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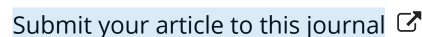 Submit your article to this journal

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DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THE CASE OF INDONESIA AND SINGAPORE

by Jia Ying Neoh and Ahmad Saifulloh

Abstract
The authors examine two Southeast Asian democratic countries and discuss how culture influences democratic participation and citizenship education.
Key words: *citizenship education, democratic citizenship education*

Globalisation, technological advancement, and the rise of market economies have altered the ways that citizens interact and participate in common spaces. For example, the rapid influx of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers—together with issues of increasing intolerance, social exclusion, and feelings of alienation and extremism among young people—have posed complex challenges for educational systems around the world (Isac, Sandoval-Hernández, & Miranda, 2018). The rise of new strands of nationalism and populism, demands for cultural uniformity, and ideological intolerance have clearly strained and challenged civic–normative tenets and frames of thinking (Strandbrink, 2019). Consequently, many countries have identified education, specifically citizenship education, as a means to address these challenges by equipping young people with social, civic, and intercultural competences needed for active and successful participation in societies (Isac et al., 2018; Kennedy, 2008; Schulz, 2019).

Broadly, citizenship education aims "to support emerging citizens by promoting their understanding and engagement with society's principles and institutions, their development and exercise of informed critical judgment, and their learning about and appreciation of citizens' rights and responsibilities" (Schulz, 2019, p. 2). Depending on one's ideology, various interpretations exist about the forms that "engagement," "exercise of informed critical judgement," and "appreciation of citizens' rights and responsibilities" should take. In discussions about the forms that citizenship education should take in the context of Asian societies, specifically East Asian societies, Kennedy (2004) noted that a key issue revolves around the competing and conflicting claims about the definitions of the value base that should underpin them. Significantly, there is tension between Western ideas of liberal democratic traditions and the resurgence of "certain forms of destructive fundamentalism, and genuine local values that seek to develop a citizenry characterised by civility and concern" (Kennedy, 2004, p. 11). In the case of Indonesia and Singapore, particularly in the context of postcolonialism, there is evidence of resistance to Western liberal forms of democracy. Consequently, the relevance of a Western imagination to non-Western contexts such as the Asian contexts of citizenship education is contested.

With rapid globalisation in the last 40 years, diversity (including, by extension, multicul-

turalism) has become one of the most visible and contentious consequences. While diversity promises progressive futures, where differences can be a source of social strength and cultural celebration, it also can be a potential source of conflict (Turner & Khondker, 2010). While the relationship between democracy and diversity is widely recognised in literature of citizenship, seeking balance between demands of nationalism and globalisation, and unity and diversity, has not been straightforward for some countries (Banks, 2018; Tarozzi & Carlos, 2016). For countries like Indonesia and Singapore, whose citizenship has historically focused on developing unity and homogeneity, embracing diversity and hybridity would require new imaginations of citizenship and new approaches to citizenship education.

This article aims to use Indonesia and Singapore, two democracies in Southeast Asia, as platforms to examine the influences of citizenship education and their impacts on the forms of democratic participation. The authors address the question of whether a common core of competencies for democratic citizenship exists to help the two countries and their citizens confront the contemporary issues of diversity. If so, what is that core?

This question is first explored here through a discussion of the country contexts to compare the challenges faced by the two countries and their impacts on the forms of citizenship education. The goal is to highlight how these countries' perceived threats could influence their ensuing philosophical bases for citizenship education. Next, the implications of country contexts on the forms that citizenship education takes are examined within the context of democratic citizenship.

Country Contexts

Indonesia and Singapore are located in the Southeast Asian region. The two countries are not only geographically close, but also share close social, economic, and political ties. In 2018, both countries reaffirmed their strong ties and committed to deepening trade and investment links. Commitments were also made to bring forth other new joint advancement initiatives. Both countries share similarities in terms of the diversity that exists within their populations. However, they also differ in some areas, particularly in their governments' views on religion, politics, and ways of maintaining social cohesion. These differences could be attributed to the perceived need to use context-appropriate approaches to solve each country's challenges.

Indonesia is physically much larger than Singapore and is resource-rich with a population of approximately 260 million people. Approximately 87% are Muslims, and the rest are Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, and Confucianists. In contrast, Singapore is physically much smaller with a population of approximately 5.6 million as of 2017. While religion is a strong characteristic for understanding the diversity of the population in Indonesia, Singapore focuses more on racial diversity. The Chinese account for approximately 78% of the population, followed by 14% who are Malay, and 7% who are Indians.

