

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE 'MALAY PROBLEM' AND 'CHINESE PRIVILEGE' IN SINGAPORE – MERITOCRACY, MULTICULTURALISM AND THE RACIALISATION OF CLASS INEQUALITIES

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Abstract

The central themes in this paper are as follows - 1) deconstruct meritocracy and multiculturalism as a central pillar in the state-society discourse of governing Singapore. While multiculturalism accords all ethnic groups equally to manage ethnic differences, meritocracy, on the other hand, is a belief where mobility is attainable through conscientious effort alone, 2) underscore the educational plight of the Malay community, being a numerical and political minority, which has an inextricable connotation to the 'Malay Problem' paradigm. Such a framework has systematically and structurally plagued the Malay community in Singapore since the 19th century (British colonialism, perceived cultural lag due to 'Malay' values, the ruling government social and economic policies, and class and socio-economic disparities), against what was recently coined in 2015 known as the 'Chinese Privilege', 3) outlines the policy options to equalise opportunities for Singaporean Malays and accord them the means to achieve upward social mobility. The reconfiguration on meritocracy and refinement on multicultural policies respectively will help ensure the system could be made more inclusive for the ethnic minority Malays.

Keywords: Chinese privilege, Malay problem, meritocracy, multiculturalism, racialisation of class inequalities

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Problem

When an illuminating Singapore documentary, *Regardless of Class*, questioned the severity of class division in a meritocratic framework in Singapore (Channel NewsAsia, 2018), the segment which generated a lot of discussions was the verbal exchange between three students. Two of the students are of Malay ethnicity, from the vocational stream, and the other student is from an Integrated Programme stream (a high-performing student in a secondary school who is allowed to bypass the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Levels and sit for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education - Advanced Levels), a non-Malay ethnicity. Viewers reactively prescribe socioeconomic stereotypes linked to a specific ethnic group to the extent that a Singapore Minister, who was involved in the documentary, asked the audience at a local conference if there were 'social bias' being put forth to the film based simplistically along ethnic lines. This paper seeks to explore how Singapore Malays, being the ethnic and political minority, attempts to stand with the pillars of meritocracy and multiculturalism, on top of

institutionalised racialisation in Singapore.

1.2 Research Questions

The paper seeks to uncover the following research questions:

1.2.1 Research Question 1

What is the ideology of meritocracy and multiculturalism?

1.2.2 Research Question 2

How both ideologies contribute to the educational plight of the Singaporean Malays? How is it linked to the concepts of 'Malay Problem' and 'Chinese Privilege'?

1.2.3 Research Question 3

What can be done structurally to achieve upward social mobility for Singaporean Malays through an equitable meritocratic multicultural Singapore?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW – MERITOCRACY AND MULTICULTURALISM

Both meritocracy and multiculturalism in Singapore have profound historical significance. Through its British construction, the administrators' assigned each group their perceived contribution to the economy based on a Social Darwinist conception of what each ethnic group ought to be utilised (Lian, 2006). This action has a legacy, forming two strongest ideological pillars that govern Singapore's economic success until today. Through the changing hands of policies from the British to the ruling government of Singapore, the administration has ideologised their colonial history and reinforced the British ideology where meritocracy forms the basis for the practice of multiculturalism. Both meritocracy and multiculturalism are about economic development.

2.1 Meritocracy

Meritocracy was first originated by Michael Young (1958) who noted an emerging social group that is rising in power with a belief that mobility is attainable solely based on ability, skills, hard work, and intellectual capacity. Education in Singapore is regarded as an uplifting tool in which individuals who come from less privileged backgrounds will be cultivated with the skills and knowledge to rise the social ladder and attain the prestige that is accorded by academic recognition. Through a system of rewards via the meritocratic ideals, it "equalises the opportunities to higher earnings for students from different socio-economic status" (Ng, 2013, p.1) to move up to higher status attainment.

However, detractors of social mobility argued that mobility is influenced by structural parameters. While education as an agent prides itself in securing privileges for the masses, such social institutions are more focused in perpetuating and reproducing middle-class values (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). On the surface, there appear to be equal opportunities available for educational attainment. It does not consider the lived experiences of ethnic and class inequality.

