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POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURE
IN THE TRAJECTORY OF
SINGAPOREAN CAPITALISM

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The Rise of Neo-Authoritarianism:
Political Economy and Culture in the Trajectory of Singaporean Capitalism¹

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ABSTRACT

Current democratization theories cannot explain the persistence of authoritarianism in capitalist Singapore while other East Asian developmental states democratized. This article seeks the explanation in the interaction between political-economic structure and cultural identity in their historical global context. State-participative development transformed the bureaucratic elite into the surrogate bourgeoisie, who located their identity in neo-Confucianism. The elite turned neo-Confucianism into "Asian values" to consolidate their rule when challenged by democratization in the 1980s. Neo-authoritarianism combines state economic participation and authoritarianism with the ideology of civilizational distinction rooted in elite identity and is the political "other" of neo-liberalism in late-capitalism.

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THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITARIANISM

During the 1970s and 1980s, East Asia defied the conventional academic wisdom first founded by Seymour Martin Lipset (1959; see also Moore 1966; Berger 1986) that correlates capitalist development with democracy. But as the Cold War waned, democratic movements toppled authoritarian regimes around the world. This “wave of democracy”, which Huntington (1991) termed as “the third wave” and Markoff (1996) “the greatest wave of all”, precipitated what Pye (1990) described as “the crisis of authoritarianism”. The decline of one-party or authoritarian regimes in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia seem to vindicate Lipset’s thesis, except that in 2000, Malaysia and Singapore still stand out as cases of resilient authoritarianism. Why are these regimes exceptions to democratization? Singapore exemplifies the neo-authoritarian exceptionalism that is both successfully capitalist and anti-democratic. Furthermore, the regime began its rule with a democratic ideology but espoused conservative neo-Confucianism in the 1980s in contrast to the Confucianistic regimes in South Korea and Taiwan that democratized in the same period.

In the development studies literature, Singapore is grouped with South Korea and Taiwan in the category of “East Asia” to explain a rare striking trait they shared in the post-colonial world: successful development that is apparently non-dependent. Political economists agree on the important role of several characteristics in distinguishing East Asian development from Latin American dependency. First, American support for these “frontier” states provided a secure environment favoring state-led development (Barrett 1988; Lie 1998; So and Chiu 1995). Second, the rise of the developmental state, ruled by authoritarian strongmen and served by an efficient technocracy, provided for the political and financial stability crucial to rapid development. The East Asian states were relatively autonomous from social cleavages, and were

thus insulated from the interests of conflicting groups. Furthermore, legitimated primarily by anti-communist ideology, authoritarian rule suppressed ethnic and class conflicts, especially left labor mobilization (Deyo 1987; Hewison and Rodan 1994). Third, the states pursued export-oriented industrialization by cultivating a close relationship with dependent domestic bourgeoisies through the control of capital flows, and by limiting or directing foreign capital investments (Barrett and Chin 1987, Haggard and Moon 1993). Fourth, the timing of East Asia's insertion into the world system and its regional economic integration were critical to the success of this strategy (Cumings 1987; So and Chiu 1995; Woo-Cumings 1996; Numazaki 1998; Gereffi 1998). The Japanese advance into the high-technology manufacturing opened up productive spaces in the world-system that were quickly filled in by South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, and increased American demand due to the Vietnam War pulled the proximate industrializing economies forward.

Scholars of South Korean and Taiwanese democratization point to the ironic consequences of successful development to explain political change (Cotton 1989; Koo 1991; Thompson 1996; Lie 1998; Cho and Kim 1998). Authoritarian developmentalism sowed the seeds of its own destruction. The burgeoning middle classes grew restive and demanded the end to political alienation. Intellectuals played a leading role by forging ties with subaltern classes and by developing counter-hegemonic discourses. The shifting global mood in the 1980s accelerated the breakdown of authoritarian ideology. Authoritarianism increasingly became the cause of political instability rather than the guarantor of stability. Furthermore, the growing independence of the established domestic bourgeoisie and the emergence of alternative sources of capital reduced the economic role of the state. The authoritarian state became a liability rather than a powerful partner for the bourgeoisie. But this approach alone cannot account for the

Singaporean regime's resilience. Instead, various studies explain Singapore's "non-change" in terms of the containment of democratization pressures. Democratization scholars explain Singapore's exception as structural containment through state corporatism or some other form of institutional and legitimation engineering (Thompson 1993; Cotton 1997; Pei 1998), thus assuming that democratization is an inexorable process linked to development. For example, Thompson (1993, p. 481) argues that the "current wave of democracy ... did not swamp ... Singapore because non-democratic rulers had erected barriers strong enough to withstand it". Other sociologists locate the regime's tenacious adaptability to democratization pressure in terms of ideological trajectory (Chua 1995) and nationalism (Hill and Lian 1995), that is, they explain the exception as cultural containment. In both explanations, the state elite is seen as an agent of history who is relatively autonomous from the social structure and dominant culture engineered by the elite themselves and from the global political-economic-cultural field.

This article seeks a dialectical explanation of the exception as the consequence of an interaction between structure and culture, fields of relations of production and discourse in which class struggle takes place and determines democratization or authoritarian consolidation. In doing so, the article attempts to locate the regime elite's "embedded autonomy" (Evans 1995) in the changing class structure and cultural milieu of Singapore and in the global system of political and cultural economy. My argument consists of three dimensions, which may be identified as political-economic, cultural and historical. The article is organized respectively. The goal of the first section is to locate the specificity of Singaporean capitalism as it pertains to the development of the class structure. Since a comparative study is called for, I will review the political economy literature on South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. I will show that extensive state ownership of the economy in Singapore, as a consequence of rapid export-oriented

industrialization without a preceding stage of domestic industrial capitalization, led to a class structure dominated by the technocratic state elite who therefore becomes the surrogate bourgeoisie. This comparative review provides the lead for the second section, which will focus on the cultural dimension of class-formation. Following the sociological route inspired by E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, I will look at the interaction between the developing social structure, preceding hegemonic discourses and emergent elite social narrative. The study here uses public archives of elite discourse. I will argue that the ruling ideology of "democratic socialism", which followed the elite's climb to post-colonial power, was reduced to sub-discourses during the 1970s to justify authoritarian repression to discipline society for rapid industrialization. Meanwhile, the elite began to articulate a neo-Confucianist social narrative to identify themselves as the ruling group in the emergent class structure.

It is a misnomer to call the third dimension historical since the argumentation in the previous sections is also historical in character. However, the third section employs the methodological device of "event" in historical sociology to show how the structure and culture specified in the first two sections led to regime consolidation and therefore the persistence of authoritarianism in Singapore. Sewell (1996) argues that "eventful temporality", in contrast to teleological and experimental temporalities, questions the causal homogeneity of abstract factors through time and emphasizes the central importance of identified events for the explanatory framework. In brief, events are contingent occurrences that significantly transform social and cultural structures. Some events are thus distinguished for being "turning points" in history. Abbott (1997) observes that turning points separate routine trajectories that are more structured and amenable to causal understanding. Turning points are heightened states of structural dissolution and fluid complexities, in which the consequences of agency are amplified. From the

mid-1980s onwards, a series of events swept East Asia – “people power” brought down the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986, then South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand democratized in their own dramatic ways. The comparable event in Singapore is the “Marxist conspiracy” event of 1987-88, when the regime faced domestic resistance and international disapprobation after cracking down on an emergent oppositional movement. I will show, by looking at the series of actions and counteractions in this event, how the elite eventually turned their neo-Confucianist social narrative into the “Asian values” ideology to consolidate their ruling position and authoritarian prerogatives. The study here examines archival data consisting mainly of press articles, government press releases, human rights reports, and the published writings of those touched by the repression. I will then conclude by suggesting that the regime belongs to the emerging post-Cold War international order as the neo-authoritarian “other” of neo-liberal democracy, thus fitting into the structure and culture of late-capitalism.

THE COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SINGAPOREAN CAPITALISM

Export-Oriented Industrialization and the Triple Alliance, 1960s-80

Singapore gained its independence in 1965 with the People’s Action Party (PAP), dominated by middle-class elites, in firm control of the state apparatus. A key similarity between the Singaporean, South Korean and Taiwanese cases is the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis society. In South Korea, the power base of the old agrarian elite was eroded by agrarian conflicts during the Japanese colonial period (Shin 1998) and was eventually broken by land reforms initiated towards the end of the Korean War (Lie 1998, pp. 5-18). In Taiwan, the Kuomintang nationalist elite ruled as an exogenous elite from 1949 onwards, weakening the local rural elite through land reforms and repressing independence-minded urban elite (Winckler

1988). In Singapore, the English-educated PAP elite, through their anti-colonial credentials, stood apart from the local bourgeoisie and other English-educated elites who collaborated with the colonial government. Relative autonomy allowed the ruling elite of the three countries to embark on rationalistic development programs detached from specific class interests and enhanced the claim of national interest that underlies their legitimacy. The elites of the three countries were aided by capable bureaucracies established by the Japanese colonial state in Korea, the British in Singapore, and the militarized Kuomintang party-state that moved from the mainland to Taiwan. Colonial industrialization in Korea and Taiwan, which deepened as Japan mobilized for imperial aggression and war, provided the economic base for post-colonial development (Gold 1988a; Koo 1987a; Shin 1998). Founded as a trading settlement by the British East India Company in 1819, Singapore was a key British base in Southeast Asia in the twentieth century. The three countries therefore possessed the politico-economic bases for post-colonial industrialization.

