

Using LORMS to Assess Conceptual Understanding of Change and Continuity in Upper Secondary History Examinations

Seow Yongzhi

*Broadrick Secondary School**

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Abstract

This paper identifies a gap between the teaching and assessment of historical concepts in upper secondary history in national examinations. It proposes four structured-essay question (SEQ) framings to assess students' understanding of change and continuity, to be graded using the Levels of Response Mark Scheme (LORMS). The four framings are: the evaluation question, the watershed question, the given change question, and the periodisation question. These SEQ framings are practical and useful because they (1) dovetail with humanities teachers' training and present practice, (2) structure scaffolds for conceptual teaching of change and continuity, and (3) provide a pathway for lateral expansion of assessment practices, to align with the syllabus and Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG).

Introduction

This paper identifies a gap between the teaching and assessment of historical concepts in upper secondary history in national examinations. It proposes four structured-essay question (SEQ) framings to assess students' understanding of change and continuity, to be graded using the Levels of Response Mark Scheme

(LORMS). The four framings are: the evaluation question, the watershed question, the given change question, and the periodisation question. These SEQ framings are practical and useful because they (1) dovetail with humanities teachers' training and present practice, (2) structure scaffolds for conceptual teaching of change and continuity, and (3) provide a pathway for lateral expansion of assessment practices, to align with the syllabus and Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG).

The teaching of historical concepts

Since 2013, the syllabus for upper secondary history has emphasised teaching for historical understanding. History educators seek to advance students beyond perceiving history as a mere stockpile of information to understand it as a form of knowledge. The Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG) for upper secondary History, produced by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD) in Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE), notes that "an understanding of historical concepts is necessary if students are to make sense of that past and how historical knowledge is constructed" (MOE, 2012, p. 12).

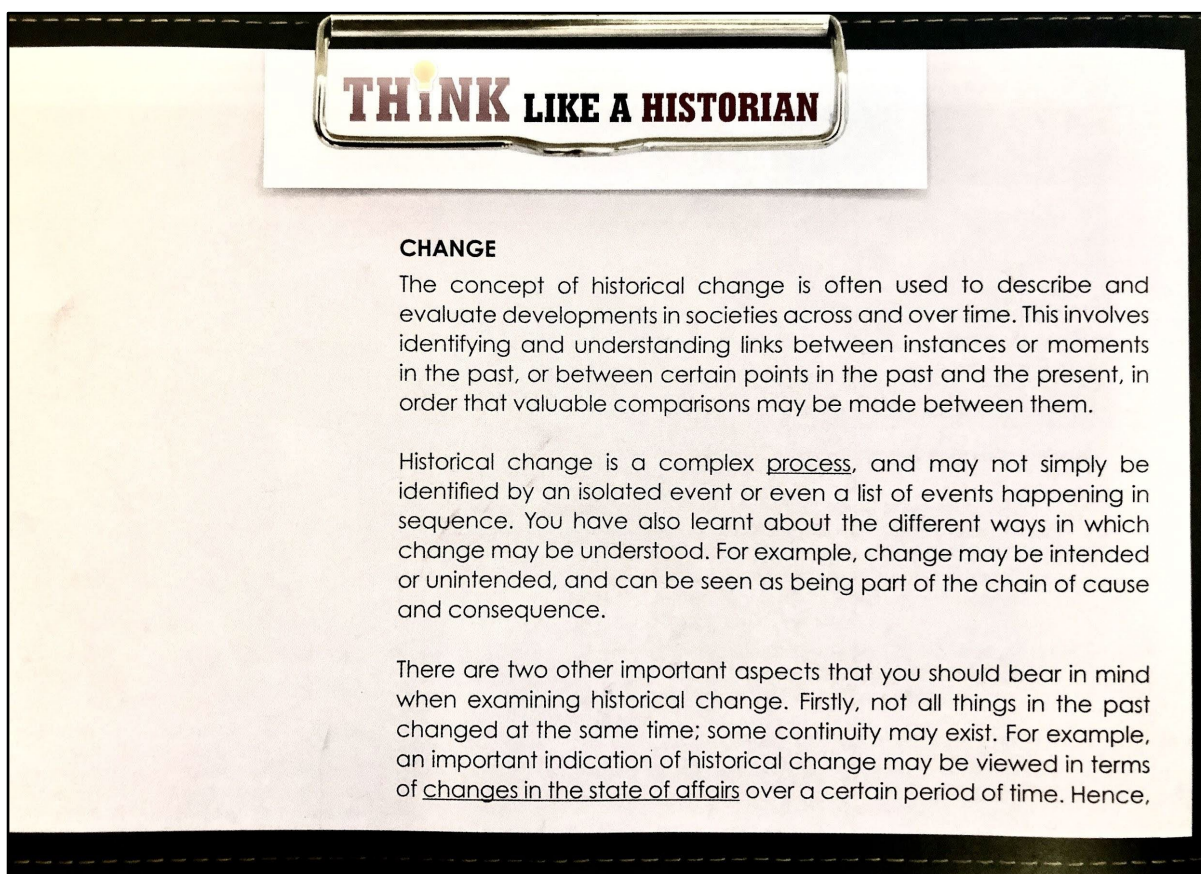
To this end, CPDD identifies eight

historical¹ concepts to be taught in the classroom: accounts, causation, change and continuity, chronology, diversity, empathy, evidence, and significance. Each of these concepts shapes a disciplinary understanding of historical knowledge: how it is constructed, what its purposes are, and where its limits lie. They enable the student to see history not as a mere collection of facts, but a conscious human project to learn about the past based on its traces in the present. The advantages are academic and pedagogical: students gain a better grasp of the idea of history, and, following Piaget’s constructivist paradigm, become aware of how to build their own knowledge (Piaget, 1953).

