of upright men, disaster will befall the country. By the way, in this respect, the PAP also
believes in the same thing”. 123

Thus began a year-long debate and discussion on Confucianism. Critics to the Confucian
ethics program argue that the underlying reason behind the introduction of Confucian ethics was
to bolster the legitimacy of and support for the PAP government. They cited the “sharp decline in
electoral support for the PAP, the election of an opposition MP in 1981, and the declining
relevance of Cold War rhetoric in Southeast Asia” as the contributing factors to this shift towards
Confucianism as the new rhetoric “to stem the rise of Anglo-American liberalism” particularly
amongst the English educated Chinese. 124 It was no wonder then that Confucian Ethics “had
been showered with a disproportionate share in resource allocation, media coverage, and public
attention as compared with other ‘ordinary’ RK courses”. 125

While Confucian Ethics was not the only subject in Religious Knowledge that had the
assistance of academic specialists from abroad, the number of specialists engaged for the
development of the syllabus for Confucian Ethics far outstripped the others. Professors Yu
Ying-shih of Yale University, Tu Wei-ming of Harvard, James C. Hsiung of New York
University, Te-Kong Tong, City University of New York, Hsu Cho-yun of Pittsburgh, Wu Chen-
tsou of National Normal University in Taiwan and Chin Chen-Oi, a Singaporean were “invited to

123 Ibid. This implied that the PAP government was the “benevolent rulers” which had to be obeyed.

124 Neil A. Englehart, ‘Rights and Culture in the Asian Values Argument: The Rise and Fall of

125 Eddie Kuo, ‘Confucianism as Political Discourse in Singapore: The Case of An Incomplete Revitalization
Movement, Department of Sociology Working Papers, No. 113, 1992, p. 6. I will draw largely from Kuo’s account
for the story of Confucian Ethics, as it is the most comprehensive.
present their views and suggestions for a successful implementation of the course”.\textsuperscript{126} The newspapers gave extensive coverage to their comments and views, and they had extensive television coverage when they visited Singapore. With such intensity in the promotion of Confucianism, it is no wonder that Kuo opined that “1982 could be called the Year of Confucianism”.\textsuperscript{127} The remarkable economic performances of the Four Little Asian Dragons (which Singapore was included) and the subsequent hailing of Confucian values as one of the factors responsible for the economic miracle by scholars undoubtedly gave credence to the introduction of Confucian Ethics.\textsuperscript{128} However, apart from drawing a parallel between Confucian ethics and the Protestant work ethic, the government was unable to give a convincing reply as to how and why Confucian Ethics was considered a \textit{religion}, and thus included under the Religious Knowledge program.

The Religious Knowledge program was thus promulgated with much fanfare, and was officially implemented in schools in 1984. It was conceived as the epitome of the moral education program. However, moral education was only one side of the coin. The introduction of social studies was also another major citizenship education initiative – one of the legacies of the Goh Report.

**Primary School Social Studies**

The syllabus document for social studies also stated that “moral Education complements the Social Studies Syllabus by inculcating values which enable the pupils to understand

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid. p. 7. \\
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{128} See Chapter 1. Confucian Ethics was clearly part of a larger project to promote Confucian values. To this end, the government established the Institute of East Asian Philosophy to promote the study of Confucianism.
\end{flushleft}
themselves and the social world they live in”. The stated objective of the Singapore primary school social studies program, on the other hand, was “to enable pupils to understand their social world and to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to participate more effectively in the society and environment in which they live”. It consisted of two units a year from primary 4 to 6:

- Unit 1 Our School: Its Environment
- Unit 2 Our Country: Her People
- Unit 3 Our Country: Her Environment
- Unit 4 Our Country: Her Needs
- Unit 5 Our Country: Her Progress
- Unit 6 Our Country: Her South-east Asian Neighbours

Schools were given the option to teach Social Studies in English or the Mother Tongue. The curriculum package for Social Studies comprised two textbooks per grade level together with activity books, as well as Teachers Guides. This new subject was meant to “integrate the History and Geography components”, while Moral Education “will absorb the Civics aspect of Education for Living”. This differs from the conventional view of Social Studies as seen in the United States.

In the United States, citizenship education in grade schools is most commonly referred to as social studies. Growing out of history education, the origins of social studies was closely linked with the inculcation of citizenship values and democracy, which still remain the case today:

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129 Ibid., p. 2.
131 Ibid., p. 2
132 Ibid., p. 1.
[National Council for the Social Studies] defines social studies as "the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence." Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. In essence, social studies promotes knowledge of and involvement in civic affairs. And because civic issues--such as health care, crime, and foreign policy--are multidisciplinary in nature, understanding these issues and developing resolutions to them require multidisciplinary education. These characteristics are the key defining aspects of social studies.133

The Primary Social Studies program in Singapore was thus conceptualized more narrowly than its US counterpart. The former was “based on a knowledge of Singapore – its distinctive environmental, historical, social, economic and cultural features and patterns”.134 It demonstrates the narrower sense of citizenship education in Singapore – one that is primarily concerned with nation-building or state formation.

Given that Social Studies was meant to complement the Moral Education program in primary schools, it would be instructive to compare Social Studies with the Good Citizen Program. Here we see substantive overlaps in the two programs. For instance, Units 2, 5 and 6 of Social Studies overlap with the Primaries 5 and 6 Good Citizen program. The most obvious overlap was in Unit 6 of Social Studies, where students were introduced to the neighbouring South-east Asian countries – Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines. The countries were introduced by way of stories whereby Singaporean families made trips to these countries.135 And this was similar to the way in which Good Citizen introduced those countries.

134 Ministry of Education, Social Studies Syllabus for the New Education System: Primary 4 to 6, p. 1
It would appear therefore that both programs overlapped more than they complemented each other.

Nonetheless, Social Studies covered topics on the history of Singapore in greater depth than Good Citizen. And it was also organised thematically, unlike Good Citizen where the chapters were sequenced in a haphazard fashion. A reason to explain this is that prior to implementing the Social Studies program, the draft curriculum packages were pilot tested in a few schools. The Singapore history topics drew from both the defunct Primary School History Syllabus of the early 1970s, as well as the Education for Living. At the same time, the teaching of Singapore history was in line with the change in the government’s stand towards the teaching of Singapore history in schools.

Lower Secondary History Syllabus

Following two decades of economic development, “the future had become less fearsome” and the reclamation of Singapore’s past became urgent and pressing. The fear of the political leadership was that with the onslaught of western influences the young Singaporeans were in danger of becoming deculturalised. “A knowledge of history, it was hoped, would provide an understanding of the necessity for political and social continuity”. History now came to be regarded as useful to nation-building for the relevant lessons that can be learnt from the past.

136 See Acknowledgements page in all Social Studies textbooks.
138 Sum, ‘History-Writing in Singapore’, p. 40
Singaporeans were now exhorted to “have a sense of the past so that they can have a better appreciation of the present” and thereby be able “to set a direction for the future.” 139

However, it can also be argued that the PAP’s loss of the electoral district of Anson in 1981 to J. B. Jeyaratnam of the Worker’s Party, breaking its 13-year total domination of Parliament was an underlying reason for the revival of interest in history. Lee Kuan Yew regarded “fierce and obstructive opposition” as a distraction and inimical to “political stability and rapid economic progress”. 140 The populace had to be “reminded” of the turbulent years prior to Singapore’s independence. Thus, like the arguments made by critics of the Confucian ethics program, the introduction of Singapore history in schools served as a tool for legitimation.

The dominance by the People’s Action Party (PAP) of Singapore’s post-1965 political landscape makes the story of Singapore almost synonymous with that of the PAP. 141 Emerging victorious from the political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, this period was viewed through the eyes of the victors. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s is portrayed as a turbulent era, as well as the birth pangs of the Nation of Singapore. The official view of Singapore history is most evident in the sphere of education.

139 Singapore Parliamentary Debates 5 March 1985, Col 199.


141 Albert Lau, ‘National Past and the Writing of the History of Singapore’, p. 44.
In 1984, a new history syllabus was implemented at lower secondary level, where history became a compulsory subject.\textsuperscript{142} This came in the form of two textbooks, \textit{Social and Economic History of Singapore} 1 and 2, which was aimed at filling the gap left by the withdrawal of History from the primary school curriculum. In the primary schools, social studies was introduced which incorporated the study of history, geography and civics to be taught from Primary 4. All these examples underscore the importance that the government now placed on the teaching of history for nation-building.

\textit{Syllabus aims}

The syllabus aims for the lower secondary history syllabus implemented in 1984 were divided into general and specific objectives. The general objectives were as follows:

1) To develop in our pupils a sense of Singapore identity
2) To impart some knowledge and bring about understanding of, and instill pride in Singapore’s past and their ancestors’ achievements.
3) To show how major external factors and events influenced the history of Singapore and the way Singapore contributed towards the development of the region and elsewhere.
4) To emphasize the relevance of the past to Singapore’s present and the future.\textsuperscript{143}

The specific aims and objectives were differentiated between secondary 1 and 2 levels. Both secondary 1 and 2 history syllabuses aimed to teach students the social and economic history of Singapore, with the former covering the time period from 1819 to 1900 (19\textsuperscript{th} century) and the latter from 1900 to 1965 (20\textsuperscript{th} century). Both also sought to demonstrate how developments in the region and the world affected Singapore, as well as Singapore’s contribution and response to

\textsuperscript{142} In Singapore, syllabuses have to be approved by the Curriculum Development Committee chaired by a Director. However, in the case of History, the syllabuses have to be cleared by the Ministerial Committee chaired by the Minister for Education.

\textsuperscript{143} Ministry of Education, \textit{History Syllabus: Secondary 1 to 2 (Special/Express Course)} (Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1982), p. 1
events in the region and world. The major difference was in secondary 1 history, which had an additional objective, “[t]o show how [Singapore’s] ancestors had appreciated and utilized the position of Singapore in the region and the world”. 144

These objectives outlined above demonstrate a social reconstructionist conception of the curriculum. This can be seen in the stated rationale for the syllabus, which mentions the importance of having “a good and sound knowledge of the history of Singapore” through the study of Singapore’s national history so that “a sense of belonging to our nation [Singapore]” can be developed.145 The main reason why the lower secondary level was chosen was because not every upper secondary pupil would study history. On the other hand, there are also elements of academic rationalism in the syllabus objectives, as seen in the first of the specific objectives in the Sec 1 and 2 syllabuses.

Scope and Sequences of Syllabus

The notions of scope and sequence are crucial concepts in the study of curriculum. The scope of a curriculum or syllabus “refers to both the breadth or range of content covered and the depth of that coverage”, while sequence “refers to the order in which the content is presented”.146 The 1984 Singapore history syllabus covers the History of Singapore from 1819 to 1965. The recommended curriculum time was about 70 minutes per week for the study of History.

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
With regards to the sequencing of the syllabuses, this can be seen most clearly in the unit outline for the 1984 syllabus:

**Secondary 1 Syllabus**
- Unit 1: The Foundation of Modern Singapore
- Unit 2: Early Growth of Singapore (1819-1867)
- Unit 3: Our Immigrant Society
- Unit 4: Social and Political Conditions and Developments in the 19th century
- Unit 5: Economic Development
- Unit 6: The Malay States and Singapore

**Secondary 2 Syllabus**
- Unit 1: Overview of Singapore Society up to 1941
- Unit 2: Social and Political Changes: The first two decades
- Unit 3: Social and Political Problems in the 1920s and 1930s
- Unit 4: Trade and Industry
- Unit 5: World War II: The Japanese Interlude
- Unit 6: Singapore after World War II: 1945-1965
- Unit 7: Social and Economic Developments, 1945-1965

The History Syllabus for the Normal stream pupils follows the same unit outline as above, with slight reductions, which are marked as “Optional for normal students” in the textbooks and teachers’ guides.

**Syllabus materials and content**

In Singapore, most primary and lower secondary curriculum materials are developed by the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS), now known as the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD) within the MOE. For the 1984 syllabus, CDIS set up a Lower Secondary History Project team comprising a team of specialist writers and academic consultants to produce the curriculum package. This package consisted of two textbooks, separate workbooks for Normal and Express/Special, two Teacher’s Guides, and teaching aids.

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147 Ministry of Education, *History Syllabus: Secondary 1 to 2 (Special/Express Course)*

The teaching aids included wall pictures, wall maps and charts, Overhead transparency masters, a slide package, and a slide tape presentation of Fort Canning Hill.

Having outlined the curriculum packages for both the 1984 Lower Secondary Singapore History syllabus, I shall now touch on the content covered in the syllabus. This is best done by examining the textbooks and the teachers’ guides. Each chapter in the teacher’s guides begins with the objectives of the corresponding chapter in the textbook. This is followed by suggestions on how to introduce and teach that particular chapter, which includes suggested classroom activities as well as the use of the workbooks. Answers are given to the written exercises in the workbooks. Finally, there are suggestions on how to reinforce what was taught in the form of supplementary reading materials found in the textbook as well as extra materials in the form of blackline masters.149

The objectives in the 1984 teacher’s guides focused on covering content. For instance, the teacher’s guide has the following objectives for the topic on the Founding of Singapore. This topic aimed to teach the students Singapore’s geographical setting, the “main compass directions”, the history of Singapore prior to 1819, as well as “how Raffles succeeded in his plan to establish a [British] settlement in Singapore.150 These objectives followed the aims of the


150 CDIS, Social and Economic History of Modern Singapore Teacher’s Guide 1, p. 1
1984 syllabus, which emphasized knowing the content of Singapore History. It is therefore hardly surprising that the 1984 textbooks were written in a narrative format.

Assessment format

The study of any curriculum would not be complete without referring to assessment format. Through assessment, we can ascertain whether the curriculum objectives have been met. The emphasis in the Lower Secondary History syllabuses in 1984 was formative assessments rather than summative assessments. This was to make history more interesting for the pupils. The workbooks, which were differentiated for the express and normal stream, provide insights on the assessment format. The main features in the 1984 workbooks included a ‘summary’ activity, which was like a ‘fill in the blanks’ exercise, oral questions, word puzzle and other objective-type exercises such as matching and true or false statements, word study, written work and mapwork. Other suggested activities like oral interviews, project work and games are also found in the workbooks. Teachers were encouraged to be flexible in using the activities in the workbooks. In short, the 1984 syllabus had more drill and practice kind of assessment.

Conclusion

This chapter traced the origins of the Asian values discourse in Singapore, and its impact on citizenship education. Contrary to popular perception, the idea of Asian values began in the early 1970s, and not by the end of the same decade. The Singapore government – and Lee Kuan Yew in particular – was concerned with the onslaught on what they considered as permissive


Western values encroaching on the desirable Eastern/Asian values. With the increasing affluence of Singapore due to its rapid economic growth, the government expressed fear of Singaporeans losing their cultural roots. The government’s official rhetoric of Asian Values and the emphasis on moral education thus provided what they considered as the ‘cultural ballast’ against the influences from the ‘decadent West’ and Western individualism, thus solving what was seen as a crisis of “deculturalisation” amongst the young. This Asian Values discourse underpinned the Moral Education Review, which resulted in the introduction of a large number of moral education programs, Religious Knowledge as well as History and Social Studies.

At the heart of the issue was the state’s attempt to forge and articulate a Singaporean identity, and the role of citizenship and moral education in attaining this goal. Indeed, the government deemed Religious Knowledge as the apogee of its moral and civic education program. The Religious Knowledge program was thus a key vehicle in the promotion of Asian values through education. Through the active manipulation of cultural values such as Confucianism and Asian values, the developmental state reinforces its legitimacy through the articulation of the desired moral and civic values that were ultimately beneficial to the cause economic development.

Throughout the latter part of the 1980s, the rhetoric of Asian values was intensified by the government. The existing moral education, social studies and history syllabuses were considered to be inadequate to meet these ostensible challenges. The government regarded the knowing one’s cultural roots and history to provide a better ‘cultural ballast’ against the onslaught of Western individualism than merely moral education. The current moral education syllabus, together with Religious Knowledge, proved to be disappointing in attaining the new
objectives. A new strategy was needed to rejuvenate the Asian Values discourse through education.
Chapter 5
The Crises of Legitimacy and National Identity and the Intensification of Asian Values: From Religious Knowledge to ‘Shared Values’

The previous chapter outlined the genesis of the Asian Values discourse in Singapore, and how it resulted in the large number of changes in civic and history education. In particular, the government regarded Religious Knowledge as the apex of its moral and civic education program. This was a key vehicle in the promotion of Asian values through education. However, the Religious Knowledge program was short lived and had to be scrapped in 1989. Events such as the sharp decline of electoral support for the PAP, as well as the detention of alleged ‘Marxist conspirators’ suggests that the PAP were concerned over a crisis of legitimacy in the 1980s. In other words, the legitimacy of the developmental state came under challenge. The crises of legitimacy, as well as the articulation of national identity, are manifested in the discussion and debates over the demise of RK, as well as the public consultation exercise over the introduction of ‘shared values.’ This chapter accounts for the demise of RK in Singapore in favour of a secular but still moral version of civic and history education. It also maps out the reasons why the resultant ‘shared values’ (which were introduced due to the failure of RK) were perceived as being a suitable substitute for a decidedly secular state bent on maintaining moral standards.

The “shared values” concept was a culmination of a long process of public consultation, a departure from the authoritarian style of governance of the 1970s. The PAP recognised that the public wanted more say in national affairs, and was prepared to liberalize politically as long as they controlled the political discourse and set the boundaries for discussion and debate. Thus,

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1 By 1980, the PAP was used to winning all the seats in Parliament. Thus, the loss of even one Parliamentary seat was regarded as a crisis. The ‘Marxist conspirators’ did not pose an immediate threat to the PAP regime. However, the developmental state’s obsession with economic growth meant that it would regard any alternative ideology as a threat to its legitimacy, and hence had to be done away with.
this “softer” style of governance was carried out in the framework of perpetuating the PAP hegemony. The younger cohort of PAP leaders continued the conflation between the party, government and the state, which was entrenched due to the long period of PAP rule. I argue that this provides a plausible explanation of the apparent contradiction between the government’s espoused goals and its political practice.

The Abolishing of Religious Knowledge

In the promotion of Religious Knowledge, a significant amount of time and resources were devoted to the development of the Confucian ethics program.² It was apparent that the government was intent on using Confucian Ethics as a chief curricular vehicle to inculcate Asian values amongst Chinese students. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew believed that Confucian Ethics, with the attention and support given by the government, would be the most popular option amongst Chinese students. This did not turn out to be the case. Confucian Ethics turned out to be the least popular choice of Religious Knowledge subjects among Chinese students, below that of Buddhist Studies and possibly even Bible Knowledge.³ The inculcation of Asian Values via the vehicle of Religious Knowledge was apparently unsuccessful.

Events taking place in the 1980s resulted in a rethink of the Religious Knowledge program. The most significant event was the arrest on May 21, 1987 of sixteen individuals by the Internal Security Department of an alleged “Marxist Conspiracy” to overthrow the PAP

² See Chapter 4.
³ The percentage breakdown of Religious Knowledge options at Secondary Three in 1989 are as follows: Bible Knowledge (21.4%), Buddhist Studies (44.37%), Confucian Ethics (17.81%), Hindu Studies (2.74%), Islamic Religious Knowledge (13.35%), Sikh Studies (0.37%). Ironically, Buddhist Studies was favoured as it was easier to do well in that subject, compared to Confucian Ethics which was deemed as difficult to attain distinctions.
government and establish a Communist state in Singapore. Subsequent arrests of another six individuals were made in the follow month. The alleged leader of the “group”, Vincent Cheng, supposedly “embarked on a systematic plan to infiltrate, subvert and control various Catholic and student organizations” using the ideology and rhetoric of Marxist and other Leftist ideas. In other words, Vincent Cheng with the other 21 detainees had allegedly used the Catholic Church as a cover for their “subversive” activities. The Prime Minister was adamant that this presented a security threat, warning the people that they “should not make the error of believing that just because they are English educated, therefore they are incapable of resolution, determination and conspiracy”.

The arrests provided the opportunity for the Prime Minister, using the National Day Rally address that year, to remind Singaporeans that religious groups should not get involved in politics, as Singapore was a secular society: “Once religion crosses a line and goes into what they call social action, liberation theology, then we are opening up a Pandora’s Box in

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4 Straits Times ‘16 Held in Security Soop’, 22 May 1987. See also Straits Times, ‘Marxist plot uncovered’, 27 May 1987 and The New York Times, “Singapore is Holding 12 in ‘Marxist Conspiracy’”, 21 June 1987. The Internal Security Act (ISA) empowers the Singapore Government to detain individuals without trial suspected to be a threat to national security. This has been highly criticized by human rights groups as a ploy to restrict the growth of the opposition and entrench the hegemony of the government.


6 The then sole opposition MP contended that the arrests were political in nature, and that the detainees did not pose a security threat to Singapore. See Parliamentary Debates, 29 July 1987. Similarly, Michael Barr casts doubt on the charges of “Marxist conspiracy”, see Michael D. Barr, “Singapore’s Catholic Social Activists: Alleged Marxist Conspirators” in Michael D. Barr and Carl. A. Trocki (eds.), Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008). By 1990, all 22 detainees were unconditionally released. They denied knowing one another prior to their arrests, see Fong Hoe Fang (ed) That We May Dream Again (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2009) where some of the ex-detainees recounted their experiences of the May and June 1987 arrests by the Internal Security Department. Be that as it may, the arrests cast a long shadow on the development of a civil society in Singapore, and might have curtailed the growth of the opposition as well.

7 ST 18 August 1987.
Singapore… the end result is dismemberment of our multi-religious community”. He further cited the examples of Sri Lanka and India to illustrate what he saw as the dangers of mixing religion with politics. It was clear that Lee ostensibly had the “Marxist conspiracy” in mind. Lee further spelt out the activities by religious groups and organizations that were deemed acceptable by the government:

What we want our religious and para-religious groups to do is to give relief to the destitute, the disadvantaged, the disabled, to take part in activities which will foster communal fellowship. Emphasis on charity, alms-giving and social and community work.

The Singapore President reiterated the government’s attitude towards religious organisations and social action in his address at the opening of the seventh Parliament in January 1989. While he commended religious groups for their “educational, social and charitable work”, the President emphasized that “they must not … venture[e] into radical social action. Religion must be kept rigorously separate from politics”. The President further warned that “[r]eligious groups must not get themselves involved in the political process”, or else “the outcome will be militancy and conflict”.

The arrests of the “Marxist conspirators” and the government’s concern about religious groups potentially entering the political arena provided the backdrop for the “Project on Religion and Religious Revivalism in Singapore”. Three academics from the National University of Singapore were commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development to undertake this study in August 1987. The final report, published in October 1988, highlighted the phenomenal

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8 ST 17 August 1987.
9 ST 17 August 1987.
10 President’s Address at opening of Parliament, 9 January 1989, col. 18.
growth of Christianity, which was especially so amongst the Protestant evangelical and charismatic groups. It also pointed out the attraction to Christianity amongst those with an English-stream education and higher educational attainment.¹¹ There were concerns that this trend might “affect the long-term delicate equilibrium of all religions in Singapore”, as the Christian “evangelist activities are often perceived by members of other faiths to be aggressive and showing little sensitivity of their feelings”.¹² In particular, some Muslim leaders were concerned about the increased Christian evangelistic activities.

The increased religious fervour underscored in the report was deemed to be disquieting by the authors:

Followers of some religions have… become more fervent in their religious interest and activities. The situation is complicated by the extent of geographical mobility resulting from urban relocation in the past decades. Followers of different religious are now coming into constant contact with one another. This increased contact may lead to tension and conflict on issues related to religion or religious practices. At the same time… [t]his is a source of potential inter-religious tension when the leaders and followers of a religion take action to protect their own religion, either for ideological reasons or for self-interest.¹³

There was also the concern that “[r]eligious and religious oriented activities could develop into a political activist movement”,¹⁴ a subtle reference to the alleged “Marxist” plot.


¹² Ibid. p. 31.

¹³ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 32
Other than highlighting the rise in religious fervour and consciousness, the report also suggested that Religious Knowledge had some part to play in the heightened religious climate, particularly amongst the Christians and Buddhists. The report appealed to the government “to ensure that teachers maintained a clear distinction between their professional and religious roles”. Furthermore, the report claimed that the government was not as impartial towards “matters in religion” as was generally believed, and “urged the government to assess the long-term impact of the Religious Knowledge programme on current and future religious developments in Singapore”. The Ministry of Education, as a result, had to rethink its Religious Knowledge program. This was also prompted, in no small measure, by concerns raised by Members of Parliament arising from the report.

At the Committee of Supply debate for the Ministry of Education in March 1989, three Members of Parliament, referring to the findings of the report, asked the Minister of Education if he would be reviewing the Religious Knowledge program in schools. In particular, Dr Aline Wong, the Government Parliamentary Committee Chairperson for Health, raised the concern that in the introduction RK, “the principle of separation between state and religion is actually being breached”. She reiterated the report’s findings that in the decision about the RK options,

16 Ibid.
“the Government is officially endorsing the chosen religions over the others”, and also the report’s warning that the active proselytizing of any faith “would lead to competition, and because religion is closely tied to ethnicity… competition may also lead to conflict”.20 Wong argued that it therefore necessitated a review of the RK program.21

In response to MPs’ concerns and queries, the Minister for Education replied in Parliament on 20 March that the MOE “would take a fresh look at whether Religious Knowledge should continue to be offered as a subject in secondary schools”.22 The Minister proffered “three courses of action”23 which the MOE was considering. He later summarized these three options when he made the Ministerial statement on the MOE’s decision on the outcome of the RK program:

First, discontinue all teaching of Religious Knowledge subjects in our secondary schools and bring back the Civics courses which we had in 1979. Second, scrap the Religious Knowledge options and replace them with a general subject called “Study of World Religions” or perhaps “Study of Major Religions”. And third, allow the Religious Knowledge subjects to be taught in schools but only as optional subjects to be taught outside curriculum time and not to be used for purposes of admission to junior colleges and pre-university centres.24

21 The Straits Times reported Dr Aline Wong’s call the following day. See Straits Times, ‘Review Religious Knowledge in schools – Aline’, 18 March 1989. Dr Wong became the Minister of State for Education in 1994, and was promoted to Senior Minister of State the following year, and held this position till 2001.
24 Ibid. 6 Oct 1989, Col. 575
In contrast to the introduction of RK, the MOE signalled a greater willingness to seek public opinion and debate on this issue.

