

SOME NOTES FOR 2012.

2010
2011

CONCERNING EDUCATION
[LAUNCH ISSUE]

CON
TEXTS

1 WHAT NOTES?

2 FROM A SYSTEM OF COMPETING KNOWLEDGE TO A SYSTEM OF COMPETING IGNORANCE

by TAN ZI HAO

3 A RESPONSE TO THE “SYSTEM OF COMPETING IGNORANCE”: CAN TAKING CHARGE REALLY BE THE ANSWER?

by CHALANI RANWALA

4 ONE MINUTE OF YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE?

by XIAO MING WEE

5 PPSMI, THE MYTHIC DECOY

by TAN ZI HAO



WHAT NOTES?

////////////////////////////////////

Dear readers,

This publication marks the beginning of a simple experiment by students – any students – interested in playing with texts and meaning-making.

Imagine this publication as a **laboratory**. Being a student, you are urged to question, to err and to stay hungry while you can. Text contributions from students are most welcomed, feedback from lecturers and students too. There will only be a total of 11 publications (#0/10 included), to be published when each receives a significant amount of contributions (minimum 3). This project will stop at #10/10.

This publication bears no brand, no manufactured identity. Writers come and go; organic and purposive. The texts presented here are wholly reactionary and assume two privileges: location and roles. Location: a UK institution in a non-UK setting; roles: the majority of students as learners encountered an institutional political experience detached from their geographical contexts, leading us to question the correlation between the system of knowledge and the diversity of experience.

Contextually, this country is also witnessing the reemergence of student activism. Student groups have held demonstration fighting for academic freedom, demanding the abolishment of UUCA and PHEA. And with successful court appeal from the UKM4, UUCA was ruled unconstitutional. Meanwhile, one must not forget about the subsequent criticism centered on students being insufficiently mature to involve in politics, or, risk being carried away by political ideologies.

Agree or disagree? This is the time for questioning. This laboratory will be a place seeking for critical views. And this Launch Issue is our first collection of writings, concerning education — students, unite and write!

////////////////////////////////////

2 FROM A SYSTEM OF COMPETING KNOWLEDGE

by TAN ZI HAO

Unabashedly, UNMC is quick to recognise the diversity of student. Through the billboard erected at the junction to Broga, the sublimity of skin pigments in their colourful collection – however diverse – showing the shared contentment with photogenic smiles, captured and forever welcoming.

The symbolic order follows a centripetal pattern: the *others* (the diversity of student) in a *centre* (a UK institution) in an *other* (a non-UK location). This centripetal interaction between the centre and the dual others reflected our infatuation with the inter-nationality: UNMC is a UK campus *not* located in the UK, and a UK campus predominantly occupied with students *not* from UK. It conveyed the message that “The University of Nottingham is culturally diverse”, the “diversity” is accentuated as a unique selling point.

But to what extent is this interaction of values respected in a classroom environment, and to what extent is “global diversity” appreciated? This issue is a castaway, one that never moves beyond the billboard and is never invited into the classroom, at large due to direct or indirect institutional power maintained through the *system of competing knowledge*. Even the well-intentioned educators are engrossed in this oppressive system where knowledge must be the basis of competition and diversity is disregarded for the fear of losing pedagogic legitimacy.

System of Competing Knowledge Through Definition And Expectation Of Contribution

The typically UNMC context is a “rojak” classroom consists of students from different nations. The lecture is predestined to commence with an abstract *definition*, which follows a standardised productive cycle where singularity is an inevitable toil. This educational logic is inattentive to the diversity of student that UNMC has brazenly promoted.



Nevermind the well-intentioned educators advocating diversity by encouraging student participation, their anticipation remained abided by the law of the same system, their *expectation of contribution* is mere politics of recognition - an instrument for consensus. Contributions from students are decors to predetermined singularity; educators' expectation followed decidedly a method of framing to interpret students' contributions as an extension of the abstract definition. They constantly reassure the students by associating their contributions and experiences to the definition, done so to preserve the relevance of the taught subject. Hitherto, Freirian notion of banking system is re-enacted, firstly, by the introduction of *definition*; secondly, by the *expectation of contribution*.

The educators cannot challenge the system because they have invested under the same tutelage - the academia. Their will to challenge is restricted by the functioning system of competing knowledge. Where knowledge becomes the basis for competition, “knowing-more” guaranteed an increase in capital accumulation (materialised through academic qualification, publications and journals), as a result, educators with the highest academic recognition is granted an entrance to academia and later the arbitrary power to educate.

