



GLOBALISATION, THE SINGAPORE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE AND EDUCATION POLICY

A THESIS REVISITED

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AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND



**Dr Saravanan
Gopinathan**

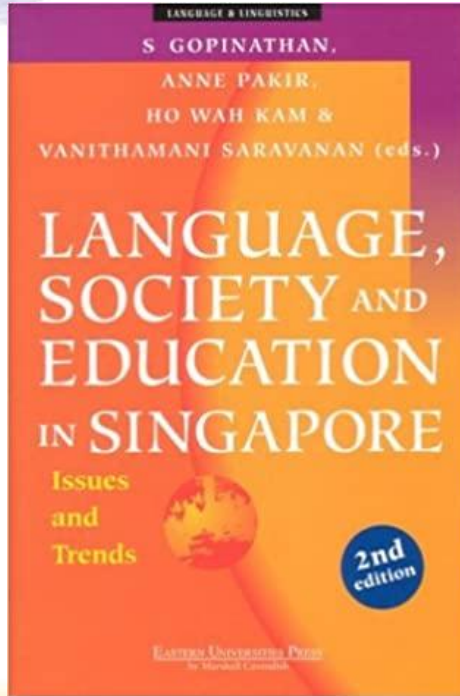
Positions

- Currently Adjunct Prof at LKYSPP
- Ex-Dean, School of Education at NIE (1974-2012)

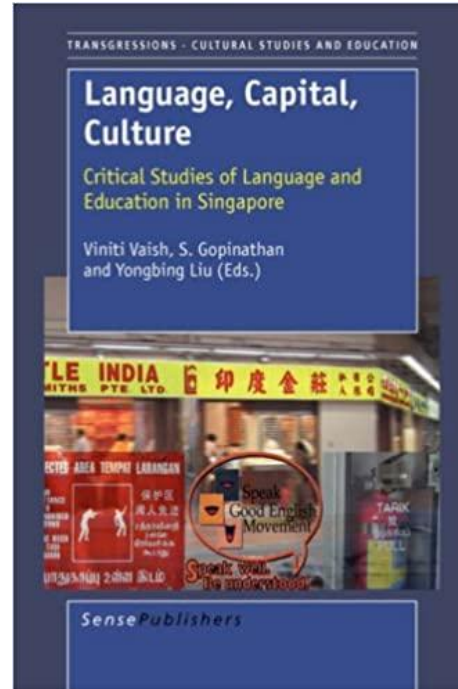
Areas of Research

- Educational policy in Singapore with emphasis on language, globalization, and pedagogy
- Theory and practice of teacher training

PUBLICATIONS



1994



2007

TEACHERS AND TEACHING IN EASTERN AND WESTERN SCHOOLS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Yanping Fang and S. Gopinathan

Introduction – Defining the Question and Scope for Review

The nature of teaching in schools in Eastern and Western countries has been a major theme in cross-country comparative studies in education in the past three decades. Interest in such comparative studies emerged in the 1970s after the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) launched the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS) in 1964 (Husen, 1967). This study showed that the US students scored much lower than students in China (Hong Kong), Japan and Korea. Subsequent large-scale quantitative measurements of student achievement, such as IEA's Second IMS in 1980, and the third, TIMSS, in mid-1990, with a science component added, had consistently revealed the same performance gap between the United States (and other Western countries, such as Germany and Britain) and their counterparts in these East Asian Countries. These large quantitative studies had led researchers to conduct smaller scale research involving qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observation of classroom teaching starting from the early 1980s, for instance, research led by Stevenson and his associates that attempted to identify the contextual factors contributing to the achievement gap. In most cross-cultural comparative studies in education, mathematics and science have been the focus not only because they are more measurable subject areas across different educational systems with different instructional languages but also because they are believed to play more important roles in determining the quality of future work forces for national economic development for the twenty-first century. Given the availability of existing research and space limitation, in this brief review, we refer the Eastern countries to those heavily influenced by Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC)¹, such as China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore and Western countries mainly to the United States, Germany, Britain and France.