The possibility that the MOE might abolish RK caused considerable disquiet amongst the religious communities. The Muslim community was amongst the first to voice their concerns. Disagreeing with the suggestion of the report on religion that RK caused religious revival, A PAP Muslim Member of Parliament urged MOE “not to take a hasty decision on the teaching of Religious Knowledge in schools”, and pointed out that the “Islamic Religious Knowledge course had done Muslim students a lot of good by inculcating in them the right moral values”.\(^\text{25}\) He encouraged “Muslim parents, religious and community leaders to give their views on the [Religious Knowledge] programme (sic) to the authorities”.\(^\text{26}\)

The Muslim religious and community leaders echoed the MP’s feelings on Islamic Religious Knowledge, saying that it “has done a lot of good to Muslim pupils” and had “been helpful in helping schools produce morally upright citizens”.\(^\text{27}\) The Muslim community “would feel let down if the Government (sic) decided to do away with the religious knowledge course”.\(^\text{28}\) Thus, they appealed to the government “not to scrap the subject without first studying

\(^{25}\) \textit{Straits Times}, ‘Don’t make hasty decision on Religious Knowledge’, 25 March 1989. His remarks came only four days after the Education Minister had made his remarks on Religious Knowledge in Parliament.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Ibid, ‘Don’t scrap Islamic Studies appeal’, 20 April 1989. The \textit{Straits Times} was citing reports from the Malay daily, \textit{Berita Harian}.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
the impact of withdrawing the course”.\textsuperscript{29} It was clear that the Muslim leaders desired Islamic Religious Knowledge to be retained.

Besides the religious and community leaders, Muslim parents were voicing their concerns as well. A letter to the \textit{Straits Times} forum page highlighted the concern by a Muslim parent that the report commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development had “a great bearing” on MOE’s rethinking of the Religious Knowledge program. He argued that “two years of religious education in schools do not or can never turn anyone into a religious fanatic or extremist, especially when the syllabus merely touched on some basic aspects of a religion”.\textsuperscript{30} The parent believed that the problem was not religion or religious knowledge, arguing that “the methods of teaching and what is being taught through them” were more important than RK per se. Having “an attitude of respect and tolerance towards each other’s religion” was equally crucial as well. If managed well, “[r]eligion could [even] be a progressive force that could be made to further enhance the process of achieving the national objectives of a country”. Thus he contended that religion “should never be seen as an obstacle for preserving multi-racial and multi-religious harmony”.\textsuperscript{31}

In addition to this letter, the other letters to the press in support of the RK program cautioned against a knee-jerk reaction to the religion and religious revivalism report, and extolled the moral values taught by the program.\textsuperscript{32} What needed to be improved was the quality of teaching, with a letter suggesting that other qualified people (beside teachers) be invited to teach

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. These letters cut across ethnic and religious lines.
\textsuperscript{32} See ibid 30 March 1989, 15 April 1989.
\end{flushleft}
There were also suggestions to teach world religions so that students’ minds would be broadened, and “mutual understanding and tolerance among different groups” be promoted. However, there were also others who called for the scrapping of the RK program, arguing that it was the role of parents, and not the schools, to teach religion.

In the months leading up to the official decision by the MOE on the RK program, the Education Ministry held closed-door sessions with students, teachers, principals and religious leaders to seek their views. The Government Parliamentary Committee on Education also organised a public hearing on the issue, in which four different schools of thought were articulated. The first wanted the RK program to remain unchanged. Another opinion was to have RK to be taught as an optional subject during school hours. The third group suggested reintroducing civics in addition to making RK optional. And the final option proffered was to replace RK with a Moral Education Program. Most participants were in favour of including RK in some form in the school curriculum. The Education Ministry likewise organised a public dialogue session, which yielded a similar outcome. All these were covered widely in the press and media.

After months of soliciting feedback and views, the Education Minister made his Ministerial Statement in Parliament on 6 October. The Minister brought the Parliamentarians

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33 See ibid 28 April 1989.
36 Ibid, ‘The options for teaching Religious Knowledge’, 8 July 1989. See also Parliamentary Debates, 6 October 1989, col. 584-5. The GPC submitted a report to MOE recommending that RK be scrapped as a compulsory subject and teach civics instead. RK could continue to be taught as an optional subject outside school hours.
through the process and rationale that the MOE had in reviewing the RK program. Arguing that the rationale behind the introduction of RK back in 1982 was sound, he went on to state that “since 1982... there is ... a heightened consciousness of religious differences and a new fervour in the propagation of religious beliefs”, which “if carried to extremes... can disrupt our traditional religious harmony and religious tolerance... in Singapore”.38 Such increased religious fervour was part of the global revivalism in Islamic and Christian fundamentalism in the 1980s. Even Buddhism witnessed a similar revitalization in the same period.

Taking cognizance of these “fundamental change in circumstances”, the Minister announced that Religious Knowledge would be phased out as a compulsory subject by 1991, and “the Ministry has decided to allow the use of Religious Knowledge as a subject for junior college and pre-university admission requirements up to... 1994”.39 To replace Religious Knowledge, the Minister revealed that

it is the intent of the Ministry to extend the present Civics/Moral Education Programme, which is presently taught in the lower levels of our secondary schools, to Secondary 3 and 4 with a view to expanding the Programme and incorporating aspects of nation building, and awareness of our shared values and an appreciation of the beliefs and practices of the various religions and races in Singapore. It will take the Ministry at least two years to construct the syllabus, to write the textbooks and train the teachers to teach this new subject. The first cohort of students to study the expanded Civics/Moral Education Programme will be those going into Secondary 3 in 1992.40

Following his ministerial statement, the Minister moved a motion to allow MPs to debate on the issue, which was a break from the normal Parliamentary procedure. Most of the PAP MPs

38 Parliamentary Debates 6 October 1989, Col. 578.
39 Ibid, col. 582
40 Ibid, col. 580. We will discuss the new Civics and Moral Education program later.
voiced support for the phasing out of Religious Knowledge. Some MPs argued retaining Confucian Ethics, which MOE disagreed with, as it would not be fair to keep Confucian Ethics while abolishing RK.  

The Education Minister, however, was persuaded to consider incorporating “elements” of Confucian Ethics which were “quite universal” into the new civics and moral education program that will replace RK. The two Malay Muslim MPs (also from the PAP) who spoke expressed regret that RK would be scrapped, pointing out that “Islamic Religious Knowledge has brought good to the Muslim students”. They appealed to the MOE to continue the RK program in schools or “allow the teaching of Religious Knowledge outside curriculum hours”, and cautioned against abolishing RK because of heightened religious awareness. Chiam See Tong, the sole elected opposition MP, likewise felt that MOE was abolishing RK because of the increased religious favour highlighted in the Ministry of Community Development’s commissioned report.

It was interesting that the Straits Times implied that Chiam’s was the only dissenting voice, despite the objections raised by the Malay MPs. Also, the Minister for Education did not specifically answer the charge that the decision of scrapping RK was done too hastily. Instead the Minister chose to rebut Chiam’s remark that the teaching of religion was a “historical institution”, saying that RK “was never a basic institution and we are not uprooting a historical

41 *Straits Times*, ‘4 MPs outline case for retaining Confucian Ethics in schools’, 7 October 1989
42 Parliamentary Debates, 6 October 1989, col. 634.
43 Ibid., col. 614.
44 Ibid.
46 *Straits Times*, “From the Gallery”, 7 October 1989. It was clear that the newspaper wanted to give the impression that Chiam’s opposition was unfounded, and that he was unprepared for the debate as well.
tradition”. Nonetheless, the Senior Minister of State for Education, Dr Tay, while reiterating that the moral education objective of RK remain unchanged, admitted that the MOE made a mistake in introducing compulsory RK in 1982:

We were aware of the limited educational objectives of the subject of Religious Knowledge. The difference then and now with the new policy is that we made it compulsory. Perhaps in our eagerness to get every child to study one of the major religions, we failed to see that it should not be compulsory... I think in that respect perhaps we erred. It is an error in application or approach. Nonetheless, it is an error.48

Here we see a rare admission of error by the government. At the same time, Dr Tay was quick to emphasize that MOE had not erred in introducing the RK program per se. If that were the case, MOE would not have to phase out RK. Citing the heightened religious awareness as the cause for scaling back RK was also problematic, as these trends were present even before the introduction of RK.49 Had the government heeded the opposing voices back in 1982, and did a societal study, it might have avoided the hastiness in scrapping RK, just seven years after its implementation. The haste in implementing RK in 1982 was similar to the haste in announcing its demise. Such a reactive policy by the PAP government appeared to contradict its rhetoric of long term, forward-looking governance.50 But seen in another perspective, this demonstrated the change in the PAP’s style of governance following the retirement of most of the first generation of political leaders in the 1984 General Elections. The new PAP leadership adopted a more consultative approach, but the substance of authoritarianism and its desire to maintain its hegemony remained.

47 See Parliamentary Debates, 6 October 1989, col. 597-8, 634-5.
49 The White Paper on Maintaining Religious Tolerance and Harmony (Cmd 21 of 1989) cited examples of religious extremism that was before the introduction of RK.
50 The political climate in Singapore in 1989 was different from that of 1982.
During the same debate over the abolishing of RK, the law and home affairs minister told Parliament that the government would be introducing new legislation to curb religious extremism, and to prevent religious groups from entering politics and destabilising society.\textsuperscript{51} This was also partly in response to the report commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development. The government subsequently tabled a white paper on maintaining religious harmony a month later, and the bill in early 1990. After intense debate on the bill both within and outside Parliament, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act was passed in 1990, which set the ground rules for permitted activities of religious groups, and proscribed their involvement in politics.

\textbf{Shared Values}

Having failed in using Religious Knowledge as an avenue for Confucian and Asian Values, the government proceeded to introduce ‘Shared Values’ ostensibly to inculcate the necessary moral values as cultural ballast against the undesirable ‘Western’ values. The origins of “Shared Values” is normally attributed to the speech by the then first deputy prime minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, in late October 1988 at a PAP Youth Wing Charity Night. In his speech, Goh pointed out that “there has been a clear shift in our values… towards emphasis on self, or individualism”, which was deemed “bad for social cohesion and the country”.\textsuperscript{52} He offered a solution to this problem of individualism:

\textsuperscript{51} Parliamentary Debates, 6 October 1989, col. 636.

\textsuperscript{52} Goh Chok Tong, ‘Our National Ethic’, Speech at the PAP Youth Wing Charity Night, 28 October 1988.
My suggestion is: formalise our values in a national ideology and then teach them in schools, work-places, homes as our way of life. Then we will have a set of principles to bind our people together and guide them forward.53

The “Shared Values” thus originated as an attempt by the government to articulate and map out a national ideology. Other than the failure of the Religious Knowledge program, I would argue another contributor for the shared values and national ideology discourse and debate can be traced to events in 1984.

In the 1984 general election, the PAP’s manifesto “outlined its vision of Singapore in the year 1999, and proclaimed the PAP’s goal of making Singapore a city of excellence and a society of distinction”.54 Mr Goh Chok Tong, who took a key role in drafting that manifesto, elaborated on the key tenets of was to be popularly known as Vision 1999 in a lecture in December 1986 to the Alumni International Singapore.55 The first was to attain the Swiss standard of living and income of 1984 by the year 1999, and the second was to be a cultivated society. In that same lecture, Goh argued that democracy was more than “the rule of the majority, on the basis of electoral power at general elections”.56 The safeguarding of minority interests was equally important for democracy to work. Goh warned that

When the minority community feels that its interests are not safeguarded, civil strife must eventually follow. *What a plural society like ours needs is a tradition of government which emphasises consensus* instead of division, that includes rather than excludes, and

53 Ibid.
55 Goh Chok Tong, *A Nation of Excellence* (Singapore: Ministry of Communications and Information, 1987). This booklet contains the text of Goh’s lecture.
56 Ibid., p. 7.
that tries to maximise the participation of the population in the national effort, instead of
minimising it.  

Goh’s speech provides us with an insight to the PAP government’s political philosophy, where

Government by consensus does not mean consulting every voter before a decision is taken… Parliamentary democracy means representative democracy. That means the voters generally consent to the policies of the Government, and are prepared to delegate to the political leaders sufficient mandate to act on their behalf.

Goh was highlighting the parameters and limits of public consultation in arriving at national consensus. Nonetheless, that the government was prepared to engage in public consultation and seek national consensus reflected a softening of the previous authoritarian, “no-nonsense” stance taken by the PAP. The decline in the PAP’s electoral support in the 1984 General Elections, which saw two opposition MPs elected into Parliament, was a key factor in this change. The PAP regarded the drop in its popular support as a crisis of legitimacy.

The election also saw the election of several new PAP MPs, some of whom were to assume cabinet positions, thus signalling the ascendancy of new generation of leadership in the government (except for Mr Lee Kuan Yew who remained as Prime Minister until 1990). This new and younger cohort of leaders signaled a willingness to seek public consultation in the government’s decision-making processes. The setting up of a Feedback Unit in the Ministry of Community Development, as well as the involvement of members of the public in the high-

57 Ibid. Emphasis added.
58 Ibid.
59 See Christopher Tremewan, The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore, Chapter 6; and Chua Beng Huat, Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore, Chapter 1.
60 This new generation of leaders were led by Mr Goh Chok Tong, who became the First Deputy Prime Minister. The ‘Old Guard’ ministers retired to make way for these new leaders.
profile Economic Committee that was set up to investigate the causes of the 1985 mini-recession and propose solutions to it, demonstrated the importance the new leadership placed on public consultation. At the same time, public consultation also provided a boost to PAP’s legitimacy, as it appeared to involve the public.

A major public consultation project was launched in February 1987 by the PAP “to reach out to the people and build a national consensus on the issues that Singapore must confront to achieve [PAP’s] Vision of 1999”. Thus began an almost year-long public discussion and debate to shape the ‘National Agenda’, the PAP’s new manifesto. Throughout the year, the younger leaders of the PAP, who had assumed cabinet positions, visited electoral districts to seek public views. Dialogue sessions were held during these highly publicized visits. The Feedback Unit likewise held several public dialogue sessions. The Ministry of Community Development also organized seminars for ‘grassroots’ leaders. The press and media gave extensive coverage of this exercise.

It was evident that the PAP was using government machinery to help solicit public feedback and consultation in the drafting of its manifesto. And that was the main criticism that was raised. Another concern was that by doing so, the line between party and government would be blurred. In answer to these criticisms, the chairman of the PAP manifesto committee, Brigadier-General (BG) Lee Hsien Loong, argued that “it is not improper… it is the national

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agenda, not just the party’s” during the press conference for the launch of the ‘National Agenda’.\(^6^3\) He further added:

> You must know that this is a PAP Government. This is not a coalition government. This is not a government without party affiliation. It is a PAP Government and its policies are the policies, which, as a party, the PAP espouses and sets up as ideals. If we did not have a PAP Government, you would not have this PAP manifesto being implemented as government policy.\(^6^4\)

Lee, who was also the Trade and Industry Minister, reiterated these points in Parliament the following month. He emphasized that setting of the “National Agenda, in the national interest” was the purview and “responsibility of any Government”, and further added that “[a]ny government which does not make full use of all the means at its disposal to achieve national goals is in dereliction of its duty”.\(^6^5\) In other words, the PAP was unapologetic about using the resources and machinery of the government to solicit public opinions and views for its manifesto. And being the ruling party, it argued that its manifesto was thus of national importance. Lee’s reply was therefore unconvincing to the sole opposition MP, who kept pressing the Trade and Industry Minister for a satisfactory reply during that same Parliamentary sitting, of which none was given.\(^6^6\)

From the National Agenda initiative, it was clear this public consultation exercise was done in the framework of continuing the PAP hegemony. The younger cohort of leaders was in effect echoing the Prime Minister’s dictum that “I make no apologies that the PAP is the

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) *Straits Times*, Use of government machinery: ‘Nothing improper, it’s a national document’, 19 February 1987,

\(^{65}\) Parliamentary Debates, 4 March 1987, Col. 9.

\(^{66}\) See ibid, col, 8-10
Government and the Government is the PAP”. Knowing this provides us with a plausible explanation of the apparent contradiction between seeking public opinion on one hand, and the detention of alleged ‘Marxist’ conspirators on the other. The PAP recognised that the public wanted more say in national affairs, and was prepared to liberalize politically as long as they controlled the political discourse and set the boundaries for discussion and debate. The ‘Marxist’ conspirators “posed a .. threat to [PAP’s] monopoly on political discourse”, and had therefore to be purged.

The result of the year-long “massive exercise in consultation, public education and consensus building” on the National Agenda was a Green Paper presented to Parliament by Mr Goh Chok Tong entitled Agenda for Action. This document outlined the objectives and roadmap for the PAP government in order to attain Vision 1999. Topmost amongst the goals were nation building and ensuring economic growth and progress. The anticipated challenges to achieving the goals were also delineated. The document echoed Goh Chok Tong’s lecture to the Alumni International Singapore in December 1986. For instance, it spelt out the PAP philosophy of governance which Goh outlined in that lecture:

Our system is a representative democracy, not a government by referendum. The elected government has a mandate to govern. It is accountable to Parliament, and ultimately to the electorate. It has the responsibility to act on behalf on all Singaporeans.

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70 Ibid., p. 3.
This was in the context of government by consensus. And the *Agenda for Action* was a prime example of consensus building by the government. Other than the importance of consensus, racial and religious harmony was another key tenant in nation building that was mentioned in the document. In fact, the latter was often raised during the public consultations on the National Agenda. This was hardly surprising as the government warned about the dangers of mixing religion with politics that year (in 1987).

The annual Pre-University Seminar in 1988 adopted “Agenda for Action” as its theme. The opening address by BG Lee Hsien Loong stressed the importance of having a set of values to undergird the long-term vision as spelt out in Agenda for Action:

> So long as Singaporeans succeed in absorbing the distilled wisdom of our society, then accumulate fresh experiences of our own to add to our common heritage, and keep our values relevant to our changing world, your generation can build on the achievements of the preceding ones, and Singapore will grow from strength to strength.  

The Agenda for Action vision was essentially a nation-building one – to flesh out the goal of making Singapore a city of excellence and a society of distinction. The latter point brings us back to Goh’s October 1988 speech at the PAP Youth Wing Charity Night, where he pointed out: “We have to determine the sort of society we want to be in the 21st Century - more communitarian or more individualistic? The answer, of course, depends on which is better for our national competitiveness or survival”.  

71 The two ideas – consensus, racial and religious harmony – became part of the eventual ‘shared values’.


73 Goh Chok Tong, “Our National Ethic”
Although Goh did not answer his question, it was clear from his speech that he was inclining towards communitarianism, as he cited an earlier speech by Lee Kuan Yew suggesting that Confucian ethic contributed to the economic success of Japan and the East Asian Tiger economies.\textsuperscript{74} Implied in his speech was the importance of traditional values that the Singaporean society should uphold even as it goes about fulfilling the goals of the Agenda for Action, and hence the need for a National Ideology. He called this the next challenge for the Government and the Party - formalising our national ethic and inculcating it in all citizens. Then we can determine what Singapore will be in the 21st Century. We are part of a long Asian civilisation and we should be proud of it. We should not be assimilated by the west, and become a pseudo-Western society. We should be a nation that is uniquely multi-racial and Asian, with each community proud of its traditional culture and heritage.\textsuperscript{75}

Asian values feature prominently in the National Ideology proposal that Goh suggested. It should be noted that the government was cognizant that the traditional values should compliment the multi-racial fabric of Singaporean society.

As early as 1985, when opposition MP Mr J B Jeyaretnam moved an adjournment debate on the search for traditional societal values for Singapore, Mr Goh Chok Tong singled out “tolerance, respect for each other’s religion, [and] respect for each other’s language” as “the traditional values… which bind us together as a cohesive society.”\textsuperscript{76} Goh also argued that “[i]t is not a stark choice between eastern values and western values. It is a rejection of western values or eastern values which are undesirable”.\textsuperscript{77} However, Goh did not elaborate on eastern values

\textsuperscript{74} I have established the links between Confucianism, Asian Values and Communitarianism in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{75} Goh Chok Tong, “Our National Ethic”.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 29 March 1985 Col. 1786-1787.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, col. 1786.
that are undesirable, instead choosing to cite examples of undesirable western values, “the emphasis on self: me first, you last; me first, society second; the trend towards promiscuity, fun loving, free loving, kind of society”. The omission of undesirable eastern values, contrasted with the examples of the excesses of contemporary western values, suggested the suitability of Asian/Eastern values vis-à-vis western values in Singapore.

At the Opening of Parliament following the 1988 election on 9 January 1989, the President outlined the raison d'être behind the National Ideology in his opening address, which was the hitherto cultural ballast rationale of Asian values – to preserve the desired “[t]raditional Asian ideas of morality, duty and society” against the deculturalising impact of “Western, individualistic and self-centred” values. The President also announced the core values that the government came up with:

These core values include placing society above self; upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony. These four core values formed the essence of a National Ideology that the government aimed to inculcate in all Singaporeans, particularly in school students through moral education and “by strengthening the teaching of values in schools”. The MOE addendum to the President’s address reiterated the point that the four core values articulated by the President were based on Asian values. Both the home and schools played an equally important role in ensuring that children were imbued with these desired values. In the primary schools, subjects such as the

78 Ibid, col. 1787.
79 PAP won all the seats in this election except for one.
mother tongue, social studies, moral education and extracurricular activities were seen to reinforce the inculcation of Asian values.  

BG Lee Hsien Loong, in his speech to the members of Alumni International Singapore on 11 January 1989, while purportedly giving his personal views on the National Ideology, reiterated the PAP government’s Asian values rhetoric. He suggested that the problem the government was trying to solve was the deculturalizing effects of westernization in Singapore:

… Westernisation holds many dangers. Singapore has succeeded because we have been different. Although we are in close contact with the Western world, our values and expectations, and our responses to challenges as a people, have so far been different from Westerners.

Our population is not a Western one.  

The solution was to identify a set of core values, or a National Ideology, which should be “Oriental” and not Western ones.

BG Lee’s speech exposed a fundamental flaw behind the PAP government’s Asian values rhetoric, which was an “unexamined belief that Singapore is a once ‘Asian’ culture now corrupted by the influences of ‘Westernisation’, a term rarely defined”. And both labels of ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ were essentialized and rendered unproblematic, with the latter demonized and the former valourized. This ‘Asian’ versus ‘Westernisation’ dichotomy was portrayed as a nation building effort by the government. As BG Lee argued,


82 MOE Addendum to President’s Address, 9 Jan 1989, Col. 21
83 Speech by BG Lee Hsien Loong, Minister of Trade and Industry and Second Minister For Defence (Services) at Third Alumni International Singapore on ‘The National Ideology – A Direction And Identity For Singapore’ at Margaux Ballroom, Meridien Hotel on Wednesday, 11 January 1989.
… we belong to a time and place, with a past which we should be proud of, and a future which is ours to make. If we are not aware of this, within one generation, or at most two, the spirit of Singapore will disappear, the society will dissolve, and the nation will be no more.  

Seen in this light, the National Ideology was presented as a solution to a crisis of identity and values – as a cultural ballast in face of the undesirable ‘Western’ values.

Mr Ong Teng Cheong, the second deputy prime minister, elaborated on the undesirable effects of westernization in the subsequent debate over the President’s address, where a main topic of the debate was the subject of National Ideology and the four core values. He defined “westernization” as “living in western style and adopting western social habits”. While he made the caveat that not “all western cultures and habits are bad”, the underlying impression was that in general, “oriental” values were superior to “western” ones. This was evidenced in the list of “undesirable influences of the western culture” he listed out, such “drug taking… paying too little attention to family relationships but stressing individualism, their emphasis on personal interest and not paying much importance to social and national interest”.  

The “west” was caricatured as having selfish atomistic societies while the east was valorised as family and societal oriented.

In essence, Ong was rebutting opposition MP Chiam See Tong’s argument that westernization contributed to Singapore’s economic success, and that “western values… if properly done would be good for nation building”.  

The second deputy prime minister reiterated the aim of the National Ideology, which was purportedly to “unite… the various races” and

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86 Parliamentary Debate 19 Jan 1989 Col 326.
“strengthen… our social cohesion”. He assured MPs that “Confucianism and its values” would not be imposed on the ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, there was acknowledgement that Confucianian values were implicit in the formulation of the National Ideology. That the core values of the National Ideology were seen as compatible to Confucian values suggests that Confucianism was appropriated in the drafting of these values. Due to the multi ethnic makeup of Singapore, the government could not openly admit it as such. Thus, the government reasoned it such that while the Chinese appropriated Confucianism, the Malays would interpret the National Ideology “in terms of Malay traditions and Islamic teachings, and the Indians in terms of Indian traditions”.

