

# Postmodern patriotism: teachers' perceptions of loyalty to Singapore

Shuyi Chua and Jasmine B.-Y. Sim

*National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

Received 19 January 2016  
Revised 9 October 2016  
Accepted 20 October 2016

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore humanities teachers' perceptions of patriotism in Singapore by addressing two questions. First, what are teachers' understandings of patriotism? Second, what are teachers' attitudes toward patriotism as a quality of good citizenship?

**Design/methodology/approach** – The qualitative case study approach was used, with semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as data sources. The participants were four teachers from diverse backgrounds with distinct perceptions of patriotism. Data analysis methods included writing teacher profiles and thematic coding.

**Findings** – Teachers were generally positive toward patriotism and understood it in four ways: cosmopolitan, nationalistic, social-movement and person oriented. These themes were not mutually exclusive but distributed across the participants in varying extents. These findings show that patriotism is susceptible to individual meaning-making, and there are different scales and expressions of patriotism.

**Research limitations/implications** – The results from this small case study cannot be generalized. However, owing to globalization, it is likely that alternative ways of understanding patriotism might become more widespread and salient in citizenship education. Hence, the authors recommend that more studies be conducted on larger samples and using other methods.

**Originality/value** – This study goes in-depth into a case where teachers had positive feelings toward patriotism, and it draws on the context of Singapore to understand how and why this is so. It also revealed conceptions of patriotism that differ from the more common constructs in the educational literature, suggesting that people from post-colonial countries with different histories, might conceive of patriotism differently from others.

**Keywords** Singapore, Patriotism, Loyalty, Cosmopolitanism, Civic education, Patriotic education, Citizenship education, National education, Nationalistic education, Teachers' perceptions

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Patriotism is commonly defined as loyalty to the country, an identification with it, and a willingness to act on its behalf (Kleinig *et al.*, 2015). Patriotism is a term so commonplace that the concept invokes timelessness; yet, it is not so. Patriotism has a long history, and its meanings and connotations have evolved over the years (Cunningham, 1981; Dietz, 2002). Considering this, it is not surprising that patriotism is a term to which many have imputed varying meanings. Today, there are many variants of patriotism. Patriotism can mean a sense of duty and service to the state, opposition to the government or king in the name of constitutional principles, or even opposition to the centralized state and capitalism (Cunningham, 1981; Dietz, 2002).

While patriotism may be rich in meanings, these meanings are seldom explored in the educational literature (Kennedy, 2010; Peterson, 2012). There is a notion that patriotism is blind and educating about patriotism is indoctrination. In this study, we argue that we can gain a better understanding of patriotism by exploring teachers' conceptions of it. Schools being situated in nation-states, and often publicly funded, are accountable to their governments and people for the kinds of citizens they educate. In this respect, teachers play an important mediating role between what is officially expected and what is eventually enacted



---

(Lee and Fouts, 2005). Yet we know little about how teachers understand patriotism. Exploring teachers' perceptions of patriotism in Singapore will not only extend the ongoing conversation about patriotism from other humanities and social sciences fields into education, but it should also inform us how socialization into citizenship takes place in schools.

Hence, the aim of this study is to illustrate a variety of understandings and attitudes present amongst four humanities teachers in Singapore, by answering two questions. First, what are teachers' understandings of patriotism? Second, what are teachers' attitudes toward patriotism as a quality of citizenship? We used the qualitative method to address the first question to avoid imposing strict a priori constructs on the data, instead allowing teachers' understandings to emerge from the ground up. To address the second issue, we designed an elicitation task using 13 qualities of citizenship to explore teachers' attitudes toward patriotism *vis-à-vis* other qualities (Lee and Fouts, 2005).

### Literature review

Previous research on teachers' perceptions of patriotism falls into two strands: studies on teachers' understandings of patriotism and teachers' attitudes toward patriotism as a quality of good citizenship.

#### *Teachers' understandings of patriotism*

Advocacy literature in support of a more critical form of patriotism over the more uncritical form blossomed in the 1990s and 2000s independently in different parts of the world, such as in Hong Kong (Lee and Sweeting, 2001), South Africa (Waghid, 2009) and the USA (Merry, 2009). Usually, they have been triggered by political transitions or crises that make scholars question the nature of citizens' devotion to their countries. These scholars typically write from a liberal point of view, which espouses democratic thinking and liberalism, and opposes authoritarian and conservative ideas (Chua and Sim, 2016). For example, the most prominent theoretical constructs on patriotism in the education field are Westheimer's (2009) democratic and authoritarian patriotism, Staub's (2003) constructive and blind patriotism, and Merry's (2009) critical and loyal patriotism. These constructs focus mainly on the political aspect of patriotism and are concerned primarily with the citizen's relationship to the state (Peterson, 2012), whereas patriotism could mean more than that, including the citizen's relationship with other citizens, with the land and with culture (Muckle, 2003). Few theoretical studies in the educational field have examined patriotism holistically. A possible reason for this is that liberal scholars have taken the lead in this field, structuring patriotism in a way that is important to them. Hence, their ideas have dominated the literature.

