

Social representations of history in Malaysia and Singapore: On the relationship between national and ethnic identity

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Social representations of history were investigated using surveys among university populations of ethnic Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Singapore and Malaysia. Representations of history and historical leaders tended to be hegemonic or consensual, showing low levels of conflict across ethnicity and nationality, even regarding the separation of these two nations. Tendencies towards in-group favoritism and ontogeny were slight, but statistically significant on some measures. National and ethnic identity were positively correlated, with ethnic identity stronger than national identity in Malaysia, and strongest among Malays in Malaysia. National identity was strongest among Chinese in Malaysia, followed by Chinese in Singapore. Results of regression analyses on national identity suggest that ethnicity is more sensitive in Malaysia than in Singapore. Results are interpreted through the frameworks provided by social representations theory and social identity theory. It is argued that hegemonic representations of history are associated with positive correlations between national and ethnic identity.

Introduction

One of the central questions of political identity at the turn of the second millennium is the relationship between ethnic and national identity (Prentice & Miller, 1999). All over the world, from Rwanda to Chechnya, from Indonesia to the former Yugoslavia, ethnic groups have been asserting themselves as a political force within nations. From the examples given above, one might be tempted to think that ethnic identity is something that stands in opposition to national identity. However, the literature is far from united on this issue. Different theorists have argued that national identity and ethnic identity are in opposition, are unrelated, or are mutually reinforcing.

The purpose of this paper is to undertake a historically grounded analysis of the relationship between national and ethnic identity within the nation-states of Malaysia and Singapore. This pair form a particularly good case study because they are young nations, each

comprising three major ethnic groups, ranked in different order of status across a shared border (Ward & Hewstone, 1985). Ethnic Malays are the politically dominant majority in Malaysia, with Indians and the economically dominant Chinese as minority groups, whereas ethnic Chinese are politically and economically dominant in Singapore, with Malays and Indians as minorities. The two nations came into being in 1965 in large part because of tensions between ethnic Malays and ethnic Chinese as to the division of political power in a greater Malaysia that included Singapore. Hence, the dynamics of identity between ethnicity and nationality here may provide insight into how stability can be maintained in the face of potential volatility.

Social representations of history, particularly the degree of consensus across different ethnic groups concerning crucial events in creating nationhood, are offered as a potential moderator of the relationship between ethnic and national identity.

Social identity and self-categorization

A framework for evaluating the relationship between national and ethnic identity is provided by social identity theory and its elaboration, self-categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner *et al.*, 1987). These theories posit that as well as personal identity, each person also has a number of group or social identities. In the absence of other normative rules, there is a tendency to evaluate one's in-group positively in comparison with a relevant out-group. Many are the implications of self-categorization into groups that make an 'us' salient and distinct from 'them' (Turner *et al.*, 1987). However, most research has focused on a single self-categorization in isolation from other social identities. While the principle of functional antagonism (Turner *et al.*, 1987) claims that at any one moment, categorization at one level of identity (e.g. nationality) suppresses identity at another level (e.g. the individual), the theory does not make a general statement of how the need to positively evaluate one group identity may affect the evaluation of another identity at a different level of inclusiveness over time, and as part of the structure of society and history.

National identity and ethnic identity are examples of group identities that can be held concurrently or alternately, with differing levels of salience over time and across situations. In order to create a cohesive sense of nation, intuitively the best strategy might be to make national identity more salient than ethnic identity. However, Huo *et al.* (1996) claim that overriding ethnic identity is not necessary in order to maintain social cohesion. They showed that providing that superordinate (e.g. national) identity is strong, strength of subgroup (e.g. ethnic) identity is irrelevant to judgements about the distribution of value in society. Both biculturalists (high in national and ethnic identity) and assimilators (high in national and low in ethnic identity) in their American study judged relational considerations with superordinate authorities as more important than instrumental considerations for their own group in justice judgements. Hence, these theorists suggest that fair and benevolent authorities can function effectively even while allowing for strong ethnic identification. Because each subgroup considers its relationship with the superordinate to be important, they do not engage in zero-sum thinking (e.g. my group's loss is another group's gain). Hence, Huo *et al.* suggest that under some conditions, there can be a zero correlation between ethnic and national identity.

In contrast, Worchel and Coutant (1997) assert that ethnic identity and national identity will often be in conflict, and that individuals are frequently in the position of having to decide which categorization is more central to their identity. This is especially likely to be a problem when an ethnic group is a minority in more than one nation. In these cases, ethnic identity

may be seen as more important, because ethnicity is generally harder to change than nationality. Worchel and Coutant imply that national identity and ethnic identity do not live happily side by side, because often, as feelings of nationalism grow within a nation, minority ethnic groups feel discriminated against. Hence, these theorists argue for a negative correlation between ethnic and national identity.

Finally, Cinnirella (1996) critiques social identity theory and self-categorization theory for failing to take into account the interconnectedness of national and ethnic identities. He argues that standard readings of these theories lead researchers to assume that in any given situation only one social identity will be salient and related to behavior. Cinnirella suggests that the significance of a particular identity (e.g. nationality) can be related to the other identities the person holds (e.g. ethnicity). Under some circumstances, and for particular historical reasons (e.g. Italians in the European Union), national identity and supranational identity are 'networked' so that they are perceived to be mutually compatible. Cinnirella's basic argument is that a theory of self is required to account for when two or more social identities will be concurrently salient, be perceived as mutually compatible and, therefore, be positively correlated, but he has not yet offered such a theory himself.

Recent experimental work by Hornsey and Hogg (2000) does offer some support for Cinnirella's position. Their research, like that of Huo *et al.*, suggests that simultaneous activation of a superordinate category and its subordinate can have implications for reducing intergroup conflict and increasing perceived fairness. The categories used by Hornsey and colleagues were relatively shallow identities (e.g. students' university and faculty identities) compared to nationality and ethnicity; however, like Cinnirella they do not offer a theory how different identities come to be interlinked.

