



1. Introduction

1.1 National education is often regarded as part of civic, citizenship or moral education, which, according to some literature studies, covers teaching and learning of history and culture, national values and morals, as well as other knowledge and attitudes shared among citizens. In many places, however, implementation of national education is often subject to debate, including the way it is promoted, whether it should be made an independent subject, and the modes of teaching and learning.

1.2 After the return of Hong Kong to China, national education was promoted in schools mainly based on the curriculum framework of moral and civic education developed in 2002 and updated in 2008. Elements of national education were infused in different learning areas, supplemented with various extra-curricular activities.¹ To further strengthen national education, the Government proposed in 2010 the introduction of the Moral and National Education ("MNE") subject as an independent subject. The initiative, however, had aroused extensive responses in the public. While there was support from the community, some disagreed with the proposal for concerns over the scope, assessment, etc. In consideration of public concerns, the Government shelved the MNE implementation plan in 2012. Recently, some stakeholders have called on the Government to strengthen the efforts in national education, in view of growing concerns about the youth's lack of understanding about the country.

1.3 At the request of Hon CHAN Han-pan, the Research Office has prepared this information note aiming to examine the approaches adopted in Singapore and Japan in national education promotion, with particular focus on its respective framework and delivery. In Singapore, national education has

¹ Infusion into different subjects and through extra-curricular activities is generally considered as a permeation approach.

been incorporated in both the formal and informal curriculum at the primary, secondary and post-secondary level, with national education messages infusing in different subjects such as Social Studies and Character and Citizenship Education. In Japan, national education has been promoted by making Moral Education ("道德教育") a formal subject at primary and junior secondary schools since April 2018 and April 2019 respectively. This information note will begin with a discussion on the general approach towards promotion of national education, followed by an overview of national education in Hong Kong, and a discussion on the approaches adopted in the two selected places. A summary table on the present mode of delivery of national education in schools in the respective places is given in the **Appendix**.

2. Approach to promotion of national education

2.1 Around the globe, there appears no uniform approach/consensus on whether and how to deliver national education. In places with national education, it is often delivered as part of civic, character, citizenship and/or moral education which are important for positive youth development. The notion of civic education, particularly in Asia, is seen to be likely based on the Confucian tradition that starts from **oneself** and move up to the level of **society, nation and the world**.² Civic and moral education alike are values education associated with attitudes, judgement and behaviour,³ and therefore there are suggestions that teaching and learning of such education should begin with the conceptual dimension of **knowing and understanding**, affective dimension of **valuing** to the final level of **acting**.⁴

2.2 Given its values-based nature, it is arguably important for teachers to satisfy the **psychological needs** of students in the learning process. Some suggest that delivery of civic or moral education should rest on certain **key principles**, such as empowerment, open discourse, promotion of critical thinking and the development of moral communities in classrooms and schools.⁵ From a communitarian perspective, citizenship education should focus on **community service** in order to access the values of responsibility for

² See Chong, K.M. (2017) and Cheng, Y.C. (2019).

³ See Türkkahraman, M. (2013).

⁴ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2002).

⁵ See Althof, M. & Berkowitz, M.W (2006).

and commitment to others.⁶ Nevertheless, the mode of teaching and assessment often poses a challenge to teachers. It is concerned that assessment methods being too narrow will only provide a limited snapshot of what students have learned. While some favour self-assessment by students, some opine that teachers should provide students with descriptive feedback that guides their efforts towards improvement. A multi-method approach is therefore considered a more balanced or possible way to understand and assess moral and character development.⁷

3. National education in Hong Kong

3.1 National education in schools began in Hong Kong before the reunification with the Mainland. In 1985 (one year after the signing of Sino-British Joint Declaration), the then Education Department issued **the Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools** which required students to have an understanding of the affairs of China, and that students should love their country and be proud of being Chinese.⁸ According to the Government, at that time there was a lack of clear concept of nationalism among the public and when teaching the relevant subjects (e.g. Chinese Language and Chinese History), emphasis tended to be placed on their academic aspects.⁹ Although the Guidelines were revised in 1996 with relevant concepts elaborated (e.g. sense of belonging to the motherland, sense of national pride and nationalism), **many teachers and parents had not received comprehensive national education**. As a result, in the course of promotion of national education, teachers were inclined to focus on the historical and cultural aspects, stopping short of in-depth understanding and analysis of current national affairs.¹⁰

3.2 After the reunification in 1997, the Government started to accord priority to the promotion of national education. Specifically, **moral and civic education**, containing elements of national education, was emphasised as one

⁶ See Althof, M. & Berkowitz, M.W (2006).

⁷ See Walker, D.I. & Thoma, S.J. (2017) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015).

⁸ See Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (2008).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of the four key tasks¹¹ under the Curriculum Reform. In 2002, the Government issued the Basic Education Curriculum Guide for primary 1 to secondary 3. The Curriculum Guide consisted of the **framework for the moral and civic education curriculum**, under which the life event approach was recommended for teaching through different school activities. Apart from that, elements of national education, including understanding of the history, geography and culture of the Mainland, were consolidated in the Key Learning Areas¹² and the General Studies curriculum.

3.3 Subsequent to the then President Hu Jintao's speech in 2007 advising that emphasis should be put on national education for youngsters, the then Chief Executive Donald Tsang highlighted the importance of enhancing national education in schools in his five Policy Addresses from 2007 to 2011. Against this backdrop, various initiatives were rolled out, including specifically the release of the **Revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework** in 2008, incorporating the priority values of "Integrity" and "Caring".¹³ Meanwhile, it created an online platform "Passing on the Torch" in 2009 which disseminated information regarding the national education activities (e.g. the Mainland exchange programmes) organized by different parties and provided a communication channel for the academia to enhance collaboration.

