

Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group Association for Asian Studies

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General Elections Rally of the Worker's Party of Singapore, held in Hougang (May 2011)



Chair's Address

I am delighted to report that at our business meeting at the Association for Asian Studies conference in Honolulu on 1 April 2011, the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group awarded the inaugural John A. Lent Prize for the best paper presented at the previous annual meeting. The prize went to Patricia Sloane-White of the University of Delaware for her paper "Working in the Islamic Economy: *Sharia*-zation and the Malaysian Workplace." The committee adjudicating the prize chaired by James Jesudason of the Colorado School of Mines and Craig Lockard of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay voted unanimously to award the prize to Patricia. I want to congratulate Patricia for being the first recipient of this prestigious award and also wish to thank James and Craig for their hard work in reading through the papers.

At the business meeting we also discussed how to use some of our current funds. Suggestions included using the funds for sponsoring a few students at the meeting of the Malaysian Studies Conference such as by subsidizing their registration fee, and/or sponsoring a reception. If you have any other suggestions on how funds might be spent to improve Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei studies and specifically to highlight our MSB Studies Group, I would be happy to hear from you.

Lastly, I invite all members to keep on using our list-serve and visiting our website at <http://www.msbstudies.org/index.html>. Do post interesting articles, circulate information about conferences and other professional activities, and express your opinion on current events. The livelier the discussion, the better!

*Erik Martinez Kuhonta, McGill University
Chair, Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group
erik.kuhonta@mcgill.ca*

Editor's Foreword

It is my pleasure to present to you the autumn issue of *Berita*. Gratitude and appreciation has to be extended to all who have contributed to the newsletter, which is the second issue in its new format. We hope that it will serve as a tool for Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group (MSB) members to disseminate information on their research and professional activities.

Berita is now making significant headway in terms of its distribution and access to a wider audience, with the newsletter being distributed through the Malaysian and Singapore Society of Australia, the Japan Society for Southeast Asian Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the University of Malaya. Additionally, the Alden Library at Ohio University will host all past and current issues of *Berita*. Access to the newsletter may be obtained via the MSB website.

This issue begins with Patricia Sloane-White's report on the MSB-sponsored panel at the Association for Asian Studies 2011. The panelists make a collective case for the need to examine the evolving role of Islam in the marketplace, and how the Islamic model of economy may serve as an alternative to the social positives that Western capitalism has thus far been purported to uniquely engender and foster.

Bridget Welsh's article on the 2011 elections in Singapore serves as a counterpoint to the developments occurring across the Johor Straits in the social psyche of Singaporeans. Welsh suggests that the nature of political inclinations and polling decisions made by Singaporeans are shifting from personality-based to issues-driven agendas. She concludes that these changes are set to continue in the foreseeable future.

Yeow Tong Chia's piece on National Education in Singapore provides a glimpse of the historical precedent of one of the key tenets of Singapore's education policy. In providing an outline of the psychological basis and the envisaged outcomes of what has become the most important framework that guides the national narrative of Singapore today, he concludes that National Education provides the Singapore government with a tool to legitimize its political rule through the determination of the historical lessons that young Singaporeans should internalize.

Finally, Matthew Schauer's notes on archival holdings on colonial ethnology provide a snippet of the wealth of information on the historical legacy of the European colonial era, as well as the fact that much of the key sources of data for our respective scholarly endeavors remain to be found in Southeast Asia itself. It is also a vivid reminder of the need to contextualise research on the various aspects of the countries and societies encompassed by the geographical mandate of our studies group into the larger region and the world.

Derek Heng, Ohio State University
Editor



Members' Updates

Cheong Soon Gan (Ph.D. Candidate, Southeast Asian History, UC Berkeley) was recently appointed Visiting Instructor (Asian History) at Union College (Schenectady, NY). He will teach Southeast and South Asian history as well as courses on Islam, diasporas, colonial perceptions of race and gender, colonial travel writing, food, propaganda and nationalism. His dissertation examines how a newly independent Malayan/Malaysian state used propaganda to disseminate its vision of multi-ethnic post-colonial nation from 1957-1969.

Derek Heng (Associate Professor, History Department, Ohio State University) is presently assisting Ohio University Press in developing a new book series entitled *Southeast Asia in World History*. He is currently researching on the impact and influences of China and India on the military and economy of the Malacca Straits region in the 6th to 15th centuries. He was recently promoted with tenure at his home institution.

Erik Martinez Kuhonta (Associate Professor of Political Science, McGill University). His book, entitled *The Institutional Imperative: The Politics of Equitable Development in Southeast Asia*, was published in August 2011 by Stanford University Press. It is a comparative-historical study of inequality in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Francis R. Bradley (Assistant Professor of History, Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, Pratt Institute) is nearing completion of a book on Islamic knowledge networks constructed most prominently by

Patani 'ulama that linked peninsular Southeast Asia with other Muslim centers in the region, as well as in South Asia, Arabia, and southern Africa in the nineteenth century. His article, entitled "Siam's Conquest of Patani and the End of *Mandala* Relations, 1785-1838", will appear in *The Struggle for Patani's Past: History Writing and the Conflict in Southern Thailand* (Singapore University Press, forthcoming 2012). His new e-mail address is fbradl21@pratt.edu.

