

Chapter 9

Globalisation and History Education in Singapore

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9.1 Introduction

Singapore is the largest Chinese-dominated society not only in Southeast Asia but also out of Greater China, which comprises China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. With a population of 5.4 million in 2013, 3.8 million were Singapore citizens and permanent residents, whereas the remaining 1.5 million were foreign workers and students who temporarily resided in the island state (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2014). Being a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, the Singapore population is comprised of not only Chinese with three quarters of the population but also Malays and Indians whose proportions are standing at around 15 and 10 %, respectively. What is important for Singapore as a fledging nation since its independence in 1965, when it marked the end of the merger with Malaysia for less than 2 years, is to achieve and maintain economic growth, social progress, political stability and racial harmony in line with the politics of survival (Chan, 1971).

Under the rule of the People's Action Party (PAP), the maintenance of racial and social harmony is always the top priority of public policymaking. The government aims to sort out viable means to make people, regardless of race, language or religion, becoming Singaporeans who are inculcated with a sense of national belonging and national identity towards Singapore as a new nation. The importance of education has been strongly emphasised not only for the interests of industrialization and human capital development but also for the sake of nation-building which ensures a unity of peoples as Singaporeans for becoming patriotic to the nascent nation and safeguarding the national interests (Gopinathan, 1997). The launch of

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the National Education (NE) programme in 1997 is a showcase of the PAP regime to make use of the history of nation-building in Singapore to achieve the policy aims of preserving racial and social harmony, consolidating younger Singaporeans' national identity and also strengthening the ruling party's political legitimacy by recognising its achievements made in the nation-building process (Chua, 1997).

From the time of independence in 1965, the Singapore government has put forward a series of education policies to construct Singaporeans' national identity, including the unification of school curriculum, the stipulation of English as the common language for schooling and public administration with the gradual conversion of vernacular schools into English-medium schools and the institutionalisation of the schools' daily flag-raising ceremony with students singing national anthem and reciting national pledge (Gopinathan, 1997; J. Tan, 2008). Moreover, the social studies subject is compulsory for both the senior primary and senior secondary levels, whereas the history subject, which covers Singapore and world history, is also made compulsory for the junior secondary level (Leow & Tan, 2010). In the recent years, more emphasis has been placed on history education with an aim to let the younger generation to grasp a better understanding about the ruling party's achievements and thus consolidate the PAP's legitimacy. Therefore, the political nature of history education in Singapore cannot be neglected (Goh & Gopinathan, 2005).

Reviewing the development of history education since the 1950s and the evolution of Singapore history textbooks for junior secondary schools from the 1980s, this chapter discusses the relationship between history education and Singaporeans' national identity. Moreover, it also argues that whilst history education is a vital political tool for maintaining social stability and strengthening political legitimacy, whether it is effective to cultivate a strong sense of national belonging and political loyalty among younger Singaporeans depends not only on political rhetoric about various nation-building achievements but also more on whether their expectations for a more open and embracing sociopolitical system can be met by the government in the face of challenges arising from globalisation. There are four sections in this chapter. The first section probes into the relationship between history education and Singapore's political development. It is followed by the second section which reviews the evolution of the history curriculum in Singapore since the 1950s. The penultimate section analyses the importance of history education for the political development in Singapore. The final section summarises the discussion.

9.2 History Education in Singapore

9.2.1 Education and History Education

Education is always conceived as an influential tool to disseminate social values in the society. It is common for the state to impose control over the contents of the school curriculum in order to make sure the schooling system can serve the national

interests (Hirano, 2009). The situation for the state to influence the education system remains more or less the same regardless of the profound influence of globalisation which was once considered a symbol to mark “the end of the nation-state” (Ohmae, 1998). Despite the impact of globalisation on the global political, social, economic and cultural developments, the state remains a prominent player in education for upgrading human resources and enhancing the nation’s competitive advantages on the one hand and promoting social harmony and constructing a national identity among citizens on the other hand (Green, 1997). The state remains strong in Singapore for it dominates both education and mass media as the two important channels to disseminating ideologies which are closely affiliated with the ruling party.

Therefore, the state’s interference into education, which is revealed from its control over language, curriculum and teachers’ training, is justified by the PAP-led government’s top priority to achieve social stability and racial harmony in Singapore as a multiracial society so that mass support can be secured to strengthen the regime’s political legitimacy (Wong, 2002). Industrialization since the 1960s provided a strong rationale for the state to expand the education and training system which in turn led to the unification of the medium of instruction, school curriculum and assessment systems in Singapore for meeting economic needs. These changes in the education system were aimed to cure the problem of racial segregation resulting from the existence of vernacular schools which did not favour interracial integration as desired by the government (Hill & Lian, 1995). The abolition of vernacular schools, which were eventually absorbed into the mainstream schooling system with the use of English as the teaching and learning language, marked the very beginning of the PAP-led government to build up Singaporeans’ national identity by breaking down ethnic isolation in education.

History education, which is a subject widely, but rather mistakenly, considered with the least market values and no direct relationships with human capital development, remains a core component of school curriculum and national education. National history is considered a sort of political ideology for the public to construct national identity through collective memories (Gluck, 1993). In this sense, history education has a political function to consolidate the regime’s power. In fact, it is widely considered a political tool to meet the needs of political development and social stability. The case of Singapore shows that the state pays very much attention to the contents of history curriculum and the writing of history textbooks which can serve the political interests in the name of nation-building. In addition, the evolution of history education in Singapore is deeply affected by the political development of the island state over the past five decades.