Since they are raised through this oppressive system of knowing, they must not harass the system, else losing the legitimate authority[1] and the foundation indispen-

sable to their accumulated academic capital[2]. Therefore, in spite of their well intention and the given freedom to modify a curriculum, the system (in which the curriculums originate) is sustained and to be reproduced in a classroom environment through the two apparatuses aforementioned.

“Intellectual legacy has perpetuated inequality through the *system of competing knowledge* and is potentially oppressive in a classroom of diversity.

System of Competing Ignorance

bell hooks has called the classroom a “learning community”. She downplayed the pedagogic role by transgressing the conventions of classroom from a relation of power to a community of shared responsibility where educators and students are entitled to each other’s learning. To postcolonial scholars, the intellectual legacy has perpetuated inequality through the recognition of “knowing-more”[3] and is potentially oppressive in a classroom of diversity.

The legitimacy of knowledge must be reduced. This requires a reassessment on the system of competing knowledge; if only education can be understood as a *system of competing ignorance*, the shift from “knowing-more” to “knowing-less” will disrupt the preoccupation in the accumulation of academic capital and repudiate the pedagogic authority.

The system of competing ignorance serves as a disputant to destabilise the system of competing knowledge: knowledge is not transmitted but exchanged under this imperative of competing ignorance, and the learning

process will benefit from the flexibility of power-relation among educators and students, wherefore roles are interchangeable and negotiable.

To integrate the system of competing ignorance into the current education, some restructurings are proposed, the list is not exhaustive and any probabilities should not be restricted by these possibilities:

1. Reform in Pedagogic Action

1.1: The production of “knowledge” must instigate a production of “ignorance”. An answer must provoke another question that will lead to another set of answers and questions ad infinitum, and in the word of Bakhtin: “If any answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue”[4].

1.2: On the pretext of 1.1, “ignorance” becomes the basis of competition. The obligation is to be doubtful. Questions will be asked, allowing the other members of the classroom to respond, and ask.

1.3: Teaching a subject must not anticipate a transmission of knowledge of that subject. For example: to teach “Political Science” is to teach political science as a transferable commodity, this necessitates an authority accountable to the propriety of transference. Conversely, the subject should be liberated: from teaching “*Political Science*” to teaching *political science* where knowledge is not transferable. The subject will be recognised as a relevant study per se, that the *political science* is not a commodity to be obtained but an experience taking place even in the classroom and among friends. This should encourage an understanding through experiential learning. The subject is to be perceived by the classroom as closely connected to real life experience not alienated nor detached from the ordinary. The classroom becomes not only as a platform of learning, but a community of practice (CoP)[5].

2. Reform in Pedagogic Operation

2.1: The course outline to be determined in a classroom,

TO A SYSTEM OF COMPETING IGNORANCE

by the classroom; the course outline is a research proposal taking the classroom as a research platform; the content must seek consent from the classroom.

2.2: On the pretext of **2.1**, different classrooms will acquire different starting points of learning, catered by collective needs. The collective needs will increase the sense of shared responsibility in a classroom since the course outline is a *collective investment*.

2.3: On the pretext of **2.2**, *definition* is no longer applicable and is always inadequate in its coverage answerable to a classroom of diversity. Definition should therefore be investigated only at the end of the course to allow an ideal classroom participation, which is without direct interference from a dominant idea in the form of mainstream concept or major publication, rather, a definition nurtured through classroom engagement, derived from memory and experience throughout the course of study.

2.4: Schedule must not take the centre stage, to which educators are often preoccupied with the duty of completing the syllabi (or their slides, for that matter). Academic schedule must relinquish control of the classroom, for the learning process must be steered by the collective investment (refer **2.2**), and that learning experience requires time and flexibility. Unless the classroom has demanded to discontinue its learning process, if a collective investment is sacrificed for an academic schedule predetermined outside the classroom, the classroom project is considerably failed and restrained by the institutional productive cycle ("scheduling" as an institutional management of time to ensure productivity - the "knowing-more" recognition derived from the system of competing knowledge). It is a shame to any teaching faculty whenever a prolonged quality discussion is halted to avoid "messaging up" the predetermined academic schedule.

