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November 9, 2022

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NUS Engineering

evolution of a global city-state  
GES1011

Learning Journal

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# Learning Journal Entry 1: Asking Questions

This module started off with the questions “what is History?” and “what is Singapore?”. These questions made me realised that I have a very shallow understanding of common words that I come across in my day-to-day life. Words such as “History” and “Singapore” seemed so intuitive that I was sure I knew their definitions, however, when the questions were asked, I found myself stumbling.

As Professor Kelvin dive deeper into the questions and into the meaning of words, I realised that there is an entire world of information hidden behind there. This inspired me to continually ask questions in my day-to-day life.

# Learning Journal Entry 2: Traces of the past

Traces of the past connects the present with the past; they provide insights to the past, but they are not the past. Hence, history as we know it are just human’s interpretation of these traces which is an important concept that can be relatable to other fields of studies. It also changes my view on History as this introduces subjectivity and biasness (Subjectivity will be discussed in entry 5 as I feel that it is a large and important topic by itself).

Additionally, meanings of these traces can also be lost through translations. The Sulalat al-Salatin is a good example of this as their content are oral accounts passed down through generations and recorded into a manuscript, some of them were even meant to be sung and whose meanings cannot be completely conveyed in text.

# Learning Journal Entry 3: Visits to heritage sites

This entry focuses on the trip to Fort Canning and the National Museum. It was an insightful experience as Professor Kelvin taught us how to truly experience and appreciate visits to heritage sites. I have learnt to use my senses to make sense of and be more critical of the content. The audio effects in the museum and the change in the floor textual display in the National Museum provides a personal and surreal experience of Singapore’s past.

Map

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Figure 1. Map of Singapore found on the first floor

A picture containing diagram

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Figure 2. Map of Singapore on an interactive display found on the third floor

This changed the experience of my future visits to other heritage sites such as the Singapore City Gallery. The entire museum is designed to indulge you in the evolution of Singapore. I have noticed the gradual increase in modern interactive displays and the more congested spaces that seems to simulate Singapore’s evolution. Figure 1 and 2 shows the difference in displaying information between the first and third floor of the Singapore City Gallery, implying a more modern and futuristic state on the third floor compared to the first floor.

# Learning Journal Entry 4: Races

The topic of races sparked my interest as it is very relevant to Singapore due to our “multi-racial” society. In my opinion, race is an identification classification system based on made up rules and serve no purpose in modern context. Scientifically, classification of races does not exist and furthermore, crossbreeding between different “races” makes this classification system difficult to maintain and rely on.

While some might immediately dismiss the concept of classifying identities as detrimental and should not be practised, I feel that it is not the classification of identities that is problematic but the societal stereotypes and biasness towards certain groups, causing discrimination. However, as society today are not mature enough to employ a socio-political classification system without causing an imbalance and preferential treatment, socio-political classification such as “races” introduces more harm and good.

# Learning Journal Entry 5: Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a double-edged sword; while I find it to be the main adversary when answering questions faced in the module, it introduces flavours to answers and makes them more interesting. As everyone have their own uniqueness one way or another (be it race, religion, sexes, etc…), everyone have their own interpretations. Hence, it is important to be constantly aware of its existence and be mindful of the possible biasness in the content that we consume in our everyday lives. Despite the unavoidability of subjectivity, I feel that we should try to understand it better to provide the most accurate and balanced view as much as possible.