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China's obsession with Singapore: learning authoritarian modernity

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Abstract Chinese government officials and academics have shown disproportionate interest in the small city-state of Singapore. The Southeast Asian country with a majority ethnic Chinese population has drawn their attention because it is the only country in the world that combines advanced industrial development with stable one-party rule. Singapore not only seemingly defies Western predictions that modernization will inevitably lead to democracy, but also appears to show that authoritarian regimes may be better suited to achieving societal stability in an Asian context. In particular, the ruling party of the city-state, the People's Action Party, has drawn the attention of conservative Chinese reformists who seek to fill the ideological void that emerged following the decline of Maoist ideology. Reformers in China also derive practical governance lessons from Singapore about fighting corruption, increasing professionalization, and improving responsiveness within the party-state. As such, political learning from the Singapore model must be seen as part of the ongoing process of transformation of the Chinese Communist Party. As a consequence of this learning process, Chinese reformers are using lessons from the Singaporean model as arguments in their efforts to bolster the ideological foundations and strengthen the governance capacity of one-party rule, thus reducing pressures for democratization.

Keywords China; Singapore model; authoritarianism; ruling ideology; governance.

Singapore, a small city-state in Southeast Asia, has drawn disproportionate attention from government officials and academics, and other observers from the world's most populous country, the People's Republic of China (PRC). At first glance, the two states could not be more distinct: their size, ethnic composition, level of economic development, and history are obvious differences. Yet many Chinese scholars and officials have become

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obsessed with the 'Singapore model'.[1] The extent of this infatuation with Singapore has been evident during the recent once-in-a-decade transfer of power within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in which references to the city-state played an unusually prominent role. Both scholars and journalists have suggested that Xi Jinping, the new top leader, wants to implement reforms modeled on Singapore (Wee 2012; Wong and Ansfield 2012). Not coincidentally, state-run TV channel China Central Television (CCTV) has filmed a major series about the city-state to be aired in the near future that promises to reveal the secrets of the country's success, including its well-governed one-party state (Peh 2012).

The main reason for this obsession with Singapore is that China's authoritarian leaders are trying to avoid the 'modernization trap' for authoritarian regimes unwilling to democratize. As communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were crumbling and economic development seemed to have contributed to the democratization of many countries around the world, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously declared the 'end of history.' This was due, in his neo-Hegelian terms, to the triumph of liberal democratic ideology over its competitors. Modernization theorists such as Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005) consider value changes linked to advanced development to be favorable to the rise of democracy. In other words, democratization was seen as the outcome of both the decline of communism and the acceleration of economic growth, posing twin dangers to continued non-democratic rule in fast growing, post-Maoist China. Moreover, democracy became widely regarded in academic and international organization circles as the regime form best able to guarantee the good governance necessary to maintain a stable economy (Rivera-Batiz 2002). The student protests of 1989 in Tiananmen Square, which revealed deep rifts within the party, highlighted another problem for China's reformers. They faced the challenge of finding a new legitimating ideology needed to supplant the declining significance of communism (Shambaugh 2008). For recalcitrant authoritarian regimes such as China, there was an urgent need to find a credible ideological alternative to democracy which preserved one-party rule by ensuring good governance.

Since the 'Reform and Opening' period starting in late 1978, Chinese modernizers have been worried about how the Communist Party could develop the country economically without losing political power. It has therefore tried to become a 'learning state' which can adapt to changing socio-economic conditions similar to other authoritarian modernizers before them. For instance, Meiji Japan emulated the late-nineteenth century Imperial German example of rapid economic growth under authoritarian rule. Japan, in turn, diffused this model of non-democratic development to other states such as South Korea and Taiwan (Cummings 1984; Thompson 2010). In this regard, David Shambaugh's (2008) study of the CCP which analyzes the party's efforts to improve both its ideological justifications and its organizational structure is important. Contradicting

the claim that authoritarian regimes are inept at reform, this book shows how Chinese leaders have been eager to learn from the experiences of other countries. This includes the negative lessons derived from the collapse of the former Soviet Union and other state socialist Eastern European countries. In a more cursory manner, Shambaugh also shows that China has also been interested in positive examples for the CCP's internal reform process, particularly the experience of non-communist, non-democratic countries in Asia, such as Taiwan under the Kuomintang (KMT) or the People's Action Party (PAP)-run Singapore.

Singapore became a crucial example for China's reformers because its model of 'Asian authoritarianism' demonstrates the compatibility of sound economic management with one-party rule while at the same time raising questions about the universality of liberal democracy. Singapore, with its 'near-perfect degree of efficiency' (Khanna 2011), appears to vindicate the view that political reforms do not have to include liberalization or transition toward a multi-party democracy. As Cherian George (2007) points out, the city-state has 'attracted the attention of officials from China, Vietnam and other states who, unwilling to accept the prescription that market liberalization can only be successful if accompanied by political competition, find in Singapore a model for having one's cake and eating it too' (p. 128). It is widely understood that Chinese communist leaders seek to emulate Singapore because it appears to prove that the lack of corruption and effective governance are not linked to liberal democracy but can be achieved through pragmatic decision-making by a determined ruling elite under authoritarian rule. What has not been systematically researched is the extent of this obsession with Singapore in China, who among Chinese state elites are interested in this city-state, and the specific mix of ideological and governance lessons they derive from the "Singapore model".

