DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
national university of singapore

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

The Loss of the ‘World-Soul’?: Education, Culture and of the Singapore Developmental State, 1955 – 2004

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CHAIRMAN

A/P Huang Jianli

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History/Political Science Lounge, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Block AS1, #04–01, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570

Abstract
This presentation examines the role of education in the formation of Singapore as a developmental state. Building on existing scholarship, it maps out cultural and ideological dimensions of the role of education in Singaporean state formation. The story of state formation through citizenship education in Singapore from 1955 to 2004 is also the history of how Singapore managed crises (imagined, real or engineered), and how changes in history, civics and social studies curricula served to legitimize the state’s actions in educating and moulding the desired “good citizen” in the interest of nation building.

State formation in Singapore has been very successful, as evidenced by its economic prosperity. However, the “economic growth at all costs” ethos comes, arguably, at a price. Nation building which fosters a sense of rootedness and belonging among the citizenry had to be relegated to the backburner in the relentless pursuit of economic development that sustains and legitimizes the developmental state. By harnessing the educational sphere for its economic growth objectives through the discourse of crisis, the developmental state gained political legitimacy in the eyes of a citizenry increasingly accustomed to educational mobility and material wealth, even at the expense of political freedoms.

About the Speaker
Dr. Chia Yeow Tong is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in History Curriculum Education in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. A graduate of the History Department at NUS, Yeow Tong was a history and social studies teacher, and was a National Education Officer in MOE HQ before pursuing his doctoral studies. He received his Ph.D. from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto in the fields of history of education as well as comparative, international and development education. This presentation is based on his monograph titled Education, Culture and the Singapore Developmental State: “World-Soul” Lost and Regained? (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2015).

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