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For Group, (F)or Self:
Communitarianism, Confucianism and Values Education in Singapore

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Abstract

Values education in Asian societies is commonly underpinned by an ideology of communitarianism that seeks to promote the needs and interests of 'others' over the 'self'. An example of an Asian country that promotes communitarian values through its values education curriculum is Singapore. By reviewing the moral and citizenship education curricula in Singapore, this paper points out that the accent is on 'others' rather than the 'self'. Noting that communitarianism has often been linked to Confucian values in Asian societies, this paper offers a Confucian viewpoint of the self and moral self cultivation. It further argues for a form of values education that balances the 'self' with 'others' through active learning, self-reflection and self-evaluation. The Singapore experience provides a useful case study on the influence of communitarianism and the potential of Confucianism on values education in an Asian context.

Introduction

Values inculcation for the young is a primary concern in many countries, especially for plural societies that need a set of shared values to unite the people. Values education in Asian societies is commonly underpinned by an ideology of communitarianism that seeks to promote the needs and interests of 'others' over the 'self'. An example of an Asian country that promotes communitarian values through its values education curriculum is Singapore. By reviewing the moral and citizenship education curricula in Singapore, this paper points out that the accent is on 'others' rather than the 'self'. Noting that communitarianism has often been linked to Confucian values in Asian societies, this paper further offers a Confucian viewpoint of the self and moral self-cultivation, and discusses the implications of such a Confucian perspective on values education. This paper begins with an introduction to communitarianism and values education. This is followed by a discussion of the values education curriculum in Singapore, and a critical exploration of a Confucian viewpoint on the 'self' vis-à-vis 'others'. The paper ends with the key implications for values education that follow from a Confucian perspective on the self and moral self-cultivation.

Communitarianism and Values Education

Our discussion is situated within the international academic literature on communitarianism and its relationship with values education. Despite variations and

disagreements among communitarians, they are generally united in their views on the self and the community.

First, they reject the view that the self is detached from society and independent of all concrete encumbrances of moral or political obligations (Taylor, 1985, 1989; Sandel, 1981). In particular, they object to 'liberal individualism' that emphasises abstract and excessive individualism at the expense of the centrality of community for personal identity and moral thinking (Arthur, 1998). Communitarians assert that the self is always constituted through a community that exists in shared social and cultural understandings, traditions and practices. It should be noted that the communitarians' critique of excessive individualism does not necessarily mean that they are antagonistic towards liberalism in general. On the contrary, liberal communitarians affirm their commitment to liberal values such as furthering the lowering of the individual's capacities and supporting the state's role to protect our powers to shape, pursue, and revise our own life-plans (Arthur, 1998; Watson, 1999, Author, 2011). But what they object to is the neglect of the primary role of the community and its relationship with the self.

This brings us to the second shared belief of communitarians: they stress the centrality of the community in the formation of the individual's values, behaviour and identity. In other words, they hold that the community provides the interpretive framework within which individuals form their values, view their world and conduct their lives (Walzer, 1983; Taylor, 1985; MacIntyre, 1988). It follows that individuals need to go beyond the self to fulfil their civic obligations; they should pursue the 'common good', understood as a collective determination of a set of goals or values for the community (Bang et al., 2000; Watson, 1999). [1]

In the context of Asia, researchers have maintained that an Asian version of communitarianism is evident in societies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, China, Malaysia and Indonesia (e.g. see Chua, 1995, 2005; Han, 2007; Hill & Lian, 1995; Kennedy, 2004; Lee et al, 2004; Sim & Print, 2005; Author, 2008, 2011, forthcoming). Chua (2005) avers that many political leaders in East and Southeast Asia attempted to develop communitarianism into an explicit national ideology for the purpose of rationalising general political governance and specific administrative policies. Underpinned by a communitarian ideology, a 'good citizen' in Asia is interpreted as one who contributes to society by supporting his or her community and adhering to a set of publicly shared values. In a comparative study on the citizenship values in Singapore, Malaysia and China, Kennedy (2004) observes that what is common in these three countries is that the emphasis for citizens is not so much the rights they enjoy but the responsibilities they have towards family and the community. Unlike their counterparts in Anglophone societies, Asian communitarians generally chose to associate communitarian values with what they call 'Asian values' – collectively defined as moral values, social norms and cultural attitudes which are said to be derived from Asian philosophical traditions and historical experiences (Han, 2007, p. 386).

