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THE MAKING OF ELITE SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE, 1940s-1980s

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Abstract

The central puzzle I engage in this thesis is how and why the Raffles Institution (RI) and the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) maintained distinction as elite schools between the 1940s-1980s, a period during which the educational arena in Singapore was consolidated under the centralized control of the state. I first show how schooling in Singapore during this phase would begin to take on the properties of a settled Bourdieusian field: competition among schools would become fundamentally organized around contests for a field-specific form of symbolic capital that signaled pedagogic aptitude. Accordingly, drawing on my interpretation of public newspapers and school magazines published during this period, I demonstrate how RI and ACS secured acknowledgement of their prestige during this time by amassing, defining and defending holdings of this symbolic capital. This thesis makes its contribution to the sociology of education by bringing *inter-school relations* to the forefront of understanding schooling differentiation and hierarchy.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Statement of Problem

The central puzzle I attempt to engage in this thesis is how some schools in Singapore were able to successfully preserve their distinction as elite schools between the 1940s-1980s. This particular phase saw the gradual consolidation and centralization of education, as schools from the different linguistic-streams established during the colonial period were meshed—though, not without problems—into a state-helmed national system of education. Further, all schools would come under great pressure to conform to the requirements of educational policy during this period. Still, schools such as the Raffles Institution (RI) and the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) would retain their prominence as two of the most prolific educational institutions within the pedagogical arena.

Explanations for these schools' capacity to secure acknowledgement of their distinction within this national system of education have been limited to vague observations that they simply continued to be 'high achieving' and possessed 'strong cultures' (Gopinathan, 2001: 33). This opacity is thus the impetus for the following research questions. What were the attributes that characterized the prestige of schools like RI and ACS during this period? How, why and to what extent did these qualities function as mechanisms of distinctions among schools? At this point, a qualification is in order. In the spirit of Steinmetz's (2007: 3) emphasis on the improbability of constructing

general theory and general laws in the social sciences, this thesis makes no attempt to propose any sort of general model of “the elite school”. Rather, my aim is only to construct the constellation of contests among schools in Singapore during the period under study. Understanding the way these competitions *between schools* worked to shape the categorization and hierarchy of schools within the context of a newly consolidated educational system opens up potential for much future work in the sociology of education.

1.2 The Sociology of the Elite and Elite Schools

1.2.1 The Elite

“Classical” theorists of the elite attempt to explain what they conceptualized as the *inevitable* emergence of a select minority wielding power and authority over a mass majority (see for example Pareto, 1963: 1422-1424; Mosca, 1939: 50-53; see also Bottomore, 1993[1964]: 1-15; Brezis & Temin, 1999: 4-10). Conversely, the sociology of the elite is more concerned to identify, investigate and analyze the social bases and mechanisms that work to produce as well as secure these groups’ *exclusivity* and *dominance*. In this section, I will attempt to outline the two positions within which most contemporary sociological works on the elite have situated themselves.

The first perspective frames the elite as a socially heterogeneous collective whose ranks are “open” and constantly renewed through a process of meritocratic selection from groups of diverse social origins. The key questions this conceptualization must contend with include if and how these various

sub-groups within the elite are able to come to any sort of consensus; or, if these sub-groups must remain simply in constant competition in pursuit of distinct self-interests. The next perspective I delineate conceives of the elite in the sense of a “ruling class”: that is, as a generally homogenous and cohesive group that seeks to consistently reproduce its advantage and privilege, while effectively excluding the participation of other groups. The important questions for this perspective revolve around how this dominant group is able to successfully maintain and legitimate its monopoly over power and authority. Subsequently, I assert that questions revolving around elite consensus and elite legitimacy can only be adequately answered if we train our sights on the organizations and institutions that mediate elite formation—one of the most important in this regard is the school.

The literature that characterizes the elite as a plural grouping begins with the assertion that in modern societies social origin has become subordinate to individual ability. Thus, ‘access to [membership] in the sub-elites is based principally on performance’ (Hartmann, 2007: 89) instead of on ‘unearned entitlement’ (Johnson, 2006: 23). In this vein, empirical examples that demonstrate that a disproportionate number of positions in the elite are held by members of middle or upper class backgrounds are not seen as contrary to the assertions of this perspective; rather, they are taken to be indicative that social groups performing better in relation to other groups will rightly have greater access to privileged positions (Hartmann, 2007: 90). The actual “sorting” processes and criteria that form the basis of social stratification—for example, the education system—are usually left uncritically examined.

