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Author(s)	Joy Chew Oon Ai
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2^B Schooling for Singaporeans: The Interaction of Singapore Culture and Values in the School

**Joy Chew Oon Ai,
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University**

INTRODUCTION

In 1985-88, I carried out an ethnographic study of a government secondary school in Singapore with the aim of investigating how national priorities and the value system of the Singapore government are reflected in the schooling experience of Singaporean students. The research was to provide a deeper insight into the complex nature of the socialisation process of young Singaporean students living in a rapidly industrialising multi-racial and multi-religious nation-state. In Singapore it is clearly the case that the national education system is intimately involved in nation-building and the evolution of a Singaporean identity. Schools are mandated to implement educational policies formulated to achieve national political, cultural and economic goals and priorities. Among the key goals are national unity, multi-racial harmony and tolerance, a literate and highly skilled workforce, sustained economic growth and the creation of a technologically-driven economy. Each school's education programme contains strong value premises and assumptions about how and why certain cultural, economic and political values and norms are important for the continuing existence of a way of life in Singapore society. I was interested in making an in-depth study of what may be better termed the *moral socialisation and moral education* of young Singaporeans in a school community. Such a study would entail an examination of different facets of the school like its formal and informal structures, the planned and unplanned curriculum, the way in which its administrators and teachers interpret and translate national educational goals into school policies and activities, and the influence of personal beliefs and values about the purpose of schooling on the school programme.

This research focus is not new at all in the sociology of education literature. Sociologists have always posited a close relationship between the larger society

and the school institution. But it has not always been clearly demonstrated how a school actually socialises and prepares its pupils for their later participation as citizens in the economy and political system of the larger society. Several questions can be asked about the socialisation process. Are there definite mechanisms and structures in the school programme that convey a particular world view and a set of values to pupil members? If there are, what are their effects? Are all socialisation mechanisms planned for or do some arise in unexpected ways from existing structural arrangements of schoolwork and schooling? Is there a possibility of contradictions in the goals, values and priorities of different aspects of the school programme? How do pupils make sense of various activities and possibly conflicting demands in their schooling?

The situation in Singapore is especially interesting for such research as there are specific educational policies relating to the moral development of Singaporean students. Often, this is operationalised in terms of the need for schools to teach a set of 'national' or 'core' values to pupils as is provided by the official policy on Moral Education. From 1979 onwards, Moral Education was made a compulsory though non-examinable subject in all schools. The policy has resulted in the implementation of a number of curriculum packages in the school system in subsequent years, some of which were controversial from the start of their conception. In 1982, *Being and Becoming* and *Good Citizen* were implemented in primary and secondary schools to replace an earlier insipid version of *Civics*. In a surprised policy move in late 1982, it was decided that *Religious Knowledge* be made a compulsory and examination subject at the upper secondary level. By 1986 six electives were offered to secondary pupils under the label of *Religious Knowledge*. The electives were: Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies, Sikh Studies, and Confucian Ethics. Then, in an equally surprising move, the government decided to scrap *Religious Knowledge* and replace it with *Civics and Moral Education* by 1993. The Education minister in 1989 explained that the earlier decision to include *Religious Knowledge* as a school subject was a contradiction of the Singapore government's stand regarding politics and religion. It was felt that the two should be kept separate in public institutions since the government was committed to an ideology of multiracialism and keeping Singapore a secular state. By giving official approval to the study of five world religions in the school system, it had infringed one of the working principles of treating all religious communities equally in the country.

History is another subject in the academic curriculum that can be and has been used to politically educate Singaporeans about the nation and the global community. A new syllabus for lower secondary pupils was introduced in 1985

called the *Social and Economic History of Modern Singapore*. As will be illustrated in a later section, this subject seeks to present through formal classroom instruction, an official interpretation and the rationale for policy choices by the Singapore government, among other things. Clearly, it is an attempt at transmitting national and moral values, and the official ideology on nationhood, multiracialism and national development strategies through the medium of locally prepared curriculum texts.

Taken together, some academic subjects in Singapore schools are designed to foster a particular moral orientation and world view about the individual and his social existence. Through such subjects, Singaporean pupils are often reminded and exhorted to behave responsibly and keep the welfare and interests of others and the nation in mind. But this moral orientation would be inadequate and incongruent with the realities of living and working in a highly competitive and individualistic capitalist economy that Singapore has become in the last two decades. In this paper, I will illustrate with some research data how one school as an agency of secondary socialisation is in fact quite effective in transmitting and inculcating certain attitudinal dispositions and values that are congruent with the value system of the larger Singapore culture. The paper discusses the ways in which the school programme is organised to achieve a number of educational goals, and analyses how the planned and hidden moral curriculum of the school affects pupils' acquisition of values, attitudes and dispositions. Before presenting data on the nature of moral socialisation that was observed in my case-study school, I shall discuss some key concepts and the research methodology that I used in the next two sections.