3. Reform in Pedagogic Administration and the General System

3.1: "because we are following the UK system" has become a popular punch line to fend off complaints regarding any inconvenience in administration. A quick reality check is that Malaysia is not/does not belong to UK (not anymore) and UNMC is not located in the UK.

3.2: On the pretext of **3.1**, UNMC should be held liable to UNMC students. If UNMC is not sufficiently independent, to an extent answerable only to the University of Nottingham in UK, the two branch campuses are nothing more than an architectural showcase of Oriental fetish in its declaration of "a truly global university".

3.3: Conclusion: The nature of UNMC reminded Malaysians the colonial history. If the system is not reassessed, the system of competing knowledge will

continue to impose symbolic and structural violence to the diversity of student forever silenced.



Notes:

[1] For a relational analysis between the act of teaching (*pedagogic action*, PA) and the authority of teaching (*pedagogic authority*, PAu); see Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, (London, California, New Delhi: Sage, 1977), pp.3-31.

[2] While many *-isms* have sought to challenge the foundation of knowledge and its capital – most prominent being "postmodernism" – the fullest effect has yet to be seen. For example, the fact that "postmodernism" has been included in the academic syllabus today exemplifies how its radicalness is hijacked and downgraded by institutionalism (product of modernity) to mere subject of teaching (ironically, can postmodernism be taught? Postmodernism is not teachable because it is a de-enlightening criticism seeking to de-objectify the commodity of knowledge). However, the academia must teach and study postmodernism, and it does so to preserve its academic capital. It prevents postmodernism to harass their system of knowing (project of modernity) by compressing its ideology into the "Postmodernism 101", assimilates it into the modern system (via examination, assessment, reading list, anti-plagiarism, scheduling etc.) and renders it useless.

[3] Includes: predetermined syllabus, examination, marking system etc.

[4] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech genres and other late essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGree (USA: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.168.

[5] Community of practice (CoP) is an organisational model proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. CoP was well-received in the study of organisational behaviour and pedagogy. It describes an organic learning community sharing similar interest of knowledge (domain), collectively invested in the domain through interactions (community) and sustaining the domain through practice development, knowledge organisation and application (practice).

A RESPONSE TO THE SYSTEM OF COMPETING IGNORANCE

CAN TAKING CHARGE REALLY BE THE ANSWER?

by CHALANI RANWALA

From what I understand, the author of the preceding article[1] wished to prove that the accumulation of knowledge should be open ended; that is gaining knowledge through tertiary education should ideally lead to more questions, of whose answers must in turn lead to another set of questions. It is also implied that the form of education we are currently exposed to goes against this notion. In essence, ignorance will make better learners of us all.

While I admire the bold recognition of this trend in Western education, about which the author seems pessimistic in terms of its potential to contribute positively to our education, the suggested "Reform in Pedagogic Operation" must be reassessed. The proposal that the classroom must be given the power to determine the course outline dangerously overestimates the aptitude of the average undergraduate student. Me being one of them, I can assuredly state that no, we have no idea what we want (if you are one of the exceptions to this rule, please disregard my statement). The contents we study in class have been chosen specifically as basic guidelines to introduce our minds to new topics and new areas of study. In a case where such guidelines are taken away from us, will we have the knowledge and experience to take charge of our own learning? If we agree with this statement we are being too optimistic about our own capabilities to control our education and to know what's necessary to steer us through to the next stage of our higher education.

With regards to section 2.2, I disagree to a certain extent that different classrooms should have different starting points of learning. When entering into a university environment straight from high school, I believe all students need to be given a solid foundation from which they can build up their own personal interests and knowledge. Even though catering to students' individual needs is important, at the undergraduate level there

needs to be a level of uniformity when beginning to teach a new discipline. Trying to do otherwise would just be chaotic and lecturers would not be able to successfully assess a student's aptitude in the first few months of university. While I am all for individualism and innovation in education, when it comes to setting a solid foundation, it is important to stick to traditional guidelines in setting a syllabus. Whether or not these guidelines are enforced upon us unwillingly by our colonial masters is a different question altogether.