Like the National Agenda exercise, the National Ideology discussions and debates featured prominently in the press and media that year. It was also the theme for the annual Pre-University seminar. The government was intent to solicit public feedback and opinion in formulating the National Ideology, which was debated widely in the public. Sensing the discomfort over the term “National Ideology”, it was subsequently changed to “shared values”. The President’s address at the opening of the second session of the seventh parliament emphasized the government’s objective in introducing the National Ideology:

The purpose of a National Ideology is to crystallise a set of shared values… which will bind Singaporeans together, despite differences in race and religion, and in the face of many external influences, which are often not germane to their circumstances in Singapore. The Government intends to publish a White Paper on Shared Values, setting

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88 Ibid. 19 Jan 1989, Col. 328.
89 See Eddie Kuo, ‘Confucianism as Political Discourse in Singapore: The Case of An Incomplete Revitalization Movement’.
90 BG Lee’s speech to Alumni International, Straits Times 12 Jan 1989. Interestingly, the Eurasian view was missing.
out those values which all the communities hold in common. Such a formal statement will help us gradually to evolve a Singaporean identity. 91

Academics were also involved in the discussion of the National Ideology, now renamed as “shared values”. The publication of the book *In Search of Singapore’s National Values*, in 1990 was a case in point. 92 The aim of the book was “to identify those national values which can counteract the perceived adverse effects of excessive individualism as well as unify both the government and the citizens of Singapore” into a cohesive nation. 93 Beginning with a study of “multi-racialism” and the history of the nation building process in Singapore, the book goes on to examine the lessons Singapore can learn from the national ideology and nation building experiences of Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia. This is followed by chapters analyzing the impact of selected government policies on nation building, younger Singaporeans and national values, and the response of a representative sample of Singaporeans on national issues using survey and census data. The book concludes by evaluating the usefulness of the four core values, and recommends the adoption of two other values to supplement these four. In sum, the book highlights Singapore’s struggle in identifying its values and trying to exclude some that the leaders believe are not good for society.

After close to two years of deliberations, the White Paper on Shared Values was finally presented to Parliament on 2 January 1991. 94 By then, Mr Goh Chok Tong had taken over the

91 Presidential Address at opening of 2nd session of Parliament, 7 June 1990. Col. 12
93 Ibid., p. 2.
Prime Ministership from Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The White Paper rehashed the rationale behind the shared values that was discussed earlier. While it emphasized that shared values was not “a subterfuge for imposing Chinese Confucian values”, and reassured readers that Confucian ethics cannot be shared by all communities, it contradicted itself by saying that “many Confucian ideals are relevant to Singapore”. And by declaring that

the [Confucian] concept of government by honourable men “君子” (*junzi*), who have a duty to do right for the people, and who have the trust and respect of the population, fits us better than the Western idea that a government should be given as limited powers as possible, and should always be treated with suspicion unless proven otherwise suggests to us that the PAP leaders regard themselves as Confucian gentlemen (*junzi*). Goh even went on to declare that “Lee Kuan Yew is a modern Confucius”. Sociologist Chua Beng Huat sums it succinctly in his opinion that “while the PAP government has failed to Confucianise the population, it has indeed Confucianised itself”.

In addition to the four values mentioned by the President in January 1989, the White Paper added one more, making it five:

- Nation before community and society above self
- Family as the basic unit of society
- Regard and community support for the individual
- Consensus instead of contention

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95 Lee Kuan Yew was appointed Senior Minister in Goh’s cabinet. It is interesting that Goh became Prime Minister on the same day that John Major took over the Premiership position from Mrs Margaret Thatcher.


97 *Straits Times*, 24 April 1990.

98 Chua Beng Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, p. 36.
Racial and religious harmony

These five shared values crystallized the Asian values and communitarian ideals that the government wished to instil amongst Singaporeans. The incomplete revitalization of Confucianism via Religious Knowledge can be said to be fulfilled in the shared values. These shared values are in agreement with Confucian ones. For instance, the concept of putting nation and community before self is a key Confucian principle, as is the importance of family.

During the parliamentary debate on shared values that followed on 14 and 15 January 1991, a number of MPs expressed reservations over the value “consensus instead of contention”. Chiam See Tong in particular argued that contention was an important aspect of consensus building, and suggested it to be changed to “consensus through contention”. Eventually, the word contention was dropped and replaced with ‘conflict’. The other four values met with little resistance. The following are the five shared values that Parliament adopted on 15 January following the debate:

- Nation before community and society above self
- Family as the basic unit of society
- Community support and respect for the individual
- Consensus, not conflict
- Racial and religious harmony

Besides the change in the fourth value, the third value was also amended. Critics of the Shared Values point out that it was a means to maintain the PAP hegemony. On the other hand,

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100 See Wing-sit Chan (trans. and complied), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*.
scholars in China saw the Shared Values providing lessons which China could learn from.\textsuperscript{104} Despite the overwhelming official reason for “cultural ballast” as a key rationale for the Shared Values, the underlying motive was arguably economic. As BG pointed out, Singapore was able to attract the multi-national corporations (particularly from the US) to set up their factories there not only because “Singaporean workers are less strange to them than Taiwanese or Korean workers”, but also because they were also “not the same as American ones”.\textsuperscript{105} The implication was that full-blown Westernization in Singapore would result in the country losing its competitive advantage. Be that as it may, the Shared Values provided the framework for the revision of the civics, social study and history curriculum.

**Civics and Moral Education (Secondary)**

The secondary school civics program saw the biggest revamp, with ‘Civics and Moral Education’ (CME) replacing RK and \textit{Being and Becoming}. The new CME syllabus aimed “to nurture a person with integrity who acts responsibly with the welfare and interest of others and the nation in mind” – a communitarian goal.\textsuperscript{106} The objectives of the syllabus were organized into 3 components – knowledge, skills and attitudes:

The first component is Knowledge (sic) – those moral principles, values and norms which are the basis for sound decision-making. The second component, Skills (sic), develops

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\textsuperscript{105} See 李显龙, Speech at Third Alumni International Singapore.

\textsuperscript{106} CME Sec syllabus (1991), p. 3.
those processes that the pupil should master in order to be able to handle specific situations or problems. The third, Attitudes (sic), deals with inculcating those innate qualities of care and consideration that would motivate the pupil towards correct Conduct (sic). 107

As for ‘conduct’ it was defined as enabling students to “demonstrate desirable character traits” and to “contribute actively to the well-being of society”. 108

The two “considerations” that underpin the syllabus content, which was to “develop character and integrity” and to “become a useful member of society”, 109 demonstrate the communitarian goal and objectives of the CME syllabus. It was also clearly stated that these two considerations and the shared values “form the basis and framework for determining the [CME] syllabus themes and objectives”. 110 The following are the themes of the CME Secondary syllabus:

1) Cultivate strength of character
2) Maximise one’s potential
3) Nurture interpersonal relationships
4) Affirm family life
5) Promote community spirit
6) Foster cultural and religious appreciation
7) Develop commitment to nation building 111

The syllabus themes were explained as follows:

The syllabus themes give importance to cultivating a person with strong character and integrity who leads a useful life, is able to relate to others, and is willing to place the

107 Ibid, p. 3. These 3 components of knowledge, skills are attitudes drew on the theoretical work by Bloom, see Benjamin Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (New York: Longman, 1956).
109 Ibid., p. 1
110 Ibid., p. 8.
111 Ibid.
concerns of community before self-interest. Such a person contributes to strengthening the social fabric of society by upholding the family as the basic and vital unit of society. Recognising the multi-racial and multi-religious nature of Singapore society, he is able to respect and appreciate this diversity of cultures and religions. He also possesses the necessary skills and inclination to resolve issues through consensus. Such a person will be a balanced individual who is able to fulfil his potential and contribute to the welfare of others and the nation. \textsuperscript{112}

The five Shared Values were clearly interwoven into the syllabus themes, with nation building being the ultimate destination.

Recognising that the didactic method was no longer suitable, four teaching approaches – the Cultural Transmission approach, the Consideration Approach, the Modified Values approach and the Cognitive Development approach – were recommended. \textsuperscript{113} These pedagogical approaches that were encouraged in the CME secondary syllabus, as well as the syllabus themes, were built on the \textit{Being and Becoming} program. It was a belated acknowledgement of the strength of the previous \textit{Being and Becoming} syllabus.

With regards to the syllabus package, they comprise teacher’s guides and pupil’s workbooks. For each level, there were two teacher’s guides and two pupil’s workbooks. The package is organised around six modules, which correspond to the themes of the CME syllabus:

- The Growing Me – corresponding to theme 1 and 2
- Building Bonds – corresponding with theme 3

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 6. “The Cultural Transmission approach identifies the desirable values of a culture and transmits them to future generations. Pupils internalise these values through direct instruction. Its goal is to maintain the system and assist individuals to adapt successfully to it. The Consideration approach focuses on the element of care and concern for others. It teaches pupils to empathise and be sensitive to others’ feelings and needs. It encourages pupils to be less selfish. Its goal is the development of a more caring personality. The Modified Values Clarification approach leads pupils to recognise and accept values as their own and take responsibility for their decisions… The Cognitive Development approach [based on Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory and approach to moral dilemmas] focuses on the various stages of moral reasoning. Through discussion of moral dilemmas, the teacher guides the pupils to apply more adequate modes of reasoning…”
Loving My Family – corresponding with theme 4
Belonging Together – corresponding with theme 5
Unity in Diversity – corresponding with theme 6
Becoming a better citizen – corresponding with theme 7\textsuperscript{114}

The final two modules are reminiscence of Balhetchet’s final two modules (nation and world) in his proposed Upper Secondary Being and Becoming program which was not implemented due to the Religious Knowledge program. Unlike Being and Becoming, which focused on a module each year, all six modules in the CME program were covered in each secondary level. The modules are subdivided into units.

The table below illustrates the topics that were taught under the modules of “unity in diversity” and “becoming a better citizen” for the lower secondary CME program.\textsuperscript{115}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity in Diversity</td>
<td>The Historical Origins of Our Multiracial Society</td>
<td>Secondary 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributions of Some of Our Forefathers</td>
<td>Secondary 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a Better Citizen</td>
<td>Our National Flag, National Anthem and Pledge</td>
<td>Secondary 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having a Sense of Belonging to the Nation contributes to Nation Building</td>
<td>Secondary 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Upper Secondary CME program, a major portion of the Secondary Three syllabus was devoted to teaching the belief systems of the various religions and religious festivals in Singapore, in addition to “modules dealing with the notion of community spirit and being a good

\textsuperscript{114} This is illustrated in the Introduction section of all the CME teacher’s guides and pupil’s workbooks.

\textsuperscript{115} See CME Pupils Textbook 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B.
neighbour”.116 With regards to Secondary Four, students were introduced to the rites of passage – birth, marriage and death – of the major religions in Singapore. The aim was that having been “familiarised with the appropriate behaviour expected of non-practitioners at the ceremonies”, students “are led to understand that one important value that guides them in behaving appropriately is respect for others”.117

As for the module on “Becoming a better citizen”, which obviously teaches on citizenship, students were taught Singapore’s constitution, the importance of the law, as well as involvement in the electoral process. Students were also instructed on “the major difficulties faced by Singapore since independence, as well as the ‘issues of national concern’ like population growth, racial and religious harmony, economic growth, and national security.”118 The emphasis was on duties before rights, as seen in the objective of “understanding the duties and rights of citizens”.119 Students were also taught about Total Defence,120 national issues of concern, and on national campaigns.121 Finally, the module on citizenship also included a unit on ‘responding to global issues’ where students were taught on the need to be concerned about global issues and how to respond to them appropriately.122

116 Christine Han, p. 102.
118 Christine Han, p. 102.
119 CME Sec syllabus, p. 44.
120 This will be discussed in the next chapter.
121 The Speak Mandarin Campaign is one of them. Another prominent national campaign is the Courtesy Campaign.
122 See CME textbook 4A.
That the pedagogical approaches and syllabus themes for the CME Secondary syllabus were built on *Being and Becoming* was a testimony to the strength of Balhetchet’s program. Balhetchet’s view that the school and classroom environment were crucial to a successful moral education program was likewise acknowledged in the CME syllabus.\(^{123}\)

**CME Primary and Good Citizen (revised)**

For the primary school CME syllabus, the *Good Citizen* program was retained. Nonetheless, it was revised in accordance to the new CME syllabus. Like the CME Secondary syllabus, it also has communitarian goal – “to inculcate in our pupils desirable moral values that will develop them into upright individuals and responsible citizens with a sense of commitment to the nation”.\(^{124}\) The syllabus was also organised into the three components of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Another similarity with the Secondary CME syllabus was the adoption of the same four pedagogical approaches.

A major difference between the Primary and Secondary CME syllabus was on the syllabus rationale. While the Secondary CME was built upon the seven themes, the Primary CME was centred on the five relationships of self, family, school, society and nation. This was a continuation of the six relationships of the previous *Good Citizen* program, with the ‘world’ not being emphasized as much. Asian Values were explicitly emphasized in the instructional materials:

The materials emphasize Asian values and deal with 35 moral concepts grouped under 5 aspects: The Cultivation of Self; Self and Family; Self and School; Self and Society; and Self and the Nation/World. The first three aspects are emphasized at the lower primary

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\(^{123}\) See ibid p. 7.

levels and the remaining two at the upper primary levels. The moral concepts are presented systematically to match the different stages in the moral development of the child.\footnote{CDIS, \textit{Good Citizen Teachers Guide} (English Edition) (Singapore: EPB Publishers), ‘Preface’ to the Pupil’s text. This is also found in the ‘Preface’ in all revised \textit{Good Citizen} textbooks.}

The Shared Values were likewise behind infused as well. The revised package had many passages on the family and filial piety, as well as relating to other ethnicities, to underscore the importance of Asian and Shared Values. The medium of instruction continued to be the mother tongue, which is contrasted to the Secondary CME, which is taught in English.

Christine Han pointed out the contradictions in using the suggested pedagogical approaches. With regards to the revised \textit{Good Citizen} textbooks, she aptly noted that

Like the original \textit{Good Citizens} texts, many of the new \textit{Good Citizens} passages draw on ethnic myths and legends. Others have a contemporary setting, and there are also occasional references to other cultures and traditions, and to such figures as Abraham Lincoln and Anne Sullivan. These indicate recognition of the need to reflect universal values and ideas, and not just ethnic ones.\footnote{Christine Han, p. 100.}

Nonetheless, she again made little mention of the citizenship topics covered in the revised \textit{Good Citizen} textbooks.

The revised \textit{Good Citizen} instructional package had the same form of materials as in the previous one. Like the previous program, citizenship topics were taught right from primary one in the revised \textit{Good Citizen} program. The revised \textit{Good Citizen 1B} had two passages extolling the beauty of Singapore.\footnote{\textit{Good Citizen (revised) 1B}, Chapters 17 and 18} Other passages that highlighted citizenship topics included flag raising, the singing of the national anthem and patriotic songs, National (Military) Service, and
the celebration of national (independence) day.\textsuperscript{128} As for primaries five and six, citizenship topics included passages on the Members of Parliament, National Service, national campaigns, polling day, Singapore’s leaders and the United Nations.\textsuperscript{129}

One major departure of the revised \textit{Good Citizen} program from the previous one was that topics were “emphasized and repeated whenever applicable in the syllabus”.\textsuperscript{130} This can be illustrated in the topic of national symbols and rituals such as flag raising and the singing of the national anthem. Students were introduced to the national flag and the singing of the national anthem in primary two. This was reinforced in primary four. Beginning with the passage on flag raising in the revised \textit{Good Citizen 2A} textbook, discussion questions were added to elicit the appropriate behaviour during the flag raising ceremony and the pledge taking.\textsuperscript{131} This is followed by the passage on singing the national anthem in the 2\textit{B} textbook, and questions drawing out the correct responses of the students were posed in the text.\textsuperscript{132} The answers to the supposedly discussion questions were “answered” in the 4\textit{A} textbook in the passage on the singing of the national anthem, where students were exhorted to stand at attention and sing the national anthem with gusto during the flag raising ceremony.\textsuperscript{133} The focus appeared to be on instilling the proper moral behaviour and the ‘right’ answer and response. And duties were emphasized over rights, as evidenced in the passage explaining the contents of the national

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{Good Citizen (revised) 2A}, Chapter 2 and 16; \textit{2B}, Chapters 1 and 4; \textit{3B}, Chapter 6; \textit{4A}, Chapters 3, 4, 12; \textit{4B}, Chapter 6.
\item \textsuperscript{129} \textit{Good Citizen (revised) 5A}, Chapter 18; \textit{6A}, Chapters 16 and 17; \textit{6B}, Chapters 14, 16, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Good Citizen (revised) 2A}, pp. 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Good Citizen (revised) 2B}, pp. 2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Good Citizen (revised) 4A}, pp. 6-7.
\end{itemize}
anthem and pledge. Replying to the students’ query on what was in the pledge, the teacher summarized it as follows: “We pledge ourselves as one united people, to strive to achieve prosperity and progress for the nation”. Concepts like justice and equality, which were in the pledge, and the phrase “democratic society” were not mentioned in the text. This demonstrated the importance of economic development over social development.

In sum, the revised Good Citizen program, while purportedly adopting similar pedagogical approaches with CME Secondary program, was in reality a more conservative program, preferring didactic approaches. Civic values remained one of the major facets of this revised syllabus. And like its secondary counterpart, the Shared Values were integrated into the program. However, as mentioned in the last chapter, we also need to examine the social studies syllabus in order to get a fuller picture on the teaching of civic values for primary school pupils.

Social Studies (Primary)

Like the CME program, the social studies syllabus for primary schools was also revised in light of Shared Values. The stated aims of the revised Social Studies remain the same as the previous one, with the inclusion of objectives pertaining to the knowledge, skills and attitudes domains. The attitudes objective explicitly mentioned the awareness of Shared Values in “help[ing] to forge a common Singaporean identity”. The sequencing of the syllabus – two units a year from primary 4 to 6 – was retained but some changes were made:

Unit 1 Our School: Its Environment

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134 Good Citizen (revised) 4A, p. 9.
136 Ibid., p. 6.
Unit 2 Our Country: Her Beginnings
Unit 3 Our Country: Her Environment & Needs
Unit 4 Our Country: Her Progress
Unit 5 Our Country: Her Communities
Unit 6 Our Country: Her Southeast Asian Neighbours

The medium of instruction for Social Studies was either English or the Mother Tongue. The instructional package for Social Studies remained as two textbooks per grade level together with activity books, as well as Teachers Guides.

While not explicitly mentioning that CME and Social Studies complement each other, a comparison of both syllabuses would reveal that a greater attempt had been made to ensure less overlaps than previously. The Primary CME and revised Good Citizen program emphasized the behavioural and affective aspects of civics learning, while social studies focused on the cognitive aspect. For instance, Good Citizen highlighted the participation in activities such as flag-raising and the singing of the national anthem, while Social Studies explored the concept of nation building in greater depth. The history of Singapore was also taught more comprehensively in Social Studies, while Good Citizen merely had some passages on Singapore’s history. Furthermore, the de-emphasis on the “world” component in Primary CME meant that the introduction of the Southeast Asian nations in Social Studies no longer overlapped with CME and Good Citizen. Thus, compared to the previous syllabus, the revised primary school Social Studies syllabus was more complementary to the revised Good Citizen program.138

137 Ibid., p. 7.
138 Perhaps the fact that it was implemented a few years after the revised Good Citizen helped in ensuring less overlaps in content.
Social Studies Syllabus for Lower Secondary Normal (Technical)

In 1991, a review was done on the primary school system, which resulted in the restructuring of not only primary education, but also secondary schooling as well. In the secondary level, a new Normal (Technical) stream was created ostensibly to provide a technical vocational curriculum for the lower ability students, so as to ensure that most students could go through secondary education as well. The introduction of Social Studies for the Normal Technical stream was meant to balance the technical centric curriculum. It builds on the primary Social Studies program.

This new Social Studies program for Normal Technical students aimed “to ensure that pupils are acquainted with the History of Singapore, as well as acquire some understanding of key issues facing the country”. The ultimate aim was “to prepare pupils to be more useful citizens of the future”. The syllabus integrated “some aspects of the History and Geography of Singapore”. A total of four units were taught over the course of two years:

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140 Ibid.
141 Ibid., p. 6.
142 Ibid.
Apart from the final unit, the other units of study were essentially on Singapore’s history. I would therefore argue that this is an abridged version of the History of Singapore taught in the regular lower secondary levels.

**Lower Secondary History Syllabus**

A significant change occurred in the lower secondary history syllabus, when the history of China, India and Southeast Asia was introduced in lower secondary history, as it was believed that students should learn about their ethnic roots. This was taught in secondary two, and the History of Singapore was to be taught in Secondary one with the textbook entitled *History of Modern Singapore*. 143

*Syllabus aims*

The revised syllabus implemented in 1994 retained much of the social reconstructionist philosophy of the 1984 syllabus. The rationale of this syllabus was similar to the previous one, with the added emphasis of knowing the heritage of the major ethnic groups “in order to provide the cultural ballast that is necessary for [Singapore’s] development”. 144 Like the CME and Social Studies, the history syllabus objectives were organized into 3 curriculum strands – Content, Skills and Values. The content and values objectives correspond to the general and specific objectives in the 1984 syllabus, with an added emphasis on the ‘skills objectives’. That an entire unit in the 1992 syllabus (to be implemented in 1994) was devoted to historiography is evidence of the importance of historical skills in the history curriculum.

143 It usually takes two years after the finalization of the syllabus to develop the curriculum materials.

The introduction of ‘skills objectives’ demonstrates the influence of the cognitive process conception of the curriculum. Historical concepts such as chronology, change and continuity, cause and effect were stated as some of the “skills objectives”. In addition, the understanding of points of view as well as the use of historical sources were also included as part of ‘skills objectives’. In essence, the ‘skills objectives’ were categorised under three headings—understand History in its setting, understand points of view in History and acquire and process historical information. The objectives were also pupil centred in tone, as evidenced in the phrase “at the end of the course pupils will be able to”.

The emphasis of the ‘skills objectives’ led to a modification of the assessment format. Historical source based study was introduced through the accompanying there activity book. Through the use of sources, historical concepts and skills such as compare and contrast, change and continuity, cause and effect and points of view were taught. These concepts and skills closely followed the ‘skills objectives’ stated in the 1992 syllabus document. In summary, the 1984 syllabus had more drill and practice kind of assessment, while the 1992 syllabus saw the introduction of historical sources in the assessments format.

Scope and Sequences of Syllabus

Like the 1984 syllabus, the 1992 Singapore history syllabuses cover the History of Singapore from 1819 to 1965. The recommended curriculum time of about 70 minutes per week

145 MOE, History Syllabus, Secondary 1 to 2 (1992)
146 ibid.
147 ibid, p. 8
148 ibid.
to the study of History was also similar for both syllabuses. With regards to the sequencing of the syllabuses, the 1994 History Syllabus condensed the 1984 syllabus into 5 units:

- Unit 2: Foundation of modern Singapore
- Unit 3: Growth of the new settlement
- Unit 4: External influences on Singapore in the early decades of the 20th century
- Unit 5: World War II: The Japanese Interlude
- Unit 6: Singapore after World War II.\(^{149}\)

As it was in the 1984 syllabus, the 1994 Normal Stream History syllabus is three quarters that of the Express/Special syllabus. This is again indicated as “Optional for Normal course pupils” in the textbook and teacher’s guide.

*Syllabus materials and content*

As in 1984 syllabus, a project team was established by CDIS to come up with the curriculum package for the 1994 History of Singapore syllabus. The 1994 package included a textbook, a Teacher’s guide, Overhead Transparency Masters, posters, Laser Discs and user’s manuals, as well as Educational Television Programmes.

With regards to the content covered, a preliminary reading of the teacher’s guides for the *History of Modern Singapore* would suggest that it has similar features with the two volumes of the *Social and Economic History of Modern Singapore*. Each chapter in the teacher’s guides begins with the objectives of the corresponding chapter in the textbook. This is followed by suggestions on how to introduce and teach that particular chapter, which includes suggested classroom activities as well as the use of the workbooks. Answers are given to the written exercises in the workbooks. Finally, there are suggestions on how to reinforce what was taught in

\(^{149}\) Ibid.
the form of supplementary reading materials found in the textbook as well as extra materials in the form of blackline masters.150

On closer examination, the 1984 and 1994 teacher’s guides reveal significant differences. First, the objectives in the 1984 teacher’s guides focus on covering content, while the 1994 teacher’s guide emphasizes both content and skills. While the 1994 teacher’s guide continued the emphasis on knowing the content of Singapore History, there is also the inclusion of ‘skills objectives’ in the form of examining and synthesising information gathered from various sources. This is in line with the 1994 syllabus aims, which emphasizes content, skills and values.151 It is therefore hardly surprising that the 1984 textbooks were written in a narrative format while the 1994 textbook was written in an expository and somewhat interactive style.152

The 1994 edition of the teacher’s guide and textbook thus builds on the strength of the previous 1984 edition. Written for both experienced and beginning teachers in mind, it gives step-by-step instructions to teachers on how to deliver the curriculum from introduction to development and finally providing closure. Various teaching strategies such as cooperative learning were introduced to encourage teachers to move away from the traditional didactic approach of teaching history, in an effort to make history learning more fun and engaging.153

153 CDIS, History of Modern Singapore: Teachers’s Guide
Upper Secondary History Syllabus

The Upper Secondary History Syllabus, unchanged since 1963, was also revised to include historical sources in its assessment format as well. A new assessment objective, “to demonstrate basic skills in the interpretation of historical source material, such as a) comprehension, b) the extraction of relevant information, and c) the explanation of terms of context” was added.\(^{154}\) The assessment format was also changed from the previous essay format to “structured” and “stimulus” questions.\(^{155}\)

The revised upper secondary syllabus was specially drawn up by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate for Singapore students only, “to meet the needs of Singapore in the 1990s”.\(^{156}\) While the content for the History of Malaya and the History of Southeast Asia were similar to the previous syllabus, a new section, “Modern World History from c. 1919 to 1952” was introduced. This covered major events in USA, USSR, Hitler’s Germany, the Second World War in Europe and Asia and its immediate aftermath, as well as the histories of Japan and China.\(^{157}\)

Conclusion

The demise of the Religious Knowledge program did not signal the failure of the promotion of Asian Values and Confucianism by the Singapore government. Instead, the government intensified its efforts on its Asian Values discourse through the introduction of the

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\(^{155}\) Ibid. Stimulus questions required students to answer questions on selected historical sources.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., p. 11.

five Shared Values. This was an attempt to incorporate Asian Values and Confucianism into Singapore’s nation building project. Critics of Asian Values were argued that the underlying reason for the Shared Values was to boost the PAP government’s legitimacy and hegemony in the wake of declining popular support in the General Elections since 1984.