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

My theoretical assumptions, research design and scope of study will be taken up briefly in this section. First, the concept of *socialisation* that I wanted to employ and operationalise in order to determine the focus and methodology of my research. It refers broadly to "... the activity that confronts and lends structure to the entry of non-members into an already existing world or a sector of that world". (Wentworth, 1980) Applied to a school setting, the term refers to the process by which new pupil members of the school are inducted into the culture and norms of the school and larger multi-racial society. School administrators and teachers can be seen as the agents of respectability of the larger society. They are responsible for implementing national educational policies and are held accountable for how effective their school programme is

in attaining specified educational goals. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that their personal philosophy about the educational needs of pupils, their actions as implementers and policy makers on matters concerning the school programme would affect pupils' socialisation experience or 'moral schooling'.

In seeking a working definition of the concept of *socialisation*, I was reminded by Musgrave (1987) and other scholars that individual social actors are potentially creative participants, and are not inert and passively responding to agents of socialisation. Depending on how power is structured within their social world, they are in the position to construct rather than merely reconstruct cognitive and moral knowledge as these are conveyed through language and other cues. It would be important to ask how pupils are reacting and responding to the planned and unplanned facets of the school programme since as school clients they have their own expectations and immediate priorities. I saw the process of socialisation as encompassing a broad spectrum of activities found in a school programme. Through their daily participation in such planned activities, pupils are inducted into evaluative and normative orientations, cognitive and technical knowledge, and equipped with social and motor skills that would help them to participate effectively in the adult society.

I was interested to make a distinction between *moral socialisation* and *moral education*. The former refers to the process by which individuals acquire values and goals of conduct, learn and become responsive to moral rules and gather a viewpoint of the social world as a moral order (Bidwell, 1972). By comparison, the concept of *moral education* is often used to refer to specific instructional programmes that are designed to influence the moral development of pupils in terms of their capacity for making moral judgement, reasoning and decisions. But such a usage would be too narrow for my research purpose as I would be looking at different modes and forms of moral learning in a school community. This became my working definition of Moral Education for my school research: *It refers to the ways in which the school seeks to intervene formally in the moral development of pupils and in the process influence their acquisition of moral values, beliefs, attitudes and actions about themselves and their relationship with other people.*

Conceptually, moral education is continuous with moral training and socialisation because such training and socialisation are a necessary prerequisite to moral education. But a further prerequisite for moral education is that this socialisation experience does not incapacitate the pupil's ability to reflect rationally on moral concepts and precepts. In reality, it would be very difficult to draw the line between where moral socialisation ends and where moral

education begins. It would be more useful to see the process of moral learning as involving a wide range of knowledge, activities and experiences. At one end of the continuum, that learning would involve some form of indoctrination or unquestioning acceptance of social and cultural practices. At the other end, the individual is capable of rationally reflecting on and evaluating the moral concepts and precepts presented to him by his society.

I was prepared to consider a variety of elements in the school programme to determine whether they were morally socialising or educative for the moral development of pupils. The following nine elements of the school programme would be pertinent for their moral impact on pupils in a school and they were included in my research design:

- the education ministry and government policies governing school management, curriculum structure, streaming, assessment and the progression of pupils from one grade level to the next;
- the formal Moral Education programmes such as *Good Citizen, Being and Becoming*, and *Confucian Ethics*;
- other subject and activities in the formal curriculum that have an implicit or explicit moral input, such as language learning, history, literature, mathematics, science, physical education and extra-curricular activities;
- school-wide events, rituals and routines such as the weekly school assembly, annual speech day, the daily flag-raising and pledge-taking ceremony observed in Singapore schools;
- the organisation of pupils into instructional groups on the basis of age, gender, ethnic identity and academic achievement;
- the school authority structure, reward and punishment system;
- the professed philosophy and underlying ideological orientations of the principal, senior teachers and teaching staff;
- the nature of social and work relationships among different members of the school community observed over a period of time;
- the school's own conception of a pastoral care or pupil welfare programme which seeks to meet the social and moral development needs of pupils.

METHODOLOGY AND CHOICE OF SCHOOL

Given the broad scope of the school programme and the qualitative nature of much of the sociological data, I decided it best to confine my study to one secondary school. As I was working on my research full-time, it was possible to plan for a year's field study in that school, using a naturalistic research design. Such a method is characterised by the open-endedness of much of data collection at different phases of fieldwork in the school. Key questions can be posed at the beginning of fieldwork in a school organisation but as fieldwork progresses, data-gathering becomes more focussed in the light of emerging lines of enquiries and stronger hunches about what is going on in the school. The process of gathering empirical evidence from a variety of perspectives and sources, and interpreting what they say about the socialisation process is a dialectical one. The researcher has to grapple with and try to make sense of the field situation guided by growing insights and emerging theoretical questions. Such a research methodology is by now widely employed in sociological accounts of schooling in Britain, USA, Australia. I will not elaborate on this aspect except to say that it required that I have almost complete access to different people in the school community.

