

## Educational Development in a Strong State : The Singapore Experience

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### Introduction

The publication of two books, in 1985 of *Bringing the State Back In* (Evans et al 1985) and in 1988 of Migdal's, *Strong States and Weak Societies : State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third*

*World*, probably the most significant works on state-society relations in the last two decades, aptly marked the burgeoning and renewed interest shown by sociologists and political scientists in the emergence and role of the modern state. Questions explored in this literature centre around the two major perspectives, the state-centric and the society-centric. Within these perspectives, scholars have explored such questions as the origins of states in Western and in developing countries, the state and economic growth and developed such concepts as the strong, active, soft and fragile state, and concepts of

autonomy and capacity among others (for a useful review of the literature see Barkey and Parikh, 1991). Academic research has been

spurred on by the phenomenon of ruinous and seemingly endemic civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the emergence of 'new states' after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There has also been a concern over the state's legitimacy in the US and

Western Europe for many states there exhibit a declining capacity to provide leadership, foster growth and equitable distribution of resources, guarantee personal safety or meet the needs of an increasingly impoverished underclass. There is also the phenomenon of the rise to economic significance in the global economy of such strong and secure states as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. How and why have some states grown and remained strong while others have turned

fragile is likely to be a major question for social scientists in the foreseeable future. Historians and sociologists of education will find in this literature new insights for exploring the relation between the state and schooling systems.

#### Conceptualising State-Society Relations

The principal issue for new states is the establishment of legitimacy.

Such legitimacy is necessary for the fledgling state to manage the extraction of resources, establish dominance, and set up political, legal and cultural and educational institutions to define the normative

framework. The process, speed and efficiency with which state legitimacy is established is dependent at least in part upon the strength of existing civic institutions. Thus, the view that the state's relation to society is essentially a contested one (Migdal 1988). Strong states emerge when they are able to tame, dominate, co-opt or otherwise destroy opposing civic traditions and institutions.

Strong states can begin by coercing citizens but then go on to win and maintain support by guaranteeing rights and through citizen participation in institutions like schools to build 'allegiance and identification' (Barkey and Parikh, p. 530). By contrast, fragile states are unable to dominate existing civic institutions; thus their autonomy, or relative freedom to act on their own interests and their capacity to implement their strategies to achieve their goals is limited (Barkey and Parikh, *ibid*, p. 526). It should be noted that states could have autonomy without capacity or that capacity could vary over time. Strong states can turn fragile and vice versa.

Reference was made earlier to the emergence, in the last two and a half decades, of strong, economically important states in East Asia. It is noted that the state-building literature does not seem to have paid sufficient attention to this phenomenon focusing instead on 'Why the capacity of many central states to penetrate local cultures and economies remains highly constrained ...' (Fuller and Bradshaw, 1993, p. 1). Next, there is a need to examine strong state emergence from a non-western perspective, paying due attention to historical circumstances and context.

Both strong and fragile states in the post-colonial developing world,

in the initial phases of their existence, sought to establish legitimacy by setting as their goal societal transformation via modernization. This often meant a rejection of traditionalism and existing civic institutions and practices on the grounds that they were

non-rational, and thus anti-modern, the creation of new symbols such as

a national flag, anthem, new and often imposing political structures like a parliament building and new national languages. A crucial part of the modernization thrust was the transformation of the economy - where this was to the advantage of new political elites - via the expansion of transportation, construction and industrial sectors and the promotion of wage labour. 'Modern Knowledge' certified via expanded

schooling was a major mechanism for linking labour to jobs, just as language and curriculum policy for schools were means for socialization. In short, what new states set out to do was to build non-particularistic loyalties by offering involvement with the modernization project, widening educational and vocational opportunities by expanding education, and boosting economic growth. That, at least, was the agenda.

#### The Role of Education in the Fragile and Strong State

Though the state-building literature is rich in descriptions of the politics of state-building, with some exceptions, there is a paucity of

work detailing the connections between the emergence of strong states and schooling (Garnier, Hage and Fuller, 1989; Fuller, 1993; Fuller and

Robinson, 1992). Yet, it can be argued that a major mechanism for state-building was the way in which the existing school system was penetrated, modified, expanded and used in the modernization project. Building schools was after all much easier than building and equipping

factories.

