

**“DISCIPLINED NATION” – YOUTH AS SUBJECTS AND CITIZENS IN SINGAPORE,
1942-1970S**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation applies insights and concepts from French philosopher Michel Foucault and the historiography of childhood and youth to provide new insights about state-society relations, power, nation-building and state-formation in post-1942 Singapore. During the formative decades of Singapore's transition from a British colony to an independent nation-state between the 1940s and the 1970s, a diverse group of people in Singapore, Japan, Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, came to equate the children and youth of Singapore with the past, present, and future of the island-city. Accordingly, they made the proper upbringing, policing, and mobilization of Singapore's youth a key aspect of governance. At the same time, they exploited the polysemic and flexible age-demarcated category of youth as a technology of power to manage democracy, dissent, diversity, and difference in Singapore. This emerging cultural politics and political rationality of youth in Singapore between the 1940s and 1970s led to the emergence of a youth-conscious and youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state — a state that employs an extensive apparatus of disciplinary institutions, programs, and agents that sought to shape, regularize, homogenize, and regulate young people's subjectivities and conduct. This was done to incorporate a diverse and divided population into productive and supportive relationships with the state and economy. In particular, the Lee Kuan Yew-led People's Action Party (PAP) government that ruled Singapore after 1965 valorized youth as simultaneously the potential pillar and potential peril of the new nation-state. This dualistic way of looking at the young warranted increasing adult and state surveillance over, and intervention into, the everyday lives and upbringing of the young. It legitimized the devotion of attention and resources to young people's development and empowerment and their policing and regulation at the same time. This resulted in both inclusionary

and exclusionary, positive and negative impacts on young people's ability and freedom to exercise control over their lives.

Lay Summary

The dissertation contributes to Southeast Asian studies, the history of childhood and youth, decolonization, and the Cold War in Asia, by arguing and showing that the cultural politics and management of youth was central to the making of the post-1945 Singapore nation-state. The successive Singapore governments that governed Singapore between 1942 and the 1970s saw youth as the solution to the integration of a mostly youthful population from different ethnic, cultural, linguistic backgrounds into a new country and society. These governments expanded and created a wide array of numerous policies, programs, institutions and networks to socialize, discipline, mobilize, and police young people. This led to the emergence of a youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state – a state that employs an extensive apparatus and assemblage of disciplinary institutions, programs, and agents to shape individual subjectivities, regularize conduct, and regulate bodies.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Edgar Bolun Liao.

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List of Acronyms

BMA	British Military Administration
CRD	Community Recreation Division
EYM	Empire Youth Movement
JMA	Japanese Military Administration
LF	Labour Front
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
NYLTI	National Youth Leadership Training Institute
PA	People's Association
PAP	People's Action Party
PAYM	People's Association Youth Movement
SCMSSU	Singapore Chinese Middle Schools' Students Union
SWD	Social Welfare Department
SYC	Singapore Youth Council
SYF	Singapore Youth Festival
SYSC	Singapore Youth Sports Centre
UN	United Nations
USIS	United States Information Service
WAY	World Assembly of Youth
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Dedication

To my fellow “youth”:

“For the young, let me tell you, the sky has turned brighter. There’s a glorious rainbow that beckons those with the spirit of adventure. And there are rich findings at the end of the rainbow. Not all will be rich, quite a few will find a vein of gold. To the young and to the not-so-old, I say, look at that horizon, follow that rainbow, go ride it. Not all will be rich, quite a few will find a vein of gold. Dig it out.”

- “The Singapore Dream”, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s First Prime Minister, 1923-2015, Address to the Singapore Press Club, 7 June 1996

Chapter One

Introduction

The founding Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, died on 23 March 2015. Over the following week, a sombre mood shrouded the island-nation. No other news mattered. Singaporeans from all walks of life and visiting dignitaries from around the world queued for hours to pay their respects to Lee's body, lying in state at Parliament House. They were joined by a great number of Singaporean children and youth. In recent years, the passing of Singapore's first generation of statesmen had become occasions for local schools to acquaint children with their contributions, with the aim of fostering a national consciousness of modern Singapore history.

Then came the spectacle of March 29. Despite the pouring rain that portentously appeared, tens of thousands lined the streets for a final send-off as Lee's funeral procession traversed the island-city. Young Singaporeans—national servicemen and schoolchildren—stood in orderly and disciplined lines along the route, placed on parade for his inspection one last time. Nobody thought it out of the ordinary for youth to occupy such a prominent place in the spectacle. Local news media also devoted pages to contrasting images of teary-eyed school children overcome by pathos and older male uniformed youth displaying a disciplined stoicism. Such images, as the historiography of childhood and youth tells us, are meant to do political and ideological work. On such a momentous occasion, they symbolize the relationship between Singapore's young, Lee Kuan Yew, and the Singaporean nation-state. These images also highlight one lesser-known truth of modern Singapore history: for the most of his public and political life, Lee had been obsessed with the conduct, activities, and mentalities of Singapore's young. This dissertation tells the story

of Lee's obsessions with Singapore's youth and explains this apparent naturalness with which the young in Singapore are subjected to, and deployed for, the gaze of adults. What explains these constant obsessions with the minds and bodies of the young, manifested in the diverse repertoire of institutions, policies, and programs aimed at disciplining, mobilizing and policing children and youth that exist in Singapore today? What were the assumptions, ideas, beliefs, fantasies, and anxieties that animated, and continue to animate, these obsessions? When, how, and why did these emerge?

By investigating and answering these questions, this dissertation shows how the analytical lens of age relations provides new insights about state-society relations, power, nation-building and state-formation in post-1942 Singapore. It reinforces the call that Rachel Leow, David Pomfret, Christina Jialin Wu have made through their work on childhood, youth, and girlhood in colonial era-British Malaya and Singapore for scholars to pay more attention to age relations as a category of historical analysis in Southeast Asia.¹ During the formative decades of Singapore's transition from a British colony to an independent nation-state between the 1940s and the 1970s, a diverse group of people in Singapore, Japan, Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, came to equate the children and youth of Singapore with the past, present, and future of the island-city. The "youth turn" (to borrow Tamara Myers's felicitous term) in Singapore history occurred during this period, when adults, including state officials, became youth conscious and even, youth-centered.²

¹ Christina Wu Jialin, "A Malayan Girlhood on Parade: Colonial Femininities, Transnational Mobilities and the Girl Guide Movement in British Malaya," in *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Richard Ivan Jobs and David Martin Pomfret (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015); Christina Wu Jialin, "A Life of Make-Believe: Being Boy Scouts and 'Playing Indian' in British Malaya (1910—1942)," *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014), 589-619; Rachel Leow, "Age as a Category of Gender Analysis: Servant Girls, Modern Girls, and Gender in Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2014), 975-990.

² Tamara Myers, *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2019).

Accordingly, they made the proper upbringing, policing, and mobilization of Singapore's youth a key aspect of governance. At the same time, they exploited the polysemic and flexible age-demarcated category of youth as a technology of power to manage democracy, dissent, diversity, and difference in Singapore.

I argue that this emerging cultural politics of youth led to the establishment of a youth-conscious, youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state—an extensive apparatus of disciplinary institutions, programs, and agents that sought to shape, regularize, homogenize, and regulate young people's subjectivities and conduct. This was done to incorporate a diverse and divided population into productive and supportive relationships with the state and economy. The resulting political rationality, discourses, and images of youth were simultaneously productive and carceral. In particular, the Lee Kuan Yew-led People's Action Party (PAP) government that ruled Singapore after 1965 valorized youth as simultaneously the potential pillar and potential peril of the new nation-state. This dualistic way of looking at the young warranted increasing adult and state surveillance over, and intervention into, the everyday lives and upbringing of the young. It legitimized the devotion of attention and resources to young people's development and empowerment and their policing and regulation at the same time. This resulted in both inclusionary and exclusionary, positive and negative impacts on young people's ability and freedom to exercise control over their lives.



1. *Singapore's youth, on parade in the downpour, giving one last salute to Lee Kuan Yew. Source: The Straits Times*

Literature Review

The historiography of childhood and youth provide invaluable lenses and insights to examine how culture, politics, and age relations intersected in Singapore. The field emerged on the back of seminal work on the social history of European youth and European youth movements by pioneers like John R. Gillis and John Springhall.³ Subsequently, it received new impetuses and influences from the cultural turn and the rise of gender history in global historiography in the early 1990s, leading to greater interest in using age as a category of analysis and on interrogating the changing meanings and significances of youth in different historical and geographical contexts.⁴ Richard Ivan Jobs studied how the post-World War Two French government saw youth,

³ The first work usually associated with the cultural turn in the historiography of childhood and youth is Michael Mitterauer, *A History of Youth*, translated by Graeme Dunphy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). See also another seminal work, John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

⁴ See Leslie Paris, "Through the Looking Glass: Age, Stages, and Historical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 106-13.

unblemished by the Vichy government's collaboration with Nazi Germany, as central to France's post-war national reconstruction. Emphasizing that "the meanings of age categories are culturally defined within any particular moment's historical context," Jobs argued for the investigation of the "political, social, and cultural emergence of the category of youth."⁵ His insightful study is part of a growing body of work that examines how states of all persuasions from the late-nineteenth century onwards endowed a variety of meanings to youth, and mobilized and schooled them to serve different national and imperial agendas. Others like Simon Sleight and David Pomfret have contributed valuable insights into how different governments in the latter half of the 20th century "sought to channel adolescent vitality and curiosity to useful political ends."⁶ Valeria Manzano's recent study of how youth "became a crucial cultural and political category" in Argentina between the 1950s and 1970s provide another powerful example of youth emerging into public visibility and political prominence and drawing adult and state scrutiny.⁷ These examples strongly resonate with how successive Singapore governments from 1942 onwards saw the moulding of youth subjectivities as the answer to the challenges of creating or re-constructing an imperial city, a self-governing state, and subsequently, an independent sovereign nation-state.

Within this growing historiography, scholars like Patricia Holland, Karen Dubinsky and Tamara Myers have called for us to examine how and why governments and adults mobilize

⁵ Richard Ivan Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁶ Mischa Honeck and Gabriel Rosenberg, "Transnational Generations: Organizing Youth in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 38, no.2 (2014), 236. See Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2014); Simon Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914* (Farnham: Ashgate 2013), 172; David M. Pomfret, *Young People and the European City: Age Relations in Nottingham and Saint-Etienne* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 6, 153.

⁷ Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 2014), 11.

children and youth as evocative mediums and metaphors to do political and ideological work.⁸ A recent special issue on foreign policy during the Cold War in the journal *Diplomatic History* discussed how children and youth became brawns and pawns in the games of state-building, nationalism, imperialism and international relations. Even more recently, Anita Casvantes Bradford and Margaret Peacock have insightfully shown how the governments of Cuba, the United States, and the Soviet Union deployed images of children as potent symbols and metaphors in the service of nation-building, state-building, and Cold War agendas.⁹ Their works underline that images and representations of children and youth are valuable prisms to unravel why and how adults and state governments tried to valorize and construct ideal youth and deploy images of children and youth. Singapore was part of this global history of modern twentieth-century nation-states that constructed youth as symbols of and metaphors for new national futures and attempted to mould them into desirable subjects and citizens.

This dissertation contributes an exemplary case of the cultural politics and the governmentality of youth—modern Singapore. The history of the making of youth in island-city-nation-state is one that is exceptional because the cultural politics and governmentality of youth in this one location were legacies of colonialism, decolonization, and the Cold War in Southeast Asia. At the same time, this is a history that is connected to many different locations, and a history that is emblematic of colonial empires elsewhere in Asia.

⁸ Karen Dubinsky, “Children, Ideology, and Iconography: How Babies Rule the World,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5, no. 1 (2012): 5-13; Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (I.B. Tauris & Company Limited 2004); Tamara Myers, “Local Action and Global Imagining: Youth, International Development, and the Walkathon Phenomenon in Sixties’ and Seventies’ Canada,” *Diplomatic History* 38 (2014), 282-293.

⁹ Anita Casavantes Bradford, ““La Niña Adorada del Mundo Socialista”: The Politics of Childhood and U.S.-Cuba-U.S.S.R. Relations, 1959-1962,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 2 (April 2016): 296–326; Anita Casavantes Bradford, *The Revolution is For the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959-1962* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 2014); Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons*.

The emergence of age relations and age-based ideas in Singapore was entangled with the growth and transformation of Singapore as a colonial city and multi-ethnic society. Singapore had an exceptional history as the headquarters of the British empire in Malaya and as a colonial entrepot founded on the principles of free trade and openness. This history turned it into a cosmopolitan port-city at the nexus of circulations of people, ideas, and goods from different parts of the world. It was also a largely immigrant society; the exceptions were the Malays who were native to the region. This status as a hub of global trade and traffic meant that the institutions and ideas of youth in Singapore had multiple sources and influences, a bricolage assembled and accreted from the efforts of different groups of people that tried to discipline, mobilize, and police children and youth on the island across the twentieth century.

Singapore was deeply influenced by British imperialism. Rachel Leow, David Pomfret, and Christina Wu have each contributed seminal work discussing the impact of developments in the imperial metropole on the colonies. Religious organizations and British uniformed youth movements sought to transmit British ideas of youth, masculinity, and femininity to children and young people in the colonies. Pomfret shows that Singapore was connected to ideas of childhood, adolescence, and youth “as symbols of evolutionary vitality and transformative potential” that had emerged by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.¹⁰ When the phenomenon of mixed-race children in the colonies created colonial anxieties about moral degeneration and cultural superiority, colonials created both exclusionary and inclusionary initiatives to protect “the fragile boundaries of white identity.” Across their empires in Asia, British and French colonials constantly sought to regulate childhood in their colonies of Indochina, Hong Kong and Malaya in

¹⁰ David M. Pomfret, “‘Raising Eurasia’: Race, Class and Age in Hong Kong and Indochina,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 2 (2009), 342.

order to enforce hierarchies of race and power.¹¹ These colonial practices surrounding childhood allowed Pomfret to argue that “[as] anti-colonial fervour undermined imperial stability, age emerged as a flexible means through which difference could be disavowed as well as delimited.”¹² This imperial strategy remained relevant to Japanese-occupied, decolonizing and independent Singapore, where the respective administrations tried to deploy the age-defined category of “youth” as a technology of power to manage the multi-ethnic population of Singapore by projecting age-based commonalities and solidarities that transcended existing differences.

Middle-class European educators, social reformers, and missionaries moving between the imperial metropole and the colony put the morality, education, and well-being of children and youth on the colonial government’s agenda from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. Pomfret and Leow have contributed insightful work on the *mui tsai*, i.e. young girls sold from poor homes to wealthy families to serve as servants, a practice prevalent in China and other locations with sizable Chinese diasporic populations. Feminists, social reformers, and abolitionists from the United Kingdom saw the practice as “child slavery” and applied unrelenting pressure on colonial administrators in British colonies of Hong Kong and Malaya. The latter eventually prohibited the practice in late 1930s and created more institutions and legislations to police and protect the bodies and morality of children and girls. One important piece of such legislation was the Child Act of 1939 to provide for the employment, adoption, and protection of children (defined as persons under the age of fourteen).¹³ On a different front, Christina Wu has shown how trans-imperial British

¹¹ David M. Pomfret, *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2015).

¹² Pomfret, “Race, Class and Age in Hong Kong and Indochina,” 342.

¹³ Rachel Leow, ““Do You Own Non-Chinese Mui Tsai?” Re-examining Race and Female Servitude in Malaya and Hong Kong, 1919–1939,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2012), 1746.

youth movements like the Scouts and Girl Guides movements in Malaya and Singapore, introduced by European expatriates, women educators and church workers in the 1910s, functioned as “a vehicle and product of cultural transmission” of British models of masculinities and femininities while opening up spaces for indigenous expressions of boyhoods and girlhoods.¹⁴ These laws and youth movements were only some of the colonial legacies that the post-colonial Singapore state have inherited and adapted for its own use.

More recently, Ho Chi Tim, in his study of the rise of the Singapore welfare state, has also accounted for how changing metropolitan ideas regarding youth welfare and development from the 1930s onwards also impacted Singapore in the form of greater attention to children and youth welfare.¹⁵ It was significant that Malcolm MacDonald was the Commissioner-General of the United Kingdom to Malaya and Singapore, the paramount British colonial official appointed to oversee British Malaya’s transition into self-governing non-Communist countries between 1945 and 1957. MacDonald was the son of the Labour Party Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. Before his diplomatic appointments, MacDonald served as Secretary of State for the Colonies and Colonial Welfare Secretary. During these appointments, he oversaw the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940 and other colonial welfare policies. Singapore and Malaya thus decolonized under the supervision and influence of a key Labour Party colonial official who was already sympathetic to the idea of colonial development and youth development. Even before the developments discussed in this dissertation, the development of programs and policies for youth

¹⁴ Christina Wu, “‘A Life of Make-Believe’: Being Boy Scouts and ‘Playing Indian’ in British Malaya (1910-42),” *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014), 594; Christina Wu, “Colonial Femininities, Transnational Mobilities, and the Girl Guide Movement in British Malaya,” 93.

¹⁵ Ho Chi Tim and Ann E. Wee, *Social Services* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies: Straits Times Press, 2016); Ho Chi Tim, “The Origins, Building, and Impact of a Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore,” Unpublished PhD. dissertation (University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2016).

in Singapore was inexorably connected to new sensibilities and attitudes towards the governmentality of children and youth in the colonial metropole.

During the same period, modern Chinese ideologies of youth found their way to Singapore by way of its sizeable Chinese population. Due to the heavy influx of Chinese sojourners and migrants into the colonial port-city, the Chinese became the ethnic majority on the island, making up three-quarters of the population by the end of the nineteenth century. This meant that Singapore was also a node of intellectual currents concerning childhood and youth emanating from intellectuals, reformers, modern educators in China. David Kenley and, more recently, Karen Teoh, have shown the impact of the May Fourth Movement's ideas that associated the moral regeneration of youth with social and cultural progress, national rejuvenation, and political modernization. Such ideas influenced the education and political activism among the Chinese community in Singapore.¹⁶ Kenley provides a seminal account of the politicization of Chinese schools and their teachers and students in Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s, which culminated in "an era of protests, boycotts and demonstrations" against Japanese imperialism in China and British imperialism. The colonial government responded by prohibiting Chinese youth political activity and placing Chinese schools under greater surveillance and regulation.¹⁷ Teoh's recent monograph on the development of education for Chinese girls in Malaya and Singapore showed how European missionaries and local Western-educated educators started English-medium schools to provide education to local Chinese girls about this time. However, these were based on existing gender ideals—these girls

¹⁶ For discussions of the cultural politics of youth in early-20th century China, see Bai Limin. "Children as the Youthful Hope of an Old Empire: Race, Nationalism, and Elementary Education in China, 1895-1915," *Journal of the History of Childhood & Youth* 1, no. 2: 210–231; Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

¹⁷ See David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore (1919–1932)* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

were taught home economics so that they could become good wives and household managers. Instead, it was the elite English-educated, bicultural, and mostly male, Straits Chinese leaders who established schools with a more modern curriculum to impart scientific learning and political awareness to Peranakan or Straits Chinese girls.¹⁸ Both Kenley and Teoh's works thus suggest that the fates and development of local children and youth were gaining increasing attention from diverse groups of people. Their arguments also underline that the colonial authorities gained new-found interest in subjecting Chinese schools and Chinese youth to greater surveillance and regulation. Nonetheless, the Chinese community in Singapore remained connected to the Sinophone world and its ideas of childhood and youth. Xu Lanjun and her students have contributed an important collection of papers showing a rich pluralistic landscape of Chinese-language children and youth magazines circulating between the diasporic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and China between the 1950s and 1970s.¹⁹

Even though there are many ways in which the Singapore case is exceptional, there are also many ways in which it was emblematic of colonial practices in other empires in Southeast Asia. Eric Jennings and Anne Raffin's work on the French colonial government's mobilization and disciplining of youth in French Indochina show that the bodies and minds of young people elsewhere were similarly sites for colonialists to attempt to imprint their imperial ideologies and realize their colonial fantasies. Jennings examined how colonial administrators in three French

¹⁸ Karen Teoh, "Exotic Flowers, Modern Girls, Good Citizens: Female Education and Overseas Chinese Identity in British Malaya and Singapore, 1900-1950s," *Twentieth Century China* 35 (2010): 25-51; Karen M. Teoh, *Schooling Diaspora: Women, Education and the Overseas Chinese in British Malaya and Singapore 1850s-1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018).

¹⁹ Xu, Lanjun and Li Lidian, eds. 徐兰君 李丽丹 (主编). *Constructing Nanyang Children: Studies of Chinese Children's Publications in Post-War Singapore and Malaya* 建构南洋儿童: 战后新马华语儿童刊物及文化研究. (Singapore: World Scientific Global Publishing 新加坡: 八方文化创作室 2016).

colonies, including French Indochina, endeavoured to propagate and impose Marshal Phillippe Pétain's concept of a “National Revolution” on colonial subjects during the Second World War.²⁰ In Indochina, these efforts included programs to encourage a nativist, conservative brand of nationalism in young Indochinese and to mobilize them against French enemies. Raffin studied youth mobilization and socialization programs in French Indochina beginning from about the same time, 1940, but extended her coverage to 1970.²¹ Both scholars argued these programs were productive of local Indochinese youth’s aspirations and their ability to organize. These programs ironically backfired on Vichy France by provoking greater resistance and introducing new ideologies that enabled anti-colonial nationalism.²² Like the British colonial government in Singapore, the Vichy administration in Vietnam also appealed to a non-Communist conservative Vietnamese group to support the colonial government’s efforts. Hence, Japanese and British attempts to discipline and mobilize local youth in Singapore were similar to the practices and strategies by other imperial administrations.

My argument that a Singapore disciplinary state emerged and expanded during and after the Second World War does not ignore the fact that some groups of young people were already the subject of colonial governmentality prior to the war. There was a distinct shift in the intensity and nature of the attention paid to the subjectivity and activity of children and youth from the 1940s onwards that warrants the characterization of a “youth turn.” This dramatic escalation of attention was partly due to the convergence of Singapore’s demographics amidst the social

²⁰ Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²¹ Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

²² Paul Sager, “Youth and Nationalism in Vichy Indochina,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 293.

dislocations and political upheaval of the Second World War and the emerging local, regional, and global Cold War competition for the hearts and minds of the young.

Youth was the social and demographic reality of Singapore during this period. In 1947, 62.2 % of the resident population was under the age of thirty (with 35.9 % under the age fifteen).²³ In 1957, 68.2 % of the resident population was under the age of thirty (42.8 % under the age of fifteen). A few factors caused Singapore's population to turn youthful from the 1920s onwards. First, the effective control of tropical diseases resulted in the decline in mortality. There was an accompanying slow but steady rise in birth rate from the 1930s. During and immediately after the war, there was a large movement of people moving downwards from the Malay Peninsula to flee warfare or to seek jobs and shelter. The result was an increase in Singapore's population from 507,785 before the war to 938,144 in 1947, and then to 1,445,929 in 1957.²⁴ These demographic realities constituted the basis for the constant refrain on the lips of colonial officials that more than 60% of Singapore were youth.

This demographic context combusted with local, regional, and global political developments to make youth an increasingly visible and significant social and political category. Singapore's transition from a British colony to a Japanese imperial city to a decolonizing country-in-the-making to an independent sovereign state in the space of thirty years turned on the question of how to integrate this mostly youthful population from different ethnic, cultural, linguistic backgrounds. The four administrations that governed Singapore through these thirty years realized

²³ Saw, *The Population of Singapore*, 37.

²⁴ Saw Swee-Hock, *The Population of Singapore*, 3rd edition (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 2012), 19.

that any colonial or national project required the support of the adults who were responsible for these young people. The welfare of the children and youth were key signs of the state officials' commitment to the development of the society.

The characterization of a “youth turn” is also justified by a shift in the nature of the state's approach to the management and governmentality of youth—from mainly repressive to productive. Outside of the disciplinary efforts of educators, missionaries, social activists, the colonial state's approach towards student political activism and the moral and social protection of girls and young women before 1942 mostly took the form of punitive laws and policies meant to preserve European prestige and paramountcy. After 1942, the different governments in Singapore began to develop and mobilize Singapore's youth on a city-wide scale, seeking to turn them into productive subject-citizens of a new self-governing city, colony, or country. This shift was particularly visible in two dimensions. Previously, colonial officials strove to police the boundaries between whiteness and local ethnic identities. They also tried to stamp out youth mobilization to prevent them from becoming threats to colonial political interests. However, the new need to mobilize local support for the British government's interests and post-war plans made colonial officials adopt more inclusionary postures. As Chapters Three and Four show, colonial officials and their local allies began to promote idealized images of multicultural youth united in equality and trans-imperial solidarity, replacing previous ideologies that positioned young white bodies as superior to indigenous bodies. They now sought to encourage and foster pro-state youth movements to compete with their political and ideological enemies for the loyalties of local youth.²⁵

²⁵ Timothy Harper has discussed this briefly in his masterful illumination of colonial strategy in British Malaya after 1945: *The End of Empire and the Making of British Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Even though the Second World War represented a key turning point in the history of youth in Singapore, transnational and trans-imperial connections remained influential for developments in Singapore. Hence, this dissertation continues to highlight the role of transnational forces and actors in the making of Singapore's policies and programs for youth. As Jobs and Pomfret wrote in a recent edited volume on the global youth transnationality in the making of the modern twentieth-century: "a transnational approach can reveal the unexamined but fundamental ways in which the accelerated contacts and interactions of the twentieth-century world had a profound impact on the lives of the young and the formation of the youth as a social body."²⁶ Accordingly, the first three chapters foreground the circulations of financial assistance, of ideas and techniques for youth work, of youth leaders and social workers, that facilitated the expansion of the Singapore disciplinary state between the late 1940s and 1950s. Youth workers in Singapore were also connected to global, trans-imperial youth movements and international youth organizations like the Empire Youth Movement, the World Assembly of Youth, and the United Nations' programs for youth welfare and development.

Hence, the PAP, when it came to power in 1959, inherited a colonial disciplinary state apparatus that had been expanding. The new imperial historiography draws our attention to how imperial power and culture persist in postcolonial societies in the less visible forms of practices, categories, and knowledges.²⁷ In their recent work, Singapore historians Sai Siew Min, Loh Kah Seng, and Ho Chi Tim ask for a deeper consideration of colonial continuities in the form of

²⁶ Richard Ivan Jobs and David M. Pomfret, "The Transnationality of Youth," in Jobs and Pomfret, eds., *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth-Century*, 3.

²⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33-58; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

structures and categories that continue to undergird governance and society in Singapore after formal independence in 1965.²⁸ In his seminal work on colonial state-building in Singapore and Malaya, Tim Harper showed how the British project to create a multicultural, non-Communist, pro-British Malaya and Singapore left enduring legacies in the form of ideas and institutions that subsequent local Singapore governments adapted and expanded.²⁹ As he points out for the case of Malaya, “the highest expression of the colonial inheritance—the modern state—[was] also the main instrument of change that the successor regime [had] at its disposal as it [sought] to affirm its post-colonial identity through monumental projects of social engineering.”³⁰ This dissertation’s structure highlights that the programs and policies for the disciplining of youth, and the political rationalities underpinning these programs and policies, were part of a colonial modernity the PAP adopted and adapted—albeit under new management and new names.

The history of the making of youth in Singapore was connected to the history of youth two imperial metropolises. For three years between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese administrators and military officers who governed Singapore tried to shape children and youth into new imperial subjects. They brought in yet another strand of intellectual and ideological influence on the ideas of childhood and youth into Singapore. The example of Singapore possesses many parallels with David Ambaras’s ground-breaking account of how concerns over the upbringing and conduct of Japan’s “bad youth” were instrumental in the creation of the modern Japanese state between the Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa period (1895-1945). He shows convincingly how “the policing of urban youth [functioned] as a crucial arena for the development of new state structures and new

²⁸ Sai Siew Min, “Educating Multicultural Citizens: Colonial Nationalism, Imperial Citizenship and Education in Late Colonial Singapore,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (February 2013), 54-55.

²⁹ T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³⁰ Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 2.

forms of social power, for the articulation of new class, gender, and family relations, and for the regulation of popular culture in modern Japan.”³¹ The apparent need to control Japanese children and youth resulted in the creation of a “thick, intrusive network of socialization agencies” to regulate the daily life of children and young adults.

In post-1942 Singapore, age relations became the entry-point for an expanding state to scrutinize and intervene in the lives of its citizens. In Chapter Two of this dissertation, we see Japanese administrators and military officers trying to implement policies akin to the modern Japanese state’s efforts to shape youth into docile, patriotic citizens, using “policies of ‘enforced homogeneity’ to foster national unity, overcome social conflict, and thus maximize social efficiency and productivity.”³² Sayaka Chatani’s book *Nation-Empire* extends Ambaras’s seminal contribution further by showing how the Japanese state put in great effort towards mobilizing rural youth in Japan and its colonies of Taiwan and Korea between the start of the 20th-century and the Second World War.³³ In Singapore, it was not only Japanese military officers and civilian officials who tried to mould local Singapore children and youth in the shape of Japanese children and youth. Japanese intellectuals and artists also played a role. Masakazu Matsuoka has used *Sakura*, a Japanese-language newspaper for schoolchildren published in Singapore during the Occupation, to study the participation of Japanese intellectuals and artists in the efforts to “Nipponize” local children and youth.³⁴ The bodies and minds of local children and youth were clearly arenas of imperial expansion and competition in wartime Southeast Asia.

³¹ David R. Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2006), 2.

³² Ambaras, *Bad Youth*, 3.

³³ Sayaka Chatani, *Nation-empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2018).

³⁴ Masakazu Matsuoka, “Nihon gunsei ka Singaporu ni okeru kodomo muke ongaku kousaku (Japanese Propaganda through Music toward School Children during Japanese Occupation of Singapore),” *Researches of Educational*

The youth-conscious Singapore disciplinary state germinated within a global milieu of attention on the welfare and needs of children and youth amidst Cold War political and ideological competition. David M. Anderson and Daniel Branch point out that historians have mostly studied national liberation and decolonization movements as “individual episodes of nationalist formation and state-making.” It is “only relatively recently” that historians have begun to examine how post-1945 liberation struggles “were framed, shaped and connected by the emerging global Cold War.”³⁵ Earlier, historians Karl Hack and Geoff Wade argued that “the ‘Southeast Asian Cold War’ was constituted by local forces drawing on outside actors for their own ideological and material purposes, more than by great powers seeking local allies and proxy theatres of conflict.”³⁶ This characterization imposes a reductive binary. The history of youth in Singapore is tightly connected to the way decolonization transpired on the island and to the global Cold War. An anthology of essays edited by Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann attempt to overcome the binary between the local and the international.³⁷ Chris Sutton points out that “there are only a few historical studies of the subsequent tug-of-war between Britain and communism (both international and local) over youth.”³⁸ This dissertation shows how the colonial, Labour Front, and PAP governments’ efforts against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and the left-wing movements

History in Asia 18 (March 2009): 48–64; Masakazu Matsuoka, ““Shonantou” ni okeru “bunkajin”: Kodomo muke shinbun kara no kousatsu (“Intellectuals” in Singapore under Japanese Occupation: A Consideration of Their Involvement in a Newspaper for School Children),” *Annual Review of Historical Studies of Colonial Education* 14 (2012): 141–159. My thanks to Tomoharu Hirota for his assistance in translating these articles for me.

³⁵ David M. Anderson and Daniel Branch, “Allies at the End of Empire—Loyalists, Nationalists and the Cold War, 1945–76,” *The International History Review* 39, Issue 1 (February 2017), 1.

³⁶ Karl Hack & Geoff Wade, “The origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (2009), 443.

³⁷ Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds, *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945–1962* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³⁸ Chris Sutton, “Britain, Empire and the Origins of the Cold War Youth Race,” *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 2 (2016), 226.

in Singapore converged with what Sutton called the global Cold War Youth Race. Developmental programs for youth in Singapore were part of a global strategy to insulate the youth in newly decolonized Southeast Asian nation-states from Communist influence. The threat of international communism constituted a vital political dimension to the successive Singapore governments' eagerness to manage youth. Singapore's colonial officials, and a large majority of Singapore's elite and middle-class groups, were especially concerned about the power of the MCP. These colonial officials and their local allies were anxious to ensure that the new self-governing colony and independent nation was one that was non-Communist and pro-Western. The increasing participation of youth (mostly Chinese, but with some from the other ethnic communities as well) in the pro-Communist, left-wing movements made the colonial government and their allies rush to insulate the hearts and minds of young people from international Communism. As the chapters show, the image of ideal youth that these political elites envisioned was frequently defined against the "Communist" other.

By the time the PAP government came to power in 1959, Singapore was already enmeshed in a flourishing regional and global milieu of youth movements, youth work, and youth culture. The PAP's ascendancy represented a moment of reconfiguration: the Singapore government began to sever or de-emphasize the existing circulations and connections that appeared detrimental to its efforts to cultivate a Singapore-centered nationalism shorn of any transnational affinities. This was most visible in the realm of student activism where the PAP tried to ensure that Singapore's elite

youth localized their activism, instead of pursuing a politics based on universalist causes or broader regional or global solidarities.³⁹

The Singapore Disciplinary State

The theme of the management of Singapore's youth offers a window into less-examined aspects of the history of colonialism, state-formation, and nation-building in Singapore. The "management" of Singapore's success is a major theme in Singapore studies, spawning two substantial volumes of essays that study the different dimensions of Singapore's nation-building since 1965.⁴⁰ There is no chapter devoted to the management of youth in either volumes. Age relations remain a little-examined structure of modern Singapore history. This dissertation provides for a novel interpretation of Singapore history as not just a developmental state but a disciplinary state, one that emerged and expanded based on disciplining a youthful population into its political leadership and state-building project. This dissertation complicates scholarly and popular understandings of modern Singapore in a several ways.

First, the history of the making of a youth-conscious and youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state allows us to interrogate popular characterizations of Singapore as a depoliticized administration devoid of politics. In 1975, Singaporean political scientist Chan Heng Chee famously characterized Singapore as the "administrative state", i.e., a state governed by

³⁹ Loh Kah Seng, Edgar Liao, Lim Cheng Tju, and Seng Guo Quan, *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press; Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, eds. *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 1989); Terence Chong, ed., *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010).

technocrats with a depoliticized citizenry who did not bother with political contestation.⁴¹ “Where has the politics gone?” Chan asked. The politics, this dissertation argues, is in how the Singapore state manages the population of Singapore through shaping youth subjectivity and conduct.

In characterizing Singapore as a “disciplinary state”, I invoke the insights of Michel Foucault. As the editor of a reader of his seminal works puts it, Foucault constantly interrogated the workings, effects, circulations of power.⁴² Education scholar Tina Besley, among others, has strongly advocated for the use of the “notion of governmentality” in youth studies to investigate how the state administers its bio-power on the young to produce docile, “useful, compliant and obedient bodies.”⁴³ She reminds us that Foucault had noted that the “art of government” in the 16th century sought to answer four questions: “the government of oneself or one’s personal conduct; the government of souls and lives or pastoral conduct; the government of children, which subsequently involved pedagogy and their education; and the government of the state by its prince and ruler.”⁴⁴ The regulation of youthful subjectivities and bodies was clearly not a 20th-century phenomenon. These centuries-old preoccupations of government have continued into the present alongside the rise of the modern nation-state. As Charles Maier suggests, the “modern Leviathan 2.0s” in the 20th century were built not only through the assertion of military force or political compulsion but also through “quietly coercive” techniques of governmentality.⁴⁵ The seemingly rational and natural agendas of modernization and development endowed these states with the

⁴¹ Chan Heng Chee, “Politics in an Administrative State: Where Has the Politics Gone?” (Singapore: Department of Political Science, Occasional Paper, University of Singapore, 1975).

⁴² Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 274-275.

⁴³ Tina (A.C.) Besley, “Governmentality of Youth: Managing Risky Subjects,” *Policy Futures in Education* 8, no.5 (2010), 528.

⁴⁴ Tina (A.C.) Besley, “Governmentality of Youth: Beyond Cultural Studies,” *Contemporary Readings in Law & Social Justice* 1, no. 2 (2009), 41-42.

⁴⁵ Charles Maier, “Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood,” in *A World Connecting*, edited by Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 197.

legitimacy to employ a repertoire of disciplinary institutions and technologies to survey and configure the everyday lives of citizens.

Foucault's ideas are eminently useful for the illumination of the polyphonic webs of power relations in which children and youth are embedded, as historians of childhood and youth like Mona Gleason, Chris Brickell, and Patrick Ryan have shown. Specifically, this dissertation draws on Foucault's ideas of governmentality, biopolitics, and discipline. The first pertains to his approach of seeing power as not only repressive but also productive in shaping subjectivity and conduct. Foucault conceived of governmentality as "the conduct of conduct." "Discipline," as he so famously wrote, "'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments as its exercise."⁴⁶ He argued that modern nation-states and societies from the 19th-century onwards employed a more subtle form of power exercised "through strategies of normalization, which produce self-regulating individuals who are both the objects and vehicles of power."⁴⁷ Foucault moved away from Hobbesian ideas of power as unidirectional between dominant active agents and passive subjects and preferred a view of power as productive and polyphonic. Power is not only a repressive force imposed top-down on subjects. Instead, power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse."⁴⁸ Foucault wishes to move us away from seeing power as a "binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other." Instead, power involves "dispersed, heteromorphous, and localized procedures" that are interwoven with all forms of social relations,

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 170.

⁴⁷ Häkli Jouni, "Governmentality," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 4 (2009), eds. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift, 628–633.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.

including kinship and sexuality.⁴⁹ These insights focus our analytical lens away from how adults and states police or regulate youth lives or behaviour through punitive or repressive force, and instead point towards looking at how they shape youth subjectivities and new relationships between youth and adult society. Historians of juvenile delinquency (and the policing of it), like Louise Jackson and Tamara Myers, have used this approach to study the policing of youth through various kinds of social inclusion programs in Britain and North America.⁵⁰

Eugene Liow, a sociologist who has recently applied Foucault to study Singapore as a “neo-liberal developmental state” notes, Foucault was particularly interested in studying “technologies of power” (which influence how individuals conduct themselves and submit themselves “to certain ends or domination”) and “technologies of the self” (which shape individuals’ subjectivity and allow them to shape others’ subjectivities). These technologies, Liow explains, “form the means by which one is channelled to think, rationalise and act in particular ways that obey the logic of the political rationality in place.”⁵¹ Accordingly, this dissertation accesses the history of the making of youth in Singapore at the points where “technologies of domination met the technologies of the self”, i.e. the programs, institutions, and policies that attempt to shape young people’s subjectivities and conduct, and mobilize young people to shape other young people’s subjectivities and conduct. These endeavours had the effect of producing a political rationality of youth consisting of a set of logics about young people, about their relationship to the progress,

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 142.

⁵⁰ Louise Jackson, *Policing Youth: Britain 1945-70* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Myers, *Youth Squad*.

⁵¹ Eugene Liow, “The Neoliberal-Developmental State: Singapore as Case-Study,” *Critical Sociology* 38, no. 2 (2011), 242.

stability, and success of Singapore, and about the necessity and value of regulating, developing, mobilizing, and policing the young.

The history of the making of youth in Singapore complicates the understanding of Singapore as a “developmental state” focused primarily on economic development. Many other scholars of Singapore used this framework—to describe the Singapore state as a state primarily driven by the desire to mobilize human capital for economic development. This is especially true for scholars of Singapore’s world-renowned education system. Historians of education in Singapore like Chia Yeow-Tong and Kevin Blackburn have continually invoked the “developmental state” paradigm to explain and critique Singapore’s education policies.⁵² Yet, their research showed that the Singapore governments’ education policies did not merely serve the imperatives of economic development but also cultural transformation and social engineering. This dissertation locates Singapore’s education policies within the cultural politics of youth that has become normalized and institutionalized by the first decade of Singapore’s independent nationhood. Furthermore, it shows that schools and the formal curriculum were only one part of the Singapore state’s disciplinary state apparatus for the disciplining of children and youth. The schooling of youth extended to different aspects of youth activity and life in Singapore, where youth culture, youth recreation, youth mobilization, and youth participation in community service became disciplinary techniques.

⁵² Chia Yeow-Tong, *Education, Culture and the Singapore Developmental State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Kevin Blackburn, *Education, Industrialization and the End of Empire in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 2017). A foundational text in applying the idea of the developmental state to Singapore is: Manuel Castells, *The Developmental City-State in an Open World Economy: The Singapore Experience* (Berkeley: Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy, University of California, 1988).

More broadly, scholars and students of Asian developmental states or authoritarian regimes in Asia may want to pay more attention to how these states did (or did not) attempt country-wide social engineering programs to establish the socio-cultural foundations of their political economy and political legitimacy. Foucault observed that biopower was “an indispensable element in the development of capitalism,” where the emergence of the European welfare state and the subsequent neo-liberal state created a new need to deal with workers not only as economic units but also as social beings.⁵³ This “new mechanism of power” that applied primarily “to bodies and what they do” was a power that sought to extract time and labour from individuals and develop their bodies to maximize productivity to serve industrial capitalism.⁵⁴ The idea of the disciplinary state allows us to see the connections between the strategies of the management of youth and the other political and economic strategies of the various imperial and national states that have ruled Singapore since the early 1940s.

The idea of the disciplinary state does not replace or invalidate the “developmental state” paradigm. There is no doubt that economic development was, and remains, a big part of life and society in Singapore and that the state has invested many resources on ensuring Singapore’s continuing economic development. The disciplinary state and developmental state are symbiotic and mutually constitutive. Within the new framework of a parliamentary democracy to replace the previous colonial order, economic development was necessary to meet the demands of a youthful population (and their parents), maintain the political elites’ political legitimacy, and retain a citizen-labour force to participate in the capitalist economy. At the same time, the youth-dominated

⁵³ Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power Over Life”, in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage Books 2010), 263.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 37. See also: Alessandro Fontana and Mauro Bertani, “Situating the Lectures”, in Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 273.

labour movement and trade union movement and anti-colonial movements had to be tamed and brought under control to restore a conducive and stable political environment for economic development. The bodies and minds of the young, therefore, had to be developed and incorporated for the needs of Singapore's capitalist economy, as well insulated from competing ideologies like Communism.

The Singapore Disciplinary State as “Effect”

The developmental state or authoritarian state paradigms commonly invoked to characterize Singapore conceives of power as imposed top-down from a paternalistic PAP government. Foucault advocated for a messier, polyphonic understanding of constellations or networks of power. He emphasized that the state did not “have an essence.” Instead, the state was “an effect” that arose from the multiplicity of institutions, texts, practices, and strategies that asserted disciplinary power.⁵⁵ In addition, he warns us against thinking of civil society as “a reality which asserts itself, struggles, and rises up, which revolts against and is outside government or the state, or the state apparatus or institutions.”⁵⁶ Instead, civil society should be seen as the very capillaries through which biopower flows. These perspectives move us away from identifying the Singapore state solely with the ruling government and its extensive state bureaucracy, as well as from romanticizing the civil society as an autonomous and distinct agency.

Accordingly, this dissertation tracks the array of non-governmental actors—religious and community organizations, youth leaders, social workers, recreation experts—and the texts, strategies, and practices that combined to shape and discipline young minds and bodies. In addition,

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, edited by Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 70.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 297.

the Japanese, British, Labour Front and PAP governments' efforts to produce youth leaders highlight that young people themselves can become disciplinary agents, either as active youth mobilizers and organizers, or as passive reproducers of ideal images of Singaporean youth culture. Foucauldian perspectives compel us to consider the ways power has been productive in shaping young people's subjectivities and in giving the young the ability to shape their lives and others. Young people can thus be subjects, capillaries, and instruments of power at the same time.

One corollary of this perspective is that scholars interested in studying young people's agency in Asia need to account for the young people who supported the state's disciplinary and developmental agendas, instead of focusing only on the admittedly more exciting stories of the youth who resisted and raged against the state. Historians and anthropologists of childhood and youth like Mona Gleason, Susan Miller, and David Lancy have been warning against the romanticization of youth agency. Miller has made a compelling case for the study of youth "assent as agency."⁵⁷ Chatani's study of state-sponsored rural mobilization in Japan also makes this important point.⁵⁸ Seeking to explain why rural youth in Japan and its colonies were willing to enlist in the Japanese military, Chatani argues that they did so in part to gain opportunities for socio-economic advancement and leadership roles. They saw benefits of being included in the state's projects. They were also animated by a consciousness of themselves as rural youth on which Japan depended for its imperial ambitions.

⁵⁷ Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education," *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446-459; David Lancy, "Unmasking Children's Agency," *AnthropoChildren* 1, no. 2 (2012): 1-20; Susan A. Miller, "Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 1 (2016): 48-65.

⁵⁸ Chatani. *Nation-empire*.

Accordingly, there is a need to avoid romanticizing radicalism and protest in the history of youth mobilization in Singapore. We need to account for the agency of the youth who supported the Singapore state's agendas and programs in return for the ability to meet their aspirations, interests, and desires. This is even as I argue that the government's disciplinary programs also shape young people's aspirations, interests, and desires in Singapore. Any narrative that romanticizes young Singaporeans as an oppositional force to the state does so in the face of the historical reality that it was a youthful electorate that overwhelmingly supported the PAP government during the period in which it was the most authoritarian in its policies and practices.

This means that we also need to account for state-sponsored youth mobilization in studying the history of youth and youth activism in any context. Within the historiography stimulated by Lee Kuan Yew's publication of his memoirs in the mid-1990s and the Singapore government's launch of National Education in 1997, the stories of transgressive, radical, left-wing youth and student movements in Singapore have received a substantial amount of attention. On this topic, Meredith Weiss, Khairuddin Aljunied, Loh Kah Seng, Seng Guoquan, Lim Cheng Tju and myself have published works on radical Malay youth groups and left-wing student and youth movements in Malaysia and Singapore.⁵⁹ Together with a number of other Chinese-language edited volumes,

⁵⁹ Meredith Weiss, *Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University; Singapore: NUS Press, 2011); Syed Muhd Khairuddin Aljunied, *Radicals: Resistance and Protest in Colonial Malaya* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015); Loh Kah Seng, Edgar Liao, Guo-quan Seng, and Lim Cheng-Tju, *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (Amsterdam; Singapore: Amsterdam University Press; NUS Press 2012). These build on older works on student politics in Singapore produced during the 1960s and 1970s, such as: Yeo Kim Wah, "Student Politics in University of Malaya, 1949-1951," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (September 1992): 346-380. Huang Jianli has also written insightful commentaries on the historiography of student activism in Singapore: "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 403-430; "The Young Pathfinders: Portrayal of Student Political Activism," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, edited by Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008): 188-205. Loh Kah Seng, "Polytechnicians and Technocrats: Sources, Limits, and Possibilities of Student Activism in 1970s Singapore," *Southeast Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (April 2018), 39-63.

monographs, and personal accounts of the student movements in the Chinese-medium secondary schools and higher education institutions in Singapore, a complex landscape of powerful and vibrant youth-led movements that resisted colonial rule and its inequities is revealed. These works also show how the colonial governments and subsequent local governments quelled these movements through increased surveillance and repressive actions—such as the arrests of student protestors and prohibitions on youth or student publications. However, this focus on the emergence and diminution of the anti-colonial and anti-government movements presents the incorrect impression that only the left-wing, anti-colonial groups in Singapore tried to mobilize youth, while the colonial and local governments only played the role of disapproving, stern-faced policemen. The focus on the colonial and local Singapore governments’ suppression of these movements does not reveal their desire to discipline and mobilize. The story of youth in Singapore during the period under study was not only a story of state discouragement or restriction of youth agency and idealism. We need to complement the study of the “paths not taken” with the illumination of “the paths taken”; the latter eventually configured the state-society relations and adult-youth relations in Singapore. Focusing on de-politization and repression only shows the known half of the story; there is a less visible half of the Singapore government’s efforts to politicize and mobilize the young of Singapore, albeit on the governments’ terms, within its preferred parameters.

The concept of a Singapore disciplinary state also alludes to the way the word “disciplined” functions as both a verb and an adjective in modern Singapore. The verb encapsulates how and why the Singapore state applied power in a productive sense and constructed “disciplinary regimes” to create young Singaporeans who were expected, in Chris Brickell’s terms, “to govern themselves in the Foucauldian sense, to interiorize the values and expectations of their society”, and “to

constitute themselves as moral subjects of their own actions.”⁶⁰ The adjective “disciplined” refers to one vital quality that Singapore’s policymakers, political leaders, educators, and their non-state partners sought to instil and nurture in ideal Singaporean youth. They aimed to mould physically disciplined, mentally disciplined, and most importantly of all, socially disciplined young Singaporeans who lived harmoniously with their fellows in society, who pursued orderly methods of pursuing their aspirations, who respected law and order and, as Lee Kuan Yew put it in a speech to Singapore’s educators, did not “spit all over the place.” “Disciplined” remained the key attribute that Singapore’s political leadership believed was the key quality required to achieve and maintain peace, prosperity, stability, and harmony in a multicultural society, as well as to ensure the continued functioning of Singapore’s capitalist economy. Singapore’s famous brand of illiberal democracy prioritized communitarian and collective interests over personal liberties. This co-existed with a utopian ideal of a “disciplined democracy” made up of self-regulating, self-restraining and self-mobilizing citizens operating, living, playing, working, and interacting with others peacefully within the context of a heterogenous and tension-fraught society packed together on a small island-city.