Interest in studying classroom teaching and learning has also been driven by the so-called East Asian learner paradox. Observers of East Asian classrooms

2009

PUBLICATIONS (CONTD.)

Globalisation, the State and Education Policy in Singapore

S. Gopinathan

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of globalisation and educational policy making in the context of a recently developed 'strong state', Singapore. It suggests both the need to clarify the concept of globalisation from such concepts as dependency and centre-periphery and to avoid overly deterministic accounts of the influence of global trends on education policy making. An analysis is provided of policy initiatives in Singapore between 1979 and 1991 located within state-based imperatives to respond to both global and state-centric challenges.

Descriptors: Globalisation, education, social-economic development, state, Singapore.

1996

Educational Development in a Strong State : The Singapore Experience

S. Gopinathan
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University

1997

CONTEXT

Publication Date: Feb 2007

Journal: *Globalisation, Societies and Education*

Notable Developments:

- 1997: Asian Financial Crisis; Launch of NE
- 2001: 9/11
- 2002: Integrated Programme and other reforms
- 2006: General Elections (LHL's first as PM)

TITLE DECONSTRUCTION

Globalisation, the Singapore developmental state and education policy: A thesis revisited

Globalisation:

Process of international economic integration and trade, and their consequences.

Developmental State

“state which gains legitimacy through its ability to promote and sustain development”

Thesis Revisited:

Relooks 1996 and 1997 thesis w.r.t accelerating globalization. Posits that the Sg state has not weakened; rather it has adapted to harness market forces.

PAPER'S OBJECTIVES

Abstract

To “review the claims that call into question the continued relevance of the East Asian developmental state model and its education” (p. 53)

ANALYSIS OF PAPER

6 Main Sections

- Globalisation, economic change and education (pp. 53 – 56)
- Overcoming dependency (pp. 56 – 58)
- The Singapore context (pp. 58 – 64)
 - Education policy initiatives: 1997-2004 (p. 59-64)
- Whither the Singapore state and it's education policies? (pp. 64 – 66)
- Policies for unquiet times (pp. 66 – 68)
- Conclusion (pp. 68 – 69)

TL; DR

Thesis:

Abstract

“The character of a civil society is largely dependent on contemporary political conditions, the nature of the state, and the manner of society-state relations, thus infusing the term with a hermeneutic instability that is reflected in the broader literature” (p. 273)

Conclusion

“Does the state have the capacity to pro-actively act to retain control or is the adoption of market type reforms a sign of weakening state influence? **Our analysis of educational reform in Singapore suggests that the former is the case.**” (pp. 69)

1. Globalisation, economic change and education

Conceptions of Globalisation

- **Definition:** “Economic globalisation may be defined as the process of accelerating economic integration which privileges market capitalism and which places considerable economic power in the hands of transnational corporations;”
- **Economic benefits:** “removing restrictions, increased trade and economic growth” driven by: (i) revolution in communications (ii) technology-driven innovation
- **Social costs** as ‘unacceptable consequences’: growing inequalities, environmental degradation, commodification of culture and education, rise in unemployment, reduction of sovereign power in states (pp. 54)

1. Globalisation, economic change and education

Conceptions of Globalisation

- **Reduction of sovereign power in states**

- Early predictions (*The end of the nation-state* by Ohmae) proved to be farfetched (pp. 54); shift to “how state roles are being reconstituted and reconfigured, not on their ‘inevitable’ decline” (Pierre, Weiss, Dale).
- “The pressure to remain economically competitive” and remain “socially cohesive” □ **Education linked to economic growth and national goals.**

1. Globalisation, economic change and education

Conceptions of Economic Change

- Castells argues that the relationship between labour and capital has changed; for such a **post-industrial society**, "future wealth generation will come from the use of knowledge" (pp.55)
- However, Singapore still generates 25% of its GDP from industrial sector, its economic governance (e.g. trade unions) is still "neo-fordist." Schooling is still content-based, not skill-based, i.e not "post-fordist".
- Further, while the shift to post-industrial society might bring "new growth" it has very painful consequences: retrenched individuals, structural unemployment, jobless growth.