Haggard and Cheng (1987, pp. 93-94) note that Singapore's export-oriented developmentalism is clearly different because multinational corporations (MNCs) dominate the local economy rather than chaebol conglomerates in Korea and local small enterprises in Taiwan. According to indices compiled by Greenhalgh (1988), Singapore's dependence on foreign direct investment was at least three and a half times more than Korea or Taiwan's dependence in the mid-1960s (TABLE 1). The comparative ratio increased to at least five and a half times in the mid-1970s. From 1966 to 1976, the percentage of companies that are more than half foreign-owned doubled from 10 to 22 percent. Although only representing about one-fifth of all companies, foreign firms employed 54 percent of the workforce and produced 73 percent of total industrial output in 1976 (Cheng 1991, p. 212). Chinese merchant capital was heavily involved

in the colonial entrepôt trade, and the domestic bourgeoisie was well organized and politically represented by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Why did the PAP regime opt for MNC-led industrialization, and thus dependency on foreign capital, instead of building up the industrial capacity of the domestic bourgeoisie as were the case in South Korea and Taiwan?

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE INDICES OF INVESTMENT AND AID DEPENDENCY

	Stock Private Overseas Direct Investment end- 1967 as percent 1965 GNP	Stock Private Overseas Direct Investment end- 1977 as percent 1977 GNP	1960-70 grants and loans as percent of 1965 GNP	1979-81 grants and loans as percent of 1980 GNP
S. Korea	2.6	4.1	139.1	1.4
Taiwan	5.2	3.2	46.8	.0
Singapore	19.6	23.4	18.3	.7

Source: Greenhalgh (1988, pp. 80-82). GNP refers to Gross National Product.

Rodan (1997, p. 150) claims that its history of collaborative alignment with the colonial state politically marginalized the domestic bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the English-educated PAP elite actively sought the support of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which they secured in end-1962 (Lee T. H. 1996, p. 246). When the elite came into power in 1959, they sought the economic advice of specialists, first under the Colombo Plan and then from the World Bank and the United Nations. Both reports, the 1959 Lyle and 1961 Winsemius Reports, included advice for the state to spearhead industrialization by assisting indigenous enterprise financially and operationally (Cheng 1991, pp. 188-190). The reason for the regime's ditching of domestic capital, in what would be the "triple alliance" of MNCs, the state and the domestic bourgeoisie (Evans 1979), is a matter of global historical timing. South Korea and Taiwan had gone through

an earlier period of import-substitution development in the 1950s and early 60s, in which US aid provided the state with capital and strategies to build up the industrial capacities of domestic bourgeoisies (Simon 1988; Haggard and Cheng 1987; Koo 1987a). The switch to export-led industrialization in the early-1960s was triggered by US policy changes that favored an open world economy and sought, because of its geopolitical concerns, to strengthen the South Korean and Taiwanese economies (Cumings 1988; Evans 1987, pp. 222-223). When Singapore embarked on industrialization in the mid-1960s, it was already too late in terms of the window of opportunity in the world-system to take time to convert domestic merchant capital into industrial capital. Initial attempts to jump-start industrialization by going into joint ventures with local capital ended in failure (e.g. Lee 2000, p. 51). In addition, Singapore received comparatively little aid (TABLE 1). The accelerated withdrawal of the British military in the late-1960s, which accounted for 10 percent of the Gross National Product, exacerbated the situation.

However, the state did not merely rely on MNCs. In place of domestic capital in the “triple alliance”, the state invested heavily to set up joint ventures with MNCs or start wholly-owned firms using capital in large part obtained through a forced retirement savings program, the Central Provident Fund, and two large state-owned banks. Singapore has the highest rate of savings in the world, with gross national savings representing over 74 percent of total gross domestic capital formation in 1966-85, and the Fund was the main component of the 46 percent public sector contribution to savings (Castells 1998, pp. 252-253). In addition, two state-owned banks, the Post Office Savings Bank and the Development Bank of Singapore, diverted private savings to provide capital for state investments. Statistics showing the degree of state involvement are non-existent but several indicators have been used. The Development Bank held 7 wholly-owned firms and was a major shareholder in 50 companies in 1973 (Haggard and

Cheng 1987, p. 106). By the 1980s, through three large holding companies, the state owned or had a stake in about 600 companies spanning a diverse range of sectors (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 32). State-linked companies represented less than 20 percent but accounted for 60.5 percent of all realized profits for the top 500 local companies in 1988 (Rodan 1996, p. 41). It was estimated that state-linked companies accounted for 45 percent of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product in the mid-1980s (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 32).

State investments also played a major role in South Korea and Taiwan during their import-substitution phase, but during the export-oriented phase, direct state involvement was greatly circumscribed and quickly reversed (Lie 1998, pp. 90-1; Gold 1988b, p. 201). The capital formation ratio of private enterprises to public ones in Taiwan rose from 1.5 in 1980 to 2.9 in 1988 (Shive 1992, p. 105). The two Northeast Asian countries, and also Japan, are often described as having a free-enterprise economy within a larger economy dominated and directed by what Johnson (1993) calls a "capitalist developmental state". But the structuring of Singapore's economy is qualitatively different. The state did not transfer capital to the bourgeoisie in the form of inexpensive loans. The state guaranteed a free-enterprise economy strategically opened to MNC participation and became the surrogate capitalist by participating in that very economy as owners of the means of production.

The "Second Industrial Revolution" and Emergent Class Structure, 1980s

In 1980s, the three countries began to restructure their economy in response to increased competition from emerging economies in the region. In both South Korea and Taiwan, the developmental state shifted its support to high technology industries and focused on developing local research and development capacity and skills training (Haggard and Moon 1993, pp. 83-86; Gold, p. 189). They also began liberalizing the economy by easing import and foreign

investment restrictions. Singapore made similar moves with regards to industrial policy, but in the latter aspect, the Singaporean economy was already liberalized from the start. In fact, dependency on MNCs continued to increase into the 80s and 90s. The foreign share of Singapore's Gross National Product was 35.6 percent in 1981 and 40.1 percent in 1991 (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 14). The largest investor continues to be the US followed by Japan and then European Union countries. As part of industrial restructuring, the regime promoted a wage policy in 1979 that increased wages by 20 percent, so as to discourage labor-intensive investments. Twelve sectors, mainly in microelectronics and petrochemicals, were selected for special promotion. The state started high-technology firms, invested in joint ventures with MNCs, and created science parks to promote research and development. In 1981, the Government Investment Corporation, which operated in great secrecy (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 34), was set up to handle investments of the state's large foreign reserves in leading high technology MNCs overseas.

The 1981 world recession coincided with the restructuring but state restructuring investments counteracted the effects. However, local enterprises suffered the brunt of increased labor costs. The attention given to high technology and capital-intensive sectors added to the bias against local firms, and this made the small and dependent domestic bourgeoisie unhappy (Haggard and Cheng 1987, pp. 119-120). This and a major recession that finally hit Singapore in 1985-6, in which output fell by 2 percent and unemployment rose to 6.5 percent (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 37), threatened to turn the state's direct activist handling of the economy into a major political issue. A Ministry of Trade and Industry team headed by Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's scion and a rising political figure, produced a report in 1986 that favored a reduced capitalist role for the state and increased support for local enterprises (Ministry

of Trade and Industry 1986, pp. 83-84). The report also commented that the Central Provident Fund and the tax-exempt deposits in the Post Office Savings Bank had diverted a large part of available capital and "inhibited private capital formation" (Ministry of Trade and Industry 1986, p. 175). The state reversed the high wage policy, consolidated and improved schemes to help local enterprises, and announced its intention to consider privatization of its enterprises. The eventuality of the latter however did not qualitatively change the state's position as the surrogate capitalist. In 1991, there were still over 400 state-linked companies (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 32). Although the state sold its complete stake in some companies, it retained large holdings in big companies in important sectors (Peebles and Wilson 1996, p. 38). This conservative privatization was further offset by the corporatization of large state-owned companies through limited public floatation. In the early 1990s, the US Embassy reports' rough estimate was that the public sector represented 60 percent of the economy, MNCs represented 25 percent, and the private sector represented only 15 percent (Peebles and Wilson, p. 32).

The fact that the regime could raise wages when it wanted indicated the degree of its control of labor. Leftist unions were crushed in the 1960s. The National Trade Union Congress was formed then as the elite-controlled alternative to leftist unions. The regime enacted a series of legislations targeted against labor union power in the late-60s, effectively clamping down on strike actions, cutting labor benefits and expanding management prerogatives by limiting the scope of union negotiations (Rodan 1989, pp. 91-93). The Congress became the incorporated but virtually powerless representative of labor in the so-called "tri-partite" arrangement between the state, corporations and labor. The Congress is headed by a minister in the PAP cabinet and has since ventured into businesses. Its other role is to serve as a vehicle for the regime's productivity and training programs. Why was labor so easily emasculated in Singapore? A

comparison with South Korean labor is instructive. First, the South Korean regime moved too late from repression to corporatist labor control. It only adopted corporatism in the early 1970s after labor unrest began and when export-oriented industrialization was well underway (Koo 1987b, pp. 106-107). In contrast, the Singaporean regime acted early and preemptively, learning its lessons from its decolonization tussle for hegemony with the left. Second, Korean labor politicization had deep historical roots in Japanese colonial industrialization (Deyo 1987, p. 185). Singaporean labor was only extensively politicized in the 1950s when the leftist anti-colonial movement gained momentum, but the movement was crushed within slightly more than a decade. Furthermore, there was little institutional continuation because this labor movement took shape in Singapore's pre-industrial period. Third, Korean industrialization included heavy industries, in which labor unionization has often been the strongest, while heavy industries are conspicuously missing from the Singaporean case, which proceeded from light industries to high-technology industrialization. Fourth, Korean labor had developed a powerful subaltern discourse, minjung ideology, that provided for a strong class consciousness (Koo 1993). Although the Singaporean working class was becoming increasingly disaffected, evident in 1981 when the PAP lost its first parliamentary seat since 1968 (Rodan 1989, pp. 166-167) and again in 1991 when it lost four (Rodan 1996, pp. 34-35; Rodan 1997, p. 167), it did not possess a collective identity and ideology to organize and express disaffection.

