

Introduction: The “Singapore model” and China’s Neo-Authoritarian Dream

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Abstract

This special section deals with China’s longstanding fascination with Singapore’s development experience that has preoccupied post-Maoist leaders from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping despite the obvious differences between the tiny Southeast Asian city-state and the most populous country on earth. In particular, there is great Chinese interest in Singapore’s success in combining effective governance and efficient state capitalism with stable one-party dominant rule. As a consequence, Chinese observers paid much less attention to electoral democracies that were well-governed states with mature economies.

Keywords: China; Singapore model; political learning; governance; state capitalism; one-party rule

As the articles in this special section show, scholars and policymakers from China have flocked to the city-state to study practical governance lessons and to learn more about an exemplary form of state capitalism. Furthermore, interest in the “Singapore model” (*Xinjiapo moshi* 新加坡模式) has also involved pragmatic cooperation between Singaporean and Chinese officials. But other authors in this special section argue that the study of Singapore has also been motivated by the search for ideological confirmation that successful economic modernization can be conjoined with one-party rule without the need to make politics more democratic. The notion of authoritarian modernism has replaced the old Communist utopia of the egalitarian society to become the new model of the good society for which Chinese leaders strive.

Chinese observers’ fascination with Singapore as a model of authoritarian modernity runs counter to the views of many Western analysts who have argued that economic modernization will inevitably lead to political change and democracy in China.¹ Henry Rowen even predicted exactly when it will occur – in 2015 (which he later postponed to 2025).² Attacked on the basis of weak statistical

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1 Rowen 1996 and 2007; Pei 2007; Liu and Chen 2012; Pei 2016.

2 Rowen 1996 and 2007.

evidence, modernization theories have often turned to East Asia as the theory's "last redoubt," because the democratization of South Korea and Taiwan after substantial economic growth provided two seemingly persuasive examples of this phenomenon.³ The case of Singapore, by contrast, appears to challenge the "endogenous modernization" theory that democracy emerges after development,⁴ providing good news for Asian authoritarian rulers who fear that continued growth could lead to increasing pressures for democratization, a kind of "modernization trap." As Cherian George points out, the city-state has "attracted the attention of officials from China and other states" who, unwilling to believe that liberal markets and political competition go together, "find in Singapore a model for having one's cake and eating it too."⁵ China's growing interest in the "Singapore model" thus suggests a very different story than the standard modernization tale: that there is an alternative authoritarian "route to the modern world."⁶ Analysing the character, transmission and influence of the authoritarian model from this Southeast Asian city-state provides important insights into the official plans for the political future of China.

Singapore represents but the latest wave of "modelling," with earlier Chinese modernizers having looked to the West, beginning in the mid-19th century, and to Japan, starting in the late 19th century, but then turning to the Soviet Union in the early 20th century until Mao's break with the post-Stalin Soviet leadership.⁷ By analysing how Chinese scholars and officials in the post-Mao era have learned from the "Singapore model," we can get a better understanding of what constitutes the latest version of the "Chinese dream" in terms of social and political development.

Following Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 lead, tens of thousands of Chinese academics and administrators have visited the Southeast Asian city-state on study missions since diplomatic relations were re-established in 1990.⁸ The frequent visits have been accompanied by a lively academic debate in China about the merits of the Singapore model and how its lessons may be relevant for Chinese reforms. A search of the China Academic Journals Full-text Database finds only 230 articles with the term *Xinjiapo* 新加坡 (Singapore) published before 1992. Since 2006, more than 1,800 articles have been published each year. Prominent scholars in Singapore and China have discussed the relevance of the "Singapore model." For instance, Zheng Yongnian, the director of the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore, has argued that Singapore offers valuable lessons for reforming the Communist Party in terms of attracting talent and better

3 Thompson 2010.

4 Przeworski and Limongi 1997.

5 George 2007, 128.

6 Moore 1966.

7 Cao 2016. Singapore had also looked to Japan as a model: Ramcharan 2001.

8 Fan 2014 claims there had been over 50,000 official Chinese visitors while three years earlier Khoo 2011 cited a lower figure of 22,000.