1. Globalisation, economic change and education

Conceptions of Education: Green

In general:

- National education developed as part of the formation of the nation state (Green)
- “Schools are sites for the preparation of the country’s labour force, preparation for social participation, for political and social identity formation and for the production of national elites” (Green 1990)

In Singapore:

- Crucial for ‘miraculous economic development’ and promoting a “cohesive civic identity based on the ideological tripod of multiculturalism, multilingualism and meritocracy” (pp. 55)

1. Globalisation, economic change and education

Conceptions of Education: Globalisation

- Globalisation has led to the commodification of education: “greater use of choice, competition, deregulation, and increasing both the involvement and burdens for parents” (pp. 55)
- Move from state-dominated systems □ private schooling.
- Importation of business practices:
 - Principals as CEOs
 - Students as clients
 - Branding, performance targets
 - School league tables

2. Overcoming dependency

Emergence of an 'East Asian developmental state'

- **Dependency theory** is of the notion that resources flow from a “periphery” of poor states to a “core” of wealthy states, forever enriching the latter at the expense of the former.
- East Asian Tigers overcame this dependency as ‘developmental states’ that fostered economic growth by ‘governing the market and not be[ing] subservient to it’
 - Developmental state is “one which gains legitimacy through its ability to promote and sustain development” (pp. 57)

2. Overcoming dependency

- Key strategy of a 'virtuous cycle': investment in education, which boosted labour productivity, generated wealth, and justified further investment in education
 - Centrally planned, universally available, standardised
 - Emphasis on S&T and vocational education

Challenges after 1997 AFC

- Neo-liberal opinion in the West pointed to issues with the developmental state model: state intervention, crony capitalism, clientalism.
- Fall of regimes (Suharto), rise in unemployment, increased power of IMF.
- Emergence of India & China □ hollowing out of industry
- Social challenges after 9/11: Malay-Muslim community in Sg (pp. 58)

3. The Singapore Context

Key Features

- **Outward-Looking**

- Singapore's survival has always depended on its usefulness to major powers (pp. 58) □ geography, language, economy
- Postcolonialism, unconventional in thwarting economic nationalism, "relied on trade heavily"

- **Culturally Distinctive**

- Recognition of English counterbalanced with mother tongue policy
- Strengthening Singapore's cultural identity as an Asian state
 - Distinct from Westminster model
 - Alignment with neo-Confucian ideology

3. The Singapore context

Education Policy Initiatives: 1997 – 2004

- Education reform in Singapore is “primarily a way of retooling the productive capacity of the system” □ taken at regular intervals
- **1997:** *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation*
 - Traditional teaching systems were inadequate □ ‘trained incapacity’ (pp. 60)
 - Switch from content-based to ability-driven curriculum
 - Lofty goals of fostering innovation and creativity??
- **2004-2004:** IP, Specialist schools, Streaming, WDA
 - More radical; greater structural flexibility and choice

3. The Singapore context

1997: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN)

- Outlined in GCT's 1997 speech: 'a formula to enable Sg to compete and stay ahead'
- Thinking Schools = process-centred environment at school
- Learning Nation = culture of continued learning beyond school
- Review of entire system: pre-school to university
- 4 main prongs
 1. **Critical and Creative Thinking:** Interdisciplinary projects, broader university curriculum
 2. **Information Technology in Education:** \$2B funding, 1:5 -> 1:2 ratio, 30% of instruction time, teacher training
 3. **National Education**
 4. **Administrative Excellence: school cluster system,** 100 hours of teacher training per year,

3. The Singapore context

2002-2004: IP, Specialist schools, Resources, Streaming, WDA (pp. 62)

- **IP:** Top 10% of primary school cohort skip O-Level; time 'saved' spent on 'broader learning experiences, innovative project work, leadership programmes'
- **Specialist schools:** Sports School, Science and Mathematics School (now NUS High), proposed school for the arts (now SOTA). Establishment of private-run, privately-funded secondary schools to add diversity
- **Increased Resources:** 1000 more primary teachers, 1400 more secondary teachers and 550 more JC teachers. Discretionary funding of \$100k for primary school, reduction of class size from 40 to 30. Provision for adjunct teachers.
- **Streaming:** Broader curriculum for N(A) and N(T) streams, DSA provision.
- In sum, an 'educational paradigm of flexibility and of choice' was emerging