Education has certain characteristics that, in the context of the discussion of state-society relations, makes it a particularly useful object of study. Education's primary functions, in a socio-political sense, of providing for socialization of the younger generation into the state's preferred normative order and providing a trained/skilled workforce to meet economic needs and through a successful link between training and occupation, social mobility, can be useful to a state seeking legitimacy. Education has a particularly potent role to play in an ex-colonial state which promises vastly improved material conditions and opportunity. School expansion can draw in marginal sectors in society, acceptance of indigenous languages in the school curriculum can blunt oppositional cultural challenges, while curriculum

diversification can provide new skills which are more relevant to a developing economy. Most powerfully, the explicit and hidden curriculum can help build in young citizens a set of values, assumptions of national character and destiny that binds state and family/individual. Equally, an inability on the part of the state to penetrate existing school structures, to replace a colonial dominated curriculum with an indigenous one, to make education pay off in the market place, to expand opportunity and to maintain quality can all have profound implications for legitimacy.

This study examines state-society relations in a developing state in which education was used successfully to build the strong state. Fuller (1991) makes the argument in *Growing Up Modern* that the essential contradictions between bureaucratization and individual development, between capital accumulation for the elite and the need for balanced development, among others, leads to a lack of direction and coherence (p. 24). Such states, he believes, can only signal modernity and where they can expand opportunity inevitably do this at the expense of standards. Most significantly, legitimacy is lost because fragile states, even with educational expansion cannot deliver either social mobility or vocational opportunity. Thus, they fail to 'deepen the school's effect on children' (p. 4). The Singapore case presented here argues that fragile developing states can become strong

and make education productive and significant.

Education and the Emergence of the Fragile and Strong State : Singapore  
The Fragile State - 1950-1965

The model adopted is one which sees state-society relationships as contested in the beginning. The fragile state then develops into a strong state (vis a vis civil society) and which maintains strength

through a measure of strong state power, control over civic institutions, especially education, and a growing measure of congruence

on values, norms and assumptions between politician - bureaucrats on one hand and citizens on the other.

Singapore, at the onset of first, limited self-government in the mid-50s, and later independence in 1965 exhibited all the features of a

fragile state. It was a colonial plural society which, during World War II, had suddenly fallen from a secure, paternalistic colonial order

to an often brutal Japanese occupation during which the majority Chinese population was frequently brutalized. Made up of three major ethnic groups, Chinese, Malays and Indian, fragmented by a variety of languages, religions and cultures, a fragmentation made visible by housing and occupational segmentation, Singapore at the beginning of the fifties showed little potential for the successful strong state it presently is.

On the political - administrative front, the incipient Singapore state faced a number of major problems. Though governed differently from Malaya, the Communist-led insurgency in Malaya complicated political and security issues in Singapore as the British were loath to give Singapore independence, fearing a communist takeover. The winning of political power by Malays (over Chinese) in Malaya in 1956 heightened ethnic tensions in both Malaya and Singapore. Civil society in Singapore itself was fragmented and polarized along English-educated - non-English educated lines, between those who allied themselves with the British and those who were anti-British, those whose economic fortunes were founded on colonial patronage and those of indigenous, largely Chinese, origin.

Singapore's independence in 1965 came after over a decade of contestation over the political identity of the state, and near universal doubt about its economic viability on its own. Two major positions held sway in the 1950s - those who wanted a near complete transfer of power, if not independence, and those who opted for a more gradual transition, fearing a left-wing takeover (Shee, 1985, p. 3-5).

Internal self-government was achieved in 1959 and in the elections the People's Action Party won all 51 constituencies. But in 1960, a leading Cabinet member resigned, accusing the party of being soft on colonial influences and in 1961 another major defection of influential party members hit the PAP. The carefully constructed facade of amity between moderates and radicals, technocrats and populists, English educated and Chinese educated collapsed raising fears of a radical-Communist coup.

The split and subsequent contest for power and influence over trade unions, schools and the civil administration among others, were played

out against the backdrop of an intense debate over Singapore's political future. In this determination the Malaysians were involved as well for they feared a Communist enclave at their doorstep. One side, notably the PAP, argued that Singapore was neither politically nor economically viable without merger with Malaysia. The Barisan

Socialis accepted the need for a union with Malaysia but on radically different terms. They feared, and as the arrests of Barisan Socialis leaders subsequently proved, that a Malaya-dominated merger would mean a security crackdown. The 'battle for merger' was won on PAP terms in 1963 but the internal contradictions between the PAP and the ruling Alliance Party in Malaysia led to disputes and Singapore's eventual expulsion from Malaysia in August 1965.