serving the people.⁹ Similarly, Daniel A. Bell, a critic of liberal democracy and chair professor of philosophy at Tsinghua University, has argued that if China follows Singapore's example of the meritocratic selection of political leaders it will help Chinese officials avoid policymaking mistakes in countries such as the US.¹⁰ The extent of Chinese infatuation with Singapore was evident during the transfer of power within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, in which references to the city-state played an unusually prominent role. It was reported that Xi Jinping 习近平, the new top leader, wanted to implement reforms modelled on Singapore.¹¹ Since then, however, there have been fewer Chinese students sponsored by the government to take part in courses in Singapore as a consequence of policies that restrict access to public money for overseas study. Moreover, recent conflicts between China and Singapore, as well as the Lee family saga, may have dampened Chinese interest somewhat, but the underlying rationale for learning from Singapore remains unchanged.¹²

China's Ideological Lessons from Singapore

Following the turmoil and destruction of the Maoist years, Chinese reformers desperately sought new directions for reform. At first, political liberals in China looked admiringly to the US, while left-leaning scholars showed greater interest in social democratic states such as Sweden.¹³ However, this changed in the aftermath of the crackdown on the democracy movement in 1989, when politically conservative intellectuals turned to Singapore to fill the ideological void that had emerged due to the dangers of political liberalization and the declining significance of Communist ideology. The "Singapore model" has become a useful reference point for conservative reformers in their efforts to bolster the CCP's ideological legitimacy and strengthen the governance capacity of one-party rule, thereby reducing pressures for democratization. China's disproportionate interest in Singapore is driven by the strength of its desire to learn "big lessons" from this tiny city-state.¹⁴ In the process of ideological formation, the Chinese leadership seeks to revitalize a regime-supportive interpretation of "Confucianism."¹⁵ A similar process had occurred earlier in Singapore when, with Lee Kuan Yew 李光耀, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) appropriated Confucian tenets underlying the "Asian values" discourse in an attempt to strengthen its rule.¹⁶

9 Zheng 2010.

10 Bell 2015.

11 Wong and Ansfield 2012.

12 The Chinese state-owned *Global Times* has suggested that the family feud "might challenge the stability of the country and bring pressure for political reform" (Yang 2017).

13 Huo 1988. Also see the article by Ortmann and Yang in this special section of *The China Quarterly*.

14 Root 1996.

15 Chen 1995, Bell 2010, Wu 2014.

16 Khua 1990, Chua 1995, Thompson 2015.

Singapore became a crucial example for China's post-socialist, "market Leninist"¹⁷ reformers because its model of Asian authoritarianism appears to demonstrate the compatibility of sound economic management with one-party rule. In this regime form, "market economic institutions and market-based strategies of economic accumulation exist and develop in subordination to Leninist political institutions and ideology. This specific combination of institutional attributes and its attendant effects on welfare, stratification, and political consciousness is what distinguishes market-Leninist regimes from other forms of political economy."¹⁸ Among defenders of this kind of political system, Singapore is regarded as a model of authoritarian success. It is widely understood that Chinese communist leaders seek to emulate Singapore because it appears to prove effective, and corruption-free governance is not tied to liberal democracy but can be achieved through pragmatic decision making by a determined ruling elite under one-party rule.

Singapore's main ideological lesson for Chinese officials and scholars sympathetic to the Singapore model has been the perceived confirmation of the claim that Asian cultures are fundamentally incompatible with liberal democracy, which in the 1990s was officially promoted by the "Singapore school" led by its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew. They launched a controversial international debate about "Asian values" in the early to mid-1990s that rejected "Western democracy" as culturally inappropriate to Asia and which critics claimed was little more than an "ideological refuge for authoritarian rule."¹⁹ The "Asian values" debate made a brief appearance on the international stage in this period because the assertion that Asian cultural particularity justified the rejection of liberal democracy was matched by impressive economic results.²⁰ This discourse was widely discredited in the West in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which was seen to be the result of a "culture of cronyism," the seeming dark side of the "Asian values" thesis.²¹ Yet in China, observers continued to believe in the value of culturalist justifications of authoritarian rule, with the semi-official revival of Confucianism being the clearest indication of this trend.²²