2.2 Multiculturalism

The other ideological pillar which has been emphasised in Singapore is multiculturalism. Used interchangeably with multiracialism, it involved the tolerance towards every ethnic group and various communities. Notwithstanding one's ethnicity, language, or religion, multiculturalism is utilised to govern the population and manage ethnic differences. It does not place emphasis on one ethnic group. Multiculturalism, as with meritocracy, is accorded equally to each community (Hill and Lian, 1995).

The rhetoric of multiculturalism requires Singaporeans to accept that it is real. Singaporeans are expected to live and behave in multicultural norms (Benjamin, 1976) in accordance with the CMIO (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others) category. This further racialises and naturalises differences, where the differences are operationalised in clear, distinct racial categories, reinforced by government policies and institutionalised by bureaucracies. In other words, "Singapore's multiracialism [or multiculturalism] puts Chinese people under pressure to become more Chinese, Indians more Indian and Malays more Malay, in their behaviour" (ibid., p. 124).

Chua (2003) noted that multiculturalism is promoted as a common good for Singaporeans, where the state establishes ideological dominance, and structures the politics of ethnicity. The idea becomes so real that the ideology manages how a Singaporean life ought to be (Lian, 2006).

3 METHODOLOGY – PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER ANALYSIS

With the theoretical understanding of both ideologies in Singapore, the basis of this topic revolves around Singapore's ethnic Malay minority and their educational plight. Given that the author grew up in a minority community and experience first-hand how Singapore's history, policies, and speeches impacted the Malay community, the involvement in the bread and butter issues concerning the community would allow the author to be in a better position to revisit the 'Malay Problem' paradigm. Sociologists would describe such methodology as a participant-observer analysis (Motalib, 2012) where the researcher would be observing and participating in the community of people one intends to study. From the multiple secondary data, the author can synthesise and form a holistic interpretation of the subject matter at hand. The trade-off to such a methodological approach is that a value-free analysis is unavoidable, as all objective accounts are subjective from the point of view of the researcher.

4 'MALAY PROBLEM' AND 'CHINESE PRIVILEGE'

4.1 Article 152 of the Singapore Constitution

A Constitution is equivalent to a social contract between the ruling government and the governed (Rahim, 2017). It comprises of the ideals, values, and principles of how a nation-state ought to function as it is enshrined and upheld as sacrosanct. It is important to internalise the significance of the letter put forth and the intended purpose of the constitution. Article 152 of the Singapore Constitution proclaimed that '*The government shall exercise its functions in such a manner as to recognise the special position of the Malays, who are indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, economic, social and cultural identity and the Malay language*' (Singapore Statutes Online, 2018).

The spirit of the constitution has, to this day, been accorded ceremonially to the Singapore Malays. Applying a narrow interpretation of the constitution is the provision of free education by the government to the Malay students from primary school to university. Initially being a government responsibility, they shifted the provision to a Malay self-help group called Council for the Development of Singapore Malay-Muslim Community to administer the free tertiary education in the late 1980s. The policy took a slight detour and had been re-categorised to those families whose monthly income is below a particular income stratum. This move significantly repositioned the government's stance to provide free education to that of community responsibility to take care of their group. This is one paradox of ethnic-based self-help group (Rahim, 1994) as it purportedly re-emphasises primordial sentiments and made multiculturalism looks like "rhetorical sloganising" (ibid., p.47). In actuality, the special status enshrined in Article 152 represents a symbolic act to achieve Independence with Malaya then in 1963. Since then, the Article has been reduced to mere tokenism and does not express the aspiration and the spirit of the constitution it once constructed for.

4.2 Ideology of Multiculturalism exacerbated the 'Malay Problem'

Alatas (1977) noted the denigrating views the British undertook to systematically position the native Malays as unintelligent, lazy and unfit to rule, thereby justifying the need of colonial takeover. The administration undertook policies which prohibited Malays from contributing actively in Singapore's economic development and instead chose to place them along the margins of society. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, considered in many Singapore mainstream education as the founder of Singapore, situated the Malays as the following – "From the comparative rude and uncivilised character of the Malay nation, learned disquisition is not to be looked for but simple ideas, simply expressed, may illustrate character better than scientific or refined composition" (Alatas, 1977, p.38) while the Chinese are viewed as the industrious and diligent group that strives on prudence and economic well-being (Barr and Skrbis, 2008). This meant that whatever position the natives are in, they are to be blamed for their predicament. Such imagery ironically absolved the blame the colonisers construed of them.