In terms of the values education curriculum, the communitarian ideology has led many Asian societies to prefer the civic republican model of citizenship to the liberal individualist model of citizenship (Hill & Lian, 1995; Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004; Author, 2008). The former focuses on passive, responsible and rule-following

citizenship whereas the latter defines citizenship in terms of one's rights, entitlements and status.2 Consistent with civic republicanism, values education is predominatly taught using the transmission approach where a 'good citizen' is one who accepts and demonstrates the values and behaviour of the established social and value system for the sake of maintenance (Lo & Man, 1996). A concern with an over-reliance of the transmission approach is that the students' reasoning, deliberation, decision-making and conflict resolution abilities that are necessary in the consensus building effort of a democratic society may be neglected. Framed by our understanding of communitarianism and values education, we shall proceed to examine the values education curriculum in Singapore.

The Values Education Curriculum in Singapore

A multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country in Southeast Asia, Singapore comprises 74.1% Chinese, 13.4% Malay, 9.2% Indians and 3.3% 'Others'. 83% of its population identify themselves as adherents to a particular religion, as follows: 33.3 % Buddhists, 18.3% Christians, 14.7% Muslims, 10.9% Taoists, 5.1% Hindus, and 17% others. Adding to the ethnic and religious diversity in Singapore is the high percentage of foreigners: permannt residents and non-residents now constitute about 36% of Singapore's 4.9-million people.

Civics and Moral Education (CME) and Civics

All Singapore students take the compulsory subject 'Civics and Moral Education' (CME) at the primary and secondary levels, and the subject 'Civics' at the pre-university level. The overarching aim of CME is to nurture a person of good character, one who is caring and acts responsibly towards the self, family, community, nation and world (MOE, 2006a). CME identifies six core values as the foundation for good character: respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience, and harmony. These six values are intended to "complement and reinforce" various state-sanctioned visions, namely "Our Shared Values, the Singapore Family Values, the Singapore 21 Vision and the National Education messages" (MOE, 2006a, p. 7).

It is instructive to know the respective values and messages identified in the above-mentioned visions. The values in 'Our Shared Values' are:

• Nation before community and society before self;
• Community support and respect for the individual;
• The family as the basic unit of society;
• Consensus in place of conflict; and
• Racial and religious harmony.

The 'Singapore Family Values' are love, care and concern, mutual respect, filial responsibility, commitment, and communication (MOE (2006b, p. 9). The 'Singapore 21 Vision' aims to "strengthen the 'heartware' of Singapore in the 21st century – the intangibles of society like social cohesion, political stability and the collective will, values and attitudes of Singaporeans" (Singapore 21 Report, n.d.). The key messages in the 'Singapore 21 Vision' are:

• Every Singaporean matters;
• Opportunities for all;
• Strong families: our foundation and our future;
• The Singapore heartbeat; and
• Active citizens: making a difference to society.

Finally 'National Education' is Singapore's version of citizenship education that aims to develop in all Singaporeans national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future. National Education promotes six key messages:

• 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;
• We must ourselves defend Singapore; and
• We have confidence in our future.

That values education in Singapore underlines one's social roles and obligations to others is even more apparent at the pre-university level. Known simply as 'Civics' without the words "moral education", the focus is on citizenship with no separate formal subject on moral education for students.3 The Civics syllabus for pre-university students dovetails itself with the CME syllabus for primary and secondary students. Identifying "Making a Difference" as its central theme, the Civics syllabus hopes to nurture students "to play an active role in helping to improve the quality of civic life in the community and to take the lead in service to others" (MOE, 2006b, p. 1).