Historically, as emerging democratic countries, Indonesia and Singapore faced significant challenges in building harmony and peace within their multicultural societies. Having been confronted with severe conflicts caused by disharmony between religious communities and ethnicities, both countries embraced democratic governance—governance intended to promote democratic values such as liberty, justice, equality, diversity, and tolerance. To maintain social cohesion in these multicultural contexts, both countries adopted citizenship education—education based on a commitment to democracy as the key means to develop citizens' capacities to live within contexts of racial and religious diversity. Each country, however, subscribes to a different philosophical base to support its respective form of democratic citizenship. This difference, in turn, impacts their interpretations of *democracy* and *democratic participation.*

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Indonesia's Case

To aid Indonesia's struggle against colonialism, the *Pancasila*, which includes five basic principles of the state, was adopted in 1945 as the basis of democracy in Indonesia. The five principles of *Pancasila* democracy include (a) belief in God, (b) just and civilised humanity, (c) unity of Indonesia, (d) democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations (*musyawarah*) among representatives, and (e) social justice.

Citizenship education during the New Order period (1966–1998) focused on building national identity. It emphasised citizens' morality based on *Pancasila* and was implemented in schools under the course title "*Pancasila* and Moral Education" (Kalidjernih, 2014). With *Pancasila* democracy as the philosophical basis of citizenship education, the curriculum has a specific scope comprised of *Pancasila,* 1945 Constitution, Unity in Diversity, and the Integral State (Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 1989). However, citizenship education materials did not cover some important values of democracy, such as freedom of speech, because the government's aim was for citizens to support and respect authority without expressing opposing opinions. As a result, Indonesia's early civics and citizenship program, based on the five principles, was considered contrary to the universal concept of democracy and viewed globally as more authoritarian than democratic.

After the New Order period, there were major changes in Indonesian citizenship education as the demands for state institutions' accountability and transparency increased dramatically. These changes led to the weakening of state domination over national education policy. Consequently, the Indonesian government at the national level engaged non-state actors—such as academics, researchers, higher education institutions, and nongovernmental organisations—to direct citizenship education in Indonesia. This model of policymaking was in response to the demands for democratisation to respond to globalisation, the challenges of multiculturalism, and the attempts by state and local educational stakeholders to voice their aspirations.

Singapore's Case

Separating from Malaysia on August 9, 1965, Singapore became an independent and sovereign state overnight, as well as highly vulnerable socially, politically, and economically. Being a divided and plural society made up of people of different ethnicities, religions, and languages, the new nation was impacted by the communist insurgency, its small size, its location between larger neighbours, and its lack of natural resources (Chia, 2015; Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004; Huxley, 2000). However, Singapore's leadership was determined to succeed and develop as a multiracial nation that would achieve unity regardless of race, language, religion, or culture (Chia, 2015).

Responding to these challenges, the "survival" rhetoric was considered key in legitimising the Singapore government's method of governance. Being a small island with no natural resources except a strategic location, Singapore is heavily reliant on external trade (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004), making the survival of the nation of utmost importance. Education in Singapore is an integrative mechanism to serve two key purposes: (a) develop *social cohesion* "by ensuring continuing collective commitment to the nation and active participation in the goals of national development" and (b) promote *economic development* by "providing skilled human resources" (Green, 1997 p. 60). Diversity was to be, and still is, approached through an emphasis on "moral understanding and promotion of social cohesion through appreciation of national traditions and goals and the meaning of citizenship" (Green, 1997, p. 61).

The importance of survival in the marketplace is addressed by emphasizing citizens' responsibility to self, fellow citizens, and the state. In the current Singapore curriculum, the "survival" rhetoric is reflected in the six national education messages (Ministry of Education,

2018) that guide the form that citizenship education takes in Singapore:

- Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong.
- We must preserve racial and religious harmony.
- We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility.
- No one owes Singapore a living (implying that "active citizens" must "have a collective resolve and a sense of shared mission towards building a Singapore for all").
- We must ourselves defend Singapore.
- We have confidence in our future. (pp. 6–7)

In addition to the preceding six messages, six core values were identified in the latest education reform that started its gradual implementation in 2008 to support the development of 21st-century competencies: *respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience, and harmony.* Competencies closely related to citizenship include the development of "civic literacy," "global awareness," and "cross-cultural skills" (Ministry of Education, 2014a).