Thus, in August 1965, the independent state of Singapore was born. However, as noted above, it lacked cohesion and legitimacy. Independence had not been sought but thrust upon Singapore. Its leaders were those who had argued that Singapore was not viable politically and economically on its own. The debate over merger and disputes within the Malaysian federation had heightened tensions between the English educated and non English-educated and between Chinese and Malays. Indeed ugly race riots had erupted in Singapore in 1964.

Singapore had several other features germane to a characterization of it as a fragile state. Singapore's economy in the mid-fifties was principally made up of entrepot activities, an economy judged to be incapable of providing employment to a population growing at 4 percent.

The trade union movement was largely in the hands of leftists and unions were being used as proxies in the political contest. Few of the

institutions in the civic sphere such as schools, the media, and business organizations were able to remain above the fray as all were politicised and factionalized. Some Chinese-language newspapers for instance, were used to whip up sentiment over language and culture issues while Chinese-medium schools were encouraged to oppose government language and curricular policies. The defining characteristic of the civil service was that it was colonial-dependent since civil servants had been recruited to serve colonial interests and almost all senior civil servants were English-educated.

If the state was weak, were civic institutions strong, and if so, why?

In many realms like education, business organizations, community

organizations like dialect-based associations and welfare organizations were active and functional. Under colonialism, the needs of the resident population were met only in minimal terms. The Chinese community, for instance, was largely responsible for providing their own language schools and by the late fifties had schools, a university and technical college functioning. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce was an active collection of indigenous entrepreneurs, picking their way in a metropolis-dominated economy. Dialect-based groups were significant in providing their members with a variety of services. Many of these organizations fell outside the realm of colonial influence and were oppositional in nature.

Singapore's colonial education history is one characterized by benign neglect, ad hoc policy making and indifference to consequences. Singapore, very soon after its establishment as a British trading post, attracted large numbers of immigrants from Southeast Asia, China and

South Asia becoming by the late nineteenth century a plural society, impoverished and multilingual. Such education 'policy' as emerged by the end of the century was to support Malay-medium education, aid the establishment of English-medium schools by missionary bodies while allowing clan and other bodies to set up Chinese-medium schools, which they did in large numbers. Major socio-political upheavals in the early years of the twentieth century, notably the 1911 Republican Revolution and in 1919, the May Fourth Movement energized the Chinese community in Singapore. Aided by an influx of teachers, writers and social activists the Chinese schools rapidly became politicised and anti-colonial. The English language came to be perceived as colonial and oppressive and the English-educated as anti-nationalist. British efforts between 1920-1940 to control Chinese schools and to wean them away from a virulent nationalism via greater teaching of English only served to further alienate the Chinese-schooled (Wilson, 1978, Gopinathan, 1974, Yeo, 1973).

Several major aspects of education in relation to state fragility can be noted. One is that the post-colonial inheritance in education was a

divided fragmented school system, with English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil-medium schools. Given their demographic majority the Chinese

dominated both English and Chinese medium schools, thus dividing an ethnic group already riven by class, dialect and clan factors by an additional language division. Many of the non-English schools were underfunded, had poor facilities and indifferent teaching. Standards and years of schooling varied as did teacher qualifications and

conditions of service. Obviously, under these circumstances no common curriculum existed. Such was the hostility that these circumstances engendered Chinese-stream students in the fifties and sixties agitated openly and defied government efforts to rid schools of communist sympathisers and to standardize curriculum and standards. In the mid-fifties, the Singapore Chinese Middle School Teachers Union was as much a political force as mainstream political parties.

There were other ways in which an anti-state school system influenced state-society relations. Tied up with, and indeed underpinning, agitation in education, were primordial concerns over ethnic identity, culture and language. Chinese school teachers and writers represented the Chinese intelligensia and were thus active in teachers unions, the Chinese-language newspapers and clan associations, among other civic institutions. The Chinese medium teachers resented their unfavorable status in terms of training and remuneration vis a vis English-medium teachers and obstructed moves to standardize and upgrade the system. Writers and journalists in their turn took up the issue, playing it up as an attack on Chinese education and culture. Given a state in which key political actors were uncertain of future political directions, such oppositional culture and language based politics held the state weak.