The 'Singapore model' as constructed by its Chinese students provides 'lessons' about ideology and governance that strengthen one-party rule and is part of an ongoing process of 'illiberal adaption' in China. To explore how Chinese scholars have attempted to draw lessons from Singapore in order to develop new ideological foundations for continued one-party rule and to find an alternative to Western-style democracy, we will analyze key Chinese academic texts mainly found in the China Academic Journals Full-text Database. The neo-Confucianism which Chinese reformers claim underpins the city-state's success proves to these sympathetic mainland observers that authoritarianism does not necessarily result in corruption and can even be a significant advantage to a developing country. We specify three elements of 'good governance' that Chinese reformers derive from the Singapore model – fighting corruption, increasing professionalization, and improving responsiveness – which stabilize one-party rule.

The Chinese discourse about Singapore and those behind it

The interest within the CCP in learning from Singapore can be traced to the period shortly after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre as a response to the ascent of so-called neo-Maoists (sometimes termed neo-leftists), who were calling for limitations on free enterprise (Misra 2003). China was at a crossroads: Would the economic and political reforms of the past decade be continued or would the clock be turned back to the Maoist era? In order to revive reform, Deng Xiaoping used his famed Southern Tour in 1992 that called for further economic liberalization to also draw attention to Singapore as an attempt to provide a real ideological alternative to leftism (Zhao 1993).[2] In widely reported remarks, the elder statesman claimed 'Singapore's social order is rather good. Its leaders exercise strict management. We should learn from their experience, and we should do a better job than they do' (quoted in Kristof 1992).

Following Deng's lead, many Chinese academics and administrators have flocked to the city-state to explore the reasons behind this authoritarian success story. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1990, China has sent approximately 22,000 officials to Singapore on study missions (Khoo 2011). In 2007, prominent CCP leaders in southern China such as Guangdong province party secretary Wang Yang and Kunming city chief Qiu He unleashed a new wave of 'Singapore fever' in China by exhorting cadres to follow Deng's dictum of learning about Singapore in order to surpass it, leading to a further increase in travel to the city-state (Peh 2009). Besides such visits, the improved relationship between the two countries has also spawned a burgeoning discourse in China about the 'Singapore model' and its implications for Chinese reforms. According to the China Academic Journals Full-text Database in 1992 only 230 articles with the term *Xinjiapo* (Singapore) can be found. Since 2006, there have been more than 1800 articles published per year (see graph on the top of the next page).

Moreover, since 1990, at least 110 articles which deal solely with the reasons for the success of Singapore's ruling party have been published. Lü Yuanli, a Chinese Singapore expert, who has visited Singapore numerous times, has written the two-volume *Why Singapore Can Do It* (*Xinjiapo Weishenme Neng*) (2007). Singapore's *The Straits Times* newspaper reported that Li's book was 'widely read by political leaders, government officials, students and academics all over China' (Leong 2008a). The book, published in mid-2007 with a foreword by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, had already gone through eight print runs by 2009 (Peh 2009). Moreover, Lü founded a Singapore research center at Shenzhen University. The central government in Beijing is actively encouraging research on Singapore which is reflected in the fact that receiving funding for Singapore-related projects is easier than for any other country (Leong 2008b).

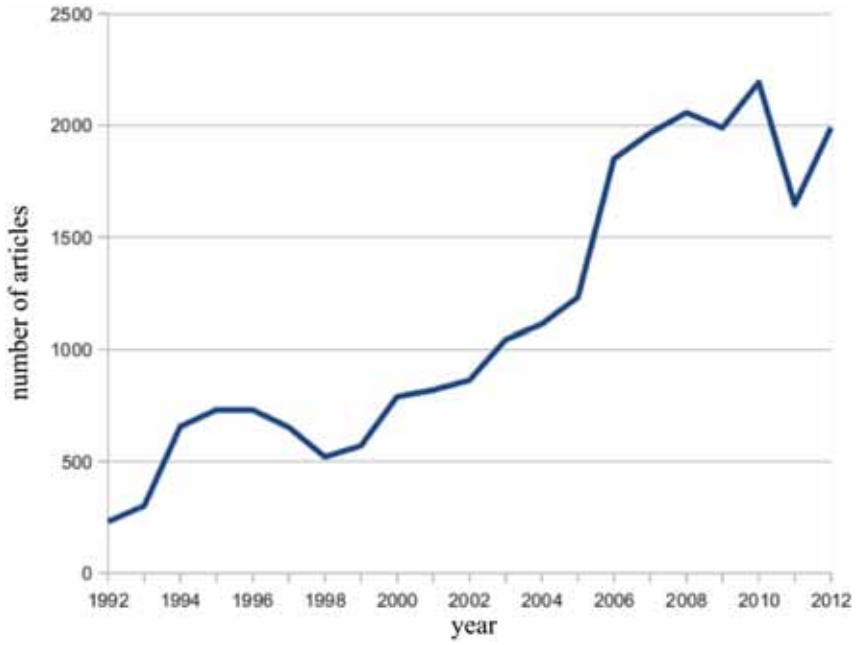

Figure 1 Articles with "新加坡" (Singapore) in the title
Source: China Academic Journals Full-text Database.

