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DRAFT

**Fostering Social Cohesion and Cultural Sustainability:
Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore**

Charlene Tan & Chee Soon Tan

Abstract

This paper critically discusses the Singapore state's endeavour to balance social cohesion and cultural sustainability through the 'Character and Citizenship Education' (CCE) curriculum. This paper points out that underpinning the CCE syllabus are the state ideologies of communitarianism and multiracialism. It is argued that the ideology of communitarianism is compatible with and finds support from Confucius' emphasis on the concept of harmony (he) and his advocacy of values inculcation that progresses from the family to the community and the rest of the world. The paper further argues that a key challenge in balancing social cohesion with cultural sustainability in Singapore is to guard against essentialising and stereotyping the various cultural groups through the surface culture approach.

Keywords:

Character and Citizenship Education, communitarianism, Confucius, multiracialism, Singapore

Introduction

Fostering the desired outcomes of social cohesion and cultural sustainability has been a perennial goal for many governments of plural societies in the world. An example is the case in Singapore, one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world. Of the 5.2 million residents (Singapore citizens and permanent residents), 74.1% are Chinese, 13.4% are Malay, 9.2% are Indians and 3.3% are 'Others'. Cutting across these different ethnic groupings and nationalities are a variety of cultural and religious beliefs and practices. 83% of its population identify themselves as adherents to a particular religion: 33.3% Buddhists, 18.3% Christians, 14.7% Muslims, 10.9% Taoists, 5.1% Hindus, and 17% others.

Under a strong and interventionist state, Singapore's modern education system strives to build social cohesion through homogenisation on the one hand, and cultural diversity and sustainability on the other. To promote homogenisation, the state uses primarily language (English as the official common language and language of instruction), secularism (confining religion to the private sphere), national values and messages (codified as 'Our Shared Values', 'Singapore Family values', 'Singapore 21 Vision', and 'National Education Messages') and a centralised school system and common school curricula. But the state is also aware of the need to integrate diverse cultural and religious groups within a nation-state while ensuring equity and autonomy for all cultural and religious communities. Hence the

state, alongside homogenisation, has also advocated its version of multiculturalism, more accurately described as ‘multiracialism’ (Taylor, 1994; Banks, 2001; Chua 2003, 2005, 2006; Vasu 2008).

A primary vehicle to promote both homogenisation and cultural sustainability among the young is values education in schools. The Ministry of Education (MOE for short) has recently revamped the values education curriculum in Singapore and renamed it ‘Character and Citizenship Education’ (CCE for short). This paper critically discusses the MOE’s goal of balancing between building social cohesion and preserving cultural sustainability through CCE. This paper begins with an exposition of the syllabus of CCE, followed by a discussion of its underlying philosophy, its relationship with Confucianism, and a potential key challenge that arises from its implementation.

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), which will be implemented from 2014, aims to “inculcate values and build competencies in our students to develop them to be good individuals and useful citizens” (MOE, 2012a, p. 1; MOE, 2012b, p. 1). CCE, in acknowledging and highlighting the diverse cultural heritage of the students, hopes that the students will be self-aware of their own identities, and learn to be ‘socio-culturally sensitive’ and preserve ethnic and religious harmony. That CCE aims to promote both social cohesion and cultural sustainability is evident in its learning outcomes for students to “take pride in our national identity, have a sense of belonging to Singapore and be committed to nation-building”; “value Singapore’s socio-cultural diversity, and promote social cohesion and harmony” (MOE, 2012b, p. 5).

The CCE syllabus states that CCE is central to the MOE’s ‘Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes’. CCE underscores the interconnectedness of three areas: (1) core values (2) social and emotional competencies and (3) critical literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills (MOE, 2012a, p. 1). Let us look at the three areas in turn.

Core Values

The ‘core values’ serve as the foundation of character and provide compass for behaviour. They are identified and described as follows (see Table 1) (MOE, 2012a, p. 6):

Table 1: The Core Values in CCE

Core Value	Description
Respect	A person demonstrates respect when he believes in his own self-worth and the intrinsic worth of all people.
Responsibility	A person who is responsible recognises that he has a duty to himself, his family, community, nation and the world, and fulfills his responsibilities with love and commitment.
Resilience	A person who is resilient has emotional strength and perseveres in the face of challenges. He manifests courage, optimism, adaptability and resourcefulness.
Integrity	A person of integrity upholds ethical principles and has the moral courage to stand up for what is right.
Care	A person who is caring acts with kindness and compassion. He contributes to the betterment of the

	community and the world.
Harmony	A person who values harmony seeks inner happiness and promotes social cohesion. He appreciates the unity and diversity of a multi-cultural society.