Consequently, studies on teachers' perceptions of patriotism have tended to rely on the aforementioned theoretical constructs in their research design and analysis. For example, Leung (2007) and Yuen and Byram (2007) were interested in how "critical" Hong Kong teachers' understandings of patriotism were. Similarly, Yau (2009) used "critical patriotism" as a means to evaluate Hong Kong teachers' attitudes toward patriotism. In a study by Fairbrother (2003), it was also the criticality of Chinese and Hong Kong students' patriotism that was of interest. Staub's (2003) constructive and blind forms of patriotism have also been popular scales upon which teachers' attitudes to patriotism have been measured (Wang *et al.*, 2006; Tonga and Aksoy, 2014). These dichotomous categories are useful for measuring patriotism in teachers, but are limited, as teachers relate to their countries not only through critical engagement or dissent, but also by embracing cosmopolitanism, cultural plurality and equal participation in a community (Leung and Print, 2002). Imposing a well-established theory on a developing inquiry may provide a neat framework, but it can also "prematurely shut down avenues of meaningful questioning or prevent [us] from seeing events and relationships that don't fit the theory [...] theory can provide perspective and suggest

pattern[s], but it need not define what [we] can see” (Schram, 2006, p. 60). For example, the New Zealand (Hirshberg, 1998) and the Russian (Muckle, 2003) conceptions of patriotism are strongly linked to landscapes and customs, but scholars struggle to locate such instinctive and sentimental patriotism that does not necessarily stem from reason.

*Teachers’ attitudes toward patriotism*

Another group of studies has examined teachers’ attitudes toward patriotism as a quality of good citizenship. This idea of patriotism as an important ingredient of good citizenship was explored by Lee and Fouts (2005) in their international study on teachers’ understandings of good citizenship across five countries – Australia, China, England, Russia and the USA and more recently in Singapore (Sim *et al.*, 2012). In the survey, teachers were asked to give their support for 13 qualities of citizenship covering cognition, social concern and traditional citizenship (Table I).

Findings from these studies revealed diverse attitudes toward patriotism across countries. By giving least weight to patriotism, it has been inferred that some teachers from the USA (Brown, 2005), Australia (Prior, 2005) and England (Davies *et al.*, 2005) did not consider patriotism an important quality of good citizenship, compared to other qualities. In fact, it can be gleaned from the interviews accompanying the survey, that some teachers strongly rejected patriotism as a quality of good citizenship. For example, Prior (2005, p. 123) reported “ambivalence” amongst Australian teachers, who often saw patriotism in the “negative.” Davies *et al.* (2005, pp. 169-170) found similarly that English teachers had negative attitudes toward patriotism and were uneasy whenever they talked about national symbols, such as flags, anthems and the monarchy. In another New Zealand study, teachers were skeptical about patriotism, and questioned the need for overt displays of symbolic actions like flag-waving and national anthems, associating patriotism with a “narrow, uncritical form of citizenship” (Milligan *et al.*, 2011, p. 9). In an independent study conducted in England, teachers shied away from talking about patriotism in the classroom because they worried it would cause division (Hand and Pearce, 2011). To one teacher, it even “reeked of the old British Empire” (p. 414).

By contrast, teachers from Russia (Ellis and Brown, 2005) and China (Lee, 2005) had positive attitudes toward patriotism. Even though patriotism was not necessarily ranked the most important quality of good citizenship, the fact that it was not ranked last suggested a more positive attitude (Table I). In their interviews, teachers in Russia deemed “loyalty to country, in good times and bad [...] as an essential element of good citizenship” (Ellis and Brown, 2005, p. 203). The authors also revealed that this “intense spirit of nationalism [...] in which the good citizen is clearly identified as one who is patriotic and loyal to the state” was the strongest theme that emerged from the interviews with the Russian teachers (p. 207). Most telling was the response of one teacher, “A citizen is [...] a synonym of being a patriot. Good citizenship is patriotism” (Ellis and Brown, 2005). Chinese teachers similarly held patriotism in high regard. Lee (2005, p. 232) found that most teachers felt that patriotism was “strongly tied” to good citizenship and “a good citizen should love his or her country and even make sacrifices for the good of the collective.” Studies conducted independently in China (Fairbrother, 2004), South Africa (Schoeman, 2006), Iran (Vajargah, 2009) and Turkey (Ersoy and Öztürk, 2015) similarly showed that teachers esteemed patriotism highly.