Compared to India and Pakistan, for example, what makes ethnic and national identity in Singapore and Malaysia relatively harmonious? Following Liu *et al.* (1999), we suggest that the link between social identity and social representations of history is crucial for determining the form of relationship between national and ethnic identity.

Social identity and social representations of history

In our view, there are different conditions under which each of three positions above can be accurate. What is required is a socio-political analysis of the context of intergroup relations. Liu and colleagues (Liu *et al.*, 1999; Dresler-Hawke & Liu, under review; Liu, 1999a,b) have argued that social representations of history are a crucial source of social context for ethnic and national groups, because historical events provide symbolic resources for the positioning of identity (Hilton *et al.*, 1995; Lyons, 1996; Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997; Laszlo & Farkas, 1997; Liu, 1999b; Dresler-Hawke & Liu, under review). Such historical events as the signing of the Declaration of Independence in the United States and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand can become an integral part of national identity, normatively linking national identity to the position of certain ethnic groups (Liu *et al.*, 1999).

For example, the Treaty of Waitangi is a contract that defines a partnership between Maori (indigenous people of New Zealand) and Europeans (primarily British). As the signing of the Treaty has come to be consensually regarded as the most important event in New Zealand history (Liu *et al.*, 1999), it has conferred upon Maori a special position as an ethnic minority in a nation that is formally bicultural. In the current socio-political context of New Zealand, therefore, we should, in general, expect a positive relationship between Maori ethnic identity and New Zealand national identity, despite a reasonably high level of polemics concerning

intergroup relations. Among members of dominant ethnic majorities, the situation is far simpler (but see Liu, 1999b): under most conditions, the relationship between ethnic and national identity should be positive.

Liu *et al.* (1999) drew upon social representations theory as a tool to come to this conclusion. Social representations can be considered as underlying worldviews that are widely shared and communicated; these provide the underlying structure for the formation of attitudes and opinions. According to Moscovici (1988), there are three ways in which representations can be socially shared. They can be hegemonic, that is, shared by all members of society and evident in symbolism and tradition; they can be emancipated, with complementary versions existing in different areas of society; or they can be polemical, held by only some groups in society, while other groups hold opposing views. Hegemonic representations are typically found in homogeneous societies containing only one group or little intergroup conflict. Polemical representations are often indicative of conflict, and tend to be found in more diverse societies (Liu *et al.*, 1999).

History, Liu *et al.* (1999) argue, can be read as a story about the making of an in-group: it provides materials for a collective narrative about events that were involved in the creation of the group, and can now be used to give meaning. History provides the raw materials from which symbols can be created to either unite (as in hegemonic representations) or divide (polemical representations), or do something in-between (emancipated representations). Because of their power and control over such institutions as media, schools, and government, the dominant majority's version of historical events is generally congruent with national narratives and symbols (see, for example, Laszlo & Farkas, 1997; Sidanius & Pratto, 1998). Therefore, national and ethnic identity should be positively correlated for most dominant ethnic groups. However, this may not always be the case with ethnic minorities, especially if they are vocally dissident, or engaged in other forms of independence movements.

We hypothesize that polemical representations between ethnic groups of crucial events in history would be associated with negative correlations between ethnic and national identity for the minority group, as predicted by Worchel and Coutant (1997). Alternative interpretations of history can function as symbolic resources to justify a different position for a dissident ethnic group in society. The prediction for the majority group in this case would be dependent on specific political factors. On the other hand, emancipated representations would be expected to be consistent with a zero correlation for both groups. It may be that for some nations, history is either irrelevant or uncontroversial, and largely unconnected to sense of identity. Finally, hegemonic representations should be associated with positive correlations between ethnic and national identity for both the majority and minority. Such representations would be expected to provide historical evidence of mutual compatibility and positive networking between these identities, as outlined by Cinnirella (1996).

Representations of history in Malaysia and Singapore

Malaysia and Singapore are particularly interesting because there is abundant potential for both unity and division among the ethnic and national groups in this region. The history contains ample opportunity for different groups to elaborate different versions of history to justify their current political aspirations.

The nation-states of Malaysia and Singapore were formed only in the 1950s and 1960s, making them young by world standards. As Turnbull (1989) notes, the early history of this region of South-East Asia is uncertain. We know there was travel between the lands in this area, and that many of the people now known as Malays likely immigrated from nearby

islands such as Sumatra, Java, and Indonesia. Today, they retain their status as the most numerous ethnic group in the region.

The first major settlement in peninsular Malaya was established in the early 15th century. The town Melaka (also known as Malacca) was built in a highly desirable location for shipping routes. Melaka quickly grew to become a major port, filling with immigrants and laborers. From the mid-15th century on, Melaka changed hands many times, from Chinese to Portuguese to Dutch, then British, and then Dutch again in the late eighteenth century. During this period, Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities came to inhabit the region.

Generally, Melaka belonged to the dominant power in the region. But because the British had to cede Melaka back to the Dutch by treaty, they sent Thomas Stamford Raffles to establish a new British trading post in the area (Turnbull, 1989). Raffles took advantage of a dispute over succession to a local throne to secure an agreement to establish a trading post in the kingdom of Singapore. Through this technique, the British East India Company (EIC) established Singapore as a safe haven for British vessels in 1819. Rule of the island originally stayed with the Sultanate, but by 1824 the island was ceded to the EIC in perpetuity (Foon, 1987). Also at this time, Britain obtained rule over Melaka and Penang, the other two main trading ports in the area. By 1826, all three trading ports were administered by the EIC. After the dissolution of the EIC in 1867, Singapore, Melaka and Penang became a crown colony, falling directly under British governance.