Social and emotional competencies

The ‘social and emotional competencies’ are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that enable students to manage self and relationships effectively as well as make responsible decisions (MOE, 2012a, p. 1). They comprise five components as follows (see Table 2) (MOE, 2012a, p. 3):

Table 2: The Social and Emotional Competencies in CCE

Social and emotional competency	Description
Self-awareness	A person who understands his own emotions, strengths, inclinations and weaknesses is able to develop positive self-concept and self-worth.
Self-management	A person who manages himself effectively is able to manage his own emotions, exercise self-discipline and display strong goal-setting and organisational skills.
Social awareness	A person who has social awareness is able to accurately discern different perspectives, recognise and appreciate diversity and demonstrate empathy and respect for others.
Relationship management	A person who manages relationships well is able to establish and maintain healthy relationships through effective communication and is able to work with others to resolve conflicts.
Responsible decision-making	A person who makes responsible decisions is able to identify and analyse the implications and consequences of decisions made based on sound moral considerations.

Civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills

The ‘civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills’ are the skills related to citizenship that enable students to function effectively as active citizens and stay rooted to Singapore (MOE, 2012a, p. 1). The skills are comprised of four components, as follows (see Table 3) (MOE, 2012a, p. 4):

Table 3: The Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross-Cultural Skills in CCE

Component of the Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross-cultural Skills	Description
Active community life	A person who leads an active community life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a sense of responsibility toward the community; • Is civic minded; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports and contributes through community and nation-building activities.
National and cultural identity	A person with a national and cultural identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possesses a sense of responsibility to the nation; and • Has a shared commitment to the ideals of the nation and its culture.
Global awareness	A person with global awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copes with change due to cultural interactions abroad; and • Recognises, analyses and evaluates global trends and their interconnections with local communities.
Socio-cultural sensitivity and awareness	A person with socio-cultural sensitivity and awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathises with others through understanding, acceptance and respect; and • Engages in appropriate behaviour with other socio-cultural groups in both local and international contexts, in a way which would enhance social cohesion.

Discussion

Fostering social cohesion and cultural sustainability

Three observations can be made from an analysis of the CCE syllabus. First, CCE continues the state's endeavour to foster national unity and cultural diversity through the ideologies of communitarianism and multiracialism.

Communitarianism, despite its diverse origins, strands and manifestations, generally subscribes to at least two central beliefs (Tan, 2012a; Tan & Wong, 2010). First, it rejects the view that the self is detached from society and independent of all concrete encumbrances of moral or political obligations (Taylor, 1985, 1989; Sandel, 1981). In particular, it objects to 'liberal individualism' that emphasises abstract and excessive individualism at the expense of the centrality of community for personal identity and moral thinking (Arthur, 1998). Communitarians assert that the self is always constituted through a community that exists in shared social and cultural understandings, traditions and practices. Secondly, communitarianism stresses the centrality of the community in the formation of the individual's values, behaviour and identity. In other words, they hold that the community provides the interpretive framework within which individuals form their values, view their world and conduct their lives (Walzer, 1983; Taylor, 1985; MacIntyre, 1988). It follows that individuals need to go beyond the self to fulfil their civic obligations; they should pursue the 'common good', understood as a collective determination of a set of goals or values for the community (Bang et al., 2000; Watson, 1999).

A number of writers have reported that an Asian version of communitarianism is evident in societies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, China, Malaysia and Indonesia (Chua, 1995, 2005; Han, 2007; Hill & Lian, 1995; Kennedy, 2004; Lee et al., 2004; Sim & Print, 2005; Tan, 2009, 2011, 2012a, b). Chua (2005) avers that many political leaders in East and Southeast Asia attempted to develop communitarianism into an explicit national ideology for the purpose of rationalising general political governance and specific administrative

policies. In tandem with a communitarian ideology, a ‘good citizen’ in Asia is interpreted as one who contributes to society by supporting his or her community and adhering to a set of publicly shared values. In a comparative study on the citizenship values in Singapore, Malaysia and China, Kennedy (2004) observes that the emphasis for citizens is not so much on the rights they enjoy but the responsibilities they have towards family and the community. Unlike their counterparts in Anglophone societies, Asian communitarians generally choose to associate communitarian values with what they call ‘Asian values’ – collectively defined as moral values, social norms and cultural attitudes which are said to be derived from Asian philosophical traditions and historical experiences (Han, 2007, p. 386).