9.2.2 De-Sinicisation and Malayisation in Post-war Singapore

For most of the time under the British colonial rule, public resources were made exclusive to English-medium schools run by the colonial government. Other vernacular schools like Chinese-medium ones were not subsidised by the colonial

government, but in fact they were the majority in the schooling system before Singapore became independent in 1965 (Gopinathan, 1974). The *laissez-faire* approach towards education by the British colonial administration gradually ended with the growing communist threat facing Singapore after the Second World War as the Malayan Communist Party determined to spread out its influence in the island through penetration into various workers' trade unions and Chinese-medium school students' organisations (Liu & Wong, 2004; Yeo, 1973). The Chinese-medium schools were easily infiltrated by communists' thoughts and turned out to be the hotbed of left-wing political forces partly because of the adoption of curriculum and textbooks originated from the Chinese mainland even after the communist regime was set up in 1949. Those Chinese-medium schools were therefore considered a major source of communists' threats against the British colonial rule in Singapore.

A series of education policies were implemented with a hope to cure these political problems closely related to the widespread of communism in Singapore, Malaya and Southeast Asia during the high time of the Cold War. Stricter rules and regulations were imposed on the production and selection of textbooks which should comply with the policy of "de-Sinicisation" and "malayanisation" or localization of the school curriculum with special attention paid to such humanities subjects as history and geography (Gopinathan, 1974). Moreover, local textbook publishers were provided incentives to produce school textbooks as a substitute to others imported from overseas, including China, for the fear of causing negative political influence on Chinese-medium school students (Wong, 2002).

After Malaya declared independence in 1957, Singapore was moving towards the formation of self-government in 1959 when the PAP won the general election and formed the government with Lee Kuan Yew, who was the PAP's secretary-general, as prime minister. At that time, the PAP government sought to merge with Malaya in order to serve both economic and security needs of Singapore. It was only when communist or left-wing radicals were suppressed that the merger between Singapore and Malaya would be put in force (Lau, 2002; T. Y. Tan, 2008). As a consequence, the Chinese-medium schools and the only private Chinese-medium university, Nanyang University, which was founded in 1955, were identified by the PAP-led government as the hotbed of left-wing radicals' political activities which should be purged before the merger into Malaysia came into effect in September 1963 (Gopinathan, 1974; Lee, 2000).

Whilst the school curriculum and public examinations were unified and English was adopted as the teaching and learning language in schools, the state imposed stricter control over the administration of the Chinese-medium schools and Nanyang University for eradicating radicals affiliated with these education institutions and thus securing political stability and social order. Nevertheless, the merger between Singapore and Malaysia lasted for a short period of time. On 9 August 1965, about a month short of the merger's second anniversary, Singapore gained independence without much preparation after being expelled from Malaysia due to significant disagreements in the political, economic and racial fronts between Singapore and Malaysia (Fletcher, 1969; Lau, 2002; Turnbull, 2009).

9.2.3 Pragmatic Curriculum for Survival Since 1965

By the time of independence in 1965, although there were life education in primary schools and civic education in secondary schools, these two subjects had limited effectiveness in deepening students' sense of belonging with Singapore (Han, Chew, & Tan, 2001). In retrospect, Singapore's education policies at the early stage of independence had two characteristics. On the one hand, strong emphasis was placed on the teaching of practical knowledge and technical skills for the needs of export-led industrialization, which was largely engineered by the multinational corporations (Huff, 1994; Trocki, 2006). On the other hand, education was considered a channel to build up the Singaporeans' national identity through rituals like the flag-raising ceremony at schools and the national day parades since 1966 to commemorate Singapore's independence (Gopinathan, 1997; Kong & Yeoh, 1997). History education was not fully emphasised for the government intended to avoid covering sensitive events like racial riots that happened in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s which might arouse unpleasant collective memories among different ethnic groups, especially Chinese and Malays, and bring negative impacts on the maintenance of racial harmony (Goh & Gopinathan, 2005).

Between the mid-1960s and the 1970s, the PAP-led government accomplished several achievements in the socio-economic aspects like full employment, nationwide public housing and universal education. In addition, the Singapore government determined to build up a clean, incorruptible and effective administration in order to win support from the populace. These provided a solid foundation of the PAP's regime which has been built on its magnificent performance in materialising continuous socio-economic growth and development. By the late 1970s, the government carried out education reforms to cure the problem of resource wastage incurred from high dropout rates from schools. As a result, students were divided into different streams according to their English and mother tongue proficiencies from the senior primary level (Goh, 1978).

Besides the streaming policy, the government also put emphasis on the importance of civic and moral education in the face of more challenges arising from westernisation as reflected in the widespread of western ideas and values like individualism and materialism which seemed contradictory to what the Singapore government advocated that citizens should be obliged to take responsibility to safeguard the interests and security of the nascent nation. Schools were stipulated to offer religious studies in order to nurture students with moral values (Ong, 1979). Moreover, some religious schools could offer Bible studies and Islamic studies as examinable subjects (Gopinathan, 1980).