Consequently, the syllabuses of history and social studies had to be revised in the light of these changes. Likewise, moral education in primary school became reconstituted as Civics and Moral Education, which extended to secondary levels. The underlying motivation behind these changes appear to be a reactive one to events and circumstances, for instance the 1987 detention of alleged Marxist conspirators and the decision to scrap Religious Knowledge. This appeared to be at variance with the PAP’s rhetoric of long term thinking and planning.

Despite their denials, it was clear that both the Religious Knowledge program and the Shared Values project had similar objectives – to instil Confucian values (via Asian Values) to the populace. The government’s enthusiasm in promoting Asian Values also resulted in the establishment of self-help groups amongst the different ethnic communities, as well as the encouragement to learn about one’s ethnic roots. Rajaratnam, a former key cabinet member, expressed concern that this could potentially detract from the long-term vision of a Singaporean Singapore. In a letter written to the Straits Times forum section in 1990, Rajaratnam argued that “[b]eing a Singaporean is not a matter of ancestry” but of “conviction and choice”. At the

158 The ethnic self help groups include the Chinese Development Assistance Council and Singapore Indian Development Association which were established in the 1990s. MENDAKI was set up in the 1980s to assist the Malay/Muslims. Finally, there is also the Eurasian Association.

159 S Rajaratnam, ‘Remembering ancestral heritage is building ghettos in the minds of the community,’ Straits Times, 9 October 1990.
same time, John Clammer was doubtful that the Shared Values would last for long.\textsuperscript{160} He was proven right. The Shared Values, promoted with great fanfare in its inauguration, eventually fell into obscurity with the introduction of “National Education”, the latest citizenship and nation building initiative of the government.

Chapter 6
The Crisis of Historical Amnesia and the ‘National Education’ Response

Citizenship education in Singapore received a major boost in 1997, with the launch of the “National Education” program by the Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on May 17. The stated aim of National Education (NE) was “to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future”.¹ This was to be achieved by fostering a sense of Singaporean identity, promoting an understanding of Singapore’s recent history, promoting understanding of Singapore’s major challenges and vulnerabilities, and the intention was to instill core National Values which would ensure Singapore’s continued success and well being. NE was clearly a “citizenship education initiative [by the state] aimed at socialising the young into a set of desired attitudes and values”.² These values include patriotism, loyalty and the willingness to defend the nation. This represented the state formation aim of citizenship education in Singapore. Other values commonly associated with citizenship education, such as social justice and democratic civic engagement, were noticeably absent.³ NE was to become the de facto citizenship education program in Singapore. Unlike the previous “flagship” citizenship education programs like Education for Living and Religious Knowledge, NE was more than a curricular subject – it was a comprehensive citizenship education framework for the entire educational system in Singapore.

¹ Lee Hsien Loong, Speech on National Education, 17 May 1997 at TCS TV Theatre at 9.30 p.m.
³ Civic engagement was included in NE in 1998 through the introduction of the Community Involvement Program. However, the engagement was limited to volunteerism; political engagement was still by and large circumscribed.
A day prior to the official launch of NE by the Deputy Prime Minister, the MOE released an official press release (with a lengthy annex) outlining the objectives and implementation strategies of NE.\(^4\) The press release traced NE initiative to a speech made by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at a Teacher’s Day Rally in September 1996, where he stated that

National Education must be a vital component of our education process…. It is an exercise to develop instincts that become part of the psyche of every child. It must engender a shared sense of nationhood, an understanding of how our past is relevant to our present and future. It must appeal to both heart and mind.\(^5\)

While the Prime Minister went on to outline the purpose and aims of NE, he did not attempt to explain the meaning of that term in his speech. This was the same for the MOE press release as well. What then is NE? And where and when did the term NE originate? This chapter discusses the origins of NE, the reasons behind the introduction of the NE program, as well as the initial implementation of NE. The conceptualization of the NE program was a top-down one, from the office of the Prime Minister. The events surrounding the launch of NE to schools suggest that it was more of a knee-jerk reaction to a crisis of supposed historical amnesia amongst young Singaporeans, rather than a reasoned and thought out strategy. NE, like the other civics and citizenship education initiatives previously, was another reactive effort by the government in response to unfolding events. In other words, it was politically and not pedagogically motivated.

Though NE was not merely about history, the implementation of NE focused initially on telling the Singapore Story, the state’s version of Singapore’s history, and obliterating other histories. The implementation of the NE program in the non-formal curriculum bears out the

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\(^5\) Goh Chok Tong, ‘Prepeare Our Children for the New Century: Teach Them Well’, Address at the Teachers’ Day Rally, 8 September 1996.
state’s concern about and almost obsession over presenting its version of the Singapore Story. In particular, I examine the National Education Exhibition as an example of the state’s construction of the Singapore Story as a narrative of triumph over adversity and crises.

**Origins of National Education: Total Defence**

NE began in the 1970s as a program (in the form of lectures) to train officers of the Singapore Armed Forces on the constraints and vulnerabilities of Singapore. In addition to the history of Singapore, the officers were also taught the history, politics and international relations of the Southeast Asian countries, China, Russia and the US. NE was subsequently extended to the Singapore Armed Forces conscripts serving their National Service. Since compulsory military conscription in Singapore was referred as ‘National Service’- denoting one’s duty to the nation, I surmise that having ‘National Education’ in the context of ‘National Service’ could be viewed as education about the nation. Moreover, Mr. Goh Chok Tong was the Defence Minister in the 1980s, with Lim Siong Guan as his Permanent Secretary. And Lim was the Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office) in 1996 when Prime Minister Goh tasked him to undertake the NE initiative. Thus, both Goh and Lim, as well as the Singapore government, were more accustomed to the term ‘National Education’ then the term ‘civics’ or ‘citizenship education’

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6 Nexus, *Engaging Hearts and Minds*.

7 Lee Hsien Loong, Question and Answer session for Plenary Session 1, in *Report of Pre- U Seminar 1988*, pp. 22, 23.


9 In his illustrious career, Mr Lim Siong Guan served under all three Prime Ministers of Singapore. He was the Principal Private Secretary under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and eventually became Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office) during the tenure of Mr Goh Chok Tong as Prime Minister. To ensure the implementation of NE, Prime Minister Goh appointed Lim as the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Education, even as he continued to be the Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office). Lim later became the Head of Civil Service, as well as the Permanent Secretary (Ministry of Finance) when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong served concurrently as the Minister for Finance.
used in the education circles. This could explain why the notion of ‘NE’ was being appropriated for schools in 1997. Nonetheless, the origins of NE had little to do with commonly held notions of citizenship education in the West.

The aims and objectives of NE are encapsulated in the six NE messages:

1) Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong. We want to keep our heritage and our way of life.
2) We must preserve racial and religious harmony. Though many races, religions, languages and cultures, we pursue one destiny.
3) We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptability. This provides opportunity for all according to their ability and effort.
4) No one owes Singapore a living. We must find our own way to survive and prosper.
5) We must ourselves defend Singapore. No one else is responsible for our security and well-being.
6) We have confidence in our future. United, determined and well-prepared, we shall build a bright future for ourselves.\(^{11}\)

These six messages were in essence adaptations of the NE messages for the Psychological Defence component of Total Defence:

- Singapore is our homeland. This is where we belong.
- Singapore is worth defending. We want to keep our heritage and our way of life.
- Singapore can be defended. United, determined, and well prepared, we shall fight for the safety of our homes and the future of our families and children.
- We must defend Singapore ourselves. No one else is responsible for our security.
- We can deter others from attacking us. With Total Defence, we shall live in peace.\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\) It is no understatement to say that the NE initiative came straight from the Prime Minister’s Office.

\(^{11}\) MOE’s National Education website, http://www.ne.edu.sg

\(^{12}\) *Straits Times*, Hearts and minds are first targets, 22 January 1984. Tim Huxley made the same point, but while he quoted these five messages, he did not refer to the sources in 1984, the year where Total Defence was launched. See Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, p. 25
Yolanda Chin observes that while this was the case, “two new elements … based on the leaders’ assessment of the nation’s current challenges” were added.\(^{13}\) These were the importance of religious and racial harmony, and the need to uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility. However, she mistakenly alluded the original to the five NE messages “as part of the training for SAF conscripts”,\(^ {14}\) when the messages were clearly meant for Total Defence.

Drawing upon the concept of total war\(^ {15}\), as well as the Swiss model of national defence, the Total Defence concept was introduced in 1984 to enhance and encourage the total commitment of all Singaporeans to the defence of the country. It builds upon military defence, which is premised on “maintaining and developing a deterrent capability” through the Singapore Armed Forces in order to prevent “threats from arising in the first place”.\(^ {16}\) Other than military defence and psychological defence, the other aspects of Total Defence are Social Defence, Economic Defence and Civil Defence. Mr. Goh Chok Tong, who was then Minister of Defence, explained the different components of Total Defence:

Why total defence… When Singapore became independent in 1965, the primary problem was getting a credible military defence capability quickly. The problem became most urgent when the British announced their pull-out East of Suez in 1967. So National Service was introduced in 1967 and the SAF formed… But we all know that a military attack on Singapore is not the only means by which Singapore can fall to an aggressor. Public morale and confidence have to be boosted with the knowledge that a civilian

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\(^{14}\) Ibid. Yolanda Chin might have skipped over the point made by Huxley (see footnote number 11) that the messages were meant for the Psychological Defence component of Total Defence.

\(^{15}\) The total war concept came out of the experience of World War Two, where a country’s entire population and all sectors of its society are mobilized in military conflict. The European Theatre of the Second World War bore this out; war is no longer restricted to battle lines between armies.

\(^{16}\) Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, p. 24.
population is organized to cope with emergencies even when the younger and physically more capable men are mobilized for SAF service. Hence, civil defence.

Also, due to a lack of natural resources and a small population, our economy must be organized to withstand external pressures as well as internal pressures that can be brought about by the mobilization of men and equipment from the private sector. Hence, economic defence.

As a multi-racial society, Singapore can be a fertile ground for mischievous elements to stir up problems on account of race, religion or culture. Hence, the need for social defence, the need to organize communities within housing estates, like… community centres and so on.

But undergirding it all is the need for Singaporeans to be willing to stand up for themselves. Hence, psychological defence.\(^\text{17}\)

The Defence Ministry launched a major media and advertising campaign in April that year “to drive home the point: There is a part for everyone in the defence of the country”.\(^\text{18}\) A total defence song was also written under the title “There’s a part for everyone” to exhort Singaporeans to put their hearts, minds, skills and wills “to the defence of Singapore”.\(^\text{19}\) Schools played a major role in the Total Defence effort, with the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) engaging school principals “to spread the total defence message to students”.\(^\text{20}\) CDIS and MINDEF also looked at how to incorporate the Total Defence concept into the school curriculum and textbooks.\(^\text{21}\) In addition, schools displayed the total defence posters and played the total

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\(^{17}\) Parliamentary debates, 16 March 1984, col 1187-1188.

\(^{18}\) *Straits Times*, ‘Media Blitz to tell you your part in defence: MINDEF to spend $300 000 to drive home message’, 3 April 1984.

\(^{19}\) This is a line from the Total Defence song, which was played often in the early years of the Total Defence campaign.


\(^{21}\) See *Straits Times*, ‘Mindef gets everyone to rally round’, 22 January 1984 and ‘Textbooks mat soon show SAF in action’, 22 October 1984. See Chapters 4 and 5 for examples in the civics and social studies curriculum.
defence song. Total Defence thus became yet another national campaign initiated and driven by the government.

There is a very close link between NE and Total Defence. The NE messages correspond with the key pillars of Total Defence. For instance, the second message on racial and religious harmony ties in with Social Defence. Economic Defence is linked to the message “no one owes Singapore a living”, while the message “we must ourselves defend Singapore” clearly relates to Military defence. Finally, the first message Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong, corresponds to Psychological Defence. As an important part of Psychological Defence, NE forms a critical component in the thinking behind Total Defence, while Total Defence is one of the ways of putting NE into action. Key to both Total Defence and NE is the cultivation of “a sense of shared history and common destiny, with an underlying commitment and confidence in the country”.22 The perceived lack of historical knowledge of Singapore’s recent history by the students was what prompted the introduction of NE to schools.

The issue that sparked this was then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s comments on ‘remerger’ between Singapore and Malaysia. At a speech in 8 June 1996, Lee Kuan Yew raised the hypothetical prospect of remerger if the following conditions were fulfilled: “if Malaysia adopted the same policy of meritocracy as Singapore did, without race being in a privileged position; and if Malaysia pursued, as successfully, the same goals as Singapore, to bring maximum economic benefit to its people”.23 Lee’s remarks “unleashed a wave of criticisms

23 Straits Times, ‘SM spells out conditions under which S’pore might rejoin Malaysia’, 8 June 1996.
across the Causeway (ie. Malaysia)”. For instance, The New Straits Times, Malaysia’s leading English daily, criticised Singapore’s meritocratic system, alleging that it discriminated against minorities. It claimed that meritocracy “kept the playing field lopsided in favour of the… Chinese, and discriminated against the poorer and less educated, who are the Malays and Indians”. Singapore was also accused of exploiting Malaysia for its economic gain. As Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted, “Malaysian writers made no bones about the reasons why Singapore left Malaysia, and why we would not be welcomed back for a very long time”. Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew’s remarks on remerger were “being taken seriously in Malaysia. Malaysian PM Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Singapore was unlikely to rejoin Malaysia now, though it might one day be possible”, a view echoed by some of his ministers.

In contrast to the sharp and emotive responses in Malaysia, the response by Singaporeans to Lee Kuan Yew’s re-merger hypothesis were “much milder”. The Straits Times conducted a random street poll on SM Lee’s remarks on the re-merger issue to 100 Singaporeans of “different age, race and income groups”. The results were, “six out of ten Singaporeans polled were against the idea of Singapore rejoining Malaysia”. Some of the reasons proffered were

24 Yolanda Chin, p. 85.


29 Ibid., ‘Poll shows 60% oppose idea of merger’, 17 June 1996.

30 Ibid.
• Singapore should retain its separate identity.
• Singapore should not go back to the mainland as a matter of pride, especially as it was now doing well economically
• Differences in lifestyle between the two sides
• Fears that Singapore’s reserves might have to merge with Malaysia’s
• Fear of being “second-class citizens controlled by the bigger state”

Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong referred to this poll in a speech to the students at the National University of Singapore on July 17, 1996. While he was reassured that the majority polled were against Singapore rejoining Malaysia, “nobody raised the basic difficulty: the different fundamental ideals of Singapore and Malaysia”. For Singapore, these fundamental ideals were “racial equality and meritocracy”.

The Deputy Prime Minister argued that one main reason why these “fundamental ideals” were not raised was because schools “spend far too little time” teaching “the key events surrounding our independence”. As such, “[t]here is a serious gap in the education of Singaporeans, especially about the circumstances surrounding the country’s merger with Malaysia and its subsequent separation”. In other words, the poll showed a “glaring ignorance” of “the circumstances surrounding [the] separation” of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965. He warned that if Singaporeans were not were of their past and history, “we will have no common frame of reference for us to bond together as one people, which is necessary for us to survive and

31 Ibid.
32 Lee Hsien Loong, ‘Challenges for the new generation’
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 *Straits Times*, ‘Serious gap in the education of Singaporeans’.
prosper”. It was important that this gap in knowledge was to be filled. Interestingly, Lee Hsien Loong used the term ‘national education’ for the teaching of the history of Singapore’s brief interlude in Malaysia and its subsequent independence.

It was therefore hardly surprising that when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong referred to national education in his National Day Rally speech the following month (August 1996), he linked it closely the learning about Singapore’s recent history: “One important part of education for citizenship is learning about Singapore – our history, our geography, the constraints we faced, how we overcame them, survived and prospered, what we must do to continue to survive. This is national education”. Thus, we have the definition of National Education by the Prime Minister. It was no wonder that the press regarded National Education as a serried of “national efforts to educate students on Singapore’s history”. Like his deputy prime minister, Goh warned of “serious consequences” to this “ignorance” of Singapore’s recent past. Citing Lee Hsien Loong’s speech at the NUS the previous month, Goh expressed concern that the circumstances surrounding Singapore’s independence were not “deeply felt” amongst the youth, nor was it a “vital part of their collective memory”. The fear was that if Singaporeans, especially the young fail to “appreciate how they have come to enjoy their present way of life, or realize how unique and precious it is”, the result would be that “Singapore will fail”.

37 Lee Hsien Loong, ‘Challenges for the new generation’
38 Goh Chok Tong, National Day Rally Speech, 18 August 1996. This still begs the question of why the term ‘National Education’ was used instead ‘civics education’ or ‘citizenship education’.
39 *Straits Times*, ‘History materials to be ready in 6 months’, 10 September 1996.
40 Goh Chok Tong, National Day Rally Speech, 18 August 1996.
41 Ibid.
Such a crisis of historical knowledge amongst the youth is not unique to Singapore. Crises in history teaching occurred in the United Kingdom and Canada in the 1960s, the US in the 1970s, and Australia in the 1980s. This was also not the first time that Singapore’s leaders emphasized the importance of history education for nation building. The difference this time round was the emphasis on how Singapore became independent. The Prime Minister cautioned that

We cannot afford to have a new generation grow up ignorant of the basic facts of how we became a nation, and the principles of meritocracy and multi-racism which underpin our entire society and political culture.

The history of our independence… should bind all our communities together… It is our shared past… We should understand why [the racial riots] took place so that we will never let them happen again.

The official rhetoric regarding the concern over the ignorance of Singapore’s recent past by the youth was that these people might take peace and prosperity for granted. An adequate historical knowledge was thus deemed essential so that young people would be committed to the state’s


45 See Chapters 4 and 5.

46 Goh Chok Tong, Address at the Teachers’ Day Rally, 1996.
ideals like meritocracy and multiracialism. Underlying the rhetoric was the crisis over the lack of historical knowledge over Singapore’s independence.47 This was the latest in a series of crises – like the crisis over “educational wastage (Chapter 3), the crisis over morality and culture (Chapter 4) and the crisis over national values (Chapter 5) – in the past decades since Singapore’s independence.

Launch of NE to schools

The chronology of the events leading to the official launch of NE in May 1997 demonstrated this crisis mentality on the part of the government. The remarks over re-merger by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in June 1996, and the results of the poll by the Straits Times a week later, were mentioned by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong the following month at his speech to NUS students where he expressed concern over the lack of knowledge of Singapore’s recent past. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong echoed the same disquiet at his annual National Day Rally Speech in mid August. Even before the Prime Minister’s National Day Rally speech, the Ministry of Education, alarmed at the lack of knowledge of Singapore’s recent history as suggested by the Straits Times poll and the Deputy Prime Minister, distributed a surprise quiz to over 2000 students in early August. By then, academics, MPs and other cabinet ministers had jumped on the bandwagon, calling for the teaching of Singapore’s recent past.48

The results of the MOE quiz confirmed the government’s fears. While most students were aware that Singapore used to be a British colony and the Japanese occupied Singapore during the Second World War, they fared poorly on the questions on Singapore’s interlude in

47 Whether this crisis was real, perceived or constructed is harder ascertain. It was, nonetheless, projected as a crisis.
48 This was widely reported in the Straits Times and Lianhe Zaobao (联合早报) from July to September of 1996.
Malaysia and its subsequent independence. In addition, few students were aware that there was a communist insurgency. Students were “generally ignorant about the state of Emergency from 1948 to 1960” as well as “the cause of the Hock Lee Bus riots”, both of which were due to the Communist threat in the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{49} Prime Minister Goh made known the findings of the MOE quiz at the Teacher’s Day Rally in September 1996. This was the same rally where he revealed that the MOE would be introducing NE to schools. The speed at which the episode unfolded showed a government that was reacting rather than responding to events, which further suggests this crisis mindset.

At this same Teacher’s Day Rally speech, the Prime Minister told the teachers that he was setting up a National Education Committee chaired by Mr. Lim Siong Guan, the Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office).\textsuperscript{50} This committee comprised representatives from the Ministries of Education and Defence, as well as other government department with the interest and resources to facilitate the national education effort in schools.\textsuperscript{51} That NE was a major undertaking by the government was underscored in the setting up of “13 project teams comprising officers from schools, tertiary institutions and MOE HQ and representatives from MITA and PA. These teams were tasked to develop strategies and measures for the implementation of the National Education programme (sic) in schools and tertiary

\textsuperscript{49} Goh Chok Tong, ‘Prepeare Our Children for the New Century: Teach Them Well’.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. Lim subsequently became Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education as well.
\textsuperscript{51} These include the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), the People’s Association (PA), and the Civil Service College. See MOE Press Release on the launch of NE.
institutions”.52 Thereafter, the National Education Committee wasted no time in setting up the infrastructure of NE.

By the end of 1996, the aims, outcomes and implementation strategies were in place. This could be evidenced from a letter by the Director of Schools to the Principals of all Secondary Schools, which explained the rationale, objectives and roll-out plans for NE.53 The letter informed principals that “a National Education Unit (NEU) has been set up in MOE HQ to provide schools with the necessary support” in the implementation of NE.54 At the same time, principals were also asked to set up a National Education Committee in their respective schools, of which they would be the chairpersons. This NE committee “will be responsible for formulating a programme (sic) of NE activities in the school, coordinating its implementation and appraising the programme (sic) at the end of the school year”.55 That the principals were to chair the NE committee of their schools showed the importance placed on NE by the MOE and the government. In addition, principals were to appoint an “NE coordinator” as well, to “liaise with the NEU in MOE HQ and assist the Principal on NE matters”. The stage was set for the official launch of NE by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in May 1997. In the meantime, a general election was held in early January 1997, which saw the PAP winning all but two of the Parliamentary seats.

At the launch of NE on May 17, 2007, which was telecast live to all school teachers, the Deputy Prime Minister made no attempt to separate NE from the history of Singapore:

52 MOE Press release on the launch of NE.
53 Letter by Director of Schools to Principals, Secondary and Full Schools, 10 December 1996.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
our young must know the Singapore Story - how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation. National Education is not an abstract sermon on general principles of nationhood. It is to do with a special story, our story. It is the story of Singapore, how we came to be one nation. We did not start off with this goal, or even as one people. Nobody imagined this would be the outcome.\(^{56}\)

The history of Singapore thus became christened as the *Singapore Story*, which was synonymous with NE. The Deputy Prime Minister also reiterated the crisis over the lack of historical knowledge by the youth in his emphasis on the importance of knowing the Singapore Story:

> Knowing this history is part of being a Singaporean. It is the back-drop which makes sense of our present. It shows what external dangers to watch out for, and where our domestic fault lines lie. It explains what we stand for and believe in, and why we think and act the way we do. It gives us confidence that even when the odds look daunting, with determination and effort we will prevail.\(^{57}\)

Once again, the aim for teaching Singapore’s history was for the lessons that history teaches that were relevant to the state’s nation-building efforts. The Deputy Prime Minister was at pains to explain that Singapore’s history, or the Singapore Story that was to be taught was based on objective facts:

> The Singapore Story is based on historical facts. We are not talking about an idealised legendary account or a founding myth, but of an accurate understanding of what happened in the past, and what this history means for us today. It is objective history, seen from a Singaporean standpoint.\(^{58}\)

It is clear from the above that the Deputy Prime Minister demonstrated a lack of historiographical understanding, as “historical facts” and “objective history” are contestable notions by historians.\(^{59}\) Moreover, even if we accept that historical truth and objectivity is

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56 Lee Hsien Loong, speech at launch of NE. Emphasis added.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

possible, the younger Lee’s claim that the Singapore Story is objective history, while with the same breath declaring a “Singaporean standpoint”, renders the “objectivity” to be suspect. Such a view of Singapore’s history found resonance amongst the PAP MPs as well. For instance, Mr Loh Meng See, MP for Kampong Glam expressed surprise over the differing perspective and opinions over the teaching and writing of Singapore History. He argued that “Singapore’s history will be written from the national perspective and it has to be analysed and interpreted as such”.

At the end of the day, the teaching of Singapore’s recent past was tied in to the government’s national building objective, as this was now regarded as a unifying tool:

By teaching the history of how we became one people, we will draw our races closer together. But our aim is not to expunge the differences between the ethnic groups. Each community contributes its own unique characteristics and strengths to our society. If Chinese Singaporeans lose their Chinese cultural heritage, or Malay Singaporeans discard their traditional customs and Islamic values, we become a much weaker society. We must create unity in diversity.

In the introduction of NE, the government could not disavow the existing history syllabus, which emphasized the learning of the ethnic roots of the three major races – Chinese, Malay and Indian. At the same time, NE’s focus on teaching Singapore’s recent past as a shared history by all Singaporeans was a tacit acknowledgement of the state that the encouragement to search and learn about one’s ethnic roots had gone a little too far.