The influence of communitarianism on values education in Asian societies results in a preference for the civic republican model of citizenship to the liberal individualist model of citizenship (Hill & Lian, 1995; Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004; Author, 2008). The former tends to focus on passive, responsible and rule-following citizenship whereas the latter tends to focus on citizenship in terms of one’s rights, entitlements and status. Consistent with civic republicanism, values education is predominantly taught using the transmission approach where a ‘good citizen’ is one who accepts and demonstrates the values and behaviour on the established social and value system for the sake of maintenance (Lo & Man, 1996). A concern with an overreliance on the transmission approach is that the students’ reasoning, deliberation, decision-making and conflict-resolution abilities that are necessary in the consensus-building effort of a democratic society may be neglected.

Returning to CCE, we see that its focus is the promotion of communitarian values that place group interests and needs above those of the individual. To start with, the stated desired outcome of CCE is for students to become “loyal citizens, with a strong sense of belonging to Singapore and a strong sense of national identity, committed to the well-being, defense and security of our nation” (Heng, 2011). Secondly, the core values of CCE are directly and explicitly derived from communitarian values formulated and propagated by the state. This is seen in the CCE syllabus stating that the core values are derived from existing national values and messages, namely Our Shared Values, the Singapore Family Values, Singapore 21 Vision and the National Education messages (MOE, 2012a, p. 2). A mapping of CCE core values and the other values is as follows (see Table 4) (MOE, 2012a, p. 36).

Table 4: Mapping of the Core Values with Existing National Values and Messages

Core Values	Our Shared Values	Singapore Family Values	Singapore 21 Vision	National Education Messages
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community support and respect for the individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every Singaporean matters Opportunities for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singapore is our homeland; this is why we belong
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nation before community & society above self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Filial responsibility Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Singapore Heartbeat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We must defend ourselves Singapore
Resilience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one owes

			Singapore Heartbeat • Strong families: Our foundation and our future	Singapore a living • We have confidence in our future
Integrity		• Commitment		• We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility
Care	• Family as the basic unit of society	• Love, care and concern • Communication	• The Singapore Heartbeat • Strong families: Our foundation and our future	• Singapore is our homeland; this is why we belong
Harmony	• Racial and religious harmony • Consensus, not conflict	• Communication	• The Singapore Heartbeat • Strong families: Our foundation and our future	• We must preserve our racial and religious harmony

The syllabus elaborates on the relationship between the core values and the other four national values and messages (the material for this paragraph is taken from MOE, 2012a, p. 37). First, under the core value of *respect*, the two important areas of focus are ‘respect for the belief and traditions of others’, and ‘respect for the law and fundamental liberties’. These two areas serve to complement the value of ‘community support and respect for the individual’ under Our Shared Values, and ‘mutual respect’ in the Singapore Family Values. Next, for the core value of *responsibility*, the focus is on recognising and fulfilling one’s duty to oneself, family, community, nation and the world with love and commitment. This is reflected in the value of ‘nation before community and society above self’ under Our Shared Values, and the values of ‘filial responsibility and commitment’ under the Singapore Family Values. The next two core values of *resilience* and *integrity* which are integral to the value of ‘commitment’ under the Singapore Family Values. While integrity is instrumental in building trust within the family which is the basic unit of society, resilience empowers a person to take personal responsibility in the midst of setbacks and crisis. Furthermore, students should learn about the importance of and factors for a resilient family.

The next core value of *care* focuses on caring for others in the contexts of one’s family, friends, school, community, nation and the world. The value of care complements the value of ‘the family as the basic unit of society’ in Our Shared Values, and the values of ‘love, care and concern’ as well as ‘communication’. Finally, the value of *harmony* emphasises the need

to maintain good relationships, promote social togetherness, and appreciate the unity and diversity of a multicultural society through the family, community and the world. It supports the values of ‘racial and religious harmony’ and ‘consensus, not conflict’ in Our Shared Values.