The emergent middle class is acclaimed to have played a major role in South Korean and Taiwanese democratization. In Korea, the participation of white-collar workers and intellectuals in particular was crucial for democratization (Koo 1991). Korean intellectuals were closely linked to the working class and articulated the minjung vision of society, forming new social movements that cut across class boundaries (Dalton and Cotton 1996;

Hsiao and Koo 1997; see Wells 1995). Taiwanese intellectuals played a similar role, although they were less radical and more distant from the working class than their Korean counterparts (Lo 1992; Hsiao and Koo 1997). They were closely allied with the domestic bourgeoisie of the Taiwanese small enterprises and local politicians, who provided financial and political support for the new social movements founded by the former (Rigger 1996; Chu 1996). In Singapore, a fragmented and circumscribed civil society led by intellectuals and professionals only began to emerge in the 1990s (Rodan 1996). The Singaporean regime monopolized the educational system, through which it not only socialized the masses into the economic division of labor, but also recruited the best into the huge state technocracy. Independent-minded intellectuals who subsequently emerged were often co-opted into the civil service, especially the diplomatic corps. The universities remain under state ownership. In 1974, the regime cracked down on university student activists involved in developmental issues, who were supporting independent labor union activities and evicted “squatters”. In 1976, legislation was passed to forbid the university students’ union from engaging in any activity that the government deemed political. That year, student leaders in the Singapore Polytechnic were detained for alleged communist activities. Intellectual and professional segments of the middle class who would not be co-opted were dealt with coercively. In 1977, 11 professionals and intellectuals were detained for dissident activities.

It may be tempting therefore to conclude that the political role of the middle class is the critical determinant of democratization, but this would reflect a static analysis of class and political change. Instead, it is the changing relationship between labor, the emergent middle class, the domestic bourgeoisie and the state that determines political change. The relative autonomy of the state increasingly became an embedded autonomy as state-led development

shaped a stable capitalist class structure. In both South Korea and Taiwan, the bourgeoisie grew in power and began to challenge its asymmetrical relationship with the developmental state. The South Korean state was caught between the increasingly independent-minded chaebol bourgeoisie (Bennett 1991, pp. 133-134; Choi 1993, pp. 46-48) and the oppositional movement constituted by labor and segments of the middle class. Economic liberalization preceded political democratization because the state was under pressure from the bourgeoisie (Koo 1987a, p. 176; Amsden 1989, pp. 136-137). As noted above, the domestic bourgeoisie played a critical role in Taiwanese democratization (Lo 1992), in which economic liberalization was a constituent process (Shiau 1996). Haggard (1998, pp. 88-89, 99) argues that the PAP regime's mid-1980s shift towards local business was linked to its sensitivity to the local bourgeoisie's electoral support, thus implying that the Singaporean bourgeoisie is becoming increasingly influential like its counterparts in South Korea and Taiwan. But this view assumes that the state elite is merely a middle-class managerial elite, like those in Korea and Taiwan, who do not identify with the class interests of the bourgeoisie. Thompson (1996, p. 641) argues that the middle class is conservative in Singapore because it recognizes itself in the "similarly educated and situated" technocratic state elite. Rodan (1996a, pp. 27, 29-32) writes of the emergence of a "virtual class" of "public entrepreneurs" recruited from the middle class, and argues that the state elite had thus generated mutual interests and values shared by the middle class. But is the state elite coterminous with the middle class?

The managerial and technocratic middle class may identify with the elite as individuals in a "contradictory class location" who were able to convert their "skill assets" into "organization assets" (Wright 1985). However, would the regime elite, although having middle class roots, who through control of state organization assets also control the domestic means of production,

continue to see themselves as middle class? I argue that the elite constitutes a group that renews itself by recruiting middle-class individuals who are rich in skill assets but distinguishes itself by its control of domestic capital. Direct state participation in capitalist export-oriented industrialization has created a class structure that selects, separates and repositions the elite segment of the middle class into the bourgeois location. The elite is therefore the surrogate bourgeoisie in a capitalist society that lack capitalists. The structural location of the surrogate bourgeoisie is in the overlap between three organizational fields: (i) the state, in which organization assets are hierarchically distributed, (ii) the PAP, which had become the political vehicle of the surrogate bourgeoisie, and (iii) the state-owned corporations, through which the means of production are owned by the state. The surrogate bourgeoisie is the elite segment of the middle class whose “contradictory class location” is systemically resolved. In summary, my argument here posits that the timing of export-oriented industrialization in Singapore, relatively late in the global economic context, meant that the English-educated ruling elite had to elect for sustained state capital participation in an economy driven by MNCs. Over time, the success of this economic strategy led to the transformation of the elite into the surrogate bourgeoisie.

ELITE SOCIAL NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY-FORMATION

Culture, as it applies to the state elite, involves two different ideational aspects that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first is implied in last section and is best explicated by Meyer (1999) as rationalistic cognitive models that define the constitution and operation of the modern nation-state. These cognitive models provide the state elite with the hermeneutic tools to interpret world politics and economics, and therefore significantly affect elite decisions, for example, in choosing the type and direction of economic development. The focus here is on the second aspect. The formation of a social group involves a set of cultural processes that

determines its identity and distinguishes it vis-à-vis other identified groups. These processes provide the state elite with the hermeneutic tools to constitute and locate themselves as an acting collective in a field of interrelated groups. For the Singaporean regime elite, their group identity went through three definitional stages. The first group identity was formed in the struggle for hegemony during the decolonization years. The negotiation of this identity followed when the elite became the undisputed rulers of a new nation on the brink of an economic crisis. After more than a decade of successful development, the elite identity went through another transformation as it became influenced by the crystallizing class structure.

The Nationalist Vanguard, Democratic Socialism and Pragmatism, 1950s-70s

Decolonization pitted the British late-colonial state against the anti-colonial labor unions and student movements led by mostly Chinese-educated leftists. A range of political groups fell in between, the most radical of which was an English-educated elite group led by Lee Kuan Yew, who had secured through his legal work a minuscule but significant support base in the government employees' labor unions. In 1954, the elite joined with the leftists to form the People's Action Party (PAP), with the former constituting the leadership and the latter, the grassroots base. The elite's articulation of "democratic socialism" matched their ascendancy to political power. "Democratic socialism" was a hybridized construction combining the socialist ethos of communism with the democratic ideals of liberalism. Speaking from a Third World position, the elite sought to negotiate the best of the Cold War's two ideological positions. As a social narrative, the elite saw themselves as nationalist vanguards that were more progressive than their rivals. In the struggle for hegemony, the English-educated elite presented themselves as representing the universal interests of society. This became more evident as "democratic

socialism” was articulated against opponents tagged as holding inferior ideologies – “colonialism”, “communism” and “communalism”.

“Democratic socialism” was first and foremost a socialist anti-colonial discourse that the two groups in the PAP, the popular left and the Western-educated elite, could share:

To end colonialism and establish an independent national state of Malaya ...; to create a democratic unitary government of Malaya based on universal adult suffrage ...; to abolish the unjust inequalities of wealth and opportunity inherent in the present system; to establish an economic order which will give to all citizens the right to work and the full economic returns for their labour and skill; to ensure a decent living and social security to all those who through sickness, infirmity or old age can longer work. (Lee Kuan Yew, on the objectives of the PAP, 22/11/1954; quoted in Drysdale 1984, p. 90)

In the subsequent politics of decolonization, the elite showed hegemonic intellectual and moral leadership (Gramsci 1971) by fighting for members of the popular left detained by the colonial government, using democratic discourse to criticize the government’s emergency powers:

If you believe in democracy, you must believe in it unconditionally. If you believe that men should be free, then they should have the right of free association, of free speech, of free publication. Then no law should permit those democratic processes to be set at naught, and no excuse ... should allow a government to be deterred from doing what it knows to be right, and what it must know to be right. (Lee Kuan Yew, Legislative Assembly debates, 22/4-7/6/1956; quoted in International Commission of Jurists et al. 1987, p. 3)

The alliance was however a Machiavellian one. While the elite rode the left’s mass support to electoral victory, they gained the friendship of the British and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the ruling party in newly-independent Malaya, by appealing to

their experience with the preceding Malayan Communist Party armed revolution. In 1959, the PAP won the elections under a new constitution specifying limited self-government and designed to legitimate the use of emergency laws to crush the leftists. When the elite announced in 1961 that the PAP would seek independence for Singapore through merger with Malaya in what was to be called the federation of Malaysia, the leftists broke away to form Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front). Their main reason for opposition to merger is the institutionalization of emergency detention powers in the Internal Security Act, legislated in Malaya in 1960. The elite began an intense public campaign against the leftists and for merger. The PAP won the referendum in 1962 and Malaysia came into existence in September 1963, but not before the Internal Security Council cracked-down on the leftists in February and then after in October. During this period, democracy was emphasized as the normative distinction between the two groups, and used to mark the leftists as communists set out to establish totalitarianism. During the crucial 1959 elections, the elite hung on to their democratic opposition to the emergency laws:

In this fight the ultimate contestants will be the PAP and the MCP [Malayan Communist Party] – the PAP for a democratic non-Communist socialist Malaya and the MCP for a Soviet republic of Malaya. ... It is a battle of ideals and ideas. ... We shall not be intimidated or browbeaten nor will we use repression as the means of government. We shall govern with the will and support of the people, firmly, wisely and justly. (Lee Kuan Yew, election campaign speech, 31/5/1959; quoted in Drysdale 1984, p. 218)

After the elections, a shift to “justified use” for the sake of democracy can be ascertained. Thus, Lee said that the emergency “powers can only provide a temporary damper against those who set out to wreck the democratic state” (Legislative Assembly debates, 14/10/1959; quoted in Seow 1994, p. 195).