Youth, Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Class in Singapore

During the period under study, colonial officials, politicians, community leaders, youth workers, educators and journalists invoked “youth” as a demographic category, a metaphor for the future, and a political symbol. The main definition of youth they articulated repeatedly in public statements and reports was a demographic one, that more than 60% of the population was under the age of 21. There was occasional deviation from the threshold of 21 as the marker of youth. The

⁶⁰ Chris Brickell, “On the Case of Youth: Case Files, Case Studies, and the Social Construction of Adolescence,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2013), 53.

authors of the first-ever colony-wide survey of the leisure needs and interests of youth discussed in Chapter Four defined youth as “a person, male or female, who has passed the age of 14, by English reckoning, but has not passed the age of 25.” Significantly, they acknowledged that “youth” had vague and contestable definitions but argued that it was a social group made up of “characteristic interests, aims and problems.”⁶¹

This premise that “youth” possessed a common age-stage-specific set of interests, desires and problems shaped successive Singapore governments’ approach towards the management of youth in Singapore. The “youth turn” in Singapore history saw the vague, imprecise, and flexible category of youth in post-1942 Singapore function as a bureaucratic category and a socio-political fact to facilitate the application of biopolitical power on the bodies of children and youth. The welfare, development, and protection of the young became the entry point and warrant for the government and adults to proactively intervene and regulate their everyday subjectivity and activity. The idea of “youth” facilitated the governmentality of young people through subjectification and self-subjectification, when young Singaporeans themselves internalized the resulting political rationality of youth and the accompanying images of normal or ideal youth culture. The imprecision and flexibility of an age-demarcated category makes it convenient to include any group of young people and subordinate them to these totalizing and homogenizing images. As the following chapters show, many of the programs and institutions created for local youth aimed at getting them to conceive of themselves as Singaporean youth rather than as Chinese, Malay, Indian, or elite or working-class youth. State agencies also frequently portrayed normal and ideal youth culture as pursuing a set of approved activities, such as sports, arts, uniformed

⁶¹ Singapore Youth Council, “Report on the Leisure Activities of Young People in Singapore: Parts I and II”. Singapore: Singapore Youth Council 1959, 2.

youth movements, and community service. By being age-demarcated and age-defined, instead of being defined by ethnicity, class, or gender, “youth” was highly conducive for modernist elites, colonial officials, and nationalists to project a single national identity and youth culture that transcended the very real differences and tensions that hindered, and continue to challenge, nation-building in Singapore. Hence, the category of youth became a technology of power that made possible the construction and normalization of an image of age-based aspirations, anxieties, interests, and needs. The construction of this image was meant to transcend the very real existing class, social, gender, and ethnic differences that divided the young in Singapore and homogenized them under the category of “young Singaporeans” or “Singaporean youth”.

Yet, the dissertation also shows that class, race, and gender undoubtedly inflected these endeavours to normalize images of Singaporean youth culture. Age became a convenient marker to forge commonality amidst Singapore’s diverse population. In ethnic terms, Singapore’s population across the 1950s and 1960s was about 78 percent Chinese, 12 percent Malays and Indonesians, 7 percent Indians, 3 percent Eurasians, Europeans, and other small minorities. Many of these groups were still loyal towards their respective ancestral homelands⁶² During the colonial era, Singapore’s immigrant-heavy society was not “only characterized by racial, cultural, social and religious pluralism but also a social stratification system which privileged *race* as the key mode of reference group ascription.” The result was, on the eve of independence, a plural society, “comprising different fractions, each with its own trades, traditions and institutionalized practices.”⁶³ This ethnic diversity complicated successive governments’ efforts to create a viable,

⁶² Martin Perry, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State* (New York: Wiley, 1997), 51-52.

⁶³ Martin Perry, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State* (New York: Wiley, 1997), 51-52.

multi-racial self-governing country after the war. It also made Chinese-Malay divisions a key force affecting politics in Singapore for much of the 20th century, especially in the face of heightened Chinese and Malay ethnic nationalism and cultural pride just before, during, and after the Second World War. These cultural and ethnic-based nationalisms escalated within the politics of the emerging Cold War where the majority of the Chinese in Singapore identified, and were identified, with Communist China and their anti-colonialism was mixed with a heavy dose of Chinese cultural nationalism that offended and threatened the sensitivities of the Malays who viewed the Chinese as attempting to take away their political rights.

Consequently, the disciplinary programs and policies for youth created during this period were mainly targeted at male working-class Chinese youth. Even though Malay and Indian youths, and girls from all races were also involved in the social and political pluralism in Singapore, the demographic situation and political realities meant that it was mainly disenfranchised Chinese working-class male youth that the Japanese government, the returning British colonial authorities, the local nationalist Labour Front and People's Action Party government aimed to discipline, police, and incorporate. In these administrations' eyes, these youth posed the greatest political threat and social menace—as members of the anti-Japanese resistance, as members of secret societies, as student radicals active in the politically-restive Chinese secondary schools, as activists in the powerful left-wing trade unions, or as petty vandals, criminals, or “delinquents.” As Chapters Three to Five show, the politics of anti-colonialism, race, language, culture, class converged to make the management of youth primarily about managing the tricky politics of race relations, and about managing the socio-political grievances of working-class Chinese youth. It was the Chinese-educated youth who were the most visible and active in anti-colonial and anti-

capitalist movements. By the time of the ascendancy of the People's Action Party in the 1950s, this threat had taken on an additional existential layer. As Chapter Five highlights, the Chinese-educated male youth in the Chinese-medium secondary schools and trade unions constituted the social, cultural, and ideological counterfoil to the England-retained Western-educated middle-class youth that Lee and his cohorts embodied. Accordingly, the ideal of "Singaporean youth" became defined in terms of this existential Other. The PAP government's strategies for the management of youth did not stop at pursuing social welfare and economic development to address the aspirations and assuage the anxieties of Singapore's mostly youthful population or at using strict laws and policing to outlaw youth unrest, vandalism, violence, and delinquency in the streets of Singapore. Instead, Lee and his colleagues also privileged a seemingly de-racialized idea of multicultural English-educated Singaporean youth as the ideal and norm. This was done to displace the Chinese-educated youth as the most compelling image of ideal Singaporean youth.

To project a homogenizing and totalizing age-based Singaporean youth consciousness, identity, and culture, girls were similarly incorporated in the disciplinary programs and institutions. Yet, for these governments, the disciplined and trained young male body was the most frequently deployed symbol of a new modern society. The Japanese, British, Singapore governments defined ideal youth in terms of masculine values and ideals: physical discipline, orderliness, restraint, resilience, stoic masculinity. The flow of power was not only distinctly middle-class; it was also predominantly masculine. It was mainly middle-class or elite Western-educated men who made the decisions and dominated these efforts to discipline, mobilize, and police youth to preserve their interests and the existing hierarchies in Singapore. While they tried to add women youth leaders, social workers, and educators into their decision-making bodies, to represent and cater for the

inclusion of girls in their programs and institutions, this inclusion was usually a peripheral consideration. These reflected the imposition of masculine ideas of youth on all youth regardless of their gender. This engendered a form of doubled paternity, where girls were expected to play their feminine roles as wives and mothers-to-be, in addition to their new roles as citizens and agents of nation-building.⁶⁴ In addition, girls were incorporated and mobilized along lines that were distinctly masculine, i.e. within programs and policies meant to discipline and police male youth.

Structure

The dissertation is organized into five chapters that illuminate how and why a youth-conscious and youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state emerged and expanded across the four different governments of Singapore—the Japanese Military Administration during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), the returning British colonial administration (1945-1956), the local Labour Front government (1956-1959), and the People’s Action Party government (1959-). For the four governments, the management of youth became central to post-colonial nation-building and state-formation, and to Cold War ideological and cultural battles in Singapore between the Second World War and the 1970s. They tried to address the multi-faceted problems of youth and to discipline Singapore’s young to solve the challenges of creating a new harmonious colony or nation-state out of a diverse and divided population. They created disciplinary programs and institutions to discipline, mobilize, and police children and youth. They also tried to mobilize networks of adults and youth to help tame or mobilize Singapore’s youth. These programs and

⁶⁴ Chris Hudson has explored the image of the “Singapore Girl” and the multifarious impacts of this image, in his work, *Beyond the Singapore Girl: Discourses of Gender and Nation in Singapore* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2013).

initiatives put youth on the public agenda and increased consciousness of the relationships between youth welfare, youth mobilization, and education and a new imperial or post-colonial modernity.

Chapter Two discusses the Japanese invasion and occupation of Singapore between 1942 and 1945 that interrupted one hundred and twenty-three years of British rule. It argues that Japanese military administrators and civilian officers tried to create new relationships between local youth and their new imperial master, to incorporate them into the Japanese Pan-Asian Empire known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. They tried to convert the existing education system and start new disciplinary programs to produce new imperial subjects, based on early-20th century images of ideal Japanese children and youth. I examine little used material from the *Syonan Shimbun* to highlight how Japanese officials also tried to mobilize male and female youth, in gendered unequal ways, as combatants and auxiliary units for the war effort, as labour for the wartime economy, and as embodied symbols of a new Japanese-dominated Asiatic modernity. Their efforts were ultimately defeated by shortcomings in their execution, as well as the contradictions in Japanese policies towards different groups of youth. Japanese military officers and civil officials' ideas of youth proved far too impracticable, given the wartime situation and the social realities in Singapore. We can only wonder what might have been had Japan been successful in sustaining its empire and had the time and resources to devote to its ambitious enterprise of creating new "Syonan" and new "Dai Toa" youth in the image of Japanese children and youth.

The British returned to Malaya and Singapore in August 1945, only to be greeted by politically awakened anti-colonial movements animated by different kinds of territorial and ethnic nationalisms and anti-capitalist ideologies like Communism. Facing international pressure to

decolonize and domestic demands to shed costly imperial commitments, the British began the process of granting self-government and independence to their colonies in Asia. However, the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) against the Malayan Communist Party and the rise of conflicts over race, culture, language among the different ethnic communities in Malaya and Singapore greatly complicated these efforts to construct a new unitary state and society. **Chapter Three** examines why and how the returning British colonial administration of Singapore placed a new emphasis on youth in their policies between 1945 and 1955, leading to the rise of a colonial disciplinary state focused on creating new “Malayan” youth and on policing radical as well as delinquent youth. The chapter uses the origins and activities of the Singapore Youth Council (1948-1959), a state-sponsored and state-supported coordinating body of youth organizations, to argue that an assemblage of youth organizations, youth workers, youth developers, and youth leaders became part of the disciplinary state’s apparatus for the management of youth.

For a decade, until its dissolution by the PAP government in 1959, the SYC was at the forefront of the colonial government’s efforts to discipline, mobilize, and police the young in Singapore. In the process, it laid the foundations for different kinds of programs and activities for youth such as youth camping and youth clubs. Their activities and efforts also greatly increased consciousness of youth in the colony. Made up of mostly youth movements and organizations of British origins and local Western-educated Anglophone middle-class professionals, their activities reflected the continuity and institutionalization of British techniques and ideas for youth in post-war Singapore. Indeed, the Singapore Youth Council and its membership of youth leaders and youth organizations formed part of the colonial state’s disciplinary apparatus for youth. Their

youth leaders, programs, and activities became the capillaries and nodes through which disciplinary power circulated between the young of Singapore, state agencies, and other non-state actors and organizations.

The mixed results of the Japanese military administration and the Singapore Youth Council's efforts to discipline local youth underline that their efforts had to contend with other sources of nationalism and youth agency.⁶⁵ The dramatic ascendancy of youth protest movements in the colony across the mid-1950s, just before and following the 1955 Singapore Legislative Assembly elections, heightened the anxieties of British officials and local anti-communist politicians and nationalists regarding male Chinese working-class youth. The Singapore Youth Council's eventual ineffectiveness and declining relevance in the face of these developments paved the way for a different coalition of colonial officials, local community leaders, businessmen, philanthropists, journalists, and sportspeople to pursue a different approach to disciplining youth—through the mass provision of youth sporting recreation. In her latest book, Tamara Myers observes that the creation and transformation of recreational venues and sporting programs for the young illuminate the shifts in the relationships between children and youth and state organs like the police. The latter employed “the sports solution” to discipline boys across class and cultural lines and help “to instil notions of hegemonic masculinity, class, and racially specific sportsmanship.”⁶⁶ **Chapter Four** focuses on the short-lived but well-regarded experiment in creating a centre for youth sporting recreation in Singapore between 1956 and 1959—the Singapore Youth Sports Centre (SYSC). This was during the equally short-lived tenure of the Labour Front government and Singapore's first local Chief Ministers—David Marshall and Lim Yew Hock. The chapter argues

⁶⁵ Paul Sager, “Youth and Nationalism in Vichy Indochina,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 293.

⁶⁶ Myers, *Youth Squad*, 16.

that, through the SYSC, youth sports and community recreation became implicated in the converging politics of youth, the Cold War, and decolonization in Singapore. The Labour Front government incorporated the mass provision of sporting recreation into Singapore's disciplinary state apparatus and employed this as a technique for the regulation of conduct, and the physical training of healthy bodies and regulation of youth leisure. The vital role of American funding and expertise in the SYSC's development, and more broadly, the development of sports and community recreation in Singapore, highlights that the less visible domain and seemingly non-ideological domain of sports and community recreation became part of the cultural Cold War in 1950s Southeast Asia.⁶⁷ Converging local, British, and American anti-communist agendas drove the advent of youth sporting recreation. Though the Singapore Youth Sports Centre only lasted for three years, it left important legacies for social policies and youth policies in Singapore, where youth sports and community recreation became a technique for the regulation of conduct, and the physical training of healthy bodies, and the regulation of youth leisure.

The People's Action Party, founded in 1954, defeated the Labour Front government and became the government of self-governing Singapore in 1959. It has remained in power ever since. **Chapter Five** surveys the PAP founding members' formative interactions with the intense, vibrant, and volatile landscape of youth idealism and youth protests in Singapore from mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. It argues that these interactions shaped the Singapore government's approaches to the management of different groups of local youth. Lee and his cohort saw the importance of

⁶⁷ Simon Creak is the only scholar to have written on this aspect of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, in the context of Laos. See Simon Creak, "Cold War Rhetoric and The Body: Physical Cultures in Early Socialist Laos," 103-130. The other relevant work, albeit covering a different historical period, is by Gerald Gems. Gems studied the prevalent use of sports as a socialization tool during the American occupation of the Philippines: *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines: Bats, Balls, and Bayonets* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

instrumentalizing and mobilizing the idealism and energy of youth and, at the same time, prevent competing influences from doing so. They went further than the Japanese, the British, and their allies in constructing a dualistic discourse of Singapore's youth as both the potential pillar and the potential peril of the new nation. Consequently, the PAP government adapted and created an array of disciplinary institutions and programs to shape new self-mobilizing and self-regulating disciplined citizens—ideal subjects who channelled their idealism and energy towards participation in national development while eschewing transgressive causes and modalities of expression or activism.

These interactions and encounters also shaped the dominant images of ideal and exemplary Singaporean youth subsequently used to discipline, mobilize, and hierarchize local youth. Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat alluded to this in his recent book, when he suggested that Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP leaders acquired a reverence for the desirable qualities they saw in their political and ideological opponents in the youth-dominated left-wing movements. In Chua's words: "the first-generation PAP leaders learned that if they were to defeat their once erstwhile radical left-wing comrades and win the hearts and minds of the newly enfranchised citizens, they would have to equal if not better the asceticism and self-sacrificing attitude of the radical left."⁶⁸ Chua's observation is only half the story, however. The PAP's ideology of ideal youth was both elitist and syncretic. The PAP sought to mould ideal Singaporean youth who possessed the desirable values, qualities, and attributes of the two most significant groups of youth then—the English-educated and the Chinese-educated. They attached special importance to the cultivation of elite Western-educated, bicultural undergraduates who could compete successfully with the

⁶⁸ Chua Beng Huat, *Liberalism Disavowed: Communitarianism and State Capitalism in Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 3.

Chinese-educated youth in the pro-Communist and left-wing trade union and Chinese-middle schools student movements for the hearts and minds of the Singapore electorate then.

Whereas the British idea of Malayan youth or Singapore youth focused on developing English-educated, pro-British and Anglicized youth who embraced the British heritage and the Commonwealth, Japanese ideals of Syonan youth focused on developing disciplined, physically, mentally, and morally fit docile subjects who were patriotic and loyal to the Japanese Emperor and saw themselves as members of a Japanese empire. The PAP adapted these precedents and added an additional dimension based on Chinese ideals of social discipline, community responsibility and obligation, sacrifice, resilience, and social commitment that were less significant qualities in Japanese and British images of ideal youth.

Chapter Six focuses on the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF), a yearly youth festival inaugurated on 18 July 1967 to exhibit and celebrate youth participation and achievement in uniformed youth movements, arts and crafts, music and dance, sports, and physical activity.⁶⁹ The Singapore Youth Festival—and more broadly the mobilization and deployment of youthful bodies in orchestrated youth spectacles in Singapore—presents exemplary cases of what Anita Casavantes Bradford has termed the “politics of childhood,” where “the strategic deployment of morally and emotionally resonant representations of children in the pursuit of power or resources, accompanied by efforts to press the body and minds of flesh-and-blood boys and girls into the service of broader political, social and cultural objectives” was a conscious and deliberate part of post-colonial nation-building and state-formation in embryonic Singapore.⁷⁰ The Singapore Youth Festival is an

⁶⁹ *The Straits Times*, “Singapore Youth Festival: Celebrating 50 Years”, 4 July 2016.

⁷⁰ Bradford, *The Revolution is for the Children*, 2.

exemplary pedagogical technique to unravel the PAP government's ideas of ideal Singaporean youth as well as how they mobilized the bodies of youths to serve as agents of representation and reproduction. The chapter argues that youth festivals, or more broadly, spectacles of youth, function within the Singapore disciplinary state apparatus to perform disciplinary functions. Through the SYF, the Singapore government deployed Singaporean youth as emotive mediators and evocative metaphors to exhibit and embody ideas and images of the ideal Singaporean youth and Singaporean nation—nationalistic, lively, creative, cultured, rugged and disciplined—and ideal Singaporean nation—culturally vibrant, multicultural, socially disciplined, and cohesive.



2. Seemingly normalized and common-sensical ways of representing Singapore's youth—literally and metaphorically the currency of the Singaporean nation.

Sources

The research for this dissertation was done over three years in libraries and archives in Singapore and the United Kingdom—in Singapore, the Central Library of the National University of Singapore, the National Library Board (Singapore), the National Archives of Singapore; in the United Kingdom, the Labour History Archive in the People’s History Museum (Manchester), the Women’s History Archive (housed in the London School of Economics), the British Library, and the National Archives of the United Kingdom. It draws upon a wide range of traditional primary materials—official reports and correspondence, newspapers, and adult publications. The increasing availability of sources related to youth in Singapore produced after 1942 evince that children and youth gained much more visibility and prominence in public discussion and policy deliberations from that period onwards. These records serve as indexes of increasing adult scrutiny and interest in youth; they allow us to trace adult concerns and state anxieties about youth among a variety of state and non-state actors. They include the first studies, reports, and surveys produced by the returning colonial and local governments to understand the young people they now sought to discipline, mobilize, and govern. The documents provide material substantiation to the dissertation’s claim of a “youth turn” in Singapore’s history. They were produced by the first generation of youth welfare officials, youth leaders, and youth workers in Singapore’s post-1942 history, who joined missionaries, educators, social reformers, child protectors, who had emerged in Singapore in the earlier half of the 20th century, in extending the Singapore state’s ability and capacity to govern and intervene in the lives of the young.

As part of the research, I also consulted a substantial volume of existing ethnographic and sociological research done by post-graduates and undergraduates in the National University of

Singapore. Many of these are valuable in providing statistical data and useful ethnographic accounts of youthful worlds and sub-cultures in the different decades of Singapore's history since the 1960s. This dissertation has also utilized some publications produced during the 1950s and 1960s, such as publications produced by the young, but mostly publications produced by adults for the young. The latter include *Young Malaysians*, *Youth*, *Youth World*, *Youth & Sport*. It is regrettably beyond the capacity and scope of this dissertation to investigate how the young negotiated or reacted to the Singapore state's disciplinary efforts. Nevertheless, it is possible to "read against the paternal grain," that is, to infer from the persisting and escalating anxieties of the Singapore disciplinary state towards youth throughout Singapore's post-1942 history that the biopolitical projects to engineer Singaporean youth remain incomplete, even if they did achieve powerful effects and outcomes in shaping, regulating, and regularizing the conduct and behaviour of Singaporeans. This points to the ultimate fantasy of modern Singapore history, a fantasy shared by the Japanese, British, local governments that administered the island-city—that it was possible to create a united, cohesive, multicultural society out of the heterogeneity of Singapore's population through engineering the young. By highlighting the Singapore governments' "disciplinary fantasies," I am not implying that the respective Singapore governments' ideologies of youth were based on fiction and falsehoods. Instead, my aim is to expose how these discourses were based on these adults' assumptions and beliefs about the qualities and deficiencies of the youth. At the core of it, the disciplinary fantasies of the state reflect adults' desires and aspirations, without regard for the real subjectivities of the young. These fantasies and desires were also based on the idealistic premise that it was possible and desirable to homogenize youth and mould them into self-mobilizing yet self-regulating and self-restraining disciplined citizens who prioritized their Singaporean identities and values more than their other identities. "Youth" became a

powerful bureaucratic category the state and other adults invoked to manage the very real diversity of Singaporean society. It became the socio-cultural basis for the Singapore state to project a social solidarity that transcended gender, class, ethnic, religious lines. Yet, the Singapore state's continuing efforts to discipline and produce ideal citizens and youth, fuelled by their unending anxieties concerning the behaviour and mentality of the young, underlines that Singapore remains a community still-in-the-making, a still unrequited fantasy and aspiration. Nonetheless, Singaporean youth continue to live with the effects and impacts—both positive and negative, both inclusionary and exclusionary—of these disciplinary fantasies.

Chapter Two

Creating and Mobilizing “Dai Toa Youth”: Youth and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, 1942-1945

The history of modern Singapore began on 30 January 1819 when British East India Company official Thomas Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with a local Malay prince to establish a trading settlement on the island. Within five years, Singapore grew into a bustling entrepot with a population of more than ten thousand. Its rapid growth was due to a combination of reasons – its free port status, its strategic position in the Straits of Malacca at the crossroads between trading networks and maritime traffic between Europe, the Arab World, India, Southeast Asia and China, and global developments such as the advancement in steamship and communications technologies and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Singapore attracted large amounts of British investment and Chinese immigration and became the headquarters of British colonial influence in Southeast Asia, which included Britain’s other interests in the Malay states in the Malay Peninsula and the island of Borneo.⁷¹ When the British announced the construction of a naval base in Singapore in 1923 (completed in 1938), this only added more lustre to the island-city’s position as the heart of the British Empire in the region.⁷²

⁷¹ Wong Lin Ken, “Commercial Growth Before the Second World War”, in *A History of Singapore*, eds. Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991), 42.

⁷² The standard accounts of modern Singapore history under British control are C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009) and Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991). Edwin Lee wrote a more recent textbook, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS 2008). Michael Barr has written a new volume, *Singapore: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019) to take a longer-term view. Barr’s book incorporates recent archaeological findings and presents a history of Singapore from the 13th century onwards. Also see: Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore: A 700-year History: From Early Emporium to World City* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2009).

The ambitions of another imperial power dramatically interrupted British rule in Singapore in 1942. On 8 December 1941, the Japanese 25th Imperial Army under the command of Lieutenant-General Yamashita Tomoyuki invaded British Malaya.⁷³ They used landing and staging areas in northeastern Malaya and southern Thailand to launch swift incursions southwards. Starved of air and naval cover and reinforcements from beleaguered Britain, British defences crumbled. On February 15, 1942, the besieged British forces surrendered in what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill termed “Britain’s Worst Defeat.”⁷⁴ For the next three years and eight months, the Japanese imperial army made Singapore the capital of the *Nampo* (the “Southern Regions”) of Japan’s own pan-Asian empire, known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere or the *Dai Toa Kyo-eiken*. This comprised Japan’s territorial gains in Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria and northern China, Malaya (renamed “Malai”), Singapore, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, the Philippines and Indonesia.⁷⁵ Singapore was renamed *Syonan-to* (“Light of the South”) and designated the Syonan Special Municipality (*Syonan Tokubetu-si*) to begin the British colony’s transformation into a Japanese imperial city.⁷⁶

This chapter examines the different efforts of Japanese military officers and civil administrators to school and mobilize youth in Singapore during this period. It argues that these

⁷³ Paul Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45: A Social and Economic History*, 2nd edition (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 3. The origins of the invasion laid in the rise of tensions between Western powers and Japan in the 1930s. The British, Dutch, and US colonial administrations restricted exports of vital oil and metals from their Southeast Asian colonies to Japan and limited the import of Japanese goods. The economic pressures on Japan allowed right-wing ultra-nationalistic military officers, intellectuals, and politicians to pursue a military build-up.

⁷⁴ There is a substantial amount of literature devoted to explaining the British’s quick defeat. The explanations range from incompetent leadership from, and in-fighting among, the military commanders, to larger strategic explanations such as the German advances in Europe and Japan’s raid on Pearl Harbor, which hindered the arrival of British or American reinforcements. See Brian Farrell’s *The Defense and Fall of Singapore* for a magisterial account.

⁷⁵ Eunice Thio, “The Syonan Years”, 1942-1945, in *A History of Singapore*, eds. Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee (Singapore: Oxford University Press 1991), 95.

⁷⁶ Vivian Blaxell, “New Syonan and Asianism in Japanese-era Singapore”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Jan 1, 2008, Vol.6 Issue. 1. Accessed at <https://apjif.org/-Vivian-Blaxell/2644/article.html>.

Japanese imperialists were the first to create associations between the disciplining of the young and the creation of a new society and polity in Singapore, one that looked towards Japan as regional hegemon. These military and civilian administrators needed to address the problems of dislocated and rebellious youth in the territories they occupied. They also saw the young as the answer to the challenges of acquiring local manpower, support, and legitimacy for Japan's empire. These needs and interests fuelled the efforts to create new subjects out of Singapore's children and youth and to discipline their bodies for incorporation into a new pan-Asian Japanese empire. These efforts became the embryonic programs of the Singapore disciplinary state that emerged more coherently under subsequent Singaporean governments. They also reflect the circulations of ideas of childhood and youth in the new imperial metropole of Japan to its imperial possession, connecting the history to youth in Singapore to the history of youth mobilization in modern Japan.⁷⁷ Even though Japan lost the war and failed to bring their embryonic programs to fruition, their programs represented the first biopolitical project aimed at incorporating the children and young of the local communities into the Singapore state and economy. The chapter also shows how these efforts included the attempts to instrumentalize and mobilize the bodies of the young in gendered ways. Japanese military officers and civilian administrators valorized young male bodies as labourers and combatants. At the same time, they deployed female bodies in subordinated roles as symbols of progress under Japanese dominance or as replacement for male youth in roles deemed auxiliary or secondary to the wartime economy and war effort.

⁷⁷ David R. Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Sabine Frühstück, *Playing War: Children and the Paradoxes of Modern Militarism in Japan* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017); Sayaka Chatani, *Nation-empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). These are seminal studies of this history of the modern Japanese state's disciplining, mobilization, and policing of Japanese children and youth.

An Imperialist Administrator

Between 1972 and 1973, Harold E. Wilson, a PhD. candidate from the University of British Columbia's Department of History, carried out research for his dissertation in Singapore. This became an early classic of Singapore's educational history: *Social Engineering in Singapore*.⁷⁸ In this comprehensive study of educational policies between 1819 and 1972, Wilson incorporated interviews with witnesses of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and Malaya between February 1942 and September 1945. Among his interviewees was a Japanese individual, Mamoru Shinozaki.

Shinozaki was no ordinary eyewitness. He was working in Singapore as a press attaché of the Consulate-General of Japan when the British imprisoned him for suspected espionage just before the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941. After the Japanese army freed him, Shinozaki became the principal advisor to the Japanese Military Administration (JMA) in Singapore, its Chief Education Officer, and subsequently its *Ko-sei Cho* (head of the Welfare Department). Hence, he was the key civilian official in charge of education, welfare, and other social policies. Despite this, Shinozaki was not indicted for war crimes after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Local community leaders, like Chinese businessman and philanthropist Yap Pheng Geck, intervened and vouched for Shinozaki as someone to whom they were indebted for shielding them from the full brunt of Japanese persecution.⁷⁹ Historians of the Occupation have used Shinozaki's memoirs, published in 1975 with a foreword from Harold Wilson, to study Japanese actions during this period. This included the infamous *Sook Ching* massacre in February

⁷⁸ Harold E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore: Educational Policies and Social Change, 1819-1972* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978). He also produced a working paper on education policies under the Japanese administration. Harold E. Wilson, "Educational Policy and Performance in Singapore, 1942-1945", ISEAS Occasional Paper No. 16 (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1973).

⁷⁹ Mamoru Shinozaki's memoirs, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1975), included a testimony from Yap Pheng Geck and a foreword by Wilson.

1942. Three days after Singapore's surrender, Japanese military officers ordered all Chinese males between the ages of eighteen and fifty to report to various checkpoints for inspection and registration. There, they singled out those suspected of being anti-Japanese elements and ferried them to areas in the east of Singapore for execution. Historian Constance M. Turnbull, who wrote the standard textbook of modern Singapore history still in use today, estimated that these *Sook Ching* (Chinese for "Purification") massacres killed about close to 25,000 Chinese.⁸⁰

While Singapore's community leaders hailed Shinozaki as a hero, Vivian Blaxell reminds us in a recent essay that Shinozaki was very much an "imperial bureaucrat" driven by the fundamental beliefs that inspired Japanese imperialism in Asia.⁸¹ Even if he disagreed with his more belligerent military colleagues' harsh methods, Shinozaki did not question "the "rightness" of Japanese imperialism. A thorough examination of the *Syonan Shimbun*, the main English-language newspaper in Singapore which the JMA turned into its principal propaganda vehicle, shows that Shinozaki was clearly a committed imperialist involved in Japan's efforts to produce new ideal subjects in Singapore. As these Japanese efforts were largely unsuccessful, they have been mostly neglected by a historiography more focused on the military aspects of the Japanese invasion and on Japanese brutalities. The neglect is also due to the paucity of sources – the British and Japanese destroyed a large portion of their files when they surrendered in 1942 and 1945 respectively.⁸² Nonetheless, scholars like Wilson, Yoji Akashi and Paul Kratoska have used the *Syonan Shinbum*, oral testimonies, memoirs, and previously un-utilized Japanese-language sources

⁸⁰ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 197.

⁸¹ Blaxell, "New Syonan and Asianism in Japanese-era Singapore."

⁸² Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore*, 5.

to study Japan's cultural and social policies in substantial depth and detail.⁸³ From these, we know that the cultural politics of youth in Singapore did not begin with the returning British colonial administration, or the subsequent Labour Front and People's Action Party governments. Instead, the Japanese military officers and civil officials who administered Singapore between 1942 and 1945, animated by the fantasy of moulding ideal new subjects for an envisioned new Japanese imperial city, were the first to pursue Singapore-wide efforts to discipline and mobilize youth.

That Japanese military and civilian administrators endeavoured to socialize and mobilize the young in Singapore was no surprise. As Sabine Fruhstuck has shown, by the 1930s and early 1940s, Japan's imperialist government "came to tightly embrace children." They sought to transform Japanese children and youth "into little (militarized) adults (*shokumin*)" and mobilize them as labour and as combatants to support the Japanese war effort.⁸⁴ These efforts had parallels throughout Japan's short-lived empire in Asia. For instance, Japanese officers and administrators set up youth organizations and paramilitary units in many occupied territories for the purpose of training local youth. Joyce Lebra has contributed pioneering research on this.⁸⁵ Well-known examples of these nationalist youth movements and military organizations include the Indian National Army, Burmese Independence Army, PETA ("Sukarela Tentara Pembela Tanah Air," or the "Army of Defenders of the Homeland") in Indonesia, and the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (The

⁸³ Yoji Akashi, "Japanese Cultural Policy in Malaya and Singapore, 1942-1945," in *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, ed. Grant K. Goodman (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). See also Yoji Akashi, "Colonel Watanabe Wataru: The Architect of the Malayan Military Administration, December 1941- March 1943," in *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945*, eds. Yoji Akashi and Yoshimura Mako (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008), 33-64.

⁸⁴ Sabine Frühstück, *Playing War: Children and the Paradoxes of Modern Militarism in Japan* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 7.

⁸⁵ Joyce C. Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia: Independence and Volunteer Forces in World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

“Young Malays Union”) in Malaya. Therefore, Japanese imperialism in Southeast Asia was an integral part of the history of youth mobilization in Southeast Asia.

In Singapore, the Occupation was traumatic, especially for the Chinese who made up three-quarters of Singapore’s population. The Japanese military sought to punish them for their participation in anti-Japanese resistance; they also wanted to eliminate any further threat from this hostile group.⁸⁶ The hardline policies of the commander of the *Gunsei-bu* (Military Administration), Colonel Watanabe Wataru, characterized the early JMA administration period between February 1942 and March 1943. Watanabe believed that the local communities had learnt a “hedonistic and wasteful way of life” from the British and had to “account for their past mistakes” and be subjected to “spiritual cleansing” before they were allowed to return to their everyday lives.⁸⁷ He forced Chinese community leaders to make a contribution of 50 million yen towards Japan’s war efforts, closed Chinese schools, and prohibited of the use of the Chinese language in schools.

Wataru also believed in “Nipponizing” the local population. This meant acculturating them in the Japanese language and culture and instilling in them beliefs about Japan’s cultural and moral superiority. Before he became *Syonan-to*’s chief administrator, Wataru authored two Japanese Total War Institute studies on cultural and educational policies in Japan’s occupied territories. He also sent out a memorandum “Principles for Reforming School Education” to governors of Japanese-occupied areas on 6 October 1942. In these writings, he argued for the vigorous

⁸⁶ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45*, xviii.

⁸⁷ Yoji Akashi, “Colonel Watanabe Wataru: The Architect of the Malayan Military Administration, December 1941-March 1943”, 34.

implementation of “Nipponization” programs. He emphasized that the core curriculum used in local schools “ought to be centered on the Emperor system with the understanding that the indigenous people of Malaya were to be citizens of Imperial Japan in the future.”⁸⁸ He made no pretence, therefore, that the Japanese military was preparing the local population for independence. Instead, the people of Malaya were to be guided into a new Asiatic modernity under Japanese overlordship.

Though Japan fought under the banner of liberating Southeast Asia from Western colonialism, its imperialist government and expansionist-minded military coveted the rich natural resources in the regions. Vivian Blaxell has written an excellent article on the complex set of ideas and images that drove Japanese imperialism.⁸⁹ These are explored more comprehensively in the work of Eri Hotta, and more recently, Jeremy Yellen.⁹⁰ The Japanese “Dai Toa” ideology promoted a vision of a Great East New Order based on Asian equality and co-operation, where Asian peoples progressed and prospered under Japanese tutelage. The Asian countries Japan liberated would enjoy autonomy but remain dependent on Japan’s hegemony – a patently paradoxical fantasy.⁹¹ Japanese politicians, intellectuals, and military officers invoked the concept of *Hakkoichiu* (“Eight Corners of the World Under One Roof” or “the rule of all peoples under one sovereign”) to encapsulate this vision. They advanced the idea of *Nihonshugi* (“Japanism”), a brand of Japanese exceptionalism that emphasized “the uniqueness and superiority of Japan’s social, political and cultural heritage” and the ideals of self-sacrifice and loyalty to the family and

⁸⁸ Yoji, Akashi, “Japanese Cultural Policy in Malaya and Singapore, 1942-1945,” in *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, ed. Grant K. Goodman (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 120.

⁸⁹ Blaxell, “New Syonan and Asianism in Japanese-era Singapore”.

⁹⁰ See Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan’s War, 1931-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Jeremy Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (U.S.A.: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁹¹ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 199.

the state.⁹² These ideologies undergirded Japanese practices and methods in molding new imperial subjects in the territories they occupied. The minds and bodies of children and youth were the site where the Japanese tried to imprint these ideologies. As Blaxell points out, “Japanese brutality coexisted with a different operation of power, one that aimed to be constructive rather than destructive in the effort to constitute the Japanese Empire.”⁹³

The *Syonan Times* (later renamed *the Syonan Shimbun*) became the main media platform for the Japanese to promote the ideals of *Hakko Ichiu* and *Dai Toa*-ism.⁹⁴ In the early months of the Occupation, the JMA made a futile attempt to reach out to a younger audience through the newspaper. Its very first issue featured a new section known as “the Children’s Corner”, where the fictional ‘Uncle Ahnah’ wrote letters to “his dear Nephews and Nieces.”⁹⁵ Over the next few issues, Uncle Ahnah tried to impart knowledge about the Japanese language and Japan’s geography and history to children. He also tried to get local children to conceive of Japan as the protector of the *Dai Toa Kyo-eiken*.⁹⁶ The column existed only for a short period of time. Uncle Ahnah’s very last letter on 2 May 1942 gave a clue as to why the column ceased – he wrote that “one nephew complained that my letter written to you on April 1, 2602, was too difficult for children in the lower classes. Therefore today I shall tell you a little story in a simple way.”⁹⁷ The admission that

⁹² Ivan Morris, ed., *Japan 1931-1945: Militarism, Fascism, Japanism?* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1963), xi-xii.

⁹³ Blaxell, “New Syonan and Asianism in Japanese-era Singapore”.

⁹⁴ When the Japanese military forces conquered Singapore, they took over all existing newspapers and media companies. The most popular English-language newspaper, *The Straits Times*, which is still the main English-language newspaper today, was renamed the *Shonan Times* on 20 February 1942. The name was changed to the *Syonan Times* the following day. The newspaper became the *Syonan Shimbun* on 8 December 1942, and then the *Syonan Shimbun* on 8 December 1943. The Japanese used the Japanese calendar based on the reign name of Emperor Hirohito. Hence, the Japanese used these dates 2602 (Syowa 16) to 2605 (Syowa 20) to refer to the years of the Japanese Occupation between 1942 and 1945. The newspaper issues were dated accordingly.

⁹⁵ “The Children’s Corner”, *The Syonan Times*, April 1, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), 3.

⁹⁶ “The Children’s Corner”, *The Syonan Times*, April 25, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), II.

⁹⁷ *The Syonan Shimbun Saturday Supplement* May 2, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), III.

the intended audience found the information inaccessible and uninteresting is an early sign that Japanese propaganda efforts were based on ambitious wishful thinking. Nevertheless, the *Syonan Shinbum* continued to feature propaganda, such as illustrations of student learning and school activities in Japan, to extol the strengths of the Japanese educational system. On occasion, the newspaper featured glowing accounts of local children from the different ethnic communities in Singapore waxing lyrical about learning Japanese. Six-year-old Eurasian Maureen Aeria enthusiastically told her mother that she wanted to go to school and learn about Japan like other children. Eleven-year-old Arab schoolboy Syed Mohamed bin Abu-bakar bin Yahya declared that “Nippon has not only freed us from the bondage of the white people, but has taught us to be clever, diligent and self-respecting.”⁹⁸

Given the newspaper’s nature as a propaganda broadsheet, it is impossible to ascertain if these children existed, or if they did, whether they were sincere in their adulation. What we can infer is that the JMA and their cultural staff were keen to demonstrate strong support for Japanese learning among children of all ethnic communities. This desire is especially evident in how the JMA and Shinozaki mobilized school children to participate in public rallies or commemorations. Frühstück observed that Japanese propaganda frequently urged Japanese children, as well as colonized and enemy children, to be grateful to the “protectors of Japan” – Japanese soldiers. These propaganda efforts often portrayed the Japanese Imperial Army soldier as “an object of affection by children on both sides.”⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the mobilization of local children and youth to pay homage to symbols of the Japanese military became a frequent practice in Singapore. For instance, on the morning of 8 December 1942, Shinozaki led a parade of youth from the major communities

⁹⁸ *The Syonan Shinbum*, 18 February, Koki 2604 Showa 19 (1944), 2.

⁹⁹ Frühstück, *Playing War*, 127.

to a Japanese war shrine in the central area of Bukit Timah to celebrate the anniversary of Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁰

Eight months earlier, children and youth took center-stage within the JMA's commemoration of the Japanese Emperor's birthday on 29 April 1942. Shinozaki's Education Department organized a march comprising thousands of local schoolchildren.¹⁰¹ The parade of children, carrying flags and singing a Japanese patriotic song, *Aikouku Koshin*, joined hordes of assembled locals gathered at the Padang, a prominent field in front of the Singapore City Hall. Together, the assembly of adults, children and youth bowed in the direction of the Imperial Palace, shouted *Banzai!* (Long Live the Emperor!) three times and sang the *Kimigayo* (Japan's National Anthem).¹⁰² According to Shinozaki, the spectacle moved General Yamashita, the commander of the 25th Imperial Army, to tears. The Tiger of Malaya, as Yamashita was dubbed for his leadership in the swift conquest of Malaya and Singapore, turned to Shinozaki and whispered, "Just like Japanese children, aren't they?"¹⁰³ For Yamashita, the bodies of local children became emotive metonyms of the pan-Asian Japanese empire he envisioned.

Japanese military officers and civilian administrators agreed that education was a powerful institution to reproduce Japanese values and beliefs in local children and youth. Harold Wilson argued that the Japanese authorities tried to promote education in Singapore to "serve the twin purposes of cultural absorption and technical/industrial development."¹⁰⁴ This was not unique to

¹⁰⁰ *The Syonan Shinbun*, December 1, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), 4.

¹⁰¹ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 205.

¹⁰² Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story*, 40. See also *The Syonan Times*, 29 April, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), III.

¹⁰³ Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story*, 43.

¹⁰⁴ Harold E. Wilson, "Educational Policy and Performance in Singapore, 1942-1945," 2.

Singapore but part of Japanese policy empire-wide. Modern Japanese education legislation, including the Imperial Rescript for Education of 1890, “conceptualized children as yet-to-be-formed individuals primarily designed to realize adult goals for the nation.”¹⁰⁵ In March 1942, the Japanese government adopted an educational policy “to unite the cultures of the indigenous peoples of the southern region with Japanese culture under the spirit of *Hakko Ichiu* (universal brotherhood), to teach industrial technologies and the Japanese language as the lingua franca of the Co-Prosperity Sphere and to promote the spirit of labour.”¹⁰⁶ In the same month, the JMA started the “Nipponization” programs in Singapore. They gave Shinozaki the role of re-opening the schools in Syonan-to and transforming them into institutions to teach a Japanese-style curriculum to Singapore’s children and youth. The Japanese were the first to attempt to create an integrated educational system to produce new subjects with a common language, outlook, values, and identities in Singapore. Their efforts pre-date the subsequent policies of the British and People’s Action Party governments. Beneath the rhetoric of cultural liberation and progress, Japanese cultural and educational policies were, as Yoji Akashi has emphasized, “paternalistic if not undisguisedly racist.”¹⁰⁷ The military officials, instructors, teachers and officials involved in propagandizing Japanese culture took it for granted that the local population they liberated from Western colonial yoke had not “developed their cultural sophistication to a level deemed worthy of independence and nationhood.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, they felt justified in subjecting their new subject peoples to a cultural and educational policy of *kominka kyoiku* (education for transforming citizens into the Emperor’s subjects) based on learning the Japanese Imperial Way, the Japanese Emperor

¹⁰⁵ Frühstück, *Playing War*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Yoji, “Colonel Watanabe Wataru: The Architect of the Malayan Military Administration,” 48.

¹⁰⁷ Yoji, “Japanese Cultural Policy in Malaya and Singapore, 1942-1945,” 148.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

cult, the Japanese language, the Japanese culture, and the Japanese *seishin* (spirit).¹⁰⁹ They wanted to replace the previous segregated landscape of English-medium schools and vernacular schools in Singapore with a system based on the Japanese model: common public schools that provided compulsory, universal primary schooling.¹¹⁰

The pedagogical programs and methods used in Singapore followed those used in Japan, where administrators emphasized physical education and character development to develop healthy, disciplined, loyal and vigorous children.¹¹¹ Each morning, schoolchildren stood in the direction of Japan and sang the Japanese national anthem and other patriotic songs.¹¹² Schools were required or encouraged to teach in Japan, though for practical reasons, instruction was given in Malay and English until students could attain proficiency in Japanese.¹¹³ The curriculum included more physical activities like mass drills and training in fencing, judo, and other martial arts, and moral education.¹¹⁴ Clearly, Nipponization meant more than pledging loyalty to the Japanese Emperor and the Japanese state. It also entailed the disciplining of the young in a new physical culture, moral purity, and patriotic conduct. The young body became an index of British debauchery and Japanese civilizational superiority, where Japanese officers and educators frequently juxtaposed the products of their educational program with the indolent, undisciplined bodies of local children and youth under British rule.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 117-118.

¹¹⁰ Wilson, "Educational Policy and Performance in Singapore, 1942-1945," 28.

¹¹¹ See Frühstück, *Playing War*, 28-30 for a succinct account of the impact of Japanese militarism on schools as educators tried to play their part in producing healthy, disciplined, physically fit Japanese children, especially boys, for the Japanese nation.

¹¹² A young scholar Masakazu Matsuoka has written articles studying Japanese use of music and children's magazines to attempt to "Nipponize" Singapore's children: "Nihon gunsei ka Singaporu ni okeru kodomo muke ongaku kousaku (Japanese Propaganda through Music toward School Children during Japanese Occupation of Singapore)," *Researches of Educational History in Asia* 18 (March 2009): 48-64.

¹¹³ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 209.

¹¹⁴ *The Syonan Times*, July 5, Koki 2602 Syowa 17, 3.

Beyond this idealistic rhetoric, the revival of the local education system was also meant to address the problem of restless youth on the streets by enclosing them in institutions where they could be trained into more docile imperial subjects. Shinozaki recounted that the JMA appointed him as Chief Education Officer – even though he had no experience or training in education – and asked him to re-open schools quickly so as to get the large number of youths “off the streets and under control.”¹¹⁵ In his next appointment as head of the Welfare Department, Shinozaki was also tasked “to reduce and eventually eliminate the large number of boy vagrants and idle youths who have infested the streets of the city since the fall of Singapore.”¹¹⁶ One measure was the re-opening of the Boys’ Reformatory to occupy the time of about two hundred boys by training them in tailoring, carpentering, and Japanese. The Salvation Army’s Boys’ Home was converted into the Syonan Home to provide a refuge and reforming institution for fifty-two youths between the ages of eight to sixteen who were deemed wayward or had suffered the loss of their parents and families in the war.¹¹⁷ The Welfare Department also reopened the *Poh Leung Kok* (an agency set up by the colonial government to protect girls and women from prostitution or involuntary servitude) and the various orphanages and institutions for the poor managed by the Roman Catholic Church. The need for social welfare for children and youth thus posed another set of difficulties for the JMA’s disciplinary fantasies – before they could even engineer and produce ideal Japanese citizens, they had to first address the socio-economic impact of wartime dislocation and devastation on the young.

¹¹⁵ Wilson’s interview with Shinozaki on 4 November 1972, cited in Harold E. Wilson “Educational Policy and Performance in Singapore,” 5.

¹¹⁶ *The Syonan Times*, 28 November, Koki 2603 Syowa 18 (1943), 4.

¹¹⁷ *The Syonan Times*, September 27, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), 4.

Beyond the increased provision of mass education modelled along Japanese lines, Colonel Watanabe Wataru wanted to train selected local male youth to become leaders.¹¹⁸ He directed three million yen, out of the fifty million yen he forced prominent Chinese in Singapore to contribute for the war effort, towards the establishment of schools in Singapore and Japan for the training of future leaders.¹¹⁹ He established the *Syonan Koa Kunrenjo* (Asia Development Training Institute) on 15 May 1942 to train selected young men between seventeen and twenty-five years old to become leaders “for the construction of a new born Malaya.”¹²⁰ These trainees underwent rigorous physical and spiritual training, along with Japanese language study, for three months; the curriculum was modelled after the Japanese military system. From an inaugural enrollment of forty-nine Malays, nineteen Chinese, fifteen Indians, two Eurasians, and an Italian, the *Syonan Koa Kunrenjo* trained about 1,000 graduates in Singapore and Malaya before its closure in July 1943, many of whom became prominent people in post-war Malaya.¹²¹ Outstanding trainee graduates were also given the opportunity to study in Japan through “the Southern Special Students (*Nanpo Tokubetsu Ryugakusei*)” program. The objective, unsurprisingly, was to produce a future leadership friendly to the Japanese. The first group of students came to Japan in 1943, and a second group of 101 students arrived in 1944.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Yoji, “Colonel Watanabe Wataru,” 48.