Collectively, these studies suggest that patriotism is a concept that defies neat categorization, as teachers often differed in their understandings and attitudes toward it. Notably, in a study that did explore this complexity, teachers in Hong Kong were found to have a dual interpretation of patriotism (Yau, 2009). They approved of a broad love for the motherland but disapproved of a narrow loyalty to the state. The differences of views of

Country	USA	Australia	England	Russia	Guang Zhou (China)	Hang Zhou (China)	Hong Kong (China)	Singapore
Sample size	825	377	679	681	81	502	733	1,606
Patriotism rank	13th	13th	13th	8th	5th	1st	8th	5th
<i>Rank order</i>								
1	Moral	Concern	Concern	Acceptance	Knowledge	Patriotism	Fulfillment	Moral
2	Fulfillment	Moral	Moral	Moral	Tolerance	Moral	Knowledge	Tolerance
3	Concern	Tolerance	Tolerance	Knowledge	Fulfillment	Knowledge	Government	Fulfillment
4	Make Wise	Ability	Fulfillment	Make wise	Participation	Make wise <sup>a</sup>	Moral	Concern
5	Tolerance	Fulfillment	Ability	Concern	Patriotism <sup>a</sup>	Fulfillment <sup>a</sup>	Concern	Patriotism
6	Acceptance	Make wise	Make wise	Ability	World <sup>a</sup>	Government	Make wise	Make wise
7	Ability	Knowledge	Acceptance	Participation	Moral	Ability	Ability <sup>a</sup>	Knowledge
8	Authority	Acceptance	Participation	Patriotism	Concern	Concern	Tolerance <sup>a</sup>	Government
9	Participation	Participation	Authority	Fulfillment	Ability	Participation	Patriotism	Ability
10	Knowledge	World	Knowledge	Authority	Make wise	Acceptance	World	Acceptance
11	Government	Government	World	Tolerance	Government	World	Participation	World
12	World	Authority	Government	Government	Acceptance	Tolerance	Acceptance	Participation
13	Patriotism	Patriotism	Patriotism	World	Authority	Authority	Authority	Authority

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Same rank. Ability, ability to question ideas; acceptance, acceptance of assigned responsibility; authority, acceptance of authority of those in supervisory roles; concern, concern for the welfare of others; fulfillment, fulfillment of families responsibilities; government, knowledge of government; knowledge, knowledge of current events; make wise, ability to make wise decisions; moral, moral and ethical behavior; participation, participation in community or school affairs; patriotism, patriotism; tolerance, tolerance of diversity within society; world, knowledge of world community

**Table I.**  
International teachers'  
perceptions of  
patriotism as a quality  
of good citizenship

teachers from different countries, also suggests how governments have used or have not used patriotism as an ideological tool to influence understandings and attitudes toward patriotism. Hence, we will now turn to the Singaporean context to understand how the Singapore government has been using patriotism as an ideological apparatus.

**The Singaporean context**

Singapore achieved independence in 1965, inheriting a culturally heterogeneous population of migrants from China, Malaya and India from the British. Being a multi-ethnic state, the government has deliberately promoted the Singaporean national identity as that which takes precedence over other identities of language, race and religion. Singapore has been governed by the People’s Action Party (PAP) since independence, allowing for an uninterrupted process of nation-building. The PAP government has strong legitimacy given how it had transformed Singapore from a third to a first world country in a matter of decades, with its citizens enjoying one of the highest standards of living on earth. The government has direct influence over compulsory mass education, and has used it to instil loyalty to the country (Chia, 2015) through the daily flag-raising ceremony, via subjects like social studies and history, and with special events such as National Day.

**Methodology**

A case study approach was taken to study teachers’ perceptions of patriotism (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). This study was part of a larger study of ten teachers from an independent secondary school in Singapore. Four teachers of diverse backgrounds who had distinct perspectives of patriotism were purposefully selected for this study (Table II). Humanities teachers were chosen to facilitate the observation of national issues in classroom discussions.

Two sources of data were collected. First, we conducted two hour-long semi-structured interviews with teachers individually, on citizenship and patriotism. Examples of questions included: “How important is it for a citizen to be patriotic?” and, “Who comes to mind when you think of patriotism?” We also designed an elicitation task that involved teachers arranging a set of 13 cards, each representing a quality of good citizenship (Lee and Fouts, 2005), in a manner meaningful to them, and explaining the reasons for their arrangements. This task was designed to reveal teachers’ implicit attitudes toward patriotism (Barton, 2015). Second, we observed an average of six lessons per teacher. Each lesson observation was followed by informal chats to ascertain if teachers’ perceptions of patriotism carried over to the classroom.

Analysis was data-derived and inductive, involving three steps. First, detailed case profiles were written to gain a holistic understanding of each teacher. Second, the case profiles were scrutinized multiple times (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) and key ideas were highlighted and hand-sorted into intuitively derived categories of patriotism. At this stage, we realized that features of patriotism were not always mutually exclusive but could be distributed across participants in varying extents. Third, we wrote each theme a parsimonious storyline, capturing the categories represented in the data. To avoid undue

**Table II.**  
Profile of teachers

Teacher	Teaching subject	Disciplinary background	Teaching experience (years)	Ethnicity	Gender	Age
Faria	Social studies	History, geography	16	Malay	Female	41
Harry	Social studies	History	8	Chinese	Male	33
Teck	Social studies	Sociology, political science, economics, southeast asian studies	15	Chinese	Male	44
Siti	Geography	Geography	13	Malay	Female	42

subjectivity in interpreting the data, we conducted member checking by e-mailing the interview transcripts with preliminary interpretations to each teacher, and we ensured both authors had observed each teacher at least once to compare field notes and to come to a consensus whenever there were differences in interpretations.