Loh Kah Seng (Independent Scholar; PhD history, Murdoch University) is currently working on the social and economic impact of the British military withdrawal from Singapore in the late 1960s and on interdisciplinary approaches to oral history and memory in Southeast Asia. His manuscripts on the 1961 Bukit Ho Swee fire and the University of Malaya Socialist Club are presently being reviewed for publication.

Matthew Schauer (Ph.D Candidate, Dept of History, University of Pennsylvania) is presently working on his dissertation, which examines the interrelation between the collection of ethnological knowledge by colonial civil servants and imperial educational policies as they pertained to Malay indigenous peoples in British Malaya and the Dutch Netherlands Indies between 1890 and the start of the Second World War. An article entitled "A Beautiful Savage Picture", is forthcoming in a volume of travel studies to be published in autumn 2011 by Cambridge Scholars Press.

Peng-Khuan Chong (Chair, Social Science Department, Plymouth State University) recently visited Wawasan University (Penang), Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR;

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Kampar) and Sunway University (Kuala Lumpur) to preparing the groundwork for university faculty and student exchange programs with his home institution. He also did a recitation of his latest anthology of poems, entitled *Disana: Penang Love Poems*, in Penang, and made a presentation on “Politics and Presidential Elections” at the Centre for International Studies, UTAR in April 2011.

Patricia Sloane-White (Assistant Professor of Anthropology & Director of Islamic Studies, University of Delaware) has been conducting fieldwork on Corporate Islam in Malaysia for a forthcoming book. She was awarded the first John A. Lent Prize for the best paper presented on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei at the 2010 AAS Conference.

Sarena Abdullah (Senior lecturer, School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia) is currently researching on Malaysian visual arts and cultural policies, and completing her research on Malaysian art writings. She is also founder

of Contesting Thoughts Research, which promotes trans-disciplinary research between the arts and sciences. She also heads the Research in Malaysian and Southeast Asian Arts (RIMA) Research Group, which promotes research on arts, culture and theories of Southeast Asia. She is currently working on a book entitled *Postmodernism in Malaysian Art* and is an editor of two upcoming books, of which the first is based on trans-disciplinary research, and the second, on a series of papers presented at “Research on Fridays Seminar Series.”

Yeow Tong Chia (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Macau) received his doctorate in Comparative, International and Development Education and History of Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, early this year. He was recently awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship by the Faculty of Education at the University of Macau.

Announcements

Conferences & Workshops

4th International Conference on Southeast Asia (ICONSEA)

Organisers: Dept of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Malaya.

Location: Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Date: 6 – 7 December 2011

Malaysia, Singapore and the Region—17th Colloquium of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia

Organisers: Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia; Supported by Deakin University & La Trobe University.

Location: 'Deakin Prime', the Deakin University, Melbourne City Centre, Level 3, 550 Bourke Street, Melbourne, Australia.

Date: 8-9 December 2011

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New Appointment to the Abdul Tun Razak Chair (Ohio University)

It is with great pleasure that Ohio University announces the arrival of Dr. Habibah Ashari, the 14th Tun Abdul Razak Chair in Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University's Center for International Studies. Dr. Habibah joined the Center in July 2011 and will be in residence at Ohio University through June 2013.

Former head of the International Education College (INTEC) at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Professor Habibah's academic specializations are teaching English as a second language (TESL), adult education, international education and curriculum. She

earned her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from Indiana University, Bloomington, in 1994, and also has an MA in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University and a BA (hons) in English and Chinese Studies from the University of Malaya.

While at Athens, she will teach courses with a Malaysia focus, and will serve as a resource at the Malaysian Resource Center, Alden Library, Ohio University. She will also be organizing activities and events pertaining to Malaysia.

Professor Habibah is available for guest lectures and participation in conferences and workshops. She can be reached at ashari@ohio.edu or 740-593-2656.

Prizes

John A. Lent Prize (presented at the AAS/ICAS 2011, Hawaii)

Prof. John A. Lent founded Berita in 1975, editing it for twenty-six years, and founded the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group in 1976, serving as chair for eight years. He has been a university faculty member since 1960, in Malaysia, the Philippines, China, and various U.S. universities. From 1972-74, Prof. Lent was founding director of Malaysia's first university-level mass communications program at Universiti Sains Malaysia, and has been professor at Temple University since 1974.

Over the years, Prof. Lent has written monographs and many articles on Malaysian mass media, animation, and cartooning. He is the author and editor of seventy-one

books and monographs, and hundreds of articles and book chapters. Since 1994, he has chaired the Asian Cinema Society and has been the editor of the journal Asian Cinema. He publishes and edits International Journal of Comic Art, which he started in 1999, and is chair of Asian Research Center on Animation and Comic Art and Asian-Pacific Association of Comic Art, both of which he established, and are located in China.

In its inception year (2011), the John A. Lent Prize was established to confer recognition upon the best paper on Malaysia, Singapore and/or Brunei presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in the previous year.

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In determining the recipient of the first award, the John A. Lent Prize committee for 2011, chaired by James Jesudason (Colorado School of Mines) and Craig Lockard (University of Wisconsin-Green Bay), was guided by the following criteria it laid out:

- Originality of research and the extent of its contribution to research on Malaysia, Singapore and/or Brunei;
- Exhibition of theoretical and analytical depth;
- Richness of empirical data;
- Persuasiveness of argument;
- Quality of writing.