3.4 Furthermore, with an aim to cultivate students' moral and national qualities in a systematic and sustainable manner, the then Chief Executive proposed in October 2010 to introduce the MNE subject at primary and secondary levels and invited the Curriculum Development Council¹⁴ to spearhead the efforts. The Curriculum Development Council developed a draft **Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 6)** for public consultation, and formed an "Ad Hoc Committee on Moral and National Education" (comprising 14 members who were mainly principals and teachers from primary and secondary schools) to solicit views from stakeholders through focus groups and seminars. After a four-month consultation, the Government released the refined Moral and National

¹¹ The other three key tasks were "Reading to Learn", "Project Learning" and "Information Technology for Interactive Learning".

¹² For example, in the Key Learning Areas of Chinese Language Education for secondary 4 and above students, it is expected to cultivate students' sense of national culture identity through reading texts and viewing audio-visual materials.

¹³ This was in addition to the priority values of "Perseverance", "Respect", "Responsibility", "National identity" and "Commitment". Please refer to the Appendix for the allocation of lesson time for moral and civic education.

¹⁴ It is an advisory body on matters relating to curriculum development from pre-primary to senior secondary levels.

Education Curriculum Guide in April 2012 and proposed to implement the subject in primary and secondary schools starting from the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years respectively with a three-year initiation period¹⁵.

3.5 The curriculum framework and contents of the MNE subject were based on the Revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework with refinements. The major differences of the two curriculum frameworks are listed as below:

Table 1 — The Revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework (2008) and Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide (2012)

	Revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework in 2008	Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide in 2012 (Shelved)
Learning objectives	Emphasizing the development of students' positive values and attitudes for whole-person development .	Strengthening the cultivation of students' positive values and attitudes and their identity-building in the different domains of family, society, nation and the world through a continuous and systematic learning experience.
Learning content	Learning objectives and core elements are organized according to the school contexts and needs of students.	Featuring life events and issues relating to direct or indirect life experiences of students in the domains.
Mode of Implementation	Diverse implementation modes such as inter-disciplinary approach and whole-school approach.	Synergizing learning experiences through classroom learning, contextual learning and life-wide practice .
Learning outcomes	Diversity in students' learning experiences according to different school-based learning programmes.	Engendering among students a sense of morality, a passion, knowledge and skills, cherish their own self as well as the people in their families, society and nation through a structured and coherent curriculum.
Assessment	Diversity in school-based assessment modes according to different school contexts.	On-going and diversified modes of assessment in the cognitive, affective and action dimensions.

Sources: Education Bureau (2011 and 2012).

¹⁵ It refers to the 2012-2013 school year to the 2014-2015 school year for primary schools and the 2013-2014 school year to the 2015-2016 school year for secondary schools.

Major concerns over the previous proposed MNE subject

3.6 According to the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide, the MNE subject aimed at cultivating students' positive values and attitudes through a continuous and systematic learning experience at the **cognitive, affective and behavioural levels**. However, since the release of the proposal, there had been resistance and oppositions from some stakeholders. Some commented that the Government had taken a **retrogressive step** to develop the subject as it had been more common around the globe to promote civic education rather than national education in schools, and there was also a view that civil education should cover national education but not the other way round.¹⁶

3.7 Secondly, while the subject covered five domains, namely personal, family, social, national and global domains, there were particular concerns over the dimension of contemporary development of the national domain.¹⁷ For instance, there were worries that only the positive sides of the Mainland would be covered whereas sensitive and controversial issues would not be touched upon, leading to brainwashing and dissemination of political ideology.¹⁸ Amid concerns in society, the Government had made clear that it would **not vet the teaching materials** produced by institutions receiving government funding, and that teachers had the freedom to choose the teaching materials they considered most suitable for teaching the subject.¹⁹

3.8 Thirdly, some expressed concerns over the **assessment** on students about the performance in the MNE subject, especially on the aspect of "affective dimension" which was difficult to assess. Although the Government had reiterated that awarding of marks or grades to make comparisons were not encouraged, some still considered that assessment of the subject would be difficult as it could hardly be assessed in the same way as other curriculum subjects.

¹⁶ See Legislative Council Secretariat (2011).

¹⁷ The national domain touched upon the historical, cultural, physical and contemporary aspects of China.

¹⁸ At that time, the publication of the handbook entitled "中國模式國情專題教學手冊" (The China Model: National Conditions Teaching Manual) by the government-funded NGO, National Education Services Centre, containing controversial content as a reference material for teachers had further triggered concerns of brainwashing. However, according to the Government, the manual has never been reviewed nor issued by the Education Bureau and was not considered as the teaching material published by the Bureau. See Education Bureau (2019b).

¹⁹ See Legislative Council Secretariat (2012).

3.9 Fourthly, there were concerns over the availability of **qualified teachers and/or resources support** on teaching the subject. According to a 2011 survey conducted by Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, over 70% of surveyed teachers preferred enhancing national education based on the existing framework rather than making it an independent subject, fearing that the latter might add to their already overwhelming teaching loads. Meanwhile, another survey reportedly revealed that less than half of the surveyed teachers were confident to teach the subject.²⁰ Worse still, only 26% of the secondary teachers and 3% of the primary teachers of the survey were confident to conduct the assessments.

3.10 To allay public concerns, the Government subsequently set up a "Committee on the Implementation of Moral and National Education" in August 2012, tasked to provide comments and advice to the Government on the implementation during the initial years. Nevertheless, grave public concerns remained and in consideration of the worries and opposing views of the public, the Government announced in October 2012 that the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide would be shelved alongside the abolition of the initiation period and that schools and school sponsoring bodies could decide whether and/or how to implement the curriculum of MNE. Yet according to the Government, it had no information as to how many schools (and school sponsoring bodies) deciding to implement the subject finally.²¹

Recent developments on promoting national education

3.11 At present, curriculum elements of national education are **incorporated** into various school programmes including (a) a number of Key Learning Areas/subjects at primary and secondary levels,²² (b) the moral and civic education curriculum, (c) relevant learning activities in and outside schools,²³ and (d) the Mainland exchange programmes.²⁴ Teachers are provided with teaching resources such as life event exemplars and access to

²⁰ See 明報 (2012).