The historical concepts are made

explicit in the TLG so that teachers will plan classroom teaching around them. The concepts are also embedded within the learning resources for history: each chapter in the upper secondary textbooks is pegged to a historical concept, and various “Think Like A Historian” boxes (*Fig 1*) are inserted to make the connections between the substantive content and the procedural concepts explicit (Ling and Paul, 2013, p. viii). These conscious inclusions demonstrate the centrality of historical concepts to the history curriculum. Three of these concepts — namely causation, change and continuity, and significance — are defined as targets of assessment for Assessment Objective 2, as stated in the 2013 History syllabus and TLG (MOE, 2016, p. 36; MOE, 2012, p. 220).

Figure 1: Example of a “Think Like A Historian” box (Ling and Paul, 2014, p. 142)



Assessment for the historical concepts

Ideally, our curricular objectives, classroom pedagogy, and assessment standards should be aligned in order to deliver the best education possible to students. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe’s celebrated “Understanding by Design” framework is an attempt to operationalise the belief in coherence (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). They advocate first deciding on the student outcomes, then designing metrics to assess students’ achievement, and finally structuring tasks around those metrics. In short: synchronise curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

The importance of assessment

Assessment – the measurement of student learning and achievement via observable outcomes – is an important element of this teaching trifecta (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment) for three reasons: information, incentives, and improvement.

First, assessment serves an **informational** function. Assessment enables educators to gather data about students’ readiness and progress.ⁱⁱ Assessment also helps learners know what to aim for, by designing performance tasks which serve as goalposts towards which students aspire and perspire.ⁱⁱⁱ Using this information, teachers tailor their subsequent lessons according to students’ grasp of the lesson material: they can decide whether to consolidate learning or to move forward.

Second, assessment is a vehicle for intrinsic and extrinsic **incentives** for learning.^{iv} Students are rewarded by seeing progress, and by peer and parental encouragement. Teachers are motivated by visible markers of student progress. A failure to meet targets may spur some

students to work harder.

Third, assessment helps learners to **improve** through application and feedback. Assignments and tests are opportunities for students to apply what they have learned, and to realise their potential and limits through the act of application. In this sense, assessment serves as a form of learning. Assessment is also the basis of teacher feedback: teachers help learners see where they fall short and how to achieve more. Feedback is a crucial strategy to assist students “to reduce the gap between current and desired understandings” (Hattie and Timperly, 2007, p.86).

Assessment in secondary school history

The TLG states that assessment in history emphasises “deepening disciplinary understanding and thus focuses on the ... understanding and application of historical concepts through historical reasoning skills” (MOE, 2012, p. 219). In other words, the teaching of historical concepts should be front and center.

Three Assessment Objectives (AOs) are set out in the history examination syllabi^v: (AO1) deploying knowledge; (AO2) constructing explanations and communicating historical knowledge; and (AO3) interpreting and evaluating source materials (MOE and UCLES, 2018, p. 5).

The ‘O’ and ‘N’ level history papers consist of two sections: a source-based case study (SBCS) and structured-essay questions (SEQs) (MOE and UCLES, 2018, p. 7). AO1 and AO2 are matched to the SEQs, while AO1 and AO3 are matched to the SBCS (MOE and UCLES, 2018, p. 6).

Using SEQs to assess the historical concepts

Both the 2013 history syllabus and the TLG charge AO2 with assessment for the “key concepts” of “causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance” (MOE, 2016, 36; MOE, 2012, p. 220) — they are to be assessed by SEQs.

Since 2014, SEQs have been split into two Parts, (a) and (b).^{vi} Broadly speaking, there are three forms of SEQs in national examinations for history: the **descriptive** SEQ for ‘N’-level Part (a), the **explanatory** SEQ for ‘N’-level Part (b) and ‘O’-level Part (a), and the **weighing** SEQ for ‘O’-level Part (b).

An analysis of past examination papers reveals a gap between learning outcomes and assessment practices in the current practice of teaching historical concepts. Prior to the introduction of the 2013 syllabus, most questions dealt with causation or consequence. Mr. Colin Emerson, then a teacher at Catholic High School, found that 91% of the questions asked at the O-levels between 2002 and 2012 “dealt with cause and effect or consequence” (Emerson, 2013, p. 43).

Mr. Emerson’s observation that “causation was privileged above other second-order historical concepts” comes prior to the introduction of the 2013 syllabus (Emerson, 2013, p. 44). He suggests that causation was the main target of assessment because SEAB “viewed [other second-order historical concepts as] unnecessary in light of the fact that second-order historical concepts were not identified as assessment objectives, nor were they explicitly described in the assessment sections of the 2001 and 2007 syllabi” (Emerson, 2013, p.44).^{vii} By this token, the 2013 syllabus should spearhead a shift in the conceptual targets of assessment from 2014^{viii} onwards. Mr Emerson expresses this hope in his paper: “[based] on what is written as AO2, it appears that causation,

change and continuity, and significance will all be assessed through the SEQs” (Emerson, 2013, p. 46).