Specifically, students learn about the importance of active citizenship through service to others, the necessity for everyone to take an interest in the needs of the community and the belief that everyone can play a role in effecting positive changes in society in their own way (MOE, 2006b, p. 1). Students also learn about various topics of being a 'good citizen' such as the importance of active citizenship through service to others, the necessity for everyone to take an interest in the needs of the community and the belief that everyone can play a role in effecting positive changes in society in their own way (MOE, 2006b, p. 1)

We can see from the above that the focus of the values education curriculum in Singapore is the promotion of communitarian values that place group interests and needs above those of the individual. In other words, 'others' comes before the 'self'. The overriding goal is for students to serve the needs of the community and nation and to lead others in performing such services. This means that values education is essentially citizenship training where students are imbibed with collectivist values for the purpose of economic and political socialisation (Chew, 1998; Tan & Chew, 2004). The emphasis on the 'others' rather than the 'self' is not unique to Singapore. As mentioned earlier, it is also featured prominently in other East and Southeast Asian societies such as Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)

The Minister of Education in Singapore has recently announced that a new curriculum for moral education will be implemented. Known as 'Character and Citizenship

Education' (CCE), it aims to bring together the current CME, Civics, and other related programmes such as social and emotional learning. As this is a new curriculum that has yet to be implemented at the time of writing, it is still too early to analyse the curriculum in an in-depth manner. But we can already observe two changes in CCE that sets it apart from CME and Civics. The changes are gleaned from the CCE handbook, speeches made by the Minister of Education in Singapore and newspaper reports.

The first change is the extent of involvement for the school in values transmission. At present, the primary responsibility of values inculcation lies with the teachers assigned to teach CME and Civics. In contrast, CCE adopts a 'whole-school approach' that strives to integrate character and citizenship values into all the school subjects and co-curricular activities. This means that all teachers, not just those teaching values during the formal curriculum time, are expected to impart values during their lessons, whether it is science, literature or music (Lim, 2011).

The second change is the process of values transmission. Supporting CCE is a 'CCE Toolkit' that sets out the approach for effective implementation. It features the 5Ps of CCE: Purpose, Pupil, ExPerience, Professional Development and Partnerships (Heng, 2011; MOE, n.d.). 'Purpose' refers to schools having a clear purpose to align and ntegrate the various programmes, including academic, co-curricula, student guidance, staff development and national education into a coherent whole. 'Pupil' reminds schools to study the pupils' profile, understand their needs, challenges and expectations so as to work towards a positive teacher-pupil relationship. 'ExPerience' stresses the need for students to experience character-building across the curriculum, and not only learn values in a dry, stand-alone subject or a series of activities. 'Professional Development' focuses on the role and training of teachers to impart the right values, social and emotional competencies and dispositions of citizenship in the pupils.

Finally 'Partnership' underscores the need for home-school-community partnership to reinforce the values taught to students, both at home and in school. Corresponding to a whole-school and student-centred approach to values education is the adoption of student-centred strategies. These include experiential learning, service learning, story telling, teachable moments, cooperative learning, group discussions, journals/learning logs, and perspective-taking (MOE, n.d., p. 17).

Does CCE continue the communitarian emphasis for values education in Singapore? There is evidence to suggest a shift from an over-emphasis on the community towards a more balanced approach between the 'self' and 'others'. That the 'self' is now given more attention is seen in the (new) attention on individual moral development in CCE. The Minister of Education outlines eight desired outcomes for CCE, with 'character building' being the first one:

> There are four outcomes relating to character building. Character building starts from "knowing thyself" — building self-awareness and self management, to enable the individual to achieve his or her full potential. Building on this, to "knowing others" — to be socially aware and to interact well with others, and nurture positive relationships. In dealing with others, we need to focus on "doing the right things" — to apply moral reasoning and take responsibility in

decision making, and have the integrity to stand by our values. Finally, in the face of individual, community or national challenges, individuals need to demonstrate resilience. … As for citizenship education, there are also four outcomes. Firstly, our pupils should grow up to be loyal citizens, with a strong sense of belonging to Singapore and a strong sense of national identity, committed to the well-being, defence and security of our nation. Secondly, they should show care and concern for others, and be willing to contribute actively to improve the lives of others. Thirdly, in our multi-racial society, our pupils need to be socio-culturally sensitive and do their part to promote social cohesion and harmony. Finally, our pupils must have the ability to reflect on and respond to community, national and global issues, and to make informed and responsible decisions (Heng, 2011).