When Singapore became a British trading post in 1819, the population comprised around 1000 aboriginal people, who lived mostly from fishing and agriculture. As Singapore prospered as a trade center, the population increased. The majority of immigrants were Chinese, followed by Indians and Malays (Clutterbuck, 1985). However, these groups were not homogeneous, and within each of the three ethnic groups there existed a variety of subgroups (Foon, 1987).

The early twentieth century was relatively uneventful for Singapore and Malaysia compared to the upheavals of World War II. Both Malaysia and Singapore were invaded by the Japanese in 1942, and they remained under Japanese control until the end of the war in 1945. Following Japanese Occupation, Britain decided to reformulate its holdings in Asia and in 1946, Singapore became a crown colony in its own right. Melaka and Penang were united with the other states on peninsular Malaysia and in 1948 they became the federated states of Malaya, gaining independence from Britain in 1957 (Clutterbuck, 1985). In 1959, Singapore was granted internal self-government, and the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew took power through democratic election.

Singapore still sought independence, and Lee Kuan Yew worked to establish a merger with the Federated States of Malaya to achieve this end. In 1963, Singapore received independence from Britain and the political entity currently known as Malaysia came into being, consisting of the federated states of Malaya (the Malay peninsula), Singapore, and Sarawak and Sabah (East Malaysia). This was not a happy union. There were political disagreements between the PAP (in particular, Lee Kuan Yew) and the leaders of the other states (including Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first ruler of modern-day Malaysia). Further disharmony occurred in 1964 when the Singapore government refused to grant Malays in Singapore the same privileges that Malays on the peninsula received, arguing instead for a non-discriminatory multi-ethnic society. As one of the few major violent incidents in Singapore history, the days of rioting that occurred over this issue are still remembered today.

Spurred on by the occurrence of the riots, and prompted by further disagreement between the PAP and other Malaysian political parties, Singapore separated (or was forced to separate) from the merger in 1965 and became an independent republic. Following this, Malaysia

implemented a 5-year development plan. However, some of the moves made by the government (for example, implementing Malay as the major teaching language in schools) were not well received. Many non-Malays resented the policy of Malay nationalism, and the elections of 1969 were surrounded by emotion. As results of the election started to come in, rallies by opposition parties resulted in counter-demonstrations by supporters of Malay-oriented parties, sparking off riots. The main force of the rioting was in Kuala Lumpur, but the violence also spread further down the peninsula. The exact number of people dead and injured is unknown, but was estimated to be in the thousands (Clutterbuck, 1985). The rioting lasted days, and resulted in a state of emergency being declared, and martial law coming into force. A combined military-civilian council was formed, which ruled until 1971, when governance was returned to parliament.

From the seventies until today, Malaysia and Singapore have focused on improving their economies and creating multi-ethnic societies, although Singapore appears to have prospered economically more than Malaysia (Kwang *et al.*, 1998). As Dresler-Hawke and Liu (under review) have noted, nearby nations form an important source of social context for the positioning of social identity; so polemics between Malaysia and Singapore would likely result in polemics among the ethnic groups within each nation as well. In this case, ethnicity would become more salient than nationality, and intergroup perceptions would be highly prejudicial instead of governed by respect for an overall superordinate as theorized by Huo *et al.* Hence, ethnicity by nationality interactions, in general, suggest polemical representations, whereas nationality main effects are indicative of emancipated representations across the border.

Overall, we expected a mixture of hegemonic and emancipated representations. If the representations are hegemonic, then we would expect positive correlations between ethnic and national identity. If they are emancipated, we would expect zero correlation between ethnic and national identity. We expected Singapore and Malaysia to display similar levels of correlation because of their proximity in space and history. However, because national policies are more ethnically focused in Malaysia (e.g. Malay is the national language, and Islam is the national religion), we predicted a higher level of ethnic identity in Malaysia than Singapore, especially among members of the politically dominant Malay majority, who stand to benefit most from this policy. A regression analysis is conducted to summarize relations between demographic ethnicity, subjective identification with ethnicity, and national identity in the two nations.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students were recruited from the National University of Singapore and the University of Malaya during 1998. Of the 395 respondents, 11 were not included in the data analysis either because of incomplete data, or because they were not of Malaysian or Singaporean nationality. Of the 384 remaining participants, there were 294 females and 90 males, whose ages ranged from 18–34, with a mean age of 21.4 years. There were 36 different subjects listed as majors, and approximately one-quarter of all participants listed psychology as one of their majors.

All but six of the participants named either Singapore or Malaysia as their country of birth. Two hundred and one participants reported themselves to be Singaporean by nationality, and 183 participants reported themselves Malaysian by nationality. The aim when sampling

was to have an ethnic mix ratio similar to the overall population in the two nations. However, minority groups were proportionally over-sampled to allow for statistical comparisons between groups. Consequently, the Singaporean sample consisted of 68% ($n=137$) ethnic Chinese participants, 17% ($n=33$) ethnic Malay participants, and 16% ($n=31$) ethnic Indian participants. The corresponding ethnic make-up in the Malaysian sample was 28% ($n=52$) Chinese, 49% ($n=89$) Malay, and 23% ($n=42$) Indian.

Materials

All of the data collected came from a questionnaire composed for the purposes of this study. This questionnaire was written in English for the Singapore sample, and was translated into Malay for the Malaysian sample. It consisted of 14 pages and 105 items. The items ranged in structure, with the majority being Likert scale responses, some being free response, and a few being forced choice.