¹¹⁹ See Yoji Akashi, “*Koa Kunrenjo* and *Nanpo Tokubetsu Ryugakusei*: A Study of Cultural Propaganda and Conflict in Japanese-occupied Malaya 1942-1945,” *Shakai Kagaku Tokyu* 67, 23, 3 (March 1978: 39-66). Cited in *Ibid.*, footnote 79.

¹²⁰ “Gunsei-bu Scheme for Malayan Young Men,” *The Syonan Times*, Friday May 22, Koki 2062 Syowa 17 (1942), 4.

¹²¹ Yoji, “Colonel Watanabe Wataru,” 49.

¹²² Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore*, 61. The students were hosted by Marquis Tokugawa, who served as Supreme Consulting Advisor to the military administration and Civil Governor of Malaya. Marquis Tokugawa (Tokugawa Yoshichika) was a descendant of the Tokugawa clan that dominated Japan for over 300 years before the Meiji Restoration of 1867.

Beyond these embryonic efforts to nurture pro-Japan youth leaders, the JMA tried to enlist local male youth in paramilitary organizations to support their regular military forces. This was especially after the Japanese forces began to buckle under the Allied armies' counterattack from late 1942 onwards. With this turning of the tide of war, the JMA urgently mobilized local manpower. In early 1943, they began recruiting *Heiho* or "subsoldiers" in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. These were non-combatants who joined the army's auxiliary services, wore uniforms, lived beside Japanese forces, and performed light work and manual labour.¹²³ This policy was touted as another solution to the problem of unemployment that led to youth delinquency and the menace of potential subversion. In December that year, the JMA formed the *Giyu-gun* (Volunteer Army) and *Giyu-tai* (Volunteer Corps) in the various regions under its control. The *Giyu-Gun* was a military force consisting of approximately 2,000 young men armed with machine guns and rifles. Its purpose was to defend the coastline and help preserve public peace and order.¹²⁴ The *Giyu-Tai* was an army troop of semi-soldiers and semi-farmers organized into small units to man local defence posts, serve as air raid wardens or police post sentries, and help maintain peace and order.¹²⁵

The *Syonan Shinbun* regularly exhorted local youth, especially Malay youth to join these organizations, valorizing service in these units as the "Duty of Youth of [the] Country." Beneath this nationalist rhetoric, however, the JMA resorted to more practical strategies of bolstering recruitment. Spokespersons like Shinozaki regularly reiterated that the volunteer units were given ranks, allowances and pay similar to that of Japanese soldiers.¹²⁶ Shinozaki also tried to assure

¹²³ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore*, 86.

¹²⁴ Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia*, 116.

¹²⁵ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore*, 87.

¹²⁶ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 1 July, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

prospective enlistees that their religious customs would be respected.¹²⁷ His labours in this regard suggest substantial resistance to the JMA's efforts to mobilize youth. The author of a *Syonan Shinbun* editorial on 9 January 1945 admitted the public had been misled by "idle and often malicious talk" about the *Heiho* and that "parents have also shown an indisposition to allow their sons to join up."¹²⁸ These disciplinary projects were not foisted onto an agentic vacuum but onto populations that already possessed their own vested interests and subjectivities. Attempts to apply disciplinary power to train and homogenize young bodies had to contend with their existing differences.

Japanese efforts at youth mobilization were ultimately racialized; they treated the different major ethnic communities in Singapore and Malaya differently. This was due to beliefs about the different groups' political loyalties and reliability. The Japanese mainly targeted Malay youth for recruitment into the *Heiho* and the other units. This was a continuation of Japanese policy in Malaya where they actively courted the support of the Malays and tried to channel Malay nationalism against their enemies. Many Malay-Muslim leaders, intellectuals, and young radicals collaborated with the Japanese for a number of reasons, including fear, a sense of patriotism, and the misplaced belief that the Japanese would help the Malays achieve Malayan independence within a larger Indonesia Raya.¹²⁹ As early as 1940, the Japanese had contacted and cultivated

¹²⁷ Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia*, 117.

¹²⁸ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 9 January, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 1.

¹²⁹ Abu Talib Ahmad, "The Impact of the Japanese Occupation on the Malay-Muslim Population," in *Malaya and Singapore during the Japanese Occupation*, ed. Paul Kratoska (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1995), 17. Historians like Timothy Barnard, Jan van der Putten and Khairuddin Aljunied have studied the emergence of Malay nationalism in Malaya and Singapore in the 1930s and its rise in the 1950s-60s in response to British policies. Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, "Malay Cosmopolitan Activism in Post-War Singapore," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds, Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); Khairuddin Aljunied, *Radicals: Resistance and Protest in Colonial Malaya* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015).

young radical Malay intelligentsia, especially members of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*.¹³⁰ The JMA encouraged Malay nationalism throughout the war and gave many Malay youth opportunities to receive military education and training in the above-mentioned paramilitary units. This was notwithstanding the significant number of Malays who were loyal to the British empire and took part in the fight against the Japanese.

For Indians, the JMA encouraged nationalist activity directed at winning independence for India from British rule. Singapore became a base for the Japanese to stir up the nationalist sentiments of Indian youths in India and Southeast Asia. They did not, however, recruit Indians into the *Giyu-gun* or *Giyu-tai*. Instead, they supported the formation of the Indian National Army and the Indian Independence League soon after the fall of Singapore as the primary organizations for Indian males. Indian women and girls were recruited into the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.¹³¹ In April 1944, the Japanese opened the Azad School, a training institute for Indian youth volunteers, at Gilstead Road in Singapore, and supported the formation of an Indian Youth Section of the Indian Independence League for Indian youth between the ages of 12 and 17.¹³² Throughout the Occupation, they encouraged Indian youths to hold large rallies and recruitment drives for the anti-colonial effort in India. Hence, the interest in encouraging Indian nationalism among Indian youth undercut the efforts of other military educators and officers in instilling a new loyalty towards Japan.

¹³⁰ See Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1945: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya," *Indonesia* 28 (October 1979): 91-98.

¹³¹ Akashi and Yoshimura, "Introduction," in *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945*, 6.

¹³² *The Syonan Times*, 10 April, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944); *The Syonan Shimbun*, 30 August, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 4.

Conversely, the Japanese military authorities remained hostile to the Chinese. This was even as Shinozaki believed that it was necessary to acquire their support for Japan's imperial rule through a softer approach. Many Chinese youth were active in the anti-Japanese resistance before and during the Japanese invasion. Japanese brutality towards the Chinese community only drove more Chinese youth into a variety of covert anti-Japanese movements organized by the British, the Communists, and the Chinese Kuomintang, such as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, the Singapore Volunteer Forces, the San Min Chu Yi Youth Corps, and a group led by Colonel John Dalley known as Dalforce.¹³³ The existence of these resistance movements increased the Japanese administration's anxieties about the loyalty of the Chinese youth. One example of a Chinese youth who participated in anti-Japanese activity was Ye Li Tian, alias Ye John, who came to Singapore from China as a young boy in the late 1920s. Ye learnt Japanese and infiltrated the Japanese Military Administration Department. He was caught and executed in June 1943, at the age of 22.¹³⁴

These different approaches to different groups of youth in Singapore, necessitated by broader Japanese strategic goals and by practical realities on the ground, fuelled ethnic-based nationalism among Malay, Chinese and Indian youth, especially when it became clear that Japan intended to keep hold of Malaya and Singapore as imperial dependencies. The loyalties among the youth were divided, regardless of Japanese rhetoric and images of united "Syonan youth" or "Dai Toa youth." Japanese efforts to discipline and homogenize the local youth were undermined by other policies of the imperial administration. It was difficult to instill a new consciousness and

¹³³ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45*, 39.

¹³⁴ Hara Fujio, "Leaders of the Malayan Communist Party," in *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945*, 92-93.

identity oriented towards Japan, the Japanese Emperor, or a distant and unfamiliar concept of “Dai Toa,” when the Japanese were also promoting nationalist sentiments among the Indians and Malays and antagonizing the Chinese.

The Valorization of the Young Male Body

The needs of the wartime economy soon caused the JMA to mobilize both local young men and women in gendered ways that privileged male bodies over female ones. Japanese propaganda and recruitment practices valorized the disciplined, physically fit, youthful male body. Japanese military commanders in charge of youth training conceived of themselves as fathers cultivating a disciplined masculinity. In the words of Iwaki, a former educator and agricultural expert turned training commander of a *Heiho* camp, it was his “sincere desire” to see his trainees “return to their respective kampungs as new men with an outlook upon life completely new, and fully qualified to be the leaders of future Malaya.”¹³⁵ The *Syonan Shinbun* regularly highlighted interviews with local recruits of the *Giyu-gun*, the *Giyu-tai*, and the *Heiho*, and their parents. The latter lavished effusive praise on how the young recruits developed their physique, character, and abilities through military training. One letter-writer encouraged parents to send their sons to join the *Heiho* so that they would “grow up into men in every sense of the word – real he-men, healthy in body and sound in mind; proud and independent yet dependable and considerate, loyal and trustworthy masters of their households and faithful citizens of a country.”¹³⁶ Another letter-writer repeated the trope of “boys becoming men” through military service. English education had turned his two boys into “absolute ‘wasters’” but their enlistment in the *Heiho* turned them into “men”.¹³⁷ Japanese

¹³⁵ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 8 January, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹³⁶ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 10 January, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

¹³⁷ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 29 January, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

propagandists frequently employed this image of desirable maturity and discipline to coax the public to support their children's enlistment in military service. In March 1945, a press party visited the islands on which the *Giyu-tai* units trained. They waxed lyrical about finding hundreds of "sturdy, bronzed young men with an upright bearing and that disciplined smartness born of constant military training."¹³⁸ The well-trained, well-disciplined bodies of local male youth became indexes of the new post-colonial modernity, as they continued to be for the subsequent Singapore governments after the war.

From 1943 onwards, the male bodies became more than just symbols. The turning of the war's momentum forced the JMA to compel Singapore residents to change their occupations and contribute their labour to the war effort. Shinozaki began to appeal to young men between 16 and 35 to "undertake more responsible and essential work to be worthy citizens." This meant working in jobs that served Japanese military and industrial needs, volunteering for local defence, or taking up agricultural work to produce more food.¹³⁹ In December 1944, the JMA introduced regulations requiring men between the ages of 15 and 40 to abandon jobs "not having any bearing towards the war effort" such as clerks, porters, hawkers, salesmen, telephone operators, lift operators, bellboys, ushers, and sweepers.¹⁴⁰ The next month, the JMA passed a Male Employment Restriction Ordinance that prohibited any local man between these ages from working in occupations deemed "light and easy." Only youth with a "deformity" or "disability" were exempted from this requirement.

¹³⁸ *The Syonan Shimbun*, 6 March, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

¹³⁹ *The Syonan Shimbun*, 7 January, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45*, 193.

The JMA's labour needs converged with Japanese beliefs about labour as a powerful pedagogical technique for disciplining youth bodies. The effort to train bodies served the goal of extracting productive service from these bodies. Japanese propaganda also focused on getting male children and youth to participate in labour service to toughen their bodies for their future civic responsibilities. In December 1943, the JMA began encouraging community organizations to create special labour units to meet the demand for labour. In response, the Malai Welfare Association (Malay Welfare Association) established a Free Labour Service Corps (*Kinro Hoshi Dan*) in January 1945 to rally Malay youth to spend their weekends in voluntary labour work.¹⁴¹ Various Islamic religious instruction centres in Singapore also formed the Syonan Muslim Students' Welfare Service Volunteer Corps to mobilize boys studying with them to render volunteer service to the country during their after-school hours.¹⁴² Altogether these efforts valorized male youth bodies as a source of vital labour, which needed to be extracted and developed for Japan's benefit.

The sacralization of young male bodies bore mixed implications for the place of local young women within Japanese propaganda and policies. Japan highlighted increasing educational and employment opportunities for girls as evidence of the social progress locals enjoyed under Japanese rule. Like its educational policies, the Japanese imperial administration's policies towards women in Singapore were based on changing gender norms and ideas from the imperial metropole. In April 1943, the *Syonan Shinbun* highlighted a special course on "domestic science and mothercraft" started at the Victoria Street Girls' School organized for seventy senior girls from

¹⁴¹ *The Syonan Shimbun*, February 1, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹⁴² *The Syonan Shimbun*, February 3, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2; *The Syonan Shimbun*, March 28, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944).

all the public girls' school in the city. The subjects the students were taught *Nippon-Go* (Japanese), cooking, needlework, and art, housework, nursing, singing, physical training, arithmetic, hygiene, nature study, general and domestic science. Catholic nuns started a similar class at the Ceylon Road Girls' School. The *Syonan Shinbun* lauded the course as “a special course which will render them better fitted to play their role in a strong and virile New Malai” and “equip themselves for their future responsibilities as mothers and wives.”¹⁴³ This constructed ideal of Japanese women, restricting them to the roles of familial caretakers and dutiful partners, can be traced back to the Meiji era during the turn of the 20th century, when the modernizing Japanese state endeavoured to prepare girls and women to become “good wives and wise mothers” to advance the Japanese nation's strength, prosperity, and moral well-being.¹⁴⁴ It was only after the First World War that Japanese officials began promoting new public roles for women. Several agencies of the Japanese government became interested in mobilizing women. They were inspired by the examples of European and American women's groups that assisted the European and American forces in the war at the home front. Accordingly, the Japanese government began to promote the patriotic public roles of women during war, beyond the confines of the “good wife and wise mother” paradigm.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, in Singapore, Japanese wartime needs created more opportunities for more women to enter the workforce. At the start of the Occupation, the Japanese did not display much interest in encouraging women to work, probably because of the high levels of unemployment then. Labour shortages forced the Japanese to pay greater attention to female labour. In 1944, they began to call on women to take over jobs vacated by males, in a way that subordinated the value of female

¹⁴³ *The Syonan Shinbun*, 2 April, Koki 2603 Syowa 18 (1943).

¹⁴⁴ Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 115.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 126.

labour to male labour. Newspapers featured stories of women who declared that they found fulfillment and joy in employment.¹⁴⁶ In February, the Japanese set up the Syonan Women's Employment Bureau to provide employment for female workers in Singapore. The organization found positions for a small number of women and girls. It reported 83 clerks, typists, nurses and telephone operators; 19 waitresses, 228 *amahs* and domestic servants, 243 factory workers registered with the bureau.¹⁴⁷ In July, Shinozaki appealed to various welfare association "to let the women of all communities know what was expected of them at this juncture and hoped that they would come forward in increasing numbers to volunteer for work."¹⁴⁸ These appeals, however, continued to reproduce essentialized images of women as mothers and wives. The *Syonan Shinbum* called for the women of Syonan-to to play a greater part in the war in both the domestic and the public sphere: "The mother and housewife, whose duties are confined to the home, can be of just as much use in her own sphere, as the office girl, who could render valuable service as a nurse in the M.A.S. or in various other ways."¹⁴⁹ Yet, the premise remained that "their object should be to relieve men where possible so that the men may engage in essential tasks of a more important nature."¹⁵⁰

The Japanese administration did not advance equality for women, even as it envisioned a new public role for girls. Instead, Shinozaki and the JMA focused on young male bodies on the basis that these were needed for essential wartime labour, while other forms of work were deemed non-essential and to be left to females or older adults.¹⁵¹ A Japanese official, in explaining

¹⁴⁶ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45*, 193.

¹⁴⁷ *The Syonan Shimbun*, May 30, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹⁴⁸ *The Syonan Shimbun*, July 28, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *The Syonan Shimbun*, January 10, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2; *The Syonan Shimbun*, January 13, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

Japanese educational policies, avowed that the increased provision of technical education in the various trade and technical schools in Syonan for boys was meant to give them more opportunities to find employment as skilled mechanics and artisans to earn good salaries as Singapore's industries developed. Conversely, the official said, "their sisters could fill their places in offices where the work was not so strenuous."¹⁵² As the JMA required more young men to take up technical vocations or join in local defence and auxiliary services, they urged girls to "replace, release men for war work."¹⁵³ In October 1944, the JMA closed all cabarets and dance halls on the island and encouraged the female cabaret employees and "glamour girls" to register themselves for work to free men for more important work. They also made community leaders and women representatives of the Chinese, Malay, and Eurasian Welfare Associations publicly encourage more women to step forward to "give of their best on the home front," so as to "release menfolk for bigger tasks."¹⁵⁴

Even as Japanese administrators imposed a new paternity on young female bodies, they had to contend with older paternities that prevailed despite the JMA's efforts. Shinozaki was soon forced to publicly qualify the JMA's exhortation to women to come out to work. After announcing the Male Employment Restriction Ordinance, he issued a public clarification in the *Syonan Shimbun* that the legislation only applied to young men. He emphasized, in block letters, that "THE AUTHORITIES WISH IT TO BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ARE NOT COMPELLING WOMEN TO WORK, OR PUTTING INTO EFFECT ANY ORDINANCE FOR MOBILIZATION OF FEMALE LABOUR POWER. THE AUTHORITIES RESPECT THE MANY RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL CUSTOMS PREVAILING IN THIS CITY AND WILL

¹⁵² *The Syonan Shimbun*, April 2, Koki 2603 Syowa 18 (1943).

¹⁵³ *The Syonan Shimbun*, October 27, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹⁵⁴ *The Syonan Shimbun*, February 17, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

NOT COMPEL WOMEN TO WORK UNLESS THEY VOLUNTARILY WISH TO DO SO.”¹⁵⁵

Evidently, the JMA’s efforts to rally women to join the labour force met with fierce opposition from the conservative social groups in Singapore, which could not be alienated at a crucial moment in the war effort. Disciplinary projects are easier conceived than achieved in the face of existing subjectivities that resist these attempts to assert power over bodies.

The JMA also deployed the bodies of young women as embodied metaphors of the “Dai Toa” ideal. In this case, the JMA did not only instrumentalize their femininity and youthfulness, but also racialized their bodies to paint an image of multicultural unity under Japanese hegemony. The “Daughters of Dai Toa” first appeared as a feature series of interviews during the anniversary week of Singapore’s surrender. Each day, the *Syonan Shinbum* featured an interview with a different “Daughter of Dai Toa”, i.e. a young woman from one of the major ethnic communities in Singapore and Malaya. In these interviews, each “Daughter of Dai Toa” expressed reverence for Japan, affirmed their adherence to the imperial cause, and presented themselves as role models of female “Dai Toa” youth. The first “Daughter of Dai Toa” featured was Rene Paglar, the 14-year-old daughter of Dr. C.J. Paglar, a leader of the Eurasian community in Singapore. The article depicted her as a bright and civic-minded girl who spoke five languages and who, as a member of the Medical Auxiliary Services, helped her father as a nurse after her day’s studies. Her love for learning the Japanese language and her sense of selfless duty, the article exclaimed, meant that she was behaving in every way a “Nippon-Fujin” (i.e. a mature Japanese woman). Rene Paglar “looked a typical maiden of Dai Toa” in her “striking purple kimono, complete with a red obi and clogs.” Beneath the grand rhetoric of pan-Asian autonomy and independence, the Japanese concept of

¹⁵⁵ *The Syonan Shinbum*, February 12, Koki 2605 Syowa 20 (1945), 2.

“Dai Toa” was based on the embrace of Japanese culture.¹⁵⁶ After Rene Paglar, the “Daughters of Dai Toa” included young women representing the other ethnic communities in Singapore: Sheum Yu Kwei, a Chinese saw-dust artiste; Patricia Piol, a Singapore-born Filipino student of the Victoria Street Girls’ School, 15 year-old Sima Binte Noorlim, and lastly, Janaki Davar, a platoon commander in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment of the Indian National Army.¹⁵⁷

The “Daughters of Dai Toa” subsequently appeared in “comfort shows” organized by the *Senden-bu* (Propaganda Department) and the *Syonan Tokubetu-si* (Syonan Municipality) in late April 1944 in commemoration of the Japanese Emperor’s birthday. While these performances were ostensibly meant to entertain the public, the JMA’s agenda once again was to use the bodies of eight young women from different cultural backgrounds to stage the Japanese’s “Dai Toa” idea for public consumption. This time, the “Dai Toa Revue Party” had expanded to include representatives from all of Japan’s occupied territories - Miss Philippines, Miss India, Miss Manshukoku (Manchuria), Miss Malai (Malaya), Miss Thailand, Miss Burma, and Miss China. Rene Paglar was identified not by a geographical location but as “Miss Aojin” (European). Significantly, there was no “Miss Japan” joining these other young women on the stage.¹⁵⁸ Only Japan’s new colonies, and not the metropole itself, could be feminized and deployed on stage for public consumption and the new colonizers’ gaze.

¹⁵⁶ *The Syonan Shimibun*, February 11, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹⁵⁷ *The Syonan Shimibun*, February 12, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2; *The Syonan Shimibun*, February 14, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2; *The Syonan Shimibun*, February 16, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944), 2.

¹⁵⁸ *The Syonan Shimibun*, April 22, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944); *The Syonan Shimibun*, April 26, Koki 2604 Syowa 19 (1944).

The End of a Beginning

Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945. In the end, this is more a story of what might have been, of unfulfilled Japanese fantasies about the moulding and mobilization of youth in Singapore. The Japanese Occupation delivered little of the promised “co-prosperity” in Singapore. Severe food shortages resulted in malnutrition, which exacerbated the spread of diseases.

Japanese military officers and civil officials’ images and ideas of ideal youth was far too impracticable given the wartime situation and the realities in Singapore. The scholars who have studied Japanese social and economic policies have agreed that the efforts to “Nipponize” youths were mostly unsuccessful. Eri Hotta points out that the task of administering the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere “quickly proved a task far beyond Japan’s capacity.”¹⁵⁹ The historical records show that the JMA was more focused on immediate short-term war aims – the consolidation of political control, the revival of the economy, and the expansion of industry to feed Japan’s military and industrial needs. The Japanese desire to discipline was strongest in the first year of the Occupation, when they were the most assured in their position in Singapore and Southeast Asia. By the end of 1943, the Japanese war machine was struggling to repel the Allied counter-invasion, especially after the United States entered the war following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. As the tide of war turned against them, the exigency of mobilizing the young for the Japanese war engine and economy overrode all other cultural or social plans or policies.

The shortcomings in the implementation of the policies stymied the efforts to create a new consciousness and identity as youth united under Japanese rule. Paul Kratoska has made a damning

¹⁵⁹ Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan’s War*, 199.

assessment: “The educational and propaganda undertakings of the Japanese seem both audacious and naïve: audacious in the scope of the changes they hoped to achieve, and naïve in underestimating the tenacity with which the people of Malaya would cling to their values and way of life.”¹⁶⁰ The Nipponization program was easier to conceive than to materialize. The need to retain the support of the Malays and Indians made it impossible for Japanese administrators to be too forceful in imposing Japanese culture. Many Chinese parents were reluctant to send their children to school, in part because of their animosity towards the Japanese. According to Turnbull, never more than 7,000 children were in school and by 1945, the number “had dwindled to a few hundred.”¹⁶¹ Circumstances like the need to return dislocated youth to school forced the JMA to allow Shinozaki to re-open existing schools, including the Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools. From April 1942, vernacular primary schools began to re-open. Shinozaki also allowed the teaching of English in English-medium schools, annoying the anti-Western military officers like Wataru, due to the shortage of Japanese teachers and Japanese textbooks to teach Japanese.¹⁶² Hence, for all of Shinozaki and the Japanese military officers’ desires to create a new consciousness through schooling local children and youth, wartime exigencies caused the re-emergence of the pre-war system of vernacular schools and the amplification of ethnic consciousness among the local communities.¹⁶³ Clearly, disciplinary intent did not guarantee disciplinary outcomes or effects, especially if would-be subjects evaded and avoided these disciplinary institutions and programs altogether due to a lack of interest and investment, or worse, adopted an attitude of resistance.

¹⁶⁰ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore*, 125.

¹⁶¹ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 210.

¹⁶² Shinozaki, *Syonan-to: My Story*, 34.

¹⁶³ Wilson, “Educational Policy and Performance in Singapore, 1942-1945,” 7.

Yet, the Japanese's application of biopolitical power was productive. Even though the outcomes fell short of the Japanese officers and officials' intentions, their efforts stimulated the nascent nationalist movements in Singapore and gave many young people the chance to receive education, leadership training, and military training. Some attested after the war that participation in Japanese training programs gave them qualities, such as physical and mental discipline, that enabled them to function as leaders.¹⁶⁴ Scholar Abu Talib Ahmad reminds us that the Occupation had some positive aspects for the Malays in Malaya and Singapore – it germinated new political awareness among Malay youth, involved Malay women in political and social organizations and increased “the ability of the Malay people to break out of their parochial environment.”¹⁶⁵ This heightened ethnic awareness and nationalistic pride infected post-World War Two political debates and struggles.

There was another significant legacy of the short-lived Japanese Occupation. Japanese policies and propaganda normalized the idea that the welfare, education, and development of the young was part of everyday social policy and governance. Japanese administrators substantially increased the opportunities for education for local children and youth in their pursuit of their disciplinary and political goals. In 1943, the JMA announced that free education would be provided to all 17,000 school children attending the *Syonan Tokubetu-si Futso Ko Gakko* (common public schools).¹⁶⁶ Between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese also set up numerous sorts of technical schools to train *Syonan* youth as technicians, mechanics, electricians, mechanical engineering and aero-mechanics. These gave more local youth the opportunities to pursue vocational and technical

¹⁶⁴ Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Abu Talib Ahmad, “The Impact of the Japanese Occupation on the Malay-Muslim Population,” 1.

¹⁶⁶ *The Syonan Shimbun*, December 3', Koki 2603 Syowa 18 (1943), 2.

education.¹⁶⁷ Opportunities for education and training went together with the provision of more opportunities for jobs and leadership training.¹⁶⁸ In his study of Vichy French policies for youth mobilization in World War Two-French Indochina, Jennings also pointed out how French administrators realized the necessity of providing more opportunities to local youth to counter Japanese and Communist propaganda. In the case of British Malaya, where the Japanese occupation authorities had more power and a freer hand to enact policies, the provision of education, jobs, developmental opportunities became tied to the politics of youth representation and imperial legitimacy. For all their unrequited imperial fantasies about the moulding and mobilization of *Syonan* youth, the various programs Shinozaki, Wataru, and the JMA started had made it impossible for the returning colonial authorities to ignore the interests and welfare of the young once again. Biopower, unleashed, produced its own momentum.

¹⁶⁷ See Kevin Blackburn's recently published study of the history of industrial education in Singapore: *Education, Industrialization, and the End of Empire in Singapore* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁶⁸ See Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 187-188.

Chapter Three

Mobilizing Youth for the Empire: The Singapore Youth Council (1948-1959) and the Emergence of the Singapore Disciplinary State

In August 1954, three hundred and fifty delegates and observers representing fifty-seven countries gathered in Singapore for the Second General Assembly of the World Assembly of Youth (WAY). The Singapore Youth Council (SYC) – a coordinating organization for state-recognized youth movements – organized this international youth meeting with the Singapore colonial government’s strong financial and moral support. The Singapore meeting was not only the second-ever WAY General Assembly, but also the first to be held in Asia.¹⁶⁹ The WAY Council chose Singapore because it considered the British colony to be very advanced in youth development work. Why had youth work become so advanced in Singapore by the 1950s, when this domain had been mostly neglected before the Second World War? What were the Singapore Youth Council and the World Assembly of Youth and how were they connected to the intersecting politics of youth, decolonization, and the Cold War? How did the SYC’s activities reveal the emergence of a colonial disciplinary state directed by the British colonial administration, which returned to Singapore after the Japanese surrender in August 1945?

For a decade, until its dissolution by the People’s Action Party (PAP) government in 1959, the SYC was at the forefront of the colonial government’s efforts to discipline, mobilize, and police the young of a modern self-governing colony. In his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault warns us against thinking of civil society as “a reality which asserts itself, struggles, and rises up, which revolts against and is outside government or the state, or the state apparatus or

¹⁶⁹ “Seventh Annual Report (15 March 1954 to 31 March 1955),” National Archives of Singapore (NAS), ME 3915 EDUN 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council”.

institutions.”¹⁷⁰ In this vein, this chapter discusses the emergence of a state-coordinated assemblage of non-state organizations and actors that made the welfare, interests, and needs of youth the focus of their work. The history of the SYC allows us to argue that a colonial disciplinary state arose on the back of the returning British colonial administration’s multi-faceted challenges of incorporating the young into the self-governing country they sought to construct. It further argues that the mobilization of youth organizations and youth leaders became an institutionalized technique of the Singapore disciplinary state – these youth organizations and youth leaders became the capillaries and nodes through which disciplinary power circulated between the young of Singapore, state agencies, and other non-state actors and organizations. Through the SYC as their partners, colonial officers attempted to normalize ideas of desirable youth activities and incorporate the young as subjects and citizens of a multicultural, non-Communist Singapore. Furthermore, the SYC’s international activities show that this assemblage of disciplinary actors was trans-imperial and global in scale. This revealed a global youth turn, motivated by humanitarian and Cold War political agendas, after the end of the Second World War.

Constructing Malayan Youth: Youth and the Making of Malaya

The British returned to their colony in early September 1945 and established the British Military Administration (BMA) to manage the colony’s post-war recovery until the revival of the colonial civil service. The BMA was inefficient, ineffective, and corrupt – in the six months of its existence, they lost the British the initial goodwill the local population had for their liberators from Japanese brutality.¹⁷¹ By then, the international climate of decolonization and the ascendancy of

¹⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, edited by Michel Senellart; translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 296-297.

¹⁷¹ C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 229.

powerful nationalist movements in Malaya and Singapore after the war rendered the continuation of colonial rule untenable. During the war, the British promised social and economic development and independence for its colonies to win support for the war effort. In the words of historian Anthony Stockwell, the British government then “embarked on a new colonialism,” where it “publicly acknowledged the principle of self-determination of subject peoples as the goal of colonial policy and adopted nation-building as the means to this end.”¹⁷² This entailed the attempt to create a viable nation-state through liberal political and social reform. Since less than altruistic objectives of reducing the costs of empire, of preserving their interests, and of containing communism in Asia drove the new-found desire to decolonize, the nation-state that the British tried to forge was one that remained anti-Communist and pro-British.

The intersecting politics of youth, decolonization, and the Cold War in Singapore and Malaya complicated these plans. The demographic significance of the young, the deprivations and dislocations of the war, the increased nationalistic fervour and anti-colonial feelings in Malaya and Singapore, combined to make youth the “biggest social problem” confronting Singapore in this period.¹⁷³ Given the prominence the Japanese administrators gave to education, youth welfare, and youth training, it was impossible for the returning British colonial administration to return to the *status quo ante*. They needed to regain their legitimacy in the eyes of a politically awakened and materially deprived populace. The population had reached 941,000 in 1947 and was rising fast as displaced families and persons from the Malay states flocked to Singapore in search of food and

¹⁷² Anthony Stockwell, “Forging Malaysia and Singapore: Colonialism, Decolonization and Nation-Building,” in *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 195.

¹⁷³ Ho Chi Tim, “The origins, building, and impact of a social welfare state in late Colonial Singapore,” Unpublished PhD. dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2016, 181.

jobs. The economic devastation meant massive unemployment for a mostly youthful population. A 1947 survey of living conditions in Singapore also revealed “an appalling state of misery and chronic overcrowding.”¹⁷⁴ These circumstances led to the increase in youth crime, gangsterism, and labour strikes. Singapore historian Ho Chi Tim attributed the dramatic increase in youth militancy and violence to the Japanese Occupation’s powerful psychological effects. Having witnessed the Japanese soldiers and administrators’ “raw and violent use of power...Singapore youth came through a wartime society where might makes right and previous societal norms were meaningless.”¹⁷⁵ Youth, previously neglected by a colonial administration and local mercantile communities reaping profits from the entrepot economy, had to be re-incorporated into Singapore society.

There was a vital political dimension to the British colonial government’s new-found eagerness to provide youth welfare – their security interests in the region. The creation of a viable non-Communist and pro-British self-governing Singapore required the insulation of Singapore’s youth from international Communism. The British were especially concerned about the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which had been increasingly active in Malaya and Singapore since the 1930s.¹⁷⁶ Before, during and after the Second World War, anti-colonial nationalism, Communism, and Chinese nationalism combined to drive many disenfranchised and politically disgruntled

¹⁷⁴ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005*, 242.

¹⁷⁵ Ho Chi Tim, “The origins, building, and impact of a social welfare state in late Colonial Singapore,” Unpublished PhD. dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ The best works on the origins of the MCP are C.F. Yong, “Origins and development of the Malayan Communist Movement, 1919-39,” *Modern Asian History* 25, no. 4 (1991), 625-648; C.F. Yong, *The Origin of Malayan Communism* (Singapore: South Seas Society 1997). On the rise of Communism in Singapore, see Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore, 1954-1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996); Lee Ting Hui, *The Communist Organization in Singapore: Its Techniques on Manpower Mobilization and Management, 1948-66* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976). See also David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore (1919-1932)* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Chinese youth studying in Chinese-medium schools into the MCP. After the war, the colonial authorities recognized the MCP as a legal party, in recognition of its contributions to the anti-Japanese resistance. With this officially sanctioned position, the MCP engaged in open anti-colonial agitation, while extending its influence in Malaya and Singapore through community and labour organizations and Chinese middle schools. The MCP benefitted too from the British authorities' decision to repeal many previous restrictions on labour unions and political freedoms between 1945 and 1948 to prepare Malaya and Singapore for self-rule. A famous writer Han Suyin then coined the period the "Malayan Spring" to describe that level of "political reform and cultural openness never before seen in the colony."¹⁷⁷ The MCP took advantage of this liberalization to exploit the grievances of Chinese students and workers. In early 1948, the MCP switched to a more militant posture and instigated waves of strikes and labour unrest. The trade union movement that had established itself in Singapore in the 1930s was already organizing Malaya-wide strikes for higher wages just before the war. But it was the dislocations of the war, coupled with the activities of the MCP, that really strengthened the movement. The number of unions climbed from 11 to 177 between 1946 and 1948.¹⁷⁸

Tensions between the MCP and the British colonial authorities finally spilled over when a small MCP cell based in Sungei Siput, Perak, in northern Malaya, murdered three European plantation owners. Scholars like Stockwell and Philip Deery who studied the Malayan Emergency agreed that the British misapprehended the extent of Chinese or Soviet Communist influence over

¹⁷⁷ Yao Souchou, *The Malayan Emergency: Essays on a Small, Distant War* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2016), 30.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Fernandez and Loh Kah Seng, "The Left-Wing Trade Unions in Singapore, 1945-1970," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore*, ed. Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 208-209.

the MCP. The Sungei Siput murders were the rash act of a careless group acting independently of the MCP's higher echelons.¹⁷⁹ Believing that the murders were the culmination of a Communist plot to overthrow the colonial government, the British colonial government declared a State of Emergency in Malaya and Singapore on 18 June 1948. The MCP was forced to run into the jungles of Malaya to start a guerrilla insurgency. The costly Malayan Emergency, as the conflict was termed, lasted twelve years (1948-1960).¹⁸⁰ The British ended the liberal climate in Malaya and Singapore and introduced the Emergency Regulations to put down the insurgency. These regulations comprised of a host of draconian measures, including a ban on seditious publications, prohibitions of meetings and associations, and preventive detention laws that gave the British the power to detain, deport and banish alleged and suspected subversives. Anti-colonial youth organizations and radical youth, in particular, bore the brunt of British surveillance and suppression. The Colonial Office was particularly concerned about the activities of overtly pro-Communist youth organizations like the Malaya New Democratic Youth League and the Anti-British League.¹⁸¹ They banned these groups as Communist front organizations.

Hence, the “youth turn” in colonial policy in Singapore was largely due to the politically expedient need to prevent the Communists from exploiting the socio-economic and political grievances of the mostly youthful population. Ho Chi Tim emphasizes that this context was central to understanding the British colonial government's “emphasis on youth welfare, on restarting

¹⁷⁹ A.J. Stockwell, “A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot to Overthrow Government in Malaya? The Origins of the Malayan Emergency,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (September 1993), 72-79.

Philip Deery, “Malaya, 1948: Britain's Asian Cold War?” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2009), 48.

¹⁸⁰ Stockwell, “The Origins of the Malayan Emergency,” 72-79.

¹⁸¹ On the activities of these two openly pro-Communist student and youth-led organizations, see Yeo Kim Wah, “Student Politics in University of Malaya, 1949-1951,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (September 1992), 346-380, and 叶钟铃 Ye Zhongling, 马来亚新民主青年团 *Malaya New Democratic Youth League, 1945-1948* (新加坡 Singapore: 新加坡当代历史研究社 Singapore Contemporary History Research Society, 2017).

schools, pre-war youth organizations, and establishing new youth clubs.”¹⁸² Earlier on, Tim Harper had similarly noted, in his magisterial study of British post-war state-building in Malaya, that the British saw the problems of youth delinquency and unemployment and the Communist menace as inter-linked – “emotional adolescents had to be kept busy; Communism fed on idleness.”¹⁸³ To British officials, idealistic and restless youth, as well as unemployed and angry youth, were easily seduced and manipulated by the MCP. The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency in 1948 only complicated the problem of youth for the colonial officials.

One of the returning colonial administration’s priorities was the provision of social welfare to address these interconnected problems and keep the young out of crime and the hands of the Communists. Recently, Ho has made important contributions towards tracing the emergence of the Singapore welfare state after the war, building on earlier pioneering work by “the Mother of Social Work” in Singapore, Ann Elizabeth Wee.¹⁸⁴ Upon replacing the Japanese military, the BMA immediately established social welfare committees made up of colonial officials and community leaders to create new institutions like people’s restaurants, and citizens’ advice bureaus to help refugees and displaced persons deal with post-war hardships.¹⁸⁵ It created children social centres, youth clubs, and other programs in community centres to assist malnourished children and

¹⁸² Ho, “The Origins, Building, and Impact of a Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore.”

¹⁸³ T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314.

¹⁸⁴ Ho, “The Origins, Building, and Impact of a Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore,” abstract. Ann E. Wee, *A Tiger Remembers: The Way We Were in Singapore* (Singapore: Ridge Books 2017). Ann E. Wee, “Where We are Coming From, Social and Welfare Interventions When Singapore was a British Colony,” in *Social Work in the Singapore Context*, 2nd ed., eds. Kalyani K. Mehta, Ann E. Wee (Singapore: Pearson, 2011); Ann Wee, “Social Work Education in Singapore,” in *Extending Frontiers: Social Issues and Social Work in Singapore*, eds. Tan Ngoh Tiong and Kalyani Mehta (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002). Wee came to Singapore in 1950 to marry her partner, a Singapore-born lawyer Harry Lee Wee (who became a prominent youth leader in the Singapore Youth Council discussed in Chapter Three). In 1952, Wee began teaching social work in the University of Malaya and became a social worker in the mid-1950s, starting a distinguished career as a social worker and academic up to her passing in December 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 241.

under-privileged youth.¹⁸⁶ These committees paved the way for the establishment of a Social Welfare Department in June 1946 and the Singapore Youth Council in 1948.¹⁸⁷ This was a dramatic transformation from the British's previous limited state approach towards social welfare, where the British government allocated minimal support towards social needs and the different communities relied on their own community organizations for social assistance.

This new emphasis on the welfare of children and youth was accompanied by research on the lives and experiences of the young in Singapore by Social Studies students and faculty in the newly established Social Studies Department in the University of Malaya established in 1948. These pioneering studies provide rich ethnographic data and vivid descriptions of the lives of some disenfranchised children and youth.¹⁸⁸ These researchers, youth workers, and their lecturers brought knowledge of modern childhood and adolescence into Singapore and became the academic experts who led the efforts to understand the young of Singapore so that they could be governed more effectively. The colonial government introduced the 1949 Young Persons Ordinance to both protect and police young people. The new Ordinance continued pre-war legislation pertaining to the policing of the youth morality and criminal behaviour – it established a juvenile court, a probation service and new approved schools and homes for the institutionalization of destitute or delinquent youth. Within the space of four years after returning to their colony, the previously indifferent colonial administration had become exceedingly youth conscious.

¹⁸⁶ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 329. See also Ho, "The Origins, Building, and Impact of a Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore" and Ho Chi Tim and Ann Wee, *Social Services* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies: Straits Times Press Pte Ltd, 2016).

¹⁸⁷ See Ho and Wee, *Social Services* for a brief overview of the development of social services and social welfare in Singapore.

¹⁸⁸ These studies and theses can be found in the holdings of the National University of Singapore library.

Training *Young Malaysians*

In addition to repressive measures targeted at subversive Communist activity and welfare programs to hinder Communist recruitment, the colonial authorities also engaged in a competition for the hearts and minds of the young. With the help of pro-colonial individuals, the British strove to create new colonial subjects through schooling their bodies and minds in Western values. These developments marked a shift from a colonial state that mainly took a punitive and carceral approach to problematic delinquent youth to one that proactively intervened in the everyday lives and activities of the young and tried to regulate their conduct en masse.

Youth entered public consciousness and official thinking not only as problems and anxieties, but also as future citizens. As Albert Lau wrote, the outbreak of the MCP's insurgency escalated the British's "simmering concerns about the island's ultimate political destiny." Furthermore, following the independence of Burma in 1946 and the Federation of Malaya in 1956, Singapore became Britain's only remaining colony in the region and only base where the British could operate to support its Cold War interests there.¹⁸⁹ Its increasing strategic importance, coupled with the prevalent beliefs that the colony lacked the necessary conditions to be independent, only made the British colonial authorities' more anxious about controlling Singapore's political development. Even as they committed to Singapore's eventual independence, they tried to ensure that power passed to local patriots who were non-Communist, or even better, anti-Communist and pro-British. Between 1947 and 1956, the colonial government tried to re-organize and expand schools to provide more educational opportunities to children of both sexes and all races, and to prepare them for self-government. Tim Harper noted the paternalism within

¹⁸⁹ Albert Lau, "Decolonization and the Cold War in Singapore, 1955-9," in *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, ed. Albert Lau (London: Routledge, 2012), 43-44.

this colonial project of “subtle social engineering” – the assumption was that the young had to “be suitably instructed towards their emancipation.”¹⁹⁰ By the 1950s, Singapore’s schools had become an essential component of the expanding Singapore disciplinary state meant to produce new “Young Malaysians.” The colonial authorities imagined these schools to be common spaces where children from the different races learned civic responsibilities and values and acquired a sense of unity through shared experiences. Singapore historian Sai Siew Min has shown how the British attempted to renovate the education system to socialize local youth in a ‘Malayan nationalism’ conceived “in terms of a culture of a responsible middle class, united by English education and the values it carried.”¹⁹¹ In her pithy characterization, education became “a privileged site for the making of the prototype Malayan citizen.”¹⁹² There was no doubt that Cold War concerns drove the British colonial official’s new-found eagerness to provide schooling for Singapore’s young. When James Griffith, the Secretary of State for the Colonies visited Singapore to open the first school completed under the colonial government’s Five-Year Special Plan introduced in 1950, he proclaimed education “an essential weapon in the worldwide battle against evil and disruptive forces in our society”, before applauding “the determined resolution with which the Emergency is being fought in the schools as well as in the jungle.”¹⁹³ Griffith’s proclamation underlined that the local project to train and produce young Malaysians was very much an enterprise connected to the global Cold War.

¹⁹⁰ Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 274-275, 311-313. See Chapters 7 and 8 in particular.

¹⁹¹ Sai Siew Min, “Educating Multicultural Citizens: Colonial Nationalism, Imperial Citizenship and Education in Late Colonial Singapore,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (February 2013): 49-73.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹³ Sai, “Colonial Nationalism, Imperial Citizenship and Education in Late Colonial Singapore.”

The Establishment of the Singapore Youth Council, April 1948

As the colonial government fought the MCP in the schools and in the jungle, it mobilized adults and youth in Singapore to support colonial agendas in the public sphere. In December 1947, the Youth Welfare sub-committee of the newly established Social Welfare Council held its first meeting.¹⁹⁴ The attendees included the colonial government's senior social welfare officials and leading English-educated middle-class professionals and community leaders like Reverend Canon R.K.S. Adams of the Anglican Church in Singapore (who was also the Chief Magistrate of the Juvenile Court). They unanimously agreed on the desirability of a community-driven youth council to "act as a liaison body between all Youth Organisations in Singapore, promoting their interests and providing executive machinery on occasions of combined activity." The attendees then agreed to consult leading youth organizations in the colony and ask them to form the nucleus of this new co-ordinating body.¹⁹⁵ These organizations became the founding members of the Singapore Youth Council in January 1948.¹⁹⁶ Beginning from the pioneering group of thirteen youth organizations in 1948, the SYC membership grew to twenty in 1951 and twenty-five in 1952. In 1959, its last year of existence, the Council reported a membership of 40,000 youth from thirty-six affiliated youth organizations.¹⁹⁷ This was a small number compared to the amount of youth in the colony—hence hinting that the SYC fell short of its objectives, something that became clear from 1955 onwards.

¹⁹⁴ See Ho and Wee, *Social Services* for the context behind the formation of the Social Welfare Council.

¹⁹⁵ The Malayan Air Training Corps representative was the first to broach the idea of forming a Youth Council. The Malayan Air Training Corps was set up by British armed forces stationed in Malaya and Singapore as a voluntary youth organization for all British citizens aged between 16 and 21. It trained youth in different aspects of aeronautics and navigation and provided recreation for boys of all races.

¹⁹⁶ Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the Social Welfare Advisory Council Sub-committee to discuss the formation of a Singapore Youth Council, held in the Secretary for Social Welfare Office, 7 January 1948, in NAS, CSO 584/48 "Proposal for a Youth Council."

¹⁹⁷ "Singapore Youth Council Eleventh Annual Report 29 March 1958 to 17 April 1959," in NAS, SWD 32/59.

At its first General Meeting, held on 14 April 1948 in a most symbolic venue – the Juvenile Court Room of the Supreme Court, the representatives of these organizations established the institutional definition of a legitimate youth organization. The dominance of middle-class English-educated adults and colonial government representatives in the SYC meant that their definition of youth organizations was based on norms that they were familiar with, as well as on their conservative political agenda. They agreed that youth organisations dealt principally with persons under twenty-one years of age.¹⁹⁸ More importantly, the representatives only recognized youth organizations that were organized on “a non-political basis.” Genuine youth organizations only conducted activities that promoted the moral, physical, recreational, developmental, and social interests and needs of youth. They eschewed any political or ideological activity that competed with the government’s prerogatives or agendas. These definitions confined the work of legitimate youth organizations to the domains of youth development, youth welfare, and youth recreation – now constructed as non-political and non-ideological domains. These decisions established a seemingly normative logic that the Singapore state continuously used to regulate the domains of social work and youth work in Singapore, demarcating these as arenas of state governance and regulation than as arenas of political and ideological contestation. The definitions of youth organizations the SYC established and institutionalized became the standards by which the Singapore disciplinary state policed youth organizations.

The stance that youth organizations in Singapore were to be non-political was itself a patently political decision. Privately, T. Eames Hughes, the Acting Secretary for Social Welfare, informed the Colonial Secretary in early February 1948 that he had succeeded in gathering a

¹⁹⁸ NAS, CSO 584/58, “Proposal for a Youth Council.”

number of youth organizations to form a Youth Council to serve as “a channel between youth organisations and the Government” and “an agency for recognising genuine youth organisations.”¹⁹⁹ Clearly, the SYC’s formation was meant to give the colonial government the ability to identify and support youth organizations they deemed legitimate and desirable, and to police and exclude others they deemed a menace to their agendas. This ability was salient considering the government’s need to work with the local communities to cater for youth welfare while preventing secret societies and left-wing organizations from recruiting displaced, disgruntled, and unemployed youth into their ranks. This underlines the perpetual conundrum for the Singapore disciplinary state in its approach to the management of youth, where the encouragement of youth civic participation engendered the risk of their subversion and mobilization by other competing forces.

The existence of many youth organizations that dedicated themselves to youth work, especially the youth chapters of religious organizations and uniformed youth movement of British origins, before the Second World War, is an under-studied facet of colonial society and social life in colonial Singapore that warrants further research.²⁰⁰ These were easily co-opted into the Singapore state’s emerging assemblage of disciplinary institutions for the young. Uniformed youth movements like the Boys’ Brigade, the Girl Guides, and the Boy Scouts Association had great influence in the SYC. These movements were started in Britain in the late 19th century to provide

¹⁹⁹ NAS, CSO 584/48 “Proposal for a Youth Council.”