Ethnic groups were compartmentalised into silos according to qualities and features specific to that group. This 'divide and conquer' rule lead to the formation of racialised multicultural policies today. During the transition from British colonial rule to self-government for Singapore, the former favoured the elite class consisting of English-educated Chinese group (Stimpfl, 2006). This changing of hands essentially institutionalised and preserves the colonial traditions through modern-day policies. Furthermore, open immigration policy to bring in more Chinese and Indians since British colonial times permanently displaced the numerical and economic majority of the Malays to a minority (Zooari, 1990).

It is the social, economic and political backwardness that stifled the Malays and continues to be

systematically underprivileged despite being seen in the privileged position of Article 152 in the Singapore Constitution. A seminar in 1970 first termed the concept as the 'Malay Problem' (Ahmat and Wong 1970).

Li (1989) was the first scholar who positioned the Malay community structurally and looks at the social life of this group concerning a broader social, economic and political context of Singapore. She contextualised her study from the 1960s onwards and drew attention to the importance of both class and cultural factors. She argued that both factors led to this group to fall behind economically behind the Chinese. Li concurred if such imageries of the Malays were removed in comparison to the Chinese, both groups are fatalistic, showed a belief in superstitions and spends money in an extravagant, irresponsible way. She challenges other authors who elucidated that the poor economic performance of the Malays to mere stereotypes. She argued that the evidences do not merit serious scholarly attention, and be viewed as asociological, ahistorical and astructural. In her conclusion, she delineated the "differences in the cultural framework within which Malays and Chinese organise their economic lives, especially with regard to entrepreneurship, have put Malays at an economic disadvantage in Singapore since 1959, and [this has] supported [the] idea that Malays are culturally inferior which, in turn, has been a source of discrimination against them" (1989, p. 182).

Further estrangement by the Malay community was courageously spelled out in the 1990 book by the Association of Muslim Professionals entitled *Forging a Vision: Malays/Muslims in 21st century Singapore: Prospects, Challenges, and Directions* (Mutalib, 2012). The book proclaimed that Malay's discontentment was primarily due to the discriminatory policies over the years which favoured the majority population. In policymaking, the authors argued that the government took little account of the minority sensitivities and place the Singapore Malays in an unfavourable position despite the Constitution outward expression to protect their interest.

4.3 Ideology of Meritocracy reinforces the Educational Plight and 'Malay Problem'

The state's racialisation of educational performance continues under the umbrella of the meritocracy ideology. In the creation of standardised national examinations, every Singaporean child is appraised in that single examination to determine his or her educational life chances. The establishment of the Streaming programme in 1979 sorted students in different bands according to their ability and pace of their learning so that it can eliminate unnecessary education wastage (Barr and Skrbis, 2008). Indirectly and ironically, the blame then falls on the community instead of the state when Malays are underperforming as compared to their Chinese and Indian counterparts. The underperformance can then be conveniently labelled as an ethnic issue (Barr and Skrbis, 2008; Nasir, 2007) which require community interference.

It is also to my knowledge that there has been no breakdown of educational results in Singapore schools according to income category, and has consistently been portrayed as an ethnic category when presented to the school's board meeting. This means that the 'community' needs to come in to help such group that requires the most attention when the focus should be on the low-income group that does not have the resources to meet the educational demands of the Singapore meritocratic society.

Studies have shown that the Malays have consistently lagged behind the majority Chinese and minority Indians in the educational realm, and this meant that Malays are overrepresented in the lower strata of the Singaporean society (Zooari, 1990). The 'Malay Problem' phenomena further gain traction when politicians such as the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew have on multiple occasions alluded that the Malays are genetically less intelligent and lazy as compared to the majority Chinese (Lee, 2011). Lee on another occasion had indirectly hinted on his culturalist beliefs when he noted that "We could not have held the society together if we had not made adjustments to the system that gives the Malays, although they are not as hardworking and capable as the other races, a fair share of the cake. They're improving because they see their neighbours pushing their children in education and so that helps." (Plate, 2010, p. 61). Being seen as less achievement-oriented translates to the lack of drive in educational attainment leading to high school dropout rates and in others being positioned in vocational education (Stimpfl, 2006). Complicating this 'Malay Problem' is the compounding association and frequent characterisation of the community as a socially and economically weak ethnic group with high rates of divorce, drug addiction, and low employment status (Pung, 1993). Even in Islamic religious education, synonymous with the Malay identity in Singapore, was perceived to be seen as being incompatible with Singapore's progress as a meritocratic society (Rahman, 2006).