The areas covered in the questionnaire were: (1) self-description, which included nationality, ethnicity, languages spoken and preferred term of self-categorization (free response); (2) the most important events in the country's history (free response); (3) the most important times in the country's history; (4) the most important figures in the country's history (free response and Likert scale); (5) most important leader and their qualities (free response); (6) views of the separation of Singapore and Malaysia (forced choice and free response); (7) statements relating to symbolic racism, threat, cultural unity and diversity (not included here); and (8) measures of national and ethnic identity (Likert scales). The scales used to measure national identity and ethnic identity each contained 12 items (following Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), and each scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Procedure

The questionnaire was given to students during class time, except in the case of students recruited to boost the minority ratio. Due to the nature of the items in the questionnaire, participants were also informed that the questionnaire was not meant as a test of factual knowledge, but rather as an inquiry into individual perceptions of history.

Results

Teaching history

Participants were asked to rate (using a 7-point Likert scale) the importance they would give to place and time if they were to teach a class on the history of their country. They rated six countries (Singapore, Malaysia, China, India, Indonesia, and UK) that have had impact on Singapore and Malaysia, during three time periods (1800–1900, 1900–1950, 1950–now). The results were plotted for all six of the ethnic/national groups who participated in the study. As the representations were very similar across ethnic groups within each country, only the results for the two nations (Singapore and Malaysia) are shown in Figure 1.

As hypothesized, Singapore and Malaysia were rated most important from the nineteenth century to now, with Malaysians rating Malaysia highest, and Singaporeans rating Singapore highest. Malaysians rated Malaysia as distinctly more important at all periods of history, more than one point higher than all other countries. In Singapore, by contrast, most countries

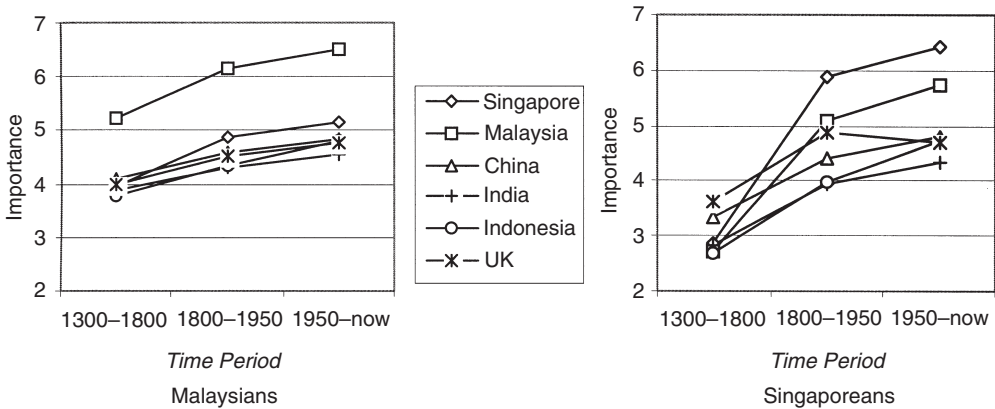


Figure 1 The importance of time and place in Malaysian and Singaporean history by nationality

increased in importance over time, and the UK and China were rated as most important during the period from 1300 to 1800. Contrary to hypotheses, and unlike previous research reported from New Zealand, ethnic Indians and Chinese did not rate their countries of origin higher than other ethnic groups did. This suggests that in-group ontogeny in historical representations is not an important source of identity for ethnic minority university students in Malaysia and Singapore. Similarly, ethnic Malays did not rate the distant past in Malaysia and Singapore (when their ancestors were present but not those of ethnic Chinese or Indians) especially highly. Evidence converges to suggest hegemonic representations of history in ratings of time and place among the student populations studied. No one group is especially focused on their own historical origins as are the Maori in New Zealand.

Important events

Similarly, within each country, there was little difference in the content of 10 most important events (see Tables 1 and 2 below). Although there were some differences between the nations and ethnicities, six events were named by all six ethnic/national groups. These were: (i) foundation of Singapore or Malaysia; (ii) British occupation; (iii) World War II and the Japanese Occupation; (iv) Independence (from Britain); (v) the race riots (1964 for Singapore, 1969 for Malaysia); and (vi) the end of the Singapore and Malaysian union. In addition, there were four events in the top 10 shared by all three ethnic groups in Singapore: the legendary founding of Singapore by Sung Nila Utama, the arrival of Raffles, the scientific development of Singapore, and the formation/election of the PAP. In Malaysia, all ethnic groups named the establishment of Melaka, interference of the foreign powers, WWI and II, and history of famous leaders in their top 10. Virtually all of the frequently named events in both Singaporean and Malaysian history were named by all of the ethnic groups. There was little or no evidence of polemics across ethnicity or nationality. Rather than being focused on ethnicity (e.g. the arrival of the ethnic groups was not considered to be an important historical event by any of the three ethnic groups nested within the two nations), the historical narrative here is about the development of nationhood from colonization to independence. Ethnic strife is noted as a cautionary tale to be avoided.

Table 1 Ten most important events in Singapore history by ethnic group

Chinese (<i>n</i> = 137)	%	Malay (<i>n</i> = 33)	%	Indian (<i>n</i> = 31)	%
1 WWII/Japanese occupation	94	Independence	79	Independence	77
2 Independence	82	Arrival of Raffles	76	End/Merger with Malaysia	68
3 End/Merger with Malaysia	73	WWII/Japanese occupation	73	Arrival of Raffles	65
4 Arrival of Raffles	64	End/Merger with Malaysia	70	WWII/Japanese occupation	58
5 Racial riots	51	Sung Nila Utama founds Singapore	48	Formation/election of People's Action Party	48
6 Formation/election of People's Action Party	36	Racial riots	42	Racial riots	45
7 Scientific development of Singapore	31	British occupation/control	37	Scientific development Singapore	26
8 Founding Singapore (no person)	30	Founding Singapore (no person)	27	British occupation/control	23
9 British occupation/control	29	Scientific development of Singapore	18	Founding Singapore (no person)	19
				Sung Nila Utama founds Singapore	19
				Anti-communism	19
10 Sung Nila Utama founds Singapore	20	Formation/election of People's Action Party	15	Deeds of Lee Kuan Yew	13

