Institute of Policy Studies

IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series: Literature Education in Singapore: Contextualising Developments, Envisioning Possibilities

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, enrolment in literature education at the upper secondary level in Singapore has declined to a critical point. As the nation celebrates its 50th birthday and looks to the future, one key question is: What is the public role of literature education in Singapore society?

The first part of this paper aims to contextualise the current state of literature education by examining root causes underlying its decline — particularly in relation to significant education policies such as bilingual education and National Education. These policies, implemented both to support and counter Singapore's globalising ambitions, have resulted in the marginalisation of literature education.

The second part of this paper then aims to envision possibilities for the future of literature education that involves a holistic reconceptualisation of its philosophy, areas of study, text lists and pedagogical approaches. This reconceptualisation is vital because literature education has implications beyond that of education, including the development of the arts and creative industries, and the nurturing of a more inclusive, participatory and cosmopolitan society.

1. Contextualising Developments

1.1 The state of literature education today

Literature education at the secondary school level in Singapore is in a precarious state even though the subject is compulsory at the lower secondary level. Enrolment for the subject at the O-Level stood at 47.9% in 1992, 21.8% in 2001, before dropping to 9% in 2012.

The Normal (Academic), or N(A), candidature for Literature as a full O-Level subject was 26.5% in 1992, 4.2% in 2001, and 2.5% in 2012. In 2012, only 50% of secondary schools or 77 schools in Singapore offered "full" Literature at the O-Level. Only 13 schools — 10% of the total number of schools with N(A) course — offered it at N(A)-Level.

Since 2002, Literature enrolment has been fairly stable. Each year there are more than 3,000 (9%) O-Level students and more than 200 (2.5%) N(A)-Level students for full Literature. In addition, there are about 3,000 (9%) "O"-Level students and about 400 (3.5%) N(A) Level students for Elective Literature (Heng, 2013).

The decline in the study of Literature, while not new, was raised most recently in 2013 by Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Janice Koh in her speech in Parliament during the Budget Debate. Much ink has been spilt on the reasons for the decline in literature education at the secondary level, but we may frame the problem in terms of three root causes that overlap and reinforce one another: a culture of pragmatism, our bilingual policy, and our National Education policy.

1.2 Reasons for the state of literature education

Culture of pragmatism

The culture of pragmatism is one of the principal reasons why Literature has suffered such a decline at the secondary level in Singapore. Such a culture is highly entrenched and pervades all sectors of life. When it comes to the crunch, many parents, students and schools think that Literature is simply not a "useful" subject. This is in comparison to subjects like Science and Math, which many feel open doors to courses of study at the tertiary level, leading to more promising job prospects. No one, for example, ever questions the need to study Math to such a high level in secondary schools or at junior college (JC). Generally, students who opt to study Literature at the O-Level are those interested in further study of it at JC. Many students who see themselves bound for the polytechnics also fail to see the relevance of Literature to their next course of study.

The culture of pragmatism we find ourselves in has been fuelled by specific measures and acts, such as the introduction of the annual public ranking of schools according to academic results in 1992. Ranking led to a drastic drop in the number of secondary school students offering Literature, because schools were afraid students would not score well for the subject and would hence adversely affect the school's overall position. Some top schools even stopped offering Literature as a subject or reduced the number of Literature classes they had (*The Straits Times*, 1995, May 24; Lee, 2000).

In the 1990s, there was widespread debate in the media following the drop in Literature enrolment. Expectedly, factors cited in the media included the fact that students were opting for Geography and History because they perceived that it was easier to score in these subjects compared to Literature (*The Straits Times*, 1995, October 7).