National examinations after implementation of 2013 syllabus

Did the 2013 syllabus – with a newfound emphasis on historical concepts – herald a change in assessment practice? To answer this question, I compiled SEQs from both History and Humanities (History) national examinations since 2014, and coded them according to the four concepts cited in AO2: ‘causation’, ‘consequence’, ‘change and continuity’, and ‘significance’.^{ix} Amongst 90 ‘O’-level SEQs, 69 assessed ‘causation’, 2 assessed ‘consequence’, 18 assessed ‘change and continuity’, and 1 assessed ‘significance’ (Fig 2). Amongst 90 ‘N’-level SEQs, 37 assessed ‘causation’, 36 assessed ‘consequence’, and 17 assessed ‘change and continuity’ (Fig 3). In total, between 2014 and 2020, 59% of SEQs have assessed ‘causation’, 21% assessed ‘consequence’, 19% assessed ‘change and continuity’, and 1% assessed ‘significance’ (Fig 4). My coding procedure and dataset can be found in **Appendix A**.

To CPDD and SEAB’s credit, national examinations have followed CPDD’s 2013 syllabus in shifting the emphasis away from ‘causation’ and ‘consequence’ in summative assessment. The combined proportion of ‘causation’ and ‘consequence’ questions has fallen from 91% between 2002 and 2012, to 80% between 2014 and 2020. Questions for ‘change and continuity’ make up the remainder, comprising 19% of the total; the sole question on ‘significance’ was asked in the 2020 elective paper.

Figure 2: Question breakdown for ‘O’-level SEQs since 2014

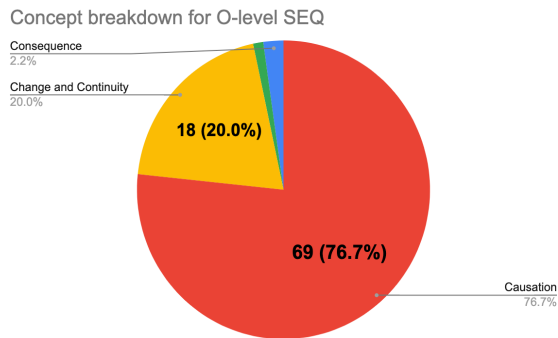


Figure 3: Question breakdown for ‘N’-level SEQs since 2014

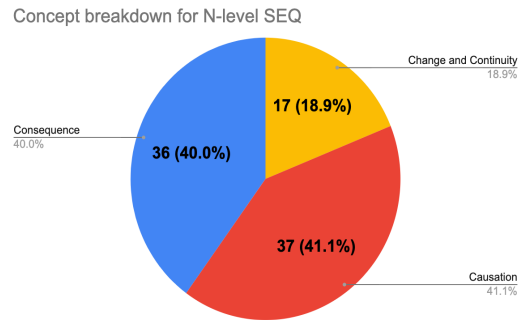
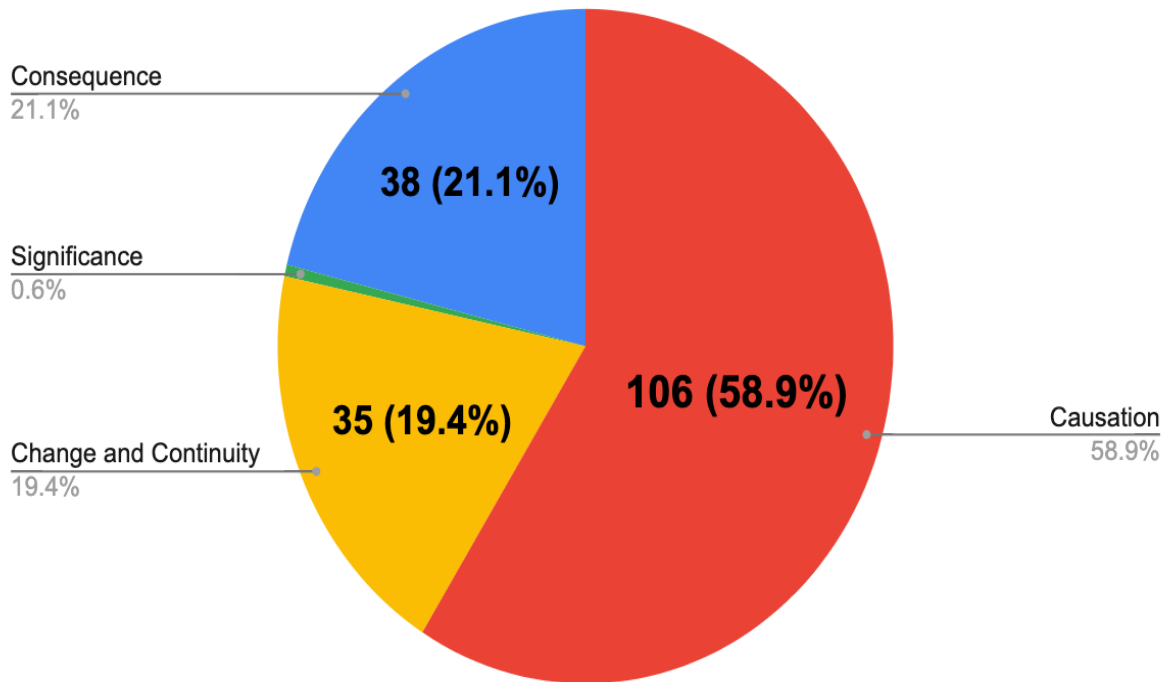