Table 2 Ten most important events in Malaysian history by ethnic group

Chinese (<i>n</i> = 52)	%	Malay (<i>n</i> = 89)	%	Indian (<i>n</i> = 42)	%
1 Independence	90	Independence	87	Independence	83
2 WWII/Japanese occupation	60	Race riots	46	WWII/Japanese occupation	43
3 British occupation/control	44	Interference of foreign powers	46	British occupation/control	40
4 Forming of Malaysia	44	WWII/Japanese occupation	44	Interference of foreign powers	38
5 Race riots	42	Forming of Malaysia	42	Forming of Malaysia	33
6 Interference of foreign powers	38	British occupation/control	40	Race riots	31
7 End/merger with Singapore	25	Melaka established	25	Melaka established	24
8 Melaka established	21	History of famous leaders	19	WWI & WWII	19
9 WWI & WWII	12	WWI & WWII	15	History of famous leaders	16
10 Depression	10	End/Merger with Singapore	12	Formation of political parties	14
History of famous leaders	10	Malayan union	12	New economic policy	14
Nationalism	10				

There were some slight differences across nationalities worth noting. In keeping with the relative size of the two nations, the end of the Singapore/Malaysian union was more important to Singaporeans (72%) than Malaysians (16%). The establishment of Melaka was named by 24% of Malaysians, while the equivalent 'founding event' for Singapore (arrival of Raffles) was named by 66% of Singaporeans. Overall, there was stronger agreement in Singapore (all events were named by 25% or more of the students) than in Malaysia (only seven of the 10 most important events were named by 24% or more). This suggests more hegemonic representations in Singapore than Malaysia.

Leaders

Participants were asked to name one leader they felt had done a lot for their country, and to name three qualities associated with that leader. In both cases the main figure named was the first political leader of the nation. Lee Kuan Yew was named by 93% ($n=186$) of Singaporeans, while Tunku Abdul Rahman was named by 70% ($n=128$) of Malaysians. Within nationality, there was no difference between the ethnic groups in naming a leader. There was overlap in the traits used to describe the two leaders, and most traits tended to be positive in nature. In total there were over 200 different words or phrases used to describe Lee Kuan Yew, and just under 100 different words or phrases used to describe Tunku Abdul Rahman. For easier comparison, descriptors were grouped into semantic categories, and the proportions of each type of descriptor can be seen in Table 3.

Detailed analysis showed that there were no major differences in words used to describe these two leaders according to ethnicity. In other words, all ethnic groups within a nation appeared to share the same (hegemonic) representation of their most important leader. Lee Kuan Yew was cited as having vision, determination, intellect and charisma. In contrast, the terms used to describe Tunku Abdul Rahman, were father of independence, patriotic, courageous, moral and a good leader. There was almost no variability in the positive tenor of the qualities ascribed to the leaders. These data, as the others before them, are hegemonic social representations. They constitute widely shared social consensus and are of little use as individual difference measures.

Table 3 Qualities ascribed to Lee Kuan Yew and Tunku Abdul Rahman

Lee Kuan Yew		Tunku Abdul Rahman	
Quality	<i>N</i> (%)	Quality	<i>N</i> (%)
Vision	98 (53)	Father of independence	46 (35)
Determination	90 (48)	Leadership	31 (24)
Intellect	81 (44)	Courageous/brave	30 (23)
Aggression	47 (25)	Patriotic	25 (20)
Charisma	38 (20)	Caliber	23 (18)
Leadership	31 (17)	Responsible	23 (18)
Diplomacy	30 (16)	Dedication	21 (16)
Political traits	27 (15)	Active work	21 (16)
Patriotic	8 (4)	Intellect	15 (12)
Responsible	7 (4)	Charisma	3 (2)

Separation of Singapore and Malaysia

By contrast, there was considerable difference across nationality, but not ethnicity, regarding the separation of the two nations. Participants were given a forced choice scenario describing the separation of Malaysia and Singapore in 1965. A multinomial analysis of variance using a Maximum Likelihood Chi-Square test statistic was used to analyze these data (Woodward *et al.*, 1990). The independent variables were nationality and ethnicity for all analyses. The procedure used is robust with unequal cell sizes, but because of the large number of significance tests reported, $P < 0.01$ was set as the significance level. To describe the results concisely, only significant differences are reported.

On the first word choice, where participants had to indicate whether Singapore was expelled/separated/withdrew from the federation of Malay, there was a significant difference between Singaporeans ($n=193$) and Malaysians ($n=181$). While both groups preferred the term 'separated' (Malaysians ($M=71\%$), Singaporeans ($S=61\%$)), Malaysians' second choice was 'withdrew' ($M=25\%$), whereas Singaporeans' was the harsher 'was expelled' ($S=21\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (2, $n=373$)=23.00, $P < 0.001$). In response to whether they thought this occurrence was beneficial/necessary/harmful to Singapore, Singaporeans (total $n=191$) were split between beneficial ($S=47\%$) and necessary ($S=43\%$), while Malaysians (total $n=181$) were definite that the separation was beneficial ($M=60\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (2, $n=371$)=9.30, $P < 0.01$). Only 35% of Malaysians preferred the intermediate choice 'necessary'. On the issue of the effect of the separation on Malaysia, again there were significant differences across nationality, with Singaporeans ($n=186$) considering it more necessary ($S=64\%$) than beneficial ($S=23\%$), while Malaysians ($n=177$) erred more towards the more beneficial ($M=45\%$) side of necessary ($M=37\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (2, $n=362$)=26.56, $P < 0.001$). For both these questions, 'harmful' was least preferred by both groups. Hence, there is little current acrimony surrounding the events of the 1960s that broke apart the two nations.