²¹ See Education Bureau (2016).

²² For example, some concepts about the relationships between the Mainland and Hong Kong (e.g. Basic Law and "one country, two systems") are included in General Studies at primary level and covered in Chinese History, History, Life and Society, and Liberal Studies at secondary level.

²³ For example, schools are advised to display national flag and regional flag at special events and raise them regularly. According to the Government, schools generally play the national anthem during the flag-raising ceremony. See GovHK (2017).

²⁴ See Education Bureau (2018).

the "Handbook of Moral Education Teaching Resources" website. In recent years, the Government has sought to strengthen students' understanding of the country, through for example enhancement of Basic Law education in primary schools, development of "values education" in secondary schools,²⁵ as well as introduction of Chinese History as an independent compulsory subject at junior secondary level in the 2018-2019 school year.²⁶

3.12 Nevertheless, some stakeholders view that the Government's efforts in promoting national education remain inadequate and there have been calls for the Government to enhance it.²⁷ Though the Government reportedly had no plan to implement national education as an independent subject in this current term,²⁸ amid the recent social incident with the involvement of many youngsters, the Government agreed that national education should be carried out in a greater depth and breadth and it would listen to the views of the public to see how it could be improved.²⁹

4. National Education in Singapore

4.1 Singapore separated from Malaysia and became an independent nation in 1965. At that time, communal tension and racial riots had led to a need to forge a common identity and sense of belonging among citizens. As such, schools were encouraged to promote the national symbols (i.e. hoisting National Flag and singing National Anthem) to inculcate students' national consciousness and patriotism. Besides, citizenship education was delivered with an emphasis on character and moral development.³⁰ Nevertheless, the growing influence of western culture during the nation's development over the decades had brought impacts to the cultural identity of the youths. In 1996,

²⁵ The Secondary Education Curriculum Guide updated in 2017 stresses that "values education" is one of the major development emphases of the ongoing renewal of the school curriculum, which will help students achieve one of the seven learning goals, i.e. "to become an informed and responsible citizen with a sense of national and global identity, appreciation of positive values and attitudes as well as Chinese culture, and respect for pluralism in society".

²⁶ See Education Bureau (2019a).

²⁷ For example, in the recent fourth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it has raised the need to strengthen the education on Constitution, Basic Law, national education, Chinese History, and Chinese culture in Hong Kong and Macao, in particular young people and public servants. See 新華網 (2019).

²⁸ See 香港 01 (2018).

²⁹ See 星島日報 (2019) and 政府新聞公報 (2019).

³⁰ See National Heritage Board (2019) and Kho, E.M. (2017).

the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong remarked in his speech that there was a lack of knowledge of the nation, in particular the modern history among the youths.³¹ He thus saw a need to strengthen students' understanding of the nation, and considered national education a vital component of the education process.

4.2 The then Prime Minister also specifically pointed out that national education, going beyond book knowledge, must appeal to both heart and mind, which he considered not easy. It could not be instilled in students unless it was first instilled in **teachers**. Teachers must feel passionately for the country before they can teach with conviction. To take forward the initiative, a National Education Committee led by the Ministry of Education was set up to steer the efforts. Since national education was not just a matter for the Ministry of Education, other ministries including the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Information and The Arts had also been included.

Introduction of national education in 1997

4.3 National education was implemented progressively in schools in 1997 with aims to **develop national cohesion of students, cultivating them instincts for survival and confidence towards the future**.³² The focus was to (a) foster young people a sense of identity, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans; (b) get them to know the story of Singapore; (c) get them to know Singapore's unique challenges, constraints and vulnerabilities; and (d) instil in young people the core values of the way of life and the will to prevail that ensure the continued success and well-being.³³ National education was **infused in both the formal and informal curriculum**, with distinct themes used at different academic levels, namely (a) "Love Singapore" (primary level), (b) "Know and Believe in Singapore" (secondary level), and (c) "Lead Singapore" (post-secondary level).

³¹ See Government of Singapore (1996).

³² The overall objectives were rephrased in six key messages, which are: (a) Singapore is our homeland, this is where we belong; (b) We must preserve racial and religious harmony; (c) We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility; (d) No one owes Singapore a living; (e) We must ourselves defend Singapore; and (f) We have confidence in our future.

³³ See Government of Singapore (1997).

Formal curriculum

4.4 In the **formal curriculum**, various subjects were reformed at different academic levels to introduce the contents of national education. A case in point was to make **Social Studies** a compulsory subject at both primary and secondary schools.³⁴ The subject integrated the disciplines of history and geography with some basic economics and sociology about Singapore, and **teaching materials** (e.g. textbooks and instruction guides) were developed and produced by the government.³⁵ **At primary schools**, the goal was to engage students emotionally, rather than intellectually, through inculcating in them "**correct values and attitudes**", and developing a sense of pride in Singapore as well as a common bond among students of diverse races and abilities.³⁶ The subject was **non-examinable**, but students were assessed through both formal and non-formal assessment modes. To give an opportunity to reflect on their own and others' performances, there were also self-assessment and peer-assessment exercises for primary 3-6 students.³⁷

4.5 Different from the primary level, Social Studies at the **secondary level** focused more on **knowledge development**. At the junior secondary level, Social Studies focused on the milestones of Singapore's history as well as distinct features of the society.³⁸ At the senior secondary level, it was implemented as a part of a new subject known as Combined Humanities³⁹ which covered more in-depth knowledge of Singapore, including the developing strategies since the independence, principles of governance, and the role of key institutions, and is subject to public examination.