On this very note I would like to state my thoughts regarding the final section of that article, titled "Reform in Pedagogic Administration and the General System". Having come from country where schools very much lean towards the Western education system, I often feel that people unnecessarily fuss over the British education system that they, in most cases, chose to be a part of. Yes we did bid farewell to Britain and their respective "systems" a long time ago, but we must nonetheless keep in mind that if we choose to be in a UK university, there really is very little we can do to escape their guidelines and their policies. So without being sour about it, we must try to make the best of it. However, the day this system begins to tamper with our individuality and restricts our education, the day we genuinely begin to feel suppressed by this system of administration, we must and we will speak out accordingly. For now, the smiling faces I see walking around campus seem promising enough.



Notes:

[1] Refer Tan Zi Hao, *From a System of Competing Knowledge to a System of Competing Ignorance* (2011).

ONE MINUTE OF YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE?

by XIAO MING WEE

During the summer, a friend of mine shared a common frustration on any high school or college students, and/or anyone whom gathered surveys from us. The question asked was simple: will you give your time to a random stranger - who stops you at the middle of the road - to complete a simple survey?

My instinctive answer was: depends. The answer was not entirely convincing since I am a person generous enough to give away one minute of my time; neither was it a lie. It amuses me that I am indecisive over such small issue, that I can't make up my mind over such simple, direct question!

Considered that I pass by these "stranger" on a daily basis on my way to the train station, I tried to understand my thought process: how did I make my decision on this matter? And my conclusion: I judge the book based on its cover. I am not entirely satisfied with this answer, and being an egoistic person who can't accept the fact that such flaw actually prevails on me, I tried to justify my action.

I question the approach of the stranger; I find their activity being carried out unconvincingly and unprofessionally; and I find it strange that they are the same

people asking the same question on a daily basis! I told myself that if there is a big campaign behind, with less aggressive surveyor who will approach me with a smile, wearing an ID tag and a uniform, and if the issue at hand does pertain to me, I will give my one minute to them.

Instantly, it strikes me that I have never reflected upon myself! I have assessed the factors which influence my thought process, but had never questioned myself on why did I think in such a manner! It never occurs to me that I had been the problem! I was shocked that my instinctive reaction led me to suspecting all the surrounding factors but not myself.

Trying to explain the "mystery", I would like to share three stories here.

The first story was featured on the newspaper few months ago (after I was "questioned"). A little girl wants to give a penny to a street bagger, but her mum stops her from doing so, telling her that the person might be someone *faking it*, and could appear richer than it seemed to be. The author argued that empathy has been robbed from the girl at such a young age, that the little innocent act of hers was quashed by cynical adults. While I was reading it, I thought, "hey, I was the girl when I was young! I was told that that street bagger might be conning me into giving him some money instead." I was robbed by my elders at a young age! I become suspicious and began to judge based on the looks without understanding the people.

Second story is a recent experience of mine. After my "questioning" bugging me at every level, I bumped into a group of surveyor again. At that moment, I was waiting

“Indirectly we were “taught” to be self-righteous, self-centered, and it is always the other’s fault that have led us to our failure.

for my friend, being a Malaysian, practicing the great culture of being late. Unsatisfied with myself and wanting to prove myself wrong, I approached them to “understand” (or in the Malaysian culture, being a *ke po* [to be curious, busy body]) what it is about. 2 minutes into the conversation, I found myself immersed into the fact that I won a brand new car in a random scratch n’ win! Later, I was being ushered to a car that would fetch me to a place to collect my prize. Luckily, I woke up from my dream early enough to get the hell out of that situation and escaped.

Dramatically, I put myself out there trying to understand the pain of asking random strangers to stop for surveys, only to find out that it is not worth the risk! This incident affected me to the extent, where, one fine day while I was visiting my “second home”, I ignored a group of students in their uniform when they asked for a simple donation. It never occurs to me that I was just being unlucky; there are people who need your attention for one minute and no more! Again, I assumed the strangers as untrustworthy, regardless of their looks. I judge someone even before I look at them!

The final story is well known by anyone who follows the news on a daily basis. It was about a child named Yue Yue in China who was left injured in the middle of the street and ignored by the public. Without going into much of the details (if you want to know more, a simple Google will lead you to hundreds of news articles and opinion pieces), it showed that people are getting more and more into the MYOB mentality (mind your own business). I thought my “situation” was bad, however it had actually penetrated into the society, even when it comes to a life-and-death situation, people are so self-centered that the kind gesture of helping has vanished!

One minute of your time please? Since young, we are taught that strangers do not deserve our one minute. Educating young infants does not solely depend on what they are being taught in the school, but also about how they are brought up. Kids learn from a very (and to emphasise on this point, very-very-very) young age. It is more important to educate them with the right mentality, rather than trying to correct it as if they are going through pains.