The next set of forced choice responses referred to the similarity of the two countries today. Malaysians (total $n=169$) responded that the two countries were still very similar ($M=60\%$), while Singaporeans (total $n=191$) preferred the response 'very different' ($S=73\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (1, $n=359$)=30.42, $P < 0.001$). There was overwhelming agreement that Singapore and Malaysia should cooperate more economically (90% in Singapore and 94% in Malaysia said yes). In terms of national defense, most participants preferred the middle option 'co-operate in joint efforts' ($S=80\%$, $M=62\%$), but Singaporeans (total $n=196$) were more likely to say the countries should 'not rely on each other' ($S=14\%$), whereas Malaysians (total $n=176$) preferred to 'strive to combine their forces' ($M=27\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (2, $n=371$)=15.13, $P < 0.001$). Singaporeans (total $n=195$) were more likely to say that they wished to remain two separate nations politically ($S=94\%$) than Malaysians (total $n=174$) more of whom supported the possibility of reuniting ($M=36\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (1, $n=368$)=33.40, $P < 0.001$).

In terms of dealing with ethnic issues, each group (193 Singaporeans and 168 Malaysians answered the question) believed that a policy similar to that held by their own country would work best ($S=70\%$, $M=64\%$) (Wald Chi-Square (2, $n=360$)=162.6, $P < 0.001$). An interaction effect showed that the ethnic groups most in favor of their own national policy were the Chinese in Singapore (83%, $n=109$ of 132), and the Malays in Malaysia (95%, $n=80$ of 84) (Wald Chi-Square (4, $n=360$)=102.10, $P < 0.001$). Among minority groups, there was considerably less support for their own nation's policy, with only 42% of Malays (13 of 31) and 43% of Indians (13 of 30) in Singapore and 30% of Chinese (14 of 50) and

38% of Indians (12 of 34) in Malaysia favoring their own nation's policy. Among minority groups, the preferred option was a policy similar to neither country's.

In summary, analyses of the separation between Malaysia and Singapore revealed significant differences according to nationality, with participants from each nation more likely to favor a more self-serving point of view. There were no ethnicity main effects, and the only interaction of ethnicity with nationality was concerning racial policy, indicating once again the absence of polemical representations across different ethnic groups. Rather, intergroup perceptions across nationality predominated.

Summary

Social representations

Singaporean and Malaysian university students' representations of history could best be described as hegemonic. There were virtually no differences across ethnic groups within each of the two nations on the importance of time and place, on open-ended nominations of the 10 most important events in the nation's history, or the nomination and representation of the nation's most important leader. There was no evidence of ontogenic focus at the ethnic level, with Chinese and Indians rating China and India no more important to Singapore and Malaysian history than Malays, and Malays rating the distant past of the region no more important than Chinese and Indians. Further, the arrival of the three ethnic groups played no part in the open-ended nominations assessing the representation of history. Finally, representations of the nation's most important leader were uniformly positive and identical across the three ethnic groups within each nation.

There was a tendency for each nationality to display self-serving biases as regards the separation of the two nations, but the representations were more emancipated than polemical, and they were not colored by ethnicity. The lack of polemics across the border is probably an important factor in the lack of polemics within the two nations. Given the evidence above, we predict that there should be strong positive correlations between ethnic and national identity for all ethnic groups nested within the two nations.

National and ethnic identity

National identity and ethnic identity were each measured towards the end of the questionnaire using a 12-item Likert scale developed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992; the membership, private, and identity subscales). Overall Cronbach's alphas for the 12 items were 0.89 for both ethnicity and nationality. The three subscales were highly intercorrelated. Because of this, the items were totaled, and overall individual means of ethnic and national identity were used. Table 4 shows the overall levels of national and ethnic identity for the six groups surveyed, and the correlations between national and ethnic identity.

As seen in Table 4, national identity and ethnic identity correlated positively, supporting our hypotheses and the notion of interconnectedness (Cinnirella, 1996). There was no significant difference between Singapore and Malaysia on the level of national identity ($F_{1,378} = 1.097$). As predicted, Malaysians had significantly higher ethnic identity than Singaporeans ($F_{1,378} = 16.3$, $P < 0.001$). Their ethnic identity was significantly higher than their national identity ($F_{1,181} = 35.68$, $P < 0.01$). Chinese had a higher level of national identity than Malays or Indians in both Singapore ($F_{2,197} = 5.49$, $P < 0.01$) and Malaysia ($F_{2,181} = 10.67$, $P < 0.01$).

Table 4 Levels of national and ethnic identification by nationality and ethnicity

	Singapore				Malaysia			
	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Total	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Total
National ID	5.05	4.78	4.46	4.92	5.20	4.71	4.68	4.84
(SD)	(0.91)	(0.89)	(1.09)	(0.96)	(0.73)	(0.50)	(0.88)	(0.71)
Ethnic ID	5.39	5.25	4.88	5.29	5.64	6.23	5.14	5.81
(SD)	(0.89)	(0.98)	(1.14)	(0.96)	(1.31)	(0.75)	(1.46)	(1.20)
Correlation between national and ethnic ID	0.600**	0.665**	0.311	0.567**	0.600**	0.451**	0.370*	0.394**

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level; **correlation is significant at 0.01 level. ID, identification.

Chinese also had the highest ethnic identity in Singapore ($F_{2,197}=3.55$, $P<0.05$), while in Malaysia, Malays were higher on ethnic identity than Chinese or Indians ($F_{2,179}=14.41$, $P<0.01$).