We can see from the syllabus that communitarian values are highlighted across the national values and messages. Our Shared Values highlight the need for individuals to put ‘society before self’, ‘family as the basic unit of society’, and ‘racial and religious harmony’. These values are echoed in Singapore Family Values that emphasise ‘filial responsibility’ and ‘love, care and concern’ and ‘commitment’ towards others. Moving in tandem is the Singapore 21 Vision where Singaporeans are reminded to build ‘strong families: our foundation and our future’. Finally, ‘racial and religious harmony’ is reiterated in the National Education Message.

The third indication of the emphasis on communitarian values in the CCE syllabus is the question of ‘self’ versus ‘others’. Six domains are identified in the CCE syllabus (self, family, school, community, nation and the world), each covering three big ideas: identity, relationships, and choices. The link between the various domains and the three big ideas is as follows (see Table 5) (MOE, 2012a, p. 12):

Table 5: The Six Domains in CCE

Domains		Identity	Relationships	Choices
Self	Being who I am and becoming who I can be	How am I similar to others? How am I different from others?	How does the way I perceive and manage myself affect my relationship with others?	How are the choices I make good for others and me?
Family	Strengthening family ties	Who am I in my family?	How do I build and maintain relationships in my family?	How would my actions affect my family and myself?
School	Fostering healthy friendships and team spirit	How am I a friend to others? What are our roles when we work in a team?	Who are my friends? How do we work well together?	What do I want in a friendship? How would we use our strengths to build a team?
Community	Understanding our community and building an inclusive society	What is an inclusive society to us?	How do we understand and relate to others in an inclusive society?	What are our roles in building an inclusive society?
Nation	Developing a sense of national identity and nation building	What makes us Singaporeans?	How do my relationships with others contribute to nation building?	How would we demonstrate our commitment to the well-being

				of Singapore?
World	Being an active citizen in a globalised world	What does it mean to be an active citizen in a globalised world?	How do we interact with the people in a globalised world?	How would we use our strengths and abilities to meet the needs of a globalised world?

We can see from the table above that only one domain (self) focuses on the individual while all the other domains are concerned with the needs and interests of the others (i.e., family, school, community, nation and the world).

It is evident that the overriding goal of CCE is for students to serve the needs of the community and nation and to lead others in performing such services. This signifies that values education in Singapore is essentially citizenship training where students are imbued with collectivist values for the purpose of economic and political socialisation ([Chew, 1998](#); [Tan & Chew, 2004](#)). The emphasis on the ‘others’ rather than the ‘self’ is not unique to Singapore. As mentioned earlier, it is also featured prominently in other East and Southeast Asian societies such as Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Besides communitarianism, another ideology propagated by the state in its attempt to balance between building social cohesion and preserving cultural sustainability is *multiracialism* (Tan, 2008, 2011, Tan & Wong, 2011). Multiracialism in Singapore is so-called as the government classifies everyone based on four racial identities according to one’s paternal line: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others (CMIO). The cultural identities are essentialised by the state which invests each ‘race’ with specific cultural characteristics through homogenisation and erasure (Chua, 2003; [PuruShotam, 2000](#); Chua, 2006; [Bokhorst-Heng, 2007](#); [Vasu, 2008](#)). The three ‘homogenised’ Asian races are the Chinese-Confucian, Indic, and Malay-Islamic cultures ([Chua, 2005](#)). One’s ‘race’ is reflected on his or her identity card and reinforced through education, housing and other public policies. A ‘mother tongue language’ is assigned for each of the three ‘races’ – Mandarin (Putonghua) for the Chinese, Malay for the Malays and Tamil for most Indians. Other cultural markers such as food, attire, religious and cultural festivals are also ascribed to the three races. The ‘racial harmony’ mentioned in the CCE syllabus, Our Shared Values, and National Education Messages thus refers to the harmony that should exist among the four before-mentioned ‘races’. To be sure, the CCE syllabus does not just mention ‘races’ but ‘socio-cultural groups’. This term is defined as “other races, religions, cultures, nationalities and/or social status” (MOE, 2012b, p. 21). But this broader term perpetuates the definition of ‘races’ based on CMO as mentioned earlier.