4.6 Apart from Social Studies, another major subject being infused with national education content was **Civics and Moral Education** ("CME"), compulsory at both primary and secondary levels. In contrast to Social Studies aiming to foster students' sense of belonging to the nation, CME emphasized students' **character development** with an understanding of the five national values, which were (a) placing society before self; (b) upholding

³⁴ Social Studies was first implemented in 1984 in the senior primary schools only.

³⁵ See Jasmine, S. (2005).

³⁶ See Kho, E.M. (2017).

³⁷ See Ministry of Education (2008).

³⁸ At the junior secondary level, Social Studies was introduced to students placed in the Normal (Technical) course only. For students placed in the Normal (Academic) course, relevant knowledge was complemented by History and Geography.

³⁹ The subject, being available in the Normal (Academic) course, includes social studies with either a history, geography or literature component. See Ministry of Education (2010).

the family as the basic building block of society; (c) respecting the rights of individuals and offering community support; (d) resolving issues through consensus, not conflict; and (e) racial and religious harmony.⁴⁰ To achieve the learning goal, CME did not just focus on theoretical teaching, but also provided opportunities for students to practice the values through participating in activities related to national education such as the compulsory Community Involvement Programme⁴¹. **Teaching materials** for class remained produced by the government but schools could make use of other relevant resources produced by the Singapore-based television and media organizations. The subject was **non-examinable** but schools could decide their own assessment tools to measure students' values and behaviour.⁴²

Informal curriculum

4.7 In the **informal curriculum**, national education was promoted through commemoration of national events in schools and extra-curricular activities, with an expectation that students would be impacted at the **affective** level by first-hand experiences. Every year, schools held different kinds of activities to commemorate four national events.⁴³ Apart from that, the above-mentioned Community Involvement Programme as well as experimental learning trips (Learning Journeys)⁴⁴ had also formed another important part of students' experiences of national education. At certain school levels, there were also designated activities such as the National

⁴⁰ See Ministry of Education (1991).

⁴¹ Students at the primary and secondary school levels are required to fulfil a minimum of six hours of community service each year. The type of volunteer work differs according to age group. For instance, primary students would engage in activities like maintaining school facilities and making handicraft to raise funds. For secondary students, they would assist in maintaining the operation of public libraries or teaching senior citizens computer skills.

⁴² To ensure consistency, teachers were advised to cross-check with the form teacher on students' behaviours. See Ministry of Education (2000a and 2000b).

⁴³ They are namely Total Defence Day, International Friendship Day, Racial Harmony Day and National Day. Total Defence Day is held on 15 February each year to commemorate the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942. International Friendship Day is celebrated in schools on the third Friday of Term Two for the understanding of Singapore's relations with its neighbours. Racial Harmony Day is commemorated on 21 July to remind students the nation's success as a harmonious society built on cultural diversity. National Day on 9 August celebrates Singapore's independence from Malaysia and its emergence as a sovereign nation.

⁴⁴ Through the initiative of Learning Journeys, schools were expected to organize trips for students by partnering with different government organizations. The goal was to provide opportunities for students to visit the heritage sites of Singapore and national institutions to sensitize them to the challenges faced by Singapore and the achievements attained. See Ministry of Education (1998).

Education Show (a preview of the National Day Parade) and dialogue sessions with senior civil servants (for junior college students). Through these activities, students were expected to review how they could contribute and improve the community.

4.8 According to the Singapore government, few years after the initial introduction of national education, schools had acquired the knowledge and skills to implement the various programmes for students. As such, schools were granted a **greater autonomy** to take the initiative and customize the national education activities to suit the learning needs of their students.⁴⁵ Tertiary education institutions had also in place various national education programmes on their own initiatives, ranging from academically-based to more experiential activities. For instance, the National University of Singapore required its students to read one module in the Singapore Studies Programme as part of the graduation requirements, while the Institute of Technical Education promoted national education in its informal curriculum (e.g. organizing Learning Journeys).⁴⁶

Refreshing national education approach in 2007 with a focus on engaging and empowering students

4.9 A national survey of 2005 revealed that almost all students were proud to be Singaporeans. However, compared with the previous surveys, there was an increasing percentage of younger students who were prepared to "live anywhere in the world" rather than Singapore if they had the choice. In light of the changing youth perceptions, the Singapore government considered necessary to **deepen national identity, rootedness and social cohesion** among the youths. Subsequently, it formed a 12-member committee, led by the Ministry of Education and comprising school heads representing different academic levels and parliamentary members, to review the approach of promoting national education.⁴⁷ Apart from consulting school teachers, parents and representatives from non-government organizations (e.g. uniform groups), the Committee also discussed with a student-initiated taskforce on

⁴⁵ To recognize schools' efforts, it had even introduced various awards (e.g. Development Award and Outstanding Development Award), evaluated based on the structures and processes for the implementation of national education.

⁴⁶ See Ministry of Education (2007b).