²⁰⁰ Christina Jialin Wu has written the most about the imperial origins and objectives of the Boys Scouts and Girl Guides movement in Malaya. See Christina Jialin Wu, “A Life of Make-Believe: Being Boy Scouts and ‘Playing Indian’ in British Malaya (1910-1942),” *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014), 589-619; Christina Jialin Wu, “A Malayan Girlhood on Parade: Colonial Femininities, Transnational Mobilities and the Girl Guide Movement in British Malaya,” in *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Richard Jobs and David Pomfret (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 92-112.

adolescents “moral guidance and training to combat problematic behaviour.”²⁰¹ These uniformed youth movements spread to Singapore through British professionals, educators, and missionaries who came to Singapore between the two world wars. These individuals and organizations, and the Anglophone locals who joined them, became the colonial government’s allies in policing youth delinquency and in fostering loyalty towards the British.²⁰² One such local professional was Alumootil Mathai Cherian, an Indian lawyer. Cherian was Vice-President of the Boys Brigade in Singapore when he became a founder-member of the Singapore Youth Council; he became the Brigade’s President in 1956. He was decorated in 1955 with a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his contributions and leadership in youth work in the colony.²⁰³

Hence, the SYC and its member organizations represented a vital layer of trans-imperial influence on the disciplining and mobilization of youth in Singapore. From the onset, European expatriates, local Eurasians and Anglophone Chinese and Indians dominated the SYC’s first Management Committee. They included leaders of religious-based youth movements, local chapters of British uniformed youth movements, as well as representatives of the colonial Secretary for Social Welfare and the Director of Education.²⁰⁴ They saw themselves as the colonial government’s allies in catering to youth welfare and youth needs and in promoting British middle-

²⁰¹ Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 4.

²⁰² Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 237. See E. Kay Gillis’s work for accounts of the rise of civil society in colonial Singapore: *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005); “Civil Society and the Malay Education Council,” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore*, eds. Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 154-69.

²⁰³ NAS, Singapore Government Press Statement INFS. JL. 57/56 “Citations for the Presentation of Awards and Insignis by H.E. The Governor, Sir Robert Black at Government House, on Saturday, July 20, 1957.” See also Boys’ Brigade Singapore, *Underneath the Banner: The History of the Boys’ Brigade in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2013), 76.

²⁰⁴ NAS, CSO 584/48 “Proposal for a Youth Council.” Subsequently, when the University of Malaya and Nanyang University were established in Singapore in 1949 and 1956 respectively, the Vice-Chancellors of both universities also nominated their representatives onto the SYC’s Executive Committee.

class ideals of disciplined, healthy and civic-conscious youth. The existence of a sizable group of English-educated, Anglophone middle-class adults and youth movements that already embraced British ideas about youth guidance and social welfare explains why youth welfare work and youth services expanded quickly in Singapore after the war. Unlike community leaders during the Japanese Occupation who were most likely forced to work for the Japanese, either under the threat of retaliation or because they thought cooperation was necessary to keep their communities and themselves safe, local Anglophone professionals like Cherian were willing supporters of the colonial project to transmit desirable values and beliefs to local youth. This was especially since they imagined themselves to be the British's natural successors as leaders of a self-governing Singapore.

The SYC's formation thus signified the creation of a collaborative relationship between the Singapore colonial state and other elite and middle-class adults over the management of youth. Since 1819, British rule in Singapore had been maintained with the cooperation of local businessmen and local leaders of the different ethnic communities, though European colonial officers retained executive and decision-making authority. The British Governor appointed some of these as members of the Legislative Council or consulted them as "unofficials" representing the interests and concerns of their specific communities.²⁰⁵ What was new after 1945 was the extension of this colonial practice to the previously-neglected domain of youth policy and youth work.²⁰⁶ Tim Harper has comprehensively shown how British counter-insurgency efforts in Malaya and Singapore centered around "the creation of community" where the colonial authorities

²⁰⁵ See Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multi-racial Singapore 1867-1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991).

²⁰⁶ Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 358; Ho, "The Origins, Building, and Impact of A Social Welfare State in Late Colonial Singapore."

mobilized local nationalists, pro-colonialists, and other community leaders to collaborate with the British in social reconstruction and in combating Communism. Community development was necessary to eradicate existing social divisions and bind the different communities together through fostering “a shared allegiance, a common culture and the obligations of active citizenship.”²⁰⁷ Ngoei Wen-qing puts it in a different but equally illuminating way: the British recruited “anticommunist Malaysians desiring a hand in the country’s destiny” to support the British’s political designs and help defeat the MCP in order to safeguard their own wealth and status or to pursue their own political or personal aspirations.²⁰⁸ Youth welfare and development became a common (and seemingly apolitical and non-ideological) space and domain for adults and youth to participate in governance and social life, knowingly or unknowingly serving as both subjects and agents of disciplinary power. This has remained a dimension of state-youth relations and age-relations in Singapore ever since.

Some of the SYC’s other affiliates were created in the late 1940s and 1950s. The Salvation Army, which came to Singapore in the 1930s, already operated a few reformatory institutions for children and youth before the war. Subsequently, it started the Torchbearers Group Movement in 1948 to organize social activities, recreation, and classes so that “young men and women who are without friends and no place to spend their leisure hours” could “spend their leisure hours in a profitable manner.”²⁰⁹ The British Red Cross Society in Singapore started its Junior branch in 1952 to encourage civic-mindedness among school children. The Menorah Club was founded in 1959 as a similar kind of social group for Jewish youth. As a testament to the productive and

²⁰⁷ Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of British Malaya*, 358.

²⁰⁸ Ngoei Wen-qing, *Arc of Containment: Britain, The United States, and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019), 46.

²⁰⁹ *Singapore Free Press*, 4 September 1947.

reproductive nature of biopower, other individuals and groups in Singapore responded to the new spotlight on youth by creating new organizations and institutions to serve the aim of socializing and policing youth.

The SYC also included a new type of institution for youth introduced after the war: boys' clubs, youth clubs, and girls' clubs. These were modelled after the Boys' Clubs in Wales and England set up from the late 19th century onwards to address juvenile "delinquency", by providing supervised activities that occupied the time of working-class youth and instilled character and discipline.²¹⁰ The Singapore Colony Annual Report of 1956 reported a total of thirty-nine clubs in Singapore – thirteen Boys' Clubs, twenty-one Youth Clubs, and five Girls' Clubs.²¹¹ Unlike the boys' clubs in Britain, which were usually set up by police chiefs in their respective jurisdictions, the clubs in Singapore were established by adult community leaders, with representatives of the Commissioner of Police, Department of Education, and Social Welfare Department as advisors. For greater coordination and mutual support, the leading boys' clubs and girls' clubs also formed the Federation of Boys' Clubs and the Federation of Girls' Clubs in 1953 and 1956 respectively. The Boys' and Girls' Clubs movement joined the SYC and became another pro-state youth movement that targeted under-privileged disenfranchised youth. Of these boys clubs, girls clubs, and youth clubs, very little documentary evidence exists, save for some sparsely-filled folders in the National Archives of Singapore.²¹² From the few records available, we know that each boys' or girls' club provided a range of social, sports and recreational activities for a few hundred

²¹⁰ See Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside*. See also Tamara Myers, *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 109-110.

²¹¹ NAS, MSA 2796 304/56 "Colony Annual Report."

²¹² A folder titled "the Federation of Girls' Clubs" only contained misfiled Salvation Army documents.

underprivileged youth.²¹³ They functioned like the police-formed youth clubs formed for boys in North America about the same time to police children and youth.²¹⁴ The clubs' effectiveness depended on their individual management committees' commitment and competence. Inadequate or wavering leadership meant that clubs faded in and out of existence. Nonetheless, the subsequent PAP government integrated these clubs into its network of community organizations headquartered in the community centres in each major population district.

A Pro-Colonial Youth Movement – Growth and Expansion, 1948-1955

As mentioned earlier, the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency in June 1948 greatly intensified the British colonial government's anxieties about the Malayan Communist Party's influence over youth. This translated into greater efforts to manage the problem of youth in the colony. In August 1950, the colonial Social Welfare Department gave the SYC a grant to employ a full-time Secretary/Organiser. The SYC then moved into an office in the Chinese Secretariat in Havelock Road in September. Buoyed and bolstered, the SYC expanded its programs.



3. Youth Rally at the Padang in Singapore, 1951. Source: National Archives of Singapore

²¹³ NAS, ME 3822 2500/55 "Federation of Boy's Club 1955-1962."

²¹⁴ See Myers, *Youth Squad*, especially chapters Two and Four.

The SYC's fundamental purpose was to channel youth to youth organizations and activities that its pro-colonial leaders deemed legitimate and constructive. They mobilized their members to participate in state-organized public ceremonies and civic rituals that demonstrated youth support for the colonial government. These public rituals included City Day celebrations, installation ceremonies for new Singapore Governors, and local civic and sports functions. On the occasion of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in early 1953, the SYC organized a Coronation Route Youth March consisting of youth from nine uniformed youth movements and the Sea Cadets and School Cadets.²¹⁵ In another prominent instance, the SYC mobilized about 10,000 young people to attend a Youth Rally for the Duke of Edinburgh's visit in November 1956. However, the rally was cancelled due to protests and strikes organized by Chinese middle-school students and left-wing trade unions elsewhere. The SYC portrayed the disturbances as "disappointing for the youth of Singapore" even though a great number of Chinese youth were participants in these demonstrations.²¹⁶ This note in the SYC's ninth annual report underlines its position as the political and ideological counterfoils to the anti-colonial youth movements and student movements. It also highlights the emergence of the politics of youth representation in Singapore, where the ability to garner and claim youth support became vital to the political and moral legitimacy of the Singapore government(s) and any other aspiring socio-political movement in Singapore. Groups competing for socio-political power sought to portray themselves as leaders, stewards, and representatives of the young. Correspondingly, youth movements and organizations that supported the colonial government in youth work gained access to tangible and intangible resources, such as funding, training opportunities, and state patronage.

²¹⁵ "Sixth Annual Report 1 February 1953 to 9 March 1954," in NAS, ME 3915 EDUN 194/53 "Singapore Youth Council."

²¹⁶ "Singapore Youth Council Ninth Annual Report – 5 April 1956 to 12 July 1957," in NAS, EDUN 194/53 "Singapore Youth Council."

The SYC also organized youth rallies – usually complete with parades of youth organizations and youth displays – to publicize the government and the Council’s programs for the young in Singapore. In 1950, the Department of Education invited the SYC to co-organize annual Education Weeks – week-long exhibitions and activities to inform the public about the colonial government’s educational policies and programmes. In the very first Education Week in 1950, 500 members of the SYC’s affiliated organisations participated in a Youth Rally and March Past before the Governor of Singapore.²¹⁷ The SYC then organized their own Youth Week in late February 1952 to raise greater public awareness of the SYC’s member organizations and their activities.²¹⁸ These efforts aimed at fostering support for the colonial government’s new educational policies and at persuading Singapore’s young and their parents that the colonial government now considered the welfare and education of youth its priority.²¹⁹ Addressing the “Youth of Singapore” at the Youth Rally, Governor Franklin Gimson pledged that the “Government must do all in its power to see that the capacities of youth are developed and its aspirations and hopes constructively fulfilled within our society.”²²⁰ This was a clear departure from the pre-World War state of affairs. The significance of Gimson’s words lay in his acknowledgement of a new political rationality in Singapore, where the Singapore government placed the aspirations of the young center-stage and used the best interests of the young as justification for increasing their ability to scrutinize and shape their lives.

²¹⁷ NAS, EDUN 227-48 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²¹⁸ NAS, SWD 386/51 “The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of “Singapore Youth Council” Vol. 3” – SWD 386/51. See also *Straits Times* 13 October 1951.

²¹⁹ On a more recent examination of the British colonial government’s evolving attitudes towards the provision of education in Singapore, see Kevin Blackburn, *Education, Industrialization and the End of Empire in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

²²⁰ *The Sunday Times*, 2 March 1952 “1,200 Youngsters on Parade: Robot Drill thrills crowd.”

Gimson also used these public assemblies of youth to exhort his audience to participate in the building of a modern, prosperous and peaceful colony, in order to safeguard their own futures.²²¹ However, the colonial government's preferred models for the future leaders of the colony were Anglicized, pro-British youth. They mainly relied on the Anglophone youth from the SYC's member organizations as the embodiment of new ideal youth. This created mixed repercussions for its objectives of rallying the local populace and local youth behind its new policies. It excited these Anglophone youth and convinced them of their position in the colony. However, the Education Weeks further convinced the youth from the vernacular schools that the colonial government sought to produce docile, pro-British youth, and to promote English-medium education at the expense of vernacular education. This was especially when these colonial officials and adults framed youth leadership and citizenship in terms of a disciplined and deferred agency, where the young were to subordinate themselves to adult tutelage and exercise agency in cooperation with adults. Nonetheless, these public spectacles of youth represented grand efforts to deploy youthful bodies for disciplinary purposes – to reproduce images of ideal youth who were incorporated into the colonial state, instead of being outside of, or in opposition to it.

The SYC, the Empire Youth Movement, and the World Assembly of Youth

During this period, the SYC was plugged into different trans-imperial and international youth movements that served different imperial, Cold War, and global humanitarian agendas. As the colonial government's official partner, the SYC was responsible for the nomination of candidates for international conferences, gatherings, or youth exchange programs. This gave the

²²¹ *The Straits Times*, 1 March 1952 "Now Youth is At the Helm."

Singapore governments and their allies influence over the selection of the delegates.²²² These opportunities became incentives for youth organizations in Singapore to affiliate themselves with the SYC. Through these avenues, youth workers and youth leaders travelled to share ideas, practices, and experiences and gained access to a substantial amount of ideas and resources with which to further youth developmental work in Singapore. They also located themselves as members of a global community of youth workers and leaders and gained greater visibility and social currency for their work.

The United Nations became a key player in the rise of global youth consciousness; one of its immediate priorities was the welfare of children and youth across the world, especially those the war displaced. The UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) started youth welfare seminars. The first UN Youth Welfare Seminar in Shimla, India, in 1951, catalyzed key developments in youth work in Singapore. Leslie Rayner, the SYC Vice-President then, reported that the seminar taught him “many new things” and gave him “new ideas on Youth Welfare work in Singapore.” These informed his recommendations to Governor Gimson in late 1951, when the latter consulted him for suggestions on improving youth work in the Colony.²²³ Due to Rayner’s recommendations, the Social Welfare Department’s Youth Services Section was created to support the growth of youth organizations.²²⁴ In particular, Rayner was convinced of the need for more youth leaders.²²⁵ He emphasized this on numerous occasions, privately to the

²²² NAS, SWD 386/51 “The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of “Singapore Youth Council” Vol. 3.”

²²³ NAS, SWD 386/51 “The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of “Singapore Youth Council” Vol. 3.”

²²⁴ Minute by H.E. The Governor, 22. Nov 1951, CSO 584/48. Correspondence between Leslie Rayner and Gimson, as well as the response of the Social Welfare Department to Rayner’s feedback can be found in this folder.

²²⁵ NAS, SWD 386/51 “The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of “Singapore Youth Council” Vol. 3.”

Governor of Singapore, and publicly in the English-language press.²²⁶ According, the colonial state supported and sponsored more programs to train and produce youth leaders.

Given that “youth leaders” and “youth leadership” have become seemingly natural categories in public discourse in Singapore today, it is useful to de-stabilize these categories and reveal how these were deeply implicated within the cultural politics of youth in Singapore since the 1950s. The training of youth leaders was part of British plans to provide tutelage for Singapore’s youth to produce good (anti-Communist) citizens with moral fibre, good character, and civic-consciousness, so as to prepare them for the eventual transfer of power from the colonial government to a local government. Subsequently, the colonial government and their allies continuously endeavoured to nurture youth leaders to support programs and institutions for the schooling of youth, for instance by helping to organize legitimate youth activities or administer institutions like the youth clubs. They became the counterfoils to the other categories of youth such as the protestor, the gangster, or the delinquent. Instead of leading other youth to protest in the streets, these youth leaders would become the role models who instilled the desired ideal values and qualities in Singapore’s youth.

The Empire Youth Movement (EYM) was the second trans-imperial youth movement to which the SYC connected Singapore’s youth. This was an Empire-wide movement started by imperialists in the UK and Canada. Christina Wu, in her recent article on the EYM, describes how the Movement was born in 1937 out of these imperialists’ desire to socialize “impressionable youth of different territories within the British sphere of influence” with positive ideas about the British

²²⁶ *Sunday Standard*, 21 October 1951, “Youth’s 3 Great Needs: Organisation, Leaders, Money.”

Empire and the Commonwealth.²²⁷ By 1942, the Movement had grown so large that an Empire Youth Sunday Committee of Great Britain and Ireland was formed to coordinate the commemorations in the UK and in Britain's overseas dominions, territories and colonies. This Committee sent out each year's Empire Youth Sunday Messages – from King George before 1953 and from Queen Elizabeth II after her ascension to the Crown in 1953 – to the respective Governors-General and Governors for dissemination in their respective jurisdictions.

In 1950, Singapore joined other British colonial possessions or former colonies like Canada, Australia, and South Africa in commemorating Empire Youth Sunday.²²⁸ At the behest of Governor Gimson, the SYC became the coordinator of each year's Empire Youth Sunday commemoration in Singapore up to 1956. In May each year, the SYC mobilized its affiliates to hold commemorative services and meetings at English-medium schools and their places of worship. At these commemorations, these mostly youth re-affirmed their loyalty to the Queen and to the Colony.²²⁹ After the observances, the Public Relations Office then released the Queen's Message to the public through the press and Radio Malaya. The SYC leadership observed Empire Youth Sunday with great enthusiasm. They submitted reports of Singapore's Empire Youth Sunday commemoration each year and were pleased when the Empire Youth Sunday Committee

²²⁷ Christina Wu Jialin, "First Unto God and then to the Queen": Frederick Ney's Empire/Commonwealth Youth Movement from the Inter-war Period to the 1960s," *Etudes canadiennes/Canadian Studies*, no. 75 (December 2013), 33-48.

²²⁸ Even before the EYM reached Singapore, local youth in the English-medium schools and in the uniformed youth movements of British origins had already, on occasion, been called upon to participate in trans-imperial commemorations of Empire. One annual event was Empire Day, inaugurated in 1902 after the death of Queen Victoria, to "remind children that they formed part of the British Empire" and to "promote the systematic training of children in all virtues which conduce to the creation of good citizens." The substantial number of English-medium schools and size of the Anglophone community in Singapore meant that Empire Day was quickly embraced. See Ben Johnson, "Empire Day", *Historic UK: The History and Heritage Accommodation Guide*, (<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Empire-Day/>).

²²⁹ NAS, PRO 100/54 "Empire Youth Sunday – 30 May 1954."

in England highlighted the SYC's contributions to the Empire-wide Empire Youth Sunday celebrations in 1951 and 1952.²³⁰ To ensure that the Empire Youth Sunday movement reached out to the other non-Anglophone communities, the SYC translated each year's Empire Youth Sunday Message into Chinese, Malay, and Tamil for reading at Empire Youth Sunday services held in the different places of worship. The SYC reported that, in 1952, "no fewer than thirty-eight services were held in Temples, Mosques, Synagogues and Churches in all parts of the Island."²³¹ There is no evidence or record, however, of how the non-Anglophone and non-Christian youth from the other communities responded to these services.

The Singapore colonial government and its allies used the EYM to encourage Singapore's youth to identify with a multicultural and multiracial yet cohesive colony and with the British Empire. The movement asked local children and youth to identify with a trans-imperial British world united by their shared British heritage and culture. The Queen's Message read out on Empire Youth Sunday on 25 May 1952 emphasized how she was "strengthened by the knowledge that [she had] the loyal support of the young people of many lands, differing in colour, race and creed, but one in the membership of our great Family of Nations, with its traditions of brotherhood, chivalry and service."²³² The emphasis on affinity and unity throughout the Commonwealth was a central theme in British propaganda efforts. Using the metaphor of a family of nations, the British promoted the idea that it was natural and desirable for former colonies to remain friendly with the

²³⁰ Minutes of the Singapore Youth Council Committee Meeting, 10 June 1952 at the Council's Offices, Havelock Road, in NAS, SWD 386/51, "The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of "Singapore Youth Council" Vol. 3."

²³¹ "Annual Report of the SYC 1 April 1951 to 31 March 1952," in NAS, EDUN 227-48 "Singapore Youth Council."

²³² "Following Message on Empire Youth Sunday on 25 May 1952 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II", 1 May 1952, Public Relations, Singapore, Press Statement, NY. 52/1" in NAS, SWD 386/51 "The Singapore Youth Council: Minutes of Meeting of "Singapore Youth Council" Vol. 3."

former colonial metropole even after formal independence. Or as Gimson's replacement as Governor, John Nicoll, emphasized in his 1955 Empire Day broadcast over Radio Malaya, the Commonwealth of nations was like a family united by their common values and identities – British values of course – and their loyalty was “not weakened when members leave it to go their separate ways.” The spectre of the Cold War was never far away beneath this commitment to multicultural unity. Nicoll emphasized that Singapore's children and youth should become exemplary role models who reproduced in others the belief that “the way of life [they] follow is a happy and free one.”²³³ Borrowing Margaret Peacock's apt metaphor, Singapore's children and youth had become “innocent weapons” in the colonial government's struggle against Communism in Singapore.²³⁴ Nicoll's message was of course at odds with the questions that anti-colonial movements worldwide and in Singapore were asking of colonial rule.

Youth development and youth leadership training became a platform for cultural diplomacy, and the British government continued to be extremely supportive of the educational travel of youth leaders from Malaya and Singapore to the UK.²³⁵ As Christina Wu has observed using the case of the Empire Youth Movement, colonial officials promoted educational travel “as the main method of moulding and solidifying the relationship between metropolitan Britain and the Empire.”²³⁶ In 1952, three men and two women represented Singapore at the International Youth Camp held at Chigwell, England, in July, organized by the British National Committee of the WAY. There, they met young people from other parts of the world and hoisted the Singapore

²³³ NAS, EDUN 227-48 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²³⁴ Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

²³⁵ “Circular No. 122 from S.C. Wong, Organising Secretary, SYC to All Secretaries of Member Organisations, 12 May 1953” in NAS, ME3915 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²³⁶ Wu, “Frederick Ney's Empire/Commonwealth Youth Movement from the Inter-war Period to the 1960s”, 37.

Youth Council flag for the first time.²³⁷ The same year, in 1952, the government sponsored Tan Huat Keng, then a senior leader of the SYC and Boys' Clubs movement in Singapore, to attend a Youth Leadership Training diploma course in Swansea University in the United Kingdom. Tan became a key figure in the exchange of experts in youth work between the UK and Singapore, and in the early organization of youth leadership training in Singapore. He also arranged for his lecturer, T.G. Jeffreys Jones, to come to Singapore in 1955, where he conducted a ten weeks' youth leadership training course and advised the Singapore government's Social Welfare Department on various aspects of running and funding youth clubs and organizations.²³⁸ Singapore's involvement in the EYM and international youth exchanges demonstrates that the development of youth work and youth organizations in Singapore was part of a trans-imperial story of youth mobilization in the 1950s as the British and its Cold War allies sought to mould youth subjectivity on a global scale.

Singapore and the Cold War: The World Assembly of Youth

Singapore's growing reputation as a center of youth work influenced its selection as the venue of the first-ever World Assembly of Youth held in Asia. The WAY was an international youth organization found in 1949 by several Western states and their colonies, including Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. Its official objective, according to its Charter, was to support state-recognized national voluntary youth organisations in countries around the world to achieve "the true satisfaction of youth's needs and the fulfilment of youth's possibilities."²³⁹ The WAY was hardly politically and ideologically neutral; it was meant to be the counter-foil to the

²³⁷ "Annual Report of the SYC 1 April 1951 to 31 March 1952 in, NAS, EDUN 227-48 "Singapore Youth Council."

²³⁸ *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1955.

²³⁹ "WAY Charter," in NAS, EDUN 227-48 "Singapore Youth Council."

World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), which was founded in London in 1945 as an anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, left-wing international youth movement. Chris Sutton has analyzed how and why British colonial planners saw “the youth race” as a “a vital battleground” in the cultural Cold War.²⁴⁰ He traced the beginnings of an “international cultural Cold War over the hearts and minds of the world’s youth” to the formation of World Youth Council in 1942. Then, the Twelfth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern resolved to extend its youth front to embrace non-communist youth organizations.²⁴¹ The subsequent organization of a Southeast Asia Youth Conference in Calcutta, India, on 19 February 1948 with Soviet encouragement made British politicians and colonial officials fear that the Soviet Union was using Communist front youth organizations in the Asian colonies to instigate anti-colonialism.²⁴² The WAY, according to Sutton, was “Britain’s first covert front organization” in its efforts to win this global struggle for the loyalties of youth.²⁴³

That the first General Assembly of the WAY in 1951 was held in New York was no coincidence. The organizers recruited youth organizations and volunteers in the United States to bring the four hundred delegates to tours and excursions to fifteen American states and forty-one towns. There they visited trade unions, youth organizations, hospitals, and observed American leisure and recreation programmes. According to Maurice Sauve, the Canadian President of WAY, the General Assembly’s program was designed to allow the delegates to “gain a better understanding of the American way of life, their methods of government, education, industrial and

²⁴⁰ Chris Sutton, “Britain, Empire and the Origins of the Cold War Youth Race,” *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 2 (2016), 225.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 227.

commercial organisations and the work of the youth organisations”, and to strengthen the “the solidarity of the democratic nations.”²⁴⁴ British officials like Malcom MacDonald, the Commissioner-General of the United Kingdom to Southeast Asia, greatly supported the SYC’s participation in WAY activities. They believed it worthwhile to “to ensure that colonial youth movements are associated with an organisation which will be genuinely concerned with the well-being of youth and are not unnecessarily exposed to infection with the virus of communism.”²⁴⁵ These remarks underline how British officials constructed a dichotomy between Communist youth movements and genuine organizations concerned about youth welfare. The first General Assembly of the WAY in Asia was thus held in Singapore, with three hundred and fifty delegates and observers representing fifty-seven countries.²⁴⁶ That Singapore both offered to, and was chosen as the host of the very next General Assembly, and the very first General Assembly to be hosted in Asia, evinces that Singapore was seen to be a significant location in the global struggle for the hearts and minds of youth. Within the context of the global Cold War Youth Race, Western governments were only too keen to support the exchange and travel of youth leaders so that they could become the disciplinary agents to socialize youth in the developing countries in their values and ways of life.

Declining Relevance, 1955-1959

Between 1948 and 1954, the SYC grew without duress or competition. The colonial authorities had banned anti-colonial and left-wing groups. As Singapore historians Albert Lau and

²⁴⁴ *WAY Forum: Revue of the World Assembly of Youth June 1951, N 2 Vol. II.* Archived In NAS, EDUN 227-48 – “Singapore Youth Council.”

²⁴⁵ NAS, EDUN 227-48 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²⁴⁶ “Seventh Annual Report (15 March 1954 to 31 March 1955),” in NAS, ME 3915 EDUN 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council.”

Yeo Kim Wah have noted, the English-educated group's enthusiastic collaboration with British plans to incrementally transfer power to a group of locals the British could trust "masked a strong undercurrent of discontent in colonial Singapore."²⁴⁷ This observation is relevant for the SYC as well. In mobilizing many pro-colonial youth organizations and Anglophone youth, the SYC's growth gave the colonial officials and their Anglophone allies the false impression that their policies drew substantial support. With misplaced confidence, they mobilized the SYC's members to endorse British plans for Singapore's political development.

In 1953, on the back of the success of the British colonial government's counterinsurgency and anti-Communists efforts, the Colonial Office moved towards self-government for Singapore to further reduce the appeal of the MCP's propaganda. The British government appointed Sir George Rendel to head a commission to create a new constitution "to enable Singapore to develop as a self-contained and autonomous unit in any larger organization with which it may ultimately become associated."²⁴⁸ To encourage political awareness in preparation for self-government, the colonial government eased the restrictions against assembly and political debate. This created the space for the re-eruption of anti-colonial animosity fomenting for the past five years beneath the seeming calm maintained by the Emergency Regulations.²⁴⁹ Youth again etched themselves into public consciousness when groups of Chinese youth associated with the Chinese-medium schools and trade union movements sustained a series of highly visible protest movements across the 1950s.

²⁴⁷ Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau, "From Colonialism to Independence, 1945-1965," in *A History of Singapore*, 127.

²⁴⁸ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 244.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

When the colonial government introduced a National Service Bill requiring selected students to join the local defence force, the students in the Chinese middle schools could not be any more hostile to the idea of having their studies disrupted for the sake of defending the colonial masters. On 13 May 1954, the students' peaceful protest march on the streets of Singapore degenerated into violent clashes with the police. The students then locked themselves in two Chinese-medium schools, the Chung Cheng High School and the Chinese High School, to protest police brutality. In the wake of the May 13 demonstrations, the colonial government passed a School Registration Amendment Ordinance that enabled them to close schools on the grounds of subversion. The government also tried to assert greater influence on the Chinese school boards and school curriculum through the offers of conditional grants. These measures further fuelled the resentment of the Chinese community and the Chinese middle school students, who perceived these as further attempts to marginalize Chinese education. The latter formed the Singapore Chinese Middle Schools Students' Union (SCMSSU) to coordinate the continued agitation against the National Service Bill and the colonial government's attempts to marginalize Chinese education, language, and culture. The SCMSSU became the focal point of the alliance between workers and Chinese school students, which successive Singapore governments perceived as a "communist united front".

The eventual 1955 Rendel Constitution elections took place within this heightened atmosphere of youth protest and dissent. The British government's original hope was that the Singapore Progressive Party, consisting of conservative pro-British local politicians, would win the elections. This did not come to pass. Angry and disgruntled working-class Chinese, now enfranchised by the new Constitution, turned up in substantial numbers to vote. They rejected the

Singapore Progressive Party and the Democratic Party that represented elite English-educated professionals and the Chinese commercial elite. Instead, they elected stridently anti-colonial, left-leaning socialist parties: the Labour Front and the People's Action Party. The Labour Front, founded in July 1954 by trade unionist Lim Yew Hock, schoolteacher Francis Thomas and other socialist-minded professionals and led by a prominent Jewish lawyer David Marshall, became the leaders of a coalition government. The PAP, which won three out of the four seats it contested, became an opposition party in the Legislative Assembly. The Rendel Constitution elections thus heralded the rise of anti-colonial left-wing parties in Singapore.

The 1955 elections also provided the stage for the two major youth movements in 1950s Singapore to pursue their agendas in starkly contrasting ways. The SYC member organizations mobilized their members as volunteers to help in the elections. They asked these youth to vote if they were above the age of twenty-one or bring the voter registration forms to their parents or older friends if they were under the voting age.²⁵⁰ Meanwhile, nearly 10,000 Chinese middle school students staged a strike and boycotted classes on the eve of the elections. The protests did not abate with the election of anti-colonial left-wing parties. The newly elected Labour Front government found itself confronting the Chinese school students' escalating militancy. In May 1955, an industrial dispute over better working conditions at the Hock Lee Bus Company developed into a strike. Leaders of the trade unions mobilized Chinese middle school students to support the strikers. The strike escalated into open clashes between trade unions, students, and the police. The Labour Front government was forced to declare a curfew and deploy British military troops to restore order. During the clashes, the police shot a sixteen-year-old student. The government's arrest of

²⁵⁰ The *Straits Times*, 8 May 1952, "Youth to Aid in Voters' Registration."

students and threat to close schools involved in the strikes only provoked more strikes and sit-ins. Yet, David Marshall sympathized with the students and refused to repress the protests.²⁵¹

The results of the Rendel Constitution elections laid bare the SYC's failure to appeal to most of the youth in Singapore. They alerted the British colonial authorities and their allies to the actual fragility of their position. Marshall's refusal to come down hard on striking labour unions and Chinese school students during the Hock Lee Bus Riots of May 1955 only deepened the British government's view of the vulnerability of Marshall's government. Hence, when Marshall pushed for immediate unrestricted internal self-government for Singapore by April 1957, the British refused. Marshall resigned after the failure of this first round of constitutional talks on Singapore's future.

Marshall's successor Lim Yew Hock proved himself more determined in clamping down on left-wing movements and combating Communist subversion. When the Chinese-medium schools' students and trade unions launched another series of boycotts and demonstrations in August and September 1956, Lim dissolved seven communist-front organizations, including the SCMSSU, closed two Chinese schools and expelled 142 students. These actions provoked another large protest sit-in at six Chinese schools and rioting in parts of Singapore, which resulted in fifteen fatalities and more than one hundred casualties. These riots forced the implementation of curfew in Singapore for two days while police and troops rushed from the Federation of Malaya to help put down the disturbances. Lim's willingness to take hard action against the left-wing movement won him British's favour. The second all-party delegation to London in March 1957 succeeded in

²⁵¹ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 263.

acquiring Whitehall's agreement to grant Singapore self-government in two years. In return, the Lim Yew Hock government accepted the constitutional terms that Marshall had rejected and agreed to the creation of a seven-member Internal Security Council.²⁵² Lim's repression of student protest and labour strikes is already a familiar story within Singapore historiography. Less attention has been given to his concomitant efforts to expand existing programmes to channel youth into more constructive activities and produce new law-abiding future citizens within the climate of increasing youth radicalism in the mid-1950s. These efforts will be discussed in the next chapter.

Amidst the unrest, the Empire Youth Movement changed its name to the Commonwealth Youth Movement in 1957. It was Singapore, a small colony in a far-flung part of the British Empire, that catalysed this change. After newly appointed Governor of Singapore Robert Black received the text of the Empire Youth Sunday message from London, Black asked if Singapore could re-designate Empire Youth Sunday to Commonwealth Youth Sunday and alter the text of the Queen's Empire Day Message accordingly.²⁵³ In his mind, the commemoration of empire was incommensurate with the political temper in the colony. Black knew that participation in trans-imperial youth movements like the Empire Youth Movement and Empire Youth Sunday was no longer politically palatable, even as imperialists elsewhere held on to such visions. In February 1957, Major F.J. Ney, the Canadian founder of the Empire Youth Sunday Movement, tried to organize an Empire Quest, an empire-wide youth exchange program where he brought young people from Canada, Aden, Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Singapore and the Federation of Malaya for a

²⁵² Ibid., 265-266.

²⁵³ National Archives (UK), CO 859/673 "Empire Youth Sunday." "Empire Day" had also been changed to "Commonwealth Day" in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya earlier that year.

tour of the United Kingdom. The Singapore government rebuffed Ney's invitation without hesitation. G.W. Davis, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, pointed out to his colleagues that Major Ney's Quests were "completely misconceived for this part of the World." No Singapore Minister could have "the courage to support this in the Assembly or in his Party even if he felt the cause was good in itself." By 1956, the British governor of Singapore and the colonial government believed that the half of Singapore's population that was under 21 years of age and below the voting age were the "most susceptible to political leadership and the most amenable tools in the hands of frustrated politicians." Hence, it was necessary to help these politicians increase "their appeal to the ever-increasing younger generation."²⁵⁴ These colonial officials realized they had to help the right local leadership win the loyalties of the young, or at the very least tame youth dissent, if they were to succeed in insulating Singapore from Communism. Governor Black's reply to Ney conveyed his recognition that the promise of assistance in modernization and development was a more attractive carrot for Singapore's youthful population than antiquated appeals to imperial loyalties and sentiments that no longer existed among the majority of Singapore's youth:

I think that the average Asian youth would consider that there is too much emphasis on cathedrals and castles in these quests. These young people are only too ready to think of England as an old country living on her past, and visits to aeroplane factories, oil refineries and atomic power stations would impress and interest them far more.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Colonial Office Memorandum, 24 August 1956, FO 1091/44, cited in Albert Lau, "Decolonization and the Cold War in Singapore, 1955-9," in *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, ed. Albert Lau (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 53.

²⁵⁵ The Quests were a series of annual tours organized by the Empire Youth Movement to foster loyalty to the Commonwealth and the British Crown among young people across the British Empire. The first Quest took place in the summer of 1953, at the same time as the Empire Youth Movement, when a group of over 170 young Canadians went to the United Kingdom to attend the Queen's Coronation. The second Quest in 1954 saw the participants attend the British Empire games in Canada as spectators.

Clearly, Black realized what Major Frederik Ney had not – that the colonial order was giving way to a new self-governing country based on the interests and aspirations of local youth. He also recognized that a more effective way of reaching the hearts and minds of the young and drawing them into the invisible tentacles of biopower was through appealing to their sense of self and aspirations, and not through more obviously coercive measures.

The Festival of Youth of 1956

In the face of ascendent left-wing youth movements in 1955-56, the colonial government and the SYC intensified their efforts to reach out to the young. In 1956, the SYC expanded Youth Week into a Festival of Youth. The Festival's program was similar to that of the previous years' Youth Weeks or Education Weeks, but on a grander scale. It consisted of an exhibition of SYC's youth work, a Talent-time Contest, an Arts and Craft Contest, an Oratorical Contest, and a Youth Rally. At the Youth Rally, English-educated youth presented themselves for the inspection of the British Governor, saluted the Union Jack, and sung "God Save the Queen." The Festival of Youth, by presenting a spectacle of orderly youth paying homage to the colonial government, presented a stark contrast to the scenes of youth unrest that dominated the youthscape of mid-1950s Singapore.

At the Festival of Youth, government officials and SYC leaders continued to emphasize the importance of the successful socialization and mobilization of Singapore's youthful population to the future of self-governing Singapore. In his speech, Governor Black reiterated that the youthfulness of Singapore's population made "the training in democratic ways and leadership a matter of urgent concern for us all."²⁵⁶ In other words, Singapore's youth had to be trained for self-

²⁵⁶ "Message from the Governor R.B. Black 4 April 1956," *Festival of Youth Souvenir Program*, 3.

government. Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock tried to convince youth to embrace a new brand of multicultural nationalism based on “the spirit of mutual understanding and friendly co-operation.”²⁵⁷ Like Black, Lim saw the schooling of youth as the antidote to the disunity and divisions in the colony. The SYC’s activities and programs were seen in this light to possess a critical pedagogical function – to enable youth from all races, religions, and social backgrounds to “meet for social service, self-education, and the *voluntary discipline* of democratic groups (emphasis mine).”²⁵⁸ Clearly, Lim’s vision of a democratic self-governing country required young people’s adherence to a regime of rules and norms designed to preserve the existing socio-political order.



4. 1956 Festival of Youth. Source: National Archives of Singapore

For this Festival of Youth, the SYC made another foray into publishing a magazine. *Youth* was meant to serve as “a useful record of youth activities in Singapore” that would “stimulate thought regarding local social problem [sic].”²⁵⁹ This was the SYC’s second attempt at publishing

²⁵⁷ NAS, SWD 48/56 “Singapore Festival of Youth.”

²⁵⁸ “Message from the Governor R.B. Black 4 April 1956,” *Festival of Youth Souvenir Program*, 3.

²⁵⁹ NAS, MSA 2796 298/56 “Youth Magazine.”

an English-language magazine for youth. It followed an unsuccessful attempt in 1953 to publish a newsletter, *Youth World*, to serve as “the medium of expression for Singapore Youth” and to “provide a meeting ground common to all and where Youth of this country can present their ideas and views for a better Malaya.”²⁶⁰ The SYC published the inaugural issue during Coronation Week in June 1953 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth’s ascension to the British throne.²⁶¹ *Youth World*, produced only in English, was not particularly successful. The magazine only reached about 4,000 odd readers and subscribers – a dismal fraction of the 35,000 members the SYC purportedly had.²⁶² The paper’s production was subsequently suspended in late 1954, after eight issues.²⁶³ The few issues and pages of *Youth World* that could be located in the National Archives of Singapore and the Singapore National Library show that their contents were oriented towards keeping youth abreast of developments in the youth scene in Singapore, of the World Assembly of Youth, and of matters affecting youth in Malaya and other parts of the world.²⁶⁴ It was also a mouthpiece for adult state officials to disseminate political messages. Writing in the September 1955 issue of *Youth World*, in the midst of escalating youth unrest, newly-elected Chief Minister David Marshall warned the colony’s youth that “their impatience and impetuosity might create havoc despite their basic idealism.”²⁶⁵ Like the political leaders who succeeded him, Marshall saw both advantages and dangers in Singapore’s youthful demographic realities. On the one hand, the idealism of youth

²⁶⁰ “Sixth Annual Report 1 February 1953 to 9 March 1954,” in NAS, ME 3915 EDUN 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²⁶¹ Its inspiration was an English-language youth periodical *Young Malaysians* produced by an educationist Richard Sidney in the Federation of Malaya between 1949 and the 1970s. On the *Young Malaysians* and other magazines and periodicals for children and youth in Singapore and Malaya during this period, see a recent collection of essays: Xu Lanjun and Li Lidan, eds. *Constructing Nanyang Children: Studies of Chinese Children’s Publications in Post-War Singapore and Malaya* (Singapore: World Scientific Global Publishing, 2016).

²⁶² NAS, ME3915 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²⁶³ “Sixth Annual Report 1 February 1953 to 9 March 1954,” NAS, EDUN 194/53 “Singapore Youth Council.”

²⁶⁴ Two issues of *Youth World*, namely Vol. 1 no. 9 (May 1954) and Vol.2 no. 5 (October 1954), can be found in the Singapore National Library’s Publications SG collection.

²⁶⁵ Singapore Youth Council, *Youth World*, Vol. 2 no. 8, September 1955, 1.

provided “the driving force of progressive evolution” for the colony, like it did for many decolonizing countries around the world. On the other hand, their impatience and impetuosity, without being “disciplined by experience” and an “effectively large adult population to be an efficient shock-absorber”, risked throwing the colony into un-salvageable chaos. This was an embryonic statement of the Singapore post-colonial state’s dualistic approach towards youth idealism in Singapore – concomitantly encouraging youth idealism while scrutinizing and regulating of it.

The contributors of *Youth* in 1956 sought to transmit similar messages. The magazine took the form of a collection of essays and reports by prominent politicians and leaders of youth organizations. As a source, *Youth* lays clear how its middle-class and elite adult authors conceived of Singapore’s youth and their relationship to Singapore’s future during a pivotal moment. They depicted Singapore’s socio-political development in terms of a young person’s participative democracy where the needs and aspirations of the young took center-stage and where the young partnered the state in the development and progress of the new self-governing country. The volume began with Chief Minister Lim restating the huge expectations on the shoulders of Singapore’s young: “Our hopes rest on the young people. Our struggles are for the young people. The future will depend on the young people.”²⁶⁶

In Lim’s mind, participation in youth organizations, youth leadership training and youth recreational programs were “object lessons in democracy” to school youth in their roles and responsibilities as citizens. Some contributors framed their contributions around the need to rein

²⁶⁶ Lim Yew Hock, “Message from the Chief Minister,” *Youth* (no. 1 1956-1957), 3.

in youth radicalism and protest. *Youth*'s editor, Jesudason, identified the idealism of the youth as a potential threat that adults had to channel towards more worthy ends. If young minds "capable of fostering hatred and preaching violence" were not given outlets to pursue their idealism, these young people would "glide into unworthy of ways of life."²⁶⁷ In the eyes of Singapore's political and social elite, the battle for the hearts and minds, and the energy and idealism, of the young, had become a battle for the future of self-governing Singapore.

George G. Thomson, whose very job as Director of Public Relations was to brand the new self-governing colony, also contributed an essay. Thomson was a regular advisor to the SYC, as well as guest speaker on Civics for the SYC's leadership courses (pre-empting his later role as the Director of the Singapore PAP government's Political Study Centre). Most significantly, he was one of the few colonial officials that the fiercely anti-colonial PAP government retained in the Civil Service despite their subsequent crusade to decolonize the colonial bureaucracy by replacing expatriate colonial officials with locals. As the Director of the Political Study Centre, Thomson was placed in charge of training the first generation of independent Singapore's civil servants. The PAP government clearly embraced and endorsed his views. The extent to which his views were formative in the thinking of the first-generation PAP leaders, especially Goh Keng Swee, who was Thomson's colleague in the colonial government warrants further research.

Thomson emphasized the vital relationship between the successful development and mobilization of youth and the creation of a new modern nation and colony. Civics education was critical, not only as a solution to "problems" of youth" but as the way to produce disciplined youth.

²⁶⁷ E.W. Jesudason, "Editorial," *Youth* (no. 1 1956-1957), 5.

He painted youth as “a pool of potential power” because of their desirable qualities – energy, resilience, flexibility and adaptability, confidence, and ambitiousness, and lastly, their longevity. He acknowledged that this was “an idealised picture of youth” but argued that it was critical to pursue these grand ideals. The extent to which the new nation could mobilize and develop its youth “is the measure of the likelihood of success in the future.”²⁶⁸ The spectre of the Cold War also loomed large in Thomson’s thinking. Like many other contributors to the magazine, Thomson framed his thinking about youth in relation to Communism as an existential threat. The future of the new Singapore nation, he argued, laid in the vision of the future to which youth directed their idealism, energy, and qualities towards – a Singapore that was democratic and allowed for citizens to fulfil their ambitions and aspirations or a totalitarian Singapore where citizens had to obey “a pre-ordained pattern of history” and “a self-ordained priesthood in the Communist Party.”²⁶⁹ Thomson and his fellow contributors were not concerned about the paradox in their proposals: their desire to insulate youth from totalitarian Communism subjected the young to a different form of paternalism. Young people’s agency, defined in terms of their ability to achieve their aspirations, became the warrant that legitimized the incorporation of Singapore’s young within a new grid of power relations.

Reaching Out to Vernacular Youth Groups

Youth also underscored the fact that the SYC continued to be a self-absorbed and insular youth movement. It is hard to imagine how children and youth outside of the privileged youth in Singapore’s English-medium schools could read the erudite essays in *Youth*. Blinded by their own fantasies of disciplining youth, the SYC failed to produce a publication that could be appealing

²⁶⁸ G.G. Thomson, “Youth and Civics,” *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1956), 16.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

and accessible to its intended audience: the broad masses of youth in Singapore. This points to the SYC's primary deficiency: the SYC was rejected by the audiences it sought to engage. Within the inter-woven politics of language, race, culture, and anti-colonialism in 1950s Singapore, the non-Anglophone communities found it unpalatable to join a youth movement that supported the Singapore colonial government. The eruption of large-scale protest and demonstrations against the colonial government from the mid-1950s onwards exposed the limits to which the needs and interests of all youth could be essentialized, homogenized, sanitized, de-racialized and depoliticized. More importantly, the rejection of pro-colonial youth movements meant that these youths continued to exclude themselves from the above-mentioned colonial disciplinary projects and institutions. By failing to entice significant numbers of youth from other cultural backgrounds to their activities, the SYC leaders reinforced the impression that they only sought to nurture an exclusive group of elite Anglophone youth.

The youth unrest of the mid-1950s and the emergence of the Chinese middle-school student movements and left-wing labour movements, led by charismatic student leaders and young trade unionists, made the SYC leadership realize that they could not remain an insular movement. They made a greater effort to shed their exclusive, elitist, and pro-colonial images. They made some headway in 1957 when they succeeded in organizing leadership courses for the members of the four largest Malay youth groups in Singapore. Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock opened this Malay-speaking Youth Training course. His speech was replete with ideas about the presumed malleability, idealism and energy of youth and about the value of mobilizing and exploiting these qualities for nation-building. Once again, youth training was seen in disciplinary terms – to mobilize disciplined youth to serve as agents of a new multicultural Singapore. He portrayed the

needs, interests and aspirations of the young as homogenous and emphasized that they transcended primordial ethnic identities: “a youth is still a youth, whether he is Chinese-educated, Malay-educated or English-educated...”. This would become a recurrent trope in Singapore’s discourses of youth – that youth had common qualities, interests, and aspirations that superseded their racial, ethnic, and religious identities and unified youths from all backgrounds.

Conclusion

For all of his encouragement and well-wishes, Lim Yew Hock did not acquire the support of the mostly youthful electorate of Singapore. In June 1959, the PAP took power with a resounding electoral victory, winning 43 out of 51 seats. Much of its support came from the working class. The PAP exploited the Labour Front’s repressive actions towards trade unions and Chinese school student movements, as well as Lim’s concessions to the British on constitutional arrangements, to depict the Labour Front politicians as colonial stooges. When the PAP accused the Labour Front’s Minister for Education, Chew Swee Kee, of accepting funding from the United States, the Labour Front’s fate was sealed.

