

Singaporean Mentality Exposed

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Film critics and audiences have dubbed *I Not Stupid* an excellent commentary on the education system and government paternalism. The movie stars three school children who have been channelled into the undesirable EM3 stream, and shows the trials and tribulation of these children and their parents. *I Not Stupid* has been described as a "coming of age movie"¹ for its rare ability to criticise the government and its policies and bring pertinent issues to light, so much so that many are surprised that it managed to get past the not-too-kind local board of censors. This [presents](#) us with an interesting question - with its explicit references to the government and its blatant criticisms of government policies, how did this political satire get past the censorship board? Was it a case of the censors deciding that this sort of criticism was acceptable once in a while? Or perhaps the censors just saw the movie differently. At first mention, the latter might sound very unlikely. However, if we ask ourselves what the real butt of the satire is, we might begin to realise that there is a possibility that this movie is not intended to be a political satire at all. In fact, it is my contention that the butt of the satire in this movie is the Singaporean mentality, and not the government.

However, before we can begin to examine the real target of the movie's satire, it is first necessary to have an understanding of the movie and its characters. The movie stars three students, Terry Khoo, Liu Kok Pin and Ang Boon Hock who are in the EM3 [stream](#). Terry Khoo, who is also the narrator in the movie, is portrayed as a chubby and clumsy spoilt brat, whose mother is overly paternalistic. Mrs. Khoo, who is decked in white for most of the movie to no doubt show a [similarity](#) between her and the PAP government who also have a white uniform, makes all the decisions for her children, and believes that they should be lucky to have such a responsible mother. While Terry is happy to accept this situation, his elder sister Selena is more rebellious and repeatedly demands her freedom. Liu Kok Pin is a student whose ability in English and Maths is weak. His mother, Mrs. Liu takes it upon herself to discipline Kok Pin to ensure that he scores well in his tests in school, while brushing aside his natural talent in art.

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