Although schools are no longer ranked in such a narrow and public way, education in Singapore is still conceived of in strongly pragmatic and instrumentalist ways. Thus, students who have imbibed the culture of pragmatism tend to view the pursuit of education as the means to better jobs and higher standards of living — rather than about studying a subject for the love of it. Literature is seen as a difficult subject to score well in and continues to be a casualty of the premium placed on grades and high-stakes exams in Singapore. Students and parents prefer "easy-to-ace" subjects even though pass rates for Literature are similar to those for History and Geography. "Performance in Literature at the O- and N-Levels has been consistent with 90% passes and over 30% distinctions. There has, in fact, been a slight upward trend in the pass rate for Full Literature, from 90% in 2002 to 95% in 2012. The percentage of students scoring distinction grades has also risen from 35% to 40% over the same period" (Heng, 2013).

The statistics show that among N(A) students, the fall in Literature enrolment has been even more drastic than it is among Express students. Again, the probable reason for this — that N(A) students are academically weaker or weaker in English to handle the subject — reflects the culture of pragmatism at work.

Bilingual policy

As part of the Singapore state's official policy on multiracialism and the formal recognition of four racial groups (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others, or CMIO) in Singapore, English Language is positioned in Singapore as a working and bridge language among the races. A bilingual policy where students offer English as a first language and their "mother tongue" as a second language has been the cornerstone of the education system since Singapore's political independence. The "mother tongue" language is supposed to provide cultural ballast, while English is valued solely for its

communicative and functional purposes. Thus, civics and moral education is conducted in the mother tongue language in schools while English as the medium of instruction and first language takes on connotations of mere functionality.

The naturalising effect of Singapore's bilingual policy has made it hard for us to think of the English Language as our own language and part of Singapore's culture. Instead, many think of it as a "working language", something to adopt for pragmatic economic reasons. This instrumentalist view of English affects curriculum and pedagogy where English is seen in terms of effective communication. Thus, instead of a Language Arts curriculum in schools when it comes to the teaching of English Language, an ESL pedagogy ("English as Second Language") is still at work in the bulk of mainstream schools because of the essentially functional view of English. Within such a system, English Literature is marginalised and seen as altogether a separate subject, suitable only for those strong in English Language, and hence only for an elite few. In many schools, excellence in English is seen as a pre-requisite for taking Literature as a subject.

National Education

In 1997, National Education (NE) was introduced to foster greater national cohesion and pride as well as help Singaporeans develop a shared national identity. Six NE messages had to be infused into the official secondary school curriculum through such subjects as Social Studies, History, Literature, Geography and Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). NE in Singapore is a "citizenship education initiative [by the state] aimed at socialising the young into a set of desired attitudes and values" (Tan, 1998, p. 29). What tends to be missing from NE discourse in Singapore are ideas about participation in a democracy, the cultivation of civic values, and the goal of social justice.

In 2001, as a crucial and strategic vehicle for NE, a new Combined Humanities subject was offered as a compulsory subject at the upper secondary level with Social Studies as the fixed and mandatory component. Thus, at the upper secondary level, students had to take a combined Humanities subject comprising Social Studies and one other elective chosen from among Literature, Geography or History. These electives are taken as a "half subject". Students could also opt to take another full Humanities subject (again either Literature, Geography or History).

It is clear that Literature has declined as a subject as a direct result of the way NE was conceptualised, structured and organised. In 2001, the year that Social Studies was made mandatory, Literature enrolment for O-Level Literature was halved (from 47.9% in 1992 to 21.8% in 2001). Since Social Studies is compulsory, students need only take a "half subject" from Literature, Geography or History to fulfil the Humanities

stipulation at the O-Level. The subject often chosen to pair with Social Studies — because it is deemed most compatible for study — is Geography, followed by History.

National Education and Social Studies in Singapore are narrowly centred on "The Singapore Story" and the six NE messages. According to then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, "The Singapore Story" is about "how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation" (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1997). It represents in effect the state's view of Singapore history and essentially the triumph of the PAP as the ruling party, together with its ideology and policies. At the same time, there is also a need to equip students to navigate a globalised world and its complexities. As a result, "citizenship education through social studies has become a complex task; the tension is between rapidly changing social, economic and political circumstances on one hand, and the PAP government's conservatism on the other" (Baildon & Sim, 2009, p. 410).