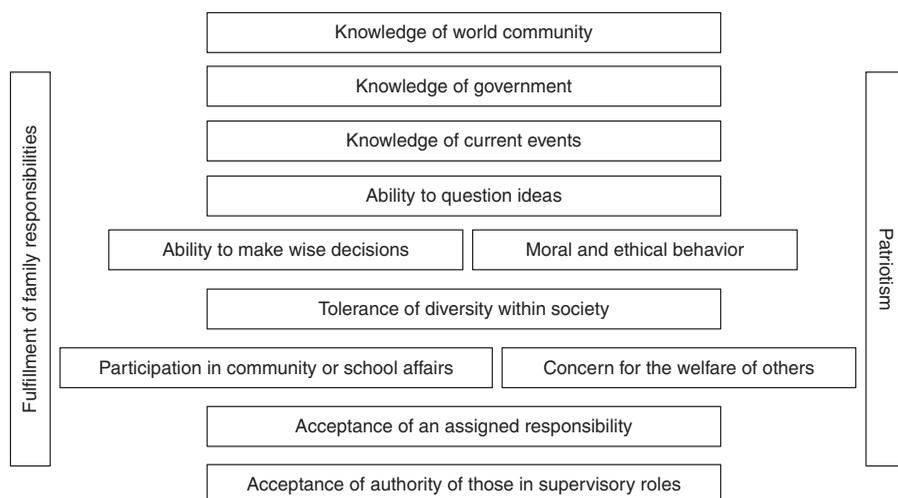
### Findings

Teachers' conceptions of patriotism were categorized as cosmopolitan, nationalistic, social-movement and person oriented. Not all teachers exemplified all four types of patriotism. For example, Faria's patriotism lacked nationalistic and person-oriented features, and Harry's patriotism lacked social-movement features.

#### *Cosmopolitan patriotism*

Cosmopolitan patriotism is a simultaneous love for the nation and the world. Appiah (2002) cogently argued that "cosmopolitans *can* be patriots" (author's emphasis, p. 26), and showed that in this complex world, there are people whose affinities are not fixed in a single locality. This progressive view is obvious in Faria's understanding of patriotism. Faria was neutral toward patriotism, seeing it as a given within the larger concept of citizenship. To explain citizenship, she created a list (Figure 1).

First on the list was knowledge of world communities, followed by knowledge of governments. She explained that "increasingly our belonging to a country extends beyond political boundaries and we see ourselves as global citizens," She elaborated, "as the world transits into different forms of bilateral and regional organizations, the singular government may become redundant and we must look at inter- or intra-governmental efforts." To demonstrate the interdependence of countries, she introduced regional and global perspectives to her lessons. For example, she conducted lessons on different systems of government. In her interviews, she also acknowledged students who contributed to humanitarian causes, citing examples of former students who had "been around the world [...] in war stricken, drought, famine places" to volunteer as doctors and lawyers. Although Faria clearly articulated the ideal of world citizenship, she concurrently supported national citizenship, expressing her affection for "the place we call home." She shared that a patriot was also rooted and obligated to her family, friends and colleagues, saying,



**Figure 1.**  
Faria's arrangement  
of the 13 qualities of  
good citizenship

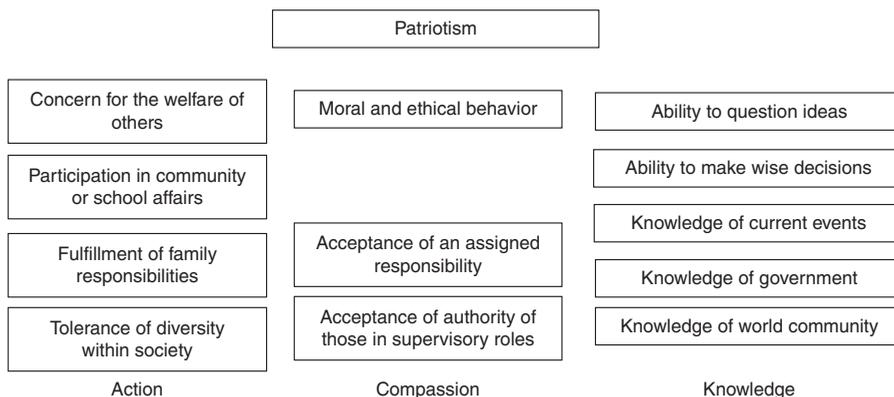
“I love this country because of the memories I have sown here, [the] people I’ve met and relationships I have established.” Hence, like Appiah (2002), Faria did not see cosmopolitanism as being antithetical to patriotism.

Faria was the only cosmopolitan patriot. The other three teachers’ understandings of patriotism were localized. For example, Harry defined patriotism as a “strong sense of belonging to Singapore” and described a patriot as “rooted” and “committed to helping Singapore overcome whatever problems [it] faced.” Similarly, Teck understood patriotism in a localized sense. It did not have to be an abstract concept, he explained, “so long [as] the interests of the people I love are taken care of by my actions and I have the right impact on their well-being, I am contributing to the notion of patriotism.” Similarly, Siti emphasized that citizens should contribute to the local community.