In addition, this perspective also conceives the elite in a society as typified by functional specialization as well as by the relative independence of the various sub-groups. Whether or not these sub-groups are cooperative or fragmented is often seen to have wider implications (see Etzioni-Halevy, 2003; Lerner, Nagai & Rothman, 1996). For instance, Higley & Burton assert that a 'consensually united elite' is an integral condition for liberal democracy to take root (2006: 2). Still, they go on to acknowledge that it is more often the case that the elite are disunited, frequently with some factions working to subdue other groups. In the specific example of Singapore, the work of Chen (1997[1978]) and Chen & Evers (1978) depict the elite as a 'conglomeration of many small groups of persons functioning as leaders in different areas of societies' (Chen, 1997[1978]: 7). However, the elite in Singapore, while heterogeneous and defined principally by their 'functional contributions to the society' (Ibid.: 8), is ultimately governed, Chen finds, by an organized "power elite" encompassing members from the political, bureaucratic and select professional elite such as lawyers and engineers.

The notion that some sort of cohesive "power elite" dominates society forms the basis of the next contending perspective. This is not to say however that there is no significant internal differentiation within this conception of the elite (see Domhoff, 1990; Zweigenhaff & Domhoff, 2006). Rather, what this view emphasizes is the propensity of the elite, despite these differentiations, to consistently behave in ways that work to consolidate its grip on power and authority. Building on the work of C. Wright Mills that portrays the elite as

constructed 'upon the similarity of origin and outlook [as well as on] the social and political intermingling of the top circles' (1959: 292), scholars have examined, for example, the roles of family and kinship networks (Farrell, 1993) and membership to exclusive clubs (Kendall, 2008) in working to ensure not only that elites are able to maintain their privilege, but also to inculcate the basis for a common group identity.

In the context of Singapore, research has considered how the model of political recruitment (Shng, 1997; Vasil, 2000), the nation-building project (Barr, 2008) and even the rhetoric and practice of multiculturalism (Goh, 2008; Goh, 2009) have contributed to the process of forming a cohesive elite. However, what is just as important are the roles these institutions play both in excluding large groups of the population from membership in the elite as well as in working to 'produce an elite generally accepted by society' (Hartman, 2007: 51). As observed by many of these scholars, any examination of the elite in Singapore society cannot avoid a consideration of the role of educational organizations or the wider system of education. In light of this, we must now turn our attention to the elite school.

1.2.2 Elite Schools

Although the work that has been done on elite schools and universities is certainly voluminous and multifarious, it has fundamentally revolved around a singular concern: the nature of the relationship between elite schools and the elite. In this section, I will aim to do two things. First, I will consider the different ways in which the question on the association between the elite and

elite educational institutions has been considered. Second, I will argue that the focus of these works has crucially neglected to consider the equally important question of how and why it is that only certain educational organizations have come to possess the legitimate ability to produce the elite. This inquiry will then form the basis of this thesis.

The question of the link between elite schools and the elite can be broken down into a series of subsidiary concerns. The first one takes as its focus *access* to elite schools. Who is able to attend elite schools? Accordingly, are elite schools able to produce the elite only because the socially privileged already attend them? This inquiry is oriented around the contention between merit and entitlement: are elite schools 'engines of opportunity' or 'bastions of privilege' (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005: 95-136)? With this in mind, scholars have probed the admissions process (Stevens, 2007; Karabel, 2005), the recruitment criteria (Kelsall, Poole & Kuhn, 1972; Brezis & Crouzet, 1999; Lin, 1999: 51-67) and the benefits of parental legacy (Larew, 2003; Ornstein, 2007: 144-146) in either facilitating or hindering enrollment to elite schools. Most scholars concur in their findings that access to elite schools is never completely equal across social groups. Even when elite schools do seem to function as 'engines of opportunity', they only do so for a select number of exceptional applicants from the non-dominant classes (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005: 135).

The next inquiry with regards to the connection between elite schools and the socially privileged revolves around the *socialization processes* that take

place within these educational institutions. How are the elite cultivated within these schools? Are elite schools only able to manufacture an elite because they have a monopoly on a particular set of strategies and practices? Here, scholars have analyzed the grueling schedule of regimentation (Ruggero, 2001; Cookson, Jr. & Persell, 1987), the micro-processes involved in elite identity formation (Armstrong, 1990: 3-23; Simpson, 1998: 209-228; Pieke, 2009: 26-55; Khan, 2011) as well as the role of elite schools in the social reproduction of the elite milieu (Douthat, 2005; Schleef, 2006; Granfield & Koenig, 2003; Lim, 2009). The value of this body of work lies in its convincing demonstration that elite schools are indeed vital sites where members that form the upper echelons of the social hierarchy learn to exhibit the poise expected of them even as they become comfortable with positions of public prestige.