Many of the Chinese scholars and officials who have visited the island nation have sought to solve the mystery of how Singapore has successfully resisted democratizing despite the pressures of modernization (e.g., Guo 2000; Hou 2007; Lai 2007; Wang, Zhao, and Cui 2008; Wang et al. 2008). Singapore's *Straits Times* reported in November 2008 that there are 'a growing number of Chinese academics who have developed an interest in studying Singapore's rapid economic growth, political stability and harmonious social order in recent years' (18 November 2008). For instance, Nanjing University history professor Lu Zhengtao (2007) argues in his book *Singapore – Modernization under Authoritarianism (Xinjiapo Weiquan Zhengzhi Yanjiu*) that the Singapore case shows that countries can successfully modernize under authoritarian rule and that the CCP can successfully adapt to these changes. In another example, Xia Guoxing, the Branch Secretary of the Training Institute of Guandong Industry Management Cadre School, who visited Singapore in November 1994, found Singapore to be socially and politically stable, corruption-free, highly efficient, and providing quality government services (Xia 1995).

China's obsession with the city-state has been met with open arms by the Singaporean government, which has invested heavily (and lucratively) in providing many different kinds of educational programs for Chinese

visitors. Nearly every government agency has hosted Chinese delegations. Both the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have offered programs for Chinese officials focusing on the Singaporean perspective on governance. Even the Civil Service College has inaugurated a school for international government officials, which has included many Chinese administrators. Tailored specifically for leading Chinese officials, the so-called Mayors' Class is offered by NTU and conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Because of the strong support from both the Chinese and Singaporean governments, the program has been quite successful. In 2011, it was able to boast its 1000th graduating master's student. Besides the MA program, the university also offers short-term training programs on subjects such as public administration, economic management, and urban planning which 10,000 Chinese officials have attended. These programs focus on practical knowledge and include lectures by Singaporean officials as well as leading scholars. Moreover, there are even visits to government departments and government-linked corporations, which demonstrates how close the relationship has become.[3]

Conservative reformists and the 'modernization trap'

Unlike their neo-Maoist counterparts, conservative reformists have used the threat of an ideological vacuum to justify far-reaching economic reforms and the replacement of an outdated communist ideology. While many reformists prior to the Tiananmen Square massacre believed that political liberalization merely needed to be delayed, in its immediate aftermath, liberal democracy became discredited. For the most part, reformers within the party leadership became politically conservative (Misra 2003).[4] When Deng Xiaoping went on his Southern Tour in 1992, he reinvigorated the reformist intellectual movement, but one which now concentrates on economic change and improvement in governance, not on political liberalization. It is since then that conservative reformists have used lessons from the 'Singapore model' in their efforts to bring about policy changes to strengthen one-party rule.

While conservative reformists in the communist elite have praised Singapore, neo-Maoists have been much more critical. Instead of seeing the capitalist city-state as a model for China's future, they highlight flaws in the market-oriented nature of Singapore. An article on the Maoist website Utopia, which was suspended in April 2012, criticized Lee Kuan Yew's opposition to inclusive welfare measures and claimed, as a consequence of this neglect, Singapore had become one of the world's most unequal societies, while at the same time also becoming one of the most expensive cities in the world. Moreover, despite its much acclaimed public housing program, most citizens have become 'slaves' to their property for which they need an average of 36.4 years to pay off their debts despite only receiving a lease for

99 years. Singapore, so the neo-Maoists, is anything but a paradise for the average citizen. Instead, it benefits largely the capitalist class of super-rich that have been drawn to the city-state in large numbers (Zhang 2010).

Because economic reforms remain the priority of conservative reformists, the main appeal of the 'Singapore model' has been the idea that unfettered state power does not necessarily have to be an obstacle to good governance. The near-total control of the ruling PAP over a developmental state provides ideological confirmation of the possibility of economic modernization without falling into the 'trap' of liberal democracy arising out of modernization.[5] Chinese reformists have searched for an alternative that would allow the Communist Party to maintain authoritarian control while still liberalizing the economy (Shambaugh 2008). Singapore offers the CCP not only the assurance that it can remain in power, but also the promise of better rule in the process as a fully modernized one-party state which effectively governs the country. The city-state therefore epitomizes the combination of authoritarian rule and good government (Jiang 2011). These Chinese reformists moreover see in Singapore the realization of 'stability' which is reflected in Deng Xiaoping's principle that 'stability comes before all else' (*wending yadao yiqie*) as well as Hu Jintao's 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*). To conservative reformers, the city-state has in a sense become the new utopia replacing the worker's paradise in classic communist parlance.

Singaporean lessons: ideological and practical

The Singapore model has inspired Chinese reformists in a number of important ways. But this is not to say that these lessons have necessarily been decisive for policy change. They often bolstered reformist efforts rather than inspiring them directly. Moreover, their interpretation of what characterizes the 'Singapore model' does not necessarily reflect the empirical realities of the city-state but instead is based on Chinese observers' preconceived notions. Flimsy parallels between the two countries are sometimes intentionally exaggerated so reformers can better make their point. In terms of policy learning generally, it is not possible to draw any causal links between the observation of external solutions and the actual policy-making (Stone 1999).