So was the SYC’s. The PAP, which openly attacked Western culture and the privileged Anglophone middle class, was hardly going to tolerate the SYC’s continued existence. The SYC could not shake off its image as a pro-colonial youth movement, not least when the SYC leaders and member organizations continued to participate in public civic rituals that celebrated Singapore’s colonial ties. When the Duke of Edinburgh visited Singapore in February 1959, the SYC once again helped to organize a Youth Rally to receive him.²⁷⁰ By gaining state-conferred

²⁷⁰ “Progress Summary – January to March 1959,” in NAS SWD 37/59.

legitimacy as the government's official partner and representative in matters concerning the youth of Singapore, these privileged Anglophone individuals were in the best position to impose their values and beliefs on the direction of youth mobilization in Singapore. Yet, the failure of the SYC to acquire the support of the majority of Singapore's youthful population showed that state-conferred legitimacy did not necessarily translate to broad appeal. In the contentious atmosphere of 1950s Singapore, where the politics of youth converged with the politics of decolonization, the SYC's close ties with the colonial government became a poisoned chalice that won for it resources such as funding and transnational and trans-imperial networks and connections but alienated it from most of Singapore's youth.

In August 1959, the PAP Minister for Labour and Law, K.M. Byrne, directed the SYC to "wind up its affairs."²⁷¹ Byrne cited the SYC's failures to co-ordinate youth organizations as the chief reason. At least twenty of the thirty-six organizations affiliated to it in 1959 were "moribund" or "not taking any interest" in its affairs. The SYC's claim that it had 40,000 members was only "true on paper." Furthermore, a particular group of youth organizations dominated the leadership of the Council.²⁷² Byrne also criticized the SYC for its inability to become financially self-sustaining. The SYC had made little effort to raise its own funds and had been content to receive financial support from the government or external sponsors like the Asia Foundation.²⁷³ This had been a frequent source of frustration for earlier governments, which expected the SYC to achieve self-reliance outside of the SWD's annual grant of \$4,000 (which had risen to \$15,000 by the mid-

²⁷¹ "Progress Summary – August 1959 – Ministry of Labour and Law, Department of Social Welfare, Singapore," in NAS, SWD 37/59.

²⁷² "Draft Press Release from Minister for Labour and Law Regarding the Withdrawal of Support to the Singapore Youth Council." Attached to letter from D.S.W. to Minister (Labour and Law) Through Perm. Sec. (Labour) in NAS, SWD 28/59 "Singapore Youth Sports Centre – Board of Management."

²⁷³ Correspondence in NAS, MSA 2890 SWD 28/59 "Singapore Youth Sports Centre."

1950s). By 1958, the Labour Front government was channelling its funds to new programs that received greater public support, such as the provision of public recreation and sporting facilities to youth (see next chapter). Hence, Bryne was re-stating an opinion already prevalent among the officers in the Ministry of Labour and Law when he opined that the SYC's dissolution would save "a wasteful expenditure of \$15,000 a year" and "pave the way for a reorganisation of the youth movement in Singapore, hitherto monopolised mainly by a privileged few."²⁷⁴

Though the SYC failed to achieve its ambitious objectives, it established important precedents, principles, and practices for the adult-led, state-sponsored mobilization and schooling of youth. Singapore would not have such another such entity for thirty years. The National Youth Council was formed in 1989 in a different set of circumstances but had a similar disciplinary agenda. The SYC's demise did not mean the demise of the Singapore disciplinary state. The PAP leaders themselves embraced the necessity and value of mobilizing youth and asserted their own control over this increasingly vital domain. Though they disbanded the SYC, they placed the SYC's affiliate member organizations under new coordinating agencies like the Singapore Council of Social Service established in 1958. They created new state-funded bodies and institutions like the People's Association, and the National Youth Leadership Training Institute to take over the SYC's programs and continue the work of disciplining Singapore's children and youth.

²⁷⁴ Correspondence in NAS, MSA 2890 SWD 28/59 "Singapore Youth Sports Centre."

Chapter Four

Disciplining Bodies and Leisure: The Singapore Youth Sports Centre, 1956-1959

The Singapore Youth Council's ineffectiveness paved the way for a different coalition of colonial officials, community leaders, businessmen, philanthropists, journalists, and sportspeople to pursue a different approach to disciplining youth – the mass provision of youth leisure and recreation. This saw the establishment of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre (SYSC) in 1956 to provide more sporting facilities and programs for youth. Though the SYSC existed for only three years, it left important legacies for state-society relations and youth policies in Singapore. The development of sporting activity between 1942 and 1959 and the establishment of the SYSC have disappeared from the pages of Singapore history. The substantial amount of scholarship on the evolution of sports in Singapore focuses only on the rise of sporting activity amidst social transformation in the colony before the Second World War, and on the PAP government's use of sports for nation-building after 1965.²⁷⁵

The SYSC's establishment was critical for the development of sports and community recreation in Singapore and its transformation into a key technique of power for the expanding

²⁷⁵ Nick Aplin, "Sports and games in colonial Singapore: 1819–1867," *Sport in Society* 15, no. 10 (2012), 1329-1340; Chan Ying-Kit, "'Sports is Politics': Swimming (and) Pools in Postcolonial Singapore," *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 1 (2016), 17-35; Eugene Chew Wai Cheong, Ho Jin Chung and Jung Woo Lee, "Sports clubs and organizations in changing times: the case of Singapore," *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 6, no. 1 (2017), 71-86; Peter A. Horton, "Complex Creolization: The Evolution of Modern Sport in Singapore," *European Sport History Review* 3 (2001): 77–104; Peter A. Horton, "Shackling the Lion: Sport and Modern Singapore," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 19, no. 2-3 (2002), 243-274; Peter A. Horton, "Sports clubs in colonial Singapore: insiders, outsiders, aspirants," *International Sports Studies* 35, no. 1 (2013), 35-48; Mike McNeill, John Sproule and Peter Horton, "The Changing Face of Sport and Physical Education in Post-Colonial Singapore," *Sport, Education and Society* 8, no. 1 (2003): 35-56; Janice N. Brownfoot, "'Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds': Sport and Society in Colonial Malaya," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 19, no. 2-3 (2002), 129-156; Lai Kuan Lim & Peter Horton, "Sport in the British Colony of Singapore (1819–1900s): Formation, Diffusion and Development," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 9 (2012), 1325-1343.

Singapore disciplinary state. Tamara Myers has shown how the establishment of sports clubs and recreational programs was “a popular cornerstone of youth-conscious policing in northern North America in the mid-twentieth century.” The formation of police-led sports clubs to offer social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for children and youth constituted a “sports solution” to the problem of “delinquent” and would-be “delinquent” youth. They represent “the fusion of interwar crime prevention with prevailing progressive-era ideas about children and youth.” These clubs “adopted reformist beliefs about the need to develop the male body and youth’s sense of morality, citizenship, and belonging at a time, when manhood and, by extension, boyhood seemed imperilled by industrial modernity.”²⁷⁶

Similarly, the SYSC’s origins and legacies illuminate how colonial officials and local non-state actors saw the provision of more sporting recreation for the youthful population of Singapore as the solution to the problems of delinquent, restless, and rebellious youth and to the challenge of incorporating them into the Singapore disciplinary state. This chapter shows how youth sports and community recreation became implicated in the converging politics of youth, the Cold War, and decolonization in Singapore and had long-lasting impacts on the young growing up in Singapore. The SYSC’s establishment represented the colonial government and its allies’ shift towards disciplining young bodies and regulating leisure as techniques of youth-conscious socialization and policing. The vital role of American funding and expertise in the SYSC’s development, and more broadly, the development of sports and community recreation in Singapore, reveals that the less visible, seemingly non-ideological domain of sports and community recreation became part

²⁷⁶ Tamara Myers, *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 16.

of the cultural Cold War in 1950s Southeast Asia.²⁷⁷ The SYSC's success, in spite of the shortcomings that led to its dissolution after three years of operation, paved the way for the Singapore PAP government to greatly expand sporting recreation facilities and programs through the People's Association's network of community centres. This chapter also uses a forgotten report produced during these three years to highlight another discernible shift of thinking at the end of 1959 – the turn towards instrumentalizing and mobilizing youth idealism.

“A Gift for the Youth of the Colony”

The SYSC was the brainchild of Sir Malcolm MacDonald, the son of Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, while serving as the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia between 1948 and 1955.²⁷⁸ Before his appointment as the paramount colonial official in British Malaya, MacDonald had a long-standing career in Britain's relations with its colonies, serving as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in 1931, Secretary of State for the Colonies and for Dominion Affairs between 1935 and 1940, and British High Commissioner to Canada (1941-1946). As Commissioner-General, he oversaw Malaya and Singapore's rehabilitation from the ravages of the war. His personal dispositions and politics combined to make him a keen supporter of social welfare and youth welfare policies. During his tenure as Colonial Secretary, MacDonald pushed for the introduction of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1940, which expanded welfare and education for local communities in Britain's

²⁷⁷ Simon Creak is the only scholar to have written on this aspect of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, in the context of Laos: “Cold War Rhetoric and The Body: Physical Cultures in Early Socialist Laos,” in *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, edited by Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia, 2010), 103-130. The other relevant work, albeit covering a different historical period, is by Gerald Gems on the prevalent use of sports as a socialization tool during the American occupation of the Philippines. Gerald R. Gems, *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines: Bats, Balls, and Bayonets* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

²⁷⁸ On the life and career of Malcolm MacDonald, see Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995).

colonies. Throughout his term, MacDonald was deeply involved in the efforts to forge a viable, non-Communist, multicultural Singapore and Malaya. When the Malayan Emergency broke out in June 1948, he made speeches on Radio Malaya to denounce the communists as foreign subversives and to call for local patriots to assist the government in dealing with the menace. Ngoei Wen-qing has recently shown how MacDonald influenced pro-British local nationalists and American government officials and diplomats to help “steer the country’s decolonization in a pro-British, anticommunist direction.”²⁷⁹²⁸⁰ MacDonald was certainly aware of the urgency the politics of youth had gained in Singapore. He picked the occasion of the end of his time in Singapore to leave another lasting legacy.

On 17 August 1955, just before he departed for a new appointment as the High Commissioner of India, the City of Singapore awarded MacDonald the Freedom of the City. The award, according to the President of the City Council J.T. Rea, “so touched MacDonald” that he presented a gift of his own to “the younger people, the future citizens of Singapore, in whose hands this great City would stake its place in the world.” This gift was a donation of \$5,000 to start a fund for “the establishment of a Youth Sports Centre where young people of every race and creed could meet for sport and friendship together.”²⁸¹ This Centre would help school children and youth receive expert training and instruction in a variety of sports, and train them to “be healthy in mind, and fit in body” to fulfil their roles as future citizens.²⁸² “Healthy minds and fit bodies” was the

²⁷⁹ Ngoei Wen-qing, *Arc of Containment: Britain, The United States, and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019), 27-29.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁸¹ “The Story of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre,” SYSC Opening Ceremony Programme, in National Archives of Singapore (NAS), PRO 488-55 “Youth Sports Centre.” See also *Straits Times*, 24 August 1955 “MacD gives \$5,000 for youth sport centre.” These words became enshrined in the SYSC Ordinance and Constitution, which stated that the Centre’s objects and purposes were “to establish and maintain in the Colony a Youth Sports Centre where young people of every race and creed can meet together for sport and friendship.”

²⁸² *Ibid.*

English public school ideal that British officials like MacDonald had internalized through their education in British public schools; it emphasized participation in sports to develop “Christian morality, physical fitness and ‘manly’ character.”²⁸³

MacDonald’s gift ignited enthusiastic support from the Anglophone groups in Singapore, who similarly imbibed these British values through their education in English-medium schools. It helped that he already possessed warm relationships with many of the prominent businessmen and community leaders among these, who were themselves invested in helping him prevent Singapore from turning Communist. He was particularly close to business tycoon and cinema magnate Loke Wan Tho and his wife Christina Loke.²⁸⁴ According to MacDonald’s biographer Clyde Sanger, the Lokes were “two people with whom Malcolm certainly showed his emotions.”²⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, Loke became the project’s principal spokesperson and champion.

The Interim Committee of the SYSC Board of Management first met in Loke’s office in the Cathay Building on 18 February 1957. It included colonial officials, notable community leaders, professionals, journalists, and businessmen and other Who’s Who of colonial Singapore. Like the SYC, the SYSC and its programs were driven by non-state actors who wanted to re-incorporate the young into mainstream society so that they did not threaten Singapore’s stability and their privileged lives. They immediately embarked on a massive fund-raising drive to canvass for funds and public support for the project. They made personal appeals to their contacts and business

²⁸³ Robert Verkaik, *Posh Boys: How the English Public Schools Ruined Britain* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2018), chapter 3.

²⁸⁴ Loke Wan Tho’s Cathay-Keris Film Production Ltd. (founded in 1952) became one of the leading film businesses in Singapore and Malaya. The company was headquartered in the Cathay Building, Singapore’s first skyscraper and the tallest building in Southeast Asia when it was opened in 1939.

²⁸⁵ Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire*, 317.

networks, and public appeals through the major English, Malay, and Chinese presses, and Radio Malaya. They also organized a diverse range of fund-raising activities across late 1955 and early 1956. Loke drove the fund-raising campaign with great fervour, making many speeches on Radio Malaya, and to audiences of potential backers and donors. He personally donated \$25,000 and loaned the Centre more than \$250,000 as an advance.²⁸⁶

The fund-raising campaign attracted donations from individuals and organizations from all sectors of Singapore society, including the different Chambers of Commerce comprising merchants and businessmen from the different ethnic communities. From outside Singapore, Sir George Thomas, patron of the Thomas Cup and former President of the International Badminton Federation, contributed \$250 to build a basketball court.²⁸⁷ The Labour Front government helmed by Singapore's first Chief Minister, Jewish lawyer David Marshall, pledged a government dollar for each dollar raised from the public, up to a maximum of \$250,000. Singapore's City Council also pledged fifty cents for every public dollar raised, up to \$150,000. Eventually, an impressive sum of \$297,453.99 was raised from public donations.²⁸⁸ The Labour Front government donated the Airport Terminal Building at Kallang, and the thirteen acres of land surrounding it, valued at \$2.5 million, to serve as the SYSC's headquarters.

On 12 October 1956, an audience of about 7,000, including MacDonald and Sir Robert Scott (MacDonald's successor as Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia), witnessed the

²⁸⁶ Memo from Acting D.S. (Finance) to Financial Secretary, 7 May 1958 in NAS, TRY 3748/57. The bulk of this loan was written off by the government in 1957 in light of the Centre's subsequent financial woes.

²⁸⁷ NAS, SWD 63 /56 "Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1".

²⁸⁸ T.P. Cromwell then approved a \$2,000 grant from the Social Welfare Department's budget to bring the funds raised up to \$300,000, so that the SYSC could receive the full pledges from the City Council and the government. Letter from Loke Wan Tho to Tom Cromwell, 12 September 1956 in NAS, SWD 63 /56 "Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1."

Centre's grand opening ceremony. About 8,000 people entered the Centre that very evening. After the opening, the Centre roared into operation, offering facilities and coaching sessions for a variety of sports: soccer, rugby, cricket, hockey, tennis, athletics, basketball, net ball, volleyball, badminton, table-tennis, boxing, gymnastics, body building and weightlifting, judo, and fencing. The Centre employed five full-time centre instructors – for badminton, basketball, body building, gymnastic, trampoline, weightlifting, volleyball and *sepak raga* (foot-volleyball). It employed four part-time instructors for Chinese Martial arts, *kun tow* (a form of Chinese boxing), table-tennis, and wrestling. A volunteer led the instruction for Western-style boxing. Loke engaged Wong Peng Soon on a personal contract for three years to serve as the Centre's badminton instructor. Wong was then Singapore's most notable sportsman. He was the first Asian player to win the All-England men's singles championship title, the Thomas Cup, for three consecutive years (1949, 1952, and 1955). For his achievements, he was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE). The Centre also boasted a range of relevant facilities, such as dormitories, which were used to host visiting sports teams from countries such as England, the Federation of Malaya, Burma, and Bulgaria. On occasions, other groups such as the Schools Sports Council, the Singapore Teachers' Union, and other sports clubs, made use of the Centre's sports courts to hold annual tournaments, attesting to the paucity of such facilities on the island. Originally, the Labour Front government asked the SYSC to build a full-size swimming pool.²⁸⁹ Due to the hefty costs and physical difficulties of building one, as well as the availability of other swimming pools and seaside camps and beaches elsewhere, the SYSC eventually dropped the project.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Management SYSC, 10 January 1958 in folder SWD G3A/56 "Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Management of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre".

²⁹⁰ Memo from Director of Social Welfare to Perm. Sec. Labour & Welfare, 29 January 1958 in SWD 63 /56 – "Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. II".



5. *Singapore Youth Sports Centre Opening Ceremony 1956. Source: National Archives of Singapore*

The Centre's founders framed its purpose in disciplinary terms – to develop the minds and bodies of the youth of Singapore for responsible, democratic citizenship – defined in terms of a respect for adult and state authority, for law and order, and for a multicultural social order. At the Opening Ceremony, its founders proclaimed that the SYSC was no mere sporting arena but “a beacon to the youth of Singapore” that would “play its part in preparing our future citizens to control their destiny.”²⁹¹ Missing the irony in his words, where the ability to control their destiny meant their incorporation into the existing social order and its regime of rules and power relations, Loke emphasized that these future citizens did not enjoy unbridled autonomy and independence. Instead, he called for the young people of Singapore to be grateful to “a paternal, a generous, and a far-seeing Government, and the liberal citizens of this island” for the Centre.²⁹² This proclamation attests to the SYSC's fundamental purpose – to address the inter-woven anxieties

²⁹¹ “The Story of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre,” SYSC Opening Ceremony Programme, in NAS, PRO 488-55 “Youth Sports Centre”.

²⁹² Speech at the Opening of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre, 12 October 1956. Found in *Loke Wan Tho's Speeches and Talks Re: Singapore Youth Sports Centre* NA 217 File Ref: 83. According to a footnote in his draft of the speech, the colonial government gave the Centre's organizing committee the use of the former Kallang Airport and thirteen acres of land for a period of 30 years at a rental of one dollar a year.

and aspirations of colonial officials and invested businessmen and elites who recognized the vital importance of incorporating youth to prevent them from posing further threats to their interests.

As MacDonald's and Loke's above-mentioned remarks suggest, the Sports Centre's founders and backers idealized the Sports Centre as a common space to produce disciplined Malaysians who learnt to play and live together in a multicultural democracy. They constantly emphasized that the Centre's aim was to break down the barriers between the different races. The *Sunday Times* declared that the Centre would "become a centre of racial harmony".²⁹³ The encouragement of sports as a space for the fostering of multiculturalism was not a new idea. Janice Brownfoot has shown how sports had been a key part of the associational and recreational life of the Anglophone communities in Singapore, who valued these opportunities to foster camaraderie and cohesion among themselves.²⁹⁴ Chua Ai Lin has written of the emergence of an "Asian Anglophone public sphere" where individuals from different ethnic backgrounds interacted and "were bonded together by a lingua franca, common educational experiences (and hence cultural references), the fabric of everyday life in Singapore, as well as a shared political identity and predicament." These individuals transcended the ethnic and linguistic lines that divided them.²⁹⁵ It was this act of "boundary-crossing" and joining together that MacDonald, Loke and the other supporters of the SYSC wanted to achieve through sporting activities. The access to sporting recreation and facilities was limited, however, to the privileged middle-class and upper classes who attended the well-endowed English-medium schools, or who had access to the recreational

²⁹³ *The Sunday Times*, 29 January 1956.

²⁹⁴ Brownfoot, "'Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds': Sport and Society in Colonial Malaya," 129-156.

²⁹⁵ Chua Ai Lin, "Imperial Subjects, Straits Citizens: Anglophone Asians and the Struggle for Political Rights in Inter-War Singapore," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore*, ed. Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 31.

clubs and facilities exclusive to European expatriates and local Anglophone elites and middle-class professionals. Most youth in Singapore from the non-Anglophone communities lacked access to suitable playing fields and sports facilities. The new impetus for the promotion of sports for youth was hence aimed at extending a previously exclusive area of social life and recreational activity to the other less privileged groups in Singapore, especially the Chinese working-class.

Already, the Japanese administrators who had to deal with the problem of governing Singapore's diverse and youthful communities began change in this area. During the Occupation, the Japanese Military Administration encouraged the formation of a Syonan Sports Association to allow for some form of leisure and recreation for locals. The Japanese saw sports as a way of eradicating "all racial and sectional differences" to achieve the ideal of universal brotherhood among the Asian peoples, and of disciplining physically-rugged individuals, who each possessed "a healthy mind and a healthy body", to achieve "a strong and virile nation."²⁹⁶ While the above-mentioned Anglophone groups who already enjoyed these opportunities flocked to the new Sports Association, Mamoru Shinozaki mentioned in his memoirs that a lot of youngsters joined the association for its activities at the Jalan Besar Stadium. He attested that it was "the only institution in Syonan" where everybody was treated equally regardless of race and nationality.²⁹⁷ On Christmas Day 1942, Shinozaki also announced a \$2 million scheme to convert an old race course turned children's playground at Farrer Park into a modern sports stadium consisting of all kinds of sports facilities, including a large swimming pool, and a baseball diamond (for a sport that was quite foreign to the local populations in Singapore).²⁹⁸ Hence, MacDonald and Loke were not

²⁹⁶ *The Syonan Times*, October 7, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), 3.

²⁹⁷ Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press), 58.

²⁹⁸ *The Syonan Times*, December 25, Koki 2602 Syowa 17 (1942), 2.

treading on new ground in championing the idea of a youth sports centre. This was built on an existing familiarity with sporting recreation as a powerful disciplinary tool.

The SYSC made this instrument available on an unprecedented scale. There was a clear focus on extending SYSC membership to underprivileged youth, revealing the political agenda that dovetailed with the official objectives of developing future citizens of a cohesive multicultural society. Secret correspondence between the Colonial Office and the Governor of Singapore reveals that the Colonial Office's Counter-Subversion Committee welcomed the SYSC as "a very important means to keep the youth of Singapore on the right lines" by diverting "their energies into more healthy and useful pursuits."²⁹⁹ To recruit more paying adult members for the Centre, Hugh Savage, a Eurasian journalist who became the Centre's Superintendent, tapped into the anxieties of the middle-class and the commercial communities regarding youth unrest. Savage's letters to the Centre's potential donors and sponsors emphasized the aims of instilling respect for law and authority in Singapore's youth and of taking Singapore's restless youth off the streets and away from transgressive activities that disrupted social stability, labour relations, and economic activity. When he appealed to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and the British European Association, made up mainly of European and expatriate businessmen, for their support, he emphasized that they had to help address the socio-economic grievances of the disenfranchised and the underprivileged to prevent further disruptions to their lives and economic interests. He argued that the Centre helped to overcome the social distance "between the rich and the poor, between the two major language groups in this cosmopolitan metropolis – English and Chinese."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Draft letter to W.A. Sanderson, Gulbenkian Foundation, in NAS, FCO 141/15014 – "Singapore Youth Sports Centre".

³⁰⁰ Hugh Savage, "The Singapore Youth Sports Centre," *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1957), 92.

The SYSC was where “the street boys and the underprivileged” would be introduced “to discipline, good behaviour and respect for authority and their fellow men.” This would eliminate “the root causes for riots and other disturbances that this Colony is subjected to periodically.”³⁰¹

Surprisingly, the two groups that had been at the forefront of youth work and youth affairs in the colony since 1948, the Social Welfare Department’s youth services officers and the leaders of the Singapore Youth Council, greeted the SYSC with a substantial degree of reservation. MacDonald’s announcement caught the SWD’s Youth Service Section by surprise. Their internal correspondence reveals substantial scepticism towards a project that was “primed by Malcolm Macdonald, strongly supported by Loke Wan Tho, and taken up flamboyantly by Government without due consideration.” They were pessimistic about the SYSC Board’s competence in managing the Centre and their commitment towards the Centre’s financial sustainability.³⁰² Since the Chief Minister and many others backed the project strongly, however, the SWD officers embraced the *fait accompli* and assisted the SYSC Board on the different aspects of the SYSC’s organization and administration.³⁰³ Thomas Cromwell, the Director for Social Welfare, approved a grant of \$2,000 to the SYSC from the budget meant for the support of youth organizations. Loke thanked Cromwell for not looking on the SYSC “with a somewhat jaundiced eye” because it undermined Cromwell’s long-standing efforts to establish a Singapore Youth Centre.³⁰⁴ He then asked Cromwell for his “advice and criticism in the setting up and running of this gigantic scheme:

³⁰¹ NAS, SWD 63 /56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1”.

³⁰² NAS, SWD 63 /56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1”. B.L. Dunsford, the Principal Youth Services Officer, felt the need to produce a paper “Suggestions and Recommendations for Planning” to advise the Centre’s Board on the various operational and policy matters that they would have to tackle.

³⁰³ NAS, PRO 488/55.

³⁰⁴ Letter from Loke Wan Tho to Tom Cromwell, 12 September 1956 in NAS, SWD 63 /56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1.”

I realise only too well how little experience any of us have in the administration of so ambitious a project.” Loke’s words were both candid and prophetic.

The Survey of Youth Leisure Needs, 1959

As Loke’s message to Cromwell above suggests, the SYSC’S establishment upset the SYC leaders and the government’s youth services workers partly because it undercut their existing efforts to establish a Youth Centre. Cromwell and his SWD colleagues encouraged the SYC and other youth organizations to develop programmes for youth recreation. The former saw sporting recreation as key to help local youth develop “moral fibre”, civic values, and spirituality, and self-reliance.³⁰⁵ The increasing interest in providing more recreational avenues for youth led to the first-ever systematic study of youth leisure and recreation in Singapore, and possibly in Southeast Asia. In May 1954, the SYC launched a project to compile a “Survey of Youth Leisure Needs in Singapore,” focusing on boys and girls between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five.³⁰⁶ The project floundered several times due to the change of personnel leading the study. The survey was finally started in 1956 under the leadership of a SYC Technical sub-committee comprising Dr. Gwee Ah Leng (a medical doctor), Dr. You Poh Seng (an economist), A.F. Wells (an expatriate social scientist from the University of Malaya), as well as a SWD representative (first, W.S. Woon and then Dr. Goh Keng Swee). This was the first systematic effort to investigate the needs and interests of the young in Singapore, which underlines the previous lack of concern with youth activity in colonial Singapore. As discussed in the preceding chapters, this attitude changed with

³⁰⁵ Memo from “D.S.W to Private Secretary to the Governor, Singapore,” 4 June 1956 in NAS, SWD 48-56 “Singapore Festival of Youth”.

³⁰⁶ “Singapore Youth Council, “Seventh Annual Report (15 March 1954 to 31 March 1955),” in NAS, EDUN 194/53-“Singapore Youth Council”. Singapore Youth Council, *Report on the Leisure Activities of Young People in Singapore: Parts I and II* (Singapore: Singapore Youth Council, 1959). The Social Welfare Department’s copy of the report, which was completed in 1959, can be found in the National Library of Singapore’s PublicationSG collection.

the convergence of local nation-building aspirations, colonial anxieties, and Cold War agendas in the decade after the end of the Japanese Occupation.

Foucault observed that social control required the creation of knowledge.³⁰⁷ The Report on Youth Leisure represents the first systematic effort by the Singapore disciplinary state to understand the young of Singapore to govern them effectively. This report marked the rise of expert and knowledge-based governance of individuals, exemplifying the youth turn in modern Singapore history. The efforts to know the lives, desires, and perspectives of youth subsequently became a reflexive impulse of the Singapore disciplinary state. At different times after 1965, Singapore state agencies regularly commissioned studies of Singapore's youth in response to public panics and state concern over youth delinquency or anti-social behaviour. These reports represent the Singapore disciplinary state's constant interest in acquiring "precise and more statistically accurate knowledge of individuals" to facilitate its normalization mechanisms.³⁰⁸ They also attest that the Singapore state's disciplinary projects were never completed – there were always some groups of youth who evaded or resisted the efforts to regulate or discipline their conduct and behaviour. Nonetheless, the constant desire to "know" youth reflects the persistence of a youth-conscious Singapore state invested in governing youth.

The SYC committee completed the first part of the survey in December 1956.³⁰⁹ The committee then started the second part of the survey in April 1957 after the Asia Foundation

³⁰⁷ Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 65.

³⁰⁸ Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 22.

³⁰⁹ NAS, ME3915 194/53 "Singapore Youth Council". Wells provided an account of the first survey in *Youth*, the magazine produced by the Singapore Youth Council in 1956. A.F. Wells, "The Youth Leisure Survey," *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1957), 44.

contributed a grant of \$7,000. (The Foundation also provided a substantial grant for the first phase of the survey.) The scale of the research necessitated the hefty expenditure – university students from the University of Malaya’s Economics Department and Social Studies Department interviewed individual youth staying in different parts of Singapore in order “to find out how much leisure time they had, what they did in their leisure-time, and also something about what they would like to do.”³¹⁰ This first survey focused on investigating youth clubs in the colony; its findings give us glimpses into the variegated landscape of youth organizations in Singapore then.³¹¹

Like the first part of the survey, this second report provides rare glimpses into the landscape of youth leisure and the socio-economic aspects of the lives of the young in the mid-1950s. The survey revealed the scarcity of leisure facilities and programs for the young in Singapore. The surveyors interviewed 1423 youth (775 male and 648 female) in 775 households, of whom 910 were unemployed. Only 328 of these youth had played sports before, and many of the others who had not, expressed interest in doing so. The authors concluded that most of these youth had ample time and desire for leisure but lacked opportunities to do so. The authors accounted for differences among different youth from different ethnic backgrounds, noting that “the tradition of playing is more firmly embedded in the English than in the Chinese schools.”³¹² Gender was also significant: girls went out less and engaged in games and sports much less than boys. The researchers were candid about how some of the findings undermined some assumptions about youth habits. In many ways, the report was a compendium of adult curiosities and assumptions about local youth. The

³¹⁰ A.F. Wells, “The Youth Leisure Survey,” *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1957), 44.

³¹¹ Singapore Youth Council, *Report on the Leisure Activities of Young People in Singapore: Parts I and II* (Singapore: Singapore Youth Council 1959).

³¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

surveyors were surprised to discover that only 60% of their interviewees went to the cinema regularly, and for many of them, not more than once a week. This challenged the “contention that cinema-going [was] in Singapore a major addiction of the young.” In addition, only a small number of youth went to amusement parks, belying the belief that many Singapore’s youth were wasting their time there.³¹³

What was striking in the Report was how these adult leaders, civil servants and academics imposed their ideas of what constituted legitimate leisure activities, and how their criteria for legitimate leisure activities were based on the biopolitical value of these activities, i.e. their potential for shaping the mental and physical development of the youth. One researcher, who read hundreds of essays written by English secondary school students in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya, found that that many students preferred to just walk or cycle around with friends. This was not a category of leisure included in the survey; neither did the surveyors consider this a legitimate form of leisure. Instead, they concluded that this form of leisure “lands one nowhere” and “should take its place with other things in a balanced programme of leisure.” The authors also rejected evidence that a majority of those surveyed preferred hanging out or walking with their friends as leisure activities. This conclusion betrayed the researchers’ instrumentalist views about youth recreation, where they valued youth recreation not for its own sake but for its potential to discipline youth and to counteract “the attraction which secret societies and subversive political activities have for the young.”³¹⁴ The report’s adult authors did not only want to police youth activity but direct youth towards activities that produced effects on their minds and bodies. The

³¹³ Ibid., 17.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

Report was a testament to the shift in the state's approach to youth activity where it became interested in proactively shaping youth leisure and culture in Singapore for its disciplinary agendas.

The Report is also striking for a discernible shift away from leisure and sports to youth idealism as a more effective tool of socialization and policing. Towards the end of the report, the authors concluded that “games have a part to play in life, but surely not an all important one... Europe has given many valuable things to Asia: but the over-insistence upon games is probably not one of their most useful presents.” There were other important dimensions of everyday social life for the young. The authors' second observation is worth quoting at length for its unabashed realism and bio-political intent:

...gangsterism and subversive activities seek to influence the real world [and] are in contact with reality, whereas games and passive entertainments [sic] are not quite related to real life. *Whoever does not see this misses an important aspect both of the politics or self-determining countries and of the problem of Youth...what young people not only need, but want, is something which is effectual in this sense, as well as something which is constructive, i.e. which leads to the good of Society, beside their own permanent good* [emphasis mine]. The idealism of youth seeks the betterment of humanity pragmatically, or would do so, if they thought there were any prospect of attaining that aim. The problem is to create aims or movements related to everyday life...³¹⁵

This is where the report's conclusions and observations diverged substantially from the Labour Front government's enthusiasm regarding sporting recreation as the solution for the problem of youth in Singapore. The authors recognized that it was young people's idealism and desires for agency that fuelled their discontent with existing socio-political realities and their commitment to pursuing socio-political change. The report thus presents an early statement that the management of youth in Singapore required the provision of opportunities for the young to

³¹⁵ Ibid., 27.

achieve a sense of agency. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, and other PAP leaders articulated similar views across the 1960s and established new institutions to harness youth idealism like the National Youth Leadership Training Institute. The history of state-encouraged youth participation in community service, volunteerism, and social development needs to be situated in the growing recognition of youth idealism as a tool of biopolitical engineering and social control in Singapore. This was undoubtedly based on the evidence of the powerful and passionate youth movements that dominated public consciousness and state attention in the 1950s.

The SYSC and the SYC: Collision and Competition

The report's conclusions belied the Singapore Youth Council's achievements in the domain of youth recreation in the preceding decade. For one, the SYC laid the foundations for the growth of camping as a youth activity in Singapore. Scholars like Sian Edwards and Leslie Paris have shown how adults in the UK and the US believed in the efficacy of youth camps in inculcating citizenship ideals in young boys and girls.³¹⁶ It was not surprising that the British colonial authorities in Singapore pursued these ideas, which were already prevalent in European uniformed youth movements at the turn of the 20th century. Camping was by no means new to the colony of Singapore – the British uniformed youth movements like the Girl Guides, the Boy Scouts, and the Cadet Corps regularly organized camps for their members. When the SYC was founded, the Acting Secretary for Social Welfare envisioned that it would develop a youth camp to provide healthier leisure programs for youth colony-wide. The SYC and the colonial government promoted camping as a form of leisure activity that encouraged youths to learn the value of hard work and gain the

³¹⁶ Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2018), 10-11; Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press 2008).

experience of working and living together with youths from other ethnic groups. Accordingly, the colonial government assisted the SYC in developing more camping sites and facilities. The SYC's first youth camp was at Ayer Biru in south Johore, the southernmost state in the Malay Peninsula bordering Singapore. The SYC reported substantial usage of the Ayer Biru Camp despite the many problems they faced in maintaining the shabby camp site: 2,045 boys and girls and adults representing 46 affiliated and non-affiliated youth groups visited the camp in the first nine months of 1951.³¹⁷

Though the SYC had to return the campsite to the government in late 1952 for military operations against the Communists, the encouraging results warranted a permanent Youth Camp. Hence, the colonial government allotted the SYC five acres of land beside a sandy beach at Tanah Merah Besar in the eastern part of Singapore, to erect the first dedicated youth camping facility in Singapore.³¹⁸ The Tanah Merah Camp proved as popular as the Ayer Biru Camp. Youth camping was one of the few SYC's programmes that saw enthusiastic participation by a broad variety of youth groups, whereas its other programmes tended to draw only the youth in the English-medium schools and uniformed youth movements. Buoyed by the SYC's youth camp's proven success, the Social Welfare Department helped the Federation of Boys' Clubs start their own camp site at Lim Chu Kang in 1952. The existence of a well-used dedicated campsite for youth camping was also one of the reasons that George Carter, the Travelling Secretary for the World Assembly of Youth, recommended Singapore as the venue for the organization's 2nd General Assembly.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ NAS, EDUN 227-48 "Singapore Youth Council".

³¹⁸ Singapore Youth Council, "Singapore Youth Council," *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1957), 10.

³¹⁹ NAS, ME 3915 194/53 "Singapore Youth Council".



6. Plaque Commemorating the opening of the Tanah Merah Youth Camp on 14 November 1953. Source: *The National Archives of Singapore*

The SYC was much less successful, however, in its quest to develop a Youth Centre for general youth activities. The impetus came from the 1951 UNESCO Youth Seminar in Simla; it was one of the recommendations then-SYC Vice-President Leslie Rayner gave the Governor of Singapore Franklin Gimson after Rayner attended the Seminar. Rayner and the SYC felt that there was an urgent dearth of facilities and spaces, both indoor and outdoor, for youth recreation. A Youth Centre, sited in a central area in Singapore, allowed for “the encouragement and training of youth leaders – one of the greatest needs of youth in this Colony.”³²⁰ Commentators also clamoured for the city government to build a youth centre with facilities for indoor programs and outdoor sports to, according to one such commentator, “keep our youthful citizens from indulging in not-so-wholesome activities, but also reduce juvenile delinquency as well as bolster up the moral of young Malaysians.”³²¹ Even before the SYSC’s establishment therefore, would-be youth developers had embraced youth recreation as a key arena to pursue the policing and regulation of youth conduct.

³²⁰ Memorandum “Government Assistance to Singapore Youth Council” from Secretary for Social Welfare to the Colonial Secretary, 11 February 1952, SWD T75/51 (575/51).

³²¹ “Wanted – A Youth Centre,” *Singapore Standard*, 26 May 1952.

Between 1952 and 1955, the SYC and the SWD studied the creation of such a Youth Centre at a leisurely pace. MacDonald's announcement in August 1955 jolted the SYC into quicker action. They lobbied harder for the Kallang Airport Terminal Building to be used for "a complete Youth Centre" that would fulfil "a wider public purpose than a Sports Centre."³²² The SYC's efforts were for nought. Eventually, the government decided that the Kallang Airport Terminal site was most ideal for a Youth Sports Centre, especially since its spacious hangars could easily be converted into badminton courts and other in-door sports facilities. The contest between the SYC and the SYSC's backers reveal disagreement and competition between different groups of community leaders and adults. They disagreed on the strategies of managing youth and vied with one another to be the leading voices on youth work in the colony. The rivalry was visible even to the colonial government. In an exchange of correspondence between the Singapore Commissioner of Police and the Governor of Singapore, the former confirmed the Governor's "own impression that youth work in Singapore is much handicapped by friction between the various bodies interested such as the Singapore Youth Council, the Federation Boys' Clubs, and the Singapore Youth Sports Centre."³²³ The tensions between SYSC and the SYC persisted throughout the SYSC's short existence.

In particular, the SYSC's management showed great aversion towards allowing the SYC's member organizations to hold leadership training activities at the Centre temporarily when space for such activities was needed. Early on, Loke emphasized that "that the original idea was to establish a Singapore Youth Centre, but after discussion it was decided to amend it to a Singapore

³²² Letter from G. Abisheganaden, SYC to Director Social Welfare on "Proposed Youth Centre," 23 August 1955 in NAS, MSA 2784 77A/55 "Singapore Youth Centre".

³²³ "Note by H.E. the Governor", 22 August 1958, in NAS, FCO 141/15014 – "Singapore Youth Sports Centre".

Youth Sports Centre in order to keep the scheme entirely free of politics.” He even specified that only books and films on sports and no other topic should be kept or shown in the Centre.³²⁴ The SYSC’s Superintendent Hugh Savage also opposed giving the SYC more than one seat on the SYSC Board. The SYSC was not, he insisted, “as is commonly mistaken, a youth organisation. It is a sports centre for youth.” He warned that donors may not be so happy about contributing hundreds of thousands if “there is going to be undue emphasis on youth leadership.”³²⁵ This strong aversion towards having any other form of youth activity at the Sports Centre evinces that many in the colony were aware of the pro-colonial political agenda behind the Singapore Youth Council’s activities and chose not to be seen promoting colonial interests and agendas even if they agreed with the project of taming youth. The SYSC’s founders too sensed that “youth leadership” was not an innocuous category of youth activity but one deeply implicated in the colonial politics of youth mobilization and representation, where the production of “youth leaders” meant the production of agents of the colonial government. While the SYSC’s founders agreed with the project of mobilizing, socializing, and policing local youth, they kept the SYC at arm’s length. Yet, the SYSC’s origins and functions were as political and ideological as the SYC’s: to take Singapore’s youth off the streets and direct them away from Communist influences, gangsterism and delinquency, and to shape them into self-governing and self-regulating citizens of a multicultural, socially cohesive, and non-Communist country.

³²⁴ *Loke Wan Tho’s Speeches and Talks Re: Singapore Youth Sports Centre* NA 217 File Ref: 83.

³²⁵ NAS, SWD 63 /56 – Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1”; *Sunday Times* 2 December 1957 “Fight for Control at Sports Centre.

The Co-ordinated Community Recreation Plan and U.S. Cold War Assistance

By all accounts, the SYSC was a considerable success, with monthly average attendances of about 18,000 youth in its activities. According to its Superintendent Hugh Savage, approximately 1,000 youth used the facilities daily while “as many visit the Centre to watch friends, brothers and sisters or children at play.”³²⁶ The Centre’s very last monthly progress report in December 1959 reported a total attendance of 18,676, with an average daily attendance of 747 for the twenty-four days of the month the Centre was open.³²⁷ The substantial public support for the SYSC and its initial success in attracting underprivileged youth into its programmes convinced the Labour Front government that this warranted greater attention and investment. As Myers has observed, citing Pierre Bourdieu, sports can be an “extremely economical means” of occupying the time of youth and incorporating them into mainstream society dominated by male, middle-class values.³²⁸ This proved true for Singapore. Especially when compared to the SYC’s failures, the SYSC’s success in attracting young members from the non-Anglophone communities, proved that sports were more attractive and effective forms of surveillance and control than state-organized youth movements or schools. This was in part because sports were based on the desires and interests of the young themselves and were not readily identified with a political or ideological center.

From the outset, the SYSC’s founders had envisioned the Centre as the start of a colony-wide movement to make sporting facilities and recreation available to all in Singapore. During the public campaign in late 1955, Loke affirmed that the new institution was “only to be regarded as

³²⁶ Hugh Savage, “The Singapore Youth Sports Centre,” *Youth* (no. 1 1956/1957), 92.

³²⁷ “Progress Summary Report 4 December 1959 for period 1 – 30 November 1959,” in NAS, SWD 63 /56 – Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. 1”.

³²⁸ Myers, *Youth Squad*, 108.

the pattern, the testing ground, for a wider concept which will have as its boundaries, the very boundaries of Singapore itself.”³²⁹ Indeed, the initial success of the Youth Sports Centre proved that the colony-wide promotion of sporting recreation was the one answer to the problems of youth. To expand recreation, especially sporting recreation to more people across the island, the Community Recreation Division (CRD) was created within the Ministry of Labour and Welfare to complement the Youth Services Section.

The CRD’s creation points towards the transnational influences of modern Singapore’s programs and institutions for community recreation and youth leisure. American experts and financial assistance played significant roles in the development of the SYSC and Singapore’s community recreation programmes. Through the work of Joey Long, Daniel Chua, and most recently, Ngoei Wen-qing, on post-World War Two U.S.-Singapore relations, we know that the American government became increasingly involved in Singapore from the 1950s onwards to prevent it from turning Communist.³³⁰ The United States originally avoided any involvement in Southeast Asia beyond its colony of the Philippines. Following the outbreak of the Korean War and its successful roll-back of Communism in Korea, the U.S. became more invested in keeping international Communism at bay in Southeast Asia. In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower famously, in Ngoei’s words, “envisioned the states of Southeast Asia as a row of dominoes, their fates all interconnected in the Cold War struggle.”³³¹ The State Department became particularly concerned about Communist China’s penetration into the region in the face of the waning of British

³²⁹ Loke Wan Tho, “Speech at Luncheon of Singapore Junior Chamber of Commerce 30 March 1957.” In *Loke Wan Tho’s Speeches and Talks Re: Singapore Youth Sports Centre*, NA 217 File Ref: 83

³³⁰ Joey S.R. Long, *Safe for Decolonization: The Eisenhower Administration, Britain, and Singapore* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2011); Daniel Chua, *US-Singapore Relations, 1965-1975: Strategic Non-alignment in the Cold War* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017). See also Chapter 2 of James A. Tyner, *America’s Strategy in Southeast Asia: From the Cold War to the Terror War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

³³¹ Ngoei, *Arc of Containment*, 2.

and French influence.³³² They saw Singapore a strategically-vital domino: it was host to their principal Cold War ally's naval and air installations in the region, and therefore, vital to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, a security and defence alliance set up in 1954. Accordingly, the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations placed a high emphasis on keeping the Singapore domino from falling.

Like the British and their local allies, American policymakers and Cold War warriors soon realized that the global policing of Communism turned on the question of youth. As Chris Sutton notes, by the mid-1950s, leadership in the global international Cold War rivalry for the hearts and minds of the young had shifted from the British to the Americans because the former no longer had the financial capability to match the Communist states' levels of investment in youth organizations and youth conferences and festivals.³³³ In Singapore, American diplomats and intelligence agents employed a "repertoire of diplomatic, cultural and covert tactics" to disseminate positive images of the U.S. and the American way of life to local youth.³³⁴ Youth organizations like the Singapore Youth Council and the Federation of Boys' Clubs had already benefited from the increasing American interest in supporting youth development in Singapore. The United States Information Service (USIS) provided grants to Singapore youth to tour the U.S. for about six months "to see for themselves how democracy works in a very large country."³³⁵ The USIS also gave the Boys' Clubs propaganda films to show to their members; the Federation of Boys' Clubs reported about one screening, usually well-attended, for each Boys' Club per month,

³³² Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 186.

³³³ Christopher Sutton, "Britain, Empire and the Origins of the Cold War Youth Race," *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 2 (2016), 236.

³³⁴ S.R. Joey Long, "Winning Hearts and Minds: U.S. Psychological Warfare Operations in Singapore, 1955–1961," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 5 (November 2008), 900. Long was citing National Security Council (NSC) policy paper 162/2 of the Eisenhower administration, which set out its strategy for containing the Communist threat in the region.

³³⁵ Letter from Abu Bakar bin Pawanchee to H.L. Wee, dated 12 December 1954, in NAS, Ed. 194/53/87.

except for the two clubs on Pulau Brani and Pulau Tekong – two islands off Singapore – that could not hold screenings due to the lack of electricity.³³⁶

While Long and Chua focused primarily on the actions of American political leaders, diplomats, and intelligence operatives, the role of the Asia Foundation, a private international organization founded in 1954 to promote peace, liberty, social progress, democracy, and capitalist development in post-war Asia, has been under-researched. Political scientist Vu Tuong observed that Asian nationalists played one Cold War rival against the other to “to secure American or Soviet aid for their nation-building programs.” This is true for Lim Yew Hock and Loke Wan Tho, who exploited their connections with American diplomats and intelligence operatives in Singapore for resources for their programs.³³⁷ The Asia Foundation was very much an invested player in the cultural Cold War in Asia. Earlier, the Foundation had already provided the Singapore Youth Council substantial financial assistance to develop the Tanah Merah Camp and to expand the SYC’s library of books and materials. It readily supported the SYSC as well. Amidst subsequent concerns about the SYSC’s financial sustainability, Social Welfare Department officials noted that the Asia Foundation had “very considerable sympathy with the movement” and could be an avenue of more funding for the Centre.³³⁸ Through his connections with the Asia Foundation, Loke arranged for the secondment of an American basketball coach and expert in physical education to the Centre for two years. Raymond Kaufman, an expert in coaching athletics and basketball, was then Associate Professor of Physical Education at San Francisco State College. Upon his arrival in April 1957, Kaufman was asked to coach basketball and track and field and train local sports

³³⁶ *FBC Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (November 1954), in NAS, ME 3822 2500/55 “Federation of Boy’s Club 1955-1962”.

³³⁷ Vu Tuong, “Cold War Studies and the Cultural Cold War in Asia,” in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

³³⁸ NAS, SWD 63 /56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. II”.

teachers and coaches at the Centre. He also helped to manage the centre whenever the Superintendent Hugh Savage was sick, and later helped the latter secure a USIS grant for a four-month US study tour to study and observe American community recreation institutions and programs. The Board soon discovered that the Asia Foundation had sent Kaufman to Singapore for a weightier mission than basketball coaching – to help the Singapore government develop plans and programmes for community recreation across the country.³³⁹ Kaufman was then freed from his regular daily coaching work to undertake a survey of recreational facilities in Singapore. In his “Co-ordinated Community Recreation Plan”, Kaufman observed that there was “simply no structure to the community recreation as it now exists in Singapore.” This resulted in the lack of overall planning and coordination and the under-utilization of existing facilities and premises. His key recommendation was the creation of a “common administration devoted to colony wide recreation for all the people” to coordinate all relevant government departments and community partners and organizations in the colony.³⁴⁰

The SWD’s youth services officers were extremely sceptical of Kaufman’s proposals and personal agendas, even though they concurred with his premises about youth sports and community recreation as a solution to the problem of youth. Lim Yew Hock ignored these reservations, if he heard them at all. Instead, he applauded Kaufman’s “excellent” plan and instructed the relevant agencies and ministries to “give Mr. Kaufman every assistance” in implementing the plan.³⁴¹ Hence, the Community Recreation Division was created in August 1958.