The reflections about the "Singapore model" by its Chinese students provide lessons in how ideology and governance strengthen one-party rule, and are part of an ongoing process of illiberal adaptation in China. The New Confucianism that Chinese reformers claim underpins the city-state's success proves to these sympathetic mainland observers that authoritarianism does not necessarily result in corruption, and can even be a significant advantage to a developing country. As such, Singapore constitutes an Asian example of

17 Kristof 1993.

18 London 2011, 2.

19 Rahim 1998, 56, also Robison 1996.

20 Lee 2000; Barr 2000; Thompson 2001.

21 Thompson 2015.

22 Tu 2000; Bell 2010.

development in which “change is not directionless but ‘modelled’ on global best practices.”²³ David Shambaugh’s study of the learning capacity of the CCP demonstrated the Chinese leadership’s determination to avoid mistakes made in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and other areas.²⁴ Shambaugh only briefly discusses China’s interest in successful models elsewhere. However, China has not only studied what it must avoid, but has also looked for guidance about what it *should* do. This is especially true for Xi Jinping’s leadership, which has pushed for major reforms to increase economic and administrative efficiency and launched a major anti-corruption drive. A secret CCP internal document leaked to the international press in 2013 argued strongly against Western notions such as “the separation of three powers, a multiparty system, a system of universal suffrage, independent judiciary, a military belonging to the nation, etc.”²⁵ This was officially reiterated by Chief Justice Zhou Qiang 周強 in a speech to legal officials in January 2017 when he asserted: “We should resolutely resist erroneous influence from the West: ‘constitutional democracy,’ ‘separation of powers’ and ‘independence of the judiciary.’”²⁶

In Singapore, the CCP has found a model of successful one-party dominant rule, which it considers suitable for adaptation to a “unique Chinese approach” intended to maintain legitimation for its rule²⁷ and to guide China towards its newly proclaimed “China dream.” The latter has become a prominent ideological slogan under President Xi Jinping, who has asserted the need for the country to return to national greatness. It comes amid a slowing economy, when the ruling Communist Party has sought new forms of legitimacy. The Chinese people are being asked to sacrifice individual demands to the greater good, an idea which has long been espoused by the PAP leadership in Singapore. This notion was reiterated in an article by Sam Tan, a PAP minister, urging “fellow Singaporeans continue to exemplify the grit and resilience of our forefathers, temper their discontentment with domestic issues, and re-think our position with an international perspective. This is essential for our continual survival and prosperity in the global arena.”²⁸

China’s Practical Lessons from Singapore

Although ideological concerns underlie Chinese interest in Singapore, Liu and Wang in this special issue point out that the most Chinese observers’ ostensible interest in Singapore is driven primarily by practical concerns. There are basically two different sets of these kinds of lessons that Chinese observers believe can be learned from Singapore: an efficient state-managed economy and good

23 Lim and Horesh 2016, 1013.

24 Shambaugh 2008.

25 Quoted in Lubman 2013.

26 Cited in Forsythe 2017.

27 He 2011.

28 Tan 2014.

governance. Singapore is seen as one of the great success stories of economic development in Asia, which has become a new basis for regional identity²⁹ and forms the basis of the Singapore brand.³⁰ The city-state is characterized by Chinese observers as a capitalist economy with a dominant state role while at the same time being open to foreign direct investment.³¹ The Singaporean government directly or indirectly controls the economy through government-linked corporations, which are owned by the government's investment corporation Temasek, or companies in which the government is an important shareholder.³² This combination has sometimes been referred to as "Singapore Inc." It is particularly relevant at the moment as the Chinese have set a goal of making state-owned enterprises more competitive on the domestic and global market without fully privatizing them.³³ Moreover, Singapore is praised for its ability to attract large foreign direct investments, something in which China has also proved to be very successful.³⁴ It is thus perhaps not surprising that Chinese leaders such as Xi Jinping have publicly praised economic globalization, although within neo-mercantilist limits. For instance, at the Davos Forum in January 2017, Xi asserted: "some people blame globalization for chaos of our world, but our problems are not caused by globalization. They are caused by war and conflict."³⁵ Singapore is also admired for its high ranking in Heritage's Index of Economic Freedom (it ranked second in 2016) as well as in the World Bank's index of the ease of opening and running a small- or medium-sized business (it ranked second in that 2017 index also) despite the important role the state plays in the economy.³⁶ The economic interrelationship between China and Singapore has also intensified as the two countries have become important trading partners. Since 1997, the majority of Singapore's foreign investments have flowed to China.³⁷ Moreover, in October 2011 the China–Singapore Free Trade Agreement came into effect, which eliminated tariffs on 95 per cent of the country's exports to China.³⁸