Instead, in order to better understand the influence of the 'Singapore model' on the Chinese reform trajectory, it is important to recognize which policy debates deal with the issues reformists consider relevant. While in China these discussions largely take place behind closed doors, academic journals provide insights into the adaptation process which help us understand more clearly in which direction China's reformers plan to advance the country's development. This is highly relevant because in China academics, even when not members of research institutes, often influence key reform debates as authors of widely read articles and books or important commissioned reports as well as through media commentary and as

government advisors (Lawrence and Martin, 2013, p. 36). It is possible to distinguish between a number of distinct lessons derived from the Singaporean experience dealing with the ideological foundations of post-communist rule, on one hand, and the party-state reforms necessary to improve governance, on the other.

Ideological foundations for one-party rule

The main ideological lesson for Chinese officials and scholars sympathetic to the Singapore model is the perceived confirmation of the claim that Asian cultures are fundamentally incompatible with liberal democracy. This argument is made despite the fact that recent democratic transitions in Taiwan and South Korea can be seen as strong counterarguments to this thesis, evidence which advocates of this position studiously ignore.[6] In particular, Confucianism in Singapore is characterized by Chinese reformists as emphasizing moral leadership, not political competition. Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and his government have been leading advocates of this viewpoint, provoking a controversial international debate about 'Asian values' from the late-1980s through the mid-1990s which eventually became discredited in the West in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Thompson 2001). A legacy of that debate, however, was to underscore that Singapore achieved modernization while remaining authoritarian, which one critic of the city-state's regime has termed 'reactionary modernism' (Jayasuriya 1997).

Based on assumptions of cultural uniqueness, many authors in China writing about Singapore consider the city-state's political system an alternative regime form more suitable to China. Since Singapore's population is predominantly ethnic Chinese, these scholars consider Singapore the country most culturally similar to China. As Jiang Jianli writes in the preface to his book *What We Can Learn from Singapore* (*Xinjiapo You Shenme Haoxue De*): 'There is no country in the world that is closer to us than Singapore. Besides China, Singapore is the only country with a majority of Chinese' (Jiang 2006, p. II). It is thus not surprising that some Chinese have become convinced by Lee Kuan Yew's notion that the authoritarian 'Asian values' are inborn and cannot be changed (Li 1997).

For many Chinese scholars, Singapore's soft-authoritarianism represents an ideal combination of Western institutions and Eastern values. At the heart of the justification for authoritarian rule is the belief that the city-state represents the best of two worlds: the institutional supervision, strict legislation, and the rule of law characteristic of most Western countries and the authoritarian efficiency and stability as well as the obedience to higher ranked people attributed to Confucianism. Quite a few texts discuss Lee Kuan Yew's assertion that liberal democracy is a Western concept alien to Asian cultures. They deny the universal applicability of liberalism,

considering it unsuitable not only during the developmental process, but also when the country is fully modernized. Asian countries will always depend on the strong rule of a small elite and restrict the freedoms of its citizens in the interest of economic growth and political stability. Instead of checks-and-balances and multi-party democracy, the Asian form of 'democracy' emphasizes a strong government with values shaped by moral leadership and society subjugated to national concerns. Political opposition is seen as detrimental to the state and society (Lai and Cao 1998).

Chinese scholars have paid particular attention to the institutionalization of these Confucian values. The Singaporean government's decision to enact the so-called 'Shared Values' in law in 1991 is seen as a milestone in the island state's development. These values are largely based on a neo-traditionalist interpretation of Confucianism and thus emphasize the group over the individual, reinforce the understanding of the family as the key building block of society, incorporate a paternalist understanding of individual rights, and promote the idea of consensus instead of conflict as well as racial and religious harmony (Clammer 1993). The key focus of the values is a hierarchical understanding of the society coupled with a lack of contentious politics. In essence, they suggest the need for a strong government capable of forging a consensus and deciding upon the best interests of society. This has struck a chord with many Chinese scholars and politicians who believe in the need of a ruling party to guide the 'ignorant masses'. As a consequence, many scholars now advocate emphasizing Confucianism in Chinese schools. With the decline of communism as a guiding ideology, there has been a government-sponsored effort to revive Confucianism, an effort enthusiastically supported by many intellectuals (Bell 2010). The hope is that the return of this traditional thought with its emphasis on hierarchy will enhance the obedience of the people to the government and avert the rise of more individualist values found in liberal democracies (Carr 2006).

Improving party-state governance

The Singaporean example has not only influenced the Chinese reformers' ideological conceptions, but also provided support for many of its institutional reforms which are designed to strengthen China's one-party state. Because of China's strong economy, studying Singapore's economic success has generally been of less interest to Chinese observers.[7] By reforming one-party rule in China, conservative reformers believe that the regime can become more stable and resilient in the foreseeable future (Nathan 2003). Since most Chinese scholarship is directed toward the maintenance of CCP dominance, the reforms proposed or discussed in journal articles are very relevant in this regard. In their analysis of the ruling party of Singapore, they have drawn a number of conclusions about how to improve

the party's rule. In particular, three areas have drawn the most attention: Singapore's successful management of corruption, its professionalization of the one-party state with an emphasis on meritocracy and formalization of powers, and its growing responsiveness to the citizenry through community outreach mechanisms and by holding 'authoritarian elections.'