3. The Singapore context

Problems

- More high SES band students gained access to ‘prestigious’ and well-funded independent schools (Tan, pp. 63). Perpetuates inequality.
- Project work initiatives have been selectively routinised and absorbed into the teachers’ repertoire □ lose flexibility
- “National Education is beset with problems of meaningful integration into curricular and co-curricular activities and scepticism from older students.”
- Integrated Programme opportunities are only available to the academically talented □ higher emphasis on PSLE

4. Whither the Singapore state

Economic Strategy

- Based on Economic Review (2002) and the Remaking Singapore (2003) committees, it was determined that the globalisation strategy must be continued
 - even at the cost of short-term economic pain via retrenchment, job loss and reduced incomes
 - Active state investment in new sectors like biotechnology
- Gopinathan claims that this is the response of a “strong state acting with a view to strengthening the local and the national in order to deal better with the regional and international ... in some ways, the state is the only game in town” (pp. 65)

4. Whither the Singapore state

Education Strategy

- “Education will be seen to be less of a common good and more of a commodity that can be priced and purchased, because it can be seen as primarily of benefit to the individual and his family” (pp. 65)
- “The provision of space for private schools and a private university could be seen as the true beginning of a marketisation process. And the language of mission statements, branding, the notion of students as clients is much more evident now in educational discourse”
- However, Gopinathan claims that reforms are “tactical changes made by a strong state”:
 - MOE tolerates only 2-3 private schools;
 - Retention of key pillars of curriculum (MTL and NE), and funding

5. Policies for unquiet times

Challenges to ‘Social Solidarity’

- **Race / Religion**
 - “Lai (2004) has pointed out that when economic growth weakens, religion, ethnicity and class can become sources of social conflict” □ COVID
 - 9/11, radical Islam in SEA and Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*
 - “Singapore’s Malay–Muslim community, already lagging behind in the socio-economic race (Tan, 1997) in spite of advances in the past two decades, feels vulnerable. In this context, relatively minor educational moves such as those to modernise the madrasah curriculum or regulate the use of the ‘tudong’ become politically charged.”

5. Policies for unquiet times

Challenges to 'Social Solidarity'

- **Inequality**

- Lai (2004) notes that 'a widening economic gap with a class-race overlap is probably emerging to an extent in the highly competitive and globalised economic setting that places a premium on educational performance and credentials ...' (p. 13).
- Rodan: 'many Singaporeans are finding themselves in the wrong half of a dual labour market'
- The cognitive elite, already the ones best placed to benefit from Singapore's streamed system of education, will gain further advantage from the integrated programme

- **Bureaucratic Rigidity**

- Reluctance to engage in radical measures
- Core assumptions: ability is detected early, differentially developed, SES doesn't matter if a school is fair
- Teachers have routinised procedures for thinking skills □ technique-oriented view of creativity prevails.

CONCLUSION

- Cautions against ‘fragmentary consequences of market capitalism’ (pp. 68)
- Gopinathan claims that his analysis educational reform in Singapore suggests that despite globalisation, the Singaporean state has the “capacity to pro-actively act to retain control”
- He qualifies his argument: “It is also clear, however, that while the state will steer it cannot be sure that it will well manage all the consequences that will flow from the educational changes it is enacting” □ Stress, creativity, ‘fear of failure’

FOOTNOTES

Primary sources

- MOE Reports (1998, 2002), a Straits Times article
- Goh Chok Tong's TSLN Speech
- No interview of teachers, policy makers, or other stakeholders

Secondary sources

- Cites several theorists: Fukuyama, Ohmae, Green, Stiglitz
- Evenly divided references, with 15 specifically about Singapore
 - Cites research on ethno-linguistic divide in Singapore's education system