I am not blaming my elders whom have indirectly influenced me. I attribute my upbringing to the fact that I learned through observations, and very often I did not realised what I had learned it. Yet, I never (and will never) ask them to tell the baby-me (when I was 1 or 2 year-old) “it was the floor’s fault when you fell down; the slippery floor was the one that caused you to fall; not you who was still learning to walk; and it was alright to fall.” In another instance, it was not my parents’ fault that they blamed the neighbours for being too loud and woke me up. Their instinct was to protect me, yet indirectly we were “taught” to be self-righteous, self-centered, and it is always the other’s fault that have led us to our failure. I was only taught to be self-reflective in the moral class, when I was at an age to understand things.

I am neither an early education expert nor a young parent. However, I realised that we should change the way we bring up our kids. Kids learn from a very young age and we should not underestimate their ability to learn. This is about how we want the future families to lead their lives, so start now and change those unwanted skepticism and cynicism! We are all educators in one way or another, and we need to realise that.

Going back to the question being asked, I stand by my answer that I gave few months ago. “Depends”. Now, it depends on me rather than what that affects me. So, do question me again in a few years’ time!



“One minute of your time please?”



Your text



is the



battleground



All articles are available online: studentsinresistance.tumblr.com

We welcome feedback and accept contributions from students: creative or academic, statements or wordplay. To write in, kindly contact: studentsinresistance@gmail.com

This conversion of languages therefore requires a certain degree of freedom and not fidelity. Because the autonomy of a language in translating, if swayed by the former authority, menaced the apprehension of intention:

“A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility.” (p.78)

Therefore:

“[I]t is not the highest praise of a translation... to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language. Rather, the significance of fidelity as ensured by literalness is that the work reflects the great longing for linguistic *complementation*.” (p. 79, my italics)

Translation allows an intertextual reading that enriches understanding. Loanwords are such exemplar, and both Malay and English (and many other languages) contained a bountiful of loanwords[7]. Cultural appropriation and lexical borrowing are our appetites.

As of now, primarily, because language must evolve as knowledge develops, the process of developing knowledge must not exclude the process of developing a language. Similarly, acquiring knowledge must not exclude the process of learning a language. Secondly, while confusion with translated jargons is real, it is a result of inadequate comprehension of the meaning and not of the translated.

Untranslatability is therefore another myth tampering with the Bogeyman to form a decoy barricading us from solving the real issue.

Myth 3: on the Mirroring Future

Reality check: One cannot fight for the future. One can only think about the future. For a struggle to realise, one must fight for the present.

The last myth is demanding.

In Malaysia, the idea of future must entail the memories of the past. Forever stuck in the interstitial and loiter along the axis from *was* to *will*, Malaysia is sentenced to endless frictions and reconstructions. Inevitably, such preoccupation adumbrates the present; many are either fighting for the past (legacy, heritage, traditional value etc.) or for the future (economic prospect, globalisation, modernity etc.). Overloaded with projections of *what-had-happened* and *what-will-happen*, we are clamped in an unforeseeable present: *what-is-happening*. (?)

This “present” at stake is repressed and voiceless[8]. Laws[9], parents and NGOs in this mass-mediated

hoo-ha have become the representative, determining the repressed’s past or the repressed’s future.

The repressed comprises: the children (material, spatial) and their future (immaterial, temporal). Further commanding the repressed is a mirror image (an *imagined community* or an *imagining community*) in which the representatives have, foremost, idealised and defined.

This repression becomes more problematic when it revolved around education: Has education become another institutional repression? What is the prerogative of education? What does teaching in Malay/non-Malay mean? Therefore it is only logical, if demythologising is permitted even among languages, to take reference from the very basic definition of the English word “education”, in Malay:

Root word:

didik (to educate)
ajar (to teach)

Here, the confix “pe-an” served to change the part of speech:

pendidikan (education)
pengajaran (lesson, teaching)

Peculiarly, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Malaysia is currently named *Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia*, as opposed to *Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*. The word *pelajaran* is often associated to *mata pelajaran* (subject of study).