The school that I had in mind for my research had to be fairly typical of government secondary schools in Singapore in terms of its history, formal curriculum, organisation, staffing, pupil intake and academic standing as measured by national examination results. I had worked out the criteria for selecting such a school. It had to be a co-educational school catering for 'average' pupils as the majority of government schools are of this category. This means a school with an enrolment consisting of academically stronger pupils (those in the four-year fast track or the "Express Stream", and weaker pupils who are differentiated in the five-year "Normal Stream" curriculum. The school should also have a credible academic track record, one that has been functioning smoothly over the last ten years with a continuous leadership and a stable staffing situation. It would not do to pick a school which had recently seen a change of headship as this could mean a time of uneasy adjustment by pupils and teachers to the new principal. Thirdly, the school should enjoy a reputable standing in the local community which would show its support by parents continuing to send their children to it. With the help of a senior official from the Ministry of Education who was familiar with the nature of my proposed research and criteria for selecting the school, I was given the names of five potential schools from which to choose one.

Balestier Hill Technical School (BHT for short) presented itself as the most feasible choice as it met all my criteria. As a well-established school located on the fringe of one of the older public housing estates in the centre of Singapore, it had gained the reputation of providing a strong education programme. This choice was confirmed when the principal, after consultation with his senior staff, agreed to my request to conduct my ethnographic study in their school. The school staff, made up of 61 teachers and three senior assistants, were informed about my interest in studying how the policy of moral education was being implemented in formal and informal ways. They were aware that I was planning to be in their school for a year and that I would be writing my doctoral thesis using data based on the school. I had requested for permission to observe classroom teaching of subjects like History, Moral Education and Religious Knowledge. The teachers did not agree to this but were prepared to be interviewed and facilitate my research in other ways. The principal explained that in his school, teachers were seldom formally observed in their classrooms. He was in fact saying that there was a strong moral ethos where teachers and administrators could be trusted to do their best for to meet pupils' educational needs. It was for me to verify the nature of the school's 'moral curriculum' and determine its impact on pupils.

Fieldwork in the school took place over a period of 11 months. I employed a variety of data-gathering methods such as participant observation in the school community, interviews of the school administrators, teachers, pupils and their parents, interviews of school inspectors and curriculum specialists, content analyses of a sample of subject textbooks, educational and school documents, case studies of past and present pupils from different academic streams. I administered two questionnaires on pupils and made a systematic recording of field notes of my daily observations of school life. Since classroom observations of teaching was not possible, I found it expedient to negotiate for a fuller participant-observer role in the school. I asked for permission from the principal to teach two Secondary Two classes English Language for six months. This was readily granted and I was allocated 12 teaching periods each week as part of my research design. It meant that I had to work closely with the team of English Language teachers and help monitor pupils' conduct and progress. That arrangement turned out to be one of the most useful though demanding strategies for staying on in the field. As I carried out my participant-observer role I became more aware of the school culture and the morality of hard work among its staff and pupils.

ACADEMIC EMPHASIS AND MORALITY OF THE SCHOOL PROGRAMME

My initial impression of the school (based on information in the Ministry of Education appraisal report of BHT and interviews with two education ministry officials) was soon confirmed by what I observed at the school. BHT was a well-run organisation, led by a professional team of dedicated and highly committed administrators and senior teachers. The principal was dynamic, far-sighted and effective in bringing about school improvements over the twelve years he was at the school. It was easy to detect a sense of purpose and orderliness in the school programme. There were clear policies and guidelines on academic and non-academic matters, student discipline and conduct, assessments, pastoral care and home-school contacts. The school head was committed to provide a balanced programme with a dual emphasis on academic learning and the social and moral development of his pupils. He had succeeded in building an elaborate school structure geared towards both types of developmental goals.

The subjects offered by BHT for lower and upper secondary pupils are largely similar to those provided by other government schools in Singapore as there is a centralised curriculum system. Lower secondary pupils take a common curriculum consisting of nine examination subjects (English Language, the Second Language, Mathematics, General Science, History, Geography, Technical Studies, English Literature, and Art and Craft). In addition, pupils take three non-examination subjects: Moral Education, Physical Education and Music. Pupils are streamed into the Express Stream or Normal Stream at secondary one, based on their examination results for the Primary School Leaving Examination. This is the first major national examination that pupils take. At the end of secondary two, they are streamed further on the basis of their performance in English Language, Maths and Science into the Science, Technical or Arts subject streams. As can be guessed, the Science and Technical streams are more prestigious than the Arts or Commerce streams. Secondary pupils are by this stage of their school career aware of the implications of failing or neglecting their school studies and most take their school work seriously. Intense academic competition is an established fact in the entire school system and serves as the motivating force for pupils and teachers to aim for better performance at examinations.