9.2.4 From Religious Education to Asian Values

Stepping into the 1980s, moral and religious education came to the forefront to strengthen younger Singaporeans' national identity, whereas history education had

yet been treated as a core instrument for boosting a sense of national belonging among Singaporeans. In 1982, religious knowledge was introduced as a compulsory subject at Secondary 3 and 4. Students could choose among Bible studies, Islamic knowledge, Buddhist studies, Confucian ethics, Hindu studies and Sikh studies. Nevertheless, in 1989, the government suddenly announced that religious knowledge would no longer be required for all students. Instead, it became an elective course for students to take at non-formal teaching hours. The religious knowledge was eventually taken over by civic and moral education for secondary schools in 1992 (J. Tan, 1997). The high time of religious studies in the Singapore's schooling system was closely related to then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's appreciation of Confucianism as the principles of governance which were comprised of core values such as elitism, meritocracy, filial piety and, the most important of all, political loyalty. This was from a cultural perspective that the political legitimacy of the PAP government could be strengthened by treating Confucian ethics as a religious knowledge to be studied by Chinese in schools.

Despite the government's advocacy of Confucianism, Confucian ethics was proved to be less popular than Bible studies and Buddhist studies for the Chinese ethnic group (J. Tan, 1997). Moreover, the making of religious knowledge as a compulsory subject was alleged to strengthen some religions like Catholicism in the late 1980s when it witnessed the crackdown of Catholic-related leftists who were accused of attempting to topple the government in Singapore (Teo, 2010). This in turn might hamper the efforts on sustaining social and racial harmony (Quah, 1990; Tamney, 1996; C. Tan, 2008a; J. Tan, 1997). The unexpected negative impacts on promoting religious studies for arousing younger Singaporeans' national identity drove the government to change its track to rely on moral and citizenship education in the 1990s.

In the early 1990s, the urge for paying more attention on students' moral values came with the policy of formulating Singapore's national shared values which could reflect on the importance of Singaporeans' national identity on the basis of shared cultures, religions and values among different ethnic groups. The five shared values were (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1990):

1. Nation before community and society above self
2. Family as the basic unit of society
3. Regard and community support for the individual
4. Consensus instead of contention
5. Racial and religious harmony

The shared values coincide with communitarian ideas upheld by the Singapore government which put national collective interests above personal interests (Chua, 1995, 2004, 2009). These shared values were penned in line with then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's advocacy of Asian values which refer to the importance of family values and national interests and the importance of a "strong and effective state" in sustaining social stability (Han, 2007). Asian values were strongly defended by Lee Kuan Yew in favour of the long-term political dominance enjoyed by the PAP in Singapore (Lee, 2000; Zakaria, 1994). It was based on the Asian

values framework that the civic and moral education curriculum was modified and run in primary and secondary schools but, unlike the religious knowledge subject, it is not examinable in school or public examinations (C. Tan, 2008b; T. Tan, 1994; Tan & Chew, 2004). Students were required to learn basic knowledge of various religions in order to convey a message that they should pay respect to others' religions (C. Tan, 2008b). Moreover, younger Singaporeans are also expected to grasp a better understanding about the close relationship between social and racial harmony and economic growth and prosperity (Tan & Chew, 2004).

9.2.5 Singapore History for National Education

In 1997, slightly after Singapore had become independent for 30 years, there were concerns about students' lack of knowledge about Singapore's nation-building history, which is largely concerned about positive contributions made by the first generation of political leaders under the PAP, including Lee Kuan Yew. From the government's perspective, this was the main reason for young Singaporeans not showing enough respect and support to the regime but concerning about their own interests. The NE programme aims to enable students to study the Singapore history from the British colonial era to the early post-independence period and teach them both the core values of nation-building and the core principles of governance (Lee, 1997). Instead of being a separate subject in the school curriculum, the NE programme is integrated into a range of subjects in primary and secondary schools as well as junior colleges. History, geography and civic and moral education are three core subjects included in the NE programme (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004).

Junior secondary students should spend one year for the study of Singapore history, whereas the Singapore history curriculum at the senior secondary level covers not only the developments leading to the merger between Singapore and Malaysia but also the withdrawal of the British troops from Singapore in 1971 in order to pinpoint the historical lessons of the racial riots in 1964 and also the importance of self-reliance on national defence concomitant with the policy of conscription. The extension of the coverage of the Singapore history in the school curriculum is believed to enable students to appreciate the socio-economic achievements made by the ruling party's and political leaders. Apart from studying Singapore history, senior secondary students have to read the social studies subject which focuses on the political, social and economic developments in the nation-building of Singapore (J. Tan, 2008).

From these, history education in Singapore, during the independent period from 1965, had not been strongly emphasised until the launch of the NE programme in 1997. The development of history education is closely tied to the political development in Singapore. As what is shown in the textbooks, which will be analysed in the following section, the history of Singapore's nation-building has been constructed by the ruling party that contents favourable to the regime are selected (Hong & Huang, 2008). Meanwhile, some contents which are considered

causing potential threats to the regime would be omitted like the racial conflicts and riots between the 1950s and 1960s for they would hamper the interethnic relationships in the early independent period. This disallows any alternative versions of the Singapore history other than the one approved by the state to be taught and learnt in the schooling system.

History education, similar to moral education and religious education, has been manipulated by the government to strengthen the regime's legitimacy by demonstrating its ability to solve political, social and economic problems and thus to inculcate in younger Singaporeans a strong sense of national belonging and identity by reaffirming the regime's achievements in improving people's livelihoods and bringing about social stability, racial harmony and economic prosperity. The following section examines the evolution of Singapore history curriculum and textbooks from the 1950s in order to prove that history education has served the political interests in Singapore under the one-party's dominance by the PAP.