Fighting corruption

Perhaps the most important concern of the CCP has been the problem of corruption at all levels of government which has not only restricted the successful implementation of policies, but also increased the sense of arbitrariness of government decisions. It has eroded the CCP's legitimacy. Emulating Singapore's success in eradicating corruption has thus been one of the main preoccupations of Chinese observers.

Wei Xiangqian (2009) argues that a key lesson Singapore can teach China is the need to construct an ideological and moral defense against graft. Leaders must improve their moral behavior and become role models who act according to the Confucian principle of the 'people as the foundation,' which means that they act in the interest of the people (Wei 2009). Agreeing with this viewpoint, Zeng Yuhua (2008) also emphasizes the integrity of the Singaporean leadership, its clean government mentality, the sense of an impending crisis, and the teaching of Confucian values. Many scholars place significant trust in the Confucian idea that subjects will follow leaders if only the latter set a good example. Moral leadership of the ruling elite is often seen as more important than institutional checks-and-balances, which some deride as a Western and consequently alien concept. A number of Chinese scholars therefore place great faith in the need for moral leadership as a crucial condition for good governance. For instance, Zhou Bibo (2005) contends that the most important lesson of the PAP's experience is that the fate of the country depends on whether the party in power is morally good or bad.

A crucial aspect of the rule of law in Singapore is the fact that even high-ranking officials are liable to be investigated (Peng 2006). In 1986, the Singapore government, for instance, openly investigated Teh Cheang Wan, a close friend of Lee Kuan Yew, for corruption until he accepted full responsibility and committed suicide. Similarly, the Chinese government has tried to demonstrate that no one, not even top ranking officials, are above the law. In recent years, there have been a number of high-level officials in China who have received harsh punishments such as long prison terms or even the death penalty. For instance, in 2000, the deputy governor of Jiangxi Province was executed for taking in US$650,000 in 90 separate bribes (Kuhn 2010). More recently, the downfall of Bo Xilai has also been framed as an attempt to demonstrate that the law applies to all levels of government. Han Deyun, a deputy to the National People's Congress, claimed: 'From what I have observed, the (Chinese Communist) Party and

government have taken concrete steps to combat graft, as demonstrated by the downfall of a number of high-ranking officials in the past year' (quoted in *Xinhua*, 11 March 2011). The government has also highlighted the number of officials who were investigated for corruption in the media. In 2010, the government claimed that 2723 government officials were investigated (quoted in *Xinhua*, 11 March 2011).

Professionalizing the party

The 'Singapore model' also demonstrates the importance of making the party-state more professional. A crucial component of this is meritocracy. Rule by experts, or technocracy, is considered the ideal form of governance by many Chinese observers. In Singapore, the ruling elite is selected through stringent mechanisms that ensure only the best and brightest are chosen to serve in the government. While such a system is theoretically open to everyone, it is actually highly elitist which is justified by the importance of merit in the selection process. Chinese observers see meritocracy as one of the key legitimating ideologies of the Singaporean regime. For instance, instead of focusing on democracy, Singapore is the archetype of the meritocracy that Pan Wei (1998, 2009) envisions for China: a country ruled by a government entirely dedicated to serve the welfare of the people and maintain the harmony of the entire society, which Pan terms *minbenism* (Pan Wei 2009).

In this regard, Chinese scholars have often highlighted that Singapore's government's aim to attract only the most qualified and highly trained people to join its ranks (Miao 2008). In Singapore, qualifications are the most important selection criteria not only for the bureaucracy, but also within party ranks. In order to attract talent, government officials and top bureaucrats receive high salaries comparable to the upper echelons of the private sector.[8] Chen (2004) points out that the PAP starts with talent selection early on with its youth organization, the Young PAP, which works according to a merit-based system. Sometimes the leadership identifies top talent in the private sector and recruits it into public service. For Zheng Yongnian (2010), the recruitment of talent has two functions: to enhance links to the society and to combat corruption. The former is achieved because of the recruitment of talented individuals from different parts of society to enter politics. This enhances the legitimacy of the government. The merit-based recruitment ensures that civil servants do not join merely because of economic benefits but because they also want to serve the community.

The CCP leadership has thus increasingly emphasized the need to recruit talented people into the party hierarchy. Bian, Shu, and Logan's study of the membership recruitment of the Communist Party has shown that China has made significant progress in attracting a technocratic elite that is both politically and professionally qualified for high-level positions (2001). Not

surprisingly, Lee Kuan Yew has approved this change in Chinese politics when he noted that the CCP is moving 'to absorb the best and brightest into the party' (Lee 2000, pp. 655–656). As a consequence of these changes, a technocratic ruling elite has emerged, which according to Xiao (2003) is resistant to substantial political change because it could harm their vested interests. Subsequently, Chinese politics has experienced a depolarization in which the central elite has become more homogeneous than ever before (Xiao 2003).