In addition to the economy, there is also an attempt to transfer knowledge about how to improve governance in a one-party state, thus avoiding the need for greater political transparency. The emphasis here is on concrete lessons that strengthen the leadership of the regime and improve the effectiveness of

29 Chua 2011; Thompson 2004.

30 Koh 2011; Huang and Zhao 1988.

31 Rodan 1989.

32 "China's love of Lee's 'Singapore model' ran deep for decades," *Bloomberg News*, 23 March 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-03-23/china-s-love-of-lee-s-singapore-model-ran-deep-for-decades>. Accessed 7 November 2016.

33 "From SOE to GLC," *The Economist*, 23 November 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21590562-chinas-rulers-look-singapore-tips-portfolio-management-soe-glc>. Accessed 7 November 2016.

34 Rodan 1989; Huang 2003.

35 Cited in Evans-Pritchard 2017.

36 World Bank 2016.

37 Zheng and Lye 2016.

38 <http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/Trade-From-Singapore/International-Agreements/free-trade-agreements/CSFTA>.

the state, particularly in fighting corruption, increasing professionalization, and improving party discipline within the party-state.³⁹ This has meant first and foremost an attempt to strengthen the top-down processes of governance, which in the Southeast Asian city-state appears to have been extremely effective.⁴⁰ As such, political learning from the Singapore model must be seen as part of the ongoing process of the transformation of the CCP.

Many of the other Chinese scholars and officials who have visited the island nation have addressed the issue of how Singapore has successfully adapted to the processes of modernization.⁴¹ Singapore's *Straits Times* reported on 18 November 2008 that there are "a growing number of Chinese academics who have developed an interest in studying Singapore's rapid economic growth, political stability and harmonious social order in recent years." For instance, Nanjing University history professor Lu Zhengtao 卢正涛 argues in his book *Singapore: Modernization under Authoritarianism (Xinjiapo weiquan zhengzhi yanjiu 新加坡威权政治研究)* that the Singapore case shows that countries can successfully modernize under authoritarian rule.⁴² He argues that the PAP remained in power because of the establishment and improvement of grassroots organizations, the creation of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau to investigate and severely punish corruption, the establishment of Nominated Members of Parliament as well as Non-Constituency Members of Parliament to make parliament more representative, the establishment of an elected presidency to provide certain checks on the prime minister, and the institutionalization of the leadership transfer. Miao Chengbin, furthermore, emphasizes the importance of meritocracy in Singapore, which insures the selection of highly qualified and honest leaders.⁴³ The key to the longevity of one-party rule is effective monitoring of the integrity of party members. Xia Guoxing, the Branch Secretary of the Training Institute of Guangdong Agricultural Management Cadre School (*Guangdong nonggongshang guanli ganbu xueyuan peixun bu 广东农工商管理干部学院培训部*) has argued that social and political stability, the lack of corruption, a high degree of administrative efficiency, and excellent government services have been key to the PAP's success.⁴⁴

At the core of the "Singapore model" is the ability of a small political elite to maintain hierarchical power while using a calibrated approach to coercion and cooptation.⁴⁵ The PAP has established a communitarian nationalist form of governance that can be termed a form of "Asian democracy," but cannot be considered liberal democratic.⁴⁶ In addition to political mechanisms, the PAP has also

39 Shambaugh 2008.

40 Li 2005.

41 e.g. Guo 2000; Lai 2007; Hou 2007; Wang, Zhao and Cui 2008; Wang et al. 2008.