Literature, with its potential for increasing students' capacity for imagination, vicarious experience, and empathy has not been seen as having a central role to play in NE. Furthermore, the kind of critical thinking and questioning of authority that Literature can foster through its pedagogic practices makes it less conducive to MOE's plan for NE if NE continues to be presented in a top-down manner, requiring adherence to a single dominant narrative and with little room for discussion, debate and dissent. As Warren Mark Liew (2013) argues:

> *The study of Literature, then, is consonant with the aims of a liberal education that seeks to develop citizens' critical reflection, independent judgement, intellectual skepticism and sensitivity toward multiple perspectives. Concomitantly, a Literature-infused NE curriculum founded on this liberal-humanist paradigm should sponsor critical examinations of the ideological assumptions underpinning Singapore's nation-building efforts. (p.186)*

In 2011, it was announced that NE would be subsumed under a new Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework, which would also incorporate the existing Civics and Moral Education (CME) and co-curricular activities. Then Education Minister Heng Swee Keat emphasised that "NE will remain a cornerstone of the CCE curriculum because our children must know Singapore's vulnerabilities and constraints as well as what makes Singapore tick" (Ministry of Education, 2011). It is possible with this new framework that a broader understanding of citizenship education could prevail, which would also allow a greater role for Literature and its capacity for cultivating a cosmopolitan imagination.

2. Envisioning Possibilities

The dismal state of literature education points to an urgent need for revitalisation, and perhaps it is the possibility of a cosmopolitan literature curriculum that provides the most compelling vision today. What would this look like and why does it matter?

Let us first start by describing the opposite of a cosmopolitan literature curriculum. In 2015, an interview with Yale University's Professor Harold Bloom was published in *Time* magazine. When asked his opinions on reading and increasing public online discussions about books, Bloom replies, "Reading is not in that sense a democratic process. It's elitist. It has to be elitist" (D'addario, 2015,). To Bloom, literature education should centre on close reading and appreciation of a few canonical and traditional texts. Bloom's views exemplify the paradigm, termed aestheticism, which continues to have a huge influence in the way literature is taught in Singapore and which is demonstrated in three key features: the idolatry of the text, anti-democratic pedagogy grounded on aesthetic taste, and elitist selection of texts. Aestheticism is antithetical to the philosophical premise of cosmopolitanism — taken from the Greek term meaning "citizen of the world", connoting hospitable openness to others and inclusivity. In what follows, we will show how a cosmopolitan literature curriculum counters these three features.

2.1 From idolatry of the text to an orientation towards the other

At the heart of literature education in Singapore today is what we term, the idolatry of the text. This is most clearly observed in the first two sentences of the MOE Literature in English syllabus (Ministry of Education, 2013a): "Literature is the critical study of literary texts. Central to the subject is the critical analysis of how language is purposefully and creatively used in texts in order to create meaning and explore issues or themes" (p. 2). It is also demonstrated in other ways.

First, the two central theoretical paradigms that continue to inform the curriculum are new criticism and reader response criticism emerging in Britain and the United States during the 1930s and 1960s respectively. The former centres on a disinterested, distanced close reading of texts while the latter emphasizes the role of the reader as he or she transacts with the text. Essentially, these paradigms prioritise aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic reading (as a form of engaged as opposed to instrumental or "efferent" reading of texts) (Rosenblatt, 2004).

Second, even though the syllabus lists other aims of teaching literature such as to encourage students to "draw connections between self, texts and the world in order to develop intellectual, emotional, socio-cultural and global awareness" (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 6), this is contradicted by what the syllabus defines as key areas

of study which centre on five aspects of the text — plot, character, setting and atmosphere, style and theme. As a result, particularly at the upper secondary level, teachers tend to focus on these five areas of the text in their teaching.