Nasir (2007) has maintained that the use of the cultural deficit thesis to explain the sustained education underachievement of the Malay is inherently unsound and distorted. He suggested instead to look from a Durkheimian perspective of anomie and transitional society as the Constitution in concept was not in tandem with practice. Rahim (1998, p. 247) mentioned that the 'Malay Problem' "is strongly rooted in the historical, ideological, and institutional processes of Singaporean society," and not due to the community's supposedly

negative values and obsolescent attitudes.

4.4 Over-representation of Malays in Low-income Rental Flats

Public housing in Singapore is one aspect of multiculturalism that the state utilises to manage ethnicity. Over 80% of the population resides in public housing constructed by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), a sole authority in charge of public housing in Singapore. One of the most intrusive multicultural policy was the Ethnic Integration Policy. Designed in 1989 as a form of re-categorising the ethnic groupings to prevent enclaves from forming, such imposition was justified on the grounds of ethnic and social cohesion in every HDB block and replicating it to every constituency. The ethnic quota was and still is imposed on public housing estates to ensure a balanced ethnic mix.

On the other hand, rental flats which are strictly intended for low-income households represents a deviation from this norm. The intertwining of class and ethnicity is also made further to light in a newspaper report in 2016 when Malays are found to be disproportionately over-represented in rental flats across Singapore's neighbourhood in national figures (The Straits Times, 2016). This is alarming especially so for Malays given that they are considered a minority community yet constitute a majority in the public housing rental flats (Table 1). Malay households also form a growing proportion of rental households.

Table 1: Breakdown of the Rental flats according to ethnic groups

| Percentage of Rental Flats 1- and 2- Room Flat | Chinese | Malay | Indian | Others |
|---|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| General Household Survey in 2005 (Singapore Statistics, 2005) | 23,696 | 5,779 | 4,021 | 383 |
| General Household Survey in 2015 (Singapore Statistics, 2015) | 25,100 | 14,600 | 5,400 | 500 |

4.5 “Chinese Privilege” and the Racialisation of Meritocratic Inequality

Privilege is a concept used for rights or advantages that are available only to a group of people. The term is used in the context of social inequality, particularly to age, disability, ethnic or racial category, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or social class. Sangeetha Thanapal in 2015 postulated that ethnic privilege of the majority ethnic group has led to institutionalised racialisation resulting in the minority group, the Singaporean Malays, being viewed as a problematic group against the dominant ethnic group (Koh and Dierkes-Thrun, 2015) - the so-called achiever majority. Singaporean playwright, Alfian Sa'at, in his Facebook posting in 2013 highlighted the various forms of 'privileges' for the majority ethnic group (Fig. 1.). Adapting a study by Peggy McIntosh's widely acclaimed paper (1988) entitled *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Alfian shared a checklist method in delineating a Singapore Malay experience in another Facebook posting in 2014 (Fig. 2.). Even when a Malay is successful, and mirrors the success of a supposedly achiever majority, the late Mr. Lee reiterated his culturalist beliefs that a Malay is “acting around like a Chinese. You know, he's bouncing, running around, to-ing and fro-ing” (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008, p.96).