⁴⁷ See Ministry of Education (2007a).

national education⁴⁸ and co-organized two symposia with them for hundreds of secondary and post-secondary students to collect the feedbacks.⁴⁹ The review and consultation indicated that national education had generally made good progress in the past 10 years, but the distinct themes (i.e. "Love, Know and Lead" Singapore) used at different academic levels had led to an over-emphasis on one particular outcome at each stage to the exclusion of others. After considering the committee's recommendations, the government changed the national education focus from raising students' level of awareness and appreciation of Singapore to **engaging and empowering them**. It introduced a new framework of "Head, Heart, Hands" as a guide for the **next phase of national education** to engage students across different levels,⁵⁰ with specific efforts addressing three different groups of stakeholders, namely **students, teachers and the community**.⁵¹

Engaging and empowering students

4.10 First, the subject of **Social Studies** had undergone review. To encourage and facilitate more student discussion, it had pursued an **inquiry approach** which sought to trigger students' curiosity to inquire into real-world issues that concerned their lives. While there was different inquiry focus at different school levels, it was expected that the students undergo four key stages of the inquiry process, namely, "Sparking Curiosity", "Gathering Data", "Exercise Reasoning" and "Reflective Thinking". Second, it had introduced a compulsory subject **Character and Citizenship Education** to replace CME, which covered not only primary and secondary levels but also pre-university level.⁵² The subject focused on "values" and "character" aiming to develop students to be "**good individuals and useful citizens**".⁵³ Similar to the

⁴⁸ It was formed by a group of pre-university students from different institutions on their own accord to provide feedback and suggestions to the committee.

⁴⁹ See Ministry of Education (2007b).

⁵⁰ In engaging the "Head", students should be actively involved in their own learning. Beyond knowing, they should think through issues and arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Singapore and what it means to be Singaporean. In engaging the "Heart", students should connect emotionally with the Singapore story. Their love for the nation should be the outcome of their appreciating Singapore and having a deeper sense of belonging. In engaging the "Hands", students should have opportunities to give back to society and realize that everyone has a part to contribute to and create Singapore's future, and, where possible, to lead in different fields of society.

⁵¹ See Ministry of Education (2007a).

⁵² Pre-university level is pursued after studying Secondary 5.

⁵³ Please refer to the Appendix for the required lesson time.

previous CME, teaching materials remain produced by the government. In addition to teacher assessment, there are also self-evaluation and peer-evaluation from students.

4.11 Third, **informal curriculum** was also expanded and enhanced. For instance, it has been launching an inter-school digital animation competition "N.E.mation!" annually since 2007 to encourage secondary and post-secondary students creating digital animation clips for the dissemination of the contents of national education. Moreover, Community Involvement Project was reframed as "Values in Action" to place a stronger emphasis on the **inculcation of values through community involvement**. Specifically, curriculum time is set aside after the activities to let students undertake **personal and group reflections** under the facilitation of teachers, which is believed useful to help reinforce their learning and make it more authentic.⁵⁴

Equipping teachers and strengthening school-community linkages

4.12 Considering the fact that teachers directly determine the quality of national education and affect students' values and attitudes, the Singapore government has launched different programmes to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. For instance, the Ministry of Education has developed for teachers a **one-stop online repository**⁵⁵, and provided **timely resource packages** relating to significant local and global events, hoping that teachers would spark discussions while these events are still unfolding. Added to this is the provision of teacher training to strengthen their skills in facilitating discussions on current issues. On the other hand, **emphasis was also put on those who were going to be teachers**. In particular, students of the National Institute of Education (a major teacher institution) were required to undergo different training programmes such as camps and seminars infused with national education contents before teaching in schools.⁵⁶

4.13 With a view to facilitating students' national education experiences outside schools, the Singapore government has sought to strengthen the community linkages by advising schools to **engage external partners** such as families, alumni and the community. These included inviting parents to

⁵⁴ See Ministry of Education (2012).

⁵⁵ The online resources platform, namely OPAL, is accessible only by users with a login and password.

⁵⁶ See Ministry of Education (2013).

participate the commemoration of national education events with their children, as well as working with various **uniformed groups** to provide training workshops and camps for students to build relationships with their peers from different background.

Refreshing national education in 2017 with a focus on values-based education

4.14 After another 10 years of national education, a second review was conducted in 2017 and a review committee consisting of 30 members from various ministries (e.g. Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Finance) and sectors (e.g. media and social enterprise) was formed.⁵⁷ Feedback from students and teachers was sought and responses were **mixed**. For example, students, while remained skeptical of national education, felt empowered by greater voice and choice through lessons and informal programmes, and they valued open conversations on issues impacting their everyday lives. On the side of teachers, they agreed that national education was important but the "top-down" Singapore story had led to national education being perceived as propaganda. They also saw a need to sensitize students to current affairs and develop in students an understanding of their identity and conviction as citizens, but there was a perceived lack of space to explore with students the various perspectives of events/issues.

4.15 Following the review and taking into consideration the feedback, the Singapore government announced in 2018 that it would refresh national education again by strengthening values-based education to provide students with more **authentic experiences**. Specifically, three directions have been come up with to guide students in exploring and examining their national identity, namely developing students **a sense of belonging, a sense of reality and a sense of hope**, through which it is expected that students will ultimately develop **a will to act** with a shared sense of mission and a willingness to work towards building Singapore. The new directions may probably be helpful to address young people's concerns and issues today. According to a tri-annual survey conducted by the National Youth Council of Singapore in 2016, youths remained proud to be Singaporeans; however, they had worries over future uncertainty and were not entirely confident that there would be enough opportunities in Singapore to fulfil their aspirations or to have a good career.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Ministry of Education (2018).

⁵⁸ See National Youth Council (2017).