Within the framework of hard multiculturalism, the Singapore government adopts the approach of ‘religious pragmatism’ where it views religious values to be of mainly instrumental worth to promote national unity and maintain national identity (Author, 2008). Unsurprisingly for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, the preservation of religious harmony is of utmost importance for the state. Religious believers in Singapore are constantly reminded that their religious beliefs and practices should not be at the expense of religious harmony. As long as the religious community confines its religious beliefs to the private sphere, the government is content to leave any religious discussions and debates to its religious leaders (Tan, 2007).

The Singaporean model of multiculturalism has been described as ‘hard multiculturalism’ as it affirms group difference by publicly acknowledging cultural differences (Vasu, 2008). In contrast, ‘mild multiculturalism’, while recognising the diversity of cultures within a polity, believes that the state should be neutral towards questions of cultural diversity in the public sphere. Hence hard multiculturalism ‘distinguishes itself from the more procedural nature of mild multiculturalism by being openly in support of differences through the defence of specific cultural differences’ (Taylor, 1994, as cited in Vasu, 2008, p. 23). This view of ‘multiculturalism’ involves ‘surface culture’ rather than ‘deep culture’. Using the iceberg metaphor, surface culture refers to manifestations that lie above the water level, while deep culture encompasses the less visible values and thought patterns beneath the water level (Weaver, 2000). With respect to multiracialism, surface culture is reflected in the ‘food and festival’ or ‘heroes and holidays’ approach to multicultural education (Banks, 2001). On the other hand, deep culture “reflects less observable values, beliefs, and customs and includes child rearing practices, rules about courtship and marriage, treatment of elders, and proxemics” (Holtzman, 2000, p. 21). While surface culture covers areas that are often observable, shared and uncontroversial, deep culture engages with sensitive issues in cultural meanings and challenges cultural stereotypes (Bokhorst-Heng, 2007).

The relevance of Confucian ideas for values education in Singapore

The second observation arising from an analysis of the CCE syllabus concerns the relevance of Confucian ideas for values education in Singapore. An examination of the CCE syllabus reveals that the underlying philosophy for CCE is compatible with and finds support from Confucianism in two main ways. First, the vision of social cohesion is emphasised in Confucius’ concept of harmony (*he*). The importance of harmony is noted in the following verse in the *Analects* (all subsequent references refer to this text; all the translations cited in this paper are done by the author):

1.12 有子曰：‘禮之用，和爲貴。先王之道，斯爲美；小大由之。’

Master You said, ‘Among the functions of *li*, harmony is the most valuable. [Harmony made] the Way of the Former Kings beautiful, and is followed alike in great and small [matters].’

To broaden the Way on earth is to achieve harmony on earth. The Former Kings who are the sage-kings who lived before Confucius’ time, kept to the straight Way by observing *li*, which led to the establishment of harmony in the empire. *Li* refers to all the normative behaviours that are accompanied by corresponding attitudes and values in all aspects of our lives.

Ames and Rosemont (1998) point out that the word ‘harmony’ is etymologically related to cooking – the art of bringing together with mutual benefit and enhancement without losing their separate and particular identities (p. 56). Li (2006), on the other hand, traces the root of harmony to music where “harmony comes from the rhythmic interplay of various sounds, either in nature or between human beings, that is musical to the human ear, and that the prototype of *he* is found in music” (p. 584). Be it in the metaphor of food or music, harmony essentially involves uniting different elements to form an integrated whole, without sacrificing the individuality of the diverse components.

How then does harmony function as a guiding standard for ‘great and small matters’? It occurs when a person coexists peacefully, purposefully and joyfully with other human beings and one’s surroundings in accordance with *li*. Harmony requires individuals to go beyond their personal needs and interests by promoting social cohesion; this is achieved by an emphasis on the *symbiotic relationship* between helping oneself and helping others to observe *li*. Confucius maintains: ‘In desiring to [take a] stand, one helps others to [take their] stand; in desiring to reach [a goal], one helps others to reach [their goal]’ (己欲立而立人, 己欲達而達人) (6.30). To ‘take a stand’ is to perform one’s social roles in society in accordance with *li*. What Confucius is saying is that we can only observe *li* when we help others to do likewise. As such, harmony is crucial for us to coexist and collaborate with others so as to collectively realize and broaden the Way (1.12). Li (2006) explains that harmony is by its very nature relational as it presupposes the coexistence of multiple parties; “persons of harmonious mentality see things, and make judgments on these things, in relation, in context, not in isolation or separation” (p. 589).