Implications for Education

The contexts of Indonesia and Singapore reveal evidence of governments' inclinations to shape conceptions of citizenship education based on the nations' perceived vulnerabilities and needs. While Singapore promotes a conception of active citizenry that is largely apolitical by focusing on cross-cultural skills, global awareness, and civic literacy, Indonesia's conception emphasizes the role of religion and democratic competencies. Although both countries stress the importance of good character in citizens, Indonesia's conception of the good citizen also is rooted in the spirituality of God and the internalisation of democratic values. However, these two foci are starkly absent in Singapore's conception of the good citizen.

These philosophical bases consequently shape the two countries' most recent education reforms. Using the latest education reforms in these countries as examples, the authors next illustrate how country contexts can impact the forms of citizenship education and the way democratic citizenship is taught.

In Indonesia, citizenship education focuses on teaching students the knowledge, skills, and values of democracy to help them participate in democratic life. In the latest 2013 curriculum reform in Indonesia, citizenship education was renamed "*Pancasila* and Citizenship Education." The scope of citizenship education is organised into four domains: (a) *Pancasila*, (b) 1945 Constitution, (c) Unitary Republic of Indonesia, and (d) Unity in Diversity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b). The objective of this course is to create Indonesian "good citizens" who believe in God, have good characters, internalise democratic values, and become responsible citizens as individuals and as members of the national and global communities. Therefore, the core competencies of the course consist of four domains, namely citizenship knowledge, citizenship skills, spiritual disposition, and social disposition (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016a).

The 2013 National Curriculum (K–13) provides learning activities to be carried out using scientific approaches within curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular settings (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b). These activities are aimed at fostering a sense of wonder among students by facilitating analysis and communication. To achieve optimal quality of learning outcomes, the adaptation and enrichment of learning activities to local or school contexts, as well as to global contexts, are encouraged (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b). The K–13 curriculum design for citizenship education in Indonesia highlights the importance of the *Pancasila* as the state's basic ideology to encourage equitable forms of democratic participation. Balance of unity and diversity is to be achieved by developing citizens who have a sense of Indonesian national identity by maintaining their cultures, while knowing and loving the nature and social environments around them with a global perspective.

Democratic Citizenship

The consideration of contexts and the implications for the encouraged forms of democratic participation are evident in Indonesia's case. Indonesia's practices of democracy differ from Western practices of liberal democracy, which focus on individual rights. Indonesian democracy is underpinned by consensus *(musyawarah),* which is the fourth principle of *Pancasila.* In addition, religious belief, as the first principle of *Pancasila,* is the basis of Indonesian democracy. In education, religious belief is reflected in the focus on spiritual disposition as one of the core competencies of "*Pancasila* and Citizenship Education." As an open ideology, *Pancasila* is not in opposition to democracy or religion, including Islam (Ubaedillah, 2015). Because *Pancasila* is based on religious principles, the mainstream religious communities in Indonesia are able to accept it as the state ideology. They also accept democracy as their way of life, because some democratic values correspond with religious values such as liberty, equality, and justice. Yet, with the history of the *Pancasila* being used as a tool for domination, Indonesia's case highlights how ideologies could easily be interpreted variously to direct citizenship education away from fundamental concepts of democracy.

The latest reform in Singapore began with the introduction of the 21st-century competencies (21CC) framework in 2008, which underpins holistic education in schools. The 21CC framework, similar to Indonesia's K–13 curriculum, emphasises the importance of concepts such as cross-cultural skills, global awareness, and civic literacy.

While Indonesia focuses on democratic values as the means to reconcile differences, Singapore education emphasises commonalities—the importance of moral values as reflected in the six core values, such as respect, responsibility, and care. These core values were identified to help citizens become socially responsible (Heng, 2011). Additionally, a sense of shared values and respect was deemed to help citizens appreciate and celebrate Singapore's diversity, so that they could stay cohesive and harmonious (Heng, 2011). Supporting the six National Education messages, a Minister of Education noted that Singapore needs values of citizenship and wants "men and women who are willing to step forward to risk their lives" for the nation (Heng, 2011, p. 5). Instead of democratic values, strong common values and emotional attachment to Singapore are intended to enable citizens to stay successful as one people, one nation.

From this perspective, Singapore's approach to dealing with the demands of growing diversity and globalisation is characterised by an emphasis on shared values and a commitment to the nation. A strong nation-centric agenda is emphasised:

> Our education system must . . . nurture Singapore citizens of good character, so that everyone has the moral resolve to withstand an uncertain future, and a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the success of Singapore and the well-being of Singaporeans. (Ministry of Education, 2014b)

While absences of reference to democracy in Singapore's citizenship education sets it apart from Indonesia's, Singapore's approach is similar to Indonesia's in that two key areas are emphasized: (a) developing students holistically (morally, cognitively, physically, socially, and aesthetically); and (b) sharpening the focus on values and character development (Heng, 2011). The focus on character and values is emphasized by the new subject "Character and Citizenship Education" (CCE), introduced to replace "Civics and Moral Education" in the formal curriculum. Together with the Values in Action programme, which aims to foster student ownership over contributions to the community, CCE "cultivates values and commitment to Singapore and fellow Singaporeans" (Ministry of Education, 2015; see also Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b) so that students become "good individuals and useful citizens" (Ministry of Education, 2014b, p. 5).