The committee received a number of excellent papers, and chose Patricia Sloane-White's paper—"Working in the Islamic Economy: *Sharia*-ization and the Malaysian Workplace"—as the winner.



Erik Kuhonta, Chair of the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group, presenting the prize to Patricia Sloane-White.

In the citation of Patricia Sloane-White's paper, the committee noted, "(The

paper is) both timely and engaging, (and) analyzes the emerging corporate *shariah* movement in Malaysia, marked by top executives and workers self-consciously seeking to instill and enhance Islamic piety in the workplace and explicitly promoting an alternative model to Western corporate and UMNO-based political capitalism, through in-depth interviews and deep familiarity of executives and workers in the Muslim spiritual economy. For those hoping to see a liberal Malaysia eventually, or expecting it to move along a western economic model, the views expressed by her respondents might require rethinking.

"The Islamic participants are not troubled by religious exclusivism in the workplace, the pursuit of a piety that endorses gender hierarchies, and a hegemonic understanding of Islam in Malaysia. Sloane-White's paper met the (prize committee's) conditions the best. It was ethnographically rich, contributed new information and knowledge about a topic not widely studied, and was lucidly written. Though not explicitly theoretical or designed to be so, the paper's deep analytical concern with culture and economic organizations is an important addition to the 'varieties of capitalism' literature taking firm root in the social sciences. It should also stir scholars to ask whether the impetus and form of corporate *sharia* in Malaysia has its roots in the country's particular brand of ethnic and authoritarian politics, or that it represents a more universal development over the broader Islamic landscape."

We congratulate Patricia Sloane-White on her accolade.



Special Report

Islam, Corporatization and Economy in Southeast Asia (By Patricia Sloane-White)

The Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group sponsored the panel on “Islam, Corporatization, and Economy in Southeast Asia” at the special joint conference of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) held in Hawaii last April. The panel was organized by Patricia Sloane-White (University of Delaware, U.S.A.), with papers presented by Timothy Daniels (Hofstra University, U.S.A.), Bridget Welsh (Singapore Management University), Michael Peletz (Emory University, U.S.A.), Patricia Sloane-White, and Chie Saito (Suzuka International University, Japan). Sloane-White presents a summary of the panel below.

Proposing this panel, I sought to make connections with colleagues in Muslim Southeast Asia who were exploring the rise of corporate and market orientations in Islamic and Islamist lives. My own ethnographic engagement with shariah-based businesses in Malaysia led me to think about the intersections between spirituality and materiality in Malaysian Islam. My co-panelists shared my assumption that crucial questions need to be asked about the growing role of Islam and shariah in local and global theories of political and corporate governance, the rise of *ulama* and shariah “professionals,” and the impact of local and global capitalist and corporate orientations on Islamic practice.

Fundamental to our panel’s focus was the recognition that Islam’s and Islamism’s roles in Malaysia and Indonesia are ever shifting as Muslim political parties and organizational agents strive for increasing moral and practical legitimacy in modern life. We argue that Islam’s actors are fashioning an Islam that is increasingly “managed,” held “accountable” (in the fullest book-keeping sense of the word) for its deliverables and to sophisticated theories and critiques of mainstream economics, law, management, gender, governance, and global capitalism. The panelists showed that these are themes which have penetrated Southeast Asian Muslim lives at multiple levels—from government and its apparatus to political parties, and deeply into household economies as well. As such, we felt that observers of Islam in this region can no longer afford to overlook the impact of materiality and the market.

As the first two papers demonstrated, the materiality of Islam in Malaysia is increasingly a focus of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). Tim Daniels’ paper on “Circulating Shariah: *Ubudiah*, *Masuliah*, and Dinar in Kelantan” examined the interpenetrating economic and spiritual principles which have guided the PAS-led Kelantan state government in its twenty-year administration. He described how PAS cleansed Kelantan of “sinful” entertainment businesses and “wasteful” consumption, and proceeded to instill Islamic values into all aspects of governance and distribution, including interest-free banking, the meticulous separating out of *halal* and *haram* state accounts, and the fashioning of an “Islamic social welfare state” which redistributes state revenue and *zakat* to needy people and worthy causes, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Kelantan’s 2011 state



budget was presented by leaders as “compassionate and friendly”—one which shared wealth and virtue between the government and its people. Daniels discussed the Kelantan government’s recent minting of its own currency—the dinar and dirham—with claims that this money has greater moral and economic legitimacy; at the same time, these are clearly political mobilizations intended to critique the Western capitalist and neoliberal positions of Malaysia’s government. Circulating shariah ideals through distribution and redistribution of state revenue, the Kelantan state government has been less effective in mobilizing Islamic principles to facilitate industrial growth. While PAS leaders blame the federal government for “blocking” Kelantan’s economic development, Daniels suggests this tactic betrays PAS’s deeply ambivalent attitude toward reconciling capital accumulation with Islamic virtue. In his final analysis, he argues that Kelantan’s pious leaders remain better at giving money away and minting it in gold and silver than at fostering its production, but there is no evidence that they will continue to allow Kelantan to be seen as the sleepy economic backwater that the ruling party has long claimed it to be.