#### The Emergence of the Strong State in Singapore

No one who has recently studied global economic developments can be unaware of Singapore's emergence since the early 1970s as an orderly, cohesive, well-managed and economically successful nation; its politicians and civil servants have won a deserved reputation as efficient and incorruptible with an exceptional capacity both to plan and to implement. Singapore today exhibits all the characteristics of a strong state. The state enjoys legitimacy in that at the regional and global level it is accepted as an independent and viable state and

the People's Action Party has won every election since 1959. Two and a

half decades of solid economic growth, careful investment in human resources and infrastructure and a prudent savings policy has enabled the state to build up enviable resources; indeed the state talks openly

about its intention to redistribute wealth and promote asset enhancement. The Singapore state now has the capacity to support its own macro-economic initiatives, and investment in regional economics is

being actively promoted. Though the Singapore state was enabled to build up an industrial economy by wooing multinationals it has never been perceived to be a client state. The state continues to be visibly

and continually active in both the political and civic spheres, and

successively so. In the former it seeks to develop (and its efforts have wide support and credibility) a democratic system relevant to its needs by such innovations as the nominated member of parliament scheme (NMP) and group representative constituencies (GRC). In the civic sphere it has been able to dominate professional organizations like the

law and medical societies, religious, cultural and welfare organizations to ensure that these do not become special interest pressure groups. Over the past three decades, state-initiated organizations like the Peoples Association and Citizens Consultative Committees have become major instruments for control and influence in the civic sphere. Indeed, it might be argued that the Singapore state is not just strong, it is hegemonic.

It is not possible in this paper to detail all the processes that led to the emergence of the strong state as there are many other accounts (Chan, 1976, Shee, 1982, Pang, 1993, Krause, ( ), Chalmers, (

)). Since our concern in this paper is principally with the role of

education, I shall only sketch here a broad overview of state strategies. The principal imperatives were to centralise political power, develop policies to deal with ethnic pluralism, to establish a democratic (as opposed to communist) political system, to transform the

entrepot economy and to build pan-ethnic loyalties to overcome primordial and particularistic affinities. That education was seen as a principal instrument is seen in the publication of *Spring Source of our Nation* by the PAP in 1959.

The political problem of ethnic pluralism had been aggravated by the political contestation of the fifties and there was a considerable degree of Chinese chauvinism evident in political life. Given Singapore's Malay-Muslim neighbours, a policy of multi-culturalism was the only viable policy; the educational consequence of this was the policy of equal treatment and bilingualism (see below). That in itself

was not exceptional policy making; what was exceptional was the steely determination to implement policies to safeguard multiculturalism.

We noted earlier that there was a battle for hearts and minds over the nature of the new state to be. Though the English-educated PAP leaders had made common cause with radical left-wingers, in part to draw support from trade unions and educational-cultural organizations under the control and influence of the left wingers, there was soon a parting

of the ways. Faced with the need to avoid hostility from the Malayan political establishment, to build a industry-based economy which

required Western technology, capital and markets the PAP articulated a philosophy of democratic socialism. Over the years that philosophy has

resulted in an adherence to such democratic forms as regular elections but the government has effectively created a dominant one-party state (as in Mexico and Japan). Socialism means not public ownership of resources but a mixed economy, strong government control in macro economic policies and a concern for raising the living standards of the poor.

A high growth rate, rising unemployment and the inadequacy of an entrepot economy led to the adoption of economic policies with the following characteristics - a choice of export-led industrialization, policies to attract multinationals, a high savings rate, taming a strike-prone labour force and a commitment to education and training to

meet the demands of the industrial economy. It was a classic example of the exploitation of competitive advantage and a unflinching assessment of what Singapore needed to do to survive in a world full of opportunity and risk.

The PAP's economic strategy over three decades has been founded on an acceptance of Singapore's small size and on building upon existing advantages and creating new ones. Thus trading links with the ex-colonial power were maintained and strengthened while new ones were established. Nationalisation of foreign economic assets was ruled out.

Multinational corporations were intensely courted to establish themselves in Singapore. The continued teaching of the English Language was vigorously promoted as being of crucial economic significance in the face of some considerable opposition from the non-English educated in the sixties. The government also established new economic institutions and incentives. The Jurong Town Corporation was established to provide basic infrastructure to ease the cost and time involved in starting up industrial operations in Singapore; the Economic Development Board (EDB) (1961) to sell Singapore abroad and to

source for new capital and industries; the Development Bank of Singapore [1968] to provide for development financing; INTRACO to open up government to government trade with the Eastern bloc countries; and a National Productivity Board, among others. These were among several key parastatal organizations that provided both innovative economic strategies and the necessary infrastructure. Indeed the EDB itself jointly ran a number of critical and specialist training centres to provide workers with skills needed in the economy but which were not available in mainstream training institutions. Centres were

established with the help of Rollei, Tata, Philips and the Japanese and

French governments.