*Nationalistic patriotism*

Nationalistic patriotism is patriotism directed toward the nation-state. Nationalistic teachers have a strong sense of national consciousness and commitment to upholding and transmitting the core national values to their students (Sim and Print, 2009). The three teachers who saw patriotism in local terms also perceived patriotism as nationalistic. Of them, Harry exemplified nationalistic patriotism most. In his arrangement of the qualities of good citizenship, he created a construct called “the ability to question, balanced with respect for authority” where he explained that citizens must not overstep boundaries (Chua and Sim, 2015), but fulfill their responsibilities to the state (Figure 2). Harry conflated patriotism with citizenship, and was positive about patriotism.

Nationalistic patriotism is associated with military service and the sacrifice of life (Dietz, 2002). For Harry, and also for Siti, the most paradigmatic duty of patriotism is to fight for the country during a war. This reflected former prime minister, Goh Chok Tong’s (2002) rhetoric on the “stayers” and “quitters” in Singapore. Stayers, referred to patriots who persevered, while quitters referred to cowards who abandoned the country during difficult times. Like former PM Goh, Harry argued that a patriot defends the country. He said, “In the event of war, what would you do? If you stay on and fight, you are patriotic but if you take the next flight out, then you are not patriotic.” Harry also described the founding fathers of Singapore, such as Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee, as patriots, as they laid the foundation for national progress. Patriotic behaviors involved “contributing to society,” while unpatriotic behaviors manifested in “self-preservation.” In one of the interviews, Harry talked about a newspaper article that compared the Nordic welfare system with Singapore’s, and he expressed concern about “whether Singaporeans would be



**Figure 2.** Teck’s arrangement of the 13 qualities of good citizenship

willing to bear the burden” by paying higher premiums to support the aging population in time to come. This state-centricity was also reflected in his lessons. Harry adhered closely to the syllabus recommended by the Ministry of Education, helping students to understand how the Singaporean system worked and why it was good.

Nationalistic patriotism was also reflected by teachers who honoured systems and symbols sustained and created by the state. Teck talked about the importance of participating in the election, to cast one’s vote and respect the outcome. Siti talked about the importance of the flag and anthem as symbols of a nation. She explained, “It sets the tone about what it means to be a citizen, and part of the country.” In contrast to the other three teachers, Faria rejected nationalistic patriotism. During an interview, she said that national history “is a narrative of the government, written by the government for the people and a narrative shaped by political interests.” She was wary of the vested interest of the government and stressed that a citizen could be a patriot regardless of political inclinations.

*Social-movement patriotism*

Social-movement patriotism is expressed as a form of activism and public-spiritedness, that evolves from “a shared struggle and self-sacrifice for a common cause” (Dietz, 2002, p. 208). Teck’s description of patriotism and citizenship most exemplifies social-movement patriotism. In his arrangement of the 13 qualities of good citizenship, like Harry’s, patriotism was the overarching concept, under which all other qualities were subsumed (Figure 3). Next, he arranged the 12 qualities into three dimensions: knowledge, compassion and action. He explained, “I see them as distinct spheres that you need to have if patriotism is a goal” and the three spheres “work together,” meaning that “if you don’t have knowledge and compassion, you can’t take action.” Teck’s way of understanding patriotism reflected “socially concerned citizenship” whereby the community is engaged in local issues and concerns (Sim and Print, 2009, p. 714). Teck esteemed patriotism highly, giving it equal status with citizenship.

Similarly to Teck, Faria’s and Siti’s understandings of patriotism also exemplified social-movement patriotism. They talked about standing up for a cause, and taking appropriate actions for community impact. Faria said that patriotism was about “social advocacy” and it involved helping those “lesser off than you get better” and “making a positive impact to their lives.” This participation could either be “a very small act” which impacts a few or “a big act” which impacts many. Its power lies in the creation of a “ripple effect” as others could “pay it forward.” For Siti, a patriot was interested in national issues and committed to making changes in the community. She described patriotism actively, as “not only a sense of knowing that you belong to this country but also what you can demonstrate as a citizen.” Siti’s patriot does not wait passively for things to be “given”



**Figure 3.** Harry’s arrangement of the 13 qualities of good citizenship

or “handed” to them, but instead “creates positive outcomes” and “effects a change.” She described the Nature Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of natural heritage in Singapore, as a patriotic organization, because it advocated the protection of the remaining pockets of nature in Singapore. Harry’s understanding of patriotism did not include this element of activism.

*Person-oriented patriotism*

Person-oriented patriotism is a patriotism of everyday life, manifested in our daily encounters with real people (Le Huérou, 2015). Hence, it is related to a citizen’s character and behavior, and includes a personal responsibility to help others (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Siti’s arrangement and explanation of the 13 qualities most exemplified person-oriented patriotism. She ranked the 13 qualities of citizenship in order of importance, with patriotism taking sixth position. She explained that patriotism was a social construct which embodied the five social qualities that she ranked first to fifth: moral and ethical behavior, tolerance for diversity within society, knowledge of the world community, concern for the welfare of others and fulfillment of family responsibilities (Figure 4). This showed that Siti was positive toward patriotism, seeing it as important to citizenship.