Another important practical lesson that Chinese advocates of the 'Singapore model' derive in terms of professionalizing the party-state is that a smaller ruling party and a downsized government can be of great advantage. Chen Xuqun (2004), for example, notes that the PAP is much smaller in terms of membership per capita than the CCP with less than 30,000 members or 1% of its population. This also makes it much less visible in the country. After studying Singapore's political system, Zhen Xiaoying (1999), of the Teaching and Research Department of the Central Communist Party School, argued that China should reduce the duplication of government and party offices which would cut the cost of governance and also help the ruling party to govern more effectively. Similarly, Wang and Ran (1999) suggest that Chinese administration be streamlined along Singaporean lines. They note that the single-stage system of government with few government departments is much more efficient and flexible. The recent reduction in the size of the Politburo may have been inspired by this. However, the repeated attempts in China to create a leaner bureaucracy have so far met with little success (Brødsgaard 2010). The growing challenges of economic modernization have even increased the need for more administrators. Merely reducing the numbers of bureaucrats without enhancing their efficiency threatens to reduce government effectiveness rather than to increase it.

In Singapore, Chinese scholars point out, the operations of the state are quite distinct from those of the party (Chen 2004). Zhen, moreover, argues that the functional differentiation of the party and the state does not mean that the party is not consolidated through state building. Rather, this increases predictability, given the state's commitment to scientific decision-making and to improving the quality of party members, especially at higher levels of the state hierarchy (Zhen 1999). Wei Qi (2004) argues that the PAP is constantly striving to transform Singapore into an 'administrative state' in which politics becomes a matter of management. The bureaucracy stands in the foreground while the party takes a back seat.

Another way Chinese reformers think party governance can be improved is to develop greater predictability through political structural reforms (*zhengzhi tizhi gaige*) (Heberer and Schubert 2006). There have been attempts to improve the legal system to move toward a system of the rule of law. In addition, Cabestan (2004) describes the increasing formalization of Chinese politics. For instance, there are now more regular party

congresses and constitutional procedures, and working regulations are adhered to more closely. One of the areas in which China has shown progress is the remodeling of the fiscal and tax system as well as the strengthening of regulatory institutions designed to promote orderly competition, reduce and minimize bureaucratic discretion and rent-seeking, as well as to strengthen mechanisms of horizontal accountability (Yang 2003).

While Chinese scholars have been most interested in improving the positive aspects of party rule, there have also been occasional suggestions on how the Chinese state could improve its methods of repression. This might have had an effect on recent legislation that attempts to 'legalize' the use of repressive tactics. In 2012, the National People's Congress amended the Criminal Procedure Law to legally permit the secret detention of any suspect for six months at an undisclosed location. The Law was praised by China's state-run media as a step in the direction of greater human rights (CNN Wire Staff 2012). This apparently odd claim was based on the party's effort to formalize authoritarian measures and codify them in law in order to legitimize them in the eyes of the public. Such efforts parallel Singapore's Internal Security Act which allows for detention without warrant and even though it has not been used in political cases since the 1980s, it is still on the books and hangs like a Damocles sword over any political opposition.

Another conclusion Chinese reformers may have drawn from the Singapore experience is that repression applied only selectively can be most effective. Unlike China, Singapore does not block any websites for political reasons. However, the Singapore government has also closely monitored dissent online and in some cases used its administrative state to curtail possible mobilization on the Internet. Only a few individuals are targeted for repression by the state to instill a degree of fear among the citizens. The intended goal of this exercise is to foster anxiety and self-censorship. Using the legal system against a handful of regime critics serves as a deterrent against other potential dissidents, a lesson the Chinese state appears to have learned only too well.

Responsiveness

Some Chinese scholars studying Singapore remain sceptical of China's ability to fight corruption and professionalize the party-state if the CCP regime is not made more accountable. For instance, He (2000) argues that even though China had implemented important administrative reforms to enhance transparency and provide clearer guidelines, reestablished and reinvigorated anti-corruption institutions, conducted anti-corruption campaigns, and attempted to improve moral education, it needs to move toward more citizen participation to effectively combat corruption to further enhance transparency and provide checks-and-balances. The lack of

at least some basic participatory mechanisms in China thus creates significant obstacles in the struggle against corruption.

In order to become more responsive, the CCP has been moving away from its roots as a 'revolutionary party' to become a party of the people, a party of professionals, and a 'ruling party' (Sausmikat 2006). While Mao still propagated an understanding of power as emerging from the barrel of a gun, today's Chinese leaders have learned that real power rests on the state's ability to penetrate society which the sociologist Michael Mann has aptly termed 'infrastructural power' (Mann 2008). Chinese leaders since Deng Xiaoping have increasingly sought to co-opt new social groups such as the new rich and the middle class. This was formalized at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 2002 with Jiang Zemin's contribution to the CCP's guiding ideology, known as the Three Represents, which stressed the importance of the so-called 'advanced productive forces.' Despite its communist heritage, the Communist Party now officially accepted capitalists into their ranks.

