

P R E F A C E

The *raison d'être* for a historical account of examinations in Singapore is organisational and professional in origin and intent.

One, the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB), as a new statutory board, is established to take greater control of the national examination system and positioned as a centre for testing and assessment services in the region and beyond, capitalising on the strong international standing of Singapore's education system. As national examinations are our core business, a broad understanding of how the present state of examinations came to be is *sine qua non*.

Two, it is timely to take stock of examinations in Singapore in view of the recent 50th anniversary of the Ministry of Education (1957–2007) and the 150th anniversary of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (1858–2008).

Three, few studies focus on examinations *per se*. The reason is perhaps obvious, as examinations are outcomes of the political, economic and social agendas of the respective governing authority (British colonial government, Japanese military administration and independent Singapore government) and the consequent policies for education. Yet, it is interesting to study the historical momentum of examinations, with changes and



continuities in examinations in the foreground and broader history of Singapore and of education in Singapore in the background.

This historical survey of examinations is indebted to earlier studies on education from the founding of Singapore up to recent times. David D. Chelliah, Theodore R. Doraisamy, Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean, H. A. Wyndham and Harold E. Wilson presented invaluable insights into vernacular and English education; and Theodore R. Doraisamy and John Yip Soon Kwong and Sim Wong Kooi provided a broad survey of educational developments and policies up to recent times.

In addition, this historical account hopes to contribute perspectives arising from primary documents from the National Archives of Singapore, the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and the Cambridge Assessment Archives. Local sources include Straits Settlements Legislative Council Papers and the Annual Reports of the Department of Education/Ministry of Education, oral history interviews, amongst others. Cambridge sources include: the letter from the Reverend G. F. Browne on the setting up of an examination centre in Singapore, documents related to the Sime Road Camp School Certificate examination, Annual Reports of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, past question papers, colonial class lists, amongst others.

This book adopts the approach of an examination question paper in constructing a chronological account of examinations. It poses questions on the key milestones of examinations and suggests answers to help readers unravel the changes and continuities of examinations in Singapore. The historical study of examinations is juxtaposed against its immediate context of education and wider context of politics, economy and society. This study covers three broad historical periods: Examinations in Singapore (1891–1945), The Post War Years (1946–1970s) and Charting Our Destiny (1980s–2007). In the British period up to 1941, local examinations were conducted by the vernacular schools, and external examinations by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. There was a lack of systematic effort to establish

a uniform system of education and examinations. During the Japanese Occupation, examinations were conducted by the Japanese authorities and, unexpectedly, the Cambridge examinations continued in the Sime Road Camp. In the post-war period, and particularly after Singapore was granted self-government, the establishment of a national education system was followed by the emergence of national examinations: the Primary School Leaving Examinations and the Singapore-Cambridge GCE N/O/A Levels for every school-going child in Singapore. Thereafter, the nature of national examinations evolved with the changing needs of education and the nation. At the turn of the century, with the Ministry of Education's decision to take greater control of examinations, SEAB was established to oversee new developments in examinations.