In his address at the Opening of the Ninth Parliament, the President reiterated the emphasis on NE, saying that it was necessary to instill “a sense of history and identity” to

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60 The late Sir Elton was a key proponent of that. See E. R. Elton *The Practice of History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1967)

61 Parliamentary Debates, 2 June 1997, col. 81.

62 Lee Hsien Loong, speech at launch of NE.
Singaporeans, as well as to imbue in the post-independence generation “the same discipline, the same drive to achieve, the same indomitable will to overcome problems that the first generation had, qualities that have brought Singapore so far”. 63 In essence, the President merely repeated the rationale for the introduction of NE to schools that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister articulated earlier. Nonetheless, coming slightly more than a week from the official launch of NE, it once again demonstrated the importance the government placed on NE. Likewise, NE’s importance was underscored in the MOE’s addendum to the President’s Address:

Schools must focus more sharply on National Education to instil in our young a strong sense of shared identity and confidence in our future. We will teach every pupil the facts of how we became a nation, why our constraints and vulnerabilities make us different from other countries and why we must continue to work together and outperform others to succeed in future. We will also use the informal curriculum in schools to develop group spirit among pupils and commitment to community and nation. 64

During the debate on the President’s opening address, NE was one of the topics that were mentioned by MPs. As expected, the PAP MPs shared the government’s concern that “the young people of Singapore do not really know the history of Singapore and they take what they have for granted”. 65 One MP hailed “[t]he introduction of National Education in our schools [as] both timely and welcome. He further added that

The introduction of National Education in our schools is both timely and welcome. National Education will imbue in each successive generation an empathy with our history and our roots. It will give our children a sense of belonging, and bonding with each other.

63 President’s Address at Opening of Ninth Parliament, 26 May 1997, col. 18. Interestingly, the general election was held in early January 1997, but it took more than five months before the new Parliament was commenced.
64 MOE Addendum to Presidential Address at Opening of Ninth Parliament, 26 May 1997, col. 22.
65 ibid. col 194.
As they grow up, they will understand how events in the past continue to shape our actions in the present and to influence our outlook and strategies for the future. Other PAP MPs echoed the government’s hope that NE would imbue in students a sense of understanding and empathy to the *Singapore Story*, as well as to engender a sense of belonging to the country. MPs argued that knowing the *Singapore Story* and feeling rooted to the country, would ensure Singapore’s continued survival and success.

The PAP MPs were thus firmly behind the government on the importance of NE and the Singapore Story. This was further demonstrated in Dr Ong Chit Chung, an MP who was also a historian, in his endorsement of the government’s rationale on the introduction of NE:

> We must, through National Education, inculcate in our young a sense of history and understanding of our vulnerabilities and potentials, and an abiding love of our county. We must anchor ourselves in our historical roots, and be like a banyan tree, standing tall and strong as a nation.

An MP summed it up by saying that “National Education is to educate our people, for our students to know how our nation was built up”. And nation building was closely tied in to nurturing a sense of belonging to Singapore, which was the essence of NE, as pointed out by another Parliamentarian:

> I believe that cultivating the Singapore National Soul is the quintessence of our National Education. …

In implementing National Education, we must take note of the following:

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67 Ibid. col 169, and 4 June 1997, col. 298
68 Ibid. 3 June 1997, col 184. Dr Ong Chit Chung
69 ibid. col 173.
Firstly, let Singaporeans have a full understanding of the problems and challenges facing the nation…. We should educate the younger generation of Singaporeans to put the national problems and challenges first and their personal interests second….

Secondly… [w]hen Singaporeans realize that survival of the nation is closely related to their personal interests, then the Singapore National Soul will be strengthened…

Thirdly, we have to deepen and consolidate national education with the cultural strength of the various races (referring to the arts)\textsuperscript{70}

The importance of having a good government was essential to this a nation-building effort. As an MP put it, students needed to be taught in NE “that a successful nation, a stable society, a peaceful life for its citizens and a happy working environment cannot be separated from good government and good citizens”\textsuperscript{71}

Opposition MP Low Thia Khiang expressed the concern that the teaching of history was insufficient to engender a sense of national belonging and consciousness, and called for the government to also emphasize on the teaching of democratic rights and values. He argued that NE “should enable students to understand what kind of rights every Singapore citizen has”, and called for “the lessons [to] teach students to understand the importance of elections” and to encourage political participation\textsuperscript{72}

The Minister of Education dismissed Low’s request. He summed up NE as follows:

The basis for National Education is factual. We will proceed on the basis of fact, not on the basis of consensus on what might appear to be the right interpretation of events, but

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, col. 171, 172
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. 30 July 1997, col. 1392
\textsuperscript{72} ibid. 30 July 1997, col 1400.
we will try and proceed on the basis of fact, documented wherever possible. I think this is the most reasonable and best way to proceed with National Education in our schools.\(^7\)

By declaring that NE is based on fact, the Education Minister implied that NE was founded on learning of the Singapore Story. This ties in to the strategy for instilling “national instincts” amongst students, which starts with “develop[ing] an awareness of facts, circumstances and opportunities facing Singapore, so that they will be able to make decisions for their future with conviction and realism”.\(^4\)

**Implementation of National Education**

In the implementation of NE, all teachers were instructed to “infuse” the NE messages into the formal curriculum. The MOE identified history, civics and moral education, and social studies as some of the subjects that were best suited for the infusion of NE. Major revisions were made in the syllabuses of these subjects to incorporate the NE objectives, which took a few years to materialize. This suggests that NE was a hastily devised program in reaction to the events mentioned earlier. In the interim period, the syllabus for subjects such as social studies and history were trimmed, and the emphasis was placed on the teaching of Singapore’s post World War Two history to independence.\(^5\) We will discuss the impact of NE on the formal curriculum in the following chapter.

\(^7\) Ibid, 30 July 1997, col. 1409. The Education Minister also mentioned that that community activities and experiential type of activities will be included in the informal curriculum.

\(^4\) MOE Press release on the launch of NE.

While the formal curriculum was being revised, it was left to the informal curriculum to realise the initial implementation of the NE program. The informal curriculum was regarded as best suited to “develop the group spirit and emotional instincts of nationhood among pupils… Attitudes and values picked up through team ECAs (Extra Curricular Activities) and group activities, and the rituals of school life, will sink in deeper than anything learnt in the classroom”.\(^\text{76}\) It was also necessary to fill in the gaps in historical knowledge via the informal curriculum as well. The commemoration of designated key historical events was one of the NE activities aimed to achieve this purpose. Schools were required to observe the following occasions:

(a) Total Defence Day (15 Feb) --- marking the day in 1942 when Singapore fell to the Japanese. The commemoration will serve to remind that everyone has a part to play in the Total Defence of Singapore.  
(b) Racial Harmony Day (21 Jul) --- marking the day in 1964 when racial riots broke out in Singapore. The commemoration would signify that efforts at racial understanding and tolerance must not slacken.  
(c) National Day (9 Aug) --- a national theme will be given to schools each year to give focus to their celebration of Singapore's independence.\(^\text{77}\)

For instance, the commemoration of Racial Harmony Day on July 21\(^\text{st}\) every year aimed to remind students “that race and religion will always be potential fault-lines in Singapore society”. That day in 1964 saw the worst ever racial riots that took place in Singapore.\(^\text{78}\) These three key events points to three pivotal historical junctures in Singapore’s history – the Japanese Occupation, racial riots and merger and separation – that formed main narrative behind the Singapore Story.

\(^{76}\) Lee Hsien Loong, Speech on National Education.  
\(^{77}\) MOE Press release on launch of NE  
\(^{78}\) The last racial riots took place in 1969, a spillover from the May 13\(^\text{th}\) racial riots in Malaysia.
Another key event, “International Friendship Day”, was added later that year. September 21 was originally chosen for International Friendship Day “as it marks the day in 1965 when Singapore joined the United Nations as an independent, sovereign nation”. It “is a day dedicated to the understanding of Singapore's relations with neighbouring countries and beyond” and the aim is “to sensitise our children towards the geo-political realities inherent in Singapore, as well as nurture in our students the spirit of friendship and collaboration among different people”. The National Education Unit came up with key learning points to help schools in the commemoration of these four core events.

Apart from the MOE initiated NE activities, other avenues were employed to raise the consciousness of Singapore’s history amongst the young. For instance, books on Singapore’s history were published. The most prominent amongst these was the memoire of Lee Kuan Yew. While claiming that the memoirs were “not an official history”, titling his memoirs ‘The Singapore Story’ suggests that Lee’s version of history was the most authoritative one. Lee expressed similar concerns that Goh and the younger Lee raised over the lack of consciousness over Singapore’s recent past:


83 Ibid, p. 8
I was… troubled over the apparent over-confidence of a generation that had known only stability, growth and prosperity. I thought our people should understand how vulnerable Singapore was and is, the dangers that beset us, and how we nearly did not make it. Most of all I hope that they will know that honest and effective government, public order and personal security, economic and social progress did not come about as the natural course of events.84

Lee, the founding father of Singapore’s independence, summed up the government’s fear that Singaporeans, particularly the youths, would take Singapore’s prosperity for granted. This was set against the backdrop of sustained and high economic growth in the 1990s, with full employment. An academic aptly encapsulated the government’s position by stating that the most crucial “element which underlies the NE thrust is that key concern that has marked Singapore’s life since the traumatic year of Separation, 1965: how can we continue to survive economically”.85

The press and television gave extensive reports and media coverage on the issues surrounding National Education and Singapore’s history. From May 1997 right through to the end of 1998, the press published several recounts of Singapore’s interlude in Malaysia and the events surrounding its independence. In particular, the racial riots were highlighted.86 Lengthy excerpts of a book on Singapore’s separation from Malaysia were also reproduced in the Straits Times.87 The launch of NE sparked off a debate on Singapore’s history as well, the most prominent example being the exchanges of letters in the press between veteran opposition politician Dr. Lee Siew Choh and Mr Mohamad Maidin, Parliamentary Secretary for Education.

84 Ibid.
86 See Straits Times, ‘Malay MP was targeted in strife years’, 20 July 1998
The spark that caused the debate was Mr Maidin’s letter “Singapore history based on facts and documents”, which was written in response to letters arguing for historical controversy in the syllabus as well as a call for objectivity in history education. Maidin rehashed the government’s position that the Singapore story “is objective history, seen from a Singaporean point of view”, and went on to state that the reason why the 1962 referendum on Singapore’s merger with Malaysia “did not offer a yes/no vote because… no [political] party objected to merger in principle”. Dr Lee disputed that claim, calling the referendum “unfair and undemocratic” since voters were not given a choice to vote against merger. In reply, Maidin claimed that Dr Lee had forgotten his history, and rebutted Lee’s arguments by narrating the chronology of the events leading to the 1962 referendum. Maidin reiterated that there was no opposition to the merger between Singapore and Malaya in the Legislative Assembly, which agreed on three alternatives on merger for the voters to decide. Unconvinced, Dr Lee fired a final salvo, challenging Maidin’s points, and rehashing his allegation that the merger was undemocratic and unfair.

From these exchange of letters, Singaporeans were given an insight into the historical controversy over the referendum, as well as a ‘loser’s’ perspective on the history of that period. It also demonstrated that there was no one definitive Singapore story, but different and

89 Gopal Baratham, ‘Who will recount the objective truth’, *Straits Times*, 22 May 1987 and Donald Low, ‘Syllabus should have room for historical controversy, creativity’, *Straits Times*, 24 May 1987.
90 Maidin, ‘S’pore story based on facts and documents’
91 Lee Siew Choh, ‘Voters were misled and not given any real choice’, *Straits Times*, 3 June 1997.
sometimes competing stories. Nonetheless, the government’s position on NE and the Singapore story remained unchanged. Apart from the many programs and activities to instill the Singapore story amongst the young Singaporeans mentioned earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Lee announced during the launch of NE that “a National Education Exhibition will be held next year to help foster better understanding of Singapore’s past, present, and future”. ⁹⁴ While this exhibition was purported for adults, it was apparent that the target audience was the youth, of which a significant number were in schools.

National Education Exhibition: The Singapore Story

Running from July 7 to August 6, 1998, the National Education Exhibition (NEE) was arguably one of the most visible and prominent events to teach the young about the Singapore Story. At the official opening of the NEE, Prime Minister Goh underscored the importance of the youths as the target audience of the exhibition. ⁹⁵ He also went on to explain the rationale behind the NEE:

The exhibition arose out of the Government’s concern that many young Singaporeans are unaware of our history. Younger Singaporeans have not experienced first hand the tumultuous events of the past sixty years. They never knew the ravages of war and hardships of the Japanese Occupation. They were spared the poverty, the communist instigated unrest and the communal riots which their parents and grandparents lived through. They were born at a time when things got steadily better year after year, and most families did not have to worry about basic things like food, shelter and jobs. Therefore we worry whether they have been adequately prepared, so that if ever they again have to face formidable odds, they will hold together and defend the prosperous economy and harmonious society that their forefathers have built. ⁹⁶

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⁹⁶ Goh Chok Tong, “The Singapore Story”, Speech at the Official Opening of the National Education Exhibition on 7 July 1998 at Suntec City Exhibition and Convention Centre.
In short, the NEE aimed to retell the Singapore Story to young Singaporeans. The Prime Minister repeated the importance of NE and the Singapore story at his speech during the opening of the NEE:

The Singapore Story is our heritage of shared recollections of past defining events, a heritage that is vitally relevant to our present and future. We must know how today’s Singapore came about, what went before, and who we are, before we can build on what we have inherited, and make tomorrow’s Singapore better and stronger than today’s. A strong understanding of our roots and history will bond us together as a people. This bonding is crucial to our survival. Only a cohesive society can withstand life’s unexpected threats and challenges, and endure.  

And the purpose of telling of the Singapore Story was to instill an understanding and appreciation of Singapore’s constraints and challenges from the perspective of the state.

A $10-million multi-media display and presentation using “film, video, stage sets and live acting to tell the story of Singapore”, this exhibition attracted over 600,000 participants, of whom more than 200,000 were students. The MOE and the National Heritage Board even provided worksheets for these students. Lasting approximately half an hour, visitors to the NEE were transported “back in time, where they… experience[d] the sights, sounds and maybe even the smells of some of the dramatic moments of Singapore’s history”. They were seated “on comfortable cinema-like seats” and “driven through seven theatres built on a 6,000 square-metre oval carousel”:

97 Ibid. Emphasis added
98 *Straits Times*, ‘Expect no yawn at this history exhibition’, 20 April 1998.
Each theatre … showcase[d] one segment of Singapore’s history, from the time Sir Stamford Raffles landed on the shores here in 1819 to the present, marking milestones such as the British rule, the Japanese occupation, merger and separation from Malaysia, Independence and the development of Singapore.  

The storyline was “narrated as a conversation between a grandfather and his grand-daughter”.  

Besides the presentation, books and souvenirs were sold at the exhibition.

Responses to the NEE were generally positive. Parliamentarians, including the opposition MP who attended the NEE’s opening, business leaders and the public, were unanimous in commending the multi-media presentation for bringing history alive to audiences of the exhibition, and felt that it provided a good history lesson to the youths. An undergraduate responded that “The whole thing was very dramatic, entertaining and up-to-date” and expressed the importance of that, “especially if the organizers want to appeal to the younger crowd”. A seventeen year old student told the press of the lessons she learnt from the NEE: “Watching the footage of the racial riots has made me realize the importance of maintaining racial harmony. We should never take it for granted”. Another secondary one student added: “I have studied a bit about Singapore history in school, but I never knew that things were so bad and scary during that time. Looking at the pictures and film makes me realise how lucky I am”. From the responses of the students and the public as reported in the press, it appeared that the objectives of the NEE were achieved.

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 《联合早报》, ‘多媒体科技叫历史活灵活现’(Multimedia brings history to life), 8 July 1998.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
The NEE was not the first major national exhibited aimed at educating the public on Singapore’s history. In 1984, the government organized a National Exhibition as a “grand finale to Singapore’s 25 years of nation-building celebrations”. Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, at his speech at the official opening of the National Exhibition, expressed concern that “[n]ow 75 per cent of our people are under 40. They have not personally experienced the traumas of the past 25 years”. He recounted the “instability and uncertainty” of 1950s and 1960s, as “[o]ne political crisis after another engulfed Singapore”. Lee was therefore glad that the exhibition would remind Singaporeans of the nation’s constraints and vulnerabilities. He further exhorted Singaporeans to be perpetually vigilant. Singaporeans will be reminded of the vulnerable nature of our society, because the fundamentals on which our survival rests are slender and tight: a limited land area, no agriculture, large dependence on international trade, on foreign investments and on imported technology.

While admitting that “learn[ing] about a riot in pictures and words [was] not the same as being caught in a riot, Lee expressed confidence that the “pictures and words” displayed at the exhibition “will carry echoes of the hate and violence which made men inflict senseless devastation and death in a riot”. Held between November 16 and December 30, 1984, at a

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107 *Straits Times*, ‘National Exhibition opens on Friday, 10 November 1984. This was the last time that the year 1959 was publicity commemorated as the beginning of Singapore’s statehood. Subsequent celebrations focused on the year of independence, 1965.

108 Address by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of the National Exhibition on Thursday, 15 November 1984 at the World Trade Centre.

109 Ibid.

110 Address by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of the National Exhibition on Thursday, 15 November 1984 at the World Trade Centre.

111 Address by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of the National Exhibition on Thursday, 15 November 1984 at the World Trade Centre.
cost of $18 million, the National Exhibition attracted over 2 million visitors, of which around 280,000 were students.\textsuperscript{112}

Both the National Exhibition of 1984 and the NEE of 1998 had the same target audience—young Singaporeans, which included students. While the former exhibition was the first time Singapore’s recent history was put on display, other themes and aspects were highlighted as well. In contrast, the NEE was primarily about telling the Singapore Story, as capsulated in the subtitle “against all odds”. The seven segments, or themes of the Singapore Story as shown in the NEE – Colonial Period (1819-1945), Political Awakening (1945-1955), Communist Threat (1955-1961), Battle for Merger (1961-1963), Merger Years (1963-1965), From Survival to Progress (1965-present), Future is in our hands – underscore how Singapore survived and thrived against the obstacles and threats in its past. Particular emphasis was placed on the period following the Second World War to Singapore’s independence. The period was presented as a tumultuous one fraught with riots and strife. The Communists and Communalists were blamed for instigating the unrest. The story ends triumphantly with Singapore succeeding despite these “odds” under the leadership of the PAP Government, and exhorts the audience to continue playing their part in Singapore’s continued success.\textsuperscript{113} From a reluctance to talk about the recent past in the 1970s, to a coming to terms with history in the 1980s, the Singapore Story narrative as presented in the NEE demonstrated the Singapore’s government’s embrace of history for nation building after over 30 years of independence.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Straits Times}, ‘Free tours by CCs and other groups, 11 November 1984; ‘Longer national show’, 2 December 1984. The opposition claimed that the cost of the National Exhibition was excessive. See \textit{Straits Times}, ‘After all is said and seen’, 29 December 1984.

\textsuperscript{113} National Education Exhibition.
Other Core NE activities

Besides the commemoration of key historical events and the NEE, other “core” NE activities were introduced in the informal curriculum to enhance the teaching and learning of NE and the Singapore Story. These include “Learning Journeys”, “NE Quiz” and “NE Show”. The NE Show was a preview of the annual National Day Parade that all Primary 5 students would attend. The aim was “to evoke a sense of patriotism amongst the students and to impart to them the significance of National Day”. ¹¹⁴ The NE Quiz, introduced in 1998, was conducted in the format of a computer game for graduating students in primary and secondary schools. The quiz had questions pertaining to Singapore’s history. ¹¹⁵ The Learning Journeys in National Education program too facilitated the learning of the Singapore Story through the visits to the various sites and organizations, many of which are historic in nature. ¹¹⁶ The MOE thus hoped that the students’ appreciation and knowledge of Singapore’s recent past would be reinforced by these three activities.

Learning Journeys in the NE Program

The background to the Learning Journeys program can be traced to the MOE’s press release on the launch of NE, in which

[MOE] will mount a programme to enable students to visit key public installations and economic facilities. Such visits will help engender a sense of pride in Singapore and confidence about the future. Students will learn through such visits how Singapore has overcome its constraints by human will and ingenuity. Schools will have to recognise

¹¹⁶ For a list of the Learning Journey sites, see http://www.learningjourneys.edu.sg
these visits as an integral part of education during term time, so that visits are spread out throughout the year.

The speech by Deputy Prime Minster Lee Hsien Loong (now Prime Minster) on the launch of NE in May 1997 reiterated the rationale for the future Learning Journeys program.

Schools will arrange regular visits to national institutions and economic facilities, such as Parliament, SAFTI, water treatment works, the port, or the stock exchange. These visits will help to build pride and confidence among our students, and show them how Singapore has overcome our constraints through sheer will and ingenuity.117

The Learning Journeys was launched on 28 February 1998 by the Minister for Education. In his speech, the Minister explains that the "Learning Journeys [concept] is to emphasize that every trip out of the school is an important learning experience, essential and integral to the educational process and not a one-off event. A learning journey, well conceived and carefully planned, can maximise the learning experience for our children."118 Learning Journeys (LJ) is thus a term coined by the Singapore Ministry of Education to refer to all trips out of schools undertaken by teachers and students to extend and enrich the educational experience. This is done through visits public and private institutions and organizations ranging from the museums, the airport, parliament and the stock exchange, “to better understand how Singapore has overcome her constraints to achieve world-class standing, and to take pride in her achievements”.119

As stated by the Minister at the LJ launch,

117 Lee Hsien Loong, Speech on National Education.
118 Teo Chee Hean, ‘Speech at the Launch of “Learning Journeys” at St. Andrew’s Junior College on 28 February 1998.
The main objective of these Learning Journeys is for our children to understand what makes Singapore tick, to understand why we are where we are today. They illustrate our vision and planning and reflect our society's character. Our children must learn about them, understand their significance, and think about the part that they themselves can play to ensure that in our journey into the future Singapore continues to stay strong as a nation and to make progress.\textsuperscript{120}

The objectives of LJ dovetailed with the aims of the NEE in that both desired to inculcate in students an understanding of Singapore’s constraints and vulnerabilities. NEE could be considered as an LJ activity, while LJ continued to reinforce the ‘lessons’ of NEE.

The LJ program started with 20 public and private institutions, which grew to about 50 today. Currently, the LJ sites create their own programs, decide on their content and frequency of offer, and the level they are suitable for. The LJ program is further guided by four criteria: ‘Instilling Pride in Singapore’s Achievements’, ‘Understanding Singapore: Its Constraints and Challenges’, ‘Building Confidence in our Future’, ‘Singapore is Our Home’. The Ministry of Education is careful not to prescribe the sites or institutions that schools should visit. Schools are given the autonomy to visit any organisations or places outside the recommended sites, provided they fulfil at least 2 of out the 4 criteria. And the LJ policy states that it is mandatory for students from primary 4 to secondary 4 (Grades 4 to 10) to go on at least one LJ trip per year.

The LJ programme was conceived as an extension to the existing field trips and site visits conducted mostly history and geography as a complement to the formal curriculum. It also builds upon the National Heritage Tours (NHTs), introduced in 1996, which centre around the social studies, history and geography curriculums. For the elementary grades, the focus is on the social and cultural aspects of Singapore’s heritage. The tours for the lower secondary students

\textsuperscript{120} Teo Chee Hean, ‘Speech at the Launch of LJs’
focus on Singapore’s historical and political heritage while those for the upper secondary pupils cover the economic, architectural and conservation aspects.

The objectives of the NHTs were threefold. First, it aimed to inculcate in students an “understand[ing] and appreciate[ion] … [of Singapore’s] rich cultural and historical heritage”, and to “foster a sense of pride in the rich diversity of [that] heritage”. Finally, the NHT endeavoured to imbue in students “a common bond which will hold [Singapore] together as a people and as a nation”.121 The sites for NHTs are mainly museums and war memorial sites. It is only in the upper secondary level that non-history sites were included. Students are required to go on at least 3 National Heritage Tours throughout their formal schooling.

With the launch of the LJ programme, schools were told that by bringing students to NHTs, they would have fulfilled the requirement of 1 LJ visit a year for each grade level. However, some teachers and schools are still unable to tell the difference between LJ and NHTs, considering them to be the same program.122 Reading the press release for the launch of the LJ programme, as well as the minister’s speech, one finds a lack of mention of NHTs.123 This suggests that the idea of subsuming NHTs into the LJ policy of 1 trip per year is a retroactive one, which accounts for the confusion between LJs and NHTs by teachers and schools.

121 Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, ‘National Heritage Tours: Introduction (http://sam12.moe.gov.sg/nht/introduction.htm). Students were required to participate in “at least three heritage tours – one in their primary school and two in their secondary school”.

122 When I was the staff officer coordinating the LJ program at the MOE HQ, I received numerous telephone calls and emails from schools enquiring about LJs, when in actual fact, they were asking about the NHTs. Each time, I had to tell them that another department of the Ministry of Education was in charge of the NHTs!

Nonetheless, both the LJ and NHTs purport to enhance the learning experience of the students. This brings to mind John Dewey’s belief that “education … must be based upon experience”\textsuperscript{124}, which he contrasts with the traditional didactic nature of classroom instruction. The progressive education movement, which grew out of Dewey’s educational ideas, adopted this strand of education as experience. Field trips, visits to museums, and outdoor education began to be seen to be as important as education in the classroom itself. History, geography and social studies use field trips as a means to engage the students’ experiences and consciousness. Through visits to commemorative sites and museums for instance, it is hoped that students would learn a sense of historical empathy. To this end, a plethora of guides to field trips and site visits have been published.