At its historical root, this idolatry of the text is inherited from colonial practices of literature education. Literature education as a subject was introduced in schools in Britain in the late 18th century to replace Religious Studies, and its core aim was to civilise the masses and instil Englishness or values of the English middle class. When the system of mass education was appropriated to Britain's colonies, literature education was a core part of a colonial project to fashion a class of local elites who would be "English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1965, para. 34). In the 1920s in Singapore, a colonial government report on education in the Straits Settlement describes how respect for English culture was growing among the local Chinese population and advocates that "it is the part of [English-medium] schools to do more — it is to educate the youth — the father of the man — to teach them our system and our language and with it to instil an admiration for most of what belongs to us" (Nagle, 1928, p. 105). In an examination of the curriculum in schools such as Raffles Institution in the 1930s, one notes how the principal had strongly advocated a close study of canonical British authors such as Shakespeare, to initiate students into "the subtleties of language and thought and imagination, which make for true appreciation" (McLeod, 1937, p. 30).

The idolatry of the text essentially means that the curriculum focuses on an in-depth study of singular texts. For example, elective literature students at the upper secondary level spend two years studying a prose text in detail. Now this is not to say that training in critical close reading is wrong. The point is that the curriculum is emphasising what we would term extreme close reading. For example, the compulsory prose section of the O-Level paper includes a passage-based question in which a passage from the text is given and students are required to know which part of the book this is taken from and be able to explain its context and significance well. The result is that students are pushed to be familiar with every part of the text; teachers also encourage students to memorise important quotes since they must cite evidence in the essay section.

The idolatry of the text results in the text becoming disconnected from the world. However, as postcolonial scholar Edward Said has reiterated, "texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society — in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly" (1983, p. 35). In other words, all texts, even canonical texts, must be seen as constructed, inhabiting particular cultural values and ideologies. They therefore need to be

interrogated, interrupted and put in conversation with other texts that can expand or provide alternative perspectives.

A cosmopolitan literature curriculum counters the idolatry of the text. On a philosophical level, it is centred on the idea of "ethics as first philosophy", which does not mean that literature should be utilised for didactic moral training (Levinas, 1989). Instead, ethics is premised on the essential question: How shall I live in relation to others? This is also to return to a different philosophy of language, which perceives language not merely as a means for communicating meaning but a means for reaching understanding of others (Habermas, 1984). Thus, a main aim of a cosmopolitan literature curriculum is for students to be exposed to as well as to empathise and engage with multiple and marginalised others in the world. Here, ethics rather than aesthetics become the philosophical premise of literature education. Ethics was a significant aspect of education during the time of ancient Greece and China with philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and Confucius calling us to contemplate such essential questions about human existence and purpose. The interest in virtue ethics, particularly in relation to such virtues as justice and care contributed by key philosophers of the late 20th century, has led to a shift away from the self's occupation with living a moral life to the question of how the self can be attentive and responsible for others in the world, particularly those who are victimised, marginalised and oppressed. This is the kind of "new, dirty cosmopolitanism" that calls us to be active rather than passive, accountable rather than disengaged readers of our world and its cultural texts (Robbins, 2012).

2.2 From anti-democratic pedagogy grounded on aesthetic taste to democratic pedagogies of connection and interruption

As mentioned, the current preoccupation with the aesthetic objective has led to the literature curriculum revolving around five areas of study — plot, character, setting and atmosphere, style and theme. Between 1990 and 2013, the proportion of questions in the O-Level Literature in English examination paper requiring students to analyse the style of the writer increased from 4.3% in 1990 to 16.2% in 2000 and to 91.1% in 2013, while the proportion of questions requiring students to discuss issues related to key themes in the text decreased from 8.5% in 1990 to 5.9% in 2000 and to 0% in 2013 (Choo, 2015, Figure 1). Further, most questions continued to centre on the analysis of textual features. While the proportion of questions requiring students to evaluate the text's ideological issues and the ethical implications of an event increased from 6.4% in 1990 and 4.4% in 2000 to 16.1% in 2013, this was still far below the proportion of questions emphasising close analysis of textual features which increased from 48.9% in 1990 to 60.4% in 2000 to 83.9% in 2013 (Choo, 2015, Figure 2).