Mata pelajaran can be a dictating term: the “subject of study” is crafted by elites and is suppressive. A “subject” is a condensation of different “studies”, where elites hold the mandate to decide on the choices of education. On this account, *pelajaran* connotes the soft power of authority. If we refer to the root word *ajar* (to teach) and putting it in comparison with *didik* (to educate), *ajar* implies a stronger authority. *Pengajaran* (lesson, teaching) also insinuates that discipline is at work, a necessary punishment for a prior action and will in future impinge on social behaviour.

On this approximation, *ajar* connotes the passion of influence while *didik* connotes the passion of mutuality. We can postulate that MoE understands education from the definition of its limiting label – *ajar*. This is also the biggest faculty of the Bogeyman: an institutional repression, the mode of education (*pelajaran*) must be instituted from an overseer.

Here comes the mythic figure: a Parent, an NGO, a Law, a Protector – the Feudal.

This conversion of languages therefore requires a certain degree of freedom and not fidelity. Because the autonomy of a language in translating, if swayed by the former authority, menaced the apprehension of intention:

“A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility.” (p.78)

Therefore:

“[I]t is not the highest praise of a translation... to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language. Rather, the significance of fidelity as ensured by literalness is that the work reflects the great longing for linguistic *complementation*.” (p. 79, my italics)

Translation allows an intertextual reading that enriches understanding. Loanwords are such exemplar, and both Malay and English (and many other languages) contained a bountiful of loanwords[7]. Cultural appropriation and lexical borrowing are our appetites.

As of now, primarily, because language must evolve as knowledge develops, the process of developing knowledge must not exclude the process of developing a language. Similarly, acquiring knowledge must not exclude the process of learning a language. Secondly, while confusion with translated jargons is real, it is a result of inadequate comprehension of the meaning and not of the translated.

Untranslatability is therefore another myth tampering with the Bogeyman to form a decoy barricading us from solving the real issue.

Myth 3: on the Mirroring Future

Reality check: One cannot fight for the future. One can only think about the future. For a struggle to realise, one must fight for the present.

The last myth is demanding.

In Malaysia, the idea of future must entail the memories of the past. Forever stuck in the interstitial and loiter along the axis from *was* to *will*, Malaysia is sentenced to endless frictions and reconstructions. Inevitably, such preoccupation adumbrates the present; many are either fighting for the past (legacy, heritage, traditional value etc.) or for the future (economic prospect, globalisation, modernity etc.). Overloaded with projections of *what-had-happened* and *what-will-happen*, we are clamped in an unforeseeable present: *what-is-happening*. (?)

This “present” at stake is repressed and voiceless[8]. Laws[9], parents and NGOs in this mass-mediated

hoo-ha have become the representative, determining the repressed’s past or the repressed’s future.

The repressed comprises: the children (material, spatial) and their future (immaterial, temporal). Further commanding the repressed is a mirror image (an *imagined community* or an *imagining community*) in which the representatives have, foremost, idealised and defined.

This repression becomes more problematic when it revolved around education: Has education become another institutional repression? What is the prerogative of education? What does teaching in Malay/non-Malay mean? Therefore it is only logical, if demythologising is permitted even among languages, to take reference from the very basic definition of the English word “education”, in Malay:

Root word:

didik (to educate)
ajar (to teach)

Here, the confix “pe-an” served to change the part of speech:

pendidikan (education)
pengajaran (lesson, teaching)

Peculiarly, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Malaysia is currently named *Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia*, as opposed to *Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*. The word *pelajaran* is often associated to *mata pelajaran* (subject of study).

Mata pelajaran can be a dictating term: the “subject of study” is crafted by elites and is suppressed. A “subject” is a condensation of different “studies”, where elites hold the mandate to decide on the choices of education. On this account, *pelajaran* connotes the soft power of authority. If we refer to the root word *ajar* (to teach) and putting it in comparison with *didik* (to educate), *ajar* implies a stronger authority. *Pengajaran* (lesson, teaching) also insinuates that discipline is at work, a necessary punishment for a prior action and will in future impinge on social behaviour.

On this approximation, *ajar* connotes the passion of influence while *didik* connotes the passion of mutuality. We can postulate that MoE understands education from the definition of its limiting label – *ajar*. This is also the biggest faculty of the Bogeyman: an institutional repression, the mode of education (*pelajaran*) must be instituted from an overseer.

Here comes the mythic figure: a Parent, an NGO, a Law, a Protector – the Feudal.

