ABSTRACT

Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools in Singapore were elite secondary schools with a strong Chinese cultural background. It was introduced in 1978 by the then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew, as part of an effort to “retain the best in Chinese Education”. This was because it was projected that Chinese education faced the possibility of erosion as more and more parents decide to send their children to English stream schools for their education.

SAP schools’ criterion for entry was stringent. Only Chinese students whose results fall within the top 10 per cent of the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) qualified for admission. In addition, its aims were to cultivate effectively bilingual (Chinese, English) students who are well steeped in worthy Chinese traditional values.

Detractors of the SAP schools cite its elitist streak and exclusivity to the Chinese community as their primary concerns. Amidst waves of criticisms for the SAP schools to be scrapped or modified, the Singapore government upholds its stand that Special Assistance Plan schools should preserve its status quo.

However, in 1999, the Singapore government admits that in actual fact, certain SAP schools are not attracting the crème de la crème of students in Singapore.
In light of this observation, this thesis investigates causes which led to the changes of SAP schools since its inception twenty-six years ago.

It is discovered that some Special Assistance Plan Schools have lost their elitist streak. The situations which used to be unique for Special Assistance Plan schools are now a common sight in other outstanding secondary schools. The discovery of these findings induces the question of how Special Assistance Plan schools can still live up to its name, given its evolution into something which its creators did not envision.