Singapore has achieved spectacular economic growth in the last twenty years. In the 1991, Singapore had a total trade of S\$216 billion and was the world's seventeenth largest exporter and the fifteenth largest importer. The GDP in 1991 stood at S\$69,451 million; percapita GDP at current market prices reached S\$25,677 in 1991 compared to S\$2796 in 1970. Official foreign reserves stood at S\$70 billion in 1993; Singapore has the highest foreign reserves per capita in the world.

Singapore's savings rate at 47% of GDP is also the highest in the world. Singapore has low levels of foreign debt and its currency has appreciated considerably in the last two decades against such major currencies as the US dollar, sterling and the mark. The government has implemented policies to achieve better wealth distribution and invested heavily in infrastructure and so the growth of the economy has been reflected in a rise in the standard of living (Chia, 1989).

Many labels may be applied to the strong state that emerged in Singapore - capitalist-developmental (Chalmers), hegemonic (Clammer, 1985), paternalistic-authoritarian (Pye, 1986). Pye's comment, noted in Mc Cord, (1991) sums up the Singapore state.

"Authority is expected to combine, with grace and benevolence, both elitism and sympathy ... the cultures revere hierarchy ... but they also expect rulers to be concerned about the livelihood of the masses".

The current fashion in some academic circles for a culture-based explanation for the economic success of the East Asian states has won the approval of Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, stressing that "the Confucianist belief that good self-cultivation, regulation of the family, and governing of the state will bring peace under the heavens ..." led to "the people's respect for their elders which made them accept tough government policies" (Straits Times, October 6, 1994). In

a paradoxical way it helped that the state had such inauspicious beginnings for it forged a steady determination not to fail and gave birth to the 'politics of survival'. The fear that it may all still go

horribly wrong, that present achievements need to be protected for the future and a measure of self-serving rationalizations continue to lead to policies that entrench the strong state.

Education's Contribution to the Emergence of the Strong State

We noted in the earlier sections that the historical evolution of a

segmented language-based system, the politicisation of such civic organizations as clan associations, media and teachers unions and a lack on consensus over Singapore's political character and destiny kept

the state weak. While many factors helped to make the state strong, in

this section we shall concentrate on the role of education. The principal question is how the weak state was able to overcome opposition and hostility in the education sector and how it used education to increase its legitimacy.

The principal reason why Chinese-medium non-government schools, teachers and pupils were hostile is that they felt discriminated under British colonial rule. Lack of funding, lack of support, limited vocational prospects in an English-dominated civil service alienated them. Further it left them open to communist subversion and to political parties who wished to use them as proxies in first, the anti-colonial struggle, and later against the successor administration.

The state was weak vis a vis civil society because of the particular nature of the education problem. The use of English as a medium of instruction and the higher economic returns to English language competence affected and influenced teachers, writers, businessmen who saw themselves discriminated because of poor English competence.

Exploitation of these grievances turned them anti-state.

The policy response was to acknowledge that non-English speakers had justifiable grievances; it was politically sensible to do so because they were the majority in the voting population. In 1956, members of all political parties accepted in the All Party Report on Chinese Education the concept of 'equality of treatment'. Henceforth, the government would support equally instruction in the four official languages, build both primary and secondary schools which would use Chinese, Malay and Tamil as main media of instruction, invest in teacher training for non-English medium teachers and apply comparable terms and conditions of service to teachers with equivalent qualifications. Isolation of pupils in different language streams would be overcome by integrating under one administration different language streams, thus providing tangible evidence of equality. Equality of treatment for languages meant not schooling in isolated ethnic enclaves but as a means to stronger social cohesion via bilingualism for all pupils. This again helped to placate the non-English educated for the previous practice had been to insist that the English language be compulsory for all in non-English medium schools (Gopinathan, 1974).

A second major policy response was the expansion of access, both by making available more school places and by diversifying the curriculum.