The new emphasis on the self in the CCE framework led Yen (2011) to claim that CCE has shifted the focus from communitarian values to personal moral development: he writes that "[i]nstead of exhorting students to put nation and society before self, the CCE's aim today is for students to build personal character, before applying themselves socially". However, I do not agree that the scale has been tipped to replace communitarian priority with that of the self. Instead, there appears to be a continual emphasis on communitarian values where group interests are valued over individual interests.

That a main objective of values education is still on citizenship training is suggested in the CCE handbook where it states that "Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) is about engaging pupils in the development of values, knowledge, skills and competencies to help them become useful and responsible citizens of good character" (MOE, n.d., p.3, italics added). Furthermore, CCE continues the aim of CME and Civics to promote communitarian values, as encapsulated in 'Our Shared Values' and National Education. Underscoring the need for CCE to be anchored on values, the CCE handbook explains:

> Values can refer to school values, Our Shared Values, values articulated in Civics and Moral Education (CME) and the National Education (NE) messages. In CME, we strive to foster in our pupils values that help them develop into morally upright, caring and responsible individuals and citizens. In NE, the focus is on developing social cohesion, cultivating the instinct for survival as a nation and instilling in our pupils, confidence in our nation's future. It also emphasises cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore (MOE, n.d., p. 3).

It follows from the preceding that while communitarianism is still featured in the values education curriculum in Singapore, the curriculum appears to be more balanced with a greater emphasis on self development. Such a move is to be applauded: without a balance between inculcating communitarian values and developing individual character, there may be a tendency for educators to focus on the interests and needs of the community at the expense of those of the individual. A possible unintended consequence is that students may find it difficult to engage in higher order thinking when asked to consider moral controversies, moral dilemmas and new moral situations. This is because they may lack confidence in performing

these higher-order thinking skills, or have become so pessimistic about the prospect of alternative views being given a fair hearing that they do not bother to participate even if they could perform these skills.

Here I need to clarify that I am not arguing for the rejection of communitarian values or the transmission of cultural legacy. After all, it is hard to object to the importance of a shared moral vision that is based on social cohesion and common good; even societies that have championed individualism and liberalism recognise the importance of communal interests and a shared moral vision (Law, 2007). But an adequate and effective values education curriculum in any society needs to give room for students to reflect and choose a moral point of view, as well as guide them to apply their moral beliefs and values in critical and creative ways to solve the real moral problems that they encounter. Simply acquiring a set of moral beliefs and values is insufficient to inform us what we ought to do in situations where the morality of the options is unclear or complex, where some of the values we subscribe to conflict with one another, or where we are not even sure what all the relevant moral questions are.

While group interests are understandably important for social cohesion, especially in a plural society such as Singapore, individual interests should not be marginalised or jettisoned. This point about not over-looking the students' character development has been acknowledged by school leaders in Singapore who observe that their students have become increasingly more individualistic, questioning and even cynical (Yen, 2011). They acknowledge that communitarian statements such as "Community before self" and "Your forefathers worked hard and this is how Singapore's success came about, so you must follow their example" are unlikely to be accepted by many students (Lim, 2011).

The need for individual moral development and moral agency also entails a corresponding change in pedagogy. It has been pointed out that the dominant pedagogy used for values education in Asian societies including Singapore, is the cultural transmission approach (Tan, 1994; Lo & Man, 1996; Tan & Chew, 2004; author, 2010).4 This approach serves to maintain the established social and value system by preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, values and beliefs that are privileged by the state.

However, the cultural transmission approach, although necessary for the formation and preservation of national identity, is inadequate to achieve the goal of balancing inculcating communitarian values with developing individual character. As noted by a vice-principal of a school in Singapore: "Students now engage better in a discussion. Telling them what is right and wrong does not work well any more" (cited in Yen, 2011). It is therefore timely for the state to review its values education syllabi to strike a balance between the interests and needs of the group and those of the individuals.