The lowest correlation between national and ethnic identity, and the only one that failed to reach significance was for ethnic Indians in Singapore. It is important to note that the correlation between ethnic and national identity was lowest for this group, and that the second lowest correlation was for ethnic Indians in Malaysia. This may be an indication that Indians may feel somewhat marginalized in the national consciousness of both countries.

Preferred identity

Participants were asked which term they preferred to describe themselves with one of six options. They could choose to describe themselves as Singaporean (in the Singapore sample) or Malaysian (in the Malaysian sample), or in terms of their ethnicity (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian) or they could choose 'other' and specify their term of preference. In the Singaporean sample, participants preferred to describe themselves in terms of their nationality, whereas in the Malaysian sample, participants preferred to describe themselves in terms of their ethnicity (see Table 5 below).

The preference for the national label in Singapore and the ethnic label in Malaysia was shown most strongly by the majority (dominant) group and minority (subordinate) group in each society. In other words, in Singapore, Malays (who could be seen to be situated in the middle of the power hierarchy) were fairly evenly divided between the term Malay and the term Singaporean, whereas the Chinese (dominant group) and the Indians (subordinate group) preferred the national label. Similarly in Malaysia, the dominant (Malay) and subordinate (Indian) groups were clear in their preference for the ethnic label, while Chinese were divided evenly between the ethnic and the national label.

These data suggest that everything is not entirely as consensual as previous data indicated. The greatest congruence between national policy (i.e. preference for national label in Singapore, for ethnic label in Malaysia) and self-description was among the dominant ethnic majorities in each country, while the minority groups held a somewhat different view. Correlation between the continuous scale measure of national identity and the dummy-coded forced choice (choice of ethnic label = 1, national label = 2) labeling measure was modest

Table 5 Percentages of the ethnic/national groups preferring an ethnic or national label

Preferred label	Participant ethnicity and nationality					
	Singapore			Malaysia		
	Chinese (<i>n</i> = 137)	Malay (<i>n</i> = 33)	Indian (<i>n</i> = 31)	Chinese (<i>n</i> = 52)	Malay (<i>n</i> = 89)	Indian (<i>n</i> = 42)
Singaporean/Malaysian	77	39	58	46	19	29
Chinese	20	–	–	54	–	–
Malay	–	36	–	–	81	–
Indian	–	–	32	–	–	71
Other	3	25	10	–	–	–

but significant $r = 0.17$ ($P < 0.01$); as would be expected given the forced choice labeling format, the continuous measure of ethnic identity had a small but significant negative correlation with preference for national label ($r = -0.18$, $r < 0.01$).

Regression analyses on national identity

Finally, to summarize, regression analyses were run separately on the data from Singapore and Malaysia on strength of national identity. Independent variables were entered in two blocks: first, a demographic block consisting of gender (1 = female, 2 = male), and minority ethnic group (dummy coded, 1 = not a member of the particular group, 2 = member of the ethnic group; majority ethnicity was not entered because of problems with multicollinearity); second, strength of ethnic identity and preference for the national label were entered as a subjective identity block. All beta weights reported are standardized.

In Singapore, demographics only had an effect in step 1. Indian ethnicity was a negative predictor of national identity ($B = -0.23$, $P < 0.002$), but this effect dropped out after controlling for subjective identity. Both ethnic identification ($B = 0.58$) and preference for the national label ($B = 0.22$) were highly significant positive predictors of national identity ($P < 0.0001$) in the final equation, whereas none of the demographics were significant (see Table 6). The overall regression equation accounted for 37% of the variance in the dependent variable (adj $R^2 = 0.37$) and was highly significant, $F_{5,193} = 24.4$, $P < 0.0001$.

A different pattern was found in Malaysia. Both Chinese ($B = 0.39$) and Indian demographic ethnicity ($B = 0.16$) remained significant positive predictors of national identity even after controlling for subjective identity. Ethnic identification ($B = 0.50$) was the single best predictor of national identity, just as in Singapore, but preference for national label was not significant ($B = 0.12$, $P < 0.10$). The overall regression equation accounted for 30% of the variance and was highly significant, $F_{5,172} = 16.3$, $P < 0.0001$.

Discussion

Social representations of history in Singapore and Malaysia displayed a far greater consensus than previously found in New Zealand. Four different measures of historical representations

Table 6 Standardized beta coefficients for regression on strength of national identity for Singapore and Malaysia

	Singapore	Malaysia
Gender (1 = F/2 = M)	-0.09	-0.01
Malay (1 = non-Malay/2 = Malay)	0.01	Not included
Indian (1 = non-Indian/2 = Indian)	-0.06	0.16*
Chinese (1 = non-Chinese/2 = Chinese)	Not included	0.39**
Ethnic identification	0.58**	0.51***
Preference for national label	0.22**	0.12 ⁺
TOTAL Adjusted R ²	0.37	0.30

⁺ $P < 0.10$, * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.0001$.

– closed-ended ratings of the importance of time and place, open-ended nominations of most important historical events and leaders, and forced word choices of terms regarding the separation of the two nations – converged on the conclusion that among university students of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnicity, representations of history were unambiguously hegemonic, or consensually shared within each nation. Furthermore, representations of the potentially contentious separation between the two nations were emancipated, with relatively smoothly interacting different versions being held across the border.

Unlike New Zealanders, who represented their history as the story of interactions between two ethnic groups (Liu *et al.*, 1999), Singaporeans and Malaysians represented their histories as the development of a nation from colonization to independence. There was no sense of ethnic in-group ontogeny, or focus on creating a narrative about historical origins at the ethnic level among any of the groups. An important question for future analysis is why. It may be that the ontogenic focus obtained among Maori in New Zealand is unique to indigenous groups. For these groups, a focus on the past is particularly advantageous as it warrants their position as ‘first peoples’ and helps in the recovery of language and traditions. Ethnic Indians and ethnic Chinese may see themselves as ‘better off’ in Singapore and Malaysia than in India or China, whereas Maori have nowhere else to go. This does not explain the lack of ontogenic focus among ethnic Malays, however.