42 Lu 2007.

43 Miao 2008.

44 Xia 1995.

45 George 2007. Barr 2014.

46 e.g. Clammer 1985, Chua 1995, Hussin 2004, Thompson 2015.

been successful in providing many social services. In particular, the availability of public housing to all citizens contributes significantly to the legitimacy of one-party regime.⁴⁷ It is thus not surprising that many Chinese scholars and officials have characterized Singapore as a highly effective and modern political system which is governed by a single dominant party.⁴⁸

Singapore as Teacher

Singapore has also encouraged the study of its model by foreign academics interested in its authoritarian success. A notable example of this is the Chinese academic Lü Yuanli's *Why Singapore Can Do It* (*Xinjiapo weishenme neng* 新加坡为什么能), which included a foreword written by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong 李显龙.⁴⁹ Singapore's *Straits Times* newspaper reported that Li's book was "widely read by political leaders, government officials, students and academics all over China."⁵⁰ The book had already gone through eight printings by 2009.⁵¹ Moreover, Lü founded a Singapore research centre at Shenzhen University (*Shenzhen daxue Xinjiapo yanjiu zhongxin* 深圳大学新加坡研究中心). The central government in Beijing is actively encouraging research on Singapore, which is reflected in the fact that receiving funding for Singapore-related projects is easier than for any other country.⁵² Despite continued geo-political differences between the two countries – most recently involving Chinese criticism of Singapore's military cooperation with Taiwan in late 2016–early 2017 – the important Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) meeting in Beijing, which sought to deepen and broaden the cooperation between the two countries, went ahead on 27 February 2017.⁵³

China's obsession with the city-state has been warmly welcomed by the Singaporean government, which has invested heavily (and lucratively) in providing many different kinds of educational programmes for Chinese visitors. In addition to establishing study programmes for visiting officials, it has published or supported the publication of books, articles and op-eds that have sought to explain the various aspects of the "Singapore model." In short, due to the growing interest among developing countries, particularly in Asia, Singapore has sought to establish its own brand of "soft" authoritarianism, which it sedulously promotes.

One way in which Singapore has tried to impart lessons from its own model is through bilateral cooperation such as the China–Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park (*Zhong Xin Suzhou gongye yuan* 中新苏州工业园区), the Sino-Singapore

47 Chua 1997.

48 Rodan 1993, more recently Ortmann 2010.

49 Lü 2007.

50 Leong 2008a.

51 Peh 2009.

52 Leong 2008b.

53 Koh 2011.

Tianjin Eco-city (*Zhong Xin Tianjin shengtai cheng* 中新天津生态城), and most recently the Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City (*Zhong Xin Guangzhou zhizhi cheng* 中新广州知识城). In addition, there are also many smaller collaborative projects such as the Wuxi-Singapore Industrial Park (*Wuxi Xingzhou gongyeyuan* 无锡星洲工业园), the Sino-Singapore Nanjing Eco Hi-tech Island (*Xinjiapo Nanjing shengtai keji dao* 新加坡·南京生态科技岛), and the Singapore-Sichuan Hi-tech Innovation Park (HTIP) (*Xin Chuan chuangxin keji yuan* 新川创新科技园).⁵⁴ These industrial parks and integrated townships are meant to involve more than just economic cooperation because they are seen as a way to export the “Singaporean experience” and to teach China its “model.” For instance, the eco-city in Tianjin has been designed to be an experiment in constructing an environmentally friendly city that is also “a testbed for social management issues.”⁵⁵ It includes an attempt to emulate Singapore’s approach to public housing, which has been seen as a key legitimating factor for the ruling party.⁵⁶ Despite initial difficulties, these projects are now managed under a Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) at the level of deputy prime minister, which was established in 2003. These Singaporean projects have introduced the Chinese to the importance of long-term planning as well as the need to be responsive to investors, to provide greater transparency and accountability, to build better communities, and to increase environmental awareness.⁵⁷

While teaching can provide important insights into what and how something is taught and even how it is received,⁵⁸ the lessons about the model may not correspond to reality, which only a more nuanced and critical analysis reveals.⁵⁹ Parallels are sometimes intentionally exaggerated by Chinese scholars and government officials to make an argument for reform. Singapore’s development is largely seen as a success story even though the city-state is facing many problems, including serious income disparity, weakening economic growth, relatively low productivity, and reliance on foreign labour, to name only a few. Some have even suggested that this demonstrates that the “Singapore model” may eventually prove unsustainable.⁶⁰ Another example is that many Chinese observers are convinced that Singapore’s perceived good governance is in part due to the assumption that it is “a country that is deeply influenced by Confucian

54 Wuxi-Singapore Industrial Park <http://www.wsip.com>; Singapore-Sichuan Hi-tech Innovation Park www.sscip.com.cn; Sim 2014.