Figure 4: Summary of concepts assessed by SEQs for both ‘O’- and ‘N’-levels

Concept breakdown for all SEQ



However, there remains a gap between the aspirations of AO2 and its assessment practices to date. Students’ understanding of ‘change and continuity’ and ‘significance’, two key historical concepts, is only assessed in one-fifth of all SEQs to date, whereas the other two concepts

comprise four-fifths of SEQs. This imbalance is unfortunate, given the important connection between assessment and learning. When students are not assessed, they are unclear on where they stand, they do not know how to improve, and they may not be motivated to learn.

Teachers are incentivised to strategically focus on causation and consequence. Furthermore, the paucity of question types for ‘change and continuity’ and ‘significance’ limits the school teacher’s routines on what sort of questions can be set in classroom practice.

How can the problem of ‘missing concepts’ be remedied? For the remainder of the article, I will describe the Levels of Response Marking Scheme (LORMS) framework for history assessment in Singapore, propose four SEQ framings to assess ‘change and continuity’ which can be assessed using LORMS, and suggest some advantages of introducing these framings in history examinations.

LORMS as a tool of assessment

The Levels of Response Marking Scheme (LORMS) is the primary assessment tool for history education for secondary schools in Singapore. LORMS allocates numerical levels to student responses (*Table 1*) based on the degree of critical thought demonstrated by a student’s response. Higher levels indicate higher-order thinking, and are awarded higher marks. LORMS partitions the total sum of marks allocated for the question into fixed bands. The chief characteristics of LORMS are that it is flexible, hierarchical, and non-cumulative.

Table 1 : LORMS template for Causation SEQ (12m question)

Level	Description	Marks
L1	Describes without factors	1–2
L2	Explains Yes OR No Award 3 marks for explanation of one side, with more marks for additional reasons or supporting details for reasons, to a maximum of 6 marks.	3–6
L3	Explains Yes AND No Award 7 marks for explanation of both sides, with more marks for additional reasons or supporting details for reasons, to a maximum of 10 marks.	7–10
L4	Weighs factors Requires an explicit consideration of ‘How far?’ using criteria beyond those used in L3. Award higher mark for more developed answers.	11–12

LORMS is a broad framework that accommodates answers from both SCBS^x and SEQs. Paper setters have flexibility in determining the mark bands for each level. This flexibility is a strength for disciplinary and pedagogical reasons. The humanities emphasises critical thinking over formulaic solutions, and LORMS' strength lies in its coverage of a wide range of student responses. In pedagogy, we tailor our instruction to the profile of our students. Similarly, good assessment adapts to student profiles in order to expose the distribution of student performance. As Mrs Kanta Wadhvani remarked in 2019, "marking is like flying a kite: we adjust according to where our students are at."^{xi}

LORMS is a hierarchical framework structured on assessing performance on the depth, rather than breadth, of students' knowledge and skills in the subject. In this vein of emphasising depth, it is comparable to Norman Webb's four-level depth of knowledge framework^{xii} (Webb, 2002). LORMS rewards high levels of thinking disproportionately.^{xiii} Consequently, LORMS provide a consistent set of scaffolds for qualitative feedback. Teachers encourage students to aim for the 'higher levels', and LORMS provides a clear pathway by which they can achieve the top bands.^{xiv}

These characteristics make LORMS a highly efficient vehicle for assessment. Its flexibility means that LORMS can be used to assess a wide range of knowledge and skills outcomes. Its hierarchical nature scaffolds the feedback given by teachers and enables astute students to engage in self-assessment.

All history teachers are trained to use LORMS. Consequently, an extension of assessment types will be made easier if appropriate LORMS answering structures are also provided. In the next section, I

propose four SEQs framings that target an understanding of change and continuity to be assessed via LORMS.^{xv}

Using LORMS to assess change and continuity

For the application of LORMS to assess change and continuity in SEQs, we need to (i) identify conceptual elements of the concept to be assessed, (ii) formulate SEQ framings that assess these enduring understandings, and (iii) propose sample answers within the LORMS framework. In this section, I discuss some approaches to and understandings of change and continuity, and propose four SEQ framings that will assess students' grasp of these elements, along with sample questions. A sample answer key written in the LORMS framework can be found in **Appendix C**.