The preoccupation with the five areas of study, especially the aesthetic style of the text, has resulted in an anti-democratic pedagogy where the over-emphasis on appreciation leaves little room for critical evaluation of the text, its politics, ideological values, the way it positions and influences the reader, as well as the socio-cultural contexts that shape it. While questions such as "How does Miller make this passage such a powerful ending to the play?" or "How does Shakespeare make Mercutio a dramatically compelling character?" (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 8) may be useful in drawing attention to the craft of the writer, it also results in classroom pedagogy becoming fixated on aesthetic originality and confined to the life-world of the author's fictional imagination.

What is an alternative? A cosmopolitan literature curriculum involves the de-centring of text and is reoriented towards the development of a critical hospitable imagination. Gayatri Spivak argues that aesthetic education — including literature education — should fundamentally provide what she terms "the training of an imagination for epistemological performance", which means training the imagination to interrogate the ways in which knowledge of self and others are constructed and interpreted as well as testing the limits of the imagination's attempts to know and perceive otherness (Spivak, 2012, p. 101).

In practice, a cosmopolitan Literature curriculum would support the development of democratic and inclusive classrooms through pedagogies of connection and interruption. First, the current five areas of study could be expanded to foreground the idea of connections involving connecting texts to other texts, to real-world issues in society and the world, and to theories about human nature, justice, suffering, etc. The following is one example from our observation of a teacher in the United States, who was part of a larger study on global education. This was a Grade 10 (equivalent to Secondary 4) Language Arts class and the unit's title was "Poverty in the United States". The anchor text was Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The teacher spent several months conducting the typical close analysis of the plot, character and style of the text. However, in the second part of this unit, she turned the focus to the issue of poverty. She had students work in groups to consider Charles Dickens as a social critic who wrote about poverty in his time. Students were asked to find out about current social critics writing about poverty and social justice in their country. They researched *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Economist* and other sources, and ranked what they thought were the best articles and writers. Following this, they compared the contemporary writer they chose with Dickens on how effective they were as social critics on poverty. Towards the end of the unit, she had students think about themselves and their own role as social critics of society. What do we notice here? The teacher did not compromise on teaching the skills of critical close reading of the text, but she moved beyond it. She connected the text to larger, pressing social issues

and she made students think about how they themselves could play an active role in countering social injustice.

Aside from a pedagogy of connection, cosmopolitan literature education can also encourage a pedagogy of interruption that recognises what Nigerian-American author Chimamanda Adichie terms "the danger of the single story" (Adichie, 2009). In early 2015, we observed a teacher in an independent school. The anchor text in her unit was *Frankenstein*. She had taught the same text the previous year but said she wanted to get students to move beyond "sparknotes kind of responses". She decided to do something different. Once again, following the typical close reading of *Frankenstein*, she interrupted this canonical text with a new and relatively unfamiliar short story titled *The Moon Above His Head* by Yann Martel, which revolves around the struggles faced by a Somali worker after he has gained asylum in Canada. She had students compare the process of "othering" the monster experienced in *Frankenstein* with modern-day forms of "othering", such as the experiences faced by asylum seekers. At one point in the discussion, students talked about how marginalised others were represented in public discourse, bringing examples of recent incidents in the local media. The teacher then challenged them to think about how their own construction and reading of the foreign other has been influenced by public mass media representations. What we observe here is the shift from singular text study limited to the fictional world to comparative text studies connected to issues of real-world global concerns.

2.3 From elitist text selection to inclusive text selection

The current literature curriculum's concern with fostering aesthetic taste has led to an elitist and narrow selection of texts. For example, in the list of texts included in the English Literature examination from 1990 to 2013, authors originating from England and the United States accounted for 68% of the texts, compared with authors originating from Africa and Singapore, which accounted for 11% and 10%, respectively (Choo, 2015). The most frequently included author was William Shakespeare, who was also the only one to be included at least once for each year of the examination, followed by Arthur Miller. The most frequently included texts were two anthologies of poetry titled *The Calling of the Kindred* and *Touched with Fire*, with at least two-thirds of these texts containing poems by long-established writers from England.