Experience in education is thus a means to an end. To Dewey, the main aim is for education to result in the practice of democracy as a way of life. While this has not been fully realised in the West, the espoused objective of citizenship education curriculum in Canada and the United States for instance, has been education for democracy. This is not the case for Singapore’s NE program, and this can be seen in the objectives of the LJ.

The aims of the LJ, understanding what makes Singapore “tick”, why Singapore is what it is today, corresponds to the objectives of NE, which is to foster a sense of national identity and social cohesion amongst Singaporeans by understanding and appreciating how Singapore overcame its challenges and odds to become what it is today. This relates to the NE messages “No one owes us a living” and “Singapore is our homeland”. The state wanted to ensure that young Singaporeans would not take Singapore’s economic success and prosperity for granted.

And the motivation for Singapore’s economic and educational success since 1965 is the Singapore government’s perception of the island-state’s innate sense of vulnerability. Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, sums it up aptly in a speech where he commented that “a consciousness of innate vulnerability has promoted a culture of competitiveness through which Singapore has excelled”.125 That the LJ and NE programs are driven by this sense of vulnerability is seen in the fact that words like “constraints”, “challenges” and “survival” appear often in the NE and LJ objectives.

In his book Singapore’s Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability, the late Professor Michael Leifer stated that “[t]he government of Singapore … has never taken the island-state’s sovereign status for granted; a supposition which has been registered in a practice of foreign policy predicated on countering an innate vulnerability”.126 What then are the perceived vulnerabilities? Tim Huxley describes them as Singapore’s “small size, lack of natural resources, ethnic diversity and location between larger neighbours”.127

Ever since 1965, the Singapore’s political leaders have stressed these vulnerabilities in the public discourse, which explains the way the Singapore government conducts its foreign and domestic affairs. And because of this deep sense of vulnerability, the state regards “instability … with great concern and misgiving”, which “explains … the no-nonsense code of conduct that is expected of its own populace and the Republic’s vocal stand on issues involving violations of

territorial … sovereignty, or when … the delicate political stability within the country” was seen to be compromised or undermined by certain “events or activities”. 128

Being a small island-city republic of about 684 square kilometres, Singapore is seen to possess no territorial strategic depth. There are no natural defences like mountains in the case of Switzerland to deter potential aggressors. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s for instance served to highlight the government’s concern and worry over Singapore’s inherent insecure geopolitical situation. Moreover, history does not favour the existence of city-states. Over time, city-states become subsumed into larger political entities. Such was the case of Venice and Florence.

The lack of natural resources meant that trade has been Singapore’s economic lifeblood since the days of British colonization. Despite successful industrialization, Singapore’s annual international trade is three times its GDP, and its port is one of the busiest in the world. Besides trade, Singapore is also highly dependent on foreign direct investment, accentuating its economic vulnerability. Moreover, Singapore depends on Malaysia for more than half of its freshwater supply and virtually all its food is imported from outside. Thus, any serious disruption of Singapore’s physical links to the outside world was seen not only as a threat to its economic wellbeing, but also on its existence as a sovereign state.

Conclusion

The National Education program represented the latest initiative in the People’s Action Party (PAP) state’s “long-standing concern … to use the school system as an instrument of

political socialisation” and nation building. Besides its expressed nation building goal, NE also aimed “to provide students with the skills required in an industrializing and modern Singapore”. Since the mid 1980s, Singapore experienced a prolonged economic boom which lasted till the Asian financial crisis of 1997/1998. When the government launched National Education (NE) in May 1997, it was concerned that “the younger generation of Singaporeans, having grown up in such a benign environment, had little knowledge or appreciation of how Singapore overcame the odds”. NE thus sought to equip “younger Singaporeans of the very necessary learning experiences they would need to prepare them for the vicissitudes of life”.

Through the NE program, the state aimed to drive home the “lesson” that Singapore’s economic success rests on its ability to survive as a nation-state, and having external and internal security. This was the underlying message behind the Singapore Story, which was emphasized in a big way at the National Education Exhibition and reinforced through the other NE activities. Singapore’s post Second World War history was presented as a triumph over several crises. The circumstances around the launch of NE were also presented as a crisis of the lack of historical knowledge amongst the young Singaporeans. Citizenship as conceived in the NE program was thus that of status and identity.

132 Ibid.
Hence, the NE program was an effort by the Singapore government to drive home this message of Singapore’s innate vulnerabilities to school students. The experience of riots and strikes in the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the 1964 racial riots underscored the obsession with stability and the need for survival by the Singapore political leaders. Singapore’s phenomenal economic success was thus driven by the need to stay ahead in order to survive and prosper as a nation. For Singapore, the focus on citizenship education was, and still is less on democratic ideals and values and more on “good governance” and nation building.\(^{134}\)

However, the government recognized that for NE to succeed, it had to be “not just intellectual comprehension or accumulation of facts, but a personal commitment to Singapore, and an emotional bonding and identification with their fellow Singaporeans”.\(^{135}\) This was echoed by the Education Minister during his speech at the opening ceremony of the annual Pre-University seminar in 1997, where he reminded students that “what is most important is what we… must feel for Singapore … to feel that sense of pride when Singapore does well, to feel the ache when a fellow Singaporean suffers misfortune, to lend a helping hand…”\(^{136}\)

In order for NE to go beyond factual knowledge and reach the heart, providing opportunities for student participation through community service was deemed to be worthwhile. This was earlier echoed by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during his speech at the launch of NE:

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\(^{135}\) Lee Hsien Loong, Speech at launch of NE.

\(^{136}\) Speech by Minister for Education, RADM (NS) Teo Chee Hean at the opening ceremony of the 1997 Pre-University seminar, "Singapore as best home: from scenarios to strategies" on 3 June 1997 at NUS.
Community service will strengthen social cohesion and civic responsibility among our young. At the lower primary level, we will encourage pupils to do community service within their own school - taking care of the school grounds, keeping common areas clean. For the upper primary and secondary levels, a school may adopt an orphanage or old folks' home, or take on long-term community projects like keeping a park or a residents' corner clean.\footnote{Lee Hsien Loong, Speech at launch of NE.}

This provided the impetus for the introduction of the Community Involvement Program (CIP), a form of active citizenship participation.\footnote{Christine Han argues that the Singapore government’s notion of active citizenship is mainly one that promotes volunteerism, and not political participation. As such, it is a passive form of ‘active citizenship’. See Christine Han, ‘National Education and 'Active Citizenship': Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore’, \textit{Asia Pacific Journal of Education}, vol. 20, no. 1 (2000), pp. 63-72.} Nevertheless, the relatively low key launch of the CIP (it was officially launched by the Director-General of Education) vis-à-vis the LJ launch for instance, signals the lower priority that the MOE initially placed on this program.

Nonetheless, except for community service, the other formal and informal curriculum initiatives for the implementation of NE focused more on instilling the facts of the Singapore story. There was also an inconspicuous absence of public and student participation in the formulation of the NE program in the first place. The conceptualization of the NE program was a top-down one, from the office of the Prime Minister. The events surrounding the launch of NE to schools seem to suggest that it was more of a knee-jerk reaction to a “crisis” of supposed historical amnesia amongst young Singaporeans, rather than a reasoned and thought out strategy. Despite that, the NE program could be said to achieve its objectives in its initial years. It remained to be seen on how the aims of NE would be realized in the revised school curriculum. And would the aims of NE remain relevant in the ensuing years following its implementation?
Chapter 7
The Crisis of National Security and Social Cohesion: National Education Institutionalized in Curriculum

This chapter examines the implementation of National Education (NE) in the formal curriculum, with the Singapore Story narrative as the starting point. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the MOE regarded history, civics and moral education, and social studies as some of the subjects that were best suited for the infusion of NE in the formal curriculum. Other than incorporating the NE objectives, the revised curriculum had to include the aims of the Thinking Schools Learning Nation vision (which included critical and creative thinking, the IT Masterplan and also NE) as well. This accounted for the trimming of the syllabuses for all school subjects in the meantime until the new curriculum was ready. What did the revised syllabus look like, and how was NE and TSLN incorporated? I argue that there exists a dissonance between NE and TSLN, as the latter sough to promote critical thinking while the former’s national identity aim privileged conformity over dissent. Any efforts to resolve this dilemma was put on hold due to fortuitous events (from the perspective of the state) of September 11 and the global war on terror.

By the late 1990s, Singapore had been experiencing dramatic economic change for over four decades, and the speed of transitions was increasing dramatically in the last decade in particular. Thus, social and cultural institutions needed to be adjusted and adapted accordingly. In light of changed economic milieu by the turn of the century by the onslaught of globalization and the resultant knowledge driven economy – with innovation and creativity being the buzz
words of this ‘new economy’ – the government felt the need to restructure both the economy as well as the education system in order to remain economically competitive. Major educational reforms were initiated toward the late 1990s, seeking to replace what was referred as an “efficiency driven education” with an “ability driven” one. The emphasis of the ability driven education was on student-centred learning and outcomes, such as the fostering of problem-solving skills, innovation and creativity. One such reform was the The Masterplan for Information Technology, or IT Masterplan, which aimed to use IT “to encourage creative thinking and lifelong learning”. During the launch of the IT Masterplan, the Education Minister called on schools and students to “learn to think beyond the obvious, to think creatively, to search for new knowledge, to come up with new ideas”.

As Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed it during his keynote speech at the Seventh International Conference on Thinking on 2 June 1997, the use of IT was “to develop communication skills and habits of independent learning”, thereby fostering creative thinking and lifelong learning. Prime Minister Goh launched the TSLN vision during his keynote speech,

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1. The government convened a Economic Review Committee (ERC) in 2001, chaired by the then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (the current Prime Minister) to comprehensively review the economic policies and propose strategies to further promote the economic growth and development of Singapore. Among the key recommendations in ERC’s final report was the promotion of creativity and entrepreneurship. See Economic Review Committee, *New Challenges, Fresh Goals: Towards a Dynamic Global City* (Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2003).

2. The efficiency driven education referred to the educational reforms as a result of the Goh Report of 1979, which emphasized on efficiency in educational outcomes.

3. See MOE’s Addendum to the President’s Address, in Parliamentary Debates, 4 October 1999, col. 24.

4. Teo Chee Hean, Speech by Minister for Education at the launch of the Masterplan for IT in Education on 28 April 1997.

5. Goh Chok Tong, ‘Shaping Our Future: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’

6. Ibid.
and the IT masterplan played a major role in this vision. In essence, TSLN aimed to “create a critical and creative thinking culture in schools”.\(^7\) In his speech, the Prime Minister also called on schools to “better develop the creative thinking skills and learning skills required for the future … bring about a spirit of innovation, of learning by doing, of everyone … all the time asking how he can do his job better”.\(^8\) The implementation the TSLN vision would require a fundamental review in the educational system, “through such means as changes in curricula, examinations and assessment systems, teacher education programmes”.\(^9\) NE, together with the IT Masterplan were subsumed under the armbit of TSLN as well, with the Prime Minister giving the reassurance that MOE “will strengthen National Education, through formal lessons as well as experiences outside the classroom, so as to develop stronger bonds between pupils and a desire to contribute to something larger than themselves”.\(^10\)

NE took on an increased importance and relevance with the September 11 attacks, the arrest of the JI extremists, and terrorist threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists. This chapter thus makes the case of a crisis of national security and social cohesion as the framework to understand the trajectory of NE. The state regarded the maintenance of racial harmony and social cohesion, and promoting inter-ethnic understanding and mixing, as its major political socialization aims in NE. By doing so, the state hopes that NE would provide the social and psychological “bulwark” against the onslaught of dangerous and radical ideas (read as political Islam). This is because any alternative ideology, especially political Islam, would be detrimental


\(^{8}\) Goh Chok Tong, ‘Shaping Our Future: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation.

\(^{9}\) Ibid.

\(^{10}\) Ibid.
to the continued economic growth of development, and hence a threat to the legitimacy of the Singapore developmental state. The Singapore state, with its security and surveillance apparatus, thus assumed greater control to combat this threat to national safety and security. NE became inscribed within the security and social cohesion rhetoric that assumed increasing importance in the post September 11th world, and it provided the ideological support (in socialising the students) for the further curtailing of already limited rights of the citizens ostensibly in return for greater public security.

**NE outcomes and the Desired Outcomes of Education**

In revising the syllabuses, the curriculum planners were guided by ‘NE outcomes at key levels’ as well as the ‘Desired Outcomes of Education’. The NE outcomes, in the form of statements outlining “key beliefs and feelings”, formed the broad strategy in the implementation of NE. The broad aim for the NE outcomes was that “NE would address both knowledge and feelings about Singapore”. To that end, “distinct strategies” were formulated that “reflect[ed] the intellectual and emotional maturity of the student. They were summed up in three ‘taglines’: “Love Singapore (Primary level); Know Singapore (Secondary level); Lead Singapore (Pre-U level)”.

For the primary level, the NE outcomes (“love Singapore”) included statements such as “I belong to my family, my class and my school”, “Singapore is my home. I am happy here”, “There are many races in Singapore. We are all friends”, “I want to do my best for my family

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11 MOE Press Release on the launch of NE (1997). Emphasis added. The NE outcomes for primary level was subdivided into another two levels – Primaries 3 and 6. This was the same for the NE outcomes for secondary levels, which delineated the intermediate outcomes for secondary 2 and 4.
and school” and “I am proud of Singapore’s achievements and that we have done well despite “the odds”.  

While the NE outcomes for the primary level were affective ones, the outcomes for secondary level emphasized on knowing Singapore, as statements such as these:

- I know the key events and personalities in Singapore’s history. I have learnt valuable lessons from them. We must strive to preserve what we have fought for.
- Singapore must live with constraints. But we have succeeded in spite of them and I believe that we will continue to do so if we remain united and work hard.
- I know that racial and religious harmony cannot be taken for granted and requires constant vigilance to preserve. Everyone must be sensitive to, appreciate and respect the differences between our major races and religions. We want every community to succeed in its efforts to move up and contribute to Singapore’s prosperity.
- I understand Singapore’s vulnerabilities and constraints and regard them as challenges. We can overcome them by ensuring stable and effective government and working together towards a common purpose.  

These NE outcomes clearly reflect the NE messages. The assumption behind the NE outcomes for secondary level was that students would have “under[stood] the duties and responsibilities of membership to the larger community” and would “be mature enough to understand the fault-lines of race and religion and to learn from past episodes of racial conflict”. Students at the end of their four or five years of secondary education should have internalized the NE messages “and have a sense of emotional identification with Singapore”, thereby having “developed an ability to look at issues from a collective perspective”. 

13 Ibid., pp. 18, 19.
14 See Chapter 6, p. 165-166 for the NE messages.
15 Ibid., p. 18
16 Ibid.
The students at the Junior College (JC) level were deemed “idealistic and critical… [having] the intellect to understand the consequences of failure”. The two main NE outcomes at this level drew “on the instincts and emotions… developed in the earlier stages”. As JC education was deemed the epitome of K-12 schooling in Singapore, as its students were regarded as potential leaders, “the student should regard it as his duty to repay society and to improve society and make Singapore even better”. The second major outcome was that the student “must have confidence in Singapore’s future”. It is interesting to note that it was only at the JC level that there was a mention of democracy (“I believe in democracy and understand that structures of democracy vary across countries”). Nonetheless, democracy was regarded as procedural rather than a way of life. In other words, it was the form and structure of democracy, rather than the spirit and substance of democracy that was emphasized.

With regards to the NE outcomes for post-secondary levels, they were “an extension of that taken at the secondary level, with an emphasis on values and attitudes of good citizenship and an understanding of how Singapore’s success is necessary for them to make a good living”. The NE strategy for university students went a step further in emphasizing the “geopolitics of Singapore’s existence” as well as “developing an instinctive commitment to

17 Ibid., p 19.
18 General schooling in Singapore is 10 years. After which, school leavers go to either the Institute of Technical Education, the Polytechnic or the JC. The JC’s main purpose was to prepare students for entry to University; hence it was also referred to as Pre-University.
19 NE Outcomes at key levels, p. 19.
20 Ibid.
21 MOE Press Release on launch of NE.
serving the community and society”. It was clear that the NE outcomes promoted communitarian values, emphasizing the collective over the individual. This was the case for the Desired Outcomes of Education as well.

Introduced in 1998, the Desired Outcomes of Education (DOE) spelt out the twin roles of education – to develop the individual and to educate the citizen. The former encompasses the domains of moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetics – “nurturing the whole child”. The latter demonstrates the importance of citizenship education, as stated in the DOE document, where schools were exhorted to teach the students “to identify Singapore as our home; a home to live in, strive to improve, and defend”. In other words, the importance of NE is highlighted in the DOE. More specifically, the DOE outlines the following outcomes to be attained at the end of post-secondary or tertiary education:

- be morally upright, be culturally rooted yet understanding and respecting differences, be responsible to family, community and country
- believe in our principles of multi-racialism and meritocracy, appreciate the national constraints but see the opportunities
- be constituents of a gracious society
- be willing to strive, take pride in work, value working with others
- be able to think, reason and deal confidently with the future, have courage and conviction in facing adversity
- be able to seek, process and apply knowledge
- be innovative - have a spirit of continual improvement, a lifelong habit of learning and an enterprising spirit in undertakings
- Think global, but be rooted to Singapore

22 Ibid.
24 Ibid. Notice the similarity of this quote with the NE objectives and messages.
25 Ibid.
The individual was regarded as an integral part of the family, community and country that s/he belonged to, deriving his/her existence from the group.

Intermediate outcomes were also spelt out at primary, secondary and Junior College levels. “Each level will build upon what has been done before [and] will also lay the foundation for what will continue to be built at the next level”.26 The summary of the NE outcomes, “love Singapore”, “know Singapore” and “lead Singapore”,27 were found in these intermediate outcomes.

**Implementation of NE in formal curriculum**

The school subjects deemed to be most suitable for the teaching of NE included Civics and Moral Education, Social Studies and History. In the secondary level, the history syllabus was revamped in the light of the TSLN and NE focus. To signal this change, the title of the textbook on Singapore history for lower Secondary was changed to *Understanding Our Past*. The syllabus was unapologetic about inculcating the NE messages as one of its aims.28 Thinking skills and IT also featured prominently in the syllabus aims. The history of China, India and Southeast Asia continued to be taught in Secondary one, with the syllabus revised to incorporate TSLN and NE.29 With regards to Social Studies for the Normal Technical, the existing syllabus and textbooks that were introduced in the 1990s were retained, with some topics of the pre-World

26 Ibid.
29 Instead of the previous arrangement of having one standardized textbook, schools had four textbooks to choose from.
World Two history of Singapore “either reduced or removed”. This was ostensibly to allow TSLN and NE initiatives to be included.

At the Upper Secondary level, a new Combined Humanities subject was offered as a compulsory subject in Upper Secondary level from 2001. Social studies, which revolved around the six messages of NE, form the compulsory component in this new subject. History was one of the electives in Combined Humanities. At the same time, History remained as a separate subject from Combined Humanities. But students opting for the History elective in Combined Humanities were prohibited from taking History as a separate subject. The History syllabuses for Upper Secondary and Junior College underwent a significant revamp in order to incorporate the focus on NE. This was especially so in the revised Upper Secondary History Syllabus. The paper on Southeast Asian history was abolished, and the “History of Malaya” was renamed “History of Southeast Asia with emphasis on Malaysia and Singapore, c. 1870-1971”. Like the Lower Secondary History of Singapore, the focus was on the decolonization of Malaysia and Singapore. Southeast Asian history was taught in a non-examinable unit on ‘Overview of Colonial Rule’ in order “to provide the backdrop for the in-depth study of Malaysia and Singapore”. Likewise, decolonization and nationalism featured prominently in the revised A

32 Ibid, p. 5.
33 Ibid.
level history, with Singapore’s political development between 1945 and 1965 as key component.\textsuperscript{34}

With regards to Civics and Moral Education, while the syllabus for primary and secondary CME were revised to take into account of NE and TSLN, the changes were minimal. Primary social studies, on the other hand, underwent an overhaul. Having outlined briefly the curricular changes in Social Studies, History and CME, I shall now discuss them in greater detail.

**Civics and Moral Education (Primary)**

Taking into cognizance the new initiatives of DOE, TSLN and NE, the Primary Civics and Moral Education Syllabus was revised in 1999 for implementation in 2000. The twin emphasis of “development of …moral character” and “fostering …love and commitment to [Singapore]” was retained in the revised syllabus.\textsuperscript{35} More specifically,

The Civics and Moral Education (Primary) programme [sought] to build in the children the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to adequately handle competing and conflicting demands while holding firmly to their moral integrity, and fulfilling their roles as responsible citizens.\textsuperscript{36}

The stated aim of CME was “to nurture a whole and balanced person, with a strong sense of moral values, good interpersonal relationships, one who will contribute to the well-being of


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
society and the nation, and eventually to the world at large”. 37 The inculcation of responsible citizenship and nation building remained important foci of the CME syllabus, and these were in line with the purpose of NE to “foster and strengthen a strong Singaporean identity among the youth”. 38

As in the previous CME syllabus, the objectives were grouped into the three domains of knowledge, skills and attitudes. There was clear alignment of some of the knowledge and attitudinal objectives to NE. For instance, the knowledge objectives of “know some of the customs, traditions and beliefs of the different races in Singapore” and “be aware of the ideals of the nation and identify behaviour befitting a responsible citizen” relates to the NE messages of racial and religious harmony and on inculcating a sense of belonging to Singapore. The attitudinal objectives of the revised primary CME syllabus had an even closer alignment to NE, where students were exhorted to:

- have respect for people from different racial groups and their cultures
- show civic consciousness and an awareness of their behaviour as responsible citizens
- demonstrate a willingness to serve the community and society
- show a sense of belonging to and love for Singapore as their homeland 39

Besides the objectives, the themes of the revised syllabus were further evidence of the infusion of NE. Two of the five themes, “being part of society” and “national pride and loyalty”, demonstrated the nation-building goals of the syllabus. 40 While the previous CME syllabus was

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40 The other three themes were “character building”, “bonding with family” and “sense of belonging to school”.
centred on Asian Values, the revised syllabus was predicated on NE and nation building. This was further evidenced in the explicit mention of the NE messages that were infused throughout the instructional package. For instance, the passage on ‘We Respect Our Flag’ reflected the NE message ‘Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong’. 41 Another infusion of NE messages that was explicitly spelt out in the teacher’s handbook was the passage on defending Singapore. 42

Nonetheless, like the previous primary CME syllabus, the revised syllabus revolved round the five relationships of self, family, school, society and nation, and it continued to be taught in the mother tongue. The changed emphasis in the primary CME syllabus saw the scrapping of the Good Citizen instructional packages that had been used, albeit in different editions, for close to twenty years. In its place, the instructional package was given the same name as the syllabus – Civics and Moral Education. Like the previous Good Citizen program, the new CME package had the form of materials (textbooks, activity books and teacher’s handbooks). The textbooks retained the story telling format of Good Citizen, and continued the spiral approach of emphasizing and rehashing of similar topics such as flag-raising throughout the syllabus. 43

As stated in previous chapters, the primary CME syllabus put more emphasis on affective and attitudinal aspects of civics and citizenship education teaching. It is therefore necessary to

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43 See Chapter 5. See also for instance CPDD, Primary CME 1A, Chapter 5; CPDD, Primary CME 2A, Chapter 3; Primary CME 4B, Chapter 6.
also examine social studies syllabus in order to get a fuller picture of the teaching of civic and citizenship values for the primary school pupils.

Revised Primary Social Studies

The social studies syllabus curriculum in primary school was radically revised in light of NE and TSLN. One obvious indication of this change was the teaching of social studies starting from primary 1 – a departure from the previous social studies syllabus which started from primary 4. The introduction to the revised social studies syllabus states the important place the subject had “in the primary school curriculum”: The general aim of Primary Social Studies was “to enable pupils to have a better understanding of their social world in the 21st century, [which] will help them to participate effectively in the society and environment in which they live”.

The alignment to the goals of NE was spelt out at the onset with the claim that the syllabus “lends itself to inculcating in the pupils from a very early age a sense of belonging to the community and country; and cultivating the right instincts for reinforcing social cohesion”. As in the previous syllabus, the specific objectives were broken down into the knowledge, attitudes and values domains. The knowledge objectives such as “understand and learn lessons from social issues, challenges and constraints facing Singapore”, and “have some knowledge of our neighbouring countries and Singapore’s link with other countries in the world” were unequivocally synonymous with NE aims. The attitudes and values aims were largely in line

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
with NE as well. This was especially so for the objectives like “respect the customs and traditions of the various communities in Singapore”, “acquire national instincts for survival and confidence in the future” and “develop a sense of awareness and concern for Singapore and its people”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 3.} Not surprisingly, critical thinking was reflected in the Skills Objectives.

The sequencing of the topics in the syllabus “[was] based on an expanding environment approach…. [which] allows pupils to first look at topics that are familiar and gradually proceed to topics that are less familiar”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.} Taking the school as the starting point, the syllabus went on “to cover the larger social spheres of the neighbourhood, the society, and the country, and ends… with the study of the neighbouring countries and the rest of the world”.\footnote{Ibid.} This was a departure from the previous primary social studies syllabus, which only focused on school and country.\footnote{See Chapter 5.}

The following were the topics covered in the syllabus:

- **Primary 1**  UNIT 1  Our School
- **Primary 2**  UNIT 2  Our Neighbourhood
- **Primary 3**  UNIT 3  Our Society: The Making Of A Multi-Racial Population
- **Primary 4**  UNIT 4  Our Country: The Physical Environment
  - UNIT 5  Our Country : Life Under Foreign Rule
- **Primary 5**  UNIT 6  Our Country : Road To Independence
  - UNIT 7  Our Country: Building Our Nation
- **Primary 6**  UNIT 8  Our Country: Change and Progress
Like CME, Social Studies remained a non-examination subject.