55 Kor 2013.

56 Chua 1997.

57 Lye 2016a; see also Lye (2016b), which argues that the creation of mechanisms at the level of deputy prime minister/vice premier has allowed Singapore to regularly and systematically share its lessons with China. His study demonstrates that the institutionalization of these bilateral links has become gradually more important and the interaction between the two countries is no longer one-directional from Singapore to China but a mutual exchange in which both sides profit from knowledge sharing.

58 Stone 1999.

59 Worthington 2003; Ortmann 2010; Barr 2014; also see the article by Thompson and Ortmann in this special section of *The China Quarterly*.

60 Lim 2014.

culture,”⁶¹ despite the fact that Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP appropriated Confucian principles primarily from an instrumentalist perspective to strengthen the ideological justification of its dominant role in politics.⁶² As such, studying the way a model is codified is of great importance for understanding its potential for proliferation. Exploring this aspect is one of the goals of the following articles.

The Articles in this Special Section

The discussion begins with Yang Kai and Stephan Ortmann’s article, which draws attention to China’s interest in various models for its developmental project. While many post-Mao reformers considered the US as the most relevant case during the initial economic liberalization period, the Swedish and Singaporean case soon became two important alternative models in the 1980s that began to attract the interest of different intellectual schools of thought looking for a “third way” between liberalism and traditional Communism. The Swedish case caught the attention of left-leaning scholars concerned with social democracy in order to achieve greater equity and harmony. By contrast, the Singapore model has been supported mainly by neo-conservative writers who are opposed to putting too much emphasis on social welfare, instead stressing a neo-liberal approach to state-capitalism. The perception of Singapore’s economic success has been an important factor in the Southeast Asian city-state becoming a more influential model than Sweden. But another crucial reason for this change was that one-party rule came to be seen as a prerequisite in the selection of potential role models, which in Singapore has never been seriously challenged, unlike in recent decades where the once-dominant Social Democratic Party in Sweden has lost its political hegemony. After Deng spoke out in favour of the Singapore model during his famous “Southern Tour” in 1992, its dominance as a “lesson giver” has never again been challenged among most Chinese observers.

Benjamin Ho’s article analyses the intersection of the Singapore model and the Chinese dream. The concept can be traced to a senior colonel in the Chinese military, Liu Mingfu 刘明福, who asserted in a book on the “China Dream” (*Zhongguomeng* 中国梦)⁶³ that the primary lesson that can be drawn from Singapore is the ability to mix socialism with capitalism, an ideal reference point for the concept of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Ho seeks to explore whether this is the case by determining why Chinese leaders are so interested in the Singapore model. Ho argues that the Chinese dream only has limited similarities to the Singapore experience and does not lend itself to effective learning. For example, he sees it as unlikely that China can adopt

61 Zeng 2008.

62 Liu 2012; Thompson 2001.

63 Liu 2015.

Singapore's standards of public service whereas the Chinese government will remain much more willing to intervene in the economy. Moreover, unlike Singapore, China acts from a position of strength in international relations, despite its long-held rhetoric of national humiliation, as it has the mentality of a great power. Finally, efforts to deal with corruption in China have not resulted in any of the structural reforms necessary for them to be effective in the long term.

Hong Liu and Ting-Yan Wang's article concerns Chinese officials who have participated in learning activities in Singapore. The empirical study is based on a survey of 1,300 graduates of the so-called Mayors' Class at Nanyang Technological University, a one-year master programme established in 2005 taught in Mandarin that has attracted mainly mid-level cadres from China. The survey seeks to determine why the officials decided to participate in the programme and what they have learned from it. They find that practical governance lessons such as meritocracy or the rule of law are viewed as more important than ideological ones, including one-party rule and authoritarianism. Although the majority of officials are aware of the significant differences between the two places, they overwhelmingly believe that it is possible to draw certain lessons from Singapore and implement them gradually in China.