With the leftist threat dissipated, the PAP and UMNO cooperation ended in a major quarrel over ideology and the terms of a common market. Affirmative action in favor of the majority Malays and in disfavor of the economically privileged Chinese was a key UMNO political platform, while the PAP advocated for race-blind meritocracy. Furthermore, PAP's ambition for Singapore to become the industrial and commercial center of Malaysia was blocked by UMNO reluctance to give the predominantly Chinese city-state such a powerful role in the new nation. Both parties began to campaign in each other's electoral turf. Racial tensions between Chinese and Malays rose to unprecedented heights and riots broke out in Singapore in July 1964. The PAP organized a united opposition against UMNO, vying now for state power in Kuala Lumpur. It campaigned for a "Malaysian Malaysia", emphasizing a democratic "equality" directed against "communalism":

A Malaysian Malaysia means that the nation and the state is not identified with the supremacy, well-being and the interest of any one particular community or race. ... The special and legitimate rights of different communities must be secured and promoted within the framework of the collective rights, interests and responsibilities of all races. The people of Malaysia did not vote for a non-democratic Malaysia. They did not vote for a Malaysia assuring hegemony to one community. (Joint declaration of the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, 10/5/1965; quoted in Drysdale 1984, p. 381)

The threat posed to UMNO was significant, as the PAP-led opposition challenged the race-based political consensus that UMNO maintained with the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress in their ruling coalition. Furthermore, the PAP-led opposition's advocacy of race-blind meritocracy ultimately favored Chinese hegemony. In mid-1965, the PAP was told to take Singapore out of the Federation. Independence was an undesired

reality. The remnant leftist movement, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the new state, organized against the PAP regime but was quickly suppressed by mass detentions. By the end of the 1960s, the left was a spent force and the regime embarked unhindered on export-oriented industrialization. “Democratic socialism” became increasingly buried under the new “pragmatism” discourse of survival engendered by authoritarian social disciplining for rapid industrialization (see Chua 1995, pp. 57-78). What survived were “communism”, “communalism”, and “colonialism” in the form of specters that threatened Singapore’s survival. In the elite’s social narrative, they have also become guardian-protectors in addition to being vanguards, who were now duty-bound to protect the new Singaporean society from the three specters as it moved forward in the capitalist world economy. Thus, Lee said during the 1968 elections that the PAP had been able to develop Singapore while “locked in combat against the three ‘C’s, first versus colonialism, then versus communism, then versus communalism” (quoted in Josey 1968, p. 40). In 1971, the PAP government purged three critical newspapers from the public sphere, for respectively encouraging communalism by advocating issues the Chinese-educated elite was concerned with, being financed by communists and being used by hostile foreign forces, i.e. “colonialism”, to destabilize the country. Lee said

Unless checked, they will tear Singapore society asunder. Any government of Singapore that does not keep these divisive and disruptive activities in check, is guilty of dereliction of duty. (Lee 1971, pp. 143-144; see Chan 1991, pp. 172-173; Turnbull 1989, pp. 308-309)

Authoritarian capitalism was in direct contradiction to “democratic socialism”.

Therefore, the “democracy” component of the hegemonic ideology was renegotiated while the “socialist” one was repressed. Firstly, democracy was placed under the sign of the collective

good, “progress” in its capitalist developmental form. In a 1968 human rights report, the last of its kind, the introduction concludes,

It is of course, inevitable that in the context of the human and political conflicts that affect developing countries like Singapore, nearly all provisions ensuring human rights are hedged about with limitations imposed in the interests of the security, stability and well-being of the whole community in accordance with current thought and practice, for example, the emergency powers ... to arrest and detain without trial, persons suspected of anti-national activities. ... the Government ... is fully aware that necessary concentration of power in the hands of the executive as a means of curbing selfish interests for the sake of the public good, must be limited and strictly defined ... (Singapore Council of Social Service 1968, pp. 12-13)

Secondly, democracy was reduced to bare electoral formalism. In a 1968 speech to the student Democratic Socialist Club, Lee said that the regime needed to devise institutional safeguards to prevent “communists” from using the freedoms of speech, assembly and protest to subvert the state, but despite this, the regime “must try to maintain and uphold the fundamentals, namely government by free choice of a people, by secret ballot, at periodic intervals” (Josey 1970, p. 12). Rapid capitalist modernization combining state participation and foreign capital brought about another contradiction – between “socialism” and the growing socioeconomic inequalities engendered by rapid economic growth. Turnbull (1989, p. 313) quotes Lee as having said in 1970, “We are developing painfully, unequally, often unjustly”. This led increasingly to the repression, under the rubric of communist subversion, of social justice discourse targeted at the growing socioeconomic inequalities. Therefore, when the Dutch and British Labor Parties moved to expel the PAP from the Socialist International in 1976, after the abovementioned

crackdowns on English-educated dissidents, the elite did not defend their socialist credentials. Instead, the PAP withdrew before the motion was decided and declared the “Euro-communists” to be the real opposition in addition to the Malayan Communist Party (Chan 1991, pp. 169, 175).

The Surrogate Bourgeoisie and Neo-Confucianism, 1980s

In 1978, an educational reform study team headed by Goh Keng Swee, a leading PAP intellectual-politician and putatively Singapore’s economic architect, recommended that moral education be put on the national agenda. As Kwok (1999) observes, Goh took Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis very seriously and believed in the ethical foundation of modern economic transformation. At the end of the 1970s, Goh had become concerned that a decadent individualism was taking root which would eat away the moral underpinnings of Singapore’s newfound economic success. This converged with Lee’s concern about increasing Westernization. In 1982, Goh announced the plan to introduce Religious Knowledge as a compulsory subject in secondary school. Secondary school students were made to choose one of the major world religions represented in multi-religious Singapore – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam – for a two-year study. At the behest of Lee, Confucian Ethics was included (Kwok 1999, p. 64). Eight scholars from the US and Taiwan were invited in 1982 to prepare the conceptual groundwork for the Confucian Ethics textbooks. In July 1983, the Institute of East Asian Philosophies was launched and headed by Goh himself. Its primary task involved the “constant re-examination of Confucian teachings to make them more relevant to Singapore’s needs” (The Straits Times, hereafter ST, 2/7/1983).

Confucian ethics in general received a great deal of attention and support from the elite. The mass media and various voluntary associations were mobilized to promote the ethics as a sanctioned weltanschauung. The political significance of the regime’s active support for

Confucianism has not been missed by social scientists. Three explanations have been put forward for the regime's neo-Confucianist turn. One, the turn was part of the regime's nation-building project. Kuo (1996) sees it as a "revitalization movement" motivated by a perceived moral and cultural crisis in a modernizing society. Hill and Lian (1995, p. 8) see it as "the search for a common symbolic core" of a nation. Two, Khong (1995) sees the turn as an attempt by the PAP elite to use ideology to strengthen its political legitimacy, in response to political pressure for democratization. Three, Chua (1995, pp. 147-168) sees the turn as a symptom of the regime's participation in a contemporary Orientalism that raised Confucianism as an explanation of successful East Asian development, in which the elite embraced the prescribed Orient "other" as a self-definition.

These explanations are however either problematic or inadequate. As a nation-building "revitalization movement" or search for the symbolic core of the nation, Confucianism is an illogical choice for the regime. Firstly, Confucianism never had deep roots in the majority Chinese population, except among a few highly-educated Westernized Straits Chinese in the colonial past (Turnbull 1989, pp. 102-103). Given the colonial origins of Singapore, a much greater amount of cultural engineering would have to be invested for Confucianism to become an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm 1983). Secondly, Singapore is an ethnically diverse country, with the composition standing at around 75 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malays, and 10 percent Indians and other ethnic groups. The PAP elite had from the beginning committed itself to a multi-racial platform, which therefore gives the anti-communalism in "democratic socialism". The advocacy of Confucianism as a nation-building discourse would undermine the hegemonic ideology. Thirdly, the regime had constantly played down the Chinese-ness of Singapore society

because of its geopolitical position of being next to predominantly-Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia and would not likely consciously jeopardize the carefully-maintained relationships.

Neither was the espousal of neo-Confucianism an attempt by the regime elite to use ideology to underpin its legitimacy, not yet at least. From 1968 to 1980, the PAP was returned to parliament winning all the seats with 84.4 percent (1968), 69.2 percent (1972), 72.4 percent (1976) and 75.5 percent (1980) of the votes in the four general elections. The espousal of neo-Confucianism can be traced back to the 1978 Goh Report. The process therefore started when the PAP's hegemony was gaining strength and before the regime suffered the electoral decline of 1981 and 1984. Besides, the espousal of neo-Confucianism took place within the Religious Knowledge program and was not a full-blown ideological campaign akin to the "democratic socialism" hegemonic consent-making. Chua's argument is the most plausible but it does not explain why the regime elite would want to embrace Orientalism as a self-defining discourse. Chua (1995, p. 147) attributes the "intrinsic conservative tendencies" of this "self-defining strategy" for "the perpetuation of politically authoritarian regimes" as the main motive, but this returns us to the historically inaccurate legitimation argument.

Arguments about motivation are conjectural, especially when sociologists attempt to get at the "real" motivation deeper than the specified aims. One strategy for improving the plausibility of our conjectures is to argue by way of historical conjuncture. Towards the end of the 1970s, the success of state-participative export-oriented industrialization became more apparent. Singapore's Gross Domestic Product increased three-fold from 9.5 billion dollars in 1968 to 28.8 billion in 1980, while the annual population growth rate from 1970 to 1978 averaged only 1.5 percent. State-ownership of local corporations fashioned a close network of state executives and "public entrepreneurs" in charge of these corporations, who took their cue

from the elite. The elite's hegemony and electoral supremacy were hardly challenged. They found themselves not only political masters, but also economic masters by virtue of the former status. Technocrats were increasingly inducted into the elite circle, while members of the old political vanguard who did not have technocratic skills were retired or moved into adjunct posts. Systemically and structurally, the elite became the surrogate bourgeoisie. My thesis is that the espousal of neo-Confucianism was the elite's social narrative constituting the surrogate bourgeoisie's coming into being-for-itself. Social narratives are collective stories told by individuals of a group to meaningfully and purposefully locate themselves in the history of a society, and are integral to the class-formation process (Steinmetz 1992). The Religious Knowledge program was an opportunity for the elite to present its social narrative to the general population, so as to constitute its identity in a public manner.