History formed an integral component in the new social studies syllabus, just like the previous one. Christine Han astutely pointed out that the titles for upper primary Social Studies, *The Dark Years*[^52], *Birth of a nation*[^54] and *Our progress as a nation*[^55], were “clearly intended to reinforce the National Education… messages that come across clearly in the text”. The upshot of this, she argues, is that “children are being socialized into accepting a view of history regarded by the political leaders as being necessary for the country’s survival, electoral practices that are distinctive to Singapore, as well as a rather passive conception of citizenship”[^56]. By critiquing the social studies syllabus, the NE initiative and objectives were likewise being put into question.

**Civics and Moral Education (Secondary)**

The introduction of the new initiatives of TSLN, DOE and NE, while necessitating a revision in the Secondary Civics and Moral Education curriculum, did not cause a major revamp in the syllabus like the early 1990s. Nonetheless, the rationale behind the formulation of the revised Secondary CME syllabus was very much influenced by NE. Students were “to know and appreciate the uniqueness of Singapore, the struggles, constraints and vulnerabilities and the

[^52]: Primary SS, p. 7.
[^53]: CPDD, *Social Studies 4B: The Dark Years* (Singapore, Federal Publications, 1999)
achievements of our nation, and the multi-racial, multi-cultural and the multi-religious nature of our society”. The introduction to the Secondary CME Syllabus document also clearly stated that “National Education messages have been infused in the content of the syllabus”. The new CME syllabus thus gave “greater emphasis to the imbuing of values and attitudes of responsible citizenship… [so] that our pupils are knowledgeable about issues that concern the nation”. This can be further seen in its knowledge objectives, which clearly reflected the NE messages and aims:

- know the values essential to the well-being of our nation including Our Shared Values, Singapore Family Values and the fundamentals of governance,
- know the people and the events of our nation’s past, and their links with the present,
- know the factors that contribute to nation building,
- understand our nation’s constraints and vulnerabilities, and know how our nation overcame these constraints,
- know the system of our government,
- be aware of the impact and issues of a fast changing world on our nation’s survival and success

The skills and attitudes objectives also reflected the aims of NE as well. For instance, the skills objective “demonstrate actions that reflect active and responsible citizenry, for example, participation in the Community Involvement Programme” was an NE one, since CIP was an NE initiative. With regards to the attitudes objectives, the following ones were clearly aligned to NE:

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid, p. 3.
61 Ibid, p. 4. Christine Han argues that the ‘active citizenship’ that was being encouraged was in fact a form of passive citizenship. See Christine Han, National Education and ‘Active Citizenship’: Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore, Asia Pacific Journal of Education, vol. 20, no. 1 (2000), pp. 63-72.
• be committed to preserving the racial and religious harmony of our nation,
• have a sense of bonding and commitment to the family, the community and the nation,
• have the willingness to contribute to the well-being, including the defence, of the nation,
• have confidence, loyalty and pride in our nation’s success

In terms of the themes of the syllabus, the themes “Community Spirit”, “Our Nation, Our Heritage” and “Challenges Ahead” were ostensibly related to NE. 62 In the successful implementation of the syllabus, “the school climate” was seen to provide “the fertile social ground in which the moral development and civic responsibility of our pupils can be rooted” 63 – a vindication of Balhetchet’s push for a “moral environment” for his moral education program.64

The Lower Secondary History Syllabus

Syllabus aims

In line with the three major policy initiatives (TSLN, NE and IT Masterplan) of 1997, the aims and objectives of the new Lower Secondary History syllabus were “to develop pupils in the areas of content, skills and values”. 65 The new syllabus thus continues the three-strand categorisation of the syllabus objectives introduced in the 1994 syllabus. For content objectives, the syllabus aims are as follows:

At the end of the course, pupils will be able to:
• recognise the purpose and relevance of studying History
• demonstrate a better understanding of the history of Singapore from 1819 to 1971, especially the post-war political developments leading to self-government and

62 Ibid, p. 2. The other themes were “Character Building” and “Family Relationships”
64 See Chapter 4.
independence, the constraints faced by the new nation and the struggle for economic survival.66

The content for the new Lower Secondary History of Singapore syllabus is a radical departure from previous ones. The emphasis is now on post-war Singapore history, particularly Singapore’s short-lived merger and separation with Malaysia.

In terms of ‘skills objectives’, there is a lot of similarity with the 1994 syllabus, with greater emphasis given to the development of critical and creative thinking. On the other hand, NE forms an important part of the ‘values objectives’, as evidenced in the incorporation of the NE messages as one of the objectives. Stimulating interest in History forms another major value objective.

**Scope and Sequence of Syllabus**

In line with the curriculum reduction to better enable teachers to implement the three major policy initiatives of TSLN, IT Masterplan and NE, the content for the *History of Modern Singapore* was likewise reduced.67 For the Normal Course, teachers could delete any two of the following topics: “Early Administration, Law and order and the work of the Chinese Protectorate and The influence of China, India and the Middle East on the people of Singapore”. For the Express and Special stream, the teachers were at a liberty to delete any four of the following topics from the syllabus:

- Growth of the town and opening up of the interior
- Economic growth in agriculture
- Law and order and the work of the Chinese Protectorate

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66 Ibid, p. 5.

• Social Services: Public health and education
• World War I

It was also felt that it would be more appropriate for Singapore History to be taught at Secondary 2 instead of Secondary 1, “so that the students will be … more mature, and appreciate better what was at stake”.68 Another reason for this change was because teachers complained that concepts in Singapore History were too difficult for Sec one students to grasp. The new Lower Secondary History of Singapore syllabus continued to be taught at Secondary 2. The unit outline of this new syllabus that was implemented in 2000 reflected the change in emphasis towards post-war Singapore History:

Unit 5: Our Modern Beginnings
Unit 6: Our Vulnerability
Unit 7: Our Tumultuous Years
Unit 8: Our Road to Independence
Unit 9: Building our Nation69

The scope of the Lower Secondary History of Singapore syllabus was thus extended from 1965 to 1971. Unit 9 in particular, dealt with post-independence history of Singapore. However, more than two third’s of the syllabus and textbook was devoted to the period from the Second World War to Singapore’s independence. Singapore’s history from 1819 to 1941 was reduced to 3 chapters in Unit 5. Also, there was little mention of the pre-1819 History of Singapore. With the introduction of this syllabus and its textbook, the official historiography of the Singapore Story found its expression in the school curriculum.

68 Lee Hsien Loong, Speech at Launch of NE.
69 CPDD, History Syllabus, Lower Secondary (1999), p. 10
Syllabus materials

As in the 1984 and 1994 syllabus, the curriculum package for the 2000 syllabus was produced by the MOE. This package consisted of a textbook and a teacher’s resource file. The textbook is written in an interactive and engaging style and format. For example, the topic on the Founding of Singapore by Raffles begins by appealing to the students’ imagination:

Imagine that you are a young Malay boy living on the island of Singapore. It is 28 January 1819 and you are walking along the beach. As you look out into sea, you see the sails of some ships... heading towards the island... They are flying flags unfamiliar to you...70

Instead of merely stating the facts about the British landing on Singapore in 1819, as in previous textbooks, the student is ‘invited’ back in time to be one of the participants in history. By this ‘hook activity’, an effort is made to arouse students’ interest in history.

Since the present textbook appears to be an improvement over the previous editions, one can assume that it would be likewise for the teacher’s resource. On the surface, the teacher’s resource file shares similar basic features with the previous editions of the teacher’s guides. This includes suggestions on how to introduce the chapter or topic, additional notes and source materials for teachers, overhead transparency and blackline masters, and a list of suggested reference books and resources. In addition, the teacher’s resource has annexes on suggested lesson plans, sample questions, and a table showing the incorporation of concepts and MOE initiatives such as TSLN and NE.

However, if a teacher were to expect the same kind of step-by-step guidance on how to deliver and teach the syllabus, he or she would be disappointed. No instructional objectives are

given for each chapter in the resource file, unlike the previous teacher’s guides. While the 1994 teacher’s guide included suggested teaching strategies and timing for each topic, this is missing in the current *Understanding Our Past* teacher’s resource. History teachers thus are left to their own ingenuity and initiative to come up with lesson plans with little guidance from the resource file.

The plausible rationale behind this was to encourage innovation and improvisation amongst the history teachers, in line with the TSLN vision. Also, since the teaching of lower secondary history had been going on for many years, schools should presumably have accumulated enough teaching resources of their own.

However, these assumptions failed to take into account the fact that many of the older teachers would be retiring in the next few years. Beginning teachers would therefore require more guidance and structure, which was not found in the current teacher’s resource. Secondly, while it was true that schools may have accumulated resources over the years, the same could not be said for newly established schools. Often, the majority of the teachers in these new schools are beginning teachers. It would take a long time for these new schools to build up their teaching resources. Finally, the instructional package for the current Lower Secondary Singapore syllabus pales in comparison to that of the other levels. For example, the Upper Secondary Social Studies and History instructional packages include workbooks and CD-ROMS. The accompanying teacher’s guides are also more akin to the 1994 history teacher’s guide, with suggested teaching strategies and step-by-step instructions. All these problems compromised the implementation of the 2000 Lower secondary Singapore history syllabus.
Upper Secondary Social Studies

The Upper Secondary Social Studies was introduced as a mandatory and examinable subject in all secondary schools in 2001. Social Studies constituted the compulsory component of the new Combined Humanities subject, which was similarly introduced to all upper secondary students in the same year. This comprised “a compulsory Social Studies component and an elective component of Geography, History or Literature”.71 The aims of Combined Humanities were as follows:

1. To provide pupils with a broad-based foundation for lifelong learning through a multi-disciplinary approach in the teaching and learning of the Humanities.
2. To instill in pupils a sense of national identity as well as global awareness.
3. To equip pupils with the skills of independent enquiry and critical thinking.72

It was clear from the above aims that the Combined Humanities was conceived with the context of the TSLN vision and NE in mind.

If the Combined Humanities course was formulated with NE in mind, it was even more so for the Upper Secondary Social Studies. This new subject emphasized “on issues pertaining to the historical, economic and social development of Singapore”, as well as “those regional and international concerns which can or may affect the development of Singapore”.73 The purpose was to enable students to be “more informed about Singapore’s achievements and limitations and have confidence in her future”, ultimately to “prepare them to adopt a participative role in

72 Ibid.
shaping Singapore’s destiny in the 21st century”. The emphasis and purpose were encapsulated in the aims of Social Studies:

1) understand the issues that affect the socio-political development, the governance and the future of Singapore;
2) learn from experiences of other countries to build and sustain a politically viable, socially cohesive and economically vibrant Singapore;
3) develop into citizens who have empathy towards others and who will participate responsibly and sensibly in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society;
4) have a deep sense of shared destiny and national identity.

From the above aims, it was obvious that social studies “is organised around the six National Education themes”. From the six NE messages, six corresponding themes were conceptualized. They comprise the following: “Birth of Nations”, “Harmony and Discord”, “Conflict and Cooperation”, “Growth of Nations”, “Looking Ahead” and “Challenge and Change”.

It is hardly surprising therefore that History is one of the key elements in this Social Studies syllabus. For instance, the theme of Harmony and Discord touch on the history of the Northern Ireland and Sri Lankan conflicts, in order to establish the causes of discord in these two countries. Another example is the theme of Growth of Nations, where the History of Singapore’s industrialization is studied. To some extent, this overlapped with a topic from the secondary two history syllabus. The sequencing of historical topics at the onset of the syllabus might give rise to perceptions of Social Studies being another form of History, as more often than not, perceptions

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, p. 18. The six NE themes refer to the NE messages.
76 Birth of Nations corresponded to the NE message “Singapore is our homeland”; Harmony and Discord – “We must preserve racial and religious harmony”; Conflict and Co-operation – “We must ourselves defend Singapore”; Growth of Nations – “No one owes Singapore a living”; Looking Ahead – “We have confidence in our future”; Challenge and Change – “we must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility”.
and stereotypes are formed from first impressions. With feedback indicating that many young Singaporeans do not see NE as relevant to their lives and ‘switch off’ because it seems as if NE keeps ‘harping’ on the past, this ran the risk of hindering the successful realisation of the stated aims of social studies. 78

Emphasis on the Singapore Story

From the discussion of the CME, History and Social Studies syllabuses thus far, it is apparent that NE was a key objective in these subjects. This is especially so for Upper Secondary Social Studies, where the syllabus was based directly on the six NE messages. The strong emphasis on the teaching of the Singapore Story, an integral part of the NE objectives, accounted for the significant overlaps and repetitions of the topics in Social Studies and History. Other than the repetition of topics in Upper Secondary Social Studies and Lower Secondary Singapore History mentioned earlier, the most noteworthy example was in the topic of Singapore’s merger with Malaysia and separation (independence). The Primary Social Studies had an entire semester in Primary 5 devoted to teaching this topic. 79 This topic was taught again in Secondary two history, under the unit “Our Road to Independence”, which was the penultimate unit. In Upper Secondary Social Studies and History, this topic was one of the most important ones. Students opting to do upper secondary would have to study the topic of Singapore’s merger and separation twice – in history and in social studies. Such an overwhelming emphasis and repetition on teaching of Singapore’s recent past in both Social Studies and History is symptomatic of the “culture of excess” which Souchou Yau described as “the telling and

78 When I was teaching Social Studies, I often get comments from students that Social Studies was synonymous with History.

79 See CPDD, Social Studies 5A: Birth of a Nation
retelling of the Singapore Story; as such it is a symptom of the dramatic, violent experience of national struggle – in the way people remember it… the Singapore Story is experienced as trauma…”.\textsuperscript{80} At the heart of telling the Singapore Story was the reminder of Singapore’s innate vulnerabilities, and hence the struggle for survival.

**Change of Assessment format**

With the TSLN emphasis, the introduction of the new history and combined humanities syllabuses witnessed a fundamental change in the assessment format. A common assessment framework was devised for the teaching of History from secondary one to four, as well as Upper Secondary Social Studies and History, with the three major objectives – “knowledge”, “constructive explanations”, and “interpreting and evaluating source material”. While the first and second of the three aims were not new, the third objective of “interpreting and evaluating source material” represented major change in the assessment structure. For this objective, students were required to

- Comprehend and extract relevant information
- Draw inferences
- Analyse and evaluate evidence
- Compare and contrast different views
- Distinguish between fact, opinion and judgement
- Recognise values and detect bias
- Draw conclusions based on a reasoned consideration of evidence and arguments\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Souchou Yao, *Singapore: The State and the culture of excess* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 32

This change in the assessment format was most evidently manifested in the introduction of a new “Levels of Response Marking System” (LORMS). The Levels of Response Marking awarded marks according to the level of skill or understanding shown in the answer. This is a radical departure from the conventional marking scheme which awards marks cumulatively. It was intended for marking questions with conceptual and skills target. The marking scheme for each question consists of a number of levels of conceptual understanding or skill. These levels represented the examination candidates’ responses, and were placed in a hierarchy. Each level had a band of bands, and marks were awarded within the level for skills and for relevant use of knowledge.

The introduction of LORMS caused disquiet amongst some history and social studies teachers.\textsuperscript{82} The lower secondary history syllabus document, textbook and teacher’s resource file did not give any hint of the introduction of LORMS. In contrast, the Upper Secondary Social Studies and History instructional materials and teacher’s guides provided adequate support and guidance to teachers and students on source based questions and LORMS.

The MOE claimed that LORMS would enable teachers to better evaluate students on “open ended questions”, as it purportedly assesses “what students can understand and do as well as what they know”. In addition, MOE argued that LORMS allowed “for differentiating across a range of ability” and rewards “positive achievement”.\textsuperscript{83} It was clear that the rationale behind the introduction of LORMS was to inculcate critical thinking skills – a key tenet of TSLN. However,

\textsuperscript{82} Yeow Tong Chia, ‘History Education for Citizenship in Singapore’, Paper presented at the Comparative and International Education Society 50\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Celebration Conference, Hawai’i Convention Center, 17 March 2006. The implementation of LORMS took place when I was a teacher in Singapore, thus I experienced the changes first hand.

\textsuperscript{83} CPDD, \textit{Training Sessions on Lower Secondary Revised Assessment Format}, p. 6
the state’s privileging of a definitive Singapore story “to foster a sense of national purpose, identity and destiny” could “work against critical thinking”.84 This tension between NE and critical thinking remains unresolved to this day. The watershed September 11 attacks in the US and threat of terrorism posed by Islamic extremists highlighted the importance of NE. As such, whatever effort that existed to resolve this dilemma was put on hold.

**September 11 and aftermath: Emphasis on racial harmony and social cohesion**

The September 11 attacks in the United States, and the subsequent detention of suspected Jemaah Islamiyah85 members heightened the importance of maintaining racial and religious harmony in Singapore. This brought home the lesson of maintaining racial harmony, an important tenet of NE. Prime Minister Goh

An obvious lesson to draw from this episode is that Singapore faces genuine security threats… Our experience with terrorism highlights another clear lesson – the continuing critical importance of maintaining racial and religious harmony. This is not a theoretical problem, nor a problem of the past that only the older generation is paranoid about. Racial and religious strife is a clear and present danger…. We therefore have to take extra and urgent efforts to strengthen our racial and religious harmony. 86

The revised curriculum already placed a strong emphasis on maintaining racial harmony prior to the September 11 attacks. For instance, the Upper Secondary Social Studies provided clear “lessons” from learning about the racial and religious conflicts in other countries. In addition, the

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85 Jemaah Islamiyah is an Islamic extremist group in Southeast Asia with links to Al-Qaeda. They are suspected to be behind the Bali bombings in 2002 and the recent hotel bombings in Jakarta.

86 Lee Hsien Loong, ‘Learning and Living the Singapore Story’
unit on the conflict in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland highlighted the necessity of racial and religious harmony for continued economic success. The textbook states that not only will conflict destroy “lives, homes and property”, it also “weakens the development of the country and often provides the excuse for more powerful neighbours to interfere in the affairs of the divided country”. Here, the discourse of the Singapore developmental state can be clearly seen in the way that conflict and security tensions were seen as inimical to economic development. In a way, with the heightened security fears and tensions due to the September 11 attacks, subjects like Social Studies, History and CME took on a renewed relevance, with their strong emphasis on NE and racial harmony.

While the local Muslim community and religious leaders came out strongly to condemn the attacks and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the government took steps to diffuse any potential mistrust and conflict between the different religious and ethnic communities, and sought to assuage the Muslims that they were not being singled out. The Prime Minister subsequently conducted dialogue sessions with community leaders following each round of JI arrests. His comments on the first of such sessions on 28 February 2002 revealed the government’s fear of religious and racial strife:

I am especially concerned about inter-racial and inter-religious relations at the ground level. At the leadership level, I am confident that good sense will prevail when dealing with racial and religious incidents. Reactions will be calm, considered and based on facts. People on the ground, however, tend to react emotionally based on rumours, hearsay and prejudices. Their reactions could well be irrational and from the gut. A minor incident could blow up into a major confrontation between the races and religions. We must prevent this.


88 Goh Chok Tong, Opening Remarks at dialogue with Community Leaders on the impact of the arrest of Jemaah Islamiah operatives, on Monday, 28 January 2002. Singapore’s Internal Security Department detained 13 people,
Prime Minister Goh thus initiated the setting up of Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCC) comprising “leaders of the various racial, religious, social, educational and business groups and organisations in each [electoral district]” with the aim “to enhance interaction among the different communities at the ground level”. More specifically,

The objective of the IRCCs is to provide a platform for confidence-building among the different communities, as a basis for developing, in time, deeper friendships and trust. Regular interactions will build up inter-racial and inter-religious rapport. They will also provide opportunities for all parties to address immediately racial and religious problems on the ground.90

At the same time, “Harmony Circles (HCs) are being formed in schools, workplaces and local organisations to reach out to more people”.91

The President’s address at the opening of Singapore’s 10th Parliament on 25 March 2002 restated the government’s worry over the threat of terrorism caused by Al-Qaeda and JI.92 He added that Singapore was “directly at risk of terrorist attacks, especially by Islamic extremist groups originating elsewhere in this region. Such attacks will cause suspicion and arouse enmity

mostly Malays, who were suspected members of JI in December 2001 under the Internal Security Act (ISA) which allows for detention without trial. Subsequently, 18 more people were detained in September 2002 under the ISA. .

90 Ibid.


92 The PAP won a landslide at the General Elections on 3 November 2001, winning all but 2 of the Parliamentary seats and an increased share of the popular vote. The uncertainty over the global political situation in the aftermath of September 11 undoubtedly contributed to this landslide victory. See Business Times, ‘PAP rides the perfect storm’, 5 November 2001.
between [the] races”.93 It was therefore imperative for social cohesion and racial harmony to be strengthened, “given [the] heightened religious consciousness” in the light of global Islam. The President thus called on Singaporeans to “redouble our efforts to encourage more mixing and interaction between the communities, and gradually widen the common ground that all Singaporeans share”.94 The President also reminded Singaporeans of “the fault lines in our society” that was brought to light by the JI arrests. Hence, he urged the strengthening of “inter-ethnic relations, for example by forming Inter-Racial Confidence Circles and Harmony Circles”.95

In response, the MOE announced the setting up of the Committee on Strengthening Racial Harmony in Schools (CSRHS) in April 2002. This committee was made up of representatives from the Ministry of Education, schools, parent-support groups and the Community Development Councils, and chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary (Education). The objective of CSRHS, as in the IRCCs and HCs, was “to enhance inter-racial understanding and mixing in schools and organise activities to strengthen racial harmony in schools”.96 The committee put forward some preliminary ideas in its first meeting to enhance inter-racial interaction amongst students:

One way is to raise the profile of Racial Harmony Day (20 July) by organising an annual symbolic event for all schools to participate in. This year (2002), the event will be known as the Racial Harmony Games Day, held to promote inter-racial interaction through

93 Opening Address by President at 10th Parliament, 25 March 2002
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
enjoyable games. Another initiative is through the sharing of good practices of and useful resources from schools and external organisations.97

That the core members of CSRHS secretariat were officers of the NE Branch of the MOE demonstrated the increased importance and profile placed on the racial harmony aspect of NE. Thus, enhancing racial harmony was (and still currently is) seen by the government as providing a bulwark against the threat of terrorism.

At the Committee of Supply debate for MOE the follow month, MPs expressed concerns over the efforts to promote racial harmony and ethnic integration in school. While acknowledging that “our national schools provide excellent opportunities for our children to mix and integrate”, an MP raised the concern that “the natural reaction is for our children to gravitate among their own kind”.98 He argued that “the increasing need to enhance inter-ethnic understanding” in the aftermath of September 11 meant that schools had to “continue to provide a conducive environment to mix well”.99 He went on to ask several questions to the Education Minister pertaining to the level of inter-ethnic integration in schools and programs that the MOE was putting in place to further enhance this.

In reply, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education reiterated MOE’s efforts in promoting social cohesion and racial harmony in schools. In addition, he cited findings on the NE Study conducted by MOE since 1997 which revealed that “students generally have a better appreciation of racial harmony, as they proceed to the next higher level of their

97 Ibid.
99 Ibid., col 1891.
education”. 100 He assured MPs that the MOE “will continue to strengthen inter-racial understanding and mixing in schools through the curriculum, co-curricular activities (CCA) and other programmes”. 101 Chief amongst these was the NE program, which reinforce[d] the important message that Singapore is a multi-racial society. As part of NE, schools set aside one day in the year – 21st July, to be precise – to commemorate Racial Harmony Day. This is the day when students reflect on and celebrate [Singapore’s] success as a harmonious nation built on a rich diversity of cultures. Since its inception, this commemorative event has proven to be effective in promoting inter-racial understanding among our students.102

The Parliamentary Secretary went on to give examples on how the formal curriculum and CCAs promoted and enhanced social cohesion and inter-racial understanding. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that given “the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States, and the heightened sensitivities to race and religion that have followed”, there was a need for MOE “to further enhance racial and religious harmony in… schools”. 103 He highlighted the recently formed CSRHS as an example of how MOE sought to redouble its efforts at promoting racial harmony amongst students, and mentioned the coming Racial Harmony Games Day as one of the initiatives of that committee.

100 Ibid., col. 1902.


102 Ibid., col. 1903.

103 Ibid., col. 1904.
At the Racial Harmony Games Day on 20 July 2002, the Education Minister in his speech referred to Prime Minister Goh’s metaphor of Singapore’s “society is made up of four overlapping circles”, and exhorted students to

see beyond our race and religion, and keep on renewing and strengthening the social glue that binds us. Where we can enlarge the common space amongst the different communities, we should do so. At the very least, we should strive to maintain the common space that we now enjoy. The protection of the common space will help provide unity in diversity and be a bulwark against any forces that may attempt to drive wedges between our communities and pull us apart.

In order to expand the “common spaces”, the Education Minister urged schools to “provide our children with a set of common experiences and shared values so that they will come to identify themselves as Singaporeans”. This could be done through emphasizing “our collective aspirations and common destiny”, thereby teaching students “to look beyond the differences that exist among us and see the commonalities that bind us”.

The Education Minister’s exhortation to schools during the Racial Harmony Games Day was echoed by Parliamentarian Gan Kim Yong during the debate over the White Paper on the Jemaah Islamiyah arrests, where he proposed that the school curriculum, and in particular, the

104 Goh Chok Tong, Speech on Singapore 21 Debate in Parliament. See Parliamentary Debates, 5 May 1999, col. 1482. The Prime Minister went on to explain his concept of the four overlapping circles:

“Each circle represents one community. The four circles overlap each other. What we can do is maximize the overlapping area. This is the area where all Singaporeans, whatever their race, work and play together. It is an open, level playing field, with English as the common language and equal opportunities for all. Outside this common area, where the circles do not overlap, each community has its own playing field. In this separate playing field, each community can retain and speak its own language and practise its own culture and customs. This practical approach of nation-building whereby every community has two playing fields has given us multi-racial harmony. This approach helps us to build a harmonious nation of diversity.”