Approaches to and understandings of change and continuity

The TLG notes that "[the] concept of change and continuity is pivotal in giving meaning and coherence to the past" (MOE, 2012, p. 335). The complexities of change and continuity have been discussed by philosophers, historians, and educators. Drawing on two key scholarly works, this section discusses some conceptual elements of change and continuity (*Table 2*).^{xvi}

Stéphane Lévesque investigates 'continuity and change' as a central plank of his book on historical thinking. Quoting Peter Lee, Lévesque describes change and continuity as a procedural concept that "provide the structural basis for the discipline [of history]"^{xvii} (Lee, 1983, p. 25; Lévesque, 2008, p. 30). He observes that change and continuity is central to the discipline since "history is, by definition, concerned with the study of historical change" (Lévesque, 2008, p. 74). Lévesque's insight is that "synoptic

judgments” on change and continuity are the “purposes and motives” which structure a chronology of events, and identifies three approaches to teaching change and continuity based on “recent studies in the field”: narrative, thematic, and contemporary (Lévesque, 2008, p. 78). The narrative approach emphasises “building coherent accounts of the past” by looking at where events originated and how they unfold; the thematic approach suggests organising history around substantive or first-order concepts that “reveal patterns of historical duration and succession”; and the contemporary approach takes present issues as a fulcrum on which students explore changes and continuities of the past (Lévesque, 2008, p. 79).

Peter Seixas and Tom Morton identify ‘continuity and change’ as one of the ‘Big Six’ historical concepts that they deem crucial to the teaching of history.^{xviii} For Seixas and Morton, historical change is much more than a chronicle of ‘what happened’. Instead, change is a convoluted process that “speeds up, slows down, and

sometimes takes a turn,” and, alongside its oft-forgotten counterpart of continuity, contributes to the richness and complexities of “the fabric of human experience” (Seixas and Morton, 2013, p. 76). Seixas and Morton identify four ‘guideposts’, or enduring understandings, by which students and educators can apprehend change and continuity as a procedural concept. The guideposts are that: (1) change and continuity are interwoven; (2) historical change is a process that has varying pace and patterns; (3) historical change can be evaluated as ‘progress’ or ‘decline’ for some specific group of people; and (4) we can partition history into periods^{xix} based on our interpretations of historical change and continuity (Seixas and Morton, 2013, p. 86). For ease of reference, I label Seixas and Morton’s guideposts as ‘simultaneity’, ‘process’, ‘directionality’, and ‘periodisation’. These four ideas can be understood as enduring understandings that undergird change and continuity.

Table 2 : Key elements of change and continuity

Lévesque’s (2008) approaches to change and continuity	Seixas and Morton’s (2013) enduring understandings of change and continuity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Narrative: how events originate and unfold ● Thematic: substantive concepts reveal patterns of historical duration and succession ● Contemporary: present issues can reveal change and continuity in the past 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simultaneity: change and continuity are interwoven, and can occur at the same time 2. Process: historical change varies in pace and profundity 3. Directionality: historical change can mean progress or regress 4. Periodisation: historical change demarcates breaks between events and historical continuity binds together clumps of events

Four SEQ framings for change and continuity

Assessment of change and continuity comprises approximately a fifth of SEQs in national examinations between 2014 and 2020, far below the proportion of causation questions. In Sections 4.3–4.7, I propose four SEQ framings to

target change and continuity, illustrated by an archetypal question. I identify elements of each framing, and map them to the three forms of SEQs — descriptive, explanatory, and weighing. All four framings can be assessed using LORMS (Table 3). I provide sample LORMS answers for the archetypal questions in Appendix C.

Table 3 : LORMS template for Change and Continuity SEQ (12m question)

Level	Description	Marks
L1	Describes without change/stand	1–2
L2	Explains Yes OR No Award 3 marks for explanation of one side, with more marks for additional reasons or supporting details for reasons, to a maximum of 6 marks.	3–6
L3	Explains Yes AND No Award 7 marks for explanation of both sides, with more marks for additional reasons or supporting details for reasons, to a maximum of 10 marks.	7–10
L4	Weighs changes/stands Requires an explicit consideration of ‘How far?’ using criteria beyond those used in L3. Award higher mark for more developed answers.	11–12

Framing 1 : the evaluation question

The evaluation question will ask whether a historical event heralded an improvement or worsening of the conditions of a target population. This framing has been used in national examinations. The archetypal question^{xx} is taken from the 2015 ‘O’-level examination:

‘Nazi rule in Germany brought about an **improvement** in the lives of **the German people.**’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (2015, GCE-

O, 2(b)

This question has three core elements: (1) a key event as the historical change, (2) the evaluation term of ‘improvement’ or ‘worsening’, and (3) the target population for evaluation of the change. In this example, the key event is the imposition of Nazi rule, the evaluation term is improvement, and the target population is the German people.

This question framing takes a **narrative** approach à la Lévesque. The key event requires students to compare two periods:

before the event, and after the event; in other words, to look at the origin of an event and how it unfolded. It demands an understanding of **directionality** à la Seixas and Morton: change can be seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (or both) for a given population. It requires an implicit understanding of **historical empathy**.

Using LORMS, we can ask candidates to describe changes due to the historical event, explain those changes, and/or weigh the change as an overall improvement or worsening of conditions (*Table 4*).