A Confucian Viewpoint of the Self and Individual Interests

It is interesting to note that the preference of 'others' to 'self' has often been attributed to the influence of Confucianism on state ideology. Some writers have averred that the Singapore government propagates 'Asian values' that are drawn from Confucianism (Chua, 1995; Barr, 2006; Chia, 2011). It has been observed that Confucian values such as Singapore's phenomenal progress in economic productivity,

social well-being and political stability (Tu, 1984). It is also not a coincidence that cardinal Confucian values are consistently promoted in the various visions advocated by the state. For example, 'Our Shared Values', with its call to place the society before self, uphold the family as the basic unit of society, and seek consensus and societal harmony, reminds us of Confucian teachings. The reference to filial responsibility in the 'Singapore Family Values' also points to the Confucian value of filial piety. The same exhortation is echoed in the vision of 'Strong families: our foundation and our future' in the "Singapore 21 Vision". We also witness the strong presence of Confucian values in the emphasis on strong families as the foundation of society and the key to social cohesion, racial and religious harmony and nation-building in the National Education messages.

On the one hand, it is correct to say that an important teaching of Confucianism is that human beings are essentially social beings with duties and obligations to others in the community. However, does it follow that Confucianism necessarily promotes 'others' at the expense of the 'self'? Is the individual's development of autonomy, moral reasoning and decision-making necessarily marginalised within a Confucian worldview? The rest of the paper shall answer the above questions by presenting a Confucian viewpoint of the self and moral self-cultivation.5 I should qualify at the outset that what I am offering is only a Confucian perspective and does not represent Confucianism as a whole. This is because Confucianism (like all other 'isms') is not homogeneous and instead consists of various and competing schools of thought, each with its origin, evolution, proponents, key teachings and impacts.

From a Confucian perspective, not all individual interests and needs are negative and detrimental to the larger good. In other words, the welfare of the 'others' does not necessarily need to be pursued at the expense of the 'self'. In fact, a core Confucian teaching is that it is in everyone's self-interest to attain the Confucian ethical ideal of a noble person (junzi). But becoming a noble person does not entail or imply liberal individualism where the self stands apart from, or over and against the community or society. Rather, the individual is socially embedded in relationships that constitute and contribute to the development of the self. To further appreciate this point, it is necessary to highlight two essential attributes of a noble person.

First, the Confucian ethical ideal of a noble person "involves a general observance of traditional norms that govern people's behaviour by virtue of the social positions they occupy, such as being a son or an official, or in other kinds of recurring social interactions … as well as the embodiment of certain attitudes appropriate to such behaviour" (Shun, 2004, p. 191). In other words, one becomes a noble person by being an active member of the community through fulfilling his or her expected social roles. Arguing that individual interests and community interests are not necessarily incompatible, Nuyen (2003, p. 81) asserts that "an individual's interests are more likely to be shaped by his or her social relationships, not that they are discouraged nor must they ultimately sacrificed for the sake of community interests (Nuyen, 2003, p. 81; also see Fukuyama, 1995; Tu, 1998).

Secondly, the Confucian ideal of a noble person is not a role-carrying individual who unquestioningly acts in the interests of the community. Instead, a noble person embodies a set of virtues, among which humanity or benevolence (ren) is the general virtue that encompasses all the other virtues. The self-realisation of humanity is not

just a matter of self-transformation of selfhood in human nature; Confucius teaches that "through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (li) one becomes ren" (Analects 6:7). Overcoming the self does not imply oppression of individuality but a reconciliation of community with individuality so that individual growth and the growth of community mutually enhance each other (Collins, 2008, p. 164). Moral self-cultivation therefore necessitates communion with others, especially through conscientiousness to others (zhong) and altruism (shu) (Lu, 1983, p. 7).