Being a moral person is an important feature of person-oriented patriotism. Person-oriented patriotism involves curbing selfishness, meeting community obligations and being devoted to people (Bodnar, 1996). Teck reflected person-oriented patriotism when he said, “All you need to do to be a patriot, is really to make sure you love the people around you the best way you can.” He believed that patriotism is about “the kind of person you are.” His understanding of patriotism was reflected in his lessons, where he frequently reminded students not to be self-centered, but considerate and “make a difference” to people around them. Siti also described unpatriotic Singaporeans as “selfish” individuals who complained



**Figure 4.**  
Siti’s arrangement of  
the 13 qualities of  
good citizenship

about bad behavior on public transport, on the roads, and in public housing, but failed to examine themselves and ask, “Am I a nuisance? Am I actively contributing to the well-being of others around me?” Harry demonstrated personally oriented patriotism when he brought his more well-to-do students to a poor estate in Singapore. He explained, “We brought them there to see the contrast. We have locals who are being left behind even as we developed, and we get our students to question why.”

Teck elaborated, “We are getting too nebulous when it comes to patriotism. We talk about it in a media-fad-centric form – will we die for the country? [...] Come on, those questions are too hypothetical.” For these teachers, patriotism often involved what citizens could do now, in peaceful situations. They seem to echo the view of McConnell (2002) that “love cannot be directed toward “humanity”; it can be directed only toward real people, with whom one can have a real relationship (p. 81).” Teck said that patriotism is about “real life stories” and “how people behave in ordinary situations.” He described ordinary individuals as patriots, such as his domestic helper, who he described as a patriot of Indonesia, and the friendly bus driver who greeted him every morning. Similarly, Siti concurred that patriotism involved doing “simple things” for others. What these teachers implied was that patriotic deeds did not have to fit the mould of “the great, the dramatic, and the distant” but could be found in the ordinary lives of people (Ho, 2014, p. 12). Faria’s understanding of patriotism did not express elements of person-oriented patriotism.

## Discussion

The study described here was small in scale, exploring how four humanities teachers had formulated their meanings for patriotism. Although we cannot claim that all teachers in Singapore have similar understandings and attitudes toward patriotism, this study shows that for at least some teachers, patriotism could hold multiple and complex meanings (Yau, 2009; Le Huérou, 2015). What could have caused teachers to develop the dominant viewpoints that they have, despite being from the same school and following the same curricula? This could partly be owing to their personal profiles. For example, Harry was the head of the citizenship education program at his school, meaning that he was more likely to be familiar with the official version of patriotism and the government’s expectations concerning it, as he had attended citizenship education courses offered by the Ministry of Education. Possibly owing to this, he could be more nationalistic than the other teachers. For Faria, she had volunteered to be the teacher-in-charge of the school’s model United Nations program, and had a keen interest in international relations, expressing a desire to pursue further studies in this area. Hence, she was possibly more cosmopolitan owing to her interest in world affairs.

Though teachers have their unique backgrounds, generally they agreed that patriotism is an important quality of good citizenship and should be promoted to their students, which was similar to the attitudes of teachers from Russia, China and South Africa (Ellis and Brown, 2005; Fairbrother, 2004; Schoeman, 2006). This contrasted with the negative views that teachers from the USA, England and Australia had of patriotism (Hand and Pearce, 2011; Brown, 2005; Prior, 2005). It is important to ask at this point, referring to the cultural and political context of Singapore, why this is so, and what are some possible implications of this? But before addressing the context of Singapore, it is important first to clarify that having a good opinion of patriotism does not necessarily mean that teachers were uncritical about it. It could just as well mean that they have a different definition of it (Chua and Sim, 2016). For example, these teachers clearly saw patriotism in a more civic than a critical sense (Chua and Sim, 2015). Undoubtedly, patriotism is a tool used by the PAP government to build a cohesive society (Chia, 2015). To ensure national unity, Singaporeans are frequently reminded that their identity as Singaporeans must supersede all other identities. Additionally, the PAP government is popular and has strong legitimacy in Singapore. It could be that people in general think that the government is doing a good job, leading to positive feelings

toward the country. Perhaps, it can be said that while patriotism may be political, it need not be politicized. In light of the poor reputation patriotism has in Western advocacy literature, this research is significant, as it suggests that we still know very little about patriotism in non-Western and post-colonial countries that have very different historical trajectories, possibly leading to conceptualizations of patriotism that may differ significantly from those of Anglophone countries.