4.16 To achieve the refreshed national education approach, three major dispositions will be pursued: (a) move from a top-down to multi-dimensional Singapore story with curriculum time being set aside for **more regular discussions on contemporary issues** so that students can make sense of connections between the past and present, and form their own opinions; (b) strengthen "**citizenship experiences**" to allow students to exercise ownership of the community, e.g. presentation ceremonies of National Registration identity Card for 15-year-old students in schools; and (c) enable more open dialogues with teaching peers on contemporary issues and more sharing of experienced teachers on pedagogical innovation to enhance the **pedagogical skills of teachers** in facilitating meaningful discussion in classrooms. While the new initiatives are under implementation, reportedly the Ministry of Education is also reviewing the syllabus of the Character and Citizenship Education to put a greater emphasis on moral education at the junior primary level, with a hope to develop a sense of identity and values from a young age.⁵⁹

5. National Education in Japan

5.1 In Japan, national education had been found in the context of moral education early in the modernization of the education system in the late 19th century.⁶⁰ In particular, the Imperial Rescript on Education⁶¹ issued in 1890 set out the standards of behaviour expected from the Japanese people (e.g. courage and filial duty) with the **emphasis on the virtues of patriotism and loyalty to the Emperor.**⁶² Moral education (known as "Shushin" at that time)⁶³ was viewed as the focal point of the overall school curriculum and had the mission of strengthening ethnocentric consciousness among Japanese. In

⁵⁹ See Straits Times (2019).

⁶⁰ See Maruyama, H. (2013).

⁶¹ During the period of the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century, the contents of education were originally found to be derived largely from European countries in which traditional Japanese concepts were neglected. The Japanese government found that it was necessary to enhance students' moral values including their loyalty to the Emperor. Subsequently, the Imperial Rescript on Education was issued to provide a structure for national morality. See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1963 and Undated: The Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education).

⁶² See Japan International Cooperation Agency (2004).

⁶³ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Undated) The Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education.

the early 20th century, ultra-nationalism and militarism even became increasingly prominent in education, particularly at the time of World War II.

5.2 Subsequent to the defeat in World War II, the Japanese government reformed the education system and enacted the Basic Act on Education in 1947 which replaced the Imperial Rescript on Education.⁶⁴ The Basic Act set out the fundamental principles of postwar education in Japan, with the compulsory education extended to nine years and adoption of co-education of boys and girls. Moral education was delivered as an informal subject,⁶⁵ until the 2010s when the government made it a compulsory subject. Separately, the Japanese government enacted in 1999 the "Law Regarding the National Flag and National Anthem" to officially recognized the "Hinomaru" and "Kimi Ga Yo" as the national flag and national anthem respectively.⁶⁶ National flag and national anthem were displayed and performed during ceremonies and other special occasions. The ensuing paragraphs highlight the past developments and present mode of delivery of national education messages in Japan.

Moral Education as an informal subject

5.3 Throughout the past decades, moral education had been basically carried out through the overall educational activities in schools at **primary and junior secondary levels**.⁶⁷ Emphasis was put on the integrity and character of individuals, as well as their relations with the local and international communities. There were four focus areas in the school curriculum, namely: (a) basic lifestyle and behaviour; (b) moral mentality and judgment; (c) expansion of personality and creative lifestyle; and (d) ethical attitude and practical motivation as a member of the nation and society.⁶⁸ A lesson time separate from formal subjects was reserved for moral education in the school

⁶⁴ See Saito, Y. (2011).

⁶⁵ A subject was considered informal in a sense that teachers did not grade students and there were no official textbooks. See Marian, D.S. & Anna, H. (2017) and the Japan Times (2014).

⁶⁶ The Japanese government had recommended that the flag "Hinomaru" be hoisted and the song "Kimi Ga Yo" be sung as the representation of national symbols at special events in schools (e.g. graduation ceremonies) earlier in the 1950s. Nevertheless, these symbols created in the pre-war period were not legally recognized after World War II and some thought that they were associated with the imperialism and militarism. As such, the compliance of such guidelines among schools was considered not high. The above legislation was only enacted after debates over several decades.

⁶⁷ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2002).

⁶⁸ See Maruyama, H. (2013).

curriculum.⁶⁹ While there were **no textbooks, examinations or other assessments** for moral education, schools were advised that moral education be taught by class teachers with a combination of methods such as story-telling, teaching with books/audio-visual aids and facilitating students' discussions.⁷⁰

Promotion of national symbols in schools

5.4 Besides moral education, following the enactment of the "Law Regarding the National Flag and National Anthem" in 1999, different local governments started implementing relevant guidelines requiring schools to promote the national symbols at special events, which is seen as part of the education to instil a sense of national identity to students. Among them, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government issued a circular notice to public high schools in 2003 requiring their school officials (e.g. teachers) to follow the prescribed implementation guidelines of hoisting the national flag and singing the national anthem at the special events in schools.⁷¹ For instance, the school officials shall stand at the designated seats in the ceremony hall and sing the national anthem when facing the national flag. Those who refused to follow the guidelines could be subjected to different disciplinary actions such as salary deductions and suspensions. The guidelines, however, were seen to be controversial and there have been lawsuits between the teachers and the government from time to time.

Developments since the 2000s

5.5 Promotion of national education has undergone noticeable changes since the 2000s. In the late 1990s, the Japanese government conducted a nationwide survey on the implementation status of moral education.⁷² The findings showed that the average lesson hours assigned for moral education were lower than the suggested hours and the satisfaction level reported by schools on promotion of moral education was not high. As part of the efforts to improve moral education, the Japanese government **created and distributed** in 2002 a workbook known as "Kokoro no note" as a

⁶⁹ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2009b).

⁷⁰ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1965).

⁷¹ See Supreme Court of Japan (2011).

⁷² See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1994).

supplementary study material to all primary and junior secondary schools. While the content of the workbook covered the above-mentioned four focus areas, students were asked to write down their own feelings and reflections based on the narratives of different topics, which had indeed drawn concerns.⁷³ Moreover, the usage of the workbook by schools was voluntary but the government would check the implementation status of the workbook, which also led some people to comment it as compulsory.