An obvious consequence is the lack of cultural representation so that a large part of the world is left out, including texts by authors from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Presumably, the inclusion of such texts requires the use of translated literatures in English, which would be perceived as a compromise to the aesthetic "authenticity" of the text. The fact that translated texts are excluded in Singapore's secondary-level national literature curriculum perpetuates the reading of similar cultures, because the

texts studied are predominantly set in and written by authors originating from English-speaking economically advanced countries. This is unlike the International Baccalaureate Literature syllabus, which includes a compulsory translated text section requiring students to study at least two works in translation as well as a prescribed literature in translation list, which includes a wide selection of classical and contemporary texts stretching over 92 pages.

Further, while a few Commonwealth authors from Africa, India and Singapore have been included in the text list from 1990 to 2013, the majority of these, such as Alan Paton, Chinua Achebe, R. K. Narayan, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, are "first-generation" Commonwealth writers who gained prominence in the 1960s rather than contemporary international writers. These postcolonial texts, while attempting to critique colonialism, provide a reminder of the continued influence of colonial power and may themselves perpetuate recolonisation rather than decolonisation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002).

Another consequence of elitism is the tendency to stick to tried and tested texts, resulting in the lack of contemporary representation of texts. Take for instance, the compulsory prose section in the GCE O-Level Literature in English text list for 2016. Schools must select one of these seven texts:

1. *Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Published in 1989. Chinese-American families set in 1920 to 1980s.
2. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Published in 1954. Set in the context of WWII.
3. *Here and Beyond: 12 Stories* by Cyril Wong (Ed.). Anthology of Singapore short stories published in 2014.
4. *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton. Published in 1948. Focuses on pre-Apartheid South Africa.
5. *The Road to Memphis* by Mildred Taylor. Published in 1990. Set in the context of 1941 and highlights the effects of racism in the American south.
6. *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham. Published in 1957. Dealing with the alien/foreign.
7. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* by E M Forster. Published in 1905. English middle-class, social class distinctions.

We can make several observations here:

- Six out seven texts are published before 1990. The texts are therefore out of date. How will our students be exposed to contemporary writers around the world beyond tried and tested authors?

- Six out of seven stories are set predominantly in the 1940s/1950s or before this period. Issues discussed appear less relevant to current realities of our time, particularly when we think about what we term urgent global issues such as terrorism, immigration, climate change, asylum seekers, etc. This perpetuates the view that literature is out of touch with real world concerns.
- With the exception of *Here and Beyond*, the texts mainly deal with race relations between blacks and whites, Chinese American culture, and the British middle class. What about less distanced contexts such as race relations among other groups as depicted in texts such as Alfian Sa'at's *Malay Sketches*?

The point is not that canonical texts have little value in our classroom. Rather it is that we need to create an inclusive space that allows for other voices and other cultural representations.

The crisis of literature education in Singapore provides an opportune moment for a repositioning of its goals no longer centred on propagating a bounded notion of culture or an exclusionary emphasis on aesthetic taste. Rather, literature education should be conceived as a significant global positioning site to grapple with the many cosmopolitan aporias facing our world today as borders that demarcate cultures and nations are constantly challenged resulting in rising xenophobia, ethnocentrism and fundamentalism. As countries such as Singapore strive to fashion themselves as influential global cities that manage and coordinate the flow of capital and business networks around the world, they must also cultivate dispositions of hospitality among citizens. This is precisely the reason why we need to remove the shackles of aestheticism and strive to develop a literature curriculum in which its philosophy, pedagogy and texts for study are grounded on cosmopolitan ethical principles.