In Singapore schools, principals have more flexibility in determining the subject offerings of the different streams at the upper secondary curriculum. At BHT, the academically stronger pupils are offered eight 'O' level subjects compared to the seven subjects taken by the Normal Stream classes. The school's

choice of curriculum subjects is based on two considerations: its assessment of how well pupils would perform at the 'O' level examination, and how useful different subjects are in preparing a school leaver for post-secondary education at either a junior college or polytechnic. Thus pupils are expected to compete for limited places at junior colleges and polytechnics. In 1991, the Ministry of Education introduced a ranking exercise of all secondary schools by publishing the 'O' level results of each school. It was the first time in the history of Singapore education that policy makers had publicly released school examination results. The underlying philosophy is more than to keep parents and pupils informed about the varying performance of schools measured solely by examination results. It is a deliberate step taken to encourage schools to compete for pupils and resources applying a free market-place principle of competition. Clearly, such a move has had the immediate effect of heightening the importance of achievement scores of each school perhaps at the expense of other curricular activities. This societal backdrop must be borne in mind for a discussion of the schooling of pupils at BHT. As will be noted, there are important consequences for the work of the school as an educational institution seeking to impart values and school knowledge.

BHT pupils' performance in national examinations has improved significantly over the years, touching 75.7% for five 'O' level credit passes in 1985, and 98.9% for 3 'O' level credit passes in 1985. This was remarkable, given the pupil profile of the school. To illustrate for the year 1986, the student population of 1395 comprised 97% of Chinese pupils who came from largely non-English speaking home backgrounds. 59.6% of their parents held skilled or semi-skilled blue-collar occupations and did not complete their secondary education. The remaining Malay and Indian pupils were similarly from a working class background. An analysis of subject performance at the school and national examinations shows that BHT pupils are much stronger in Mathematics, Science and technical subjects. They are generally weaker in the Arts subjects. English Language poses tremendous difficulties for the majority. There is a definite technical bias in the school's academic programme resulting in pupils paying more attention to Mathematics, the Sciences and Technical Studies.

Teachers and school administrators often reminded me that they were working with an academically weaker cohort of pupils than those found in the more prestigious government schools in Singapore. As a result, they have found it necessary to supervise pupils very closely and even spoon-feed them in order to prepare them for the GCE 'O' level examination. Over the years, the staff at BHT have developed a rigorous and challenging programme to motivate and meet the aspirations of its pupils to succeed at examinations. There is also a

school policy where parents are kept informed of their children's progress on a regular basis. Teachers would also contact parents about their children's absenteeism. Parents are required to monitor their children's behaviour and negative attitude towards schoolwork. The principal would personally ask to meet with a pupil's father if he or she shows clear signs of losing interest in schoolwork. He would counsel both parent and child about the importance of the latter finishing up his secondary education. This approach has worked well for many errant pupils as parents are quickly convinced by him that their children should complete their secondary education instead of leaving school prematurely. A description of the academic programme at BHT would be incomplete if no mention is made of the strict observance of a set of school rules and regulations pertaining to pupils' conduct when they are in school, and rules about their general appearance such as their hair-style, proper uniform attire, no wearing of jewellery, make-up and branded shoes. These are regarded by the staff as being an integral part of the pupil's overall education. From the perspective of the principal and the three discipline masters, the posture of keeping a stern front and a no-nonsense approach regarding school rules is necessary in more than one way. It is the staff's belief that there must be an orderly and predictable learning environment before teachers can carry out their professional responsibilities effectively. The main business of the school is made clear to all: teachers would engage pupils in a demanding instructional programme. On their part, pupils are expected to comply with these rules and regulations even though some appear to be remotely related to a pupil's learning. It is therefore not surprising that pupils tend to be passive in the teaching-learning process. The school programme is in fact stressing personal values such as self-discipline, perseverance, punctuality, industry and careful attention to school work as part of its official curriculum. There is a distinct moral thrust in the school, undergirded by a strong conviction that pupils must use their time profitably in school.

THE EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (ECA) PROGRAMME

Pupil participation in ECA is compulsory in government schools in Singapore. This policy dates back to the early Sixties when the Ministry of Education set about to develop a national education system. The official objectives are well known: ECA in school would allow pupils to cultivate qualities of character and social discipline and their physical development. At BHT, the ECA programme consisted of 24 separate activities grouped under three categories:

- Group A :** Air Rifle, Athletics, Basketball, Canoeing, Judo, Sepak Takraw, Soccer, Swimming and Volleyball.
- Group B :** Brass Band, National Police Cadet Corps, National Cadet Corp, Scouts, St John Ambulance Brigade.
- Group C :** Art Club, Camera Club, Chinese Orchestra, Maths and Science Society, Gardening Club, Social Studies Club, Literary, Drama and Debating Societies (held separately for English Language Malay Language and Chinese Language).