Table 4 : Three SEQ forms for evaluation question

SEQ Form	Part	Sample Question
Descriptive	GCE-N Part (a)	Describe how Nazi rule in Germany changed the lives of the German people.
Explanatory	GCE-N Part (b)	Explain how Nazi rule in Germany improved the lives of : (i) the German military; (ii) the unemployed.
	GCE-O Part (a)	Explain how Nazi rule in Germany improved (or worsened) the lives of the German people.
Weighing	GCE-O Part (b)	Nazi rule in Germany brought about an improvement in the lives of the German people.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer

Framing 2 : the watershed question

The watershed question will ask about the magnitude of a particular historical change: whether it was significant or insignificant. This is a novel framing for secondary history, although it has been asked at the A-level. An archetypal question:

‘Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was a watershed in Japanese history.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

This question has two core elements: (1) a key event as the historical change, and (2) the identification term of ‘watershed’. It has an optional element of setting a historiographical boundary. In this example,

the key event is Japan’s invasion of China in 1937, the identification term is ‘watershed’, and the historiographical boundary is ‘Japanese history’. If left unspecified, the boundary is world history.

This question framing takes a **narrative** approach à la Lévesque. The key event requires students to look at one event and see how history unfolds from that event. It demands an understanding of **process** à la Seixas and Morton: change can be interpreted as profound or superficial. It requires an implicit understanding of **historical significance**.

Using LORMS, we can ask candidates to explain how the change was significant, and/or weigh its significance in a longer view (*Table 5*).

Table 5 : Two SEQ forms for watershed question

SEQ Form	Part	Sample Question
Explanatory	GCE-N Part (b)	Explain how Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was significant to (i) Japan; (ii) China.
	GCE-O Part (a)	Explain how Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was a significant/insignificant landmark in history.
Weighing	GCE-O Part (b)	‘Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was a watershed in Japanese history.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

Framing 3 : the given change question

The given change question proposes that an event resulted in a historical change, and ask candidates to evaluate the proposal. This is a novel framing for secondary history, although it has been asked at the A-level. An archetypal question:

‘**The 1950–1953 Korean War** led to the **globalisation of the Cold War**.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

This question has two core elements: (1) a key event, and (2) a historical change that resulted from the event. In this example, the key event is the 1950–1953 Korean War,

and the historical change is the globalisation of the Cold War.

This question framing takes a **narrative** approach à la Lévesque. The key event requires students to look at one event and see how history unfolds from that event. It demands an understanding of **simultaneity** à la Seixas and Morton: historical events can result in both change and continuity. It requires an implicit understanding of **causation**.

Using LORMS, we can ask candidates to explain the given change(s), explain a given change resulting from two key events, and/or weigh the link between the given change and the key event (*Table 6*).

Table 6 : Two SEQ forms for given change question

SEQ Form	Part	Sample Question
Explanatory	GCE-N Part (b)	Explain how the 1950–1953 Korean War changed the nature of the Cold War with regards to (i) its global reach; (ii) US military spending. Explain how the Cold War was globalised as a result of: (i) the 1950–1953 Korean War; (ii) the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.
	GCE-O Part (a)	Explain how the 1950–1953 Korean War changed the nature of the Cold War.
Weighing	GCE-O Part (b)	‘The 1950–1953 Korean War led to the globalisation of the Cold War.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

Framing 4 : the periodisation question

The periodisation question will ask students to choose between multiple options as boundaries^{xxi} for a historical period or colligation^{xxii}. This is a novel framing for secondary history, and to my knowledge it has not been used in examinations for other levels. An archetypal question:

‘It was the **1936 Moscow Trial**, not the **1934 Kirov Affair**, that marked the **beginning** of **Stalin’s Great Terror**.’^{xxiii} How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

This question has three core elements: (1) a boundary term, (2) the period or colligation in question, and (3) multiple options to serve as the boundary. In this example, the boundary term is “beginning”, the period or colligation is Stalin’s Great Terror, and the options are the 1934 Kirov

Affair and the 1936 Moscow Trial.

This question framing takes a **thematic** approach à la Lévesque. It demands that students perceive a theme or substantive concept that holds together a period or colligation, and use this theme in choosing an option to serve as a boundary. It demands an understanding of **periodisation** à la Seixas and Morton: choosing which historical change to demarcate a break in time. It requires an implicit understanding of **historical significance**.

Using LORMS, we can ask candidates to explain the relevance of the boundary option to the period, and/or weigh the suitability of two options (*Table 7*).

Since the periodisation question is wholly novel, I provide some colligations and boundary options relevant to upper secondary history in **Appendix D**.

Table 7 : Two SEQ forms for periodisation question

SEQ Form	Part	Sample Question
Explanatory	GCE-N Part (b)	Explain how each of the following events can be seen as the beginning of Stalin’s Great Terror: (i) 1934 Kirov Affair; (ii) 1936 First Moscow Trial
	GCE-O Part (a)	Explain how the 1934 Kirov Affair and the 1936 Moscow Trial can be seen as the beginning of Stalin’s Great Terror.
Weighing	GCE-O Part (b)	‘It was the 1936 Moscow Trial, not the 1934 Kirov Affair, that marked the beginning of Stalin’s Great Terror.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

Summary of the SEQ framings

Table 8 : Four proposed SEQ Framings for change and continuity

	Framing	Archetypal Question (Weighing)	Change & Continuity	SEQ Form Mapping
1	Evaluation	‘Nazi rule in Germany brought about an improvement in the lives of the German people.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (2015, GCE-O, 2(b))	Approach: Narrative Enduring understanding: Directionality	Descriptive, Explanatory, Weighing
2	Watershed	‘Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was a watershed in Japanese history.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Approach: Narrative Enduring understanding: Process	Explanatory, Weighing
3	Given change	‘The 1950–1953 Korean War led to the globalisation of the Cold War.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Approach: Narrative Enduring understanding: Simultaneity	Explanatory, Weighing
4	Periodisation	‘It was the 1936 Moscow Trial, not the 1934 Kirov Affair, that marked the beginning of Stalin’s Great Terror.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your	Approach: Thematic Enduring understanding:	Explanatory, Weighing

		answer.	Periodisation	
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Advantages of introducing SEQs for change and continuity

The chief advantage of adopting the suggested SEQ framings is that it bridges the pedagogical gap in secondary history, between what is to be taught and what will be assessed. These suggestions help to fulfil the promise in AO2 to assess change and continuity. There remains space for further work on SEQ framings for change and continuity, and proposals for SEQ framings for historical significance.