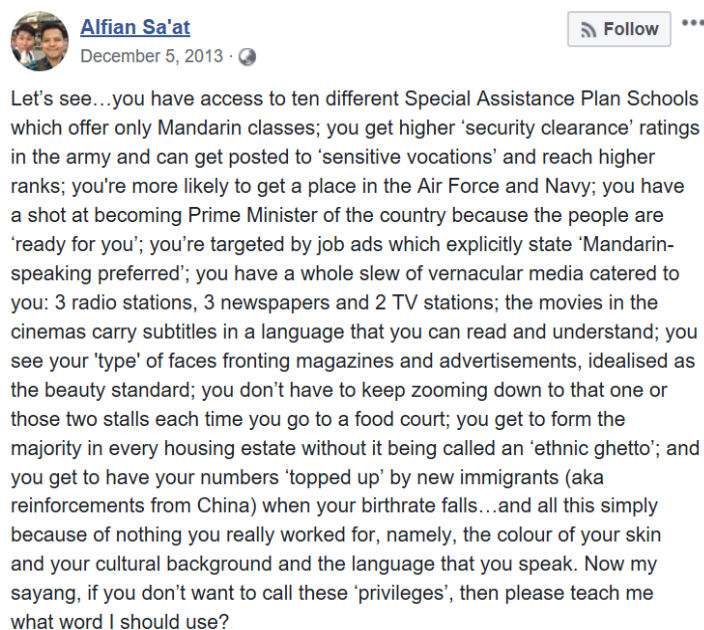


Fig. 1. Singaporean playwright, Alfian Sa'at, posting on his 2013 Facebook posting (Facebook 2013)



Fig. 2. Singaporean playwright, Alfian Sa'at, on his 2014 Facebook posting (Facebook 2014)

The structural ethnic Singaporean Chinese's privilege is seen as a racialisation paradox against minorities.

This draw attention to one dominant ethnicity as the identity in the management of Singapore's political and administrative system. The incumbent ruling government first sought to 're-Asianise' Singapore with policies that emphasises 'Chinese-ness' in order to neutralise the onslaught of 'Westernised' ideals. The Special Assistance Plan was one scheme to cultivate and uphold Singapore's Chinese character, positioning Chinese schools as a single class monocultural institutions. The government also launched 'Speak Mandarin' and 'Asian Values' campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s which heavily emphasised Mandarin and Confucian values as benchmarks, at the expense of other languages. The re-Asianisation programme did not extend to other two communities such as specially launched vernacular campaigns like 'Speak Malay' or 'Speak Tamil'.

It would be too simplistic to argue that all Chinese in Singapore enjoys 'privilege'. The position of the non-English Chinese-educated community illustrates this dilemma. The 1979 Goh Keng Swee Report laid down several fundamentals of the Singapore education system, chief of which was the creation of a National Education System instructing in English. This period saw the use of Chinese devalued and diminished, leading to its demise and its Chinese-educated community while advantaging the English language and English-educated segment as a "harbinger of modernisation" (Kwok, 2001, p. 499). They were further thrown to oblivion during the closure of Nantah, a Chinese educated university, by the ruling government in 1980, perpetuating the minoritisation of the Chinese community (Chua, 2005).

The fixation on maintaining the ethnic percentage of the CMIO category deserves some attention here. As of 2018, ethnic Chinese has maintained consistently around 76.2% of the citizen population (Table 2), making them the consistent majority in Singapore (Strategy Group, 2018). Conspicuously missing from the statistical table is the breakdown of immigrants coming into Singapore along ethnic lines. The government has, till today, mentioned no official position as to why the ethnic quota was maintained, as many of the argument to conserve the percentages came from the late Mr. Lee.

Table 2: Ethnic mix of citizen population in percentages, as of June 2018 (Strategy Group, 2018)

| | 2008 | 2013 | 2017 | 2018 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Chinese | 76.3 | 76.2 | 76.1 | 76.1 |
| Malay | 15.2 | 15.0 | 15.0 | 15.0 |
| Indian | 7.3 | 7.4 | 7.4 | 7.5 |
| Others | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.5 |

A veteran opposition Member of Parliament Mr. Chiam See Tong once asked in 1989 about shifting ratio of ethnic groups and possible composition of one-third each for Chinese, Malays and Indians respectively. Mr. Lee in his National Day Rally Speech in that year replied: "Let me tell you what I would think if I were an Indian. Why not 76 per cent Indians, 15 per cent Malays and 7 per cent Chinese? That is better still.But you know this is the real world. Let us just maintain status quo. And we have to maintain it or there will be a shift in the economy, both the economic performance and the political backdrop which makes that economic performance possible" (The Straits Times, 1989b, p. 17).