9.3 Evolution of Singapore History Curriculum and Textbooks

In the early 1950s, the school curriculum was not unified with the limited role of the colonial government in education policy. A majority of Chinese vernacular schools, which were privately run by Chinese business and voluntary organisations, adopted history textbooks originated from China with much coverage of Chinese history rather than world history. Therefore, the Chinese vernacular schools were suspected to be deeply influenced by overseas political forces especially those from communist China that might frighten the British colonial administration which was busy with tackling the widespread influence of the Malayan Communist Party in the Malay Peninsula. The post-war period witnessed the colonial government's heightened interference into the making of education policy, including the formulation of the school curriculum and the production of school textbooks, with no exception for history education.

When the self-government was set up with the victory of the PAP in the general election in 1959, the PAP-led government imposed more detailed regulations on the history curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. The history subject was introduced from Primary 3 to 6 with a coverage of world history in addition to historical figures in Malaya and Singapore. Meanwhile, the history subject at the secondary level covered modern Europe, the United States of America, Russia, China, Japan and Southeast Asia, including Malaya and Singapore. These changes point to "de-Sinicisation" in the history curriculum and textbooks, which were widely adopted in the Chinese vernacular schools, in order to dilute the influence of communist China in shaping the schooling system in Singapore.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in the early stage of independence, the importance of such humanities subjects like history was subordinate to other

subjects like English, mathematics and science which were more relevant to the needs of economic development and labour market. Moreover, the government tried to play down the importance of the history of racial riots in the 1950s and 1960s for these historical events might arouse discontent among different ethnic groups and affect racial harmony and social stability (Goh & Gopinathan, 2005). As a result, the history subject at the primary level was abolished in 1972 and replaced by the subject of “education for living”, in which elements of the Singapore history were included, until 1979 when it was discontinued (Chia, 2012). Singapore history was subsequently made an elective subject for upper secondary schools as a part of the history of Malaya (Lau, 2002).

9.3.1 Social and Economic History of Singapore (1984 Edition)

It was not until the mid-1980s when it witnessed a revival of history education in the face of growing challenges arising from westernisation and the widespread of individualism and materialism, both of which were perceived to have negative impacts on younger Singaporeans’ allegiance to the PAP. Apart from promoting Confucianism among the majority of the Chinese population in Singapore, another means to retain the populace’s support to the regime was to remind them the difficult pathways taken by older generations in making Singapore an independent nation and achieving magnificent socio-economic developments since 1965. It is believed that the re-emphasis on history education in the early 1980s was a result of the PAP’s loss of a parliamentary seat to an opposition party leader in 1981 for it ended the ruling party’s monopoly in the parliament for 13 years since 1968 (Mauzy & Milne, 2002). From the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew’s perspectives, the populace should be reminded of the process of merger and independence through history education in order to enhance the political legitimacy of the current regime (Chia, 2012).

Besides the introduction of religious knowledge as a new subject for senior secondary students, the teaching and learning of the Singapore history were made compulsory at the junior secondary level in 1984, when two-volume Singapore history textbooks, *Social and Economic History of Singapore*, were published. There was a Lower Secondary History Project Team (LSHPT) under the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore in the Ministry of Education. The team was responsible for designing and writing the Singapore history curriculum and textbooks. The curriculum was aimed to enable students to study the historical development of Singapore from the arrival of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, who represented the British East India Company to found a free trading port in the Malay Peninsula, to 1965 when Singapore gained independence. It was aimed at cultivating a sense of national belonging and developing a sense of Singapore identity among students. Students were taught the social and economic history of Singapore from 1819 to 1900 and 1900 to 1965, respectively, in secondary 1 and 2 (Chia, 2012).

As stated in the two-volume textbook's preface, it is of vital importance for young Singaporean citizens to:

... acquire a sound, basic knowledge of our national history. A knowledge of the past can help them to understand the present, as past events and developments have, in no small measure, shaped the present. A knowledge of our country's history can also help to develop in our pupils a sense of identity with, and loyalty to, our Republic. There are also useful lessons to be learned from the past, such as the desirable social values and personal attributes exemplified in the lives of certain historical personalities, the factors contributing to their success or failure, and the need for the people of Singapore to be ever alert and adaptable to changes on the regional and international scene that impinge on Singapore. (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1984a, p. iii)

It is noteworthy that the two-volume textbooks contained a total of 44 chapters, with a comprehensive coverage of topics related to the social and economic history of Singapore during the British colonial period and the how Singapore gained independence in 1965. Those topics included different peoples and their settlements in Singapore, economic prosperity, social issues and problems in the nineteenth century, the relationship between Singapore and the Malay states, the impacts of the two world wars on Singapore, the road leading to independence and post-war socio-economic problems being tackled by the PAP government. However, the sensitive issues like racial riots in 1964 were only briefly covered with a mere two short paragraphs (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1984b, pp. 226–227), but the suppression against political opposition in the Operation Coldstore in February 1963, in which prominent opposition leaders such as Lim Chin Siong were arrested, was omitted. However, the textbook did mention Lim as one of the Chinese-educated leaders in the PAP and “provided links between the PAP and the Malayan Communist Party and pro-communist groups” (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1984b, p. 205).