Many Chinese scholars argue that the CCP needs to enhance community outreach activities to strengthen its authority. They consider the ruling PAP much more closely linked to the people than the Communist Party even though the CCP has extensive grassroots organizations and its party constitution requires it to have 'close ties with the masses' (Kuang 2010). In Singapore, popular links are made through various organizations such as the PAP Community Foundation, the People's Association, Meet-the-People sessions of members of parliament, kindergartens, supermarkets, and even cooking and sewing classes (e.g. Sun 2005; Wu 2009). As Cai Dingjian (2005) notes 'serving the people' is not merely a slogan but is taken quite seriously in Singapore. He asserts that it is because the PAP truly acts in the interest of the people, and it has been tolerated even by its critics. Lü and Huang (2009) moreover assert that the PAP's focus on community services such as grassroots organizations or kindergartens leads people to limit their criticisms to the quality of the services delivered, not the legitimacy of the party itself. Wu (2009) thus suggests that the CCP should follow the PAP's example and introduce, among other things, regular meetings with the people, welfare societies, and kindergartens to enhance the party's ability to serve the people. Lee Kuan Yew stated a similar opinion in 2000: 'China's political structures must allow its citizens more participation and control over their lives or there will be pressures that could destabilize society, especially during an economic downturn' (2000, p. 656).

Another way to improve ties between the party and the people that Chinese reformers have considered is Singapore's use of 'authoritarian elections.' Several Chinese scholars have noted that the PAP effectively manipulates elections, restricting the opposition through the legal system and winning over the electorate through handouts (pork barrel politics). This means that polls pose little threat to the PAP's dominance while

strengthening its legitimacy (Wang and Ran 1999; Xiao 2004). Moreover, elections contribute to the party's dedication to act in the interest of the people because, as Cai Dingjian argues, they create a 'sense of crisis' in the ruling party that it could really lose the balloting (Cai 2005). Additionally, Yao Jianguo (2001) sees elections as a means of reducing foreign criticism of authoritarian rule because the PAP 'allows' the opposition to win some seats.

Instead of relying only on competition, elections in Singapore have been combined with selection, which guarantees that only qualified people can become elected. According to Zheng, the PAP first selects the best candidates and then, in a second step, subjects these candidates to electoral competition, thus making the selection process competitive. He argues that democracy alone cannot guarantee the quality of candidates because in theory two bad candidates can compete against each other. By combining selection with election, Singapore has achieved the best of both worlds (Zheng 2010). Singapore's success thus proves that multi-party democracy should not necessarily be equated with the supervision of public officials. Power does not really need to be checked within a liberal democratic framework and instead a single ruling party, such as the PAP, is perfectly able to achieve good governance with what might be called a selectorate (Qin 2008).

Some scholars, however, have urged caution in emulating Singapore in this regard because maintaining control over even an electoral authoritarian system could prove very difficult in a country as vast and heterogeneous as China is (Xiao 2004). Elections have been introduced at the village level, but so far they have not been expanded to the central level. Instead, scholars studying Singapore have generally advocated 'inner-party' democracy to enhance the competitiveness within the CCP (Liu 2008; Zheng 2010). So far even this modest reform proposal has not yet been successfully adopted, although it drew renewed attention during the 18th party congress held in November of 2012 (Pei 2012).

Conclusion

The Singapore model teaches its Chinese apprentices how to combat democracy in ideological and practical terms. Chinese reformers have attempted to draw lessons from Singapore in order to develop new ideological foundations for continued one-party rule in China. Neo-Confucianism underpins the PAP's success according to these sympathetic mainland observers. Fighting corruption, professionalizing the party-state, and increasing its responsiveness are all ways of making communist rule in China more accountable and thus better able to pre-empt liberalism. The Singapore experience teaches Chinese observers that successful authoritarian regimes are not passive – relying largely upon coercion and public

apathy to stay in power. Rather it is an active form of rule in which the party-state's good governance, formalized powers (including the use of repression), and citizen outreach along with 'authoritarian elections' gain citizen's respect, incorporate their wishes, and win their loyalty.

In particular, the Chinese policy-makers have sought to cultivate moral leadership according to the precepts of Confucianism, to enhance the effectiveness and predictability of the CCP regime while reducing corruption and promoting meritocracy as well as increasing its responsiveness and accountability to society. We have stressed that it cannot be proven which reforms undertaken or proposed were directly influenced by the Singaporean model. (It was preconceived ideas about the kind of change China needs that led reformers to look to Singapore in the first place). However, it is notable that the growing rhetoric about the need to emulate the 'Singapore model' in order to increase accountability within the CCP is closely linked to the conservative reformist project designed to strengthen the regime's resistance to democratization.

Yet Chinese attempts to emulate Singapore may face significant challenges in the future because the two countries share much less in common than most conservative Chinese reformists believe. In particular, there are greater cultural differences than they care to admit and that are likely to inhibit the learning process. For instance, the differences in the legal culture of the two countries could not be greater. An effective legal system, however, is a crucial element of the success of Singapore's governance approach. More generally, Singapore has a multi-cultural and strongly Westernized society that is less 'Chinese' than most mainland observers appear to believe.