A closely related focus in the literature on how elite schools are able to "make" the elite are the investigations involving how these schools are able to "mark" individuals as *belonging* to the elite, as well as the role this labeling process plays in conferring social advantage. Scholars working within this sub-field have focused on how membership to particular establishment schools and their networks in different national contexts work to bestow the title of "elite" to a select group that, often, already possesses a set of prerequisites rather than bestow any actual distinctive practices to their pupils (Bourdieu, 1996a; Cutts, 1997; Li, 2001; Graham, 1999). Other scholars have attempted to produce evidence that membership to an elite educational institutions have very real material benefits, such as increased wages and

better labor market outcomes (see Brewer, Eide & Ehrenberg, 2003). In sum, the existing body of work that has considered how elite schools play a crucial role in elite formation has been remarkably valuable.

Yet, there is something lacking in almost all of these works. Specifically, why are some schools consistenly acknowledged as elite schools and not others? How have some schools managed to distinguish themselves as elite schools? It would definitely be erroneous to say that the literature mentioned thus far has in no way considered these questions. Indeed, most work makes at least some reference to the prominent status of the elite schools. Yet, scholars seem inclined to leave this as simply a fact about which there is 'no mystery' (Cook & Frank, 1993: 122) or the outcome of a tautology that social scientists have come to depend on (Stevens, 2007: 16-17). Others have characterized the prestige of elite schools as 'a somewhat amorphous asset' (Kingston & Lewis, 1990: xx), a 'mystique' (Cookson, Jr. & Persell, 1987: 6), a 'halo effect' (Greene, 1998: xv-xxv), or, most precisely, as a 'charter' (Meyer, 1977): a 'prestige image arising from [an] institution's eminent history and name recognition' (Granfield & Koenig, 2003: 73).

Nevertheless, as Kingston & Lewis (1990: xxi) go on to recognize, 'how [exactly] certain institutions acquire an elite reputation…remains [a] fruitful topic for investigation'. Further, they note that while the differential standing of various schools in education systems has often come to be simply a 'popularly noted fact', there has

> 'been only a limited amount of detailed research indicating how certain schools came to acquire an elite stature, and how various social conditions shaped the nature and functioning of this hierarchy. In short, research has not adequately analyzed organizational differentiation within education from a historical perspective.' (Kingston & Lewis, 1990: xxiv).

In light of this statement, this dissertation aims to make its distinctive contribution to the literature on elite schools and, by extension, to the sociology of the elite. Probing the persistent classification of RI and ACS in Singapore as elite schools, I argue that symbolic processes and mechanisms are an especially key area of analysis in order to understand the construction of prestige in the educational arena. By symbolic processes, I refer to the specific means by which *representations* are produced, understood, contested, and defended.

1.3 Method and Sources

The basic questions that frame this thesis's inquiry is as follows: what are the symbolic mechanisms that made the recognition of RI and ACS as elite schools possible during the formation of the national system of education in Singapore (1940s-1980s), and why were they successful? The method by which I will identify these mechanisms and explain their workings is based on an interpretation of two main sources—public newspapers and school magazines—published during that period and grounded in Critical Realist epistemology (see Steinmetz, 1998; Archer et al. (Eds.), 1998).

In essence, Critical Realism asserts three levels of ontology. The most intuitive level is the *empirical*: this level corresponds to the directly observable and can be thought of as constituting basic experience. The next level is the

actual: this level encompasses the empirical and is produced by “hidden” mechanisms that can only be discerned indirectly—or, at best, re-presented—most precisely through the scientific construction of knowledge. The final level is the *real*: this consists of the intertwining of experiences and observable episodes with the underlying mechanisms that produce and sustain them.

Adopting this epistemological stance, I employ the strategy, following Daniel Goh (2005: 54-58), of “differentiated reading”. First, I read my sources as descriptive *presentations* of *empirical* events. Thus, I treat newspaper reports of, for example, the various scholastic achievements attained by schools like RI and ACS as referring to concretely occurring accomplishments. Next, I read my sources as *representations* of an *actual* arena of inter-school competition that was in the process of being formed. Hence, newspaper reports that detail sporting victories and frame emerging rivalries between schools also indicate a “deeper” level at which schools would begin to compete in order to secure acknowledgement of their educational prestige. Similarly, school magazines are not just a ‘self-appointed official record of school life’ (Mangan, 2000: 243). As I show in Chapter 5, they are also an important means to unearth underlying discourses through which schools like RI and ACS would attempt to project their holdings of symbolic capital and, at the same time, emphasize the lack of legitimate distinction wielded by other schools.

I am well-aware that by looking at newspaper reports and school magazines, I am mainly examining the schools’ projection of intentions and

their representations of themselves as a means to legitimate their position as elite schools. Unfortunately, the archival data in Singapore did not show the power struggles behind doors among the elite schools as well as private correspondences between the heads of elite schools and the Ministry of Education. Such archival data is, in all probability, located at the National Library in London. Nonetheless, this thesis