But social cohesion, for Confucius, does not mean the marginalisation of diversity, be it cultural or other human differences. Achieving harmony with others does not mean eradicating our individual differences or coercing others to conform to one’s own standards. The *Analects* cautions that we should ‘seek harmony not sameness’ (和而不同) (13.23); that is, we should not seek superficial harmony (sameness) but genuine harmony. [Li \(2006\)](#) elaborates on the broad meaning of harmony:

Harmony, as understood in Confucianism, can occur at various levels. It can take place within the individual. A person can harmonize various parts of his or her body, the mind-heart, and various pursuits in life into a well functioning, organic whole. Harmony can take place between individuals at the level of the family, the community, the nation, and the world. This may include harmony between societies, harmony within a society with different ethnic groups (or political parties), harmony within the same ethnic group with different kin, and harmony among the same kin. Harmony also can take place between human beings and the natural universe (p. 588).

Secondly, the CCE’s underlying philosophy parallels the Confucius’ advocacy of values education that progresses from the family to the community and rest of the world. It is pertinent to highlight the cardinal teachings of Confucius on the role of the family and community in values inculcation (Author, forthcoming). Confucius maintains the need for all human beings to conduct ourselves based on *li* (the normative behaviours that are accompanied by corresponding attitudes and values in all aspects of our lives). The essence of all normative behaviours, attitudes and values is *ren* (humanity or benevolence). The ideal human being is a *junzi* – a noble or exemplary person who constantly abides in and manifests *ren* behaviours, attitudes and values in accordance to *li*.

How then does one cultivate *ren*? According to Confucius, the root of *ren* is *xiao* (filial piety), as explained by a disciple of Confucius in the following passage from *The Analects*:

1.2 有子曰：“其爲人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好犯上，而好作亂者，未之有也。君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其爲仁之本與！”

Master You said, “It is rare for a person who is filial and respectful to his elders to transgress against his superiors. It is also unheard of for a person who is not inclined to transgress against his superiors to be inclined to start a rebellion. A *junzi* devotes his efforts to the root, for once the root is established, *dao* (the Way) will grow. Being filial and respectful to one’s elders could be said to be the root of *ren*!”

Describing filial piety, with its accompanying quality of respect towards one’s elders, as the root of *ren* suggests that the cultivation of *ren* should start with one being filial to one’s parents. Being filial is to relate to one’s parents in accordance with *li*, as explained in the following passage:

2.5 孟懿子問孝。

子曰：“無違。”

樊遲御，子告之曰：“孟孫問孝於我，我對曰，無違。”

樊遲曰：“何謂也？”

子曰：“生，事之以禮；死，葬之以禮，祭之以禮。”

Meng Yizi asked about filial piety.

The Master replied, “Do not violate.”

Fan Chi was driving the Master’s chariot, and the Master said to him, “Meng Yizi asked me about filial piety, and I replied: ‘Do not violate.’”

Fan Chi asked, “What does that mean?”

The Master replied, “While your parents are alive, serve them according with *li*; when they are dead, bury them and offer sacrifice to them according with *li*.”

Here we see how filial piety, *ren* and *li* are related to each other. Filial piety, i.e., observing *li* in one’s relationship with one’s parents, is the first step in values cultivation towards *ren*. Filial piety is of great importance to Confucius as he is cognisant of the natural, spontaneous and deep bond between parents and children. Confucius, in his comment on the *junzi* (the ideal or exemplary person), teaches that “when the *junzi* is affectionately committed to his parents, the masses will be inspired towards *ren*” (君子篤於親，則民興於仁) (8.2). Through practising filial piety, a person gradually learns to love other people in the community. In other words, performing one’s role as a child and sibling in the family enables one to similarly perform other social roles such as being a friend, a colleague and a subject in society. This progression of loving one’s parents through filial piety to loving people outside one’s family is noted by Confucius:

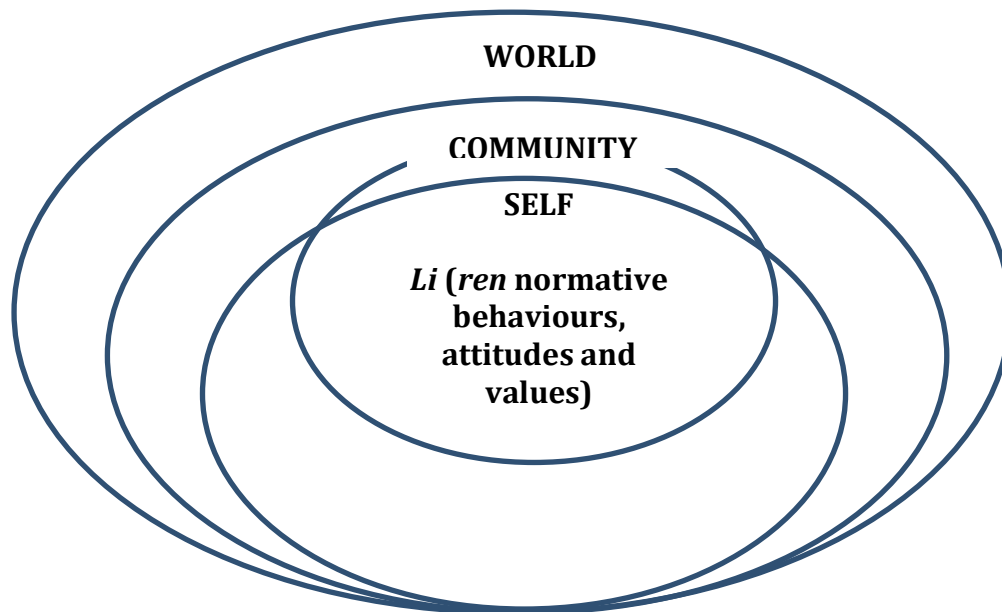
1.6 子曰：“弟子入則孝，出則悌，謹而信，汎愛衆，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。”

The Master said, “A young man should be filial at home and respectful towards his elders in public, be cautious in speech, be trustworthy, love the multitude broadly, be intimate with those who are *ren*. If there is energy left after doing the above, use it to learn the arts.”

From the above, we can identify four categories of people: one’s parents, one’s peers (those who are *ren*), elders in public, and the general populace. This framework can be represented using a series of concentric circles (Author, forthcoming) (see Figure 1). The quality of *ren* is expressed through filial piety, friendship, respect and love. We are encouraged to demonstrate *ren* in our speech (‘be cautious in speech’), actions (‘be trustworthy’), and

choice of company ('be intimate with those who are *ren*'). In short, the Confucian model of values inculcation reflects a communitarian model where the interests and needs of the self are intricately tied to the interests and needs of the community.

Figure 1: A Confucian Framework on Values Inculcation



Here I need to clarify that I am *not* claiming that MOE in Singapore has openly supported and incorporated Confucian values into its values education curriculum, including CCE, for Singapore schools. It should be acknowledged that there is no mention of Confucianism or any cultural or religious ideologies in the official documents by MOE. What is argued in this paper, rather, is that the philosophy that underpins the CCE syllabus is compatible with and finds support from Confucius' teachings as expounded in *the Analects*.

It should also be noted that the claim that there is compatibility between values education curriculum and Confucianism in Singapore is not a new one. A number of writers have averred that the Singapore government propagates 'Asian values' that are drawn from Confucianism (Chua, 1995; Barr, 2000; Chia, 2011). It has been observed that Confucian values such as frugality, industriousness, self-discipline, loyalty and considerateness have stimulated Singapore's phenomenal progress in economic productivity, social well-being and political stability (Tu, 1984). It is also not a coincidence that cardinal Confucian values are directly or indirectly promoted in the various visions advocated by the state. For example, Our Shared Values, with its call to place the society before self, uphold the family as the basic unit of society, and seek consensus and societal harmony, reminds us of Confucian teachings. The reference to filial responsibility in the Singapore Family Values also resembles the Confucian value of filial piety. The same exhortation is echoed in the vision of 'Strong families: our foundation and our future' in the Singapore 21 Vision. We also witness the strong presence of Confucian values in the emphasis on strong families as the foundation of society and the key to social cohesion, racial and religious harmony and nation building in the National Education Messages. It is noteworthy that rapid technological innovation has undermined traditional filial piety structures in some countries where the young quickly pick up new technologies (like a new language) and 'translate' them for their elders, shifting power relations. In the case of Singapore, however, it appears that the digital age has not

diminished the hold of traditional values and structures on the populace. In a recent survey of 4000 Singaporeans conducted from 1 December 2012 to 31 January 2013, it is reported that “filial piety and safety and security for their families were regarded the most important” across all age groups, including young people in their 20s and 30s (Our Singapore Conversation Survey, 2013, p. 4).