Pupils elect two ECA from the listing above, one of which should be a game or a physical activity. There is an official system of awarding merit points for active involvement in ECAs. Essentially, the aim is to motivate pupils to be committed to their choice of two ECA. In reality, though, this incentive system has failed to work at BHT.

From the perspective of moral socialisation, the most interesting and visible ECA are the uniformed groups that are conducted on Saturday mornings. Pupil members have each shed off their school uniform and are in the proper attire of their respective groups. Unlike the other more sedentary ECAs, they are now engaged in a variety of highly organised group activities that require a high degree of teamwork and physical fitness training. Of all the uniformed groups, the National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC) and the National Cadet Corps (NCC) are most regimented and demanding in terms of personal commitment and self-discipline. Each of them is a youth movement whose programmes have been influenced by government leaders' view that civics and citizenship training should be reflected in their training programmes. NCC is linked to National Service for male citizens in Singapore. The objective is to identify potential elites among male pupils and expose them early to the idea of serving in the armed forces.

The NPCC is affiliated to the Singapore police force. Its training programme consists of a wide range of activities like armed drills, foot-drills, camp craft, first aid, law lectures and unarmed combat training. Male and female teacher are identified among the staff and formally trained by the Police Academy to become NPCC officers for their school units. Group competition is often used as a strategy for instilling loyalty and commitment by pupil cadets to their uniformed groups. In such a hierarchically structured organisation where there are clear-cut leadership roles and ranks among the cadets, pupils are being socialised to behave in appropriate ways towards their superiors. They also

learn to put the interest of the groups above their own individual ones. Such ECA groups are therefore well conceptualised to socialise pupils in a number of ways. It is striking to see the transformation among pupils in terms of their participation in group activities. Not only are they actively involved in their ECA programme, they are also engaged by older pupils or teacher advisors in a coordinated set of activities that are planned to impart qualities like discipline, physical stamina, mental alertness, perseverance, group loyalty and *esprit de corps*.

POLITICAL SOCIALISATION: THE CASE OF HISTORY AND CONFUCIAN ETHICS

History at the Lower Secondary Level

A quick perusal of the course materials for Lower Secondary History shows that much of the official textbooks is an attempt at civics education, political and moral socialisation. The overall impression one gets of the treatment of Singapore historical themes by the MOE curriculum writers is that it is aimed at citizenship training. A few examples from the theme on national development should suffice to illustrate how this subject is used as a vehicle for conveying an official viewpoint on government policies.

In the final chapter of Volume 2 of the *Social and Economic History of Modern Singapore* there is a discussion about the system of government, the economic development goals of the government, and the strategies used to promote industrial growth and higher technology. Any pupil who takes the contents of this history programme seriously is likely to come away from his history excursion into the founding and establishment of Singapore as a modern nation well informed of the official rationale for government policies. Three extracts from the textbook are given below to illustrate the point.

- 1) . . . *In order to survive [in the 1960s], Singapore had to go full steam ahead with its plan to industrialise. If it did not manufacture (or make) goods on a large scale, it would fail to solve the unemployment problem and its economy would also fail to grow. Hence it must either "make or break".* (p. 275)
- 2) . . . *The government realised that it was necessary to build factories and start industries, but it was not sure what new types of industries should be set up or how to attract people to invest their capital in the*

new industries. Not many local businessmen had experience in manufacturing industries as they were mostly traders who bought and sold goods Foreign companies also had to be encouraged to set up their factories in Singapore. But these foreign firms would come only if there was a strong government. There also had to be industrial peace, that is, the absence of strikes during which workers fight against their employers for their rights . . . (p. 277)

3) **Our dependence on external factors**

The economic growth of Singapore is very much affected by events or development outside Singapore, as we are greatly dependent on the developed countries for trade and investment. Our economy benefited when world trade was expanding rapidly in the 1960s . . . However, in the 1970s, the economy of many developed countries was badly affected by a sharp increase in the price of oil. This was followed by a world-wide recession The high unemployment rate in the developed countries led to increasing protectionism Thus it became increasingly difficult for our businessmen to sell Singapore-made goods to these countries. For our nation to continue to survive and even to prosper, our people must be more disciplined and more productive Thus the main problem in the 1980s is to ensure higher productivity as well as to keep up and further develop the higher technology introduced in the 1970s. The key to our future prosperity lies in our people's enterprise, their ability to overcome difficulties, and their determination to succeed. (p. 284)

The first extract gives the rationale for the economic policy of industrialisation and sets the tone for the underlying logic of the ideology of national survival. The account of the destiny of Singapore under the PAP government is presented in the active past and present tenses which convey the note of urgency of adopting certain developmental policies. The 'Make or Break' image captures the critical period of the country's political and economic circumstance and lends focus to the need for certain measures associated with a strong government. In the second extract, pupils are given the reason for such a style of government: in order to encourage foreign investors who would only come "if there was a strong government . . . industrial peace and absence of frequent strikes".