Bridget Welsh’s paper on “‘New’ Islamic Governance: The PAS Evolution” resonated closely with that of Daniels in demonstrating how the economy, theories of global Islamic and corporate governance, and the primacy of market principles have had a significant impact on PAS as certain of its factions rebrand it for a new political era. Voters are no longer expected to make a trade-off between a “good” government based on values and “good” government based on performance. Drawing on up-to-the-minute interviews with PAS leaders,

Welsh’s paper argued that a new formula of “Islamic governance” is under construction, based on an embrace of the market, social welfare focused both on need and religious education, and policy implementation led by performance-driven, managerial-style professionals rather than traditionally conservative *ulama*. At the same time, internal debates about Malay rights and Malaysian unity are generating deep rifts. She concludes that the new performance-driven practice of Islamic governance for PAS may offer greater prospects for social and political inclusiveness and participation, and also “deliver the goods”—that is, provide the economic and social deliverables that PAS’s prior policy articulations did not.

Michael Peletz’s paper, “From ‘Kadi Justice’ to e-Syariah Governance: Corporatization and Discourses of Transformation in Malaysia’s Islamic Judiciary,” argued similarly that the deep impress of corporate professionalization on Islamic law in Malaysia cannot be underestimated; so, too, does he argue that the relationship between global capitalist rationality and “Islamization” in Malaysia is much closer than we may have thought. Peletz studies the “cultural logics” of Malaysia’s shariah judiciary. The shariah judiciary is re-engineering both its organization and personnel. Judges are no longer “kadis” but “hakim”—suit-wearing professionals not merely dressed like their civil-law counterparts but operating increasingly by standards set by civil- and common-law procedures, a rebranding exercise not dissimilar to the one described for PAS by Bridget Welsh. Shariah in Malaysia has entered the information age via “e-Syariah portal”—a sophisticated, interactive electronic “toolkit” for legitimizing and disseminating



shariah rulings and data to portal “clients” and “users.” Similarly, the shariah judiciary has re-invented its bureaucracy according to Japanese-style management techniques, applying a workflow-efficiency and auditing system to enhance key performance “outcomes.” Peletz argues that these corporatized shifts in Malaysia’s Islamic judiciary require us to shift our own monolithic and reductionist assumptions about the nature of what we call “Islamization”. Its processes are complex and contingent “assemblages” and “products” forged in relationship with a multiplicity of global discourses and local practices that are “not reducible to a single logic.”

My own paper, “Shariah Elites in Malaysia’s Islamic Economy,” also concerned the professionalizing of shariah, but not the shariah of Malaysia’s judiciary. My focus was on the small but powerful cohort of shariah scholars (46

individuals and a handful of consultancy firms), who as paid consultants vetted by Bank Negara (Malaysia’s central bank), scrutinize and approve the products and deals generated by Malaysia’s very successful Islamic financial institutions. We know little about the Malaysian Islamic economy’s progenitors and promoters—the people who have orchestrated

its global ascendance. I demonstrated how recent changes in Malaysian law have granted shariah scholars the same status as civil court judges—a rise in both power and prestige which resonates with Peletz’s analysis of shariah-court judges. I described how shariah scholars get their vaunted positions and the elite characteristics they share: they are government- and *agong*-approved, highly networked, mostly male, cosmopolitan and global in orientation; recipients of first-class Islamic and U.K. academic pedigrees; and have emerged as entrepreneurial and consultancy “stars.” I argue that shariah advising in Malaysia provides membership of power elite of corporate-style Islamic scholars who seek to orchestrate Malaysia’s Islamic capitalist future.

Chie Saito’s paper concerns not grand-scale capitalism and

corporate life but the ground-level changes in household politics that accompanied the rise of Muslim women’s petty capitalism in Aceh, Sumatra after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Many aid organizations entered Aceh after this tragedy in order to reconstruct destroyed Acehnese societies and provide a variety of programs for the security of victims’ economic



Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group-sponsored panel (AAS/ICAS Meeting, Hawaii, April 2011)



lives. Saito demonstrated how aid in affected areas was often a synonym for economic development and empowerment. An Indonesian feminist NGO, which loaned capital for women's small-scale economic activities and organized women's vocational groups in rural areas, conveyed powerful political/feminist messages while trying to maintain a discourse with Islam that interpreted women's economic activities within an Islamic framework. To village women, Saito showed, various interpretations of Islam could provide either reasons for women's heightened economic activities or also justify their inactivity and continued dependence on husbands. Saito's paper reminded us how intricately woven together are the themes of economic and gendered duty in Muslim households and that reconciliations between Islamic understanding and economic mobilization are occurring as rapidly in the "petty" sector of the economy as they are at the institutional and political levels.

Ultimately, our papers highlighted how money, materiality, and corporatization are

providing both a vocabulary and a rationale for managing and legitimizing change in Muslim lives in Malaysia and Indonesia. Recognizing the interconnections between Islam and economy allows us to acknowledge that Islamism and Islamization in this region (and also beyond) may be more closely aligned to global corporate and managerial trends than is often recognized, and that the role of economic (and not merely moral) accountability—and the market itself—will likely continue to play a significant and rapidly growing role in Islam's political, legal, and gender transformations.