These SEQ framings are also practical and useful within the current context of history education in secondary schools for three more reasons: (1) the coordination with the LORMS framework dovetails with humanities teachers’ training and practice, (2) the SEQs offer a means for teachers to scaffold conceptual learning for change and continuity, and (3) these framings provide a pathway for lateral expansion of national assessment practices to include more historical concepts.

First, the use of LORMS is widespread within the fraternity. LORMS features in

the assessment modules for trainee teachers teaching humanities subjects at the National Institute of Education. It is widely employed by in-service teachers for exams at every level. LORMS is a *lingua franca* for assessment amongst humanities teachers. Therefore, the expansion of SEQs to include novel framings will not be difficult for teachers to pick up, insofar as assessment is done by LORMS.

Second, these framings provide alternatives by which history teachers can promote their students’ disciplinary understanding of history. The SEQs scaffold a new historical concept within familiar cognitive structures. They provide a standard frame by which teachers can exchange insights among professional circles, and they create a common criteria for providing feedback to students.

Third, these framings enable a lateral expansion of assessment for national examinations. Armed with these framings, ‘O’- and ‘N’-level SEQs can ‘mix and match’ concepts. Table 7 provides a visual comparison using the 2019 papers:

Table 9 : Remodelling causation SEQs as change and continuity SEQs

		Original causation questions	Alternative C&C questions
O level, SEQ 2 World War II in Asia-Pacific	(a)	Explain why Japan occupied Manchuria in 1932.	Explain how Japan’s occupation of Manchuria in 1932 was a watershed in history.
	(b)	‘The reason for Japan’s defeat in World War II was American military might.’ How far do you agree? Explain your answer.	‘Japan’s defeat in World War II improved the lives of Asian people.’ How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

N level, SEQ 2 Hitler’s rule over Germany	(a)	Describe Hitler’s actions during 1933 to consolidate his power as Chancellor of Germany.	Describe the changes that Hitler’s actions in 1933 made to Germany’s political system.
	(b)	Explain how each of the following increased Hitler’s popularity in Germany: (i) remilitarisation; (ii) propaganda.	Explain how Hitler’s popularity in Germany was changed by: (i) remilitarisation; (ii) propaganda.

Importantly, the new framings tap on the knowledge outcomes already required by the syllabus. The proposed change and continuity questions do not necessitate additional content knowledge; instead, they demand flexibility and critical thinking, which is the point of teaching historical concepts. Since students learn the PEEL technique in line with the LORMS framework, the ‘skills-based’ burden of such a lateral expansion in assessment is minimised.

There are two limitations to the suggestions proposed in this article. First, none of the four question framings occasion Lévesque’s contemporary approach to teaching change and continuity. Colleagues may conceive of other ways to tap on the pedagogical potential of this unused option. Second, some framings are less amenable to SEQ forms present in the ‘N’-level examination. This implies an inequitable contribution to the learning of ‘N’- and ‘O’-level candidates. Nevertheless, considering that there have been zero change and continuity SEQs in the past five years of ‘N’-level papers, any move towards new historical concepts is a win. I am certain that colleagues in the fraternity will come up with both inclusive and innovative question framings, sooner rather than later.

Conclusion

As we saw with Mr. Emerson’s article,

the 2013 syllabus evoked high hopes that the historical concepts would ground a new way of teaching history in Singapore. We have come a long way in meeting those hopes, by introducing the historical concepts in our syllabus, courseware, and assessment objectives. What remains is to align our stated objectives with assessment practices, in an efficient way that reaps the benefits of a lateral expansion in assessment while minimising the transactions costs inherent to changes in existing practice. I am optimistic that these four proposed SEQ framings, tapping on the fraternity’s familiarity and expertise with LORMS, may contribute to our common endeavour.

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Note

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ⁱ The terms ‘historical concept’, ‘procedural concept’, and ‘second-order concept’ are sometimes used interchangeably.

ⁱⁱ According to Peter Airisian and Michael K. Russell, assessment is “the process of collecting, synthesising, and interpreting information to aid in classroom decision making” (Airisian and Russell, 2012, p. 3).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Assessment Reform Group describes formative assessment as a process of educators and learners figuring out “where [the learners] need to go and how best to get there” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002, p.1-2).

^{iv} According to Thorndike’s law of effect, behaviours which lead to positive outcomes are strengthened (Thorndike, 1911).