1959

1965

1970

1975

1980

1985

1990

#### Primary

357,075

363,518

328,401

291,722

278,060

257,932

#### Secondary & Junior Colleges

114,736

145,740

176,224

173,693

190,328

161,029

#### Academic

47

102,861

136,782

153,029

148,553

154,435

155,800

#### Technical/ Vocational

-

11,875

8,958

23,195

25,140  
35,893  
35,659

Technical &  
Vocational  
Institutes

1,193  
3,039  
9,830  
13,839  
21,161  
29,102

Universities &  
Colleges

7  
13,807  
13,683  
18,501  
22,633  
39,913  
55,562

Total

323,000  
486,811  
527,668  
532,956  
501,887  
529,462  
534,005

Sources: Chng Meng Kng, et al, Technology and Skills in Singapore, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, Table 11, pp. 47.

Singapore: Department of Statistics, Yearbook of Statistics 1985/86. Ministry of Education: Education Statistics Digest, 1990.

As the table indicates the Government was able to increase the number of school places from 323,000 in 1959 to 486,811 in 1965, an increase of 163,811 in six years. This increase must be considered significant in that it took place during a period of severe political turmoil and attests to the fact that the capacity of the government was not seriously undermined during this period.; the number of school places continued to expand, to 527,668 in 1970. The number has stabilised since as the government has been able to moderate population growth with an active and effective family planning policy. Equally

impressive has been the steady shift away from a purely liberal arts education to a greater emphasis on science and mathematics in the

curriculum, enrolling pupils in technical and vocational institutes and in secondary schools the development of vocational and technical streams.

In many countries, educational expansion has often been accompanied by a lowering, both of standards, and of satisfactory levels of resource allocation as ministries often expanded education under political pressures but without the necessary resources; this has often resulted

in declining legitimacy. In Singapore's case great care and attention has been paid to ensuring that standards were maintained in the face of

expansion. The percentage of pupils passing the Primary School Leaving

Examination rose from 58.7% in 1975 to 88.4% in 1989; at the GCE 'O' level examination the percentage of pupils obtaining a minimum of 3 'O' level passes rose from 65% in 1979 to 89% in 1990; those obtaining

5 'O' level passes rose from 38% in 1979 to 69% in 1990. By keeping the quality of output at higher and specified levels the government was

able to signal employers that expansion of education opportunity did not mean less productive workers.

Government expenditure on education has been maintained at a high level. According to the Ministry of Education its budget for the financial year 1992 was 15% of total government expenditure or 3.6% of the Gross Domestic Product. Total expenditure on education increased from approximately \$217.5 million in 1969/70 to S\$1.7 thousand million in 1989/90. Impressive increase in secondary education, polytechnics as well as universities, indicate rising costs due to both expansion of

students enrolled as well as infrastructural development.

#### Economic Development

Another major way in which the Singapore state gained legitimacy was in

its ability to foster economic growth. Growth is significant for education, not only because it provides a resource base with which to fund educational modernization but because the modernization project patently fails when schooled youths have no jobs to go to. The promise

that is implicit in government calls for extended involvement in

schooling is especially for hitherto marginalised groups, that it offers incorporation into the mainstream and social mobility. Where a state is able to closely couple education to economic needs, investment

in education becomes more productive and the state more legitimate

One way of demonstrating the education-economy link is to show that additional years of school pay off in better job opportunities and increased wages. The tables below show the educational qualifications and the type of jobs for employed men and women who earned more than S\$3,000.

Table: Highest Educational Qualifications for Men and Women Earning more than S\$3,000

#### THEIR HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

Men

Women

Never attended school

1.1%

0.6%

No qualification (below PSLE)

1.9%

1.9%

Primary school leaving or equivalent

5.1%

2.2%

O or N-level or equivalent

17.6%

13.8%

A-level or equivalent

22.7%

20.3%

University degree

49.6%

59.1%

Other qualifications

2.0%

2.2%

Basic data: Report on the Labour Force Survey of Singapore 1987

Table: Type of Job held by Men and Women Earning more than S\$3,000

TYPE OF JOB THEY HOLD

Men

Women

Administrative, managerial/executive

44.9%

37.5%

Professional/technical

38.3%

50.6%

Sales

9.3%

9.4%

Other jobs

7.55

2.5%

Going to school and staying in school pays off in Singapore because the

economy has grown and diversified and has demanded new skills which schools were able to successfully teach. The strong state built and maintained an orderly school environment, stressed meritocracy and high academic achievement. A strong manpower orientation in policy making ensured that the links between the school system and the needs of the workplace were tight.