Even though the teachers were generally positive toward patriotism, the non-conventional patterns that emerged seen in the cosmopolitan, social-movement and person-oriented varieties of patriotism, challenge the dominant conception of nationalistic patriotism. Though the teachers did not speak directly about the critical kinds of patriotism that educational theorists espouse (Merry, 2009; Staub, 2003; Westheimer, 2009), the fact that they have found different ways to express their allegiances to the nation, is itself a critique of nationalistic patriotism. These newer ways of expressing loyalty to the nation reflect postmodern patriotism (Harris, 2001) in two ways. First, the scale of patriotism was contested, and the object of patriotism was not only the nation-state. Community-based patriotism was found reflected in some of the teachers' social-movement and person-oriented patriotism, and a broader feeling of patriotism in the context of a world community was reflected by one of the teacher's cosmopolitan patriotism. These reimaginings of patriotism may confound traditional scholars and authoritarian governments, but, historically speaking, they are not in fact new (Cunningham, 1981; Dietz, 2002). Second, the expression of patriotism was contested. Patriotism is often portrayed as a public show of loyalty, involving active participation in matters of national interest (Westheimer, 2009). However, these teachers also expressed patriotism quietly and privately (Le Hu  rou, 2015). Being a good neighbor, which is common for person-oriented patriots, or being an activist, which is common amongst social-movement patriots, were not seen as inferior to being a soldier, which is common amongst nationalistic patriots.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we illustrated a variety of understandings of patriotism among four humanities teachers in Singapore, namely cosmopolitan, national, social-movement and person-oriented patriotism, and elicited generally positive attitudes toward patriotism. This finding implies that patriotism, as understood by teachers, is not necessarily only either a state-centric or a critical concept. These are important matters for researchers and policymakers to consider, as teachers may interpret official documents about citizenship education variedly. Though these results from a small Singaporean sample cannot be generalized, it is likely that owing to globalization, alternative ways of understanding patriotism, similar to those shared by these teachers, might become more widespread and salient in citizenship education. Hence, research on larger sample sizes, with the use of quantitative methodologies is recommended to further investigate postmodern understandings of patriotism. For example, Q-methodology could be used to extract viewpoints from a larger sample. Additionally, what causes countries to be more patriotic and postmodern, and others to be less so, are also issues worthy of further research.

### References

- Appiah, K.A. (2002), "Cosmopolitan patriots", in Cohen, J. (Ed.), *For Love of Country?*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, pp. 21-29.
- Barton, K.C. (2015), "Elicitation techniques: getting people to talk about ideas they don't usually talk about", *Theory & Research in Social Education*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 179-205.

- Bodnar, J. (1996), "Moral patriotism and collective memory in Whiting, Indiana, 1920-1992", in Bodnar, J. (Ed.), *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pp. 290-304.
- Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (2007), *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, 5th ed., Pearson Education, Boston, MA.
- Brown, C. (2005), "Teachers' perceptions of citizenship in the United States", in Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (Eds), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 55-92.
- Chia, Y.T. (2015), *Education, Culture and the Singapore Developmental State: "World-Soul" Lost and Regained?*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Chua, S. and Sim, J.B.-Y. (2015), "Crossing boundaries: an exploration of how three social studies teachers understand and teach patriotism in Singapore", *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 79-93.
- Chua, S. and Sim, J.B.-Y. (2016), "Rethinking critical patriotism: a case of constructive patriotism in social studies teachers in Singapore", *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, (in press).
- Cunningham, H. (1981), "The language of patriotism, 1750-1914", *History Workshop*, Autumn, No. 12, pp. 8-33.
- Davies, I., Gregory, I. and Riley, S.C. (2005), "Teachers, perceptions of citizenship in England", in Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (Eds), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 131-173.
- Dietz, M.G. (2002), "Patriotism: a brief history of the term", in Primoratz, I. (Ed.), *Patriotism*, Humanity Books, New York, NY, pp. 201-215.
- Ellis, M.J. and Brown, C. (2005), "Teachers' perceptions of citizenship in Russia", in Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (Eds), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 175-208.
- Ersoy, A.F. and Öztürk, F. (2015), "Patriotism as a citizenship value: perceptions of social studies teacher candidates", *Elementary Education Online*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 974-992.
- Fairbrother, G.P. (2003), *Toward Critical Patriotism: Student Resistance to Political Education in Hong Kong and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong.
- Fairbrother, G.P. (2004), "Patriotic education in a Chinese middle school", in Lee, W.O., Grossman, D.L., Kennedy, K.J. and Fairbrother, G.P. (Eds), *Citizenship Education in Asia and the Pacific: Concepts and Issues*, Kluwer Academic Publishers and Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, pp. 157-174.
- Hand, M. and Pearce, J. (2011), "Patriotism in British schools: teachers' and students' perspectives", *Educational Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 405-418.
- Harris, C. (2001), "Postmodern patriotism: Canadian reflections", *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 193-207.
- Hirshberg, M.S. (1998), "Apolitical patriotism and citizenship education: the case of New Zealand", in Ichilov, O. (Ed.), *Citizenship and Citizenship Education in a Changing World*, The Woburn Press, London, pp. 191-204.
- Ho, S.H. (2014), "Rethinking the who, what and when: why not Singaporean military heroes?", in Vasu, N., Chin, Y. and Law, K.-Y. (Eds), *Nations, National Narratives and Communities in the Asia-Pacific*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 11-29.
- Kennedy, K. (2010), "Young citizens in Hong Kong: obedient, active and patriotic?", *Social Psychology of Education*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 111-127.
- Kleinig, J., Keller, S. and Primoratz, I. (2015), *The Ethics of Patriotism: A Debate*, Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex.
- Le Huérou, A. (2015), "Where does the motherland begin? Private and public dimensions of contemporary Russian patriotism in schools and youth organisations: a view from the field", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 28-48.