In the third extract, the history lesson on Singapore's economic growth in the 1980s carries the economic argument that Singapore is vulnerable to external forces of change. 13-year old pupils are introduced to economic

concepts such as 'recession', 'protectionism' and 'higher technology' and then given the national solution. Two observations can be made about the textbook discussion. One is the undisguised lesson on the nature of economic forces that determine the fortunes of countries in the 1980s. There is a clear line of reasoning given in the text to suggest how Singaporeans must respond to a highly competitive world economy which is threatened with protectionism and strong economic competitors from "some other Asian countries". The tone and style of the narrative has become more authoritative and unequivocal as the text refers to the need for higher technology in Singapore. There is also a noticeable fusion of the destiny of the nation with the individual citizens who make up the country. The first person pronoun in plural ('we') and the possessive pronoun ('our') are used to convey the argument more persuasively in the concluding sections of the chapter. The economic logic for the government's drive to have a disciplined workforce and work ethic is clearly presented in the text.

The second observation about the excerpts given above is that they are so reminiscent of the way in which government leaders and spokesmen in Singapore address economic, social, political and cultural issues to the Singapore population via the mass media. The Singaporean curriculum writers have identified with political spokesmen on the theme of Singapore's economic survival. Their invocation of the need for solidarity makes this History material most appropriate for the political socialisation of Singaporean pupils. A helpful comparison to this explicit form of moral socialisation found in History is another school subject, *Confucian Ethics* which will be discussed in the next section.

Confucian Ethics: A Secular Moral Education Subject

The subject *Confucian Ethics* was first introduced to schools in 1985. Its inclusion in the official curriculum is significant in that it highlights an ideological premise of the Singapore government about the relevance of neo-Confucianism for promoting national development. This viewpoint is based on the writings of some Western scholars (like Peter Berger and Herman Kahn) that there is a positive correlation between the dynamic economic growth of industrial East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore and their common cultural heritage of which Confucianism features prominently as a work ethic. But teaching Confucianism for its work ethics in a multiracial and multi-religious country like Singapore would present immense pedagogical problems unless the contents are up-dated to demonstrate its relevance for the social, economic and political conditions of Singapore today. The task of developing the syllabus and course materials for the two-year

Confucian Ethics course was undertaken by a Singaporean team of curriculum writers. Initially, the government encouraged public debates on the idea of introducing Confucian values in the school system. It invited a number of Confucian scholars from USA and Taiwan to lead in public forums on the subject. This was an attempt to diffuse suspicion that there might be a social control motive for introducing Confucianism in the school system.

The new subject was implemented in 1985 and taught in the English and Chinese medium. Teachers were specially identified and given training on the specific objectives of the subject and instructional approaches. Among the five instructional objectives were these: "*To inculcate Confucian values in our pupils*"; "*To help them grow up to lead meaningful lives as upright moral beings imbued with Confucian beliefs*", and "*To make them aware of their cultural and moral heritage*". Seen as a whole package, this subject is a unique attempt at giving Singaporean pupils an inherently self-transforming programme of "self-cultivation". It is designed to give them an ethical system for coping with life in a fast-changing and materialistic society. Three passages from the textbook will serve to illustrate the nature of moral education lessons conducted in *Confucian Ethics Textbook* (1985):

Singapore is a young nation. Our ancestors came from various lands and cultures. Life is changing fast, with new ways of living influencing us, including the effects of rapid industrialisation. These new ways of life compete with old ways, and often we are confused. . . . Because of the need to compete with one another in school and industry, we tend to be self-centred and disregard the interest of other people. And we have been influenced by Western ideas encouraging us to think of ourselves more as individuals than belonging to a social group. In striving for success, we tend to think that other people do not matter. We regard ourselves as tools for industrial success, and forget that we are all human who should have a sense of spiritual values. Some of us may not feel we have moral standards to live by, or a moral way of life to uphold . . . Despite increasing competition in the work place, and life becoming more and more mechanical, we may still follow the Confucian path of spiritual self-cultivation and live meaningful lives with one another. (p. 3)

Confucian ethics is presented as a way of life, a newly written East Asian philosophy to help Singaporeans grapple with the harsh realities of life in a highly competitive and depersonalising society. The text deals openly with the social problems and sense of normlessness in a society caught up in a rapid

momentum of social and technological changes. Its relevance and suitability for a multiracial and multi-religious Singapore is broached in the introductory lesson in this way, (Confucian Ethics Textbook, 1985):

Confucius taught that there should be harmony among people. This refers not only to members of one's family, race and nation, but also the whole family of mankind. Therefore, when we study the Confucian way of life, we will see how reasonable it is to live in harmony with members of other races or culture (p. 4).