³³⁹ Memo from Perm. Sec Labour and Welfare to Secretary to Chief Minister, 24 March 1956, in NAS, SWD 63 /56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. II”.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Lim Yew Hock’s memo to the different ministries, dated 10 March 1958, in NAS, SWD 63/56 – “Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. II”.

This Division was responsible for coordinating the recreational and leisure-time activities in youth clubs, community centres and vacant lands and campsites controlled by the Department of Social Welfare. It planned and co-ordinated the use of school buildings and grounds for community recreation and the development of more grounds and land into serviceable playing fields for young and adults in the urban or rural areas of Singapore.³⁴² Its objectives, spelt out by Kaufman's plan, was to "make available to all, whether children, youths, or adults, easy access to facilities for the spending of leisure time in healthy, creative and profitable activities and contribute in no small measure to even more intensified intermingling of the races and the fostering of a sound civic sense of responsibility in all sectors of the future Island State of Singapore." Portentously for the SYSC, the new CRD's Field Headquarters was housed, with the SYSC Board's agreement, in two of the four dormitories in the Centre.³⁴³ The plan represented the culmination of the SYSC's success in proving that sports constituted a domain that the Singapore state could focus on to pursue their aims of disciplining youth subjectivity, conduct, and culture at the same time.

Significantly, the CRD incorporated one activity the SYSC previously shunned - the provision of "leadership training for youth through camping." Again, this was seen in biopolitical terms: "to give Chinese educated boys and English educated boys opportunities to live and learn together and to develop friendships in a camping situation."³⁴⁴ Even though he tasked the new department to develop recreation for all ages, Lim Yew Hock emphasized that the program was

³⁴² "Brief for Chief Minister, the Division of Community Recreation", in NAS, DIS 175/58 "The Co-ordinated Community Recreation Plan."

³⁴³ "Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Management SYSC," 8 August 1958, in NAS, SWD 63/56 - "Singapore Youth Sports Centre Vol. II."

³⁴⁴ "Brief for Chief Minister, the Division of Community Recreation," in NAS, DIS 175/58 "The Co-ordinated Community Recreation Plan."

“aimed more at the youth than the adults of the Colony”. In his brief to the relevant Ministries, Lim reiterated the basic problem of youth for Singapore:

the fact that Singapore has a population over 50% of which are youths below the age of 21 years, poses urgent problems in regard not only to employment opportunities for such a young population, but also the essential need for planning of leisure time and recreational activities of all categories. As we build more schools and provide the other social services, so must we safeguard the interests of all these youngsters in order that they may not be drawn into anti-social or other undesirable forms of associations, and thus become liabilities rather than assets to the new State of Singapore.³⁴⁵

Lim’s earnestness for the paternalistic incorporation of the young into socially acceptable and economic productive relationships with the Singapore state was undoubtedly due to the escalation of youth unrest in mid-1956 discussed in the previous chapter, which raised the stakes for the successful taming of youth conduct to new heights. Lim reached out to the Asia Foundation again and the organization arranged for an American recreational and physical educational consultant to come to Singapore to implement Kaufman’s blueprint and train a local man to take over. This recreational and physical education expert was Sterling S. Winans, who had substantial experience. He had been an instructor in physical education and music in high schools in Washington and California, where he supervised recreational programmes at city parks and beaches. Thereafter, he served as Director of Recreation for the city of Santa Maria between 1938 and 1940; Director of Recreation for Santa Barbara in California from 1941 to 1945; and recreational consultant to the California Youth Authority for two years before his appointment as the California State Director for Recreation, which he had been for eleven years prior to his arrival in Singapore.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Winans's first task was to develop Kaufman's proposals into a more comprehensive study of the existing facilities and avenues for recreation in the colony. In this report, "Singapore Developments in Community Recreation," submitted on 7 July 1959, Winans provided evidence of the growing levels of youth participation in these programs. More importantly, Winan's report reiterated ideas about the relationship between youth participation in recreation and sporting leisure and the proper upbringing of youth as citizens in a democratic community. Through recreation, young people received the chances to "exercise self-government – moral, mental and physical control of ourselves."³⁴⁶ They also learn how to fulfil their responsibilities as members of a self-governing community and support the state apparatus that allowed them to enjoy these recreational pleasures.³⁴⁷ The report was hence replete with biopolitical intent.

The role of American expertise and financial assistance in stimulating the development of sporting recreation in Singapore remains a lesser-known facet of the cultural Cold War in Southeast Asia where American technical assistance did not take the conventional forms of military technology or economic development but financial support and expertise in youth sports and mass public recreation. The Foundation certainly deemed its involvement in Singapore noteworthy enough to highlight in its 1958 *Asia Foundation Program Bulletin* as a successful example of the Asia Foundation's support for development in Asian countries. It was a good model that "will help guide other governments in Southeast Asia concerning the moral responsibility to youth in terms of recreation."³⁴⁸ Kaufman's remarks point to a broader story of the Asia

³⁴⁶ Sterling S. Winans, "Singapore Developments in Community Recreation," in NAS, DIS 175/58 "The Co-ordinated Community Recreation Plan."

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Report in the Asia Foundation Program Bulletin "Community Recreation in Singapore," 1958, 3. The article was written by Raymond Kaufman, who unabashedly credited himself for having "conceived and developed" the plan.

Foundation's involvement in promoting programs for the disciplining of youth in Southeast Asia that merits further research. Kaufman and Winans's arrival to share their expertise attest again to how trans-imperial circulations of youth developers within a global assemblage partly shaped the disciplining of youth in Singapore.

The End of the Singapore Youth Sports Centre

The CRD's establishment had ambiguous consequences for the SYSC. On the one hand, it attested to the SYSC's success in proving that sporting recreation was a viable strategy for disciplining the young. On the other, the SYSC was displaced as the government asserted more control over the management of the colony's recreational programs and plans. This was unsurprising, given the government's growing disillusionment with the SYSC's management. Kaufman alluded to this in his *Asia Foundation Program Bulletin* article, where he noted that the Singapore government had become convinced "that any sound program reaching the many hundreds of thousands of young people as well as adults must stem from the government."³⁴⁹ Internally, senior colonial government officials like the Singapore Commissioner of Police were voicing anxieties about the Centre's deteriorating fortunes and the deficiencies of its management and leadership.³⁵⁰ In late 1958, the Governor of Singapore, William Goode, corresponded with the Colonial Office on the subject of the SYSC's future and revealed that "there [was] a good deal of hard thinking going on about the running of this Youth Sports Centre." The SYSC Board themselves, Goode wrote, were "coming to the view that the whole project would be more soundly based and administered if it was brought under the supervision of the Government."³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ "Note by H.E. the Governor", 22 August 1958, in NAS, FCO 141/15014 – "Singapore Youth Sports Centre".

³⁵¹ Ibid.

The SYSC's financial sustainability was the principal problem. The Centre incurred a deficit of \$31,934.14 for the year of 1956 and \$80,109.47 for 1957 - a total deficit of \$121,043.61 for its first two years of operation. The SYSC was originally meant to be financially self-sufficient from membership subscriptions and public donations, but the SYSC Board did not have much success in raising public donations beyond the initial effusive support it received in 1956. By September 1957, the SYSC had to cut staff and appeal to the government for financial assistance. Government officials were evidently losing confidence in a SYSC Board that revelled in their status as youth leaders and developers but showed little competence in sustaining the institution that accorded them this status.

As such, the Labour Front government was reticent towards supporting the SYSC's expansion plans. In 1959, the resignation of its Superintendent, Hugh Savage, further affected the SYSC's credibility. Savage resigned after a quarrel with some Board members, in particular Sir Percy McNeice, the Deputy Chair of the Board and Loke Wan Tho's brother-in-law, over a press report on the SYSC's work in March 1958. Savage's public statements proved to be the final straw in a series of disagreements between Savage and the Board over the former's proclivity for acting without Board approval. The estrangement between Savage and the SYSC Board was rendered moot when Savage met with an accident while pillion-riding on a motorcycle in May 1958 and was unable to return to work for over two months. The fall-out occurred just after Savage returned from his four-month USIS-sponsored study tour of the United States, brimming with ideas to improve the recreational sports landscape in Singapore. Savage's report on his tour, submitted to the SYSC Board, gives us his view of the gaps and deficiencies in these domains in Singapore. We can only speculate the extent to which his observations were incorporated into the development

of community recreation and youth sports in the country.³⁵² By late 1958, the government was diverting its resources and attention away from the SYSC towards institutions that it could control and coordinate better, especially the Community Recreation Division, community centres and youth clubs on the island.

Conclusion

The People's Action Party's overwhelming electoral victory in the Singapore General Elections of 30 May 1959 sealed the SYSC's fate, as it did the Singapore Youth Council's. Shortly after the election, PAP Minister K.M. Byrne, who replaced Lim Yew Hock as Minister for Labour and Law, informed the SYSC Board that the SYSC was not to hire any new employee until the Ministry determined the Centre's future."³⁵³ In the same month, Percy McNiece resigned as Deputy Chairman. Shortly thereafter, in October 1959, Loke Wan Tho informed the SYSC Board of his resignation, purportedly to allow him to focus on his new appointment as Chairman of Malayan Airlines. By then, Loke had also become estranged from Malcolm MacDonald after rumours of improprieties between MacDonald and his wife Christina Loke emerged. These developments contributed in no small part to Loke's ready acquiescence to the PAP government's decision to dissolve the Centre.³⁵⁴ Finally, in December 1959, Byrne repealed the Singapore Youth Sports Centre Ordinance and placed the Centre under the Social Welfare Department's supervision.³⁵⁵ On 21 December 1959, the Centre was handed over to the SWD; the services of all

³⁵² Savage's report can be found in the folder "Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Management of The Singapore Youth Sports Centre", in NAS, SWD 63A/56 - "Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Management of The Singapore Youth Sports Centre."

³⁵³ "Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Management SYSC", 13 July 1959, in NAS, SWD 28/59 - "Singapore Youth Sports Centre – Board of Management".

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

its staff were terminated with effect from 31 January 1960.³⁵⁶ This was only a few months after the SYSC celebrated its third anniversary on 17 October 1959. In the report commemorating this third anniversary, the Centre was hailed as “an institution unique in South East Asia, set up to cater for the physical recreation needs of the young people of the State of Singapore.”³⁵⁷ More than 700,000 young people – “the flower of Singapore’s youths” – the report enthused, had used the Centre.³⁵⁸ By itself, the aspiration of building a multicultural sports centre for the sake of racial harmony appeared to be a utopian idealistic impulse. Yet, contextualized within the heady intersecting politics of race, language, and decolonization in Singapore in the late 1940s and 1950s, this was clearly meant to homogenize an ethnically and socially divided population and tame delinquent and dissenting youth.

Despite its efforts to distance itself from the pro-colonial SYC, the SYSC was too strongly connected to Malcolm MacDonald, the Labour Front, and American financial and technical assistance for the fiercely anti-colonial PAP to accept. The PAP government’s decision to dissolve the SYSC was also due to the latter’s declining ineffectiveness in a domain of social policy that Singapore politicians and civil servants now deemed vital. Dr Goh Keng Swee, who witnessed first-hand the efforts to provide more sporting recreation for youth in the 1950s, was now a key member of the PAP. Having witnessed the deficiencies of the SYSC’s management, Goh believed that the mass provision of sporting recreation could not be left mainly to private citizens, however passionate and enthusiastic they may be. Instead, the lessons of the SYC and the SYSC taught the

³⁵⁶ Letter from W.S. Woon, Director of Social Welfare to The Comptroller of Income Tax, 20 July 1960, in NAS, SWD/63/56 “Singapore Youth Sports Centre”.

³⁵⁷ “Report on the 3rd Annual Anniversary”, in NAS, SWD 63A/56 - “Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Management of The Singapore Youth Sports Centre”.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

PAP government that a strong political centre was required to coordinate the assemblage of community leaders and youth workers on the island. The cases of the SYC and the SYSC suggest that flow of power in a disciplinary state could be iterative and corrective, where the Singapore disciplinary state actively intervened to strengthen or re-organize its assemblage of actors and institutions, whenever necessary or expedient, to support its disciplinary objectives.

Accordingly, the PAP government established, in the very same Kallang Air Terminal that housed the SYSC, the headquarters of the People's Association (PA). The PA was a new state-directed central coordinating agency for the twenty-eight community centres established by the colonial government. The PAP government quickly built up these centres after taking power in 1959. These community centres became the neighbourhood hubs of youth clubs, boys' clubs and girls' clubs, and sporting facilities for youth development and youth recreation in Singapore. Today, the People's Association's official histories have fallen silent about its origins in the converging politics of youth, the Cold War, decolonization, and nation-building in the 1950s. This is even though community centres offering a diverse range of social activities and recreational programmes for all ages now stand in every precinct and district in Singapore – monuments of state and adult interest in providing sporting recreation for youth. Originating in Western ideas about the utility of sports for disciplining and policing the young, sporting recreation became an everyday pedagogical space for Singapore's children and youth from the late 1950s onwards.

Chapter Five

Taming Youth Idealism: The PAP and the Management of Youth, 1954-1969

28 January 1950. The scene is Malaya Hall, London, the residence of Malaya-born university students studying in the colonial metropole.

A young man, who had just graduated with a Law degree from Cambridge University, stood before a crowded audience of Malayan students. With startling candidness, he mesmerized his audience with a lecture on the future place of the “returned student” in Malaya and the “lines along which [they] should act if [they were] to rise up to the situation instead of waiting passively for events to overtake and overwhelm [them].”³⁵⁹ He demanded that his audience recognize that they were the type of leaders the British preferred as the leaders of an independent Malaya inclusive of Singapore.³⁶⁰ Hence, they, like the returned students who led nationalist struggles for independence in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, had to be at the forefront of the struggle to end imperialism in Malaya.³⁶¹ Their duty was to organize a nationalist movement that, first, competed effectively with race-based nationalist movements and the Communists for the loyalty of the Malayan populace, and second, succeeded in building a socially-cohesive, multicultural Malaya.³⁶² If they failed in their duty, these elite youth may find that “there is no place for us in the Malaya that is to be after the British have departed.”³⁶³

³⁵⁹ “The Returned Student – A Talk Given to the Malayan Forum at Malaya Hall, London (28 January 1950)” in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew: Speeches, Interviews and Dialogues*, Volume 1 (Singapore: The National Archives of Singapore, Gale Asia Pte Ltd, 2012), 3.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Times had changed, the 27-year-old Lee Kuan Yew emphasized, and so must they, if the English-educated were to safeguard their interests and even their lives in a Malaya going through cataclysmic change. Lee and a few other like-minded members of the audience returned to Singapore and bade their time under the restrictive climate of the Emergency Regulations implemented in 1948. He practised law in a local law firm and became a legal adviser to a few trade unions, gradually establishing his credentials as an advocate for the working-class. Four years later, on 21 November 1954, Lee and a motley group of activists founded the People's Action Party (PAP), a socialist, anti-colonial nationalist movement that fought for a democratic, independent, multicultural Malaya inclusive of Singapore. He became its Secretary-General. On 30 May 1959, the People's Action Party won a resounding victory in the first-ever full general elections of a self-governing Singapore and Lee became the first Prime Minister of Singapore at the age of 35. Lee, after defeating his political rivals in the Labour Front in the 1959 elections, would go on to turn the conduct and mentalities of Singaporean youth into a life-time obsession. He and his colleagues in the PAP inherited the colonial state's disciplinary apparatus and turned it into a formidable instrument for the social control, incorporation, surveillance, and engineering of the then-youthful Singaporean population.

As the previous chapters have shown, Lee and the PAP came onto the scene during a period when the young had become a riveting social and political concern for many adults. The youth were associated with the shape of the postcolonial nation-state being built, and were regarded as a source of political legitimacy for any would-be national leadership. This chapter focuses on the PAP founding leaders' formative encounters with different groups of young people from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. It argues that the PAP leaders' entanglements with youths during this

period led them to embrace the necessity of regulating youth conduct and establishing cooperative relationships between Singapore's youth and the state. They went further than the Japanese, the British, and Labour Front governments in constructing a dualistic discourse of Singapore's youth as both the potential pillar and the potential peril of the new nation. This discourse was premised on their malleability, which simultaneously valorized the potential power of youth and aggrandized their vulnerability to competing influences. Lee and another key PAP leader, Dr Goh Keng Swee, believed that it was vital for the Singapore state to encourage and exploit the idealism and energy of young Singaporeans for national development, and at the same time, prevent political or ideological competitors from doing so for their agendas. The Singapore government subsequently created new institutions and expanded colonial-era programs to produce disciplined citizens, both regulated and self-regulating, mobilized and self-mobilizing, out of Singapore's youthful population. By the 1970s, most Singaporean youth could be found in disciplinary institutions, organizations, and movements that aimed to normalize, train, mobilize, and police their bodies and minds for productive service to the new Singaporean state, society, and economy.

The PAP as beneficiaries, witnesses, and antagonists of youth idealism

It may surprise the many liberal-minded present-day critics of the notoriously illiberal PAP government that the PAP represented the party of the country's most idealistic and committed youth activists when it was formed. The origins of the national movement, as the PAP saw itself, that has dominated Singapore politics since 1959 laid within the vibrant landscape of youth idealism, radicalism, and activism in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s.

An error of judgement by the British Governor of Singapore, John Nicoll, during a month of highly visible youth protest, culminated in the PAP's formation. In late May 1954, Nicoll ordered the arrest of eight members of the *Fajar* editorial board for sedition. *Fajar* was the magazine of the University of Malaya Socialist Club (USC), the first student political club founded in Singapore four years after the establishment of the University of Malaya in 1949. Nicoll was angered by a *Fajar* editorial criticizing the British-sponsored formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. As the USC published the piece a week after the outbreak of the Chinese middle school students' highly charged demonstrations against the colonial government's National Service bill on 13 May, Nicoll suspected that these elite undergraduates were conspiring with the Chinese school students to undermine the colonial government.

After their colleagues' arrest, the University Socialists secured the services of a renowned British Queen's Counsel, D.N. Pritt, to defend the arrested *Fajar* editorial board members. They also asked Pritt to defend Chinese-medium secondary school students arrested earlier for participation in the May 13 demonstrations. Pritt's assistant was Lee Kuan Yew, then a legal adviser to a few of Singapore's trade unions. Pritt and Lee succeeded in persuading the trial judge to throw out the sedition charge against the University Socialists. However, they failed to acquit the Chinese school students. Nonetheless, Lee's participation in the defense of the persecuted students cemented his credibility with the left-wing movement. He gained key allies in the University Socialists, the leaders of the powerful labour movement, and the Chinese middle school student movement.³⁶⁴ In November 1954, the leaders of these groups formed a new political movement to end colonialism and establish an independent Malaya inclusive of Singapore.

³⁶⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, Times Editions, 1998), 166, 177.

The PAP's origins hence laid in the convergence of three different strands of youth activism in Singapore. The first strand, as the opening to this chapter highlights, consisted of the politically awoken England-educated young professionals who returned to Malaya and Singapore from their university studies in the colonial metropole, where they had been exposed to new ideas like Fabian socialism. In their travels, they also witnessed the power of youth-led anti-colonial movements all over Asia. Three of these professionals, Lee Kuan Yew, S. Rajaratnam, and Toh Chin Chye, were the PAP's founding convenors. Lee and Toh were associated with the Malayan Forum discussion circle in London, which had been formed in 1949 by six students – including Goh Keng Swee and the future Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdul Razak. The Malayan Forum's purpose was to bring together politically minded students from Malaya and Singapore in the U.K. to discuss political issues and affairs. The title of its newsletter, *Suara Merdeka* ("Voice of Freedom" in Malay) encapsulated their aspirations for an independent Malaya. This group of young professionals began to hold regular political discussions in the basement of Lee Kuan Yew's house from early 1954 onwards.

The second strand consisted of the English-educated student activists in the University of Malaya Socialist Club. A group of students seeking to push for a non-communal, socialist, and independent Malaya formed the USC on 21 February 1953.³⁶⁵ The Club drew many politically conscious undergraduates who shared the Club's strong anti-colonial and socialist sentiments. Unlike other groups of University of Malaya undergraduates, they were not content with participation in campus politics; they ventured beyond the elite University of Malaya to forge

³⁶⁵ Loh Kah Seng, Edgar Liao, Guo-quan Seng and Cheng-Tju Lim, *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press; Singapore: NUS Press 2012); Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee, and Koh Kay Yew, eds., *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and The Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: SIRD, 2010).

connections with the Chinese-medium secondary school students and with the trade unions. The University Socialists published and distributed their own magazine, *Fajar* (Malay for “Dawn”), to the public, the trade unions, and other schools in Malaya. The publication, which contained fierce criticisms and diatribes against the colonial government, quickly attracted the attention of the British authorities.

The third and most important strand of youth political activism in Singapore was the powerful left-wing movement. This comprised the trade unions representing Chinese and non-Chinese workers from different trades and occupations, and the radicalized students in the Chinese-medium middle schools. Many of these workers and youth resonated readily with the Malayan Communist Party’s anti-colonial and anti-capitalist messages. They were inspired by the struggles to end unjust colonial rule across Asia. They appreciated the Chinese Communist Party’s proclamation of a new People’s Republic in 1949. Lee openly admired the Chinese-educated youth and their leaders. One prominent leader was Fong Swee Suan, a co-founder of the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers’ Union. Fong was surpassed in prominence and popularity only by Lim Chin Siong, a charismatic orator who held electrifying rallies in fluent Malay, Mandarin, and Hokkien (a Southern Chinese dialect).³⁶⁶ Lee famously once regarded Lim as his only rival to become the Prime Minister of an independent Singapore.³⁶⁷ Both Fong and Lim were only young

³⁶⁶ On the story of Lim Chin Siong, see T.N. Harper, “Lim Chin Siong and the ‘Singapore Story,’” in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, eds. Tan Jing Quee and K.S. Jomo (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 2001), 1-56. See also Thum Pingtjin, “The Malayan Vision of Lim Chin Siong: Unity, Non-violence, and Popular Sovereignty,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2017), 391-413.

³⁶⁷ See Melanie Chew’s interview with Lim Chin Siong in Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore* (Singapore: Resource Press, 1996). There are two editions of a vital collection of essays dedicated to the study and memory of Lim’s life and activism. Fong Swee Suan, who recently died, published his memoirs in Chinese, 方水双 *Fong Swee Suan*. 方水双回忆录 *The Memoirs of Fong Swee Suan* (新山 Johor Baru, Malaysia: 新山陶德书香楼 Xin shan tao de shu xiang lou, 2007). For a powerful eye-witness account of the interactions between the different strands of student and youth activism in Singapore in the 1950s, see Poh Soo Kai, *Living in a Time of Deception* (Singapore: Function 8 Ltd; Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2016). For an extended study of the PAP founding members,

schoolboys of about 15 to 16 years old studying in the Chinese High School when the Malayan Emergency started in 1948. As Lee recounted in his memoirs, when he first met Lim and Fong during his involvement in the *Fajar* trial, he saw them as “the Chinese-educated equivalent of the *Fajar* boys who were prosecuted for sedition, but more determined, more selfless, more hardworking, the kind of lieutenants we had been searching for.”³⁶⁸ Shortly before, Lee had witnessed the dynamism of the Chinese-educated student movements during the 1954 National Service student protests. This convinced him that Singapore’s future laid in the hands of its idealistic, passionate, and committed youth.³⁶⁹

The Ideal Malayan/Singaporean Youth

As the earlier chapters have shown, the 1950s and 1960s constituted the period when the question of the new country’s ideal youth was being questioned, debated, and inextricably linked to the question of the country’s future political leadership. Foucault contended that the processes of selection, normalization, hierarchization, and centralization of bodies were a key component of how a disciplinary society applied biopower through institutions and discursive practices. This insight asks us to examine the dominant images of ideal bodies constructed and deployed by a disciplinary state for these purposes. An image of the ideal, exemplary Malayan (later Singaporean) youth clearly emerges from Lee’s reflections from his experiences and encounters with the two most prominent groups of youths in the country. He, and his colleagues in the PAP combined the

see Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y. L. Tan, eds., *Lee’s Lieutenants: Singapore’s Old Guard* (St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1999).

³⁶⁸ Lee, *The Singapore Story*, 178.

³⁶⁹ Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and his Ideas* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, Times Editions, 1998), 45, cited in Yao Souchou, “All Quiet on Jurong Road: Nanyang University and Radical Vision in Singapore,” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore*, ed. Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 182. See also “The English-educated and the Future” – Address at the Singapore Union of Journalists Lunch at the Cathay Dragon Room (16 August 1959) in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol. 1, 114-115.

desirable attributes and qualities of these groups of youth into an image of the exemplary Singapore youth that would be the best suited to become the leaders of a viable, multicultural, and harmonious independent country. This image became the template that the PAP-directed Singapore disciplinary state privileged in its different mechanisms to evaluate, train, and hierarchize Singaporean youth after 1959.

Shortly after coming to power, Lee and his colleagues rallied tertiary students in the University of Singapore and the Singapore Polytechnic to embrace the task of leading the new country's development. In one speech at the Singapore Polytechnic on 6 April 1961, Lee reminded his young audience that in transitional societies like the decolonizing Afro-Asian countries, it was "the youth of that society which sets the pace" and "form the vanguard of that transition."³⁷⁰ He reminded the audience that he became a political leader six years after he left university, and Prime Minister of Singapore eleven years after he graduated with his first degree from Cambridge. Lee thought himself emblematic of the trend in the Afro-Asia countries where young leaders like Tom Mboya (Kenya) and Aung San (Burma) took over leadership from the older generation and led their countries into a new era.³⁷¹ Given Singapore's youthful population, it was natural, therefore, that "youths not only decide the leaders, youths become the leaders."³⁷² He demanded that the tertiary students rise to the occasion, just as he had demanded the Malayan university students in London in 1950, and support the Singapore government as active citizens.

³⁷⁰ "Youth and Politics in Afro-Asia" – Speech to the Political Society of the Singapore Polytechnic (6 April 1961) in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol. 1, 213.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 214-216.

Lee was anxious for the English-educated to stake their claims as the new country's rightful leadership; otherwise, they risked displacement by the other groups of activists from different socio-cultural backgrounds and ideological persuasions. Despite his admiration for the Chinese-educated youth movements, Lee did not waver in his beliefs. As expressed in his 1950 speech in London, he believed that it was the English-educated youth who ought to be the leaders of Singapore's nationalist movement. This was in part because the Chinese-educated youth were more likely to gravitate towards Communism and Chinese cultural nationalism. These, Lee believed, were the main impediments to Singapore's successful decolonization and post-colonial nation-building. Lee wished to forge a multicultural Singapore made up of citizens who could resist the powerful pulls of race, ethnicity, culture and religion. He valorized the English-educated students of the University of Malaya as the ideal template of future Malaysians (and later, Singaporeans). In 1960, at a talk in the University, Lee sensationally pronounced the University of Malaya undergraduates as the group "nearest to the norm of what a Malaysian should ultimately be in a Malaysian nation."³⁷³ The English-educated were the only group able to "transcend the racial barriers of the races of Malaya," due to their "homogeneity of attitudes, of values and social cohesion cutting across racial and cultural lines." Their proficiency in the English language and their Western educational backgrounds were vital attributes that prevented them from embracing ethnic nationalism and Communism. This was an idea that he had consistently held since his speech to the Malaysian Forum in 1950. It helped that Lee himself belonged to this group.

The PAP government was not treading on new ground when they envisioned the elite youth of the University of Malaya as the key to Singapore's post-colonial future. As Chapter Three shows,

³⁷³ "Graduates and Nation-building," Speech at the University of Malaya Socialist Club (1 July 1960) in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol. 1, 190.

British plans to create a new self-governing democracy made them keen to socialize “Young Malaysians” through the expansion of English-medium primary education and other civic rituals. The University of Malaya’s establishment in 1949 was part of these plans to transfer power to an Anglicized local elite and preserve the British’s economic and strategic interests in the region. In historian Anthony Stockwell’s characterization, the University was to become “the crucible of the Malayan Nation” by producing pro-British, Western-educated elite young Malaysians.³⁷⁴ Its Chancellor, Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General in Southeast Asia who started the Singapore Youth Sports Centre project discussed in the previous chapter, declared the University “a cradle where a truly non-communal nation is nurtured” through the provision of a common bonding experience for young Malaysians of all races.³⁷⁵ The University of Malaya, therefore, was not simply meant to be a degree-granting institution training the new country’s professional manpower and administrators. Instead, it was to become a disciplinary institution to churn out elite youth with the desired outlooks and values.

Like the British, Lee also believed that the graduates of the University of Malaya would be willing partners of the Singapore state. Another “good quality of the English-educated,” as Lee noted in a different speech to the University of Malaya in Singapore Students’ Union in 1961, was that they possessed “the instinctive respect for law and order and a desire not to be a party to unlawful and unseemly conduct.”³⁷⁶ Lee’s vision was ultimately an ableist and elitist one. He sacralised the English-educated youth – they would become the administrators, leaders of the

³⁷⁴ A.J. Stockwell, “‘The Crucible of the Malayan Nation’: The University and the Making of a New Malaya, 1938-62,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 5 (September 2008), 1149.

³⁷⁵ Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), 58-59.

³⁷⁶ “Taking a Stand,” Speech at the Dinner of the University of Malaya Students’ Union, Singapore, the Rosee d’Or (30 November 1961), in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol.1, 307.

country. Through their leadership and example, they would become a “powerful factor towards cohesion and unity.”³⁷⁷ Evidently, he intended these elite youth to become the role models and disciplinary agents who would help the state produce more local youth in the same mould.

However, Lee also believed that these undergraduates were deficient in some critical ways. He argued that they were “devitalised, almost emasculated, as a result of deculturalisation.” Their Western education was a poisoned chalice that caused them to lose touch with “the mass of their own people who speak the vernacular languages.”³⁷⁸ As a result, they were unable to gain the support of the majority of the local population, who supported instead the pro-Communists and cultural nationalists. To compound this weakness, these model “Malayans” lacked the verve, courage, and organizational discipline of their counterparts in the Chinese-medium schools. He recalled this impression of the University of Malaya undergraduates in a vignette in his memoirs published in 1994. In October 1955, he passed by the Chinese High School, where the Chinese-educated students were staging well-organized sit-in protests against the colonial government’s discriminatory education policies. Afterwards, he drove past the University of Malaya’s Duncannon Road student hostels and was disgusted to see that:

... some students were gleefully blowing football referee whistles, excited at the prospect of the fun and games soon to begin. I cursed the idiocy, ignorance, and naivety of those English-educated students. They did not know what a dangerous position they were in.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ “Graduates and Nation-building,” Speech at the University of Malaya Socialist Club (1 July 1960) in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol.1, 191.

³⁷⁸ “The English-educated and the Future,” Address at the Singapore Union of Journalists Lunch at the Cathay Dragon Room (16 August 1959) in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, Vol.1, 114-115.

³⁷⁹ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, 246-247. The University of Malaya was established in 1949 under colonial auspices through the merger of Raffles College and King Edward VII Medical College in Singapore. In 1979, it merged with Nanyang University to become the National University of Singapore. Before 1979, it was named the University of Malaya in Singapore (1958-1961) and the University of Singapore (1962-1979) in alignment with political developments.

Thus, the two most prominent groups of youth in 1950s and 1960s Singapore posed different sorts of anxieties for the Singapore PAP government. The cultural politics of youth became inexorably tied to the vital question of who would become the country's future social and political leadership. The English-educated university students in Singapore were, in Lee's mind, the socio-cultural template of ideal citizens and leaders for a non-Communist, multicultural Singapore. However, they lacked the social consciousness, tenacity, and organizational ability and discipline of their counterparts in the Chinese-medium schools. A PAP cadre member Fong Sip Chee recounted his impressions that "the English stream students were not only apolitical, but also did not quite know what it was all about. Politics at that time mattered little to the English educated. There was really nothing for them to fight for."³⁸⁰ This compared unfavourably to the squads of well-organized, disciplined Chinese-educated youth who "provided the sinews on the ground" for the PAP during their election campaigning and became the core of the party. Any of these youth, Fong attested, "could readily launch into political harangues without preparation."³⁸¹ Lee and his cohort, as evident from the many occasions he had to speak to the English-educated youth born in Malaya and Singapore, wrestled with the problem of ensuring that the local communities embraced this group of youth as the leaders of a self-governing democracy. This group did not seem to have a bright future when social status and political position was no longer based on colonial fiat and British patronage. Within the tumultuous politics of culture, language, decolonization during this period, the English language and Western cultural heritage that these youths carried, which Lee and the colonial authorities valued, had become a liability.

³⁸⁰ Fong, *The PAP Story: The Pioneering Years (November 1954 – April 1968): A Diary of Events of the People's Action Party: Reminiscences of an Old Cadre* (Singapore: Times Periodical, 1980), 30.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

Hence, the PAP leaders were anxious for the English-educated youth of Singapore to be as effectively organized and politically committed, as the Chinese-educated youth. If the English-educated youth were to become a counter-veiling bulwark against the Chinese-educated youth, then their behaviour would have to change. In his recent monograph, Ngoei Wen-qing cites correspondence between Lee Kuan Yew and the UK Commissioner in August 1959, where Lee emphasized to the Commissioner that his rivals recruited “ten able young Chinese from the Chinese schools” for each English-educated youth that joined Lee’s faction in the PAP. Hence, Lee had to increase the number of English-medium schools to produce more English-educated or bi-cultural youth.³⁸² He and other PAP politicians continued to encourage the English-educated students to participate in the country’s political development and to wrest the initiative from their more radical, pro-Communist counterparts in the Chinese schools. This was a clear continuation of the earlier British strategy of defeating Communism by moulding Anglicized youth who were more likely to align themselves with a pro-Western, English-educated political leadership.

Taming Youth: Collisions and Contestations

While the qualities of these two groups influenced Lee’s ideas about exemplary Singapore youth, the collisions with the radical, left-wing youth and with other groups of youth activists in Singapore shaped his beliefs about necessity of taming transgressive youth. These collisions must be contextualized within the momentous, volatile political developments that Singapore confronted in the early 1960s prior to its independence in 1965.

³⁸² Ngoei Wen-qing, *Arc of Containment: Britain, The United States, and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2019), 126. He cites this document: UK Commissioner, “Discussion with the Prime Minister on August 13, 1959,” 14 August 1959, FCO 141/15345, The National Archives.

Between the PAP's formation and its election as the government of self-governing Singapore in 1959, the PAP was a formidable alliance of activists from opposing ideological positions and social backgrounds. Both sides were engaged in an ambiguous and uneasy arrangement to use each other to ascend to political power within the constitutional framework. Lee Kuan Yew captained a group of Western-educated professionals who were moderate in their political outlook. They were adept at communicating with the British and the English-educated bourgeois world, and at operating within Western political structures and constitutional processes. The left-wing labour movement and Chinese-medium schools student movements enjoyed mass appeal and support from the workers and the majority Chinese community.³⁸³ These two groups exploited each other's strengths to rise in prominence and popularity, first as an opposition party in the Labour Front coalition government between 1955 and 1959, and finally eclipsing the Labour Front as the most credible anti-colonial nationalist movement in Singapore.

After the PAP defeated Lim Yew Hock's Labour Front party in the 1959 elections and became the government of Singapore, Lee then pursued a merger with the Federation of Malaya.³⁸⁴ The revived possibility of merger brought the conflicts between the factions in the PAP into the open. Lim Chin Siong and the left-wing leaders were dead-set against merger; they were concerned about their political futures under a new political arrangement that allowed the anti-Communist,

³⁸³ Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, 136.

³⁸⁴ On the complex politics of the merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya, see Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998); Tan Tai Yong, *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonisation and the Politics of Merger* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008). The leaders of the ruling Alliance Party in the Federation of Malay originally opposed the idea of merger with Singapore. They were concerned that Singapore's overwhelmingly Chinese population would upset the racial balance of power in the Federation, and that Singapore had too many leftists and Communists. However, their position changed following the imminent threat of the left-wing movement taking over Singapore. On 27 May 1961, Tengku Abdul Rahman, in a speech to foreign correspondents, openly mooted the possibility and desirability of a merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. The imperative of ensuring the internal security of neighbouring Singapore over-rode his previous reticence to a reunification with Singapore.

conservative Federation of Malaya government to intervene in Singapore's politics. They also perceived merger as a colonial machination invented by the British, Lee, and the Federation of Malaya government, to block them from gaining power. In June 1961, the left-wing faction made an open bid to seize power from Lee's faction. The uneasy alliance disintegrated. Lee expelled the left-wing Members of the Legislative Assembly from the PAP in July 1961, leaving the party with 26 members in a 51-member Assembly. On 17 September 1962, Lim and the left-wing leaders formed a new political party, the *Barisan Sosialis* (BS), which became the focal point of left-wing movements and organizations in Singapore.

This split altered the course of the politics of youth activism in Singapore. The Chinese-medium schools student movements and the labour unions had been the PAP's most important source of support between 1954 and 1961. Most of their members now turned against the PAP and lent their numbers to the *Barisan*. Between 1961 and 1962, the *Barisan* and the PAP mobilized their allies to compete over the question of merger. The PAP's battle with the *Barisan* has been a major theme in Singapore historiography. What this historiography has not foregrounded is that this ideological and political contest between erstwhile partners also entailed a competition to be the master and director of Singapore's idealistic youth. Throughout the 1960s, these collisions with different groups of militant youth hardened the PAP's views about the necessity of quelling youth militancy, youth protest, and juvenile delinquency, as well as the value of mobilizing youth idealism for their political agendas.

At this point, Lee began to rally the public to assist the PAP government in its project to tame and incorporate Singapore's youth. The apparatus to mobilize youth now extended to the

general public, galvanized to help police the conduct of the young. In 1962, Lee made a series of broadcasts in different languages over Radio Singapore to explain the PAP government's position on merger and to rally public opinion against the left-wing movement. Lee impressed upon the public his anxieties about the Communist subversion of youth. He called for the public to assist the government in insulating the minds of children and youth from Communist influence. The Communists, defeated militarily in Malaya, he explained, were exploiting the idealism of the Chinese middle-school students in Malaya and Singapore to find new recruits for their struggle.³⁸⁵ On the streets, the militancy of the Chinese school students and labour movements' actions served as evidence for Lee's claims. To meet this challenge, it was important to present the populace with "a clean and effective alternative to the communist rigidly-disciplined society" and "offer healthy and dynamic leadership *to channel the idealism of our young men and women of the coming generation* [emphasis mine] as they leave our school and universities."³⁸⁶ The fight against the Communists was effectively "a struggle for the hearts and minds of the political activists of the country."³⁸⁷ Lee's words also underlined the PAP leadership's beliefs that the Singapore state could not and should not simply repress the agency of idealistic youth. Instead, it should become the agenda-setter and the beneficiary of the idealism of Singapore's young. The competition to incorporate Singapore's idealistic and passionate youth into the disciplinary state was officially on the public agenda.

³⁸⁵ "Broadcast Talk II: The Communist Challenge," Broadcast over Radio Singapore (15 September 1961), in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, 242.

³⁸⁶ "Broadcast Talk XII: A New Nation Though Merger," Broadcast over Radio Singapore (9 October 1961), in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, 293.

³⁸⁷ "Broadcast Talk II: The Communist Challenge," Broadcast over Radio Singapore (15 September 1961), in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, 244.

The working-class youth and Chinese-educated students spilled onto the streets once again. For more than a decade, youths had frequently protested and rioted in the streets. The repression of the left-wing forces in 1963 provoked another round of protests. In February 1963, the Federation of Malaya and the Singapore governments, with the reluctant consent of British officials, launched an internal security operation named Operation Coldstore, in which they arrested and detained 113 leaders of the *Barisan Sosialis* and the left-wing organizations, on the allegation that they were about to launch a Communist insurrection against the Singapore government.³⁸⁸ The arrests provoked youth demonstrations at City Hall, which the government portrayed as Communist efforts to “try to involve innocent but misguided youths and women in violent clashes through front men in the Barisan Socialis.”³⁸⁹ This trope of youth as naïve innocents manipulated by insidious forces would recur in Singapore’s management of youth. This depiction of youth was simultaneously empowering and incarceratory – it constructed youth as concomitantly powerful but vulnerable, warranting the state’s guidance and policing.

With the majority of its top echelon in detention, the Barisan could not compete with the PAP in the Legislative Assembly elections held shortly after the creation of Malaya on 16 September 1963. As a result, the PAP won 37 out of 51 seats, with the *Barisan* winning only 13. The *Barisan Sosialis* assemblymen boycotted the Legislative Assembly, which enabled the PAP-majority Parliament greater leeway to pass bills without opposition. Finding the PAP now entrenched in government, the *Barisan*’s young supporters took to the streets. In 1965, there were

³⁸⁸ Operation Coldstore remains a hotly contested controversy in Singapore historiography. See Loh Kah Seng, “An Annotated Bibliography of Operation Coldstore,” 15 January 2015 (<https://www.newmandala.org/the-history-writes-itself-an-annotated-bibliography-of-operation-coldstore/>) for an excellent summary of the controversy and the major works associated with the debate.

³⁸⁹ *The Straits Times*, 24 April 1963.

about twenty-one demonstrations and clashes between police and youth, with 258 youths arrested and charged.³⁹⁰ In the first six months of June 1967, Singapore witnessed forty-nine incidents of illegal processions and demonstrations by youths. Youth did not only demonstrate in the streets. In their schools, Chinese school students attacked principals and teachers who interfered in their protests.

In response to these different groups of youth, the PAP government did not hesitate to invoke the punitive, legislative, and judicial tools it had at its disposal (left behind by the colonial government) to incarcerate or punish transgressive youth. As in the case of mid-20th-century North America as discussed by Tamara Myers, exclusionary or punitive measures to deal with transgressive, delinquent youth did not disappear, even as the Singapore state began to rely more on productive methods that shaped subjectivity and conduct.³⁹¹ They adapted several colonial-era laws and enacted new ones to quell militant youth protest. The 1960s was the decade in which the PAP government earned its longstanding reputation for being authoritarian and paternalistic. For instance, they introduced and strengthened the Vandalism Act to deal with arson committed against buses, community centres, PAP branches, and post offices between 1968 and 1971. The PAP government also adapted the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance, which the Lim Yew Hock-Labour government introduced in August 1958 precisely to deal with youth protest and secret society gang fights. According to a police spokesperson in 1966, this law was effective in reducing the incidence of secret society gang fights from 400 in 1957 to 70 in 1965.³⁹² At the end of June 1967, the government passed the Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill to give

³⁹⁰ *The Straits Times*, 2 May 1965; *The Straits Times*, 4 May 1965; *The Straits Times*, 8 May 1965.

³⁹¹ Tamara Myers, *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 12.

³⁹² *The Straits Times*, 3 March 1966.

courts the right to refuse bail to persons charged with rioting. The government also used the Registry of Societies Act, another colonial-era legislation, to police youth organizations and recreational organizations suspected of being fronts for Communists or secret societies. Legislation and law enforcement thus went together with the technique of encouraging and nurturing civil society and community organizations to partner the state in providing youth welfare and youth services.

It was during these struggles with the *Barisan* that the PAP-directed Singapore disciplinary state extended its influence over an institution for the very young – kindergartens. The PAP was worried about the pro-Communists using kindergartens in rural areas to spread Communist ideas to children. In December 1965, the Defence Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee declared that Communists were using kindergartens to subvert toddlers by getting them to sing anti-government jingles or through influencing their parents.³⁹³ Consequently, the PAP government had to “combat Communist subversion of the infant mind” by ensuring that children attended kindergartens under their supervision. The People’s Association, a network of community organizations and community centres under the government’s management, started kindergarten classes for children from 1964 onwards partly to combat this threat. From eight kindergartens in eight community centres, the People’s Association operated one hundred and fifty-eight kindergartens by 1977, catering for about a third of pre-school children in Singapore. The spectre of infant subversion persisted throughout the late 1960s. Speaking in 1968 at a kindergarten graduation ceremony at a PAP-controlled kindergarten in Tanjong Pagar, the PAP’s Minister for Labour, Jek Yeun Thong, warned parents to exercise caution in selecting kindergartens as the *Barisan Sosialis*, “whose aim

³⁹³ *The Straits Times*, 25 December 1965

was to mislead children to become anti-national elements,” controlled some of them.³⁹⁴ This was a weighty topic to broach at a kindergarten graduation ceremony, which only underlines the depth and intensity of the PAP’s anxieties about their political and ideological rivals’ access to the minds of children, simultaneously presumed innocent and malleable, and therefore vulnerable. As mentioned earlier, the PAP’s approach to the management of youth now included the mobilization of parents, seeking to exploit their fears and anxieties about their children to enlist them in the enterprise to police and tame youth. Kindergartens now joined youth welfare organizations in being normalized and sanctified as non-ideological and non-political institutions for the schooling of the young.

Altogether, the 1960s was a decade in which different groups of youth presented substantial challenges for the PAP government. The latter had to quell youth militancy and protest from the pro-*Barisan Sosialis* youth on the one hand, and deal with the activities of youth gangs on the other. But this was an experience that befell a smaller number of youths in Singapore in the 1960s. For most of Singapore’s youth, their experiences were in the many institutions, programs, and agencies of the PAP government created to school, scrutinize, and regularize their subjectivities and bodies as much as possible.

The PAP and the Schooling and Mobilizing of Youth, 1965-

On 9 August 1965, Lee Kuan Yew found himself the leader of an independent country. Merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya, formed in politically expedient circumstances in 1963, was short-lived. Disagreements over economic arrangements and political

³⁹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 1 January 1968.

differences between the Singapore government and the Federal government escalated and became heavily racialized. Already, the surging ethnic nationalism among the Chinese and the Malays in Malaya and Singapore across the past two decades had exacerbated tensions between these two groups. These ethnic tensions, aggravated by political bickering between the political parties in Singapore and the rest of Malaysia, culminated in racial riots in Singapore on 21 July 1964 and September 1964, where a total of 35 persons were killed, and over 500 injured. The violence, compounded by fierce disagreements over financial and political affairs between the Federal government and the Singapore government, resulted in Singapore's separation from Malaysia on 9 August 1965. These experiences shaped the PAP leadership's sensitivities towards the management of race relations in an ethnically diverse society and its emphases on unity and cohesion in its vision of a postcolonial Singapore nation. It became even more urgent for the Singapore state to incorporate youth from all ethnic groups into one imagined community, and to school them to conceive of themselves as one united multicultural society.

As the previous chapters suggest, the PAP government adapted colonial-era programs and networks of youth leaders and youth developers into an extensive disciplinary state apparatus in pursuit of producing ideal Singaporean youth. They also retained the expertise of a group of bureaucrats, youth services officers, and educators who were involved in the colonial-era management of youth in the 1950s. Many of these continued to oversee the development of policies and programs under the new political masters. One of these colonial officials who became a key PAP Minister was Dr Goh Keng Swee, a man Lee lauded as the "rare combination of the brilliant scholar and the practical organiser."³⁹⁵ Singapore sociologist Kwok Kian Woon reminds us that

³⁹⁵ "The PAP Team: Film Script on Singapore's Ministers Read Out by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (14 June 1959)," in *The Collected Papers of Lee Kuan Yew*, 101.

the London School of Economics-trained Dr Goh was not only the economic architect of modern Singapore, but also its “social architect.”³⁹⁶ Before he became the mastermind behind many of the PAP’s policies, Goh was an officer in the Social Welfare Department, eventually rising to the role of Acting Director of Social Welfare. Across the 1950s, Goh was a key participant in the colonial government’s expansion of programs to socialize, mobilize, and police youth. When Goh resigned from his Civil Service position to come out as a PAP politician, he had already accumulated more than a decade of experience in looking after youth issues and social inequalities in Singapore.

In December 1965, a few months after Singapore’s acrimonious exit from Malaysia, Goh reminded Parliament that “more than 60 per cent of the population was under 21” and that this represented “a major problem that needed to be urgently tackled.” He did not frame the problem as that of the provision of jobs for these youth. Instead, he was primarily concerned about “the question of channelling the abundant energies of youths towards constructive ends in national-building and leadership.”³⁹⁷ The development, mobilization, and incorporation of Singapore’s youth, not simply economic development, was on the top of Goh’s concerns. This is not to claim that he was not interested in training Singapore’s youth to participate in the economy. As mentioned earlier, Goh was famous for his economic policies that went some way towards solving the problems of youth unemployment.