Patricia Sloane-White is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Director of Islamic Studies, University of Delaware. She was a Fulbright Senior Scholar to Malaysia in 2008 and a research fellow at University of Malaya in 2010. A version of her paper, entitled "Working in the Islamic Economy: Shariazation and the Malaysian Workplace", will appear in the journal *Sojourn* in late 2012.



Feature Article

Singapore's Democratic Opening? 2011 Elections. (By Bridget Welsh)

Singapore's May 2011 parliamentary election has already been classified as a watershed election and the same can be said for the August 2011 polls in which the People's Action Party (PAP) stalwart Dr. Tony Tan secured a less than one percent victory in the presidential election. When the results came in each election, the incumbent party—the PAP—had marked its worst performance since independence, losing forty percent of the popular vote in May with a record loss of six out of eighty-seven seats and over sixty-five percent of the votes to candidates who ran on anti-PAP platforms in August. One week after the May polls, its first two prime ministers, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong, resigned from the Cabinet. Another week later, eleven out of fourteen ministers had been changed, with three additional ministers removed from senior posts – in a completely revamped Cabinet. Review committees were set up and in the August 8th National Day Speech, for the first time in years, the prime minister outlined new policies involving the country's social safety nets. The reverberations of the August results are only now percolating. The PAP is grappling with responding to an awakened electorate that sent a clear message – change.

For some, the election results came as a surprise. The PAP government had achieved a record 14.5% GDP growth in 2010 and successfully navigated the 2008 financial crisis,

maintaining Singapore as an attractive financial center and regional hub. Economic performance, efficiency and calls for stability have underscored the PAPs political support in the past, and in these areas they continue to shine. Based on past practices, the PAP should have had a smooth sailing ride, as the party's elite had usually returned to power in landslides. Elections in Singapore are supposed to be non-events, with the highlight being the out-of-bounds comments of an opposition politician leading to the subsequent defamation suit. Singaporeans moreover have been traditionally portrayed as politically apathetic, reinforcing the "exceptional" quality of Singapore, where the expansion of the middle class and economic development have not been associated with greater calls for democracy. Yet, this year, the electorate engaged the campaigns in an unprecedented manner and in the process reshaped Singaporean politics, strengthening the opposition with a clear signal for the dominant party to reform.

These changes have been captured for the first time through straw polling. Public opinion research (at least that which has been published) began during the 2006 polls, but this year it deepened further. There were four polls conducted around the May polling campaign period, including one by myself conducted by Merdeka Center, and another two in August. We collectively found that the May 2011 campaign was driven by issues rather than personalities, with debates focused on cost of living, affordable housing and immigration. Bread and butter concerns were seen as paramount. In August, personality, party affiliation and issues mattered, as the debates from the May parliamentary elections extended into the presidential poll. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, these issues involved a soul-



searching dynamic for national identity, and varied among different groups. There was considerable attention to those who are left out of Singapore's success and the challenges of national integration. There issues were real concerns about the direction of where Singapore is heading.

The other main driver in the polls was more support for checks and balances. The electorate rejected the constitutional changes made by the PAP government before the May parliamentary elections that allowed for more nominated members of parliament. Instead, in voting to put the opposition into one of the large group constituencies known as Group Representation Constituencies (GRC) which have been a hurdle for opposition gains, by sending five opposition candidates into parliament, they showed greater support for a non-PAP alternative. Polling during the May campaign reported that over a majority of Singaporeans saw the opposition as credible, especially the main opposition victor, the Worker's Party, and an unprecedented number were willing to put the opposition into parliament. This extended into the more staid presidential contest, where over a quarter of voters support a candidate who openly called for a more watch dog presidency. More voters want a check within the system; there is now greater openness to alternatives than before, although these voices are still a minority.

The question is—why? Why would Singaporeans move away from the trusted incumbent political party and call for political reform? The answers are complex and interrelated. Most point to a growing divide between the PAP and the populace tied to elite rule. Having the “best and brightest” has become a liability over time, as the PAP has lost

its traditional grassroots connections and ability to connect to the ground. There is a sense of inflexibility, a lack of empathy for the everyday challenges, in a system where people are expected to follow and be talked at rather than genuinely engaged or heard. This elite-grassroots divide was most obvious in the presidential contest where this elite-grassroots division in the PAP, symbolized by the more accessible and amiable Dr. Tan Cheng Bock, almost cost an upset to the old elite guard candidate Dr. Tony Tan. The argument that the PAP indeed has the best slate was challenged this time round, and in fact openly questioned.

Part of the changes are the result of different forms of political information. In this day and age where people's voices are being heard globally like never before, Singaporeans are awakening politically. These campaigns featured the emergence of different sources of information, namely social media and the internet as media for political discourse. This is the direct product of the PAP's decision to allow for more openness and a less regulated cyber space.

We see also new generational differences. Much has been made of the generation divide. Generation Y is seen as having a more liberal outlook, supporting alternatives and demanding a more responsive PAP that not coincidentally grew up with the internet. There are sharp differences among Singaporeans. These extend into class as well, as upper and middle class professionals (what the Institute of Policy Studies' 2011 survey called the “service” class), private home owners and private sector employees, are willing to distant themselves from the state, and the iron-grip control of the PAP on state power.