The process of becoming 'moral persons' through a study of Confucian ethics is also explained. One notes how different the pedagogical approach is from that used in the History course as shown earlier on. In fact, there is an almost religious element in Confucian Ethics Textbook (1985):

In studying Confucian ethics, we must be prepared to think, discuss and select . . . After thinking about and discussing Confucian ethics, and after deciding on the right way to live morally, should we stop there? No, that is not enough. A moral man . . . must make up his mind to practise it. He must feel that this way of life is his very own. Only then can he be considered a moral person. It is hoped that after the thinking, and the training of our minds in Confucian ethics, we will practise it in our daily lives. We will then catch the spirit of the Confucian tradition, and learn through our own experience the meaning and worth of Confucian ethics. (p. 5)

In comparing the contents of two subjects illustrated above, it is interesting to note the moral themes that they deal within regard to the individual and his society. In the case of History, pupils are reminded about national survival issues and the need for Singaporeans to be prepared to work hard and compete with other industrial economies which are enjoying phenomenal economic growth in the late 1980s. Such history lessons contain a distinct economic morality which can well be applied at the personal level to the pupil's experience of striving for academic excellence. As a subject, Confucian Ethics recognises the negative effects of such a morality and seeks to convince pupils that they should cultivate other qualities of mind and spirit in order to live a meaningful life. One can conclude that the academic curriculum presents more than one morality system to pupils. On one hand, there is a morality system that stresses the economic survival of the nation-state, a message that is often heard in Singapore.

On the other hand, the morality of Confucian ethics states that man is a spiritual being and hence the spiritual dimension should not be neglected for the good of the "Greater Self" or Society. While they appear to be compatible in that Confucian Ethics could provide the moral standards for young Singaporeans to live by, much would depend on the dominant value system of Singapore society.

I had asked the principal of BHT what he thought of formal Moral Education courses introduced by the Ministry of Education and whether they would have any impact on pupils' moral learning. The principal felt that it would be difficult to evaluate their efficacy. Moreover, the teachers involved were still unfamiliar with the new textbooks and teaching strategies. In the meantime, he had adhered to the implementation guidelines on the selection of teachers and the provision of two weekly periods for Moral Education lessons. His view was that the official Moral Education courses lacked the status and respectability enjoyed by other school subjects. The fact that it was a non-examination subject had made it convenient for pupils to ignore it if they chose to. Moreover, the impact of this mode of values education would depend very much on how skilful and committed teachers are in conducting their lessons.

THE SCHOOL'S CONCEPTION OF MORAL EDUCATION

Besides monitoring the academic programme regularly, the principal was actively working on a number of school projects to create opportunities for more pupils to be exposed to a broader range of enrichment activities such as leadership training, specialised sports and computer appreciation. Having succeeded in building a rigorous academic programme which was producing good results annually, he was now seeking to address more intangible educational goals like the moral and social development of pupils. Evidence of this concern can be seen in the following statement taken from the Principal's Message in the school's bi-annual report in which he hoped that the school had succeeded in directing students towards being more considerate, more caring and in convincing them that your moral growth is just as important as their development in other fields (BHT School Magazine 1983).

What was the reason for the "increased emphasis on moral education" in the school programme? The school head explained that he had been experimenting with a number of ways of promoting desirable values and attitudes among pupils. In fact, this was in response to a worrying tendency that he had observed among pupils: they were highly utilitarian, selfish and pragmatic about much of their school activities. Despite his attempt to mount a broad-based

curriculum for a rounded education, he had noticed that pupils were lukewarm to certain subjects and compulsory school activities. Many of them were quick to dismiss subjects like History, Geography, Literature and Moral Education as being a waste of time. They were narrowly concentrating on subjects that they believed were important to clinch them a place in post-secondary institutions like the polytechnic or junior college. This explains why their examination results were often poorer for the so-called 'unimportant' and 'useless' subjects. Often, the weaker classes of pupils would choose not to concentrate on such subjects in order to have more time to study what they regarded to be the 'relevant and useful' subjects. The school's objective of providing a 'balanced' education was thus being thwarted by this very pragmatic attitude amongst pupils. This tendency extended to the school's ECA programme: pupils were dropping out of their particular ECA clubs and uniformed groups in increasing numbers by the second school term of each year. It was this pervasive outlook that prompted the principal to think creatively of other ways to engage pupils in extra-curricular, co-curricular, social and personal development programmes.

Over the years, the school had evolved an elaborate pupil-welfare programme in which leadership training was a main objective. The principal was seeking to promote the idea of a Students Council as a mechanism for nurturing leadership qualities for a bigger number of male and female pupils from different form levels. He was aware of the limitations of the Prefectorial Board which could cater for fewer than ninety pupils in terms of developing their leadership potentials. Moreover, prefects at BHT were often viewed by other pupils as performing a policing role rather than being genuine student leaders. Would it not be possible to replace the prefectorial board with a students council and gradually allow student leaders to organise certain activities for their fellow students?