Solving the Wrong Crisis

As the 3 myths were partially debunked (hopefully), asking the right question becomes crucial. We can imagine a useful metaphor, the very moment where Dom Cobb was looking closely at the spinning top, the totem, before his children and the idealised future (the repressed) distracted him.

Realistic check: Are we facing the crisis of employing the tool of articulation (language), or the crisis of articulation per se (education)?

Language as a cultural product is conveniently jumbled together with ethnicity by the Bogeyman, it is a perfect booby-trap in Malaysia's ethnic-based politics. The Bogeyman intends to galvanise all parties into action against an endless and vague yet pressing issue: an apparent mess to foreshadow an obscure crisis, keeping the Malaysian society preoccupied with issues highlighting clear-cut differences rather than shared values (a strategy to prolong the tension, to bypass the politics).

Amidst this inescapable preoccupation, the underlying educational crisis remains. The powerful stays in power, simultaneously, this unnecessary cultural conflict necessitates their political existence. We are booby-trapped in their ethnocentric nationalist lens (despite one's political inclination). By keeping postcolonial ethnic-based politics relevant, He managed to preserve the current status quo.

By presenting Him, the government has successfully shifted our concern away from any potential structural reform in education, since all problems are attributable to the crisis of language and its implementation.

The Bogeyman is keeping us purblind. This overemphasis of language is a manufactured Plato's cave; a simulacrum fascinated with clear-cut cultural differences (recently: language, Hudud and sexuality). But He mustn't enlighten us, for He fears losing His seduction.

Postscript

These overloaded myths, if ever, presently defeated, only serve to mythologise the very idea to demythologise. The author hitherto must discredit himself because he has become part of the myth.[10]



Notes:

[1] Due to the mythic quality of PPSMI, the term "Bogeyman" will be used to replace "PPSMI and its problem" collectively, and rather abstractly, throughout the entire essay. In the law of

the myth, a "Bogeyman" must stay loyal to the dominant historical narrative. Therefore necessarily this "Bogeyman" must represent a Man and not a Woman, as it upholds the patriarchal burden of: the politics of liberal humanism and English education (pre-1826 patriarchal elitism), the introduction of English education in Malaysia by the British colony; the 3 reactionary nationalist phalli: Barnes, Fenn-Wu and Razak; the patrimony of Mahathirism as the father of PPSMI). With all these Man-made decisions, the "Bogeyman" bears the consequences of the Man. At times, I shall also refer "Bogeyman" with the pronoun "He", "His" or "Him".

[2] "Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?" asked Barthes.

[3] "Yes to PPSMI: 'Don't play political games,'" *Free Malaysia Today*, October 22, 2011, accessed November 3 2011, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/2011/10/22/yes-to-ppsmi-dont-play-political-games/>

[4] Inferring Foucault's docile bodies: instead of the mechanism of the battalion, the bodies now succumbed to the mechanism of mass-mediated politics (metaphorically, the game).

[5] "Produce" here functions both as a noun (harvest) and a verb (to harvest/harvesting).

[6] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69-82. Written as an introduction to Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*. In this short but influential essay, Benjamin tried to redefine the task of a translator. The focus of this essay was on literary works, which are conceptually different to subjects like Science and Mathematics. But I wish to escape this narrow classification by dealing with the relationships (kinships) of languages and the "quality of text", of what Benjamin referred to as *translatability*. This somewhat spiritual concept, he argued, is a "pure language" (devoted to pure purposiveness). This pure language communicates regardless of the poetic or the scientific.

[7] For relevant studies on loanwords in Malaysia, readers can refer to: 1) Chow Chai Khim, "The Study of Loanwords between Chinese Language and Malay Language in Malaysia" (MA thesis, National University of Singapore and Peking University, 2010); 2) Michael Ian Hartley and Wong May Kim, "Loanwords from English to Malay in the Field of Mathematics" (in *Language and Linguistics*, vol.1, no.2, pp. 63-78, 2000).

[8] Malaysiakini however has done a brief video interview in 2009 with a few students (the direct subject at stake) on the implementation of PPSMI. See Malaysiakini, 2009, *PPSMI: What the student say*, online video, accessed November 3 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gelwim7exko>

[9] Stated in the Preamble of Education Act 1996: ...pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.

[10] See Tan Zi Hao, "PPSMI: the Mythic Decoy" (2011).



Students commemorating the 45th anniversary
of Speaker's Corner in the University of Malaya.

30 November 2011

The return of student power?