What is being ignored, however, are the less tangible changes transforming how Singaporeans engage politics. The era of strong man politics in Singapore is ending, a phenomenon that has already affected many countries throughout Asia. This has been coming for some time. What is interesting is that in Singapore, it is bringing with it a dealignment toward the PAP as a party, and more focus on individuals and issues. The PAP's name brand no longer sells quite like it used to, as the electorate has become more discerning, weighing a variety of factors in voting. Ministerial performance, personality and credentials associated with individual candidates account for the variation in the results and foreshadow the increased obstacles the PAP will face in maintaining support. Leaders will now be called on to deliver more tangibles for people, not just point to growth numbers. Jobs, housing, healthcare, social services and more are part of this new era where opportunities are expected. Singapore is not alone in the increased demands being placed on governments. At the same time, the PAP leadership will have to manage the competition and differences within the PAP itself on its direction and leadership that came into the open in both campaigns.

Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong now faces major challenges. While his own voting share increased in May, he now faces the challenge of reforming his own party and grooming new leadership in a manner that does not exacerbate the party divisions that were exposed during the elections. The fourth generation of PAP leadership has been put in place, but has yet to come to the fore. The transformation of the PAP will not be easy as the strong-man era fades. The easier tack is one

of policy reform, an arena where the PAP is more comfortable. Yet the problems of inequality, exclusion and integration are not easy to address, as the PAP has to move beyond its past models and assumptions to adopt new policies. Here the ideas of the fourth generation and the check of the stronger opposition are especially important, to move the country toward maintaining itself as an example in governance. The system has the difficult task of reforming in an era of greater demands. The 2011 polls showed that the PAP needs to wake up to the new reality of Singapore and touch base with an awakening Singapore that both wants and deserves more.

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Bridget Welsh is Associate Professor of Political Science, Singapore Management University. She is editor of *Reflections: The Mahathir Years; Legacy of Engagement in Southeast Asia* (2004) and *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore* (2009).



Feature Article

What is National Education in Singapore? (By Yeow Tong Chia)

Nation-building is one of the key aims of all national education systems. This is often referred to as citizenship education, or civics education in most countries. In the United States, social studies assume most of the citizenship education role. When you mention “citizenship education” to an average Singapore, however, it will most likely draw a blank. This is because in the case of Singapore, “National Education” (or NE program) assumes the function of citizenship education. More than a curricular subject, it is a comprehensive citizenship education framework for the entire educational system in Singapore. Why “National Education” and not “citizenship education”, or “social studies”? This paper traces the historical antecedents and origins as well as the immediate causes of the NE program, and ultimately answers the question, “What is National Education?”

What is commonly known to most Singaporeans is that NE was launched in a big way to schools in May 1997. What most Singaporeans do not know is that 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 (Nexus 2003). 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 (Lee 1989, 22 & 23). NE was subsequently extended to the Singapore Armed Forces conscripts serving National Service (Huxley 2000, 25). Since compulsory military conscription in Singapore was referred to as ‘National Service’, denoting one’s duty to the nation, it could be surmised that ‘National Education’ could be viewed as education about the nation.

Moreover, in the 1980s, when Mr. Goh Chok Tong was the Defence Minister, Lim Siong Guan was his Permanent Secretary. In his illustrious career, Mr Lim 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. 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. Hence, in 1996, when Mr Goh, as Singapore’s Prime Minister, tasked Lim Siong Guan (the then Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office) to undertake the NE initiative, both men, and the Singapore government as a whole, were more accustomed to the term ‘National Education’ than the term ‘civics’ or ‘citizenship education’ used in the broader international education circles. It is no understatement that the NE initiative came straight from the Prime Minister’s Office, and that said office was to explain the appropriation of the term for use in schools.

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 incorruptibility. 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.

(Source: <http://www.ne.edu.sg>)

These six messages were in essence adaptations of the messages from the psychological defence component of Singapore's Total Defence concept:

- 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.¹

Drawing upon the concept of total war, where a country's entire population and all sectors of its society are mobilized in military conflict, as well as the Swiss model of national defence, Singapore's Total Defence concept was introduced in 1984 to enhance and encourage the total commitment of all Singaporeans to the defence of the country. It was built 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" (Huxley 2000, 24). Other than military defence and psychological defence, the other aspects of Total Defence are Social Defence, Economic Defence and Civil Defence.

There was therefore a very close link between NE and Total Defence. The NE messages correspond with the key pillars of Total 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".² The perceived lack of historical

¹ *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 (Huxley 2000, 25).

² *Business Times*, 'Vital to instil concept of Total



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".³ Lee's remarks "unleashed a wave of criticisms across the Causeway" (Chin 2007, 85). 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 "ke[pt] the playing field lopsided in favour of the... Chinese, and discriminated against the poorer and less educated, who are the Malays and Indians".⁴ 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" (Lee 1996). 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",⁵ a view echoed by some of his ministers.

In contrast to the sharp and emotive responses in Malaysia, the responses by Singaporeans to Lee Kuan Yew's re-merger hypothesis were "much milder".⁶ 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".⁷ The results were, "six out of ten Singaporeans polled were against the idea of Singapore rejoining Malaysia".⁸ Some of the reasons proffered were

- 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".⁹

Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong referred to this poll in a speech to the students

Defence', 23 January 1984.

³ *Straits Times*, 'SM spells out conditions under which S'pore might rejoin Malaysia', 8 June 1996.