EVALUATION

- Incremental thesis?
- Does the thesis still hold 14 years later?
 - Subject-Based Banding; PSLE;
 - 'All Schools Are Good Schools'
 - Establishment of 4 other autonomous universities funded by the state
 - Sg Citizens at international schools
 - Merging of JCs / primary schools / secondary schools
 - NUS policies: CHS, expansion of SoC.
- Globalization
 - Tuition industry (\$1.4B); enrichment classes; private unis;

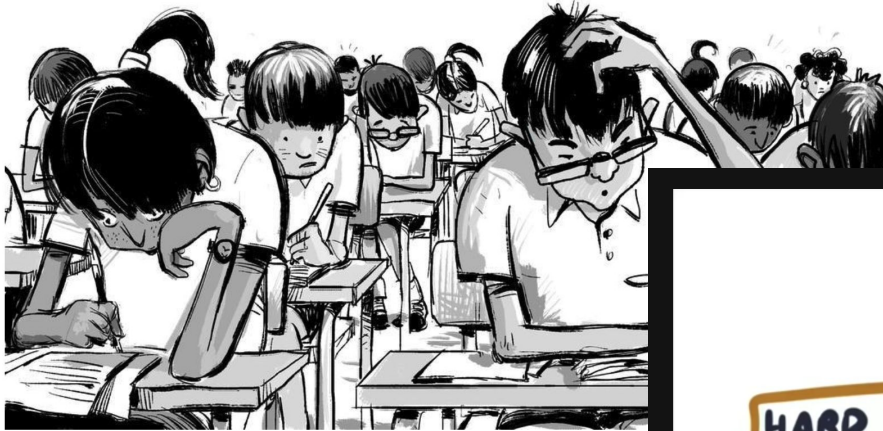
Tuition has ballooned to a S\$1.4b industry in Singapore. Should we be concerned?



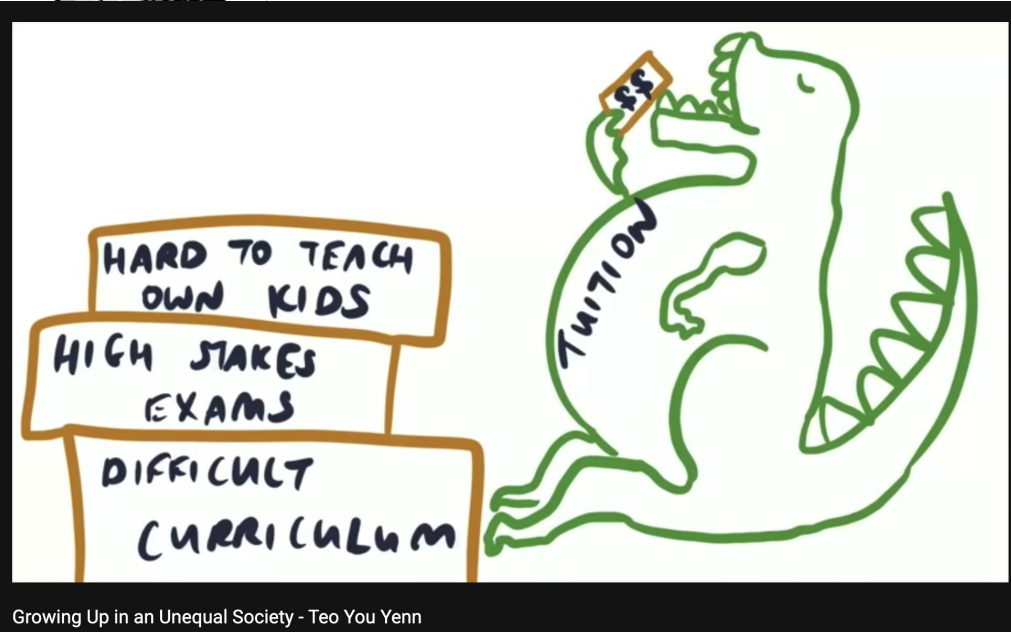
By KELVIN SEAH KAH CHENG

Published SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

Updated SEPTEMBER 30, 2019



The growth of the tuition industry is fuelled primarily by two factors: Increasing average real incomes of households and children keep up with the competition, says the author.



Growing Up in an Unequal Society - Teo You Yenn



THANK YOU

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