The articulation of neo-Confucianism as the elite social narrative was a "natural" choice because of three factors. First, the political struggle with the anti-Western Chinese-educated leftists sinicized the English-educated elite. The leftists had launched an "anti-yellow culture" campaign in 1956, which mobilized popular community support to replace "yellow" pornographic culture with healthy "red" culture. In 1959, the newly elected PAP government banned Western films and publications held to have corrupting influence or to belittle Asian culture (Turnbull 1989, p. 264). Lee recalled his dependence on a close Chinese-speaking associate to gain the trust of the majority Chinese population, relying on speeches written by the associate to "prove [he] was Chinese" (quoted in Sai and Huang 1999, p. 139). Lee eventually mastered the Chinese language during those years of struggle. Second, because of the history of its emergence and role in the bureaucratic antiquity of dynastic China, the discursive structure of Confucianism is logically tied to bureaucratic elitism. Third, there were a small number of

Chinese-educated vanguards among the English-educated elite, who influenced the direction of the elite's sinicization and articulated the theme of "East versus West" with Confucian emphases (Sai and Huang 1999). Confucianism eventually defined the identities of many individual members of the PAP elite, no less than Lee himself. Speaking of Dutch economist Albert Winsemius, who advised the regime on export-oriented industrialization, Lee said,

He once told me he could not explain why he felt a great affinity with Sui Sen [the former Minister of Finance] and me and could only conclude that there was a "congruence of the Calvinistic and Confucian philosophy of life." (Lee 2000, p. 61).

The Confucian Ethics textbooks provide us with the textual windows into the elite's social narrative. The personification of the elite is the Confucian gentleman. The first textbook focuses primarily on the topic of "self-cultivation", the cultivation of "right feeling, thinking, speech and behavior" so that the moral "inner selves" can be developed to "goodness and perfection", which is "the basis of regulating the family, governing the state and bringing peace to the world" (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1985, pp. 50, 52). The self-cultivated person is a junzi, the Chinese language equivalent of the "gentleman" with its meaning of cultured and ethical virtuosity. The plot structure traces the "gentleman-ruler" exercising his obvious responsibilities in the trajectory of national development. The textbook describes the benevolence of the gentleman-ruler in a legend about the Confucian philosopher Mencius advising a selfish king about the masses' discontent regarding his private hunting enclosure. The moral of the story is that benevolent gentleman-rulers "should fairly distribute the fruits of the land to all" (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1985, p. 126). But the text goes beyond the story and posits that after material needs have been fulfilled, the gentleman-rule must turn to post-materialist needs, a clear reference to the elite's present undertaking:

But we should not think that the ruler's role is only to ensure that all citizens have a fair stake in the material prosperity of the nation. In the incident related above, the hunting park is only a symbol of the search for the good things in life. ... Therefore, the benevolent ruler should go beyond looking after the people's material welfare... More importantly, he should look after the moral and spiritual development of his people, and ensure that conditions in the nation are such that the people's spiritual growth is encouraged".

(Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1987, p. 126)

The social narrative is also an incipient ideology in both the weltanschauung and ideological resolution sense. The second textbook focuses on how Confucianism applies to abstract topics and society, including those that relate to "democracy" and "social justice". It is first a weltanschauung that promises a moral vision for meaningful social action:

Economic prosperity and technological advancement have brought with it undesirable social traits and harmful lifestyles. Materialism, individualism, and the thirst for excitement and easy money are some examples. Though Confucian ethics may not be the answer to the moral problems of today, its stress on benevolence, social consciousness and the pursuit of the moral life can help us to find meaning in life. (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1986, p. 121)

It is also an ideology that has the propensity to naturalize and ideologically resolve the contradictions of authoritarian capitalism. For Paige (1997), social narrative is closely linked to the Marxian notion of ideology, in that elite narratives are important for the naturalization of privileged class positions and the concealment of social contradictions. The chapter on "Rights and Duties" reads, "Confucians recognize rights, but for them, duties come first. If everyone fulfils his duties in a responsible manner, than all can enjoy their rights" (Curriculum

Development Institute of Singapore 1986, p. 80). An illustration captioned with the chapter title shows a man casting his vote and another paying taxes. It goes on to say,

Fundamentally speaking, all human beings should have equal rights and duties. However, since society involves so much ... division of labour, in fact everyone has his own assigned duties relating to his position in society. ... Related to these roles are the corresponding rights which we can enjoy. We should not, therefore, insist on rights that we are not entitled to. (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1986, p. 82)

The weltanschauung therefore envisions a hierarchical order of society, in which the surrogate bourgeoisie and the other subordinate classes know their own place and fulfill their social functions without questioning capitalist development and the existing status quo:

In our drive towards greater productivity, two major factors must be considered: the management of human relationships and good work attitudes. ... The Confucians' deep respect for learning, personal development, discipline and diligence all work towards the fostering of good work attitudes. (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1986, p. 121)

In conclusion then, the identity-formation of the surrogate bourgeoisie was a historical process closely linked to the trajectory of Singapore's political economy. At the same time that the state embarked on its "second industrial revolution" in the 1980s, when the surrogate bourgeoisie class structure took shape, the PAP regime began recruiting a new generation of technocrats into its leadership ranks. As the regime gradually shed its old nationalist vanguards, the PAP changed from a political movement into a political vehicle of the surrogate bourgeoisie. Discernable discursive shifts took place at about the same time. The "democratic socialism" ideology carved in the decolonization struggles faded into "pragmatism" during rapid

industrialization, and then the elite articulated the neo-Confucian social narrative in the early 1980s. It is argued here that the structural becoming of elite as the surrogate bourgeoisie preceded their cultural becoming, that is, the identification of themselves as Confucian gentleman-rulers taking care of the material and spiritual welfare of the people would not have happened if the elite had not elected a developmental program that placed them in direct control of domestic capital. However, this does not imply that culture is necessarily superstructural or epiphenomenal. In fact, as we shall see in the next section, the cultural identity of the elite would become crucial for them to maintain their dominant structural position as the surrogate bourgeoisie.

THE "MARXIST CONSPIRACY" AND "ASIAN VALUES", 1987-92

The 1980s saw political turning points for many East Asian countries. In the Philippines, the 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino galvanized action against the Marcos regime, which culminated in the dramatic "people power" revolution in February 1986 that brought down the regime. In South Korea, violent suppression of the 1980 popular revolt against the military regime, known as the Kwangju Uprising, spurred more active opposition, which reached its climax in the street revolts of June 1987 that led to democratic reforms. In Taiwan, the early 1980s inaugurated several significant protest movements which led to the lifting of martial law in 1987. In Thailand, political liberalization beginning in the mid-1980s was hijacked by a military coup in 1991, which in turn was met by a bloody popular uprising in May 1992 that affirmed the direction of democratization. There were similar political stirrings in Singapore during the same period. From 1987 to 1989, during what came to be called the "Marxist conspiracy", the regime executed a series of crackdowns that brought it international attention and disapprobation. But because the outcome was not democratization, scholars

attribute little significance to the event, seeing it as just another occurrence of authoritarian politics. I argue here that the “Marxist conspiracy” event is significant as a turning point, in which the regime consolidated its ruling position in a new configuration that weaved together cultural, political and economic power, and that the elite’s newfound cultural identity played an important role in this process.

Through the 1970s, activist groups were piecing together a dissenting discourse. With secular ideologies of social justice purged along with Chinese-educated leftists and English-educated dissidents, Christians became the main advocates through their liberation theologies. Spurred by the socially progressive proclamations of the Second Vatican Council and South American liberation theology, Roman Catholics reflected and acted upon the inequalities occasioned by capitalist development. As early as 1970, critical essays could be found in the University of Singapore’s Catholic Students’ Society’s annual publication Aquinas. For example, the 1976 issue contains an article on “social sin”, which states unequivocally, “the complicity or silent acquiescence in social injustice is an instance of social sin”. The same issue includes a poem, “To My Asian Brother”, which spoke of an Asian man doomed to a life of hard labor amidst the abundance of a modern city. The 1979 issue contains a critical report on “Child Labour in Singapore” by the church’s Justice and Peace Commission. Essays critical of government policies on education, population and economic restructuring appeared in 1980. The Christian Conference of Asia, a regional Protestant organization linked to the World Council of Churches and constituted by member churches in Asia, operated from Singapore since 1974. One of the Conference’s key move was the articulation of an Asian Christian identity related to the historical experience of capitalist development the region was finding itself in. Lie (1998, pp. 134-143) notes the Conference’s role in the South Korean minjung movement. In 1984, the

Conference, together with the World Council of Churches, organized the Asia Forum on Justice and Development in Singapore (Christian Conference of Asia and World Council of Churches 1984). While the Conference did not direct its work at Singapore, preferring to look at less developed countries, the local influence is discernible. In February 1987, Methodist Bishop Emeritus Doraisamy cited the advocacy of social justice as a way to promote inter-faith harmony in the Parliament of Religions (Inter-Religious Organization 1987, p. 16).

Emergent political groups challenged the bare democracy of what was left of “democratic socialism”. Chief among these were the two rising opposition political parties, the left-of-center Workers’ Party and the liberal Singapore Democratic Party. The former, other than championing welfare provision benefiting the working class, called for greater democracy in Singapore. In 1981, J. B. Jeyaretnam, the secretary-general of the Workers’ Party and a former judge, broke the PAP’s total dominance of parliament by winning a by-election. In the 1984 elections, Jeyaretnam and Democratic Party leader Chiam See Tong were elected, and the PAP’s percentage of the total vote dropped 12.6 percent to 62.9 percent. Professional groups in civil society were increasingly emboldened. For example, the Law Society was vocal in their criticisms of the judiciary and alleged executive interference in the judiciary, and openly dissented against state curbs on the press and legal profession in the mid-1980s (see Seow 1994).

The social justice discourse appealed to the working class while the middle class was receptive to liberal democratic arguments, and the various groups articulating these discourses were beginning to form links among themselves. An emergent opposition movement could not have come at a worse time for the regime. After the drastic electoral decline in 1984, the economy went into a bad recession in 1985. Moreover, the elite had been gearing up with a crop of carefully-selected technocrats for a major leadership transition. The sense of political crisis

was exacerbated by President Devan Nair's resignation in 1985 for alleged alcohol dependence and the 1986 suicide of a senior cabinet minister accused of corruption. Furthermore, the regime came under pressure from the transnational press. In the early 1980s, the regime consolidated its grip on the local press by merging the Chinese and English press into one company. With the local press muffled, the critical voice of the transnational press became louder. The regime restricted the circulation of Time and the Asian Wall Street Journal in 1986. Because the elite's interests were to be found in their control of state organization assets, which gave them control of the means of production, democratization and the social justice discourse respectively challenged the elite's surrogate bourgeoisie class location. The elite blamed the opposition movement for their predicament. In August 1985, Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said that the election of opposition members of parliament had caused investors to "question the maturity of the electorate" or "conclude that the society contains an element of instability" (Goh 1985). In November 1986, Lee warned that "colonialism", "communism" and "communalism" threatened to reemerge in new forms, with the new danger coming from the English-educated "who took after the British leftists and the radicals in the United States" (ST 24/11/1986).

The Crackdowns and Hegemony Lost

In May 1987, the regime detained 22 persons under the colonial-era Internal Security Act. The regime declared that it "has uncovered a Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore through communist united front tactics to establish a communist state", and that the individuals were "new hybrid pro-communist types who draw their ideological inspiration not only from Maoism and Marxism-Leninism, but also from the ideas of contemporary militant leftists in the West" (ST 27/5/1987). It claimed that the "conspiracy" was based on a network of professionals, church and social workers, allegedly

centered on Vincent Cheng, the Executive Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission, and Tan Wah Piow, a student activist leader jailed in a previous crackdown now living in exile. The organizations allegedly “subverted” were nine Catholic, student, worker and drama groups, and the opposition Workers’ Party. The primary evidence were Cheng’s confession, obtained in the face of indefinite detention without trial, a heavily-edited “interview” of Cheng by four journalists aired on prime-time television, and a two-part television “documentary” entitled “Tracing the Conspiracy” showing “interviews” with the detainees.

Unlike previous crackdowns, this generated strong local antipathies and attracted intense foreign attention and international protests. Anyone who opposed the arrests was potentially branded a “communist”. Minister of Home Affairs Jayakumar said, “Every time the [Internal Security Act] is used, the communists always react and say, ‘Abolish the [Act], free the detainees or charge them in court’” (ST 8/7/1987). An atmosphere of fear became pervasive. Therefore, Lee Hsien Loong had to dismiss the suggestion that the “conspiracy” was a campaign of “white terror” (ST 20/7/1987) and a PAP parliamentarian told a forum audience to not be afraid while three other panelists expressed that the “conspiracy” had silenced criticisms (ST 15/12/1987). The fear implies widespread skepticism concerning the “Marxist conspiracy” theory. Despite so, local resistance was unexpectedly active. Dissent came from the Singapore Polytechnic Students Union, Law Society, the Church, opposition parties, and individuals including the exiled Tan, former President Nair and former Solicitor General Francis Seow. They were quickly suppressed by the regime, using detention, censorship and disbandment, or the threat thereof. In contrast to the Philippines, South Korea and South American countries, the Church in Singapore gave up its social activism and political agency after a brief facedown with the regime. After the arrests, the church held a packed special service (ST 28/5/1987; New Straits Times 29/5/1987),

and reiterated that it would “continue its mission of spreading its teachings on matters pertaining to justice as they apply to social, economic and political issues” (ST 29/5/1987). But the church soon conceded (ST 5/6, 6/6, 7/6/1987). An outburst at the press conference following the meeting between the two sides suggests that the regime had all the power, as reported:

The Archbishop said he had asked the Government to give proof that the nine detained church workers – apart from Vincent Cheng who made an admission – were involved in a clandestine communist network. Here, Mr Lee interrupted, to point out that he had never said he was going to prove anything in a court of law. “It is not a practice, nor will I allow subversives to get away by insisting that I got to prove everything against them in a court of law or evidence that will stand up to the strict rules of evidence of a court of law,” he said. (ST 3/6/1987)

The regime expelled the Christian Conference of Asia in December, accusing it for “using Singapore as a base to support ‘liberation movements’ in other Asian countries, helping to fund pro-communist movements...” (Singapore Government Press Release, hereafter SGPR, no.48/Dec/1987), a week after it co-organized “The Erosion of the Rule of Law in Asia” seminar with the International Commission of Jurists in Bangkok, where Seow gave a critical paper (International Commission of Jurists and Christian Conference of Asia 1987; see O’Grady 1990).

Two major regional weeklies, Far Eastern Economic Review and Asiaweek, reported intensely on the unfolding events. Their articles cast doubt on the veracity of the government’s allegations, testified to local disbelief and resistance and gave voice to dissenters ignored by the local press (Review 4/6, 11/6, 18/6, 2/7, 17/12/1987; Asiaweek 7/6, 14/6, 21/6, 5/7, 12/7, 2/8, 13/9/1987). The regime subsequently restricted their circulation (ST 8/10, 27/12/1987). Lee also sued the Review for libel (ST 28/12, 31/12/1987). About 200 human rights and other non-

governmental organizations in US, Europe, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Hong Kong responded vigorously to the arrests, criticizing the regime and calling for the detainees' release (ST 28/5, 31/5, 4/6, 7/6, 9/6, 11/6, 20/6/1987). Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, International Federation of Human Rights and Asian Human Rights Commission, and Asia Watch of Human Rights Watch made fact-finding trips (Asiaweek 12/7/1987; The Business Times 3/7/1987; New Straits Times 6/7, 8/7, 10/7/1987; ST 8/7/1987) and released highly critical reports (Asia Watch 1990; International Commission of Jurists et al. 1987). Pressure came from political elites of friendly industrialized countries, major sources of capital investments. Japanese legislators, the European parliament and the US Congress protested and called for the release of the detainees (ST 20/6, 7/8, 21/8/1987; Asiaweek 12/7/1987; ECHRMS 1989; US Congress 1988). US, Australia and Canada registered concern (ST 20/6/1987; Asiaweek 5/7/1987).

The "Marxist conspiracy" is a turning point because the regime's hegemonic ideology broke down in the face of domestic skepticism and international human rights pressure. The elite was put on the defensive. In its ideological work to legitimate the crackdown, the three 'C's retained from "democratic socialism" were used extensively. The "conspiracy" clearly evoked the communist menace. The old elites employed the trope forcefully, often linking it back to the authority of their experience (SGPR no.8/Jul/1987, no.26, no.43, no.46/Aug/1987, no.50/Dec/1987; ST 14/8, 15/8, 18/8, 20/8/1987, 15/8, 24/8/1988, 26/5/1992). But the "communist" trope was losing its value globally in the 1980s, with the liberalizing policies of Gorbachev's Soviet Union and Deng's China. In the late-1970s, Singapore established diplomatic and economic ties with China, with the billion-dollars bilateral trade tripling from 1979 to 1986 (SGPR no.44/May/1987). Even in South Korea, technically at war with the

communist North, anti-communist ideology had become stale (Lie 1998, p. 147). As the Cold War waned and the discursive binarism of “totalitarian communism” versus the “free world” broke down, the normative discourse of human rights championed by non-governmental organizations pressured authoritarian regimes worldwide and influenced the realpolitik considerations of Western countries. It was this discursive fluidity occasioned by the world-historical changes and its political import that the elite did not seem to comprehend fully, although they sensed that the emerging geopolitical problematic for them would be neo-liberal pressure for democratization. Thus, PAP ideologue Rajaratnam said in 1986 that “[s]uccessful democracies have a way of enfeebling the moral resoluteness of a people” (SGPR no.42/Dec/1986). The regime invoked national sovereignty as a variant of the “colonialism” thread (ST 4/7, 1/9/1987; SGPR no.23/Jan/1988), but the power of this claim was limited in the changing geopolitical circumstances and emergent international human rights regime. The “communalism” thread was powerful due to Singapore’s multi-religious character, that religion and politics should not mix because, as Lee puts it, “[o]nce one faith enters the political fray, others must follow” (paraphrased in Asiaweek 30/8/1987; also SGPR no.30, no.46/Jun/1987, no.44/Jul/1987, no.28, no.60, no.61/Aug/1987; ST 2/4/1988). But this was useless when the crackdown extended into the political arena.

In April 1988, as a result of the regime’s constant denigration in its ideological work, nine released detainees issued a joint statement denying involvement in a “Marxist conspiracy”, and asserting that they were ill-treated and that their televised “interviews” were made under coercion (Asia Watch 1990, pp. 69-71). The next day, the regime re-arrested them and their lawyer, who had kept human rights groups informed (Seow 1994, p. 90), evoking now an old communist specter by claiming that the “conspiracy” was a Malayan Communist Party

“operation to make inroads into English-educated groups using English-educated intellectuals” (SGPR no.35/Apr/1988). The regime later released more information on the communist links from further “revelations” of an ex-detainee and information “obtained” by the Malaysian regime from a student activist among the 119 detained in Mahathir’s imitative October 1987 crackdown (SGPR no.36/Apr/1988). On 28 April, the government released sworn statements signed by the detainees verifying their previous “confessions”. This time, the “colonialism” thread became apparent, showing the regime’s anxious hand, which had earlier signaled impending elections:

As the general elections approach, the government expects foreign groups to make more attempts to use Singaporeans as proxies to influence the domestic politics of Singapore. It would not be for the first time in Singapore’s history. In 1957 and 1958, the CIA funneled S\$700,000 to ... the Lim Yew Hock government, through Taiwan. ... that subversion means acting for foreign powers, whether Communist or Western. (SGPR no.50/Apr/1988)

In May 1988, Seow, who had become a vocal critic and the lawyer for two detainees, was arrested for “investigation into foreign interference in Singapore’s internal affairs” (SGPR no.9/May/1988). Seow “revealed” details of US interference (ST 21/5/1988) and that Amnesty International and Asia Watch accused the government of torturing the detainees while knowing it to be untrue (ST 21/5, 22/5, 23/5/1988). The government expelled the First Secretary of the US Embassy for “cultivating” Seow and other lawyers (SGPR no.14/May/1988), which the US responded to with a comparable expulsion. A strongly-worded US statement warned that “constant repetition of the baseless charges” could only damage the two countries’ traditionally close relations (ST 27/5/1988), apparently directed against the barrage of nationalistic jingoism churned out by PAP leaders during public engagements and duly reported on by the press (SGPR

no.19, no.23, no.24, no.42/May/1988; ST 12/5, 15/5, 16/5, 17/5, 20/5, 21/5, 25/5, 26/5, 27/5, 30/5, 1/6, 2/6/1988).

From “Colonialism” to “Asian” Difference and Distinction

The diplomatic spat served to galvanize the population in a burst of nationalistic outpouring encouraged by the regime, but the outpouring was kept on a leash. While the elite needed a new hegemonic ideology, the anti-Western sentiments were detrimental to their position as the surrogate bourgeoisie given the elite’s reliance on foreign investors. As early as 11 May, when the regime responded to the retaliatory expulsion, it already sounded conciliatory, and after Lee reminded PAP leaders in June that the Americans were friends, the rhetoric petered out (SGPR no.20/May/1988; ST 12/5, 24/5, 27/5, 2/6/1988). In this context, the elite’s neo-Confucian social narrative intersected with their need for a new hegemonic ideology and for a counterfoil against human rights and neo-liberal democratic discourse. The “colonialism” thread changed to an articulation of “Asian” difference and distinction from Western political thought, which was already found in the neo-Confucian narrative.

Before the “Conspiracy”, the younger PAP leaders publicly espoused a modestly articulated view of Confucianism translated into general “Asian values” (e.g speeches by Lee Hsien Loong, SGPR no.25/Oct/1986, and Wong Kan Seng, SGPR no.30/Mar/1987). After the diplomatic spat with the US, the articulation of cultural difference and distinction through the Confucian tropes became more important, and the central theme became “we must not lose our cultural heritage, and become a pseudo-Western society” (SGPR no.11/Oct/1988). Thus, Lee Hsien Loong said,

We cannot teach children traditional values by making them memorise passages from the classics, as children used to do when I was in school. We have to translate the stories not

only into modern Chinese, but even into English, preserving the core truths but presenting them more simply and vividly in order to reach as wide a population as possible. ... the phrase “cultivate your person, regulate your family, govern your state rightly, and make the whole kingdom tranquil and happy” expresses a whole philosophy of social order and government. ... If not, we may become decultured, lose our internal cohesion, and no longer be able to work together for the common good. (SGPR no.7/Jun/1988)

In these, they repeated the older Lee’s concerns (ST 23/5, 3/7, 15/8/1988). But the younger leaders, because they would be the new generation of surrogate bourgeoisie, were the ones who had the task of building a new hegemonic consensus. The PAP managed to stall the electoral decline in the September 1988 snap elections and garnered 61.8 percent of the votes. Journalists from critical regional weeklies were expelled and denied entry, preventing on-site coverage (Asia Watch 1988). Seow was released so that he could contest the elections, and despite the “foreign collusion” stigma and new allegations made on election eve that he was financially untrustworthy and had criminal acquaintances, his WP team nearly won with 49.1 percent of the votes in the contested constituency. The stall gave the regime breathing space to work on hegemonic consent-making. In October, Goh Chok Tong announced that the search was on for a national ideology (SGPR no.52/Oct/1988).

On 30 April 1989, Lee Hsien Loong announced that the regime might introduce a “religious harmony” law to maintain peace (ST 1/5/1989). The regime was apparently acting on a series of six reports by social scientists on religious trends it had commissioned in August 1987 in the wake of the “conspiracy”. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill was tabled in December 1989. The three main concerns listed were “aggressive and insensitive proselytization”, “mixing religion & politics” and “religion and subversion”, with “Catholic

priests” and the “Marxist conspiracy” featuring as key concerns in the latter two (“Annex”, in Singapore Parliament 1989). The Bill gave the government powers to silence religious leaders it deemed to be overly-political, with the penalty of fine or jail if the order is contravened. Major reservations were expressed by community leaders over giving the state such overwhelming powers and the ostensibly clear divide between the secular and the spiritual (ST 18/5/1989, 18/1, 23/1, 8/2, 23/2, 24/2, 25/2, 21/9, 22/9, 1/11/1990; The Catholic News 4/2/1990; Singapore Parliament 1990), but the bill was passed into law in November 1990 with minor alterations (ST 10/11/1990). Through this legislation, the PAP regime institutionalized its narrativized role as the guardian-protector against “communalism” and religion was effectively consigned to the spiritual realm with no prerogatives in secular matters.

As discussed, the discursive specters of “communism” and “colonialism” were no longer tenable. Furthermore, the Religious Knowledge program was scrapped following the social scientists’ recommendations. The major channel exposing Singaporeans to the elite’s neo-Confucian social narrative was lost. Instead, the narrative was stripped of its parochial reference to Chinese heritage and elevated to the level of national public discourse to provide an ethical framework for a communitarian movement that has the elite as the moral vanguard. This movement was launched and led wholly by the younger PAP elite, who must prove their intellectual and moral leadership to create a new hegemony. The “national ideology” project announced in October 1988 was preceded by Goh’s assurance in July that the regime wanted to introduce “a more participatory style of government”, thus achieving a more “participative democracy” (ST 30/7, 31/7/1987). The elites hung on to the formal definition of democracy but attempted to build around it a hierarchical model of sanctioned participation within government-

provided channels of consent-making communication. The younger Lee, who headed the preliminary committee to look into the “national ideology” project, said in January 1989,

With a common understanding of what we as Singaporeans believe in, we can absorb what we want from the practices of other countries, without blindly following irrelevant American or European standards. This is all we mean by a national ideology. It is the characteristic ethos and spirit of a people. It is the core values which the community shares, and which distinguishes them from other peoples and countries. It is the beliefs which underpin their social and political institutions. ... It must complement, not replace, our system of democracy. ... However, democracy is not an automatic formula for political success. To make it work, the people need to have the right values, understanding and sense of responsibility. Our core values should contribute to this. (ST 12/1/1989)

Lee proposed four values: “community over self”, “upholding the family as the basic building block of society”, “resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention”, and “stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony”. For the next two years, the elite solicited different sectors of society and mobilized the population to participate in the formulation of the national ideology (ST 13/1, 16-21/1, 24/1, 6/3, 10/3, 24/3, 1/6, 20/6, 24/6, 26/7/1989, 8/7, 3/9, 20/12/1990; Ministry of Education 1989). Social scientists were commissioned to “identify those national values which can counteract the adverse effect of excessive individualism as well as unify both the government and citizens of Singapore” (Quah 1990, p. 2). With the same terms of reference, they echoed the regime. In January 1991, the regime proposed the same four values, plus a compromise to public fear concerning state power: “regard and community support for the individual”, in the Shared Values White Paper. In it, we see the neo-Confucian narrative blended with the formal definition of democracy:

Many Confucian ideals are relevant to Singapore. For example, the importance of human relationships and of placing society above self are key ideas in the Shared Values. The concept of government by honourable men (junzi), who have a duty to do right for the people, and who have the trust and respect of the population, fits us better than the Western idea that a government should be given as limited powers as possible, and should always be treated with suspicion unless proven otherwise. ... The electorate must uphold the democratic process. They must oppose venal groups who seek power for their own ends, and back honest governments which govern in the overall interests of the nation, not of any particular group. (Singapore Parliament 1991)

The PAP-controlled parliament endorsed “shared values” with minor amendments (ST 16/1/1991). The neo-Confucian social narrative of the elite, detached from its ethnic roots, was transformed into the “Asian values” ideology.

Regime Consolidation

In the 1991 elections, the percentage of votes received by the PAP declined again to 59.3 percent. However, the continued exposition of “Asian values” in the subsequent years seemed to have built up a new hegemonic consensus; in 1997, the percentage of votes increased to 63.5 percent, the best result since 1980. As I have argued, the political dissatisfaction among the middle class revolved around the issue of democratization and among the working class, the issue was economic disparity. The domestic success of “Asian values” is predicated on its ideological value in resolving the dissatisfaction of the middle and working classes. “Asian values” is a two-step ideological resolution. The first is where the inequalities and unfreedom of the capitalist economy is resolved in the “free” and “equal opportunity” market and state meritocracy. The problem comes with the PAP’s authoritarian rule, which the elite claimed is

necessary for political stability, on which, it is also claimed, economic prosperity still depends. The unwillingness of the elite to relinquish authoritarian control creates another contradiction, that the market and state meritocracy atomize community into individuals for the unfree and unequal circulation of labor value and yet the individual citizen thus created meets an unfree authoritarian regime, in which he or she does not stand as an equal to the elite. The second resolves this contradiction in the fantastic realization of individual worth as a member of a “free” community “equal” to the world-hegemonic West, a move that involves taking the nation as part of an imagined civilization.

The “Marxist conspiracy” event had led to regime consolidation. The PAP regime now possessed a hegemonic ideology, a coherent weltanschauung that ideologically resolves social contradictions. The regime also consolidated its “structural” position. The state embarked on the globalization of its capital in the 1990s, and was investing heavily in the region. Many investment projects involved the construction of “mini-Singapore” industrial enclaves in Indonesia, India, China, Burma and Vietnam (Rodan 1997, p. 162). In 1991, the regime released its Strategic Economic Plan, which laid out its strategy for globalization. The small domestic bourgeoisie was again a central concern. The plan called for state assistance in nurturing local enterprises into MNCs and developing their international competitiveness. This and the aforementioned limited liberalization of state-participation in the economy were constituent processes in the elite’s regime consolidation, for the weaving of a paternal relationship with the thus-dependent domestic bourgeoisie on the basis of shared capitalist interests ensures that the class distinction between the two is blurred. The consolidation was thus political, economic and cultural. This is best described by the Plan when it offered two scenarios for Asia, the

“constructive and peaceful” “Adaptive Change” and the “destructive and violent” “Social Revolution”, with the former being the regime’s interpretation of its experience:

The political leaders accede to demands for greater participation in leadership. There is a willingness to make substantial changes in the old order. Prudent economic management and liberalisation lead to strong sustained economic growth. The masses perceive their lot to have improved substantially over the years. With strong cultural traditions the average person takes pride in his own values and rejects the more radical western norms. Social consciousness and responsibility are high. (Ministry of Trade and Industry 1991, p.33)

CONCLUSION: NEO-AUTHORITARIANISM

Much has been written on the international entanglements of “Asian values” with human rights discourse or international realpolitik (Rodan 1996c; Wee 1996; Freeman 1996, 1998; Bauer and Bell 1999; Van Ness 1999; Jacobsen and Bruun 2000). In 1992, there were earnest domestic discussions of “Asian values” versus liberal democracy, reinforcing the Orientalist binary of “East” and “West” (ST 23/5, 30/7, 6/9/1992). The regime was increasingly sensitized by geopolitical shifts occasioned by China’s economic rise and the strain between China and the West after the 1989 Tiananmen event. The alignment with China on human rights came right after the elite’s experience of human rights pressure during the “conspiracy”. The 1993 regional preparations in Bangkok for the World Conference on Human Rights gave the regime a perfect opportunity to transpose a mainly defensive domestic discourse into a statement of principled civilizational difference. At the end of the preparations, the Asian states adopted the “Bangkok Declaration”, which emphasized national sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and cultural relativism (see Asian Cultural Forum on Development 1993). On the international level, “Asian values” function as a focal discourse articulating difference and distinction from the

democratic West and the concentration of international human rights groups in Western countries. In 1994, a major debate across the Pacific was sparked when the regime jailed and caned an American teenager for vandalism. In August, Prime Minister Goh used the teenager as an example of Western “moral decadence” in his National Day rally speech exalting “Asian values” (see Goh 1994). The international debate interacts with domestic articulations to render Singapore’s imagined civilizational membership in a grand old Asia real.

When the 1997 “Asian crisis” hit, some commentators saw the end of the “Asian values” (The Economist 25/7/1998; Fukuyama 1998). But Singapore’s economy has weathered the crisis relatively well, and with China’s continued growth, the political-economic substrate remains for the survival of “Asian values” not just as a zivilisationskritik discourse (Thompson 2000) but as the political and ideological neo-authoritarian “other” of neo-liberalism in the late-capitalist world-system. The term “neo-authoritarianism” was first used by Petracca and Mong (1990; see Rosen and Zou 1991) to denote the political thought that arose in the uncertainty and hopefulness of Deng’s modernizing China in the 1980s. It was the professed ideology of a reformist school that observed the correlation of authoritarianism and rapid economic development in Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, and sought for eventual democratization as an outcome of successful authoritarian capitalist modernization. It captured the moderates of the communist leadership, but was repressed as the moderates were purged along with democracy advocates in the Tiananmen debacle. Ironically, the conservative leadership appropriated neo-authoritarianism after Tiananmen. Woo-Cumings (1994) uses the term “new authoritarianism” to describe the ideal-type of “a statist utopia” that is being employed by post-Mao China, as the Communist Party elite sought to model their state-led developmentalism on the experiences of South Korea, Taiwan and explicitly, Singapore. She contrasts new authoritarianism with the

“old” bureaucratic authoritarianism that dependency theorists have studied in the world-system semi-peripheries of Latin America. Through state intervention in the polity and market, new authoritarianism provided political and financial stability for the export-oriented industrialization developmental program. Woo-Cumings also alludes to the cultural constructiveness of new authoritarianism, helped by Western academics who revived (from Weber’s usage) the category of Confucianist culture as a positive independent variable.

I call the post-“conspiracy” PAP regime “neo-authoritarian” not only to distinguish it from the authoritarianism of the 1965-1987 period, but also because the regime has become an explicit and conscious role-model for many developing countries, especially in East Asia, the most important of which is China. The Singapore case provides evidence for Petracca and Mong’s argument that even if the Chinese neo-authoritarians had emerged as hegemonic, there would not be any guarantee of eventual democratization since the neo-authoritarian’s vested economic interest would “militate against surrendering their power for the sake of democratization” (1990, p. 1116). This is a major point Woo-Cumings misses, because the “new authoritarianism” that lasted, i.e. Singapore, represents the crucial difference between “new” and “old” when it comes to political outcome. The configuration of a capitalist economy in which there is extensive state-ownership of the means of production transforms the ruling elite into the surrogate bourgeoisie, who, because of the political logic of inclusion into the international field of discourse that comes with economic integration, must then narrativize its group ideology and identity in the larger capitalist world-system that is dominated by the West. Neo-authoritarianism is a case of “making capitalism without capitalists” that is particularly relevant to post-communist societies (Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley 1998). The neo-authoritarian configuration is emerging in China. Johnson (1993, pp. 100-101) notes that China is a “reformed

command economy”, in which the state retains ownership but decentralizes control to corporations. Chan (1996, pp. 171-175) observes that the Communist Party elite is actively incorporating the emerging capitalist class into its fold. Liu (1997, p. 106) concludes her discussion of the relationship between the discourse of individualism and China’s nation-building since its violent induction into modernity with the observation that the post-Tiananmen elite had successfully transformed the inherited leftist criticism of bourgeois ideology into individualism as a synecdoche for a negative West.

In summary, neo-authoritarianism describes a system that has these characteristics: (i) the economy is a liberalized or liberalizing capitalist one; (ii) the state has extensive ownership of the means of production and continues to participate in the capitalist economy through decentralized profit-oriented firms; (iii) the institutions of civil society and the public sphere are tightly regulated or controlled by the state, i.e. authoritarianism; (iv) the ruling elite maintains a network of technocratic experts, public entrepreneurs and local capitalists; and (v) the ruling elite sustains its hegemony by mobilizing consent for its ideology of civilizational difference and distinction rooted in its group identity. As I have argued, the ruling elite in such a system is the surrogate bourgeoisie by virtue of their control of state organizational assets. This class location of the Singaporean ruling elite came about historically through the global timing of export-oriented industrialization in Singapore, which saw direct state participation in the economy replacing local capital in the “triple alliance”. It follows that it would be in the elite’s interests to retain control of the means of production by retaining their control of state organizational assets and that the attendant elite identity-formation engenders a social narrative which makes cultural sense of their class location and ideologically resolves growing contradictions. I have argued that the Singaporean elite’s social narrative of choice was neo-Confucianism, that this was

mainly historically conditioned by the sinicization experience of their political struggle with the Chinese-educated left during decolonization, and that the narrativizing took place as the old hegemonic discourse of “democratic socialism” fell apart. The elite’s ruling position was challenged in the political and economic crises of the 1980s by an emergent democratization movement. When the remnants of the old discourse failed in the subsequent “Marxist conspiracy” crackdowns, because of domestic skepticism and active disapprobation from international human rights organizations and Western liberal groups, neo-Confucianism was transformed into the “Asian values” ideology. Contrary to the claims of the discourse itself, “Asian values” did not emerge from a putative “Asian” culture that was inherently conservative, but during the “conspiracy” event as the Singaporean ruling elite’s articulation to consolidate their ruling position and authoritarian prerogatives against the expanding “global” neo-liberal consensus. The “Asian values” of East Asian neo-authoritarianism resonates in the post-Cold War era of late-capitalist globalization as the “other” of “Western” neo-liberal democracy.

But every naming, even when it is conducted from a theoretical position, involves political stakes. Both Hill and Lian (1995) and Chua (1995) deviate from the common academic description of the Singaporean regime as some form of “authoritarianism”. From the theoretical perspective of nation-building, Hill and Lian calls the regime a Civic Republican one because the PAP elite have consciously promoted collective values rather than individualistic ones to define the citizen. Chua calls the regime a Communitarian Democracy because the elite’s communitarian discourse accommodated growing middle-class pressure for political participation. Both accept the elite’s discourse on face-value, with the former situating it in the conservative tradition of Western political philosophy and the latter accepting the elite’s blending of Confucian communitarianism and its formal definition of democracy. The politics

are clear for both, with the former articulating the Singaporean case as a critique of Western liberal-individualism and the latter believing that acquiescence in the elite's hegemony offers democratizing opportunities. Both over-specify the elite's agency, seeing the elite as still autonomous from the class structure despite decades of development and ignoring the class and discursive struggles in their global and local dimensions that underlie politics in Singapore. Both therefore miss out on the "Marxist conspiracy" as the turning-point conjuncture of structural and cultural contradictions. "Neo-authoritarianism" does not only capture the historical continuities and discontinuities of the Singaporean regime, it also locates the regime in the discursive terrain of late-capitalism. Wedged between the neo-liberal "end of history" and the neo-authoritarian "clash of civilizations" may be the historical opportunity for us to transcend the material and epistemological inhumanities we have inflicted upon ourselves.

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