^v The three syllabi are for the ‘N’-level combined humanities (history elective) paper (*Syllabus 2176*), the ‘O’-level combined humanities (history elective) paper (*Syllabus 2273*), and the ‘O’-level pure history paper (*Syllabus 2174*). All syllabi are crafted jointly by the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES).

^{vi} For ‘O’-level candidates, the Part (a) question (worth 8 marks) requires explanation of events or issues, and the Part (b) question (worth 12 marks) requires judgment and evaluation of events or issues (MOE and UCLES, 2018, p. 18). For ‘N’-level candidates, the Part (a) question (worth 8 marks) requires description of events or issues, and the Part (b) question (worth 12 marks) requires explanation of events or issues.

^{vii} Mr Emerson suggests a second reason that causation is privileged: “because all events in history have causes and effects that can be studied” (Emerson, 2013, p. 44). While this is true, it should apply equally to the other historical concepts set out by CPDD, which were identified precisely because they frame history as a discipline.

^{viii} 2014 is the first year in which national examinations will be based on the 2013 syllabus.

^{ix} The HSSE editorial team point out, rightly, that the underlying assumption is that each question is focussed on one historical concept (rather than multiple concepts at once). This quantitative analysis (like any other) is indeed a model – a simplification – of actual assessment in the ‘real world’ of national examinations. And as with any model, the hope is that it provides some insight into the workings of the real world even though it cannot describe the real world in its full complexity.

^x SCBS permutes between several question archetypes, each of which has a corresponding LORMS structure. For example, a question on the purpose of a source often awards higher levels when candidates can demonstrate awareness of the message, the audience, and the intended outcome, and questions on source reliability often seek to check for students’ ability to employ cross-reference techniques or compare the source’s purpose with its message.

^{xi} I had the privilege of learning from Mrs Kanta Wadhvani, then HOD/Humanities at Bedok Green Secondary School, during my attachment there in 2019. She made this insightful comment during a department meeting.

^{xii} Norman Webb’s depth-of-knowledge framework posits four levels of student thinking. In order, they are: (1) factual recall or basic comprehension, (2) intermediate comprehension or processing, (3) explanation or connecting of ideas, and (4) developing hypotheses and applying knowledge in unfamiliar examples.

^{xiii} For example, a student who writes ‘five paragraphs of a lower level’ would score lower than another who writes ‘one paragraph at a higher level’ (*Table 1*).

^{xiv} A caveat about LORMS is that it is not cumulative: a student who performs at the highest level will immediately be awarded top marks, regardless of whether they ‘hit’ the lower levels. To illustrate these characteristics, a sample LORMS answer key for the 2019 ‘O’-level SEQs is provided in **Appendix B**.

^{xv} The HSSE editorial team noted that this paper does not provide new structures beyond existing LORMS formats. This section argues that using existing LORMS frameworks is helpful in rolling out new question types. I thank the HSSE editorial team for their valuable feedback.

^{xvi} This section summarises the findings of two books on historical thinking: *Thinking Historically* (2008) by Professor Stéphane Lévesque, and *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (2013) by Professor Peter Seixas and Tom Morton. These two books are important contemporary works that summarise the scholarship on historical thinking, suggest applications in history education, and even tapped on by CPDD in their formulation of historical concepts in the syllabus.

^{xvii} Peter Lee’s 1983 paper identifies the key procedural concepts as evidence, cause, empathy, change, and time (Lee, 1983, p. 25). Stéphane Lévesque’s 2008 book chooses to emphasise historical significance, continuity and change, progress and decline, evidence, and historical empathy (Lévesque, 2008, p. 37).

^{xviii} Seixas and Morton's six key concepts are, in order: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective, and the ethical dimension (Seixas and Morton, 2013, p. 10-11).

^{xix} There are two approaches to periodisation: by looking at historical change or by looking at historical continuity. Seixas and Morton's discussion of periodisation centers on identifying the boundaries of historical periods (Seixas and Morton, 2013, p. 85). In other words, Seixas and Morton focus on historical change when approaching periodisation. Stéphane Lévesque, by contrast, chooses to see historical periods as colligations. Quoting William Wals, Lévesque describes colligations as a "sequence of significant events" which require "the tracing of the *intrinsic* [sic] relations of one event to others in a series" (Walsh, 1961, p. 59; Lévesque, 2008, p. 70). In other words, Lévesque focuses on historical continuity when approaching periodisation.

^{xx} This is the only question in all SEQs set in national examinations between 2014 and 2020 that asks about 'improvement/worsening'. The closest other example is: "Stalin's economic policies in the Soviet Union were a failure.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer." (2018, *GCE-O*, 2(b)).

^{xxi} This is the Seixas and Morton (2013) approach to studying historical periods by looking at the historical changes, or boundaries. The alternative approach, discussed by Lévesque (2008), is to look at historical continuities as the basis of colligations. I discussed this difference in an earlier footnote, in Section 4.1.

^{xxii} Drawing from William Walsh, Stéphane Lévesque defines a colligation as "the tracing of *intrinsic* relations of one event to others in a series" (Lévesque 2008: 70). In other words, a macro-event comprising related micro-events.

^{xxiii} The boundary options chosen for this question are intentional. Stalin's Great Terror is dated to the 1934 Kirov Affair in the upper secondary history textbook (Ling and Paul, 2013, 49). However, on Wikipedia, it is dated from the first Moscow Trial held in 1936.