Chua has rightly pointed out that "the government has made a fetish out of changing demographics and has decided that the Chinese population should constitute three-quarters of the total populations at all times" (2003, p.69). The Straits Times article (1989b) highlighted that Malays were assured by the late Lee they did not need to worry about the arrival of Hongkongers who migrated to Singapore (Fig. 3.). Rahim (1998) asserted that the maintenance of ethnic quotas seeks to safeguard the Chinese's majority status, and considered their cultures and work ethic as pivotal to Singapore's survival. 'Chinese Privilege' was formalised as an academic study by Saharudin (2016) and has since gained traction in realising the many ideals the Singapore Constitution did not hold up to.

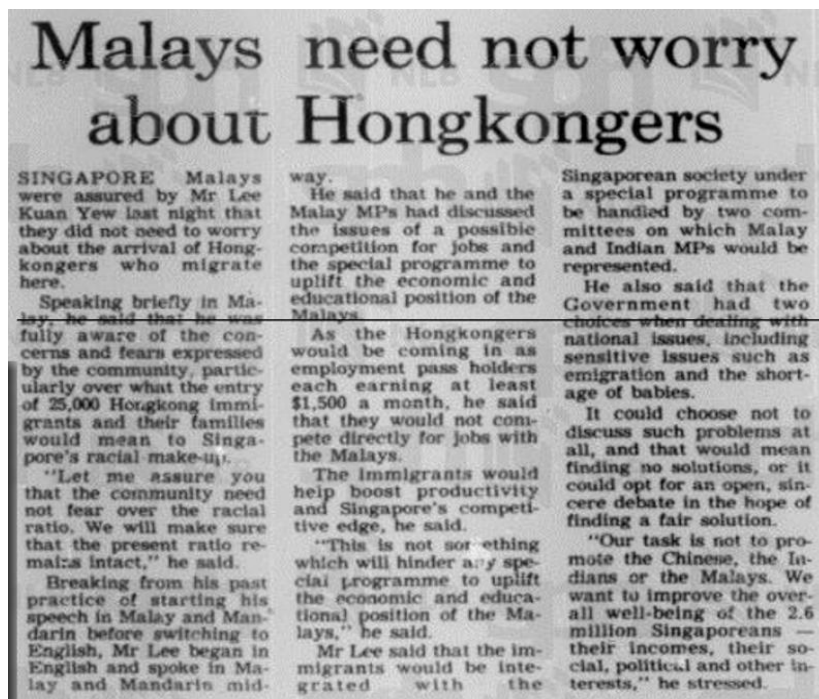


Fig. 3. Malays need not worry about Hongkongers (The Straits Times, 1989b)

The compounding structural factors of ethnicity, class and numerical representation of minority Malays as compared to the majority Chinese brings about an interesting perspective that class, ethnicity and power seems to intertwine. The lower socio-economic status group which are over-represented in education as the so-called underachievers, rental flats, drug abuse, prison population, and blue-collar crime related cases are overwhelmingly Malays. The higher socio-economic status group, with the highest number of millionaires in gated communities, are overwhelmingly Chinese.

5 POLICY OPTIONS – EQUITABLE MERITOCRATIC MULTICULTURAL SINGAPORE

The section outlines the policy options to equalise opportunities for Singaporean Malays and accord them the means to achieve upward social mobility.

5.1 Stakeholder Analysis and Recommendation

Given the arguments presented earlier, these are the options for consideration in closing the gaps. The policy recommendation that focus specifically on the family and neighbourhood has been adapted from a previous academic exercise (Lim et al., 2018).

5.1.1 Families – Social Service Care Team Model

I recognise that the individual's upbringing plays one of the most significant roles in determining the meritocratic gap. Thus, I propose a comprehensive Social Service Care Team Model approach comprising of practitioners from the social service division to monitor the plight of low-income families monthly. I can address the needs of the family and provide a periodical update on the status of the family to ensure that they can attain social and economic self-sufficiency such as career counselling.

The proposed Social Service Care Team Model team's representatives can consist of representatives from schools, community club, family service centres, ethnic-based self-help groups, and voluntary welfare organisations. This proposition can be implemented immediately by connecting existing resources from various community organisations. Difficulties of identifying which households would require help can be mitigated during and after the constituent advisor's home visits. Assessments would be based on the advisor, and grassroots volunteer's judgment as this group knows their residents best. Research elsewhere (Imbroscio, 2015) has also shown that intensive interventions have had some positive effects on family outcome. During the initial phases, it is pivotal to establish connectors such as grassroots volunteers to smoothen the transition and adjustment process.