9.3.2 History of Modern Singapore (1994 Edition)

In 1994, the LSHPT simplified and combined the two-volume Singapore history textbooks into one-volume *History of Modern Singapore*, which was taught only at Secondary 1. There were 19 chapters in the textbook (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1994):

1. History and Us
2. Early Singapore and Its Founding by Raffles
3. The Coming of the Immigrants
4. They Helped Singapore to Grow
5. Growth of the Settlement
6. Growing Crops for Cash
7. Trade and the Growth of the Port
8. How Singapore was Ruled
9. Law and Order

10. Education and Medical Services
11. How Events in Other Countries Influenced Singapore
12. World War I and Singapore
13. The Drift to Another War
14. Flames of War
15. Fall of the Fortress
16. The End of the War
17. The Road to Self-Government
18. From Self-Government to Independence
19. Building a Nation

The first chapter is concerned about historiography and the importance of historical skills and concepts such as chronology, change and continuity, and cause and effect in the historical studies. A historical source-based study was also introduced as a means to teach students how to study history (Chia, 2012; Ministry of Education, 1992). Moreover, it is obvious that, as revealed from the textbook, the focus of the Singapore history subject was not very much on the process of nation-building but on topics like economic development, immigrant population growth and governance under the British colonial administration before the Japanese occupation in 1942. Whilst there were five chapters (Chapters 12–16) addressing the impacts of world wars on the historical development of Singapore, there were only three chapters (Chapters 17–19) covering the transformation of Singapore from a British colony to an independent nation through a short-lived merger with Malaysia (1963–1965) between the 1950s and 1960s.

Some sensitive issues like racial riots were not emphasised for they might arouse the feeling of uneasiness and hatred among different ethnic groups. Instead, it shows a clear tendency for the government to let students know about how British rule in Singapore was fallen into Japan as a rising power in Asia and also the historical significance of the Japanese occupation between February 1942 and August 1945 on how it changed the historical fate of Singapore to embark on decolonisation. Apart from studying the Singapore history at the junior secondary level, the history of other parts of the world like Europe, Britain, the USA, Japan, China and Southeast Asia, with special references on the history of Malaysia, was made available for senior secondary students (Champion & Moreira, 1995).

9.3.3 Understanding Our Past: Singapore from Colony to Nation (1999 Edition)

With the launch of the NE programme in 1997, the focus of the teaching and learning of the Singapore history at the junior secondary level was placed on the transformation of Singapore from the Japanese occupation to independence and nation-building. In 1998, as a part of the NE programme, National Heritage Board published *Singapore: Journey into Nationhood* to lay out the historical

developments of post-war Singapore through the process of decolonisation to the declaration of independence in 1965. Although this book was not a textbook used in schools, it served as a propagandist publication to arouse the public's consciousness about the historical developments since the 1945. Whilst the British colonial period was narrated briefly as the historical background, the book provided more details about social and racial riots that happened in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the relationship between the PAP and the leftists in the discourse of merger and independence (National Heritage Board, 1998).

The book's predecessor, *Road to Nationhood: Singapore 1819–1980*, which was published by the Singapore government's Archive and Oral History Department in 1984, reviewed the history of Singapore's political development. The first two chapters looked into the political system under the British colonial rule, and the third chapter referred to the Japanese invasion as a watershed of Singapore's political history for its role in leading the process of decolonisation. The final two chapters covered how Singapore became a self-government and independent, but it did not provide details about racial riots and how the communist-related leftists penetrated into the Singapore society (Archive & Oral History Department, 1984). In this sense, it was clear that those sensitive historical events like the leftists' penetration into the PAP and racial riots were no longer taboos as considered by the Singapore government.

In line with this change of the government's attitudes towards the teaching of the Singapore history, the new textbook of the Singapore history was concerned less about British colonial history but more on what lessons could be learnt by young Singaporeans from historical events. For instance, young Singaporeans were expected to learn from the history of the Japanese invasion that it is important for them to be self-reliant on upholding the defence and security of the nation. This justifies the conscription policy which requires male adults to receive military training and serve in national service for certain periods since 1967 in Singapore. Moreover, the teaching of racial riots is to remind all ethnic groups to keep in mind the importance of keeping racial harmony in Singapore (Lee, 2008).

In order to cater for the needs of NE programme, the Curriculum Planning and Development Division under the Ministry of Education reformed the history curriculum for the junior secondary level in the late 1990s. Instead of beginning with the Singapore history, Secondary 1 students had to study civilizations of China, India and Southeast Asia, the rise and fall of empires and their politico-socio-economic systems and also the methods of historical studies and research (Kelly & Goh, 1999). Then, Secondary 2 students turned to study the Singapore history. A new textbook on Singapore history, *Understanding Our Past (Singapore: from Colony to Nation)*, was published in 1999 in line with the NE programme to cover the history of Singapore from 1819 to 1971. There were 14 chapters in that textbook (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 1999):

1. The Founding of Modern Singapore
2. The Immigrants: They Came, They Settled, They Contributed

3. The British as Rulers
4. External Events That Affected Singapore
5. World War II and the Fall of Singapore
6. The Syonan Years: Surviving the Horrors of War
7. End of War and Post-war Problems
8. Waves of Unrest: Strikes and Riots After the War
9. Road to Self-Government
10. Joining Malaysia
11. On Our Own: Separation from Malaysia
12. Journey in Nation-Building
13. Housing the People
14. Building Up Our Defence Force

The textbook, as what its contents reveal, put much less emphasis on the British colonial rule in Singapore with only four chapters' coverage. Moreover, more emphasis had been placed on the historical development in the twentieth century rather than the nineteenth century for its focus would be placed on the history of nation-building in line with the NE programme. The history of the Japanese occupation was covered by three chapters in the textbook. They described the historical significance of World War II on changes facing Singapore in the post-war period, which was characterised by the eclipse of the British colonial supremacy and decolonisation. Besides history textbook, young Singaporeans have been reminded with the historical legacy of the Japanese occupation in the Singapore history through museum exhibitions and publications (Lee, 2005).