Without reference to sustain Singapore's democracy in policy and curriculum documents, one may wonder whether Singapore is committed to democracy. However, there are indications to suggest the commitment. In the national pledge that all Singaporean students recite every school day, the concept of "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality" shows democratic values similar to those in Indonesia's K–13 curriculum.

In examining the implications for Singapore's citizenship education on democratic citizenship, a key concern is Singapore's focus on developing personal capacities without educating for political literacy. This approach may risk positioning citizenship education as part of the broader didactic politics of neoliberalism, because economic progress is the other focus of Singapore's survival rhetoric. Consequently, citizenship education can "become a tool for promoting private competencies upheld by neoliberalism" (Howard & Patten, 2006, p. 472), which could, in turn, work against enhancing individual and social agency to pursue social justice and democracy.

Recommended Goals

If citizenship education for democratic citizenship is to be considered within the goal of revitalising a part of a broader discourse of political agency and critical citizenship in a globalised world (Crick, 2007; Giroux, 2004; Isac et al., 2018; Schulz, 2019), then citizen education must be underpinned by concepts of social justice and global democracy. Yet, citizenship cannot be isolated from cultural norms, political priorities, social expectations, national economic development aspirations, geopolitical contexts, and historical antecedents (Kennedy, 2004). With the expectation that citizenship education will take different forms in different national jurisdictions, the question then is whether common threads, common values, and some universals could contribute to a common core of knowledge and insights across diverse programmes of citizenship education (Kennedy, 2004).

The discussions on Indonesia and Singapore have contributed to the Asian values debate by illuminating the countries' efforts to preserve their unique perspectives on democracy rather than adopt those established by international covenants and treaties. Indonesia subtly included the ideals of democracy, such as the respect of human rights, in its citizenship education programmes through a focus on religion. Conversely, Singapore's resistance has been historically overt, with democratic values intentionally subsumed under shared national values.

Moving forward, Indonesia's case appears to be more straightforward than Singapore's, because the "*Pancasila* and Citizenship Education" curriculum is already committed to democratic values. Two key recommendations could be made for Indonesia's citizenship education. First, Indonesia should address the issues related to the implementation of the curriculum, such as issues of limited availability of teaching resources and teachers who are trained to deliver the curriculum effectively (Suyanto, 2017; Yulianti, 2015). Second, collaborations between schools and the stakeholders of education, such as political entities, nongovernmental organisations, and the community, need to be stronger. Such collaborations could provide authentic learning opportunities for students to engage in deliberations about societal issues based on democratic processes.

With globalisation and technological advancement, Singaporeans are becoming increasingly politically literate. Unavoidably, Singapore needs to consider more effective ways of balancing unity and diversity in the curriculum in order to facilitate the deliberation of multiple perspectives regarding issues of citizenship and identity (Alviar-Martin & Baildon, 2016; Neoh, 2017). The applicability of Western ideals of democratic concepts in Singapore needs to be reconsidered within the context of increasing quests for diverse groups, locally and globally, for recognition and inclusion. From this perspective, one might argue that it is necessary to encourage the "flourishing of a critical type of

mentality that challenges entrenched constructions of citizens as economic and nationalistic subjects" that would not "risk excluding cultural minority and low-income groups" (Alviar-Martin & Baildon, 2016, p. 20). Critical thinking used only for promoting economic competitiveness would eventually cripple citizens' self-definition and social agency to address issues of social justice and global democracy.

Closing Thoughts

The discussion in this article has illuminated the need to reconsider the relevance of democratic ideals in Asian contexts, where these ideals could be so easily rejected on the basis of their association with the West. The implications of the discussion converge to one key point that can be drawn from Kennedy's (2004) work on the East–West debate about citizenship education; he stressed the importance of the responsibility of civil societies, regardless of their political ideologies, in acting "as a moderator of civic life to ensure that it is consistent with those values that are shared both within and across societies" (p. 21). In other words, all societies need to be responsible for ensuring that their civil societies have the power to moderate the institutions and ideologies of democratic societies. Without this, societies' roles in mediating the influence of globalisation and fundamentalism can be questioned.

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