On 20 November 2018, the Singapore government has initiated an inter-agency taskforce known as the

Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (Uplift), with the aim of strengthening support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (The Straits Times, 2018b). Citing the one-stop service framework from a hospital as a learning point, social service sector opined that more co-ordination must be in place to streamline the help needed to the families.

5.1.2 Neighbourhood – Mixed-income Blocks

Currently, rental flats are clustered within one neighbourhood. One example is at Jalan Kukoh neighbourhood located at a central part of Singapore (Fig. 4.). The second phase of rental flats since 2008 shifted from such clusters to integrating with the purchased units in a neighbourhood – such as those in Tampines neighbourhood located at the eastern part of Singapore (Fig. 5.) (The Straits Times, 2018a).

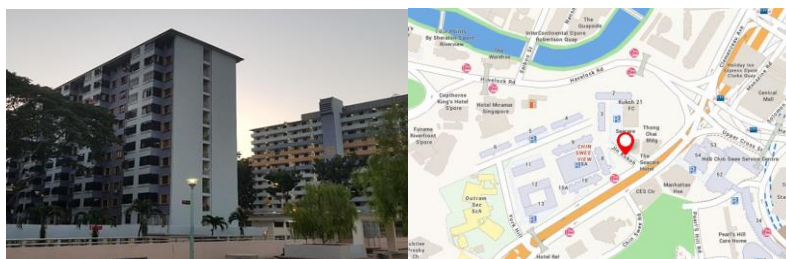


Fig. 4. Jalan Kukoh neighbourhood – consisting of rental flats clustered together (OneMap 2018)



Fig. 5. Tampines neighbourhood – rental flats located within the affluent neighbourhood (OneMap 2018)

My proposal seeks to shift away from the above and instead integrate one or two-room rental units with purchased flats within the same block, which is the model of an integrative mixed-income block. Such approach inclusivise the already intrusive Ethnic Integration Policy by building mixed-income blocks on a national scale (Fig. 6.). Currently undergoing construction in selected towns, the need to close inequality and providing a multicultural experience on a national level is of urgent imperative. I suggest that each block will constitute different housing types under one roof to cater to different incomes. Rental flats will be built side by side together with purchased flats consisting of two-room to five-room flats on every floor, with a single common corridor at each level, allowing interactions on the common space. Through daily interactions where residents are socially engineered to mingle, families will be able to attain social and cultural capital. Social mixing will also prevent class and ethnic segregation.