⁴ *New Straits Times*, 'Greater social justice in Malaysia: meritocracy shuts out low-achievers in Singapore society', 16 June 1996.

⁵ *The New Paper*, 'Rejoining Malaysia: Views', 11 June 1996.

⁶ *Straits Times*, 'Serious gap in the education of Singaporeans', 18 July 1996.

⁷ *Straits Times*, 'Poll shows 60% oppose idea of merger', 17 June 1996.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*



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” (Lee 1996). 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” (Lee 1996). 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”.¹⁰ In other words, the poll showed a glaring ignorance of the circumstances surrounding the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 (Shamira 1998, 74). He warned that if Singaporeans were not aware 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 prosper” (Lee 1996). It was important that this gap in knowledge 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 to the learning of 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*” (Goh: 1996a).

It was no wonder that the press regarded National Education as a series of “national efforts to educate students on Singapore’s history”.¹¹ 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 National University of Singapore 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 (Goh 1996a).

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 – a crisis generated by the state to promulgate the *Singapore Story* – the story of the PAP state’s triumph over adversity. Nonetheless, it is clear that NE has a longer history than its launch in schools in May 1997,

¹⁰ *Straits Times*, ‘Serious gap in the education of Singaporeans’.

¹¹ *Straits Times*, ‘History materials to be ready in 6 months’, 10 September 1996.



and that it was a tool for the legitimization of the Singapore state.

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Yeow Tong Chia is presently post-doctoral fellow at the Faculty of Education, University of Macau. This paper draws from his recently submitted doctoral dissertation entitled *The Loss of the World-Soul? Education, Culture and the Making of the Singapore Developmental State, 1955-2004*, submitted to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.



Methodology and Field Work

Researching the Colonial Ethnology of British Malaya and the Netherlands Indies (By Matthew Schauer)

My dissertation research, conducted at the department of history, University of Pennsylvania, examines the interactions between the ethnological research of British and Dutch colonial civil servants and the formulation of educational policies in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies from 1890 to 1942. My examination of colonial ethnology has led me to take research trips to Leiden, London, and Singapore. In this article, I will give an overview of some of the printed materials that are available for scholars enquiring into colonial ethnology in the region, as well as some of the resources available archivally in archives in the previously mentioned cities.

Similar to other colonial situations, the work of colonial ethnologists in British Malaya and the Netherlands Indies was enacted officially through governmental channels, and unofficially, as a personal hobby or private academic endeavor. Official ethnological work can be found in government annual reports and special reports on specific subjects, which can be found among the colonial archives in the Public Record Office at Kew, UK and in the National Archives of the Netherlands in The Hague. The unofficial forms of ethnology and ancient Malay studies were often presented and published within local intellectual societies built from the

moulds of England's Royal Society, Royal Asiatic Society, and more locally the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (RBSAS) in Batavia. One of the other major intellectual societies was the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (SBRAS), which is presently still in existence as the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. As I examine in my research, these societies were part of a global system of scholarly exchange that often superseded issues of imperial competition in the spirit of preserving and interpreting the culture, archaeology, and history of Southeast Asia. These societies' proceedings and journals are invaluable resources to the scholar of Southeast Asian history and culture and have not been utilized to their full extent. There are a number of similar contemporary societies in the region, such as the Siam Society, and their roles in historical preservation and ethnography would be an excellent topic for further enquiry.

The publication of intellectual work in scholarly society journals was a common practice in a number of different colonial situations and is an excellent place to start one's research on colonial ethnology. These intellectual society journals and often their published minutes were exchanged world wide, and are generally readily available in most major libraries. The main publication of the SBRAS was *the Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* and the RBSAS's major publication was its *Verhandelingen* or proceedings. The RBSAS also published its *Notulen* (minutes) and a quarterly volume: the *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*.¹ The journals contain a wide

¹ The SBRAS's journal continues to be published under the auspices of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. The *Tijdschrift* was published until 1958 and the



variety of information in a diverse array of disciplines besides ethnology, including entomology, ichthyology, geology, geography and linguistics. They provide an important record of scholarly trends in ethnology and other fields, as well as containing detailed information about specific localities and contemporary popular views of cultural practices and ethnic groups. Scholars have compiled very useful guides with content analysis and indices for both of these Society's journals. This makes their journals a great starting point when researching colonial ethnology and academic practice.² The other printed primary sources that I found most useful in the early stages of my project were the invaluable ethnographies and travelogues reprinted by Oxford in Asia Press. As for secondary historical work, Victor T. King and William D. Wilder's volume also provides a nice survey of the major contemporary trends in colonial ethnology through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (King & Wilder 2003).

I completed my research at the KITLV in Leiden, the Netherlands, the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, UK, the National University of Singapore, and the National Archives of Singapore. My research

Verhandelingen was published from 1779 until 1950. A volume by The Lian and Paul van der Veur contains wonderful content analysis and information crucial for navigating the RBSAS' proceedings, and covers the *Verhandelingen* and not the *Tijdschrift* or *Notulen* (Lian & Veur 1973, v-vi).