106 Ibid.
National Education program be revised “to include issues relating to terrorism”. The White Paper gave a comprehensive account of the JI, its links with Al-Qaeda and the global terrorist threat, providing the rationale behind the detention of the JI members. It also put forward three recommendations to counter the terrorist threats: enhancing security measures, policing the spread of terrorist and extremist ideology, and strengthening social cohesion and religious harmony.

The Bali bombings on 12 October 2002, believed to be caused by the JI, lent an air of urgency in containing the terrorist threat. The White Paper urged all Singaporeans to “remain committed to the ideal of a harmonious and tolerant multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, in order to prevent dangerous, radical ideas from taking root in Singapore”. The fear was that such radical ideas, especially from the radical Islamic fundamentalists like Al-Qaeda and the JI, would result in terrorist attacks. The need for inter-ethnic interaction and mixing was therefore deemed more important than ever.

In the debate over the white paper, MPs raised concerns over the level of racial and religious harmony in Singapore. Schools were seen as important in fostering racial and religious cohesion. This was the context where Gan argued that in order “to strengthen religious harmony and foster greater mutual understanding and acceptance”, there was a “need to create more channels for communication amongst the various ethnic and religious groups”. While it was necessary to “acknowledge and accept the differences” between the ethnic and religious

108 White Paper on JI arrests and the threat of terrorism (Cmd. 2 of 2003)
109 ibid, p. 1.
communities, Gan maintained that it was even more important to “emphasise and build on the similarities”. 111 He further called on the government “to strengthen the resilience” of Singaporeans, in particular the youth, “against distorted [religious] teaching”. 112 He thus called on MOE to “inculcate in [the youths] the basic values of mutual respect, mutual tolerance and mutual acceptance, regardless of race and religion”, so that “they will have strong moral courage to resist the call to be part of a terrorist plan to kill innocent people”. 113

Gan’s concern and call for MOE to boost its efforts on inter-racial integration was echoed by another MP, who similarly argued that “the largest circumference of the strategic framework for tackling [terrorism] is the need to enhance social harmony amongst the various ethnic and religious groups”. 114 She believed that schools were the best places to inculcate racial harmony, calling them “the crucible for multi-racial living”, and urged schools to “teach our children to be colour blind, and celebrate harmony amidst diversity”. 115 Hence, she felt that MOE should come up with “more activities … to promote racial and religious harmony”, arguing that

There is a need to watch out for the unwitting formation of enclaves in schools because groups of students may unconsciously clique and engage each other in a particular language, and thus could alienate students of other races, who may otherwise feel out of place. 116

111 Ibid, col. 2320.
112 Ibid, col. 2318.
113 Ibid., col. 2319.
114 Ibid., col. 2328.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., col. 2328-9.
The Parliamentary Secretary (Education) assured the MPs that schools were providing ample opportunities for students of different ethnic groups to interact, “be it in classrooms as well as in their extra-curricular activities or through their academic curriculum”. He added that there are a lot of opportunities for our students to interact, build friendships, learn to be tolerant and respect one another through classroom activities, ECA and project work. This year, more new initiatives will be carried out in schools in order to bring about social cohesion.

Parliament unanimously endorsed the White Paper and its three recommendations. Racial harmony was thus given greater emphasis in the NE program in schools, since the common consensus was that inter-racial mixing and interaction has to start from young. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that MPs continued to raise this issue in Parliament, and asked MOE on its efforts in promoting NE and racial harmony.

During the MOE’s Committee of Supply debate in 2003, Gan reiterated the call he made earlier in the year for NE to be revised to “take into account recent events and issues, such as terrorism and international relations”. He argued that “the effectiveness of the NE [Program] will determine whether [Singapore] will succeed in developing a strong and cohesive people”. Fellow PAP MP Dr Wang Kai Yuen, who was also the chairperson of the Feedback Unit, shared that “in the dialogue sessions conducted by the Feedback Unit on social cohesion, the issue of racial interaction among … children is a recurrent theme”. He went on to call for “ways to

117 Ibid., 21 January 2003, col. 2253.
118 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
force greater interaction among… pupils and students” in order to “inculcate tolerance and understanding of each other’s cultures and habits”. 122

Replying on behalf of the Education Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary sought to reassure the MPs that schools were making the effort “in teaching our students the importance of racial harmony and social cohesion”. 123 This was done through activities such as “multi-cultural celebrations of ethnic festivals, setting up [of] National Education or Heritage Corners”, as well as “home-stay and home visit programmes” in collaboration with parents and the Community Development Councils”. 124 The Parliamentary Secretary thus expressed confidence that schools had done their part in promoting greater inter-ethnic mixing, claiming that “the foundation for racial integration and harmony [was] laid very early in [the] schools”. 125 At the same time, he informed MPs of the launch of a racial harmony website in February 2003 by MOE “to share best practices in promoting racial harmony in schools as well as to engage students to discuss and understand racial harmony issues better”. 126

Having assured MPs, as well as the public, on the efforts of schools to foster inter-ethnic interaction, the headline article “Pupils aren’t mixing, study finds” in the *Straits Times* on July 26, 2003 was arguably a slap in the face to MOE and schools. The article reported on the findings of a six-month study by a research team from the National Institute of Education (NIE), which concluded that “[c]hildren tend to have friends of their own race, sticking together during

122 Ibid., col. 1620.
123 Ibid., col. 1634.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
recess and out of the classroom”. These researchers, all of whom were faculty members of NIE, interviewed close to 4,400 students in Primary 3 and 6 in six public schools on who their best friends were and the people they hung out with during their recess. This “birds-of-a-feather phenomenon” was even more pronounced in children at the higher level (Primary 6) than the younger ones (Primary 3). The streaming policy was cited as one reason accounting for this occurrence, which was stoutly refuted by the MOE, whose Acting Minister argued that streaming promoted rather than hindered inter-racial integration.

Be that as it may, the comprehensive coverage of the NIE study sparked off a national debate on the efficacy of the NE program and racial harmony initiatives in integrating the students of different ethnic backgrounds. The Straits Times subsequently published two letters from the minority groups (Indian and Malay) which questioned the effectiveness of programs such as Racial Harmony Day in promoting inter-ethnic integration and understanding. In response, MOE acknowledged the findings of the study, but its Parliamentary Secretary stressed that “schools know best how to improve the situation, and some already acted with good results”. However, in an uncharacteristic veiled critique on the education ministry’s approach to racial integration in schools, Tan Tarn How, a senior correspondent with the Straits Times argued that “the approach taken by Parliamentary Secretary (Education) Hawazi Daipi and his

129 Straits Times, ‘One parents’ sad experience at integrating daughter’ and ‘Up to each of us to reach out’, 31 July 2003.
130 Ibid, ‘Yes, there’s little racial mixing, some schools are trying: MOE’, 31 July 2003.
15-member panel [CSRHS]” as being “too hands off”. Tan felt that the Parliamentary Secretary’s comment that schools knew best to improve inter-ethnic ties and integration “seems contradictory for a government that has constantly stressed the importance of racial harmony and forming bonds with those of other races”.

Tan’s criticism was shared by some MPs, who questioned the Education Minister in Parliament on the measures MOE would be taking to strengthen racial harmony and integration amongst students. The Acting Education Minister, in reply to the MPs’ queries, stated categorically that “MOE does not have a hands off policy” in promoting racial harmony. He assured Parliamentarians that his ministry “spend time and energy trying to figure out new ways of enhancing racial integration”. The Acting Education Minister then reiterated MOE’s stand on the matter that was articulated by the Parliamentary Secretary, that it was best “not to impose on schools a set formula, a fixed template [which] would not work”. Rather, MOE’s role should be to encourage “the schools themselves come up with innovative ways”, and “ensure that the best practices [of promoting racial integration] get exchanged quickly” amongst schools. This devolution of the actual practice of promoting inter-ethnic mixing to schools seemed to contradict the hands on approach that the Acting Education Minister had earlier articulated. Also the NIE study raised the concern that the current efforts by MOE in promoting racial integration, such as the initiatives by the CSRHS, were but “cosmetic endeavours … that

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{131}}\text{Ibid, ‘Intervene early to bridge the colour divide’, 2 August 2003.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{132}}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{133}}\text{Parliamentary Debates, 15 August 2003, col. 2474.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{134}}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{135}}\text{Ibid.}\]
… [were]… scraping the surface, [not] going deeper into the psyche of the students to ensure that there is some kind of realistic acceptance of each other’s cultural differences”.  

The NIE study was part of a larger project entitled “The Ethnic Relations Project” by the Institute of Policy Studies, a government funded think tank. This project had a threefold aim: “To understand the current state, diversity and complexity of ethnic pluralism and relations in Singapore; to identify key trends, issues and concerns in various areas impacting ethnic relations and social cohesion; and to provide policy insights and recommendations”. The research was conducted in 2002, with the findings and recommendations presented at a research forum in October of the same year “to 300 participants which included academics, researchers, politicians, civil servants, representatives of social and community organisations, civil society activists and professionals from different fields such as social services and teaching”. The events of September 11 as well as the JI arrests and the Bali bombings added an increased relevance to the project. The NIE study was thus not a surprise to the government. What was surprising was the timing of the article publication, as well as the prominent space it was given in the front page of the Straits Times. In contrast to the hype and attention given to the NIE study in July 2003, the publication of the book Beyond Rituals and Riots the subsequent year, in which the NIE study was a chapter in that book, did not attract as much interest.  

Conclusion

138 Ibid, p. xi.
139 Ibid.
National Education was one of the three major initiatives by the MOE in 1997, the other two being the Masterplan for IT, and the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation vision. TSLN became the vision of MOE, and NE became subsumed into this overarching vision. The implementation of NE in the formal curriculum, just like the informal curriculum, placed strong emphasis on instilling the “facts” of the Singapore story. As such, it privileged the dominant narrative, and tended to be didactic in its approach. This sat uncomfortably with the rhetoric of promoting critical thinking and openness in TSLN. The realization of NE in the curriculum also tended to be excessive, as evidenced in the repetition of topics on Singapore’s independence and racial riots.

With the September 11 attacks, the arrest of the JI extremists, and terrorist threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists, NE took on an increased importance and relevance. The state regarded the maintenance of racial harmony and social cohesion, and promoting inter-ethnic understand and mixing, as providing the social and psychological bulwark against the onslaught of dangerous and radical ideas threatening to destroy the societal fabric in Singapore. And NE was a key political socializing tool of the state in this undertaking. At the same time, the Singapore state, its security and surveillance apparatus assumed greater control to ostensibly combat this threat to national safety and security. The enhanced surveillance capability of the state further curtailed of the already limited civil and political liberties in Singapore. This contradicted the promotion of critical thinking and openness as espoused in the TSLN vision, as well as the assurances of political openness by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his Deputy.

140 Jason Tan, ‘Whither National Education?’, p. 82. As the TSLN vision was articulated after the launch of NE, it can be argued that the inclusion of NE in the TSLN vision was an afterthought.
Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who became Prime Minister in September 2004. The call for openness remained at best, good intentions, and at worst, empty rhetoric. Ensuring Singapore’s security and survival remained topmost in the PAP government’s priorities and agenda, and education played a key role in the project.

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141 A few months before he assumed the Prime Ministership in November 1990, then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Parliament that he would grant “greater freedom for Singaporeans to make their own choices, and to express themselves” see Parliamentary Debates, 13 June 1990, col. 232. See also Lee Hsien Loong, ‘Building a Civic Society’, speech by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Harvard Club Singapore’s 35th Anniversary Dinner, 6 January 2004.
Chapter 8
Final Thoughts on the ‘World-Soul’ of Singapore: Education, Culture and the Making of the Developmental State

Said the Mandarin: There is nothing lacking
in the provision of the body, seeing
our middle kingdom bodily strong, sinewy —
but there is more to Kingdom and Man than Body.
When a people clutch all gods as money gods,
you must be vigilant. Pieties are not rods
to fish material things; they form a World-Soul
to which one gives assent and he is whole
who lives in fellowship: this, too, is your goal.
Great cultures are not hewn from a heritage
for sons, but for great-great-grandsons of due age.
Some investments then must always seem pointless,
a fling into the well, but there’s some goodness
to be less than pragmatic. No work is ample
and no wall strong if you should slight the temple.

- from the poem A Chinese Parable by Gwee Li Sui1

In Singapore, as in most countries, education is a key instrument for state formation. This was the primary objective of citizenship education curricula, which found its expression over the years in subjects like civics, ethics, history, education for living, Religious Knowledge, civics and moral education, as well as social studies. Unlike citizenship education in the West, education for democracy did not feature as an important goal in citizenship education in Singapore. For Singapore, the focus on citizenship education was, and still is, less on democratic ideals and values, than it is on “good governance”, nation building and state formation.2

This dissertation builds on existing scholarship on education and state formation, as well as the role of education in the making of the developmental state. It goes beyond the conventional notion of seeing education as providing the skilled workforce for the economy, to mapping out cultural and ideological dimensions of the role of education and the developmental state. The story of state formation through citizenship education in Singapore is that of a culture of crisis management that is driven by an innate sense of vulnerability and a survivalist mentality of the People’s Action Party (PAP) government. It is essentially the history of the Singapore developmental state’s management of crises (imagined, real or engineered), and how the changes in history, civics and social studies curricula, served to legitimize the state, through the educating and moulding of the desired “good citizen” and nation building. Underpinning these changes is the state’s use of cultural values such as Confucianism and Asian values to shore up its legitimacy.

This dissertation has demonstrated how the Singapore developmental state maintained its hegemony and legitimacy, through the culture of crisis management through education. Being “the quintessential developmental state”, the Singapore case provides a useful heuristic to enable us to examine and understand other developmental states like China and some of the Middle East Gulf states like the UAE and Qatar. Nonetheless, whether the developmental state is sustainable in the long run is still moot. Citing the democratization of developmental states like

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4 David Ashton, Francis Green, Donna James and Johnny Sung, *Education and Training for Development in East Asia*.

5 Manuel Castells, ‘The Developmental City-State in an Open World Economy’, p. 4.
Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, Castells predicts that the economic development in these developmental states would eventually result to the demise of this model of development. In other words, the developmental state sows the seeds of its own demise, in that the economic growth would give rise to a middle class that would clamour for more political freedoms and hence lead to the scaling back of the interventionalist developmental state.\(^6\) The Singapore case has managed to challenge Castells’ prediction thus far. It remains to be seen if the Singapore developmental state will continue to remain viable in the long run.

Since Singapore’s independence, it has been the constant struggle of the PAP state to articulate the Singapore national identity. Different visions were proffered over the years, only to be replaced by new ones. From the rugged society and Singaporean Singapore of the 1960s/1970s, to the Asian values of the 1980s, Shared Values of the early 1990s, and the National Education program, the state remained driven by a survivalist mindset. Lily Rahim aptly sums it up like this, “Singapore’s national identity has been strongly shaped by a crisis discourse centred on the struggle for survival and security”.\(^7\) Indeed, “the PAP government’s security paradigm has been driven strongly by fear – of communists in the Cold War, communalists in the 1960s and 1970s, radical Islamists in the ‘war on terror’ and a pervasive fear of the national and regional ‘other’”.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 110.
According to Velayutham, “the Singapore government’s survival rhetoric and economic concerns have contributed as much to shaping the construction and reconstruction of national identity as they have dictated national policy priorities”.\(^9\) Bryan Turner refers to the consequent form of citizenship in Singapore as a ‘national security citizenship’, “in which the principle role of the state is not to guarantee social rights … but simply to guard public spaces from political disruption”.\(^10\) He further argues that the case of Singapore “could be taken as the harbinger of the future demise of liberal versions of citizenship”.\(^11\)

This culture of crisis management and the consequent ‘national security citizenship’ proposed by Turner, demonstrates the cultural process that education, and in particular citizenship education, serves in the making and formation of the Singapore developmental state. Embedded within this developmental state of Singapore are the Confucian and Asian Values, as well as a culture of crisis management and survivalism that is driven by the need for the economic and political survival of Singapore, and that of the PAP.

Nonetheless, this culture of crisis management predated the PAP administration. Upon the return of the British to Singapore following the Japanese Occupation, the colonial state embarked upon the Ten Year Plan to provide mass schooling in Singapore. This was ostensibly an effort at state formation to counter the communist utopian vision of the Malayan Communist Party. Hitherto, the British had adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards education as well as state formation in Singapore, as the chief purpose of their rule in Singapore was trade and not

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\(^11\) Ibid.
settlement. The Ten Year Plan did not sit in well with the Chinese community, who feared the loss of autonomy of Chinese Schools. In contrast, the report of the commission of the All Party inquiry on Chinese Education was well received. The commission was set up in large part as a reaction to the crisis of Chinese education, which was brought to a head by the various student unrests in the 1950s. The All Party Report’s recommendations had a far reaching impact on the subsequent educational development of Singapore, as it formed the blueprint for the subsequent PAP’s educational policy.

The first decade or so of Singapore’s independence was a period of accelerated economic growth, which propelled Singapore to the status of one of the Four Little Asian Dragons. In contrast to the decade prior to independence, there was social and political stability and order. The ruling PAP won all Parliamentary seats in successive general elections until 1980. The industrialization of the economy, and the policy of bilingualism led to English becoming the language of governance and business. Mathematics and the science subjects were emphasized, and these were taught in the English language. As a consequence, the period witnessed a steady decline in the enrolment of vernacular stream schools vis-à-vis English stream schools.

In contrast to math and science, the use of the mother tongue to teach history and civics meant that, in practice, these subjects were seen as less important despite the constant mention of civic and moral values in the official rhetoric. History in primary school was a victim of the bilingual policy, as it was merged with civics to become Education for Living, which was

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12 This was a popular term in the 1980s to refer to the four tiger economies of East Asia – South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

13 Of course, the boycott and eventual resignation of the opposition MPs within a year of Singapore’s independence helped to create this one-party Parliament.
regarded as a subject to teach moral and civic values. Indeed, the state regarded civics/citizenship education and moral education as one and the same. It was no wonder that some saw history as being withdrawn from the primary school curriculum. Eventually, EFL, together with Civics, were scrapped, as they were deemed inadequate for the teaching of moral values. The answer to the inculcation of moral values was to be found and discovered in ‘Asian’ values.

Contrary to popular perception, the idea of Asian values began in the early 1970s, and not by the end of the same decade. The Singapore government – and Lee Kuan Yew in particular – was concerned with the onslaught of what they considered as permissive Western values encroaching on the commendable Eastern/Asian values. With the increasing affluence of Singapore due to its rapid economic growth, the government expressed the fear of Singaporeans losing their cultural roots. This was presented in the form of a crisis, and thus the need for a Moral Education Review, leading to the introduction of a large number of moral education programs, Religious Knowledge classes as well as programs in History and Social Studies.

Throughout the latter part of the 1980s, the rhetoric of Asian values was intensified by the government, which was concerned with influences from the ‘decadent West’. The government constantly lamented Singaporeans’ general lack of the knowledge of their own culture, which would make them open to the influences of the West. The existing moral education, social studies and history syllabuses were deemed inadequate to meet these challenges. It was felt that new syllabuses had to be designed in order to ground students in their cultural heritage, so as to have a ‘cultural ballast’ against the onslaught of Western individualism. Knowing one’s cultural roots would then make one more appreciative of Singapore’s history. Religious Knowledge, which was initially conceived as the apex of the
moral and civics education program, proved to be disappointing in attaining this aim, and was scrapped just 5 years after its implementation.

Nonetheless, the demise of the Religious Knowledge program did not signal the failure of the promotion of Asian Values and Confucianism by the Singapore government. Instead, the government intensified its efforts around its Asian Values discourse through the introduction of the five Shared Values. This was an attempt to incorporate Asian Values and Confucianism into Singapore’s nation building project. Critics of Asian Values argued that the underlying reason for the Shared Values was to boost the PAP government’s legitimacy and hegemony in the wake of declining popular support in the General Elections since 1984. The Shared Values was a culmination of a long process of public consultation, a departure from the authoritarian style of governance of the 1970s. The PAP recognised that the public wanted more say in national affairs, and was prepared to liberalize politically as long as they controlled the political discourse and set the boundaries for discussion and debate.

Consequently, the syllabuses of history and social studies had to be revised in the light of these changes. And moral education in primary school became reconstituted as Civics and Moral Education, which extended to secondary levels. The underlying motivation behind these changes appears to be a reactive one to events and circumstances, for instance the 1987 detention of alleged Marxist conspirators and the decision to scrap Religious Knowledge. This was at variance with the PAP’s rhetoric of long term thinking and planning. But seen in another perspective, this demonstrated the change in the PAP’s style of governance following the retirement of most of the first generation political leaders in the 1984 General Elections. The new PAP leadership adopted a more consultative approach, but the substance of authoritarianism and its desire to maintain its hegemony remained.
Nonetheless, the Shared Values, promoted with great fanfare in its inauguration, eventually fell into obscurity with the introduction of “National Education”, the latest citizenship and nation building initiative of the government. The conceptualization of the NE program was a top-down one, from the office of the Prime Minister. The events surrounding the launch of NE to schools seem to suggest that it was more of a knee-jerk reaction to a “crisis” of supposed historical amnesia amongst young Singaporeans, rather than a reasoned and thought-out strategy.

Through the NE program, the state aimed to drive home the “lesson” that Singapore’s economic success rested on its ability to survive as a nation-state, and on having external and internal security. This was the underlying message behind the Singapore Story, which was emphasized in a big way at the National Education Exhibition and reinforced through the other NE activities. Singapore’s post Second World War history was presented as a triumph over several crises. The circumstances around the launch of NE were also presented as a crisis of the lack of historical knowledge amongst the young Singaporeans. Thus, the formal and informal curriculum initiatives for the implementation of NE focused more on instilling the facts of the Singapore story. As such, it privileged the dominant narrative, and tended to be didactic in its approach. This sat uncomfortably with the rhetoric of promoting critical thinking and openness in TSLN. The implementation of NE in the curriculum also tended to be excessive, as evidenced in the repetition of topics on Singapore’s independence and racial riots.

With the September 11 attacks, the arrest of the JI extremists, and terrorist threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists, NE took on an increased importance and relevance. The state regarded the maintenance of racial harmony and social cohesion, and promoting inter-ethnic understand and mixing, as providing the social and psychological bulwark against the onslaught of dangerous and radical ideas threatening to destroy the societal fabric in Singapore. The
Singapore state, its security and surveillance apparatus thus assumed greater control ostensibly to combat this threat to national safety and security. The enhanced surveillance capability of the state further curtailed the already limited civil and political liberties in Singapore. This contradicted the promotion of critical thinking and openness as espoused in the TSLN vision, as well as the assurances of political openness by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who became Prime Minister in September 2004. At the end of the day, ensuring Singapore’s security and survival remained topmost in the PAP government’s priorities and agenda.

On 18 August 2009, a Nominated Member of Parliament moved a motion, calling Parliament to reaffirm “its commitment to the nation building tenets as enshrined in the National Pledge when debating national policies”, which “entails strengthening Singaporeans’ sense of citizenship, the fundamentals of democracy and racial and religious unity”. The ensuing debate witnessed the ongoing tension and dilemma between those desiring greater political openness and freedom of expression on one hand, and the PAP state’s worry about the fault lines of race and religion, and hence the need to maintain racial and religious harmony on the other. Invariably, citizenship education in the form of NE was invoked by MPs as a vehicle to instill national identity formation. In a rare off the cuff speech in Parliament, Lee Kuan Yew (now a ‘Minister Mentor’ in the cabinet) dismissed what he termed the “highfalutin ideas” of racial equality of the Nominated MP, which needed to be “demolished”. He argued that Singapore’s

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constitution “states expressly that it is a duty of the Government not to treat everybody as equal”, as the interests of the minorities were being safeguarded and protected by the state.\footnote{Ibid., ‘Dangerous to let highfalutin ideas go undemolished: MM’, 20 August 2009.}

Speaking after Lee Kuan Yew, Dr. Ng Eng Hen, the Education Minister, reminded MPs of the government’s worry over Singapore’s vulnerability, and the need to therefore ensure economic development and social stability. Ng cited the PAP’s success in being returned to power in every successive general election since Singapore’s independence as a testimony to the people’s faith and trust in its policies.\footnote{Ibid., ‘The real meaning of the Pledge’, 20 August 2009.} The Education Minister’s speech summed up the main goal of the Singapore developmental state – performance legitimacy through economic growth. And the reminder of Singapore’s innate vulnerability epitomizes crisis discourse of the PAP, which is the vehicle by which it ensures its legitimacy.

In a sense, Dr. Ng and Mr. Lee were articulating the sentiments of the Premier in the poem found in the first chapter of this dissertation. The Premier aptly expressed the weltanschauung of the Singapore developmental state, especially in the phrase “Work is Life”. State formation in Singapore was therefore very successful, as evidenced by its economic prosperity and education played a key role in this success. However, the “economic growth at all costs” ethos that “work is life” connotes arguably comes with a price – the potential loss of zeitgeist, or as the Mandarin puts it, the loss of the “World-Soul”. Nation building, and fostering a sense of rootedness and belonging of its citizenry to the country – the “World-Soul” – had to be relegated to the backburner in the relentless pursuit of economic development, in order to sustain and legitimize the developmental state. By harnessing the educational sphere for its economic
growth objectives through the discourse of crisis, the developmental state gained political legitimacy in the eyes of a citizenry increasingly accustomed to educational mobility and material wealth, even if at the expense of political freedoms.
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