5.6 When Shinzō Abe was elected as Prime Minister in 2006, there were substantial changes in the curriculum framework of education. In particular, the Basic Act on Education was revised in the same year which highlighted "**fostering the value of respect for tradition and culture and love of the country and regions**" as one of the objectives in education.⁷⁴ The amended law was considered constituting a radical shift in the educational system from one that sought to nurture individual character to one aimed at "cultivating individuals who would comply with the policies of the nation".⁷⁵ On the other hand, the Prime Minister also pinpointed that there was a growing trend of various behavioural problems among children (e.g. bullying) in Japan, prompting a need to instil them proper values through moral education.⁷⁶ Against this backdrop, the Education Rebuilding Council⁷⁷ convened by him proposed to introduce moral education as **a formal subject** in 2007.⁷⁸ However, there were opposing views that such proposal might impose pre-war values to students in an authoritarian manner, and some also raised the unresolved issue about the relation between moral education and freedom of conscience.⁷⁹ With his stepping down in the same year, the proposal was shelved by the subsequent government.

⁷³ For example, for the part related to cultural nationalism, there were critics that teaching was based on certain fixed values and students were guided to extend the love of home to a sense of loving the nation, rendering students to become loyal and submissive citizens. See Murakawa, K. (2012) and Takeuchi, M. (2006 and 2009).

⁷⁴ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2006).

⁷⁵ See Mark, R.M. (2016).

⁷⁶ See Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (2007).

⁷⁷ Established in October 2006, the Council was tasked to review the education system in Japan. It was composed of the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and MEXT Minister, together with different academic experts. See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2016).

⁷⁸ See Education Rebuilding Council (2007).

⁷⁹ See Japan Press Weekly (2007).

5.7 Since then, although the curriculum guidelines of moral education were revised in 2008 to conform to the Act, the approach of promoting national education through moral education remained largely unchanged in schools. It was until Shinzō Abe re-taking office in 2012 that government's efforts in promoting national education was seen to be strengthened again. In 2013, the Japanese government pointed out that there were still some problems among the youths such as extreme individualism and loosening social ties.⁸⁰ To tackle these problems, there was a need to improve moral education in schools and various initiatives were subsequently rolled out. This included revising "Kokoro no Noto" into a new workbook "Watashitachi no Doutoku" for distribution to schools which added stories to promote self-awareness of being Japanese and understanding of Japanese traditions.⁸¹ Most notable is making moral education a formal compulsory subject.

Introduction of the Moral Education subject

5.8 Following the proposal of making moral education a formal subject by the government, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology ("MEXT") formed a caucus with conservative politicians across political parties to exchange opinions about moral education. In 2015, the Japanese government decided to introduce moral education as a formal subject at primary and junior secondary schools starting from April 2018 and April 2019 respectively. The scope of moral education was stipulated in the ministerial guidelines, covering relationship, moral judgment and patriotism, etc. In addition to mandating a lesson time⁸² for the subject, there was a tighter control regarding the delivery of contents from schools/teachers to students.⁸³ Specifically, **textbooks** for the study are required to gain **authorization** from MEXT before publication as with other subject textbooks, and there would be **evaluations from teachers** towards students' performance.

⁸⁰ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Undated) Current status and issues of education in Japan.

⁸¹ See Bolton, K.H. (2015).

⁸² Please refer to the Appendix for the lesson time.

⁸³ See The Asia-Pacific Journal (2018).

Government approval on textbooks

5.9 In order to be authorized for publication, publishers are required to submit their textbooks for official examination and approval by MEXT.⁸⁴ The relevant authority will examine the textbooks based on four criteria: (a) compliance with the curriculum guidelines of the subject; (b) adaptability to the development stage of students; (c) objectivity, fairness and neutrality of the teaching materials; and (d) accuracy of the content.⁸⁵ Subject to the request of MEXT, there may be revisions to the content of textbooks. Although publishers have the freedom to include their own learning methods and ideas in the textbook materials, there had been concerns that through retaining control over the content of the textbooks, the government could impose its prescribed values on national education. Reportedly, in order to gain the authorization, there was a textbook publisher replacing a western-style bakery shop picture in a section of the book with a picture of traditional Japanese "wagashi" (和菓子) sweet maker.⁸⁶

Assessments from teachers

5.10 Since teacher assessment is required for the subject, some are concerned that certain value aspects such as students' sense of patriotism might be assessed for determining their advancement in education/allocation of school places. According to MEXT, the assessments are to be conducted in descriptive expressions based on the provision of positive feedbacks to students.⁸⁷ The rationale is to record the development of students' moral values in a continuous manner. To reassure the assessments are not used for other purposes, there would **not** be any numerical assessments in the subject, assessment on individual content items (including attitude towards the nation) as well as comparison among students' performance.

5.11 To support teachers in teaching the subject, MEXT has consolidated the teaching materials such as instruction guides and textbooks in an online platform.⁸⁸ Furthermore, there are class videos available in the platform for teachers to make reference in drawing up the teaching content/format in the

⁸⁴ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005).

⁸⁵ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2009a).

⁸⁶ See Reuters (2017).

⁸⁷ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2017a).

⁸⁸ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2020).

lesson. Nevertheless, in the survey about the implementation status of the subject conducted by MEXT in 2019, there remained some issues from the subject teachers. About 80% of the teachers commented that it was challenging to assess the students' performance in the subject, and about half expressed concerns over the teaching methods and their effectiveness.⁸⁹ Yet since moral education has only become a formal subject in recent years, there appears yet a comprehensive evaluation on the implementation. A survey on youth attitude conducted by the Japanese government in 2018 indicated that compared with 2013, there had been a drop of almost 10 percentage points (70.4% to 61.2%) on the proportion of youth answering yes to "I am proud of being a citizen of my country".⁹⁰ Whether strengthened moral education will help improve young people's perception and views remains to be seen.