In addition, Singapore's recent political changes, which have raised serious questions about the long-term viability of one-party rule in Singapore with its electoral authoritarian system recently becoming more competitive (Ortmann 2011). In fact, Singapore's increasing liberalization seems to confirm earlier assumptions about the democratizing effect of modernization. Responding to media reports of Singapore's movement toward democratization, the *People's Daily* published an editorial that asserted: 'The future of Singapore does face challenges, the challenges will surely not involve whether Singapore's political system will be closer to Western democracy or whether reforms coveted by some will occur. The real challenge is whether Singapore can continue the way of development that has been consistent with its context' (Ding 2011). While supporters of authoritarian rule such as Ding cling to the conventional understanding of the 'Singapore model,' a growing number of Chinese critics question its continued relevance. For instance, in an article in *China Business*, Wang Yi (2011) argues that the recent developments in Singapore prove that there is no viable alternative to liberal democracy after all (Wang 2011). In essence, despite Xi Jinping's recent public expression of support, China may soon no longer be able to refer to Singapore as a successful case of

how to avoid the 'modernization trap.' The only thing left for neo-authoritarian ideologues would then be to insist on China's exceptionalism, which is, however, highly contingent on the regime's successful economic performance and appeals to nationalism.

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Notes

1. The term 'Singapore model' has been around since the 1990s and has been used in many different contexts, but the combination of authoritarianism with advanced economic development is one of the most common usages. A key text is Roy (1994) which sees China and Singapore in a rhetorical alliance on development and (soft) authoritarianism. Zheng (2010) is one of many Chinese authors who sees Singapore as a model for China. Jon S. T. Quah (1998) lists nine aspects of the 'Singapore model' but does not explicitly speak of the connection of economic development with authoritarian rule, although it is implied. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's 'founding father,' in an interview spoke of how China views Singapore as a model for its further development (Kraar and Lee, 1997).
2. It has been suggested that 'Singapore fever' in China actually began in 1979, when Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore for the first time (Peh 2009). But at this stage few systematic efforts were made to study Singapore by party cadres or scholars. Also, there were no diplomatic relations between the countries before 1990.
3. It is interesting to note that Singapore has also attempted to transplant its model to China by developing investment projects such as the Singapore-Suzhou Industrial Park and Tianjin Eco City (Carter 2003; Inkpen and Wang 2006). The former, however, was largely a failure, with Singapore reducing its share in the ownership to only 35% in 2001 (Dolven 1999). Nevertheless, both places are still considered important for the diffusion of the Singapore model to China. Official rhetoric still portrays them as successful experiments of knowledge exchange in urban development and are thus heralded as possible scalable solutions for China in the future.
4. There are many distinctions between leadership factions in the CCP. Cheng Li, for example, distinguishes between populists and princelings (Li 2012). Leftists seem to cut across both factions as Bo Xilai is a princeling but also considered a leftist. Factions have also been conceived of based on regional or other networks (see: http://connectedchina.reuters.com/). Misra's (2003) categories of 'neo-rightists' and 'neo-leftists' are more useful. Our distinction between conservative reformists and neo-Maoists is similar, although it has the advantage of stressing that post-Tiananmen reformists became politically conservative, abandoning plans for regime liberalization after the crackdown on student-led opposition while continuing their calls for economic transformation. We believe that our categorization has the further advantage of not relying on a 'left–right' political spectrum which is very misleading in the Chinese context today. It also allows

categorical space for the few remaining liberals in party and academic circles who are scorned both by reformers, who reject their political project, and by neo-Maoists, who in addition denounce their economics. Those within the Chinese party leadership who look to Singapore (and do so positively unlike the neo-Maoists critical of the city-state's economic model) are searching for 'lessons' to assist their conservative reform efforts.

5. Modernization has been defined in many different ways, but in the Asian context, it has been influentially summarized by Morley and his co-authors (1999) as involving economic growth that leads to growing social differentiation which in turn results in new forms of interest representation. For the authors of Driven by Growth, the result of this process is inevitably, though not necessarily immediately, democratization (Morley 1999).
6. The Asian Barometer has done a series of studies showing how Confucian culture has not been a major obstacle to democratic transitions or stability in East Asia. See, for example, Chang (2007).
7. Earlier, however, Chinese reformers may have adopted key components of Singapore's economic strategy. Since the early 1980s, the Chinese government promoted the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) along coastal areas, which reflected the leadership's decision to let some parts of the country develop before others. It has been suggested that Taiwan's economic development zones influenced the formation of Chinese SEZs (Gallagher 2002, p. 345). However, Singapore may have been a 'reference state' in this area as well. This was underlined by the 1985 appointment of Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's economic architect who established the Economic Development Board (EDB), as adviser on coastal development and tourism by the Chinese government. His success in establishing the Jurong industrial estate in the Western part of Singapore to lure both local and foreign investors may have encouraged the Chinese leadership to begin with the development of SEZs.
8. The Singapore model also suggests that higher salaries could reduce corruption. However, not only does the sheer size of the Chinese state make such a reform difficult, but also experiments have demonstrated that simply raising salaries does not by itself reduce corruption (Cai 2005).

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