Besides the British colonial rule and the Japanese occupation, more than half of the textbook's coverage was concerned about the development of nation-building in Singapore during the post-war period. Social unrest, racial riots, Singapore-Malaysia relationships, the reasons for merger and separation and the linkage between the PAP and leftists were examined in more detail. In addition, the textbook also turned to assess major achievements made by the PAP after Singapore's independence in 1965. Two core policies were addressed in the textbook, namely, public housing and conscription. These two policies do not only demonstrate the PAP's ability to bring about social progress and stability but also enhance the political legitimacy of the ruling party.

For public housing, on the one hand, the "home ownership scheme" since the 1960s gradually increased the island state's home ownership rate to over 90 % which in turn contributed to the growing sense of national belonging through the entitlement of Singaporeans home ownership. This could be conceived as the state's determination to entitle every Singaporean a stake of the nation. For conscription, on the other hand, this was to reinforce the belief that Singaporeans regardless of race, language or religion should be prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of national interests (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 1999).

9.3.4 *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation, Pre-1819 to 1971 (2007 Edition)*

In 2007, the fourth edition of the Singapore history textbook, which was entitled *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation, Pre-1819 to 1971*, was published and has been used by schools until the time of writing. Unlike its predecessors, the starting point of the Singapore history was no longer confined to 1819 but back to as early as the fourteenth century for written records and archaeological findings about Singapore at that period had been discovered over the past few decades (Kwa, Heng, & Tan, 2009). Similar to the previous Singapore history textbook published in 1999, the textbook put a strong emphasis on Singapore in the twentieth century with special reference to historical changes before and after World War II. There were 10 chapters in the textbook (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2007):

1. Was There Singapore Before 1819?
2. Who Was the Founder of Singapore?
3. What Part Did the Different Immigrant Communities Play in Singapore's Development?
4. How Did the British Govern Singapore Before World War II?
5. How Did External Events Before World War II Affect Singapore?
6. How Did World War II Affect Singapore?
7. How Did the Local People Respond to British Rule After World War II?
8. How Did Singapore Progress to Internal Self-Government?
9. How Did Singapore Achieve Independence?
10. How Did Singapore Tackle Its Challenges in Its Early Years of Independence?

As shown in the table of contents of the textbook, more than half of its coverage was concerned about the historical development of Singapore over the three decades between 1942 and 1971. This demonstrates a clear intention for the government, which was responsible for curriculum design and textbook writing, to articulate major achievements in social progress and economic development accomplished under the current regime during the early years of independence. This is not only to enhance the regime's political legitimacy but also to cure the problem of young Singaporeans lacking knowledge about the first-generation political leaders and their contributions made to the nation-building of Singapore. Therefore, the biographical notes of the first-generation political leaders like Lee Kuan Yew and other founders of the PAP, including Goh Keng Swee, Toh Chin Chye and S. Rajaratnam, were included in the textbook (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2007).

Apart from this, public exhibitions on the early years of Singapore's independence were organised by the government to enable young Singaporeans to recognise the PAP's contributions on economic development, social stability, racial harmony and the improvement of people's living quality (National Archives of Singapore, 2008; National Library Board and National Archives of Singapore, 2007). These

measures were aimed at shedding away any negative images posed on the ruling party for its unpopular and controversial policies confronting with political opposition and constraining the freedom of the press, assembly and public expression.

In summary, the Singapore government has put more emphasis on the teaching of the Singapore history at the junior secondary level concomitant with the implementation of the NE programme in the 1990s. There has been a shift from the orientation towards the British colonial history to the historical development of Singapore in the twentieth century with a strong emphasis on the lessons learnt from the Japanese occupation in 1942–1945 and how the nation-building of Singapore went on under the PAP's regime. With the government as the only writer of the Singapore history textbook for the junior secondary level, the intention was to make use of history education to cultivate a sense of national belonging and identity. The textbook also cultivated the sense of being Singaporeans who are willing to sacrifice individual interests for the sake of protecting communitarian and national interests. Being a core component of the NE programme, the Singapore history curriculum and textbooks are expected to serve a core purpose of legitimising the ruling party's governance in spite of the ever growing challenges facing the PAP for it is unlikely for young Singaporeans to accept unconditionally the political mandate and paternal rule by the ruling party. Post-65ers, referring to Singaporeans who were born after Singapore's independence in 1965, in fact, are more likely to question whether their rights of political participation and voices commenting government's policies could be respected and responded.

9.3.5 Singapore: The Making of a Nation-State, 1300–1975 (2014–2015 Edition)

Following the previous edition of the lower secondary textbook, together with the archaeological findings on Singapore before 1819, the latest textbook entitled *Singapore: The Making of a Nation-State, 1300–1975*, whose the first volume of the two was published in early 2014, traced the origins of “old Singapore” before the arrival of the British colonial power back to the fourteenth century. As stated by Ho Peng, Director-General of Education, in the textbook's preface as a “message to students”,

You will begin your exploration by Tracing Singapore's Origins. This journey begins with the question – How old is Singapore? – and focuses on tracing Singapore's origin as a port-of-call along the Asian maritime trade route from the 14th to 19th century. You will discover how Singapore was connected to the region and the world. (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2014, p. i)

The first volume of the textbook covers two main periods, one is between fourteenth and nineteenth century and the other is between 1819 when Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore and 1942 when Singapore was occupied by the Japanese in World War II. Rather than simply providing historical facts for students to study

the Singapore history, more emphasis has been placed on encouraging students to examine historical sources and evidence like artefacts, documents and oral historical accounts to come up with their own analysis. In other words, the new history syllabus has been designed to encourage students to interpret primary sources and therefore to stimulate their reasoning and analysis rather than relying on old-style rote learning method (Peterson, 2014). Meanwhile, the second volume, which would be published in early 2015, focuses on the period starting from the Japanese occupation, decolonisation for self-government and independence and also the first decade of independent Singapore between 1965 and 1975.