3. Literature Education and Arts and Culture Policy

The development of arts and culture policy in Singapore is largely determined by the city-state's desire to strategically cultivate its identity as a global city while still adhering to more traditional nation-building goals. This is apparent from the Renaissance series of reports on arts and culture. In 1989, the *Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts* recommended a series of measures, including major infrastructural changes and the establishment of key institutions like the National Arts Council (NAC) to make Singapore more culturally vibrant. In 1999, the *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore* by the Ministry of Information and the Arts further set out a vision for Singapore as a global city for the arts brimming with culture, creativity and innovation. At the same time, it stressed that it was building upon an older nation-building initiative where the arts would provide "cultural ballast" and enhance national identity. As a cultural document, the *Renaissance City Report* is

significant for counteracting the government's earlier neglect of the arts in its headlong pursuit of rapid economic growth and intensive urban development. The arts was now a cornerstone of the country's economic strategic plan; it served as an "economic catalyst" to produce a "multiplier effect" in the economy (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000a, p.47).

The Renaissance plans were the manifestations of the government's desire to maintain Singapore's competitive edge in the 21st century, by transforming it into an interesting, "cool" and vibrant place that would attract and retain foreign talent and tourists while also grooming a more creative and entrepreneurial local population for the new global economy. Arts and cultural policy have become part and parcel of the government's suite of policies for what Kenneth Paul Tan has described as "sexing up" Singapore, policies that ran the gamut of boosting the birth rate to deliberately investing in "sexy", non-traditional industries like the biotech and life sciences industry (Tan, 2003). Situating Singapore on the larger world stage, we see how its espousal of a "discourse of neo-liberal/ liberated cosmopolitanism" (Liew, 2014, p. 712); and its re-orientation towards the arts allow it to chime with the growth of the cultural or creative industries in the global North from the last third of the 20th century onwards, and the increasing recognition that these industries "could be an important way of reinvigorating post-industrial national economies" (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005, p.4).

In 2010, Lui Tuck Yew, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, announced the formation of the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) Committee to map out policy directions for further developments in the arts and culture sector until 2025. Lui made clear a policy shift for the arts away from the building of physical infrastructure towards enhancing the "creative capacity" of the populace and developing areas of artistic excellence with which to distinguish Singapore as a global city (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2010). Unveiled in the same speech was the Literary Arts Plan worth a total of S$24 million "to develop writing talents to enrich our cultural scene and give voice to our unique national identity." In 2012, the ACSR Committee published its report, which in some respects represented a significant departure from the *Renaissance City Report* and plans. Less exuberantly embracing of the global in its tone perhaps, the ACSR report reflects a greater community emphasis on the arts and expresses more pointedly the intention for the arts to be an essential component of everyday life. It proclaims as its goal the development of "[a] nation of cultured and gracious people, at home with our heritage, proud of our Singaporean identity" (Arts and Culture Strategic Review Committee, 2012, p.15). It also expresses the desire for a gradual withdrawal of the state to allow the private sector and the arts and culture community a larger leadership role.

The discourse of ecology and eco-system is prevalent in much contemporary discussion of arts and culture policy. An eco-system suggests an organic whole of many inter-related and interdependent parts. This is recognition of the fact that in terms of promoting a flourishing and sustainable literary culture, for example, we need to do more than just grow writers. Writers cannot be thought of separately from readers, editors, literary agents, librarians, publishers and literature teachers. Adopting this view of a larger whole, it is clear that literature education has a vital role to play in the growth of readers and audiences as well as the other members of the eco-system. It is also key to the continued development of the cultural and creative industries in a way that would combine excellence and access. Indeed, the potential for literature as a subject to enhance students' imagination and allow their creative expression has not been fully exploited. We need to adopt a concerted and integrated approach to the problem of low literature enrolment with school educators working alongside the arts community, and MOE alongside the NAC. With literature education policy and arts and culture policy moving in the same direction, we can foster a conducive environment for a thriving arts and literature eco-system.

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