6. Concluding remarks

6.1 Promoting national education is often subject to debate in different places. After the return of Hong Kong to China, the Government started to accord priority to the promotion of national education, which was mainly delivered through moral and civic education infused in different learning areas and school activities. Ten years ago, the Government proposed to introduce MNE as an independent compulsory subject. However, grave public concerns and worries have resulted in the plan being shelved finally. Since then, there have not been material changes to the mode of national education except making Chinese History an independent compulsory subject. Recently, there have been renewed concerns over young people's lack of understanding about the country. Some stakeholders have called on the Government to step up its efforts on national education.

6.2 In both Singapore and Japan, national education is infused in one or more independent subjects. In Singapore, national education is mainly infused in Social Studies aiming to develop students a sense of belonging to the nation, as well as Character and Citizenship Education, which emphasizes students' character development. In the past two decades, the Singapore

⁸⁹ See Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2018a).

⁹⁰ The survey was commissioned by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese government, which compared the respective attitudes of the youths (aged between 13 and 29) of Japan and other six countries (i.e. France, Germany, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States) to better identify the characteristics of youths in Japan and problems that they were facing. See Cabinet Office (2018).

government has shifted twice the approach of national education from raising the awareness and appreciation of Singapore at the beginning to empowering students and encouraging open discussion on contemporary issues today. At the same time, the government also emphasizes community services aiming to build the authentic experiences for students, and has attached importance to supporting teachers in order to improve their pedagogical skills in facilitating class discussion.

6.3 In Japan, national education used to be delivered informally in schools without textbooks and assessments. In the 2000s, national education was seen to be strengthened. The Basic Act on Education was amended to include the message of "love of the country and regions", while a supplementary study material on moral education was produced and distributed to schools by the government. After Shinzō Abe re-taking the office in 2012, the government proposed again making moral education an independent subject, partly in view of the growing youth problems such as bullying and individualism. Under the subject framework, assessment is required but it will not go into individual content items, which may have eased some concern of stakeholders. However, textbook approval from the education authority is required, as with other subject textbooks. After less than two years of implementation, initial feedback from teachers revealed difficulties in sharing consistent/effective teaching methods. Whether there will be more guidelines on the mode of teaching or other adjustments may require longer time to see.

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Present mode of delivery of national education in schools in selected places

	Hong Kong	Singapore	Japan
Overview			
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly embedded in moral and civic education which is not formal subject but infused in different learning areas and school activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly infused in the formal subjects of Social Studies and Character and Citizenship Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly contained in the formal subject of Moral Education.
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary and secondary level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary, secondary and post-secondary level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary and junior secondary level.
Formal curriculum			
Formal subject(s) that promote national education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse concepts (e.g. Basic Law and "one country, two systems" are included in General Studies at primary level; related education is also contained in Chinese History, History, Life and Society, and Liberal Studies at secondary level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly Social Studies at primary and secondary level, and Character and Citizenship Education at primary, secondary and pre-university level. Some related concepts are included in History and Geography at secondary and pre-university level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly Moral Education at primary and junior secondary level. Some related concepts are included in Social Studies at primary and secondary level, as well as History and Geography at secondary level.
Approval on textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No, only recommended textbook list.⁽¹⁾ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes. Teaching materials are produced by the government but schools may also use other relevant materials specified by the government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes.
Lesson time allocated for cultivating students' values and attitudes (including national identity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through moral and civic education: P.1 – P.3 and P.4 – P.6: 19% of three-year lesson time infused in other learning areas and school activities. S.1 – S.3: 8% of three-year lesson time infused in other learning areas and school activities. S.4 – S.6: 5% of three-year lesson time in "other learning experiences" (e.g. Liberal Studies). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through Social Studies: (a) Junior primary: one period (30 mins) per week; (b) Senior primary: two to three periods (60-90 mins) per week; (c) Junior secondary (Normal (Technical) Course): two periods (each period is 35-40 mins) per week; and (d) Senior secondary (Normal (Academic) Course): as a part of the Combined Humanities subject which consists of three to eight periods (each period is 35-40 mins) per week. Through Character and Citizenship Education: (a) Junior primary: 60 hours per year; (b) Senior primary: 75 hours per year; (c) Secondary: 60 hours per year; and (d) Pre-university: 80 hours in total. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through Moral Education: P1: 34 units (45 mins per unit) per year, approx. 25.5 hours per year. P.2 – P.6: 35 units (45 mins per unit) per year, approx. 26 hours per year. S.1 – S.3: 35 units (50 mins per unit) per year, approx. 29 hours per year.

Note: (1) On 3 January 2020, the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council passed a motion to set up a subcommittee to study the development of textbooks and teaching materials for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.

Present mode of delivery of national education in schools in selected places (cont'd)

	Hong Kong	Singapore	Japan
Formal curriculum (cont'd)			
Assessment on students' values and attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity in school-based assessment modes according to different school contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal (e.g. pen-and-paper assessments) and non-formal assessment (e.g. group/individual interviews) by teachers, self-assessment and peer-assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive expressions. No numerical assessments, assessment for individual content items and comparison among students.
Informal curriculum			
Extra-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly Mainland exchange programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Involvement Programme, Learning Journeys and designated activities at certain school levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not specified.
Commemoration of national events at schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not mandatory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not specified.
Promotion of national symbols at schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are advised to display national flag and regional flag at special events and raise them regularly. Schools generally play the national anthem during the flag-raising ceremony. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are encouraged to recite national pledge, hoist national flag and sing national anthem at special events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools should hoist national flag and instruct teachers/students to sing national anthem at special events.
Other supportive measures			
Assistance to teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of "Handbook of Moral Education Teaching Resources" website and life event exemplars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-stop online repository providing timely resource packages relating to significant local and global events; and sharing among teachers to strengthen pedagogical skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online platform consolidating all teaching materials (e.g. instruction guides and textbooks).

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