In 1984, the idea of a Students Council was piloted in the school, with two senior teachers identified as the advisors. An executive committee of the Council consisted of a chairman (who was the head prefect) and eight other student members to represent the uniformed groups, library committee, class monitor committee, and the sports unit. All counted, the Students Council had 250 key students from the different component groups. The principal and his senior staff were committed to the idea of grooming a student elite in the school. The selection process was complex and involved a number of steps. Potential student councillors were nominated by form teachers or those in charge of extra-curricular activities as a first step. They were then interviewed by two discipline masters in order to gauge their motivation for wanting to attend leadership training camps. Such students are then sponsored by the school for annual

leadership training camps conducted at the National Youth Training Institute (NAYTI) in Singapore. Student leaders were reminded that they would have to help organise school-based leadership training programmes after their attendance of the NAYTI residential camps. BHT students who attend NAYTI training courses would have the opportunity of interacting with fellow participants from other secondary schools. They are put through a series of workshops on communication and leadership over a period of one week. At the end of the camp, they would have gathered many ideas and models of running student activities. These ideas are used by the student councillors to plan their own training programmes for the younger students from the lower secondary classes. I was able to observe how members of the Students Council run a similar school-based camp during the June school vacation period in 1986. It was clear that the elite students were being encouraged to practise leadership skills such as planning and managing small-scale projects and, more importantly, rendering their service to the school community.

DISCUSSION

The sociology of schooling as observed at BHT shows how factors at the national level interact with micro-level ones at the school and individual participants to produce a school programme that is permeated by values and ideological positions about Singapore society. It also throws light on the existence of various mechanisms and processes that work to shape pupils' socialisation experiences. Data gathered for different segments of the school programme also yield insights into how the school functions to promote the economic, political, social and cultural goals of the State. While much of schooling has been structured and guided by national policy considerations and the ideology of the State, there are particular aspects of pupils' behaviour and reactions to school demands that are not planned for. Nevertheless, the larger Singapore culture has impacted on the operation of the school in many ways, as illustrated by the school's implementation of official policies and the interplay of forces that influence how pupils respond to schooling.

From the presentation of data on different facets of the school programme at BHT, it is now possible to draw some conclusions about the nature of moral schooling there. Firstly, it has been noted that the academic subjects and ECAs are strongly influenced by national educational policies and directives on how schools should be organised for cognitive and moral development. The school curriculum is centrally controlled by the national education system. The

impersonal and ubiquitous examination system at the national level exerts a powerful sway over the instructional programmes and work of school personnel. BHT administrators and teachers are implementing school policies geared at preparing pupils for academic competitions and improving their chances of going on to tertiary education.

At the same time, the principal is committed to pursue a pupil-welfare programme designed to develop the social and personal education of adolescent pupils. In this he is guided by his own belief that the school programme must allow them to realise their full potentials for further growth. Under his leadership, the school has created opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of enrichment activities. There is another reason for seeking to provide a balanced educational diet for pupils. The principal is hoping to arrest the worrying tendency for pupils to be narrowly focussed on book learning. But the two school goals are perceived as imposing a great burden on many pupils who are academically weaker. They are quick to dismiss certain school subjects as being unimportant, especially when these are not taken into account in the formal examinations. Examples of low-status subjects are Music, the additional Humanities subject and Moral Education courses. In a similar way, many pupils are more than prepared to forego time-consuming ECAs, even if such activities prove to be educationally valuable and enriching for personal development. This pragmatic and utilitarian outlook is prevalent and can be seen as a consequence of the hidden curriculum of schooling.

It has been argued that subjects like Confucian Ethics and History teach explicitly a variety of political, economic and social values about the nation and individual. They seek to promote a social morality about the role and moral responsibility of citizens. They emphasise a group orientation where values such as care and concern for others, loyalty to the group and nation, teamwork, social discipline and cooperation are highlighted. But there is a conflicting moral orientation in parts of the written curriculum that socialises Singaporean pupils to behave in a very individualistic and self-serving way in their relationships with other people. The message is clear: if an individual and a small nation-state is to survive in a highly competitive world, then they must work smartly and try to 'keep ahead of the pack'. Herein lies the strongest driving force in Singapore society, a force that encourages unbridled competition and selfish individualism, and one that is reflected in the education system. The school programme poses some serious dilemmas to its pupils. Given the reward structure of the larger society, pupils are responding in an expected way. In this sense, the whole educational system is geared towards sustaining a competitive ethos rather than an ethos of cooperation and caring for others. An important

consequence is that much of the effort put in by the school to give pupils a balanced education is in danger of being nullified by the entrenched value system.

The school programme is replete with a broad spectrum of values such as economic, technological, political, civic and religious values. While it seeks to foster the personal and social development of pupils, the school is mainly engaged in moral socialisation in formal and informal ways. The schooling experience at BHT is therefore one that is effective in socialising its pupil members for life in Singapore.