An early PAP innovation was the Work Brigade. In 1960, the PAP created the Work Brigade to train and employ thousands of unemployed school-leavers in civil construction projects.

³⁹⁶ Kwok Kian Woon, “The Social Architect: Goh Keng Swee,” in *Lee’s Lieutenants: Singapore’s Old Guard*, ed. Lam Peng-er and Kevin Y.L. Tan (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999).

³⁹⁷ Singapore Parliamentary Report (19 December 1966), Vol. 25, cols 888-915.

This was a hastily hatched scheme to provide jobs for the unemployed, like the Civilian Conservation Corps created in the United States in the 1930s. At the same time, Lee Kuan Yew emphasized, at the Passing Out Parade of the first cohort of the Work Brigade in 1960, that the purpose of spending \$7 million a year on the Work Brigade was “not just to give relief work to the unemployed.” Instead, the program was meant to train youth to function, think, and behave as members of a collective society who would contribute their energy to productive service:

the more important objective [was] to gather our young people who are awaiting employment in work camps of 50 to 100 or 150 each where they lead a corporate life, where they *learn to lead and to be led*, to co-operate in working, in studying and in recreation. In that time, they will receive valuable training in social cohesion, organisation and be imbued with *a sense of purpose and effort in the work of national construction* (emphasis mine).³⁹⁸

Lee’s words underlined the dualism within the PAP’s ideology of youth, where the young had to be molded into both subjects and citizens, to be directed and yet empowered, at the same time.

The Work Brigade was short-lived. The government terminated the program due to concerns about Communist infiltration. However, it did not take long for the PAP government to resurrect the effort to discipline Singaporean youth through military regimentation and in-camp training. In April 1964, in the face of the Indonesian *Konfrontasi* – a three-year conflict between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore triggered by Indonesian President Sukarno’s opposition to the formation of Malaysia - and a spate of public disorders, the government established the Vigilante

³⁹⁸ Speech by the Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, at the Passing Out Parade of the Work Brigade at Pasir Ris, 15 May 1960.

Corps to mobilize Singapore's youthful population to assist in national defence. Like the *Giyu-tai* created during the Japanese Occupation, the Vigilante Corps were made up of volunteers trained and equipped to protect key installations around the island, to police their neighbourhoods and prevent terrorist acts by Indonesian saboteurs. By 17 November 1964, about 15,000 people had applied to join the Corps.³⁹⁹ In June 1965, a 10,000 strong Vigilante Corps celebrated its first birthday with a grand rally and march-past at the Jalan Besar stadium.⁴⁰⁰ The government was delighted by the enthusiastic response. Initially, they did not explicitly orient the program towards youth. It was inevitable, given Singapore's youthful demographics, that many of the 15,000 were below the age of twenty-one. In 1966, the government lowered the age limit for joining the Corps from eighteen to sixteen to allow more young people to join. Announcing the change, the Minister of State (Defence) argued that the Corps offered opportunities for young people who were not in school to find recreation and social contact and gain training and experience in leadership and organization – these words essentially repeated the objectives of the ill-fated Work Brigade.⁴⁰¹ Significantly, the Vigilante Corps' training camp was established at the former Work Brigade Camp at Tanah Merah (which was the previous site of Singapore Youth Council's Youth Camp). The spectre of the menace of Communism and delinquency was never far away. Speaking at the third anniversary of the Corps' formation at the National Theatre, Finance Minister Lim Kim San applauded the Vigilantes as a desirable form of voluntary service that would "lead anti-social people to mend their ways" and create loyal and disciplined citizens.⁴⁰² In 1967, Parliament formally passed the Bill to establish the Vigilante Corps to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order, preservation of public peace, prevention and detention of crime and apprehension

³⁹⁹ *The Straits Times*, 17 November 1964.

⁴⁰⁰ *The Straits Times*, 13 June 1965.

⁴⁰¹ *The Straits Times*, 20 June 1966.

⁴⁰² *The Straits Times*, 5 July 1967.

of offenders.⁴⁰³ The same year, about 1,700 volunteers had completed and passed out of a six-month basic training course.⁴⁰⁴ A decade after the authors of the Report on Youth Leisure Needs in 1959, the PAP succeeded in creating programs and institutions for youth that sought to channel the young to pro-government activities and socialized them as agents of social development.

The Vigilante Corps' success set the stage for Goh Keng Swee to introduce an institution that shaped, and continues to shape, the lives of male youth in Singapore. Under his direction, the state began compulsory, universal National Service (NS) in 1967. All able-bodied males were enlisted for between two and two and a half years of full-time military service, after which they remained part of the reservist force until the age of forty-five. National Service had an early precursor: in December 1965, amidst tensions with Indonesia and Malaysia, the PAP government created the People's Defence Force made up of young men and women aged 18 and above. They were subject to military regimentation and could be mobilized to support the Singapore Armed Forces or the army of any Commonwealth country if necessary. Youth between the ages of fourteen and seventeen could enlist as drummer boys and band boys. In justifying the National Service Bill in Parliament in March 1967, Goh emphasized that the *raison d'être* for National Service was to instil social discipline and moral values in Singapore's youth.⁴⁰⁵ By having to live, train and spend time together, Singapore's young males would acquire a formative common experience that bridged their many differences.⁴⁰⁶ He reiterated the idea that Singapore's post-colonial modernity required the transformation of a colonial society of immigrants into a new

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ *The Straits Times*, 4 September 1967.

⁴⁰⁵ Speech by the Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee in moving the second reading of the National Service (Amendment) Bill in the Singapore Parliament on 13 March 1967.

⁴⁰⁶ Tan Tai Yong, "The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore: The Persistence of Civil-Military Fusion," in *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and Leadership*, ed. Marcus Mietzner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 157.

cohesive community: “nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more thoroughly than participation in defence.”⁴⁰⁷ Military service was meant to shape both youth subjectivity, conduct, and the body in multi-faceted ways. This common experience also allowed the government to give National Servicemen instruction in moral values, good citizenship, and their social responsibilities.⁴⁰⁸

Goh also created new institutions to produce youth leaders who helped to reproduce the normative standards and ideals of Singaporean youth, thus extending the state’s assemblage of disciplinary agents. The National Youth Leadership Training Institute (NYLTI), which still exists today as the National Community Leaders Institute, was first conceived in 1963 as the “Buona Vista Youth Leadership Training Centre.”⁴⁰⁹ Goh laid the Foundation stone for the institution on 15 April 1964 and declared it open on 5 October 1964. Its objective was to train and create “good professional youth leaders to execute policy directions from People’s Association Headquarters on the ground level.”⁴¹⁰ It mainly offered a three-year long diploma course that included both theoretical and practical lessons. Subsequently, it broadened its offerings to offer training programmes on a diverse range of topics including leadership development, youth work, community work and community development, trade union and labour studies, social education

⁴⁰⁷ See W.E. Wilmott, “The Emergence of Nationalism,” in *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, ed. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 591. Tan, “The Armed Forces and Politics in Singapore,” 157; Sean Walsh, “The Roar of the Lion City: Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture in the Singapore Armed Forces,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 2 (2007). See also a recent edited volume on different aspects of National Service in Singapore, Ho Shu Huang and Graham Ong-Webb, eds., *National Service in Singapore* (Hackensack, New Jersey: World Scientific, 2019).

⁴⁰⁸ Speech by the Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee in moving the second reading of the National Service (Amendment) Bill in the Singapore Parliament on 13 March 1967.

⁴⁰⁹ Singapore Youth Training Leadership Institute, *Buona Vista Youth Leadership Training Center Souvenir, 1964* (Singapore: Singapore Youth Leadership Training Centre, 1964), 29.

⁴¹⁰ People’s Association, *Annual Report 1967*, 3.

and social work service.⁴¹¹ The NYLTI addressed some of the deficiencies of the erstwhile Singapore Youth Council. It was now identified with the elected national leadership of the country instead of a privileged pro-colonial elite. Instead of only representing the Anglophone youth movements and youth groups, the NYLTI trained and incorporated grassroots leaders and youth workers in the community centres and grassroots organizations already embedded in the respective communities in Singapore - the People's Association, the Vigilante Corps, the National Trades Union Congress and its affiliates, social service organizations, student organizations, and even industrial and commercial firms. The PAP government was more effective than the Singapore Youth Council and Lim Yew Hock government, in part because it was more convincing in its appeal to the nationalism and self-interests of Singaporeans.

Even though the NYLTI, like the other institutions for youth, was positioned as an institution for all Singaporean youth, its first goal was to rehabilitate and incorporate the disenfranchised Chinese-educated youth. In August 1967, the government announced that it was giving fifteen of the some two hundred Chinese middle school students expelled for participation in Communist activities that year a second chance to “prove themselves worthy and patriotic citizens of the Republic.”⁴¹² After their successful completion of a two and a half month residential course at the NYLTI, beginning on 14 August 1967, they were permitted to return to school to continue their studies. As part of their reformatory education, they studied Communist ideology and Communist methods of subversion. Their instructors told them “how they had been made used

⁴¹¹ Singapore Youth Training Leadership Institute, *Buona Vista Youth Leadership Training Center Souvenir*, 1964, 12. The Institute produced and distributed its own NYLTI Journal, published three times a year, as a platform for the exchange of ideas and opinions, and for the dissemination of information, research and news pertaining to youth training, social development and trends in Singapore.

⁴¹² *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1967.

of” and “uselessly sacrificed” by unscrupulous agents who had been running the student cell network.”⁴¹³ In October, upon graduating from the course, the fifteen students issued a joint statement published in the press where they “renounced Communism, thanked the Government for giving them a second chance in life and pledged loyalty to the Republic.”⁴¹⁴ The very public manner in which these successful rehabilitation efforts were publicized in the press, for the consumption of adults and other young people alike, again speaks to the Singapore government’s dualistic approach to idealistic and passionate youth. While they were prepared to police transgressive youth movements by arresting or banishing their leaders, they also tried to avoid the wastage of youthful idealism and energy. Instead, they sought to re-train and re-incorporate idealistic youth into the project of national construction. The Singapore disciplinary state was now invested in the most efficient and economical way of incorporating and mobilizing young people – through their own aspirations and desires for agency.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the NYTLI’s official opening in November 1968, Goh emphasized:

There are some people who say that youth work is not really a matter for Government, and that young people should be left to themselves to do what they like. I disagree with this view ... Let us be courageous enough to admit that the problem we face with our youth – the menace of secret society gangsters, the ease with which a large element of our youth can be seduced to disloyal causes – let us admit that these troubles arose out of past neglect... [The development and training of youth and youth leaders] is an important innovation in social policy and one which, if successful, will have profound and far-reaching effects in many spheres of life.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1967; *The Straits Times*, 2 November 1967.

⁴¹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 16 October 1967. The first Principal of the NYTLI was Leong Kuo Sing.

⁴¹⁵ Speech by the Finance Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the Laying of the Foundation Stone Ceremony at Buona Vista Youth Leadership Training Centre on 15 April 1964.

Goh's speech was also remarkable for his candid recognition of the need to exploit the idealism of the young for nation-building goals:

A successful youth movement must base its appeal not merely to the body but also to the spirit and intellect of our young people....young people have a capacity for idealism and dedication which is rare among grown-ups...I believe that *a dynamic youth movement must be able to inspire idealism among its members and sustain their dedication to noble causes.*⁴¹⁶

This was a belief that he shared with Lee Kuan Yew. The PAP government's struggles and battles with radical youth across the 1960s did not reduce Lee's beliefs in the importance of cultivating and moulding idealistic and socially conscious youth. At a speech to students at the Singapore Polytechnic in 1966, Lee asserted that:

When you are young, from about 15 to 16 until you are about 25 or perhaps even 30, it is an age of idealism when you believe nothing is beyond fulfilment. And you are motivated not by selfish, greedy desires... but by a desire to try and bring about a better world. And that is *an asset to any community....The idealism of youth is a valuable weapon in the hands of any sophisticated, ruling elite* [emphasis mine]....Now, let me be the first to admit that when it is necessary, we have used very stern methods...But if you smacked it down beyond what is necessary, then you have a quiescent, and a dead population, one without the vitality and the verve. *Hence, you stop short of just enough to prevent real unruliness; and, short of that, we give full play to youthful boisterousness, exuberance, vigour, vitality, and idealism* [emphasis mine].⁴¹⁷

This vision is striking for its simultaneously paternalistic and idealistic tenor. On the one hand, Lee demanded that Singapore's youth remain politically aware, socially conscious, active, and idealistic. On the other hand, they should be self-regulating and self-restraining, while remaining politically subordinate to adults. These were not new ideas but conclusions that Lee had

⁴¹⁶ Speech by the Finance Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the Laying of the Foundation Stone Ceremony at Buona Vista Youth Leadership Training Centre on 15 April 1964.

⁴¹⁷ Speech by Lee Kuan Yew at the Singapore Polytechnic on "Students, Politics and Jobs", 12 October 1966. Accessed at: <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19661012.pdf>.

formed across his encounters and interactions with different groups of young people in Singapore across the 1950s and 1960s.

It is thus not surprising that the PAP government attempted to create its own state-coordinated youth movements to harness the energy and idealism of youth. These programs exemplified the new inclusionary mode of social control where youth were attracted and recruited into becoming the active partners of the state or passive reproducers of the state's values, beliefs, and ideals as role models of ideal youth. The most notable state-coordinated youth movement was the People's Association Youth Movement (PAYM), which remains today the most influential and popular state-coordinated youth movement in Singapore. The People's Association, housed in the very same Kallang Air Terminal that housed the Singapore Youth Sports Centre, announced its purpose in terms resonant of the SYC and the SYSC – to promote group participation in social, cultural, educational and athletic activities for Singaporeans so that “they may realise that they belong to a multi-racial community, the interests of which transcend sectional loyalties.”⁴¹⁸ Goh Keng Swee “took a personal interest in the Association” and sent in capable administrators from the Civil Service, educators, and youth leaders to supervise the community centres and oversee the improvement of their administration and the quality of their Management Committees.⁴¹⁹

The People's Association launched the PAYM to create identity among the youth who would become the leaders of Singapore's communities (and to compete with the *Barisan Socialis* for the hearts and minds of Singapore's youth). The PAYM's first task, was unsurprisingly, “to penetrate into the social layers in which the anti-democratic, anti-Malaysian elements have

⁴¹⁸ People's Association, *Annual Report 1967*, 1.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

influence” and to channel the energy of youth “towards constructive nation-building, modernisation and industrial development.”⁴²⁰

Transnational expertise played a role in the development of Singapore’s institutions and programs for youth. An Israeli consultant-trainer was seconded by the Israeli government to Singapore to become the first Commandant of the PAYM. Arie Levy modelled the PAYM after the Israeli youth movement; he also served as trainer in the NYLTI when it was established. This first iteration of the PAYM collapsed in June 1966 due to internal conflicts and disagreements between the youth groups of the movement and adult community leaders.

The PAYM was re-established in November 1971, amidst rising concerns about youth participation in drug abuse, crime, delinquency, and counterculture. It provided opportunities to young people to participate in social and recreational activities and to develop their organizational skills and leadership abilities. Even though the twin threats of Communism and racial chauvinism had abated by the 1970s, new anxieties emerged to continually warrant the Singapore disciplinary state’s obsession with regulating youth subjectivity and conduct. By 1996, there were ninety-two Youth Executive Committees overseeing ninety-six youth groups with a membership of about 100,000. Youth movements like the PAYM and the National Youth Council founded in 1989 became state-directed youth movements that allowed the Singapore government to encourage and mobilize youth civic participation and monopolize the development of youth leaders in Singapore. These movements became platforms for youth to pursue social and political change within

⁴²⁰ Janet Low Ton Li, “Youth leaders’ involvement in youth executive committees,” Unpublished Academic Exercise, National University of Singapore, 1996, 6.

permissible boundaries. They also allowed the PAP government to identify and groom suitable Singaporean youth, who met the exacting standards mentioned above, as future political leaders.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the 1950s and swept through the 1960s and 1970s, situating the rise of state and adult concern about the young within the vibrant milieu of student activism and protest. When Singapore began its independent existence as a sovereign nation-state, it had already been youth-conscious for at least two decades. Other than the demographic reality of Singapore's youthful population, young people thrust themselves into public awareness and state attention through their activism and participation in activities deemed a threat to the established and dominant groups in society - gangsterism, crime, ethnic conflicts. As a result, the 1960s became the formative decade for the PAP government's dualistic approach to the management of youth in Singapore – taming and suppressing transgressive, violent, rebellious youth through coercive laws and police enforcement on the one hand, and creating and expanding a range of disciplinary institutions to mould ideal Singaporean youth on the other. This inscribed the disciplining, mobilization, and policing of youth as a governing logic and instinct in Singapore. The Singaporean nation-state not only became youth-conscious but also youth-centered.

In addition, the PAP's experiences of collaborating and colliding with youth-dominated left-wing movements in the 1950s and 1960s highlighted the social and political power the young held as agents and foot-soldiers of change. PAP founder-members, drawing inspiration and lessons from their encounters with the vibrant youth movements in Singapore and around the world, conceived of youth agency in terms of a privilege and responsibility of citizenship. They also came

to see youth idealism and desire for agency as a vital resource that the state had to nurture, exploit, and monopolize for nation-building ends, as well as for their disciplinary projects of moulding new citizens. This normalized a dualistic discourse of Singaporean youth as both potential pillar and potential peril of the nation. If their energy and idealism were productively directed to the cause of nation-building, they could be a pillar of the nation; if they were left unsupervised, or worse, exploited by anti-national forces, they could be its peril. This dualistic discourse justified increasing adult and state surveillance and intervention in the upbringing of Singaporean children and youth through a diverse range of institutions and programs. These institutions and programs went some way in helping to recast the relationship between the young and adults and the state. Adult political leaders and community leaders promised to include the young, especially the disenfranchised and excluded, into the full rights and privileges of citizenship. In return, these youth were expected to share the same nationalistic imagination of Singapore and place themselves in a supportive and subordinate position vis-à-vis the state and adults in Singapore.

Chapter Six

Exhibiting and Embodying Youth and Nation: The Singapore Youth Festival

“This is indeed a spectacular occasion which, all those present here today will long remember! Never in the history of Singapore are there as many as 64,000 people gathered in this magnificent National Stadium of ours to watch the dazzling display by 8,000 girls and boys representing the cream of our youth – looking splendid in their colourful uniforms, vibrant, dynamic and disciplined. Their expression of joy of life and happiness typify the buoyant and lively spirit of Singapore, in the year 1973!”⁴²¹

Yong Nyuk Lin, Singapore Minister for Communications (and Minister of Education between 1959 and 1963) at the 1973 Singapore Youth Festival Opening Ceremony

20 July 1968. In pouring rain at the Jalan Besar Stadium, a parade of Singapore’s youth stood on attention before Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, at the second-ever Singapore Youth Festival (SYF). Lee, wanting to be a role model to the ten thousand local youth assembled before him, refused an umbrella, and chose to stay in the rain. Then, he exhorted them to “grow up and broaden out to fill the roles of citizenship and leadership” and to acquire “a fierce loyalty to Singapore and what Singapore means to all of us.”⁴²²

Inaugurated on 18 July 1967, the SYF was a yearly youth festival of programmes and activities that showcased youth participation and achievement in uniformed youth movements, art & crafts, music and dance, sports, and athletic endeavour.⁴²³ Each year’s SYF was organized at

⁴²¹ Speech by Yong Nyuk Lin, Minister for Communications (and Singapore’s first PAP Minister of Education between 1959 and 1963), at the Opening Ceremony of the 1973 Singapore Youth Festival at the National Stadium, 14 July 1973. Accessed from the National Archives of Singapore Online: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/PressR19730714b.pdf>. Last Accessed 28 March 2019.

⁴²² Text of Prime Minister’s Speech at the Opening of the Singapore Youth Festival on Saturday, 20th July 1968, at Jalan Besar Stadium. Downloaded from the National Archives of Singapore: www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19680720.pdf. Last Accessed: 4 September 2017

⁴²³ “Singapore Youth Festival: Celebrating 50 Years,” *The Straits Times*, 4 July 2016.

great expense and involved the coordination of thousands of participating schoolchildren from almost all the schools in Singapore. Senior Education Ministry official, Chan Chieu Kiat, who chaired the SYF Steering Committee between 1967 and 1972, outlined the SYF's multi-pronged objectives in 1969: "(a) to inculcate national consciousness (b) to project the rich cultural background of our multi-racial school population (c) to promote inter-racial harmony and (d) to provide information to the public on youth activities which are carried out in our schools."⁴²⁴ Clearly, the SYF was not simply an occasion for youth to showcase their talent. Instead, it was, and still is, part of the Singapore disciplinary state's repertoire of programs to discipline the bodies of Singapore youth and to mobilize the bodies of youth for ideological and biopolitical reproduction.

Historians of childhood and youth like Patricia Holland, Tamara Myers, and Karen Dubinsky have asked us to consider what kind of political and ideological work representations of children and youth do. They call for us to consider how and why governments imbue the bodies and qualities of children and youth with new national significance and mobilize them as evocative metaphors.⁴²⁵ Dubinsky has recently pointed out how pictorial representations of children show us how the young are deployed as political subjects.⁴²⁶ Foucauldian perspectives agree that representations of the young can reinforce normative ideas of youth bodies and youth conduct. Charles Taylor, reflecting on the deep implications of Foucault's ideas of power, notes that images

⁴²⁴ Letter from Chan Chieu Kiat, Chairman, Steering Committee, SYF 1969, to Permanent Secretary (Education), Ministry of Education, 13 May 1969, in National Archives of Singapore (NAS), EDUN. 2955/68 "Singapore Youth Festival." Chan was then a senior official in the Ministry of Education - Deputy Director (Professional) in the Ministry of Education. He had, earlier in 1960, led a Commission of Inquiry on the reform and expansion of vocational and technical education in Singapore.

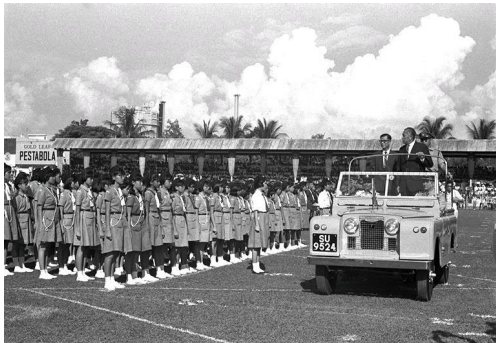
⁴²⁵ Tamara Myers, "Local Action and Global Imagining: Youth, International Development, and the Walkathon Phenomenon in Sixties' and Seventies' Canada," *Diplomatic History* 38 (2014), 282-293.

⁴²⁶ Karen Dubinsky, "Children, Ideology, and Iconography: How Babies Rule the World," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5, no. 1 (2012): 5-13.

of ideal human subjectivities and conduct “are in fact very powerful instruments of control.” Biopower succeeds when we end up “assuming the shape it has moulded for us.”⁴²⁷ In other words, representations of the young exert power by communicating seemingly innocuous images of normalized ideals. As orchestrated performances, youth festivals and texts are meant to normalize the ideal.

This chapter argues that youth festivals, or more broadly, spectacles of youth, function within the Singapore disciplinary state apparatus to perform different disciplinary functions. They are mainly to normalize images of ideal Singaporean youth and mobilize young bodies to reproduce these images. Hence, the Singapore Youth Festival is an exemplary pedagogical technique to illuminate the PAP government’s ideas and images of ideal Singaporean youth. Through the SYF, the government mobilized youth to exhibit and embody ideas of ideal Singaporean youth – nationalistic, lively, creative, cultured, rugged and disciplined – and the ideal Singaporean nation – culturally vibrant, multicultural, socially-disciplined, and cohesive. They also used these young bodies to generate affective experiences that served multifarious political and disciplinary agendas.

⁴²⁷ Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 79.



7. State leaders inspecting the parade of youths at the Singapore Youth Festivals of 2000, 1968 and 1967 (Top to bottom respectively). Source: National Archives of Singapore

The SYF - Exhibiting and Embodying the Nation

As the previous chapter has shown, the PAP government went further than the British colonial government and the Labour Front government in the project of disciplining Singapore's youth. The PAP government valorized Singapore youth as a potent social force, national resource, and embodied map of the new Singapore and sought to mould young people's subjectivity through using orchestrated youthscaapes. Like the case of post-Vichy France studied by Richard Jobs, where the Charles de Gaulle government idealized French youth, untainted by collaboration with Nazi Germany, as exemplary agents for national reconstruction, the PAP government assumed

Singapore's schoolchildren to be unblemished by the ethnic chauvinism that divided their parents' generation. Therefore, they bore the most potential for socialization in new identities and values. Soon after the PAP's ascension to power, in December 1959, Lee Kuan Yew summoned "the biggest assembly of teachers in the history of Singapore" to a mammoth Loyalty week rally. Reminding the some 10,000 teachers and principals gathered there that "more than 54 per cent of our people are under 18 years of age," Lee emphasized that Singapore's youth was "the spring source of the nation. If you handle it carefully and nourish it well, the country will blossom and grow fast."⁴²⁸ Lee saw the moulding of youth, presumed to be pure and malleable, as integral to the management of ethnic tensions and differences in Singapore:

Their minds are *still open and free from communal prejudices*. It is our sacred duty to keep it free from such divisions... if *you teach and teach the tenets of a faith over and over again to your young people, you will settle basic and permanent attitudes to life, standards of good and bad conduct, values of good and evil*. The formative years of a man's mind are decisive. In your hands are *the plastic minds of our next generation*... What is in the balance is the very basis, the very foundation, of our society. For if we are not to perish in chaos caused by antagonisms and prejudices between water-tight cultural and linguistic compartments, then you *have to educate the right responses among our young people in the schools*... The future is ours to make. In our youth of today are the leaders and citizens of tomorrow. It is for you to teach them and make them *the homogenous and united people of tomorrow* (emphases mine).⁴²⁹

These statements underscore Lee's beliefs in the desirability of moulding the bodies and minds of Singapore's youth on a massive scale. They reveal Lee's assumptions about the purity of youth, to the extent that he believed that the young mind was unblemished by ethnic chauvinism. In addition, the political context was of the utmost importance. The PAP's rise to power on the

⁴²⁸ *The Straits Times* 9 December 1959; "Responsibilities of Teachers" – Speech at the Education Ministry's Rally of Teachers at the Happy World Stadium (8 December 1959)" in *The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew: Speeches, Interviews and Dialogues*, Volume 1 (Singapore: The National Archives of Singapore. Gale Asia Pte Ltd, 2012), 148.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

crescendo of youth and student activism in Singapore across the 1950s convinced Lee of the imperatives of pro-actively moulding how the young related to one another and to the Singapore state and society, i.e. to ensure that they only chose “the right responses.”

Lee, was, in Philip Holden’s words, “characteristic of Third world national elites who, on achieving independent nationhood, embark on producing national cultures through disciplinary projects, especially educative ones that ‘outdid those of the colonial state.’”⁴³⁰ Historians of education in Singapore have shown how the PAP government regarded education as a key institution for the socialization of new youth and new citizens.⁴³¹ Like the Japanese and the British administrations, the PAP government pinpointed the school as a key disciplinary institution and pedagogical space to engineer new Singaporeans. They greatly expanded the colonial-era educational plans and rapidly built schools for the children and youth of Singapore. This had the additional benefits of meeting the socio-economic aspirations and anxieties of Singaporean parents and youth and producing a trained workforce for the new export-oriented industrialized economy. The literature on Singapore’s education policies under the PAP is substantial. This chapter adds to that literature by describing the context of the cultural politics of youth and situating Singapore’s educational policies within this broader domain of the cultural politics of youth.

Within the PAP’s educational programs, the SYF was one key educative project that took place outside the formal curriculum and the classroom to address the challenges of creating a new national identity out of a politically fragmented, culturally, and socially heterogeneous immigrant

⁴³⁰ Philip Holden, “A Man and an Island: Gender and Nation in Lee Kuan Yew’s *The Singapore Story*,” *Biography*, 24, 2 (Spring 2001): 408.

⁴³¹ Harold E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore: Educational Policies and Social Change, 1819-1972* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978).

society. In its early years, the SYF was usually held over two weeks in July. The only exception was SYF 1975, which only lasted one night to address the concerns of parents that it was taking too much time away from their children's academic work.⁴³² One of the longstanding myths of Singapore public discourse is the perception that the Singapore government focuses too much on academic over non-academic matters. This is a misapprehension of the PAP government's policies for education and youth. Instead, the PAP government's insistence on activities that take time away from academic study was often at odds with some parents' preferences. In the government's eyes, disciplining youth for economic development and for social and moral development were equally important, and even, symbiotic.

The highlight of the SYF was the grand Opening Ceremony, held at Singapore's largest stadium, Jalan Besar Stadium between 1967 and 1973, and the National Stadium after it was completed in 1973, was to affirm the new significance accorded to Singapore's youth. A typical Opening Ceremony lasted about two hours. It featured a youth parade and marchpast formed by a Combined Schools Brass Band, contingents from selected secondary schools, uniformed youth movements, and the participants of the Festival's athletic sports meets. The parade and marchpast were then followed by energetic and lively mass youth displays and performances and the singing of the Singapore National Anthem and the Singapore Youth Festival Anthem. To provide a sense of the scale of the Festival, the 1968 SYF Opening Ceremony featured about 18,000 youth participants – 9,000 involved in the parade and mass performances, and another 9,000 secondary school and primary school children as spectators.⁴³³ The 1969 SYF Opening Ceremony was

⁴³² "Singapore Youth Festival: Celebrating 50 Years," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 2016.

⁴³³ Details contained in addendum to Letter from Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Culture, sent 15 July 1968. Archived in NAS, EDUN 2955-68 Vol. 2 "Singapore Youth Festival 1969/70."

especially grand. The Ministry of Education was eager to showcase the contribution of Singapore's schooling youth to the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Singapore's founding. Hence, the Opening Ceremony featured 5500 pupils in the march-past, about 7,500 children in the subsequent displays, and about 30,000 school children and guests in the audience.⁴³⁴ By the mid-1970s, more than 60,000 adults, children, and youth spectated or participated in each year's Opening Ceremony. The government's ability to mobilize thousands of students and educators to participate in the SYF attests to the swiftness with which it built more schools and extended its influence over existing schools to create a state-directed national education system. This was not surprising – the country's schools had become battlegrounds over the future of the country.

Like public spectacles involving youth in early 20th century Australia, France, and England, the SYF Opening Ceremony was a space for the “didactic displays of discipline, vigour, and health,” and for the “generation, identification, and demonstration of good citizenship,” by youth for youth.⁴³⁵ In its early years, the SYF's primary audience was clearly the youth of Singapore. The 1969 SYF Steering Committee rejected a sub-committee's recommendation to hold the SYF Opening Ceremony and the Combined Cadet Corps Parade that year at the Padang – a prominent large playing field in the city area – because “it was felt that the festival was meant more for our youth than for the public.”⁴³⁶ The SYF brought together the schools from the different language-streams in Singapore's linguistically-divided educational landscape – and their school leaders, teachers, and students – in an annual state-organized pedagogical enterprise. Through witnessing

⁴³⁴ “Singapore Youth Festival 1969 Press Release,” 3 July 1969, in NAS, EDUN 2955-68 Vol. 2 “Singapore Youth Festival 1969/70.”

⁴³⁵ David M. Pomfret, *Young People and the European City* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 154, 173; Simon Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 171-173.

⁴³⁶ “Recommendations for the 1969 Youth Festival and Minister's Instructions,” note attached to the Minutes of the Tenth Steering Committee Meeting, 4th October 1968. In NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

and participating in the Festival and its associated activities, Singapore's youth were familiarized with the symbols of the new Singaporean nation-state and its elected leaders.

Singapore's schoolchildren were also asked to identify with youth from other language-stream schools and from other social and ethnic backgrounds, under the category of "Singaporean" youth. The different activities of the SYF became yearly occasions to reduce the social and spatial distance between the children and youth from the different ethnic communities, different socio-economic classes, and different language-medium schools. To facilitate this aim, the organizing committee was determined to ensure the inclusion of as many schools as possible. In 1968, Chan Chieu Kiat instructed that "Malay, Tamil and new schools should not be deterred from participating out of a lack of money." The government subsidized their participation if their submissions were of desirable quality.⁴³⁷ This was an improvement from the festivals the colonial government and the Singapore Youth Council organized in the 1950s, which mainly featured youth from the English-medium schools, or from youth organizations mainly of the Anglophone youth.

At the same time, the Singapore Youth Festival, or the use of youth spectacles and youth festivals, was not a PAP innovation. Its format and structure were modelled after the youth festivals the British colonial government and other groups in Singapore, such as the Singapore Teachers Union, organized in the 1950s and early 1960s to produce "Malayan youth." These local educators and educationists shared the British colonial government's aspirations and anxieties towards Malaya and Singapore's youth. Founded in 1946, the Singapore Teachers Union was made up of local educators concerned about their poor employment conditions and prospects and about

⁴³⁷ Minutes of the Second Steering Committee Meeting, SYF 1968, 17 February 1968, in NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

educational inequities under colonial rule. Kua Busan's history of the Singapore Teachers Union has shown how local educators involved themselves in the anti-colonial movement in post-war Singapore and Malaya.⁴³⁸ Yet, outside of their political agitation, they also tried to prepare local youth for self-government and eventual nationhood. The Union organized the Youth Festival Competition of Drama, Music and Dance in 1949 "to foster a Malayan consciousness and unity through cultural values and to discover hitherto hidden artistic talent among our youth."⁴³⁹ While it first began as an event organized for English-medium schools, the Union soon invited the other schools teaching in the other vernacular languages to participate. By 1960, the 5th Youth Drama and Music Festival featured participants from the four different language streams in Singapore. Both the Festival Organizing Chairperson R.S. Barth, and the PAP Minister for Culture, S. Rajaratnam who attended the event, pinpointed the minds and bodies of the young as the site to germinate a new national culture. Barth wrote that "if a Malayan culture is to evolve, it will have to develop and grow spontaneously from our youth primarily."⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, Rajaratnam believed that "the power-house of Malayan culture is in our schools and that from the young people in our schools will come the leaders of Malayan culture."⁴⁴¹ The PAP Minister for Education Ong Pang Boon's stated inspiration for the SYF was the Singapore Teachers Union's 7th Youth Festival Competition, which he attended as Guest-of-Honour in 1966. In his closing address to the Festival, he opined that:

⁴³⁸ Kua Busan, *Teachers Against colonialism in Post-war Singapore and Malaya* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan: The Institute of Social Analysis, 2007).

⁴³⁹ Singapore Teachers Union. *Youth Drama Music & Dance Festival 1960 Souvenir Programme*. In NAS, Ministry of Culture File No. 897 "Singapore Teachers Union – Youth Cultural Festival Competition 1960."

⁴⁴⁰ Singapore Teachers Union. *Youth Drama Music & Dance Festival 1960 Souvenir Programme*, 11-12. In NAS, Ministry of Culture File No. 897 "Singapore Teachers Union – Youth Cultural Festival Competition 1960."

⁴⁴¹ Singapore Teachers Union. *Youth Drama Music & Dance Festival 1960 Souvenir Programme*, 10. In NAS, Ministry of Culture File No. 897 "Singapore Teachers Union – Youth Cultural Festival Competition 1960."

Festivals of this nature again will offer the opportunity to our young multi-racial student population...to understand and appreciate one another's rich cultural heritage, to find unity in diversity and ultimately, in a generation or so, to find a rich identity of their own.⁴⁴²

There was, however, nothing spontaneous in these deliberate efforts to engineer cultural awareness and national consciousness in Singapore's youth.

Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul, building on Benedict Anderson's famous observation that a nation is a "cultural construct" perpetuated through language and printed media, calls for us to consider what other mediators help to create a national imagination and consciousness.⁴⁴³ Like the staging of city children in urban public celebrations in other locations, such as early 20th-century Melbourne, the organizing committee deployed the bodies of Singapore youth at the SYF Opening Ceremonies to "embody a national idea" and perform "a metonymical function." The aim was to exhibit the image of the multicultural, socially disciplined, and harmonious Singaporean nation and the abundant potential of its people.⁴⁴⁴ The 1968 World Youth Festival of Youth and Students in Sofia provides a contemporaneous parallel: the Bulgarian Communist government mobilized Bulgaria's youth to "mirror a model social order" through a "choreography of prowess and excellence in sports, art and music in a grand manifestation of an imagined community: youth united by socialist conviction."⁴⁴⁵ Caroline Mezger, in a recent article, discusses another relevant example of how Nazi Germany organized public spectacles and displays

⁴⁴² Speech by Ong Pang Boon, Minister for Education, at the 7th Youth Festival Competition of Drama, Music and Dances organized by the Singapore Teachers' Union at Victoria Theatre, 13 June 1966.

⁴⁴³ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 15.

⁴⁴⁴ Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne*, 199.

⁴⁴⁵ Karin Taylor, "Socialist Orchestration of Youth: 1968 Sofia Youth Festival and Encounters on the Fringe," *Ethnologia Balkanica* 7 (2003), 46-47.

of German youths in order to present an image of a German utopia based on a “Germanness” that transcended and united the different ethnicities in newly-occupied German territories.⁴⁴⁶

Indeed, each year’s SYF Opening Ceremony exhibited a social order based on nationalistic multicultural unity. Its iconography projected an image of Singaporean youth who transcended the indelible biological differences on their bodies, to come together to put on parades, displays, and performances that embodied discipline, vitality, unity, and cohesiveness. These images provide stark contrast to the public’s memories of disruptive youth protests and inter-racial strife in the streets of Singapore in the 1950s and early 1960s. The 1968 SYF Opening Ceremony began with a tableau march of two blocks of youth each in phalanx formation. The first block was made up of three hundred and twenty secondary school students dressed in white sleeveless vests, white trousers, and white canvas shoes, each carrying a Singapore State flag. The second comprised of another three hundred and twenty secondary school Police Cadet Corps girls dressed in white blouses, shorts, and shoes (white, symbolizing purity, was also the colour of the People’s Action Party). After the parade, more teams of youth put on a Gymnastic Display and a mass drill display that portrayed the physical fitness and versatility of youth, as well as performances that symbolized youth support for “the peace and prosperity for the country” and “show the unity and harmony of the people of Singapore.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ Caroline Mezger, “Entangled Utopias: The Nazi Mobilization of Ethnic German Youths in the Batschka, 1930s-1944,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2016), 89.

⁴⁴⁷ “Singapore Youth Festival 1968: Opening Ceremony: Synopses of the Schools’ Display Groups,” Addendum to letter from Kwan Sai Kheong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education to Hsu Tse-Kwang, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Culture, 15 July 1968, in NAS, SWD 178.

Through the SYF's iconography, the government mobilized and orchestrated youthful bodies to enact an evocative image of a more orderly and multi-cultural youthful modernity to the audiences at home and abroad. This image sought to convince these audiences of Singapore's emergence from its recent strife-filled history and deficient colonial past, and of the desirability of the PAP government's preferred vision of state-society relations in Singapore – working, playing, moving in unison. Historian Simon Sleight argues that “the very function of the ceremonial event, in fact, is to actively even out difference and present a united front.”⁴⁴⁸ Singapore's case differed from his case of turn-of-the-century Melbourne on one critical note – unity did not mean uniformity. Instead of an assimilationist vision where one single community's culture dominated and difference was evened out, the SYF's iconography emphasized the peaceful and productive co-existence of the different major cultural communities in Singapore, represented through their cultural forms and expressions in music, dance, and art. It presented Singapore's ethnic heterogeneity and cultural diversity as a source of vibrancy and dynamism to be cherished, and not a cause of social division and fractures to be feared. For instance, during the 1969 SYF Opening Ceremony, about a thousand secondary school students put on a rhythmic pugilistic performance, and another thousand a “Tarian Singupura” (Malay for “Singaporean Dance”) incorporating Chinese, Malay, South Asian and Western dance elements to show how “the four races unite to welcome the 150th Anniversary of Singapore.” These were then followed by other performances that depicted “youth and a rugged society,” Singapore “as a Garden City,” the four races “dancing in perfect harmony,” and “living in unity.” The sight of Singapore's children and young practising the different traditional art forms and cultural practices of the different ethnic communities in Singapore assured the different communities that their cultures were respected and included. The

⁴⁴⁸ Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914*, 173.

principles of multicultural representation and inclusion was sacrosanct: on discovering that the adjudicators had deemed no Malay item deem worthy of selection for the 1968 Music and Dance Presentations opening night programme, the Steering Committee asked the organizers to “insert the best of the Malay items entered.”⁴⁴⁹

Creating Citizens

For audiences of Singaporean youth and their parents and teachers, the bodies of Singapore’s children and youth became effective triggers of positive sentiments and attitudes towards Singapore’s post-colonial modernity and future. Singapore’s leaders believed that youth spectacles were an effective form of emotional socialization; they understood the power of children and youth as emotional stakes to “generate a feeling of pride in, and loyalty to, our nation.”⁴⁵⁰ When officiating the 1978 SYF, Ong Teng Cheong, Minister for Culture (and a future President of Singapore) proclaimed: “Every son and every daughter is being watched by proud parents, happy teachers and many more at home.”⁴⁵¹ Clearly, these youthful bodies were being deployed for affective effect. As noted in earlier chapters, education became a key battleground for political legitimacy for any would-be Singapore government, especially when colonial educational policies chronically neglected the aspirations of the non-English-educated. Each year’s SYF, with its scale, signalled to the Singapore populace that the Singapore PAP government invested large amounts of attention and resources in meeting the aspirations of the mostly youthful population of Singapore. For the illiterate parents and youth from working-class backgrounds, such evocative

⁴⁴⁹ Minutes of the Fifth Steering Committee Meeting – Singapore Youth Festival, 24 May 1968, in NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

⁴⁵⁰ “Singapore Youth Festival 1969 Press Release,” 3 July 1969 in NAS, EDUN 2955-68 Vol. 2 “Singapore Youth Festival 1969/70.”

⁴⁵¹ Speech by Ong Teng Cheong, Acting Minister for Culture, at the Official Opening of the Singapore Youth Festival 1978 at the National Stadium, 8 July 1978. Accessed from the National Archives of Singapore Online: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/otc19780708bs.pdf>. Last Accessed 28 March 2019.

spectacles were more compelling and accessible mediums than print media for the inspiration of national consciousness and confidence. They made for powerful visual declarations of the Singapore government's commitment to the education and welfare of young Singaporeans.

Hence, each year's SYF Steering Committee paid great attention to ensuring the highest amount of media coverage for the SYF and its different activities, even as it focused on youth as the SYF's primary audience. The PAP Minister of Culture, Jek Yun Theong, quickly saw the SYF's value for his Ministry's efforts to foster a national culture among all Singaporeans. In 1968, Jek lamented the poor media coverage given to the Festival and directed his Ministry to select and feature outstanding dance and musical performances from the Music and Dance Presentations on television once or twice a week during the whole festival.⁴⁵² Thereafter, the Ministry of Culture provided ample publicity through television and radio announcements and interviews, press releases and photographs. In 1968, the Ministry of the Interior and Defence also began to include suitable items from the mass display performances in the annual National Day Parades the Ministry organized.⁴⁵³ Youth festivals paved the way for the regular state practice of featuring youths in Singapore's yearly National Day Parades which were organized to construct national identity through the production of ritual and spectacle. Relevantly, Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong noted that these annual spectacles were meant to highlight Singapore's youthfulness and "the importance of youths in nation-building."⁴⁵⁴ The mobilization and exhibition of youth in public ceremonies and

⁴⁵² Handwritten memo between Hsu Tse-kwang, Acting Permanent Secretary (Culture) and Minister for Culture, signed 27 June 1968. NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

⁴⁵³ Minutes of the Second Steering Committee Meeting, SYF 1968, 17 February 1968, in NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

⁴⁵⁴ Lily Kong and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "The Construction of National Identity through the Production of Ritual and Spectacle – An Analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore," *Political Geography* 16, no. 3 (1997), 28.

events to serve as embodied metaphors of the nation's vitality and progress became a frequent practice of the Singapore PAP government and its agencies.⁴⁵⁵

Exhibiting and Embodying Ideal "Singaporean Youth"

Other than serving to socialize audiences in the ideal of a multicultural, harmonious, and disciplined Singaporean social order, the SYF Opening Ceremony and its component activities became occasions to both discipline and exhibit the ideal Singaporean youth. At these events, state leaders communicated to the assembled audiences of youth and adults their aspirations for Singaporean children and youth to become the cohesive, disciplined, energetic, and rugged citizens of a new postcolonial society. They projected an orchestrated image of Singapore youth's commitment (and subordination) to the Singapore state and society. Singapore's education officials conceived of the SYF as "a microcosm of the aims and aspirations of the people of the Republic of Singapore as a whole" and as a demonstration of the capacity and commitment of Singapore's youth to become the nation's future builders.⁴⁵⁶ Physically fit and strong, energetic, and active, disciplined, and orderly young bodies were an essential component of the SYF's iconography.

For Lee Kuan Yew and his PAP colleagues, their experiences of the high rates of youth unrest and youth crime in the 1950s and 1960s taught them that social discipline was a particularly vital quality to be instilled in Singapore's youth. In a June 1962 talk at the government's Political Study Centre to civil servants, which was later broadcast, Lee emphasized the importance of

⁴⁵⁵ Minutes of the Second Steering Committee Meeting, SYF 1968, 17 February 1968, in NAS, MC 178-67 Vol.1.

⁴⁵⁶ Educational Publications Bureau, *Our Youth: In Commemoration of the Sesquicentennial Celebrations of Singapore (1819-1969)* (Singapore: Ministry of Education, Educational Publications Bureau, 1969), unpaginated.

fostering a “socially organised and disciplined” citizenry as the bedrock of the Singapore nation. Based on his observations of decolonizing societies around the world, such as India, Egypt, and Yugoslavia, he believed that there were “three basic essentials for successful transformation of any society” – “an effective determined leadership,” “an administration which is efficient” and “social discipline.” He viewed the last as the hardest to achieve: “It takes years to change a people in their habits, in their attitudes. If you don’t get social discipline, everybody does what he likes to do, or will not bustle about what he is told to do.”⁴⁵⁷ In 1966, a year after Singapore’s independence, Lee held a meeting with the principals of the schools in Singapore to explain their tasks – to get every Singaporean child to identify his or her individual survival with the community’s survival. He articulated the “ideal product” of Singapore’s schools – youth who were “strong, robust, rugged, with tremendous qualities of stamina, endurance and at the same time, with great intellectual discipline and, most important of all, humility and love for his community; a readiness to serve whether God or king or country or, if you like, just his community.”⁴⁵⁸ The Prime Minister even felt the need to spell out that the well-behaved youth “respects his community and does not spit all over the place.”⁴⁵⁹ Social discipline, hence, meant the willingness to support one’s community, as well as the ability to regulate and restrain one’s own behaviour out of respect for one’s community. The school was for Lee a key disciplinary institution to train Singapore’s young in these habits and attitudes of self-mobilization and self-regulation. The PAP government, accordingly, attached great significance to extra-curricular activities and the SYF. The inculcation of social discipline, more than policing or state repression, was the most effective and economical strategy to maintain

⁴⁵⁷ “The Need for Continuity Amidst Change,” Broadcast Version of a Talk to the Civil Servants at the Political Centre (14 June 1962), 378.

⁴⁵⁸ Speech by the Prime Minister at a Meeting with Principals of Schools at the Victoria Theatre, 29 August 1966.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

peace, harmony, order in a democracy. This attribute shows the conception of Singapore as a disciplined democracy based on self-mobilizing and self-regulating citizens.

Government leaders took every opportunity to reiterate the importance of fostering disciplined, determined, and rugged youth. When participants of the 1970 SYF Opening Ceremony braved a heavy downpour to complete their mass display performances, the Guest-of-Honour, Minister of Education Ong Pang Boon, wrote to their principals to request that they convey his appreciation for the participants' "display of discipline and steadfastness." He added that "the spirit of determination which our boys and girls demonstrated at the Opening Ceremony augurs well for the future of our Republic."⁴⁶⁰ From the 1970s onwards, the inclusion of a National Inter-school Track and Field Championship gave sporting endeavour additional emphasis. The sports competitions and athletic meets had, in the words of the 1976 SYF organizing committee, "become symbolic of the discipline and robustness of our youth."⁴⁶¹ This emphasis on physical fitness and ruggedness reified the socially disciplined and physically rugged body. This entailed the exclusion and marginalization of youth that did not fit these images, such as obese youth and youth with disabilities. It was only from the 1990s onwards that the Festival become more inclusive of youth with disabilities in its iconography. By then, it was too little, too late. Due to the SYF's potency in exhibiting and normalizing images and ideas of ideal physically energetic and rugged Singaporean youth, ableism remains a deep-rooted and troubling problem in Singapore society and culture.