It is important to note that moral self-cultivation, from a Confucian perspective, involves both the heart and mind, or heart/mind (xin). The combined word 'heart/mind' is used to capture the Confucian teaching that affective cognitive activities (the domain of the mind) and affective activities (the domain of the heart) are integrated. To speak of 'mind' in the Confucian context always involves the dimension of the heart (Tu, 1984, p. 49). The heart/mind is 'free' or independent of external control by holding on to the directions it sets without being swayed by external forces (Shun, 2004). It can have desires and emotions, deliberates about a situation, directs attention to and ponders about certain things, keeps certain things in mind, and sets directions that guide one's life and shape one's person as a whole. In short, self-cultivation is "the process of constantly reflecting on and examining oneself, setting one's heart/mind in the proper direction, and bringing about ethical improvements in oneself under the guidance of the heart/mind" (Shun, 2004, p. 187).

Here I need to clarify that I am not denying the close relationship between communitarianism and Confucianism. The latter, after all, shares some of the same interests and aims of the former, such as an emphasis on society, the common good, duty, responsibility, and so forth. But my point here is that the parallel between communitarianism and Confucianism does not mean that the self is a fortiori unimportant, or that self-cultivation should be jettisoned. Rather, I have argued that upholding the interests and needs of the community is compatible with upholding those of the self, from a Confucian worlview. Returning to the two questions posed earlier, Confucianism does not necessarily promote 'others' at the expense of the 'self', and the individual's development of autonomy, moral reasoning and decision-making are not necessarily marginalised within a Confucian worldview.

Key Implications of a Confucian Perspective for Values Education

It follows from a Confucian viewpoint of the self and moral self-cultivation that the values education curriculum in Singapore (as well as other relevant Asian societies) should not neglect the students' individuality and character development. It is recommended that the values education curriculum should strive to balance the 'self' with 'others' through active learning, self-reflection and self-evaluation.

First, the process of nurturing the noble person involves active learning through self-directed learning, authentic moral motivation and self-actualisation. Commenting on the compatibility between the transmission of cultural legacy and active learning, Elliot and Tsai aver as follows:

> Although, for Confucius, teaching involves the transmission of the cultural legacy, it does not imply passivity on the part of the learner. The role of the

teacher is to engage students in the creative process of adapting and extending the meanings in the tradition to illuminate their 'lived experience'. … Knowledge is only fully achieved in action. From this standpoint the cultural legacy is not 'the mirror of truth', but resources for the learner to use in articulating and determining his or her practical stance (Elliot & Tsai, 2008, pp. 570, 572).

This process of actively engaging students to illuminate their lived experiences is premised on the Confucian belief that human beings are born good, and that human nature develops through practice in life and habit (Wang, 2004). Besides active learning, self-reflection and self-evaluation – components of moral self-cultivation (xiuji or xiushen) – are also essential for values education. Confucius explains what self-cultivation means:

Cultivate oneself for/with reverence, cultivate oneself for/with bringing peace to others, cultivate oneself for//with bringing peace to the people". (Analects, 14-42m)

Seeing unworthy people, one should reflect on internally (meaning reflect on the internal self)". (Analects, 4-17).

Confucius talked about cultivating oneself on the basis of self-reflection (Analects 1:4), and learning for oneself and not for others (Analects, 14:25). Chung-ying Cheng explains that "the self has the ever reflective self-conscious capacity of rational thinking, which articulates itself in logical and moral reasoning and develops itself in terms of its interaction with world, culture, history, learning and knowledge" (Cheng, 2004, p. 125). Self-reflection means that students should be encouraged to reflect on their own moral self. As Zhu Xi points out, "To respect morality requires that one should first find out
about one's moral self. When one finds out about one's moral self one will naturally know the reasons for everything, so that one could suddenly be enlightened about everything" (Wang, 2004 , p. 438).

In addition to self-reflection, self-cultivation also involves the critical process of self-evaluation – a method by which a person considers her or his own moral integrity by self-examination (Wang, 2004, p. 442). This appraisal of one's own moral character by reflection on oneself is mentioned in the Analects by a disciple of Confucius:

Every day I make several self-examinations on the following points: as to whether I have or have not exerted myself to my utmost in helping others; whether I have or have not been honest and sincere in intercourse with friends; whether I have or have not practised the instructions of my teacher (Wang, 2004, p. 442).