Alternatively, it could be that media, education, and freedom of speech are more carefully controlled by the state in Malaysia and Singapore than in the West, so that alternative views of history are not taught or given voice. As both Malaysians and Singaporeans are highly sensitive to ethnic issues because of the memory of the race riots in the 1960s, the institutional banding together of a single account of their history may be one way to protect harmonious relations among ethnic groups, and simultaneously suppress dissent.

Unlike in New Zealand (Liu *et al.*, 1999), where Maoris are actively striving for some degree of autonomy and identity salience and are using history as a resource, there seems to be little tendency among Malaysian or Singaporean students to trace their roots back to their ethnic ancestors in representing history. This may be a property of the relatively uncontested nature of race relations in these countries at present. It may be that history only becomes disputed among members of different ethnic groups during a resurgence in minority identity (Taylor & McKirnan, 1984; see Liu, 1999b). Also, it may be that only a historical event of the order of war, with enduring ramifications for land tenure and other resources is likely to be used as a divisive lever between people (Dresler-Hawke & Liu, under review).

The level of consensus found here, while not providing as interesting a story as the disputed history of New Zealand (Liu *et al.*, 1999), is crucial in showing the strides towards nationhood that both Singapore and Malaysia have taken. It reminds us that history is a social construction, where sometimes a lever that could potentially be used to divide people (i.e. the separation of Singapore and Malaysia) does not function so. However, a major reservation about the data reported here are that the findings are restricted to tertiary students. For Malaysia, a very geographically and demographically diverse nation (see Ishmail & Othman, 1999), this is particularly important. Even so, these findings should not be underestimated, as university students can be an important source of social unrest at the intellectual level of society (Liu *et al.*, 1999).

The levels of national and ethnic identity for the two nations illustrate the different ways in which identity can be constructed. National identity and ethnic identity are relatively high in both Singapore and Malaysia, and their high positive correlation supports Cinnirella's (1996) notion of the interconnectedness of group identities. Both governments appear to have been successful, at least in their universities, at creating a positive link between national and ethnic identity. In accord with hypotheses, the hegemonic representations of history found within both nations and the emancipated representations across the two nations were associated with strongly positive associations between ethnic and national identity.

However, while national identity and ethnic identity were at more or less equivalent levels in Singapore, in Malaysia, ethnic identity was significantly higher than national identity, especially among members of the politically dominant Malay group. These differences highlight a crucial finding of the current research: that the strength of ethnic identification seems to be contingent upon the rewards associated with that identity rather than being any fixed property of majority – minority status or historical representations. In Singapore, ethnic identity was slightly higher than national identity for all three ethnic groups, and Chinese had the highest levels of both ethnic and national identity. In Malaysia, Malays held the strongest ethnic identification and Chinese had the strongest national identity. The level of correlation between ethnic and national identity was lowest among ethnic Indians in both nations.

A highly functional interpretation can be applied to these findings: (1) that Chinese have the highest stake in maintaining the national identity of Singapore, and they do so by supporting the official political milieu of multiculturalism; and (2) that Malays benefit from having special status as Malays in Malaysia, and so are strongest in ethnic identity. Chinese in Malaysia would like to see a stronger level of national identity to protect their interests as a politically disadvantaged ethnic group, and ethnic Indians, as subordinate minorities in both nations, see the least connection between their ethnicity and the national identity. In both nations, the dominant ethnic group most strongly supported official policy: multiculturalism in Singapore (where by law each young person must learn both English and another language, mostly their ethnic group language), and Malay nationalism in Malaysia (where by law Malay is the national language and Islam the national religion).

Regression analyses revealed that minority demographic status was a significant positive predictor of national identity even after controlling for subjective identification (ethnic identity and choice of label) in Malaysia, but not in Singapore. This result suggests that ethnicity is more sensitive an issue in Malaysia, because the effect of demographic ethnicity is not captured by the more global variables used to measure subjective identification. In Malaysia, Chinese and Indians feel differently about the relationship between various aspects of their ethnicity and the national identity than Malays. The same does not hold true for minority groups in Singapore.

Overall, results suggest there is no one-to-one correspondence between such factors as majority and minority status and strength of identification as some experimental research might suggest, but rather that these factors are contingent upon national policies and social representations. Present results suggest that an official policy of multiculturalism (Singapore) can be as effective or more effective in promoting a positive relationship between ethnic and national identity, as an official policy promoting a single national language or religion (Malaysia). This would certainly have ramifications for the USA, where debate rages over which path is better (Prentice & Miller, 1999). According to our insights, the key is not multiculturalism *versus* assimilation, but the representations associated with these. There can be highly controlled, hegemonic, and consensual representations of nationhood even within multiculturalism. We surmise that the tight links between government and media are critical in allowing Singapore to have both an official policy of multiculturalism and strong consensus across ethnic groups concerning nationhood and history.

Although the present research has demonstrated an association between hegemonic social representations of history and positive links between ethnic and national identity, it has not ascertained the causal paths between these factors. Are polemical social representations a cause or an outcome of intergroup conflict? Does freedom of the press moderate the relationship between these two? Are hegemonic social representations a cause or outcome of national unity? While we believe there is a dynamic link between social representations of history and intergroup relations, it remains for future research to determine the exact form and function of this link. Future research should use broader samples, and develop measures of ethnic and national identity that are less restricted by method variance than those used in the present research. Understanding the link between national and ethnic identity through the medium of social representations may be a fruitful area of research for years to come.

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