⁴⁶⁰ Letters dated 23 July 1970 and 25 July 1970, in NAS, Ed. 2955/68/V.3 "Singapore Youth Festival."

⁴⁶¹ *Singapore Youth Festival '67-'76: 10th anniversary* (Singapore: Singapore Youth Festival Steering Committee, 1976), 65.

The media helped to publicize the SYF and amplify its ideological messages. The PAP government's policies for youth resonated with the Chinese community. Journalists writing in the mainstream Chinese-language press repeated ideas about the relationship between the proper schooling of the young and Singapore's national progress. One commentator in a major Chinese newspaper, the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, agreed wholeheartedly with PAP Minister for Education Lim Kim San's exhortation at the SYF 1971 Opening Ceremony that the national progress of Singapore depended on youth possessing "healthy and strong bodies" and "moral souls." The SYF also enabled "the cultivation and fostering of useful citizens" out of Singapore's youth and their insulation from "negative external influences" and "the social ills of the past." Another commentator applauded the SYF in July 1973 for demonstrating "the youthful vitality and freshness of the young country and the importance and care that the country gave to its youth." He hoped that Singapore's youth would fulfil their civic responsibility as "the main driving force of the country's development."⁴⁶² These comments by Chinese-educated commentators connects the history of youth in Singapore with a longer history of the cultural politics of youth in China where the Chinese-educated community in Singapore already imbibed ideas and associations about cultivating modern youth with social upliftment, national rejuvenation, and cultural revitalization as a result of the May 4th Movement in China in 1919. They too saw the bodies of youth in terms of national revival and a new cultural modernity.

Journalists writing in the main English-language newspaper, *The Straits Times*, joined in the fetishization of disciplined youth bodies, invoking British middle-class masculine ideas of discipline and industrious labour. Their outlandish language exemplified how the bodies of the

⁴⁶² *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 19 July 1973.

young – both male and female – were objectified and subjected to the disciplinary gazes of the state and the Singaporean adult public. One journalist gushed about how students from an elite girls’ school, Raffles Girls Secondary School, marching in the 1971 SYF Opening Ceremony ” look[ed] immaculate in their white T-shirts and shorts, which could not but accentuate flashing suntanned legs – no doubt, the result of hours of practice in the sun.” Even though at least twenty youth fainted in the rest of the Opening Ceremony, the journalist emphasized how “everything else went like clockwork..... created by a synchronisation of mass bodies.”⁴⁶³ Another journalist enthused about witnessing “Disciplined Confidence at Youth Festival Parade” for the 1972 SYF Opening Ceremony. After the “rigid precision” of the uniformed contingents’ marchpast, a dance performance by “girls dressed in white blouses and red sarongs gaily twirling matching red and white umbrellas” provided a “striking contrast” of liveliness and vibrancy. Thereafter the mood “changed to one of “strength, power and endurance” as 400 boys and girls of Whampoa Secondary School went through drill movements carrying dumbbells. This was followed by a demonstration of “the Rugged Society in action as the students, in red and yellow T-shirts, bent and heaved their way through a series of exercises.”⁴⁶⁴ Within this iconography, the image of female youth was ambiguous and ambivalent. On the one hand, girls were equally incorporated into the collective body of rugged, disciplined “Flagbearers of the Republic.” On the other, while the young male body was only, and could only be, portrayed in athletic, masculine and martial tropes, the bodies of girls were both feminized and masculinized. Girls were as much involved in dance performances that extolled the feminine tropes of grace, beauty and vivacity as they were in the uniformed cadet groups parades and military marching bands that exuded and displayed “Martial Might.”⁴⁶⁵ The

⁴⁶³ *The Sunday Times* 27 June 1971.

⁴⁶⁴ *The Sunday Times* 16 July 1972.

⁴⁶⁵ *The Sunday Times* 16 July 1972.

tones and vocabulary with which these journalists reported on the SYF show evidently that it was not only the youth but the envisioned Singaporean nation that was on display. Within these depictions, the actual qualities displayed by the youthful bodies on display became the metonyms for the imagined nation.



Left: 8. An all-female military marching band performing at SYF 1972. Source: National Archives of Singapore

Right: 9. Girl dancers as part of a mass youth dance display at SYF 1973. Source: National Archives of Singapore

Exhibiting Ideal Singaporean Youth Culture

The interest in propagating ideas of ideal Singaporean youth was accompanied by the promotion of images of ideal youth culture and activities. As earlier chapters have shown, the respective Singapore governments and their partners have been interested, since the 1950s, in both promoting and regulating youth activity, so as to both mould youth bodies and control them. The previous chapter has already observed how Singapore's disciplinary state began to privilege specific activities and pursuits based on their biopolitical value and efficacy. The education system became a space to promote children and youth's participation in these activities as well. What colonial officials and adults attempted to do through organizations like the Singapore Youth Sports Centre, the Singapore Youth Council, and the other youth groups, the PAP government succeeded

at a national level through the integration of these activities in the schools' informal curriculum. From early on, the PAP saw extra-curricular activities as pedagogic spaces to socialize Singapore's schooling youth in new social values and social relations and to "channel their youthful enthusiasm and energies toward the healthy growth of character and body."⁴⁶⁶ These common activities in common spaces were meant to encourage "the social integration of students from the different streams of education" and to acquire desired values and qualities such as teamwork, resilience, and perseverance.⁴⁶⁷ A Senior Minister of State for Education wrote in the SYF's 10th year anniversary publication: "It is *on the playing fields and the courts, on the stage and in the music room, and on the parade ground* [emphases mine] that feelings of mutual respect can best be developed and character strengthened."⁴⁶⁸ In this pithy quote, the Minister summed up the three kinds of pursuits and activities that the PAP government sought to normalize as Singaporean youth culture – sports and physical activities, the arts, and participation in uniformed youth movements. These were mainly promoted to schooling youth as "extra-curricular activities" in the school system.

The SYF remains the Singapore government's biggest annual statement of its beliefs in the importance of the extra-curricular activities in disciplining and shaping the behaviour and conduct of Singapore's youth. It became a yearly event to galvanize schoolchildren to participate in these activities and showcase their achievements. Before the Festival each year, students devoted more than half a year to extracurricular activities in their schools to train and rehearse for their

⁴⁶⁶ "Draft of Minister's Message for the Singapore Youth Festival Program" for Singapore Youth Festival 1972," in NAS, EDUN-2955-68 Vol. 5 "Singapore Youth Festival."

⁴⁶⁷ R. W. Mosbergen, "The Educational Scene in Singapore," in Ministry of Education, *Our Youth*, unpaginated.

⁴⁶⁸ *Singapore Youth Festival '67-'76: 10th anniversary* (Singapore: Singapore Youth Festival Steering Committee, 1976), Foreword.

participation in the Festival's programs. Singapore's educationists echoed the politicians' beliefs that participation in the SYF and these activities constituted powerful affective experiences that stimulated and reinforced national consciousness and identification. *Our Youth*, the commemorative publication the Ministry of Education published in 1969 to celebrate the sesquicentennial of Singapore's founding, makes it clear that they saw the value of these activities in terms of their ability to generate and produce the emotional experiences that informed subject-formation:

Our children were enthralled to discover that wherever their own talents and abilities lay, there was activity in which they could excel. They experienced the thrill of knowing that they were among the best in the state. On the day or night when they would appear before their fellow-pupils, their parents, and thousands of spectators, they would be in the centre of things.⁴⁶⁹

Clearly, the government's pedagogical efforts were based on a conception of power as productive and generative. The late Paul S. Abisheganaden, a maestro, musician, and music educator, who was later recognized with Singapore's Cultural Medallion, the highest accolade for cultural figures, in 1968, was Chief Inspector of Schools and a key member of the SYF Organizing Committee in its early years. During the organization of the 1969 SYF Arts & Craft exhibition, he wrote to the principals of all schools and kindergartens to ask that they emphasize "the child's personal ideas and experience" in interpreting the theme of the exhibition that year: "What Singapore means to me." They should encourage students to find inspiration in "the lives of the people at work and at play" and "their cultures and aspirations," instead of "well-worn clichés such as 'glowing sunsets', scenes with coconut palms and attap huts." He wrote: "Whatever topic is

⁴⁶⁹ Educational Publications Bureau, *Our Youth*. unpaginated.

chosen, the finished result must be *a felt sensation of the child*.”⁴⁷⁰ Abisheganaden’s words underline this strategy where the state’s educationists aimed to engineer youth subjectivity not through coercion or prescription but through positive affective experiences. As a journalist for *The New Nation*, one participant-turned-commentator, Violet Oon, attested in 1972 that the SYF and extra-curricular activities had “become part and parcel of the pattern of school life in Singapore.” She provided her personal account: “I can still remember that barrenness of my school days – the Youth Festival only made its debut in my last two years. In pre-Youth Festival days, I think very few children could sing, dance, or play musical instruments in groups.... I also remember that it was great fun singing in a choir in the festival – much more exciting in the National Theatre than in the school hall.” The SYF was also “an arena for our youth to show off their [otherwise hidden] talents,” citing the example of a schoolgirl whose “lovely voice” was discovered because of the SYF.⁴⁷¹ The development of the individual young person was evidently a key part of the governmentality project. Oon’s comments link back to one of the Singapore disciplinary state’s strategies for managing youth – occupying their time with desirable activities in supervised spaces and institutions. These were activities that were desirable because they diverted youth from engaging in less desirable activities, so that their bodies and minds could be schooled in the qualities and values of ideal Singaporean youth. As Singapore’s Ministry of Education continues to declare, its mission remains: to mould the future of the (Singaporean) nation.

Behind the SYF therefore lies the ambitious project of engineering a new Singaporean culture through shaping youth culture. After each Opening Ceremony, youth, teachers, school

⁴⁷⁰ Memo from Paul S. Abisheganaden, Chief Inspector of Schools for Director of Education, Singapore, to Principals of All Schools and Kindergartens, 14 January 1969, in NAS, EDUN. 1556/55/Vol. 2/199.

⁴⁷¹ *New Nation* 15 May 1972.

leaders and the public and community leaders attended several signature events that showcased youth endeavours in uniformed youth movements, arts and crafts, music and dance, sports, and physical activities. These included primary school and secondary athletic meets, district, and national-level parades of the four Cadet Corps (the National Cadet Corps, the Sea Cadet Corps, the Malayan Air Training Corps, and the Police Cadet Corps), an Arts and Craft exhibition, Music and Dance Presentations, and grand Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The first-ever Art and Craft Exhibition in 1968 received more than 500 exhibits selected from around 5,000 entries of art, handicraft, photography, and needlework received from kindergarten, primary school, vocational school, and secondary school students. The Arts and Craft Exhibition the following year showcased 705 entries selected from kindergarten, primary and secondary schools.⁴⁷² The 1969 Music and Dance Presentations exhibited 81 items chosen from 490 entries received from Singapore's primary and secondary schools.⁴⁷³ Some schools were even found to have been too zealous in participating in the SYF. On one occasion, the SYF Steering Committee had to discuss the "tendency towards over-involvement on the part of some schools" and advise schools "against over-indulgence in the activities of the Festival" and the "overtaxing of individual teachers and pupils."⁴⁷⁴

The PAP government's Ministry of Education continued to use uniformed youth groups to constitute the SYF Ceremonies parades, reflecting the successful integration of these British uniformed youth movements into the PAP's own disciplinary state apparatus. Even though the

⁴⁷² "Singapore Youth Festival 1969 Press Release," 3 July 1969 in NAS, EDUN. 2955-68 Vol. 2 "Singapore Youth Festival 1969/70."

⁴⁷³ NAS, MC 178/67 "Singapore Youth Festival 1969."

⁴⁷⁴ Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of SYF (1971) Steering Committee, 6 September 1971 in NAS, EDUN 2955-68 Vol. 4 "Singapore Youth Festival."

PAP government dissolved organizations formed under colonial auspices like the Singapore Youth Council and the Singapore Youth Sports Centre, it integrated the uniformed youth movements into their educational school system and supported the establishment of chapters or branches in Singapore's schools. Today, these uniformed youth movements have been so well-integrated into the national school system that most young Singaporeans are unaware of their international (and colonial) origins. These movements were happy to embrace new loyalties to the independent Singapore and become part of the disciplinary state apparatus to produce loyal, disciplined citizens for the new country. A speech by a PAP Member of Parliament Ho Cheng Choon, at an annual campfire for Scouts Cubs in October 1967, shows how easily the PAP government incorporated a British youth movement originally meant to socialize British working-class youth in British middle-class values within their own discourses of ideal Singaporean youth:

...Scouting is not merely a past-time; it is a discipline with a code of conduct that is accepted throughout the world. It teaches a scout not only how to survive physically in conditions entirely different from the comforts and shelter of city life but also *self-discipline* as well as *social discipline*. Such a code of conduct cannot but shape a boy into a confident and disciplined young man fully aware of his own responsibility to society. Today is Children's Day and I wish all the children gathered at this campfire a happy time. They and their parents should be proud to see them participating in *an honourable discipline rather than indulging in unproductive and anti-society activities* [emphasis mine].⁴⁷⁵

The Scouts Movement in Singapore quickly adapted its practices and programs to the new enterprise of moulding Singaporean youth. According to a Handbook produced for the Movement's Cadet Scouts, the Singapore Scouts Movement was to re-orient itself to the Singapore context and help develop young bodies to serve the Singapore state and economy. Quite literally,

⁴⁷⁵ Press Release of Speech by Ho Cheng Choon, Member of Parliament for Geylang East and Parliamentary Secretary (National Development) at the Annual Campfire for Cubs at Dunman English School, 2 October 1967.

the Scouts were to produce “young men who are trained in the sophisticated skills required by our expanding industries” as well as “loyal and useful citizens, conscious of their duty towards their fellowmen and the community in which they live.”⁴⁷⁶ The Singapore Battalion of the Boys’ Brigade was another clear example – it prided itself for helping to turn out the “highly motivated and disciplined workforce” that Singapore needed.⁴⁷⁷

The mass expansion of the uniformed youth movements in Singapore gave the PAP government greater ability to exploit the emotional capital the young possessed to recast relationships between Singaporeans and government agencies that previously symbolized colonial power. In Lee Kuan Yew’s explanation of the origins of the National Police Cadet Corps, a uniformed group the Singapore government established in 1967, Lee explained that the Singapore public did not trust the police as they were seen as “an instrument of suppression” that the British government used to suppress anti-colonial movements. Consequently, the government encouraged children to join the NPCC so as to get parents to “identify themselves with the police...when they see their children in this role.”⁴⁷⁸ Lee repeated the same justification for the National Cadet Corps – to get Singaporeans to identify the Singapore Armed Forces with their children and see the army as “their protectors.”⁴⁷⁹ Hence, uniformed youth movements did not only serve the disciplinary aims of regulating the conduct of Singapore’s schooling children, but also the aim of fostering positive sentiments and affinities between the rest of the Singaporean public and state institutions

⁴⁷⁶ Toh Ching Chong, *A How and Why Handbook on What to Do to Fulfil the Purpose of the Cadet Scout Section: Cadet Scout Leader’s Handbook* (Singapore: The Singapore Scout Association, 1970), 7-8.

⁴⁷⁷ Boys’ Brigade Singapore, *Underneath the Banner: The History of the Boys’ Brigade in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2013), 62.

⁴⁷⁸ Michael Teow Beng Kim and Eugene Wijesingha, *National Police Cadet Corps: Its Origin, Growth and Development* (Singapore: National Police Cadet Corps Headquarters, 2000).

⁴⁷⁹ National Cadet Corps (Singapore), *National Cadet Corps: 100 years of Distinction* (Singapore: National Cadet Corps, 2001), 33-34.

like the police and the army. The government continued to deploy parades of uniformed youth for these evocative purposes in state-orchestrated spectacles like the Singapore Youth Festival ceremonies and events and the National Day Parades.

In previous chapters, we have seen how the colonial authorities and the Singapore Labour Front government became interested in promoting sports as an activity to foster multiculturalism and nationalism and to police youth at the same time. This followed Japanese precedents. The PAP government took this practice even further and emphasized sports and physical endeavour as a pedagogical activity in Singapore's schools. In his work on the socialization and mobilization of youth in post-Vichy France, Richard Jobs highlights the French government's focus on fostering "physical citizenship" as it would bring "national benefit... in terms of healthy, morality, education, character, work, prestige, and of course, military strength."⁴⁸⁰ Simon Creak has made similar observations in his studies of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party government's efforts to mould the "new socialist person" in Laos from the 1970s onwards.⁴⁸¹ Like the PAP, the Lao PRP government defined the new socialist person in terms of physical, behavioural and moral characteristics and started a mass sport and physical culture movement to construct these new socialist persons out of the Lao population.⁴⁸² Likewise, the Singapore PAP government encouraged youth to become physically active and rugged through extra-curricular activities like sports and uniformed youth movements. This was framed using the metaphor of "a rugged society" whose citizens are socially-disciplined, physically vigorous, and mentally resilient, as they would

⁴⁸⁰ Richard Ivan Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 121-122.

⁴⁸¹ Simon Creak "Cold War Rhetoric and The Body: Physical Cultures in Early Socialist Laos," in *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, ed. Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2010), 103-130.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 103.

be “more productive if they are more fit.”⁴⁸³ Whereas the SYSC achieved a degree of pomp and interest, it was the PAP government that effectively integrated the emphasis on sports into the national school system and made sports part of the everyday schooling life of Singaporeans across the island. The PAP’s Ministry of Education greatly increased the promotion of sports and extra-mural activities to bring up, in the words of a PAP Member of Parliament at the opening ceremony of a sports field at a Chinese middle school in July 1969, “a disciplined and rugged generation.”⁴⁸⁴

The attention the Ministry of Education paid to the SYF and the encouragement of extra-curricular activities suggest that, contrary to the popular public perception that Singapore had deliberately sacrificed arts and culture for the technocratic pursuit of economic progress, the government had constantly viewed arts and culture as a “means of ennobling the soul and creating a society that was “cultured” and “civilised.””⁴⁸⁵ When he first praised the idea of a youth festival of the arts in 1966, Ong Pang Boon opined that that the method was ideal because “art and its appreciation transcends all racial and political boundaries and differences.”⁴⁸⁶ The belief that a new Singaporean culture could emerge from cultural learning and appreciation dates back to an earlier decade, when Singapore’s educators encouraged youth to pursue arts, drama, and music for similar objectives, albeit within the context of a “Malayan” nation. This motivated the emphasis of arts and craft and music lessons in schools, as Singaporean social scientist Terence Chong has

⁴⁸³ Mike McNeill, John Sproule & Peter Horton, “The Changing Face of Sport and Physical Education in Post-Colonial Singapore,” *Sport, Education and Society* 8, No. 1 (2003), 37, 42.

⁴⁸⁴ Speech by Ho Cheng Choon, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Law and National Development at the opening Ceremony of the Sports Field at Hua Yi Government Chinese Middle School, 26 July 1969.

⁴⁸⁵ Speech by Tony Tan Keng Yam, Minister for Education, at the Opening Ceremony of the Singapore Youth Festival at the Kallang Theatre, 8 July 1989; Speech by Ch’ng Jit Koon, Minister of State (Community Development), at the Opening of the SYF Arts and Craft Exhibition at that National Museum Art Gallery, 1 August 1986.

⁴⁸⁶ Speech by Ong Pang Boon, Minister for Education, at the 7th Youth Festival Competition of Drama, Music and Dances organized by the Singapore Teachers’ Union at Victoria Theatre, 13 June 1966.

recently shown.⁴⁸⁷ Government leaders believed that the creative arts, music, and dance was a conducive means to concoct a new unique Singapore culture that could be the basis of common national identification. Singapore's multi-cultural diversity was a strength that allowed young Singaporeans "to evolve and create art forms relevant to our social condition to reflect features in society that are distinctively ours."⁴⁸⁸ The SYF demonstrates the promotion of a few specific forms of youth activity as legitimate and productive youth culture. Unsurprisingly, educators and state leaders spoke of these activities in terms of their biopolitical value. In that regard, the SYF represents the Singapore disciplinary state's continued efforts to normalize preferred forms of youth activity and culture that were productive for the incorporation of youth and for the development of their bodies for service to the nation and participation in the economy. What remains to be asked is whether this idealization of these specific activities marginalized other kinds of youth pursuits and created new exclusions for groups of local youth who chose to pursue activities now deemed deficient or deviant.

Anxieties in the 1970s

In the first few SYFs organized from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, state leaders addressed the gathered audiences at the SYF Ceremonies and events in mostly positive and optimistic language. In the mid-1970s, their tone and vocabulary shifted, to borrow Richard Jobs's felicitous phrasing, "from hope to threat" as political leaders warned Singapore's youth against participating in youth counterculture that was influencing youth movements and activity worldwide.⁴⁸⁹ Singapore's openness to global flows and circulations of ideas, currents and

⁴⁸⁷ Terence Chong, "Arts Education in Singapore: Between Rhetoric and Reality," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 32, No. 1 (March 2017), 107-136.

⁴⁸⁸ Speech by Minister for Culture – Art & Craft Exhibition at the Victoria Memorial Hall on Friday, 26 July 1968.

⁴⁸⁹ Jobs, *Riding the New Wave*, 269.

commodities as an export-oriented economy under the PAP government meant that Singapore's youth were exposed to other ideologies and influences such as international Communism, global youth radicalism, and shifting youth cultures. The consumption of drugs by the young was a subject of public attention in the 1970s, as more and more youth under the age of twenty was arrested for drug abuse.

These created new anxieties and exacerbated old ones for adults, who intensified their efforts to socialize, mobilize, and police youth. The great significance assigned to the cultivation of healthy young bodies and minds and encouraging wholesome youth pursuits in the preceding decades undoubtedly provoked and nourished these anxieties. This underlines Foucault's observation that power in a disciplinary regime is never complete. The Singapore state's efforts to discipline the conduct of Singapore's youth exist in competition with other forms and sources of influence over the lives and subjectivities of its population. In that vein, critiques of power in disciplinary societies and states should not only focus on arenas or instances of direct resistance and opposition to state discourses, but also areas where biopower fell short of achieving its intended effects.

The SYF ironically became a platform for political leaders to articulate their anxieties about youth culture and youth behaviour, using the vocabulary of moral panic and national peril and once again invoking the symbolism of Singapore youth as a social thermometer. Accordingly, arts, culture, sports, and extra-curricular activities gained additional meanings as pursuits that steered them away from these debilitating Western lifestyles and youth culture. At the 1971 SYF, Minister for Education Lim Kim San emphasized that "wholesome group activities" were an important

“adequate outlet for their youthful energy and enthusiasm,” without which they were “in danger of being attracted by activities of an undesirable kind, such as those associated with juvenile gangs, ganja parties, rock festivals or hippism.”⁴⁹⁰ At the 1977 SYF, the Minister of Home Affairs warned Singapore’s parents to insulate their youth from the “more pernicious aberrations of western culture which we see being manifested in drug addiction, long hair and the hippie sub-culture.”⁴⁹¹ At the 1982 SYF, the Minister of State for Culture compared the materially-abundant lives of his youth audience with the uncertain, wanting circumstances of his own youth in the 1950s and 1960s. He cautioned them against letting Singapore be “plunged into a hedonistic society in which only personal enjoyment, pleasure-seeking and entertainment are what [youth] live for.”⁴⁹² The frequency of these articulations throughout the 1970s highlight the unremitting interest of political leaders and adults in prescribing youth interests, youth culture, and youth aspirations. Their anxieties hint at the resistance of some groups of Singaporean youth to the state’s efforts to prescribe youth culture and activity. They point towards the existence of a pluralistic landscape of youth culture, youth leisure and activity beyond the idealized, sanitized, and homogenized images that the SYF conveyed. The highly open cultural environment of Singapore stymied the state’s efforts to shape youth culture, where its disciplinary programs often competed with other sources of influence on the lives of the young. Nonetheless, these worries and complaints about counter-culture only make sense within the associations between youth culture with the healthy development and upbringing of youth, and correspondingly with the progress, vitality, and health of the Singaporean nation. Yet, these anxieties attest to both the impact and limits of disciplinary

⁴⁹⁰ Speech by Lim Kim San, Minister for Education, at the Opening Ceremony of the Singapore Youth Festival 1971, accessed from National Archives of Singapore Online: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/PressR19710717a.pdf>. Last Accessed: 1 April 2019.

⁴⁹¹ Speech by Chua Sian Chin, Minister for Home Affairs and Education, at the Official Opening of the 11th Singapore Youth Festival, 9 July 1977.

⁴⁹² Speech by Fong Sip Chee, Minister of State for Culture, at the Official Opening of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of the Singapore Youth Festival 1982 at the National Museum Art Gallery on 2 August 1982.

power. On the one hand, young people gained access to resources and opportunities for their development and interests. On the other, they became subjected to unrelenting scrutiny over their lives.

Conclusion

The massive resources endowed on the SYF raise the question of the SYF's actual impact on Singaporean youth. However, the oft-cited methodological difficulties of finding sources that "speak directly" from the experiences of youth hinder this line of inquiry.⁴⁹³ Accounts and testimonies of youth who have experienced or witnessed the SYF are scarce. In Karin Taylor's study of the 1968 Sofia Youth Festival, she concluded that the event "flashed into their lives like a brilliant parade and gone by, without leaving palpable traces."⁴⁹⁴ For a Festival that involved thousands of spectators and participants each year, the paucity of accounts or testimonies suggest that, for most of its observers and participants, the Singapore Youth Festival had been a similar experience. This makes it difficult to make conclusive claims about the SYF's impact. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suggest that these greatly publicized spectacles of youth succeeded in normalizing the exhibited ideals and images of Singaporean youth and nation in the eyes and minds of Singapore's schooling youth, their parents, and their educators.

For a few students who left short accounts of their participation in recent SYFs, the SYF did produce the intended disciplinary outcomes. Goh Wei Na, a participant of SYF 2003,

⁴⁹³ Mary Jo Jaynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 117.

⁴⁹⁴ Taylor, "The Socialist Orchestration of Youth," 57.

remembered how weekly dance practice taught her “resilience and discipline.”⁴⁹⁵ Another student, Anisah, remembers her SYF 2010 experience in vocabulary resonant of the Singapore national narrative: “we pushed ourselves together and overcame every obstacle as one regardless of race and religion. It taught me a lot on how to persevere and how friendship is really valuable to me.”⁴⁹⁶ Some individuals highlighted their participation in the Singapore Youth Festival as their most significant memories of their schooling years. A participant of the 1973 SYF recollects how:

The sounds of different music from ethnic groups - Malay, Indian, Eurasian, and Chinese - enchanted me with their rhythms and the motion-in-colour gracefulness of the dancers impressed me deeply as a child. My memories of SYF at National Theatre will always come back whenever I go pass Fort Canning Hill.⁴⁹⁷

One account in particular highlights how the SYF’s ideological messages were transmitted across generations – underlining that disciplinary power possessed trans-chronic effects in shaping youth subjectivity and behaviour at the time of application and at a later instance of reproduction. A current student recounts his story of how he “chanced upon” an old photo of his mother as a student performing in a ‘Multi-cultural Dance’ during SYF 1979. When he asked his mother about the photograph, “she confessed that the performance then was very special, as it was an ethnic dance which was comprised of many different cultural dances; Chinese dance, Malay dance and Indian dance.”⁴⁹⁸ These reminiscences reflect the dissemination and internalization of the idea of

⁴⁹⁵ Goh Wei Na, “River Valley High School: dance practice,” The Singapore Memory Portal. Accessed at: <http://www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMB-504137a2-3ed0-4947-8753-922dabc1a1a4>

⁴⁹⁶ Anisah Binte Muhammad Hussain, “The Singapore Story,” The Singapore Memory Portal. Accessed at: <http://www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMB-8a539333-0853-4855-abf4-5fc43ce41ac7>

⁴⁹⁷ Josephine Chan Mae Yi, “Dance of Dreams @ Fort Canning,” The Singapore Memory Portal. Accessed at: <http://www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMB-d96e8519-71cb-48ed-a8fd-105802931283>. Last Accessed: 28 March 2019.

⁴⁹⁸ Teoh Jun Yi, “1979 The Singapore Youth Festival,” The Singapore Memory Portal. Accessed at: <http://www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMA-b0566203-0e70-4a38-9849-1ec5ccb8383d?nextrecord=8&listtype=searchResult&id=SMA-b0566203-0e70-4a38-9849-1ec5ccb8383d&pagenm=1&startrec=1&type=memories&keyword=teoh%20jun%20yi&memory=SMA-b0566203-0e70-4a38-9849-1ec5ccb8383d>. Last Accessed: 28 March 2019.

multiculturalism as a social norm and ideal in Singapore, even though this is limited to the awareness and appreciation of a cultural group's artistic forms and practices.

As Simon Sleight argues, the paucity of first-hand accounts should not stop us from reading youth spectacles like the SYF “as ritual texts since their meanings were concocted by adults.”⁴⁹⁹ Today, the SYF has become a routine part of the school calendar, hardly evoking the same public excitement that it did during the first decade of Singapore's independence. Yet, government agencies and youth organizations in Singapore continue to mobilize children and youth in public spectacles like community festivals and the annual National Day Parades for the same biopolitical purposes of exhibiting and embodying the ideal Singaporean youth and nation. They encouraged the young to embrace a multicultural citizenship based on deference to authority and to the values promoted by the state, as well as conformity to a state-sanctioned youth culture. This use of this pedagogical technique began at least five decades ago, during the formative years of Singapore's nation-building, when colonial officials, political leaders, and other adults projected the country's promise and progress, as well as its possible degeneration and demise, on the minds and bodies of Singapore's youth. When Singapore's Ministry of Education officially adopted a Mission of “Moulding the Future of the Nation” in 1997, it was essentially reiterating the fundamental principle of Singapore's educational policies and the idealized association between the schooling of Singapore's youth and national progress, both of which had already been established during the formative decade of the island-nation's independence. Thus, when young people were assembled in orderly, regimented lines in the rain before Lee Kuan Yew's funeral procession as it rolled through the island in March 2015, this once again reified the political and ideological centrality

⁴⁹⁹ Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914*, 197.

children and youth have occupied in Singapore since the 1950s. It is also a reminder that for the entirety of his political life, Lee Kuan Yew had been obsessed with scrutinizing, moulding, instrumentalizing, mobilizing, and policing the bodies and minds of Singapore's children and youth.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion - Youth and the Future of Singapore

In March 2018, a 22-year-old university student, Tan Yang Long, read out a speech at a forum on campus. The speech addressed the Singapore's next Prime Minister on the current status on the nation's youth.⁵⁰⁰ Subsequently, a panellist at the forum, Nominated Member of Parliament Kuik Shiao-yin, discussed the speech in parliament.⁵⁰¹ In his speech, Tan expressed reservations about "the future leadership's ability to listen to, trust and work with the people – particularly those with dissenting views." He began with accusatory questions: "how much do you trust us young people? It's a little confusing right now because we're not always treated consistently. Do you see us as equal partners – leaders you want to empower – or as citizens you need to govern? What kind of role do you trust us to play?". Tan's confusion was due to the erroneous way he framed subjecthood and empowerment in oppositional, dichotomous terms. The answer to Tan's question is actually *both* – the Singapore PAP government has constantly regarded Singapore's youths as the future leaders and partners of the state in nation-building *and* as citizens to be governed and policed ever since it came to power in 1959. Tan's perception of a seeming contradiction between the empowerment and the policing of young people, and his ability to make such a complaint and have it discussed by Singapore's highest legislative body, are the present-day effects of the political rationality regarding youth in Singapore that became normalized and institutionalized in Singapore after the Second World War.

⁵⁰⁰ Tan Yang Long, "A Letter to our 4th Prime Minister", 20 March 2018. Tan read out this open letter at a panel organized at his college – Yale-NUS, a liberal arts college collaboratively established by Yale University and the National University of Singapore. Tan made the letter public on his Facebook account. (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/tan-yang-long/a-letter-to-our-4th-prime-minister/2057730451181986/>).

⁵⁰¹ Kuik Shiao-yin, "'The Power of a People' A response to the 2018 Presidential Address as delivered in Parliament on 17 May 2018", downloaded from Kuik Shiao-yin's Facebook, 9 July 2020. Cited with her permission.

This dissertation has used insights from Michel Foucault and the history of childhood and youth to illuminate a previously unknown history of Singapore as a youth-centered disciplinary state. Between the 1940s and 1970s, the demographic reality of a youthful population, the dislocations and deprivations caused by the war, the surge of youth crime and youth protest activism, and increasing attention on the welfare of children and youth globally combined to make youth a highly visible and significant category. Though this youth turn in modern Singapore history was connected to a longer history of increasing interest in regulating children and youth in Singapore from the beginning of the 20th century, these earlier efforts were eclipsed by the scale of the programs of the Japanese imperial administration (1942-1945), the returning British colonial administration (1945-1955), the local Labour Front government (1955-1959) and the People's Action Party (PAP) government (1959-the present). Their respective imperial, Cold War, and nationalist agendas and anxieties elevated youth to the forefront of their respective empire-building, nation-building, and state-building projects. These governments exploited the flexible and polysemic category of "youth" to justify its their increasing influence over the lives of the young through new programs and institutions to discipline, mobilize, and police them. The PAP went even further and valorized an idealized image of a homogeneous youth identity and culture, based on age-based aspirations, interests, and anxieties that transcended gender, class, ethnic, religious lines, to forge national unity and social solidarity among otherwise divided and diverse communities. These programs, institutions, and images gave the Singapore disciplinary state a high degree of control over the upbringing and everyday lives of the majority of Singapore youth. Together, these programs, institutions, and images produced and normalized a political rationality of youth that continues to animate policies and programs for children and youth in Singapore today. "Youth" as a category also facilitated both subjectification and self-subjectification. By classifying

and conceiving of themselves as Singaporean youth, young Singaporeans situate themselves within this political rationality, as Tan's above-mentioned remarks evinces.

The case of the making of youth in Singapore highlights how the history of childhood and youth's methodological focus on age as a category of historical analysis becomes especially potent when combined with Foucauldian perspectives of power. As Ian Hacking puts it, Foucault calls for us to study "how the subjects themselves are constituted.... It is a Foucauldian thesis that every way in which I can think of myself as a person and an agent is something that has been constituted within a web of historical events."⁵⁰² Disciplinary power applied onto children and youth is not only messy, polyphonic, pluralistic, but also transchronic in the circulations, relations, and effects it produces. The combined lenses of age and biopower foreground the processes that have shaped subject-formation in modern Singapore. They illuminate the Singapore disciplinary state's desires to shape youth subjectivities and conduct and to extract their labour and service - not only in the present but also in the future when they grow up – continue to be a vital part of politics and governance in Singapore. The disciplinary state was not one institution or one political party but the "effect" of the decisions and actions of a multitude of actors who cooperated in the application of biopower on children and youth, including but not limited to politicians, civil servants, youth workers, educators, recreational experts. The Foucauldian lens calls for us to understand the "Singapore state" not as a monolithic entity, but as an expansive assemblage of government and non-government actors who participate in the project of taming and moulding youth. In examining other societies and contexts, it would be valuable to move away from unilinear analyses of state-youth interactions and relations, and instead, move towards a more thorough study of the pluralistic assemblage of agents and institutions that served as capillaries, nodes, and relays of biopower.

⁵⁰² Ian Hacking, "The Archaeology of Foucault", in David Couzens Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 36.

The positive impact of this increased attention and state capacity is increased youth agency. The anthropologist of childhood and youth David Lancy observed that there were two distinguishable definitions of the agency of children and youth – “freedom” (the autonomy to act on their own) and “efficacy” (the ability to have an effect on others).⁵⁰³ This distinction allows for a more accurate characterization and understanding of youth agency in the Singapore context. For young Singaporeans, membership within the modern Singaporean nation-state engenders the ability to gain agentic efficacy, that is, to gain the ability to shape their life choices. Since the 1940s, successive Singapore governments invested substantial resources into catering for the welfare, interests, and aspirations of children and youth. Especially after the 1960s, young Singaporeans were able to take for granted access to education, housing, socio-economic opportunities, healthcare, social welfare. They have also enjoyed an abundance of ways to pursue artistic, cultural, leisure and recreational activities, as well as to pursue social activism and community service – without being aware of how these were meant to shape their subjectivity. The political rationality of youth in Singapore also guarantees young people the right as citizens to make demands of the country’s political leadership. The politics of youth representation has become naturalized within Singapore society and politics. The much-admired stability and longevity of Singapore’s political system and capitalist economic order has been in part driven by the Singapore state’s continuing capacity to ensure that the aspirations of the young did not become a threat to the Singapore state and economy, but instead, its source of legitimacy and vitality.

However, this increased attention and state capacity has also meant increased scrutiny, surveillance, and prescriptiveness. The very same romanticized qualities of malleability, idealism,

⁵⁰³ David Lancy, “Unmasking Children’s Agency,” *AnthropoChildren* 1, no. 2 (2012): 6.

and energy that made youths potent allies and agents of the state also made the state fear their subversion or rebellion, should their aspirations and frustrations not be addressed, or should they be mobilized by competing ideologies. The PAP government's discourse of youth in Singapore was, and still is, a dualistic one – where Singapore's young have been conceptualized as both the potential peril of the Singaporean nation-state, to be regulated and policed, and its potential pillar, to be developed, empowered, and mobilized as national resources for social and economic development. This meant the loss of agentic autonomy for the young, who became subjects of a regime of rules and logics governing youth conduct, subjectivity, and culture in Singapore. Their freedom to expand the parameters of legitimate political claims and methods of political expression, as well as the range of aspirations, interests, and identities they possess, remain cautiously scrutinized, and if necessary policed. "Empowerment" in the Singapore context means the ability to pursue and fulfil their aspirations and interests, but not the autonomy to define these aspirations and interests beyond those acceptable to the country's entrenched political leadership and dominant social groups. This contributes to the seeming contradictions in the Singapore state's approach to youth agency since the 1960s.

Hence, this dissertation partly explains why there was little or no large-scale youth unrest in Singapore after 1975. To argue that this phenomenon was due to the repressive and authoritarian policies of a paternalistic PAP government is an incomplete answer – one that obfuscates the more complex cultural politics of youth in post-1945 Singapore. Instead, the answer is partly in how the Singapore government had already learnt the importance of managing and mobilizing youth and developed an extensive and effective disciplinary state apparatus to do so. This apparatus did not only consist of strict laws to police transgressive youth behaviour or outlaw some forms of political

activity. It also involved an extensive assemblage of government and non-governmental actors, institutions, and images that helped to incorporate children and youth into productive and cooperative relations with the Singapore state and economy. Most young Singaporeans no longer engage in mass public protest and demonstrations not only because they are not allowed to, but also because they no longer not have the time to, they no longer not need to, and they no longer want to. Youth dissent is unwarranted so long as the Singapore disciplinary state continues to respond to the aspirations and anxieties of young Singaporeans through their policies and programs, and so long as it continues to provide effective spaces and mechanisms for the young to pursue and achieve social and political agency through non-transgressive means.

Small acts of public youth dissent do occur on occasion. Most recently when five young people staged “a public assembly without a permit” outside the Ministry of Education’s headquarters on 26 January to protest continuing discrimination against LGBTQ students in Singapore’s schools.⁵⁰⁴ This protest-act points towards the continuing existence of marginalized groups in Singapore, including young Singaporeans for whom state policies and the dominant groups’ values and interests represent disempowerment and discrimination, instead of empowerment and inclusion. The occasional appearance of such protests also reflects the resistance of a small section of youth to the state’s preference that the young articulate political demands in sanctioned channels and spaces, or through democratically elected political representatives. Yet, these rare occurrences of public youth protest were noteworthy of media attention precisely because they were incidental. Most young Singaporeans remain content with political agency through electoral democracy. Within the Singapore state’s political rationality of

⁵⁰⁴ *The Straits Times*, 27 January 2021. Accessed at: (<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/three-people-arrested-for-protesting-outside-ministry-of-education>).

youth, even voting against the People's Action Party government is not a radical or transgressive act at all. Voting, i.e., deciding to participate in shaping the future of the Singaporean nation-state through the state-sanctioned mechanisms, is itself a politically conservative and state-affirming act.

This is also a history that requires us to complicate how we think about youth activism as agency. Youth activism is often positioned as outside of, or oppositional to, adult/state power. However, Foucauldian perspectives suggest that children and youth can be subjects, capillaries, and instruments of power at the same time. This calls for us to be careful about analytical approaches or narratives that cast children and youth only or mainly as hapless political subjects, or conversely, as autonomous agents valiantly resisting oppressive power. Singapore's case underscores that youth activism remains embedded in power relations and that it can become tool of the disciplinary state to preserve state or adult interests, structures, and hierarchies, rather than to challenge or critique these. Chapter Five highlights that, for the PAP government, youth activism and idealism became a location where "the technology of domination meets the technology of self." Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, and his cohort of founding nation-builders were intentional in supporting the youth pursuing idealism and social activism. They did this for a few reasons: to shape a youth culture where young people's time and energy were occupied by productive (and therefore non-transgressive) activities; to mobilize young people's idealism and desire for agency as a resource for social development; and to socialize young people in desirable social and political values so that they could reproduce these values either actively as youth leaders or passively in other subject-positions – as adults, as parents and so on. Over time, the existence of state-provided structures for youth mobilization and social activism like the People's

Association Youth Movement allowed the government to monitor the pulses of Singapore's passionate and idealistic youth and adjust its policies and programs to incorporate their causes. These structures also became mechanisms for the government to identify and groom socially committed nationalistic young Singaporeans who were talented at leadership, organization, and mobilization and co-opt them into the Singapore disciplinary state apparatus.

As this dissertation has emphasized, Singapore's social and political development as an independent nation-state was partly driven by the activism of young people. This included the rise of the People's Action Party, who represented a coalition of younger politicians and nationalist leaders that successfully mobilized the support of the mostly youthful population of Singapore to wrest political power from the colonial authorities and older local politicians and community leaders. It should not be surprising then that the Singapore PAP government had constantly made the management, mobilization, and policing of young people a vital part of their programmes and policies. These formative experiences continue to shape politics in Singapore in less-visible ways. Other than normalizing the politics of youth representation within Singapore's political culture, they have shaped the Singapore government and citizenry's normative yardsticks of ideal leaders of the country. As Chapter Five detailed, these yardsticks were based on an amalgam of the qualities and attributes the PAP leaders valued in the two most significant groups of youth in Singapore. The recruitment and grooming of the country's most talented, most educated, most disciplined, and most socially committed youth for the renewal of the national leadership, whether among the ranks of the PAP or the Singapore civil service, has become institutional practice. Though the idea of political leadership renewal is obviously not unique to Singapore, there are few countries around the world that matched the Singapore government's intentionality and success in

passing political power through non-violent means to the next generation. In the early 1980s, Lee Kuan Yew famously forced many of the first generation of PAP ministers and Members of Parliament to retire, precisely to make way for a new cohort of younger politicians. This started the government's practice of leadership transfer. In Singapore, Singaporeans no longer speak in the language of coups or revolutions – they speak in terms of the transfer of leadership to the next generation. This speaks to why disciplined young Singaporeans - embodying the next generation of Singaporeans and the future of Singapore - were mobilized and placed on parade on 29 March 2015, for Lee Kuan Yew's inspection, one last time.

Directions for Future Research

While the dissertation has mainly focused on developments within Singapore, it has also shown that the history of youth in Singapore was very much a trans-national and connected story. The emergence of the Singapore disciplinary state arose within the wider regional and global context of Japanese imperialism in Asia and thereafter, the ebbs and flows of decolonization and the Cold War in the region. Policies and programs for youth development and mobilization in Singapore were driven by less visible but no less influential transnational circulation of ideas and ideologies about youth between the colonial metropole and its colonies in the 20th century. They were also driven by the circulations of youth workers, youth leaders, experts, and financial assistance between the United Kingdom, the United States, and Southeast Asia. In that sense, the Cold War Youth Race and the post-1945 global concern for the welfare and the political activity of children and youth created global capillaries for biopower through expanding assemblages of trans-national youth movements and travelling youth workers.

The connection between the struggle to discipline youth in Singapore and a global competition for the hearts and minds of the young poses this question: to what extent did the onset of the Cold War amidst the embers of the Second World War result in a global youth turn during this period. This relates to the conversations initiated by Margaret Peacock, Chris Sutton, and the contributors to a special issue of *Diplomatic History* on the cultural politics of youth during the Cold War.⁵⁰⁵ There is substantial room for further comparative investigation of how the Cold War shaped the making of youth across different Southeast Asian nation-states taking different positions and sides in the Cold War, as Simon Creak and Olga Dror have recently done.⁵⁰⁶ To what extent did Cold War anxieties and global humanitarian agendas shape the cultural politics of youth in Asia and Southeast Asia? How did trans-imperial and transnational efforts to discipline youth converge or collide with existing beliefs about childhood and youth among the local communities in Asia? More research is certainly warranted for the youth-related activities of the Asia Foundation and other U.S. cultural diplomacy agencies in other parts of Asia. What roles did non-governmental organizations and transnational actors like travelling youth experts and youth workers play in the emergence of a global or regional politics of youth? To what extent did Cold War ideologies and agendas lay beneath the promotion of the seemingly non-ideological concepts of “youth development” and “youth welfare” in Asia?

The findings of this dissertation create the contextual basis for a deeper and more comprehensive socio-cultural history of youth in Singapore, focusing on the lived experiences of

⁵⁰⁵ Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Christopher Sutton, “Britain, Empire and the Origins of the Cold War Youth Race,” *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 2 (2016): 224-241; *Diplomatic History* 38 (April 2014).

⁵⁰⁶ Simon Creak, “Cold War Rhetoric and The Body: Physical Cultures in Early Socialist Laos.” In *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (eds), 103-130 (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2010), 103-130; Olga Dror, *Making Two Vietnams: War and Youth Identities, 1965-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

children and youth growing up under the watchful eye of the Singapore disciplinary state. More research needs to be done on how Singaporean children and youth interacted with the state's ideologies and images of youth. As Foucault observes, the disciplining of bodies is pursued through a "double system" of gratification and punishment that conditions behaviour. This creates a micro-economy of benefits and penalties that "hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes."⁵⁰⁷ Once institutionalized, the images and ideas of ideal Singaporean childhood and youth became the normative frameworks to examine and hierarchize youth conduct and subjectivity. What were the experiences of the youths who deviated from, defied, or simply fell short of these exacting standards and expectations? Given the valorization of the mentally disciplined, physically fit and rugged bodies with the Singapore state's ableist and elitist ideology of youth, what were the experiences of youth with physical and mental disabilities? Power, as Foucault reminds us, engenders its own resistance. The extensive scholarship on childhood and youth produced by the geographers of youth tells us that the young themselves played a role in the process of defining youth, and certainly in negotiating, contesting adult-sanctioned definitions of youth.⁵⁰⁸ Hence it is important to consider how youth responded in variegated ways to the efforts to socialize, mobilize, and police them. How did the state's policies for youth interact with the changing aspirations, anxieties, and expectations of the young and their parents as Singapore modernized and became more affluent? How did gender, race, sexuality, class, and other social identities continue to shape youth lives and subjectivities, even as the state tried to privilege a homogenous Singaporean youth identity and culture?

⁵⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 181.

⁵⁰⁸ See, for instance, Doreen Massey, "The Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures", in Tracy Skelton and Gill Valentine, eds., *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1998).

The oft-cited challenge for historians of childhood and youth in finding sources and texts that speak to youth voices and perspectives is pronounced for Singapore. Yet we can read against the grain of adults' continuing fantasies and anxieties about youth that some groups of youth did not accept these discourses and disciplinary programs (even as the majority of Singaporean youth did). How did the governments' efforts to steer youth culture towards what they considered wholesome, healthy, and constructive youth activities collide with other sources of influence on youth culture, such as popular culture from the Western world? Singapore's openness to the world meant that the project to homogenize and discipline youth was never fully complete or achieved, as the Singapore government and their allies had to compete with other sources of influence over young people. This is made visible by the Singapore government and their civil society partners' constant anxieties about the conduct of different groups of young people from the 1970s onwards. These anxieties drove the expansion of older programs and introduction of new ones to discipline and mobilize youth. Key examples of new programs and institutions introduced after the 1970s include the National Youth Council (1989), National Education (1997), the school-based Community Involvement Program (1997), and most recently, the Youth Corps Singapore (2014). These unrelenting efforts to produce ideal citizens underline that Singapore remains a community still-in-the-making, a still unrequited aspiration. Singaporean youth continue to live with the effects, both inclusionary and exclusionary, of these disciplinary fantasies. How did these programs and institutions – and the discourses and images of youth undergirding them – assert inclusionary and exclusionary power on different groups of youth? This dissertation focused on the history of a youth conscious, youth-centered Singapore disciplinary state marks only the beginning of a deeper, more comprehensive history of youth in modern Singapore.

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