We turn next to the state's policies to win 'allegiance and identification'. Newly developing states faced with a variety of cultural-ethical traditions, of different modes of child socialization,

some of them seen as oppositional to the press for modernity have first

to reach a political consensus on preferred values and norms, to develop syllabus and materials and then to implement them in the school

system; both political and pedagogic aspects are important. Two approaches can be identified in the Singapore school system. One had a

largely political content, to signal that a new political order had emerged and to describe its ideology e.g. acceptance of diversity via multiculturalism, institutions like the cabinet and parliamentary system, state symbols like the flag, the anthem, the pledge of allegiance, etc. History textbooks, for instance, quickly changed to include more balanced accounts of colonial rule but also with more emphasis given to the personalities and political struggle involved with winning independence. The teaching of civics intensified between 1956-1965 with the aim of developing a greater understanding in pupils about the workings of the new society. Since the seventies, there has been a daily flag raising and lowering ceremony in the schools, the singing of the National Anthem and the recitation of a pledge of loyalty. School uniformed groups like the Police Cadet Corps and National Cadet Corps are encouraged and allowed to participate in National Day parades (Gopinathan, 1988).

The new state also made an ambitious effort to develop a curriculum for

moral education. While multiculturalism had the advantage of making all communities feel equal, it also had the potential to lead to divisiveness and feelings of marginalisation by smaller ethnic communities; the Chinese after all made up 75% of the population. The government chose to respond to this issue by extending the rationale for bilingualism. The acceptance of languages other than English was a

political necessity. English had clear economic value. The educational argument for the mother tongues (Chinese, Malay, Tamil) was

that as language was a carrier of values, the teaching of the mother tongue in itself and the use of it as a medium of instruction for moral

education would be beneficial. Indigenous or 'Asian' cultural values were strengths, to know and prefer only English was to risk becoming 'deculturalised'. Thus, with English serving as a link language, the

ethnic communities were encouraged to re-discover their Asian roots and

to develop and strengthen them (Gopinathan, 1988). Moral education textbooks stressed such values as respect for elders and elected leaders, the importance of the family unit, selfless service to

community and consensual decision making among others. Textbooks with titles like Education for Living, Being and Becoming were used to teach

these values. A more controversial move was to try to legitimate Confucian Ethics as the state's preferred value system; it ran into opposition from the other ethnic groups. Notwithstanding that, it can be claimed for Singapore, that the PAP having won by 1965 the political

battle to define the nature of the state, was able to overcome opposition in the schools to establish the normative order (Gopinathan, 1988).

In the editorial introduction to Fuller's Growing up Modern M. Apple asks "What difference does it make that schooling is controlled, organized and offered by the state?" The answer is, a great deal. Because schooling is effectively controlled in a strong state it can do

more than signal modernity. By offering an alternative to familial socialization, it can by deepening school effects, build new loyalties and affiliations. Where the strong state is able to promote economic growth, it can tighten the link between education and the economy.

I shall, in conclusion, address briefly two major aspects in the analysis of state-society relations that need for further work if a fuller theory of state-society relations is to emerge. Fuller is of the view that the modern nationalistic state expresses universal (western) ideals, symbols and organization. The ideals of economic opportunity, social mobility, modern structures like the law courts, the prison, the school, values like meritocracy are all seen as characteristic of the modern state. Singapore has all these characteristics. Using this criteria, is Singapore a strong Western state? If the organizational structures do appear modern, is the essence however, non-Western? Since the seventies, the PAP government in developing the normative framework has argued that Singapore needs to be faithful to its non-Western roots to grow and to remain strong. Its success as a strong, economically viable state has emboldened its ideologies to argue that the Confucian ethic almost always leads to strong central power responsible leadership and a population willing to

be guided and led. These characteristics it would seem are the essence of the strong state. There is not much room here for individual agency.

A second aspect pushes the theory beyond Fuller's account of strong developing states growing weak (in a political sense due largely to economic failure). What of states that, remain politically strong and economically viable and yet experience a renewed demand for more civic autonomy. In part, these moves as in Singapore, could be a consequence

of increased educational achievement, of greater wealth and therefore options and also fostered by the government's desire to allow stronger communities to develop for a variety of reasons. The Singapore state

may have become too strong, raised too many expectations and may need

to retreat to conserve legitimacy. It therefore promotes civic action,

albeit on its own terms, but can the Pandora's box once opened be closed?

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