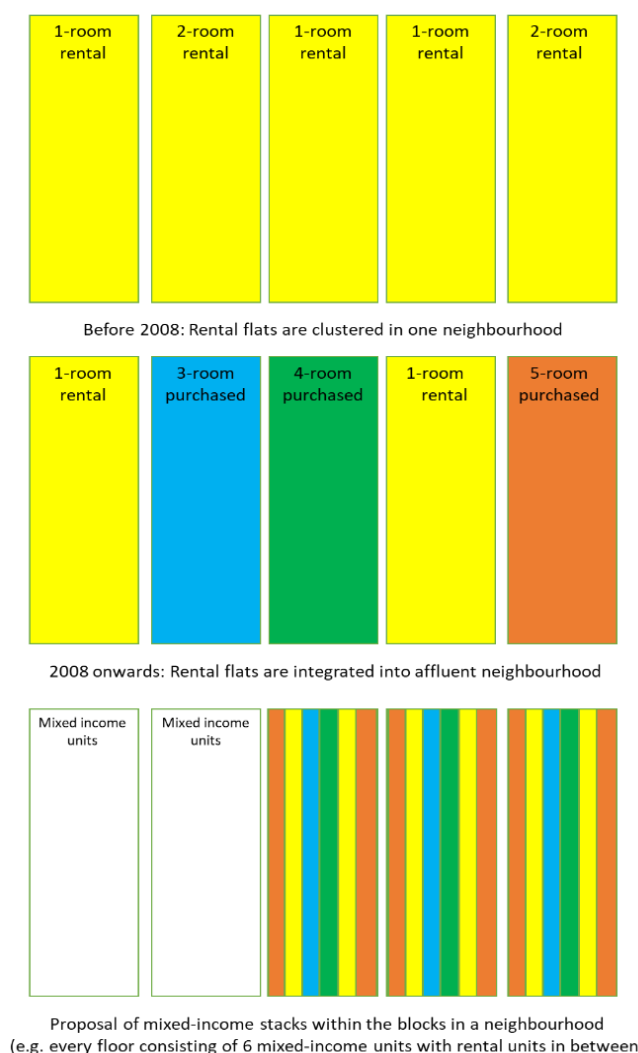


Fig. 6. Proposal of a mixed-income stacks within block

While getting the middle-incomes earner to hop on board will require some convincing, financial incentives such as top-up grants will help alleviate their financial woes. Amenities surrounding the mix-income blocks also ensure the attractiveness of the area to families intending to move in. The government needs to monitor the development in going ahead with such an arrangement.

5.1.3 Education – Introduction of Special Assistance Plan schools in the Malay community

Currently, Special Assistance Plan schools are aimed to provide students who did extremely well in the primary school and provide an opportunity to study both English and Mandarin, with a strong emphasis on Chinese heritage and Chinese education. As of writing, there are 15 such Primary Schools and 11 such Secondary schools in Singapore. Such schooling programme is periodically criticised as being segregationist and aims to amplify the Chinese language at the expense of others.

My idea is to introduce a similar scheme to the Malay community to emphasise the Malay language at both school level and professional level at the working world (Table 3). The plan will stop short of merely providing ad-hoc programmes and paying lip services such as the Malay Language Month or the forum entitled Malay Language: Role and Value in The Region. The proposal will tie to the ethnic composition of Singapore society to cater to the respective population. This will position Singapore as a multicultural language hub, preserving own knowledge and culture and allowing the vernacular language to adhere to the highest standard.

Table 3: Proposed Special Assistance Plan schools for other vernacular languages

| | Chinese (76.1%) | Malay (15.0%) | Indian (7.5%) |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Primary School | 15 | 3 | 2 |
| Secondary School | 11 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 26 | 5 | 3 |

In order to respect the spirit of the Constitution and Article 152, education will be given free to those from the lower income strata. Such a move will appease the Malay community who has considered the Special Assistance Programme schools to cater specifically to the majority population, thereby increasing the space for non-Chinese voices and narratives.

5.1.4 Ethnicity – Equalising the Ethnic Composition of the Illusive CMIO model

This is the boldest move of all proposals. The proposal also assumes that multiculturalism as a founding ideology will continue to be a central pillar in the state-society discourse of governing Singapore. Taking reference from the opposition Member of Parliament in 1989, the proposal seeks to remove any majority-minority problem and privilege and ensuring that multiculturalism is truly inclusive in numerical wise, addressing any contradictions between the myth and reality of meritocracy and multiculturalism.

Without asking the Chinese to depart from the country, the current 76.1% will remain, and the Malay-Indian population will be topped up accordingly to make up for the shortfall. Each immigrant will then have to go through the compulsory Integration and Naturalisation Programme conducted by the statutory board in Singapore, known as The People's Association, to familiarise themselves with the norms and values of Singapore society. To overcome the strain on urban infrastructure, the numerical increase must be in line with the urban redevelopment.

6 CONCLUSION

Singaporean Malays are often embedded in broader discourses of both ethnicity and class as they renegotiate their identity to be a competent Singapore citizen of tomorrow. The role of class and ethnicity cannot be eliminated due to the layering effect of both categories. They operate as powerfully at the individual level as it ever did on a collective level. When activated on periods of inclusion and exclusion, it troubles the soul and preys on the psyche of the conscious mind.

The Singapore Pledge epitomises the words to forge a sense of nationhood:

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

In order to be a society that is based on justice and equality, the suggestions put forth seeks to guide collective action towards desirable outcomes and allowing the minority community, the Singaporean Malays, to achieve upward social mobility.

Both multiculturalism and meritocracy, together with its historical significance will not be erased and will be debated by academics, society and community alike in the foreseeable future. In recognising the unintended social, economic and political consequences the government has created, the proposal seeks to right the wrong and moves forward as an equitable Singapore society where every citizen can be proud to call home.

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