² For the SBRAS/Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society journal, the best index to this journal series, from 1878 to 1963, may be found in Lim & Wijasuriya 1970.

was funded by travel grants by the Pew Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania's Walter Annenberg Research Grant. I was only able to spend several weeks in each location, but I was able to work very efficiently due to the user-friendly organization of the archives and the help of a number of gracious archivists. I will now describe the general collections of each location as they pertain to colonial ethnology, and the accessibility of the collections.

The KITLV or Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden has the largest ethnological collections of all of the archives I have visited. Their holdings are a treasure trove of artifacts, photographs (over 150,000), original field notes, oral history recordings, governmental documents, and personal papers from colonial-era Indonesia. The majority of their archives and photograph databases are searchable through the Internet. The collections of personal papers are listed in online inventories in PDF form, but are generally described only in Dutch. The staff at the archive is multi-lingual and I had little difficulty in getting their assistance with the occasional language question, but be prepared to translate many of the search guides from their original Dutch. All of the personal papers I sought were available to be accessed, although I viewed many of them on microfiche due to their fragility. In addition to these holdings, the libraries of the KITLV hold the full runs of many of the non-Dutch colonial scholarly societies, as well as their own, and have a wide variety of extremely rare books and ethnographies. Digital photography is not allowed, but copies of microfiche and scans can be purchased. Leiden is easily accessible for day trips from Amsterdam, and the KITLV is within a twenty-minute walk from the train station.



My other archival trips were to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. SOAS has a large and varied collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century publications and ethnographies dealing with various areas of Southeast Asia. Simply by browsing their stacks, which are arranged topically, I was able to find a number of ethnographies and government-published monographs I was previously unaware of. Their archival holdings are located in the basement floor of the library building. The collections are described very clearly and the online database contains collection overviews for the majority of the accessions. The archivists will be able to present you with more detailed inventories for individual collections if they are available. Their collections contain private personal papers, particularly from former professors or scholars who were attached to the school.

For example, I examined Frank Swettenham's papers, and those of several former members of the Malayan Civil Service who eventually became professors at SOAS. SOAS also contains reprints of many of the Blue Book annual reports, as well as large holdings for a number of the London-based colonial missionary societies. SOAS is located near the British Museum; five minutes walk from the Russell Square Underground Station. The staff are extremely solicitous and I had no trouble gaining a "reader's card" with my passport, student identification, and a letter of introduction from my academic advisor. Digital photography of most archival materials appeared to be generally allowed, but consult the archival staff for the proper legal forms and instructions.

In Singapore, I found the library at the National University of Singapore (NUS) to be

the most fruitful collection for my research on British ethnology. NUS has a Singapore/Malaysia Collection reading room that contains hundreds of extremely rare volumes. These include ethnographies, textbooks, government almanacs, government special reports, pamphlets, travelogues, and hard to find recent academic publications. The reading room also holds several shelves of rare novels and pulp literature published in the region or that have Southeast Asia as a setting. NUS's archives are directly adjacent to the reading room. The principal librarian, Mr. Tim Yap Fuan, and his staff have an encyclopedic knowledge of the archive's holdings and helped me immensely by suggesting additional documents and aided me in locating them. The archives contain rare documents and fragile volumes, such as personal papers and government publications. The majority of the Straits Settlements, Federated and Non-Federated Malay States Annual Reports are also available on microfilm or microfiche in the lower library. Copies from microfilm and microfiche are available for a fee. Consult the library staff for their policies on digital photography. NUS is accessible by city bus from the Clementi MRT station, and the campus has a convenient shuttle service so that you can avoid walking in the stifling heat.

My final archival stop was to the oral history collections at the National Archives of Singapore in the former Anglo-Chinese School building on Coleman Street near Canning Rise. The Archives have a very useful searchable database that covers their holding in several different media. I primarily utilized their Oral History Collections, which help document the colonial history of the Straits Settlements and Singapore. The interviewees come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and are an extremely interesting source that gives an insight into



cultural practices and different ways of life among the diverse cultural groups of the region. The oral history collections are organized according to various projects according to subject matter. Many of the recordings have been transcribed and are available on the Internet through a searchable database. The remaining records are available on cassette tape at the archives. You are allowed to take notes with pencil and paper or a laptop, but some of the recordings have restrictions on their use and quotations, so you must consult the archivist. The Archives are a ten-minute walk from the City Hall MRT station. I was able to gain access with my passport, a letter of introduction, and my student identification card.

Archival Search Engines:

KITLV, Leiden:

Main Page for Researchers:

<http://www.kitlv.nl/home/eresources/>

Archives Collections Surveys in PDF Form:

http://www.kitlv.nl/home/eresources?subpage_id=377

National University of Singapore:

NUS Singapore/Malaysia Collections:

<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/search~S12/>

NUS Integrated Library Collections:

<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/search/>

National Archives of Singapore:

National Archives Master Database:

<http://www.a2o.com.sg/a2o/public/search/index.html>

National Archives of Singapore Oral History Centre Catalogue:

<http://cord.nhb.gov.sg/cord/public/internetSearch/>

School of Oriental and African Studies, London:

SOAS Archives:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/archives/>

SOAS Archives Catalogue

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Matthew Schauer is a PhD candidate at the department of history, University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation examines the interplay between the collection of ethnological knowledge and imperial educational policies for indigenes in British Malaya and the Dutch Netherlands Indies between 1890 and the start of WWII.



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Editor: Derek Heng (heng.5@osu.edu)

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