A key challenge in balancing homogenisation and cultural diversity

The third observation is that a key challenge in balancing social cohesion with cultural sustainability in Singapore is to guard against essentialising and stereotyping the various cultural groups through the surface culture approach. As mentioned, the emphasis of multiracialism in Singapore schools is on learning the observable and shared cultural manifestations such as food, attire, religious and cultural festivals of the three ‘races’: Chinese, Malay, and Indian. Learning about another ‘race’ is tantamount to learning about ostensible and prescribed cultural markers such as language (defined based on Mother Tongue Languages), religion (Taoism and Buddhism for the Chinese, Islam for the Malays, and Hinduism for the Indians) and ethnic festivals (e.g. Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali). All these may give students the impression that there exist three homogenised and essentialised cultures, known as ‘*the Chinese culture*’, ‘*the Malay culture*’ and ‘*the Indian culture*’. The linguistic, religious and cultural differences within the ethnic group are erased, leading to the common (mis)perceptions that all Malays are Muslims, all Indians speak Tamil, and all Chinese observe the Hungry Ghost Festival.

There is a need to help students to go beyond these stereotypes to understand and appreciate the cultural significance and differences within and across the ethnic groups. In other words, the surface culture approach should be replaced by the deep culture approach so that multiracialism could go beyond being “minimalist, maintained by passive tolerance of visible and recognisable differences without substantive cultural exchanges, deep understandings, and even less cultural boundary crossings” (Chua, 2005, p. 188). In other words, the deep culture approach, by helping us to understand and appreciate the implicit values, assumptions and worldviews of our fellow citizens, supports Confucius’ ideas of harmony (*he*) and humanity (*ren*).

The limitation of cultural understanding to surface culture also poses problems for students to articulate their own ethnicity and culture (Tan, 2011). The surface culture approach has a danger of perpetuating ethnic stereotypes and sidelining deep culture which paradoxically prevents social cohesion (Bokhorst-Heng, 2007; Vasu, 2008). Chua (2005) avers that the resultant ‘racial harmony’ is “minimalist, maintained by passive tolerance of visible and recognisable differences without substantive cultural exchanges, deep understandings, and even less cultural boundary crossings” (p. 188). What is neglected is deep culture which turns our attention to the often implicit values, assumptions and worldviews embraced by people. The accent on surface culture has unwittingly led to a disjunction between the objectives of CCE syllabus and the teaching of multiracialism in schools. Students in Singapore are expected to respect and appreciate the beliefs, customs and traditions of different ‘races’, interact freely with people of other races, and play their part in maintaining racial and religious sensitivity and harmony. To do so, both surface culture such as ethnic festivals, and deep culture such as the cultural beliefs behind these festivals, should be taught. But the definitions of ‘race’ and ‘racial harmony’ are circumscribed by the ideology of multiracialism based on a surface culture approach. This gives few opportunities and little incentives for students to respect and appreciate other cultures at a deeper level outside the classroom.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that underpinning the state's desire to foster national unity and ethnic diversity are the ideologies of communitarianism and multiracialism. It was pointed out that the ideology of communitarianism is compatible with and finds support from Confucius' emphasis on the concept of harmony (*he*) and values inculcation that begins with the family. The Singapore experience serves as a useful case study on the potential of values education curriculum as a means to foster national unity while preserving cultural differences in a plural society. What is noteworthy is how the CCE syllabus continues the discourses on communitarianism and multiracialism, and echoes a Confucian approach to values education. The Singapore case also illustrates the accompanying tensions that arise when a 'multiracial' approach is adopted where specific cultural identities and characteristics are identified, assigned and promoted for the diverse groups.

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