9.4 History Education and Political Development in Singapore

In the early days of Singapore independence, the PAP's governance was maintained on the basis of a crisis mentality for the nascent Chinese-dominated multiracial country had no hinterland's support but needed to be self-reliant to survive in between two major Islamic countries in Southeast Asia, namely, Indonesia and Malaysia. The ideal type of society in Singapore as desired by the PAP regime is the society with a strong belief on solidarity, and peoples regardless of race, language or religion are disciplined without hesitation to make sacrifices for protecting the national interests as far as possible. Public policies like public housing, compulsory retirement scheme and conscription reflect a fundamental belief upheld by the PAP-led government that Singaporeans should be united and should recognise their national identity which should not be bounded by their own ethnic origins. The unity of Singaporeans should come with mass support and loyalty to the ruling party, which politicised the issue of Singapore's survival successfully, that is an important message conveyed by various editions of Singapore history textbooks as discussed earlier.

9.4.1 Politicisation of History Education

For education, a series of policy initiatives, including the adoption of daily rituals of raising the national flag and singing the national anthem at schools, the unification of schools' medium of instruction in English, the elimination of vernacular schools and the standardisation of school curriculum and textbooks, were aimed at terminating the phenomenon of interracial segregation which was considered harmful for maintaining social and racial harmony (J. Tan, 2006). Students have been taught to respect and also have better understanding about the custom and culture of other ethnic groups for maintaining racial harmony, based on which political and social stability can be sustained in Singapore. Therefore, for the PAP-led government,

education is not only for upgrading human resources but also for keeping the ruling party in power for perpetuity as what the PAP leaders have been consistently thinking about (Chong, 2010).

Nevertheless, in fact, challenges arising from the easy access of information from the network society and also the profound influence of western cultures and values like individualism and materialism make it more difficult for the ruling party to come up with citizens whose values and beliefs have become more heterogeneous when the influence of state's propaganda and ideology on individuals' daily life has been diminishing. It is therefore not surprising that young Singaporeans need to be reminded constantly about how the nascent nation was created and how they should contribute to the ongoing nation-building of Singapore.

Since 1965, the PAP regime in Singapore has been achievement based provided that the strong mandate of its rule and governance in Singapore is largely due to its magnificent economic and social progress achieved over the past few decades. However, whether the ruling party can make use of its achievements in the remarkable economic growth and social progress to win popular support in long term is increasingly questionable. In fact, the ways that Singapore is governed are not entirely welcomed by its people, and some policies proposed by the PAP and its leaders like Lee Kuan Yew had aroused controversies and suspicions among Singaporeans. For instance, the advocacy of eugenic beliefs and the controversial graduate mothers' scheme to encourage educated women to have more children were seen as discriminative against those who tended to be less educated but to have more children. This was believed to target Malays in Singapore (Mauzy & Milne, 2002; Rahim, 1998). The consistent suppression of political opposition and the imposition and tight control over the mainstream mass media have long been considered stifling alternative nongovernment voices to be heard in Singapore society.

For Singaporean youths who are more eager to engage themselves in social media and pursue individual needs and material aspirations, they are simultaneously more demanding for a higher degree of freedom, human rights and democracy. The top-down governance style prevailed under the premiership of Lee Kuan Yew was challenged by the urge for more open-minded government which should be able to listen to and embrace different voices from the ground for facilitating the policy-making and implementation. When Lee Kuan Yew stepped down as the nation's first prime minister in 1990, Singapore has witnessed a new political chapter marked by the growing number of post-65ers who were born after Singapore's independence, but they did not show empathy with the first generation of political leaders, including Lee Kuan Yew. Worse still, young Singaporeans seemed to lack knowledge about the contributions made by Lee and his colleagues in the PAP. The introduction of the NE programme, therefore, should be considered a medium of political education to reinforce the political status of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP as the founders of the Singapore nation which should be well respected by the younger generation.

In Singapore, history education in schools is under tight control by the state for the sake of national and political interests. There are no alternative interpretations of the Singapore history, except the one made by the state, being presented before the

students in schools. The state's version of historical account provides only a positive narration of the nation-building history with an attempt to justify what the PAP-led government did under its political hegemony even though some policies might arouse resistance and controversies among the populace. As a consequence, students are discouraged to be more critical about the historical role of the ruling party in the nation-building and the costs for developing the economy and maintaining social order and racial harmony under the PAP's rule.

Whilst history education is politicised, it was expected to educate young Singaporeans to be depoliticised that they blindly accept how they have been governed. Social constraints and problems such as lack of social mobility, educational inequality among racial groups and widened income gap, arising from the nation-building developments, were omitted or concealed in the school curriculum. In the long run, however, the ignorance of these social problems in the Singapore's nation-building history would result in the further deterioration of social and racial dilemmas for these problems have not been treated seriously (Rahim, 1998; J. Tan, 2008). In short, the politicisation of history education in Singapore intends to result in the depoliticisation of the younger generation. Nevertheless, it is argued that the effectiveness of history education in ensuring Singaporeans' unquestioning political loyalty towards the PAP's regime is indeed problematic.