It is also instructive that Confucius himself employs what is known today as student-centred pedagogy to foster active learning, self-reflection and self-evaluation. He asked thought-provoking questions, encouraged critical thinking, customised different teaching strategies to suit different needs of the students, and gave the students plenty of opportunities to put the moral values learnt into practice (for further readings on Confucian pedagogies, see Chang, 1980; Kim, 2009; Wang, 2004; Elliot & Tsai,

2008; Author, forthcoming). Hence a Confucian moral education, with its accent on selfcultivation that aims at the heart/mind, nurtures and empowers the individual's moral reasoning, critical reflection, responsible decision making, problem-solving, and application of values. It also supports an inquiry-based teaching approach where teachers provoke thinking and discussion for the students to autonomously reflect on themselves and the community they live in, and freely choose to live a life that judiciously balances their personal and societal interests.

Conclusion

The Singapore experience provides a useful case study on the influence of communitarianism and the potential of Confucianism on values education in an Asian context. This paper has argued that individual interests and needs are not necessarily at odds with those of the community; they may be compatible and inter-dependent from a Confucian viewpoint. It was argued that values education in Singapore and other societies in Asia should focus on balancing the promotion of communitarian values and the students' moral self-cultivation. In short, values education should be for the group as well as for the self.

It is heartening to note that the Ministry of Education has announced that CCE curriculum will adopt self-directed learning where students "ExPerience" characterbuilding across the curriculum. Student-centred pedagogical approaches for CCE are likely to include experiential learning, story telling, group discussions, and other student-centred methods. Only time will tell if the implementation of CCE will lead to a balance between 'others' and the 'self' through a whole-school approach where values education starts with, and continues to emphasise, character building.

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NOTES

1 It is important to point out that the communitarian view on the primacy of the community is consistent with the recognition that some of our communal attachments can be problematic and may need to be changed (Bell, 2009).

2 The tensions between the cvic republican model of citizenship and the liberal individualist model of citizenship are reflected too in international policy initiatives. For example, see UNESCO (2011) as an implicit case in point.

3 This is not to say that Singapore schools at the pre-university and other levels do not offer their own moral education programmes and activities for their students. To be sure, many schools in Singapore inculcate and infuse moral values into their planned and hidden curricula. But the focus of this paper is on the formal values education curriculum conceptualised and promoted by the state.

4 It should be acknowledged that the CME syllabus, besides recommending the cultural transmission approach, also suggests some other approaches that schools may adopt when teaching CME. Examples are the Modified Values Clarification Approach (Responsible Decision Making) that hopes to help students clarify their values through examining their personal feelings and behaviour patterns; and the Cognitive Development Approach (Moral Reasoning) which is based on Kohlberg's theory about students' progress from a self-centred perspective to a higher stage of moral development (MOE, 2006a, p. A7). The Civics syllabus also recommends an 'inquiry-based teaching approach', with discussion questions designed to enable students to learn more about the community they live in, reflect on the meaning of service in leadership and recognise their roles in the community they live in, and to enable teachers to provoke thinking and discussion among students (MOE, 2006b, p. 4). However, researchers have pointed out that the dominant pedagogical approach in practice is still the cultural transmission approach that serves to inculcate communitarian values (for example, see Tan, 1994; Tan & Chew 2004; Author, 2010). That is why Yen (2011) claims that the current moral education curriculum emphasises "exhorting students to put nation and society before self", in contrast to the aim of CCE "for students to build personal character, before applying themselves socially".

5 Some readers may object to my application of a Confucian perspective on values education in Singapore, on the account that Confucianism is a 'Chinese' or faith-based ideology that is inappropriate for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society such as Singapore. While it is a fact that Confucianism originated from China, it is not a 'Chinese' ideology because its core teachings such as the ethical ideal of a noble person, the virtue of humanity, and the process of self-cultivation are universal and transcend cultural differences. Confucianism is also not commonly regarded as a religion in the sense of a faith system that is governed by institutionalized organisations, dogmas, regulations and membership.