- Lee, W.O. (2005), "Teachers' perceptions of citizenship in China", in Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (Eds), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 209-246.
- Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (2005), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong.
- Lee, W.O. and Sweeting, A. (2001), "Controversies in Hong Kong's political transition: nationalism versus liberalism", in Lee, W.O. and Bray, M. (Eds), *Education and Political Transition: Themes and Experiences in East Asia*, 2nd ed., Hong Kong University Press, Comparative Education Research Centre, Hong Kong, pp. 101-121.
- Leung, Y.W. (2007), "Understandings and teaching approaches of nationalistic education: the case of Hong Kong", *Pacific-Asian Education Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 72-89.
- Leung, Y.W. and Print, M. (2002), "Nationalistic education as the focus for civics and citizenship education: the case of Hong Kong", *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 197-209.
- McConnell, M.W. (2002), "Don't neglect the little platoons", in Cohen, J. (Ed.), *For Love of Country?*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, pp. 78-84.
- Merry, M.S. (2009), "Patriotism, history and the legitimate aims of American education", *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 378-398.
- Milligan, A., Taylor, M. and Wood, B.E. (2011), "Teachers' conceptions of citizenship in New Zealand social studies education", *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 287-301.
- Muckle, J. (2003), "Russian concepts of patriotism and their reflection in the education system today", *Tertium Comparationis*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 7-14.
- Peterson, A. (2012), "Civic patriotism as a legitimate aim of education for citizenship in England", *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 5-20.
- Prior, W. (2005), "Teachers' perceptions of citizenship in Australia", in Lee, W.O. and Fouts, J.T. (Eds), *Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 93-129.
- Schoeman, S. (2006), "A blueprint for democratic citizenship education in South African public schools: African teachers' perceptions of good citizenship", *South African Journal of Education*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 129-142.
- Schram, T.H. (2006), *Conceptualizing and Proposing Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., Pearson, Merrill Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Sim, J.B.-Y. and Print, M. (2009), "Citizenship education in Singapore: controlling or empowering teacher understanding and practice?", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 705-723.
- Sim, J.B.-Y., Chua, S., Koh, K., Yap, P.S. and Lee, W.O. (2012), "Teachers as citizenship educators: Singapore teachers' perceptions of citizenship", paper presented at IOE-BNU Equity and Quality in Education Conference, Beijing, 23-24 October, available at: [www.academia.edu/3070425/Teachers\\_as\\_citizenship\\_educators\\_Singapore\\_teachers\\_perceptions\\_of\\_citizenship](http://www.academia.edu/3070425/Teachers_as_citizenship_educators_Singapore_teachers_perceptions_of_citizenship) (accessed January 8, 2016).
- Staub, E. (2003), "Blind versus constructive patriotism: moving from embeddedness in the group to critical loyalty and action", in Staub, E. (Ed.), *The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 497-512.
- Tonga, D. and Aksoy, B. (2014), "Evaluation of the patriotic attitudes of the prospective teachers according to various variables", *International Journal of Academic Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 172-178.
- Tong, G.C. (2002), "Prime minister's national day rally 2002 speech, 18 august 02", available at: [www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2002081805.htm](http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2002081805.htm) (accessed October 9, 2016).
- Vajargah, K.F. (2009), "What kind of citizens we need? A critical review on Iranian school curricula", *Journal of Techniques, Technologies, Education Management*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 112-123.
- Waghid, Y. (2009), "Patriotism and democratic citizenship education in South Africa: on the (im)possibility of reconciliation and nation building", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 399-409.

- 
- Wang, C.K.J., Khoo, A., Goh, C.B., Tan, S. and Gopinathan, S. (2006), "Patriotism and national education: perceptions of trainee teachers in Singapore", *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 51-64.
- Westheimer, J. (2009), "Should social studies be patriotic?", *Social Education*, Vol. 73 No. 7, pp. 316-320.
- Westheimer, J. and Kahne, J. (2004), "What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy", *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 237-269.
- Yau, D.T.-S. (2009), "A study of teachers' paradigms of the 'China today' module in Hong Kong under one country and two systems", *New Horizons in Education*, Vol. 57 No. 2, pp. 74-90.
- Yuen, T. and Byram, M. (2007), "National identity, patriotism and studying politics in schools: a case study in Hong Kong", *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 23-36.

### About the authors

Shuyi Chua is a Research Associate at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She researches on patriotism and nationalistic education. Shuyi Chua is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [shuyi.chua@nie.edu.sg](mailto:shuyi.chua@nie.edu.sg)

Dr Jasmine B.-Y. Sim, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She researches on civics and citizenship education, social studies education and school-based curriculum development.

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)