9.4.2 History Education for Patriotism or Political Loyalty?

There is a question about the purpose of history education to make the younger generation to be patriotic to Singapore or to be politically loyal to the PAP's regime. One of the aims of the NE programme, with an emphasis on the teaching of the twentieth-century Singapore history, is to make young Singaporeans appreciating and recognising the PAP's contributions in the nation-building process and thus reinforce the feeling of satisfaction about the material gains and the improved living quality resulted from various policies like public housing and universal pension scheme. Nevertheless, when a sense of national identity and belonging has been inculcated among young Singaporeans through history education and the NE programme, it does not mean they would have a high degree of political loyalty to the ruling party or the regime. In other words, the younger generation is patriotic but not necessarily loyal to the PAP.

As what is revealed from the 2011 general election, which is also labelled as a watershed election, the PAP won the lowest percentage of votes, whilst the opposition Workers' Party won the highest number of elected parliamentary seats (even though only 6 out of 87, increased to 7 after its victory at a by-election in January 2013) ever since independence in 1965 (Da Cunha, 2012; Singh, 2012). Although this reflects the PAP still enjoys political hegemony, it is more difficult for the regime to garner solid support from young Singaporeans, most of whom are patriotic and have a strong sense of national identity, for they have much easier access of information on contentious perspectives of the ruling party from other

channels not entirely controlled by the state like the Internet (George, 2006, 2011) that can arouse a feeling of discontent among young voters aged between 21 and 35, who are interested in issues like civil liberties and living quality and thus tend to be more vocal and also more likely to ask for more alternative voices to be heard in the policymaking process (E. Tan, 2012; J. Tan, 2010; Vogel, 1991).

Whilst it is without doubt that history education can promote a patriotic feeling among young Singaporeans, it is far from true that it can serve as a political propaganda to solicit strong support among the younger generation to the ruling party especially at a time when more social problems as mentioned earlier have emerged and affected people's livelihoods. As a survey on the wellbeing of Singaporeans conducted with 1,500 citizens in 2011 by Tambyah and Tan (2013) shows 77.1 % of the respondents would identify themselves as Singaporeans and over 90.8 % felt proud to be a Singaporean. However, only about half of the respondents (50.7 %) agreed to have patriotic education to breed patriotism. In this sense, the linkage between patriotic or national education and the cultivation of national identity is not as clear as what the government used to assume. The Singapore society is no longer depoliticised but re-politicised for the growing interests of the younger generation in political issues. It is unrealistic to expect young Singaporeans will accept whatever the ruling party delivers, but they can be more critical towards the governance of the PAP-led government. The trend of having a more open-minded and embracive government cannot be reversed (Chong, 2012).

Meanwhile, history education should not be monopolised by the state machine that alternative views and interpretations are completely banned in schools for it should not be a mere tool of political propaganda, which is aimed to provide uncritically positive view on the history of nation-building. There should be a more balanced coverage of historical accounts from both positive and negative sides being presented in the history textbooks which should not be dominated by the state. Meanwhile, instead of simply avoiding sensitive historical events and political issues which are widely considered as taboos, teachers should be given more rooms to encourage more balanced discussion on the historical development of Singapore's nation-building. By doing so, students can develop constructive criticisms on the PAP's regime and thus think more independently about how the nation is going to be further developed in the long run when the older generations who led the independence of Singapore passed away.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the development of history education, with special reference to the teaching of the Singapore history at the junior secondary level and its relationship with the political development in Singapore since the 1950s. As a developmental state, both the national and economic developments provide a solid foundation for the PAP-led government to construct its political legitimacy and mandate in Singapore over the past half a century (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004).

The state plays a prominent role in maintaining social and racial harmony for the sake of economic development (Gopinathan, 2007). Education remains pivotal in developing the economy of the developmental state like Singapore (Green, 1997). Regardless of the profound influence of market forces, the Singapore government keeps holding a tight grip over education affairs, including curriculum planning and development. History education not only reminds young Singaporeans the historical significance of the PAP's leaders in building up Singapore as a modernised and united nation but also constructs an image about the ruling party which can remain in power in perpetuity.

The growing importance of history education is also closely related to the changing political landscape in Singapore, where there has been calls for more open-minded and embracive government that may induce some challenges to the absolute political hegemony enjoyed by the PAP's regime. History education has been incorporated into the NE programme to make sure that young Singaporeans have knowledge about who the founders of Singapore nation are and what the first generation of political leaders of the PAP did for the interests of the nation. Certain historical events are manipulated to have an important political message propagated in the society. For instance, the Japanese occupation serves an important lesson for Singaporeans to be prepared to make sacrifices for the interests of national security in line with the self-reliance principle. Racial riots in the 1960s denote the importance of keeping a harmonious relationship between ethnic groups for public order and social stability.

The political nature of history education in Singapore can be vividly observed. History education has been manipulated by the PAP-led government to consolidate its political mandate. Nevertheless, the one-sided historical narration dominated by the state ignores problems or negative aspects related to the PAP's rule over the past few decades. With the younger generation well educated, paternalistic rule and top-down approach of governance have been seen a major obstacle for them to take a more active role in Singapore politics. History education, together with the NE programme, as a political propaganda is not effective in making more young Singaporeans to support the ruling party, but they are more patriotic and proud of being Singaporeans without necessarily being affiliated with the PAP. Therefore, more challenges are facing the PAP's regime for most of young Singaporeans are educated and more critical about the shortcomings and setbacks committed by the government, whose policymaking and governance are under much greater pressure to be more accountable and transparent as expected by ordinary Singaporeans who vote the PAP with its mandate to rule in Singapore.

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