Finally, the article by Mark Thompson and Stephan Ortmann examines why the key lessons China has attempted to draw from Singapore are based on a "mis-modelling" of the city-state and have thus led to significant distortions in the learning process. They argue that this has occurred in the attempt to follow Singapore's example in adopting a discourse of Confucian values to justify the regime's hold on power, utilizing elections to enhance legitimacy, and launching an anti-corruption campaign. In each of these three areas Chinese observers misunderstand the "Singapore model" because they view Singapore as an overtly authoritarian regime heavily influenced by Chinese culture, thus missing the "soft" character of the city-state's non-democratic rule and the limited impact of an elite-constructed conservative culturalist discourse on it. In Singapore the legacy of British-style constitutional rule is still strong, while in China an illiberal Communist one-party state has evolved from Maoist totalitarianism with no history of separation of powers or the rule of law.

While all the articles in this special section agree that Chinese observers are determined to "learn" from Singapore, they differ about what aspects of this "education" have been most important. Some authors emphasize practical lessons, particularly those related to governance and state economic policies. This includes Chinese officials who attended "mayoral courses" in Singapore as well as those who have attempted to implement these "lessons" in China with regard to combining state management with market forces while maintaining political control, combating corruption and generally promoting efficient rule by a one-party state. An alternative view is that "given the unclear effects of policy transfers to date ... Chinese policymakers – from local officials to Xi Jinping – continue to proclaim the importance of learning from Singapore" largely due

to political considerations.⁶⁴ This is an attempt to follow Singapore's example in continuing to successfully legitimate authoritarian rule despite its advanced level of economic development. The ideology of "authoritarian modernity" is, in this view, key to Chinese policymakers and scholars in developing an ideology capable of justifying continued one-party rule in an increasingly modernized society.

But several of the articles in the special section also draw attention to an inherent paradox in China's attempt to learn from Singapore, which, despite some similarities, is fundamentally different institutionally. In fact, in this regard Singapore has much more in common with Hong Kong, also a former British colony and also a global financial and trading hub, which in 1997 became a part of China under the principle of "one country, two systems." The integration of the former British colony so far has focused largely on increasing the economic linkages with the mainland and very little on attempting to draw any meaningful political or economic lessons from the former British colony. Recent political developments – including the failed attempt to introduce universal suffrage and growing doubts about how long civil liberties will be protected – reinforce the impression that China is not serious about adopting any fundamental institutional lessons and instead is merely driven by a desire to preserve its current one-party regime.⁶⁵ This paradox raises serious questions about China's commitment to undertake meaningful reforms to deal with the many challenges that the country faces in the immediate future.

Acknowledgements

Funding for the editors' research on this topic was provided by two City University of Hong Kong Strategic Research Grants, "Teaching Authoritarian Developmentalism: The "Singapore Model" (Grant No. 7004349) and "The Singapore Model and Its Influence on China" (Grant No. 7004477). The authors wish to thank the university for this support. The first drafts of several of these articles in this special issue were presented at a conference on China's "Singapore Model" held at the City University of Hong Kong on May 9, 2016, and sponsored by the university's Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC). We would like to extend our special thanks to all the participants of the workshop for their active participation in the discussions, including the discussants Donald Low, H. Christoph Steinhardt, Darryl S.L. Jarvis and Toby Carroll. Finally, we also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

64 Lim and Horesh 2016, 1013.

65 Zhang 2012 argues that early capitalist development in the Shenzhen Economic Zone was modelled on the "big master" Hong Kong, particularly with the emphasis on a free market economy. But given their increasing emphasis on consolidating one-party rule in the midst of rapid state-led modernization, Shenzhen policy elites followed the example of observers elsewhere in China in turning to authoritarian Singapore as a model.

Biographical notes

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摘要: 该特刊探讨中国长期以来对新加坡发展经验的浓厚兴趣。虽然这个东南亚小国与地球上最多人口的国家存在显著的不同,但毛泽东时代之后,自邓小平到习近平以来的历届中国领导人都对其经验表示赞赏。中国方面尤其对新加坡能在一党政治下实现有效的管治和高效的国家资本主义的成功经验情有独钟,不过也因此往往忽视选举民主在新加坡发展中的作用。

关键词: 中国; 新加坡模式; 政治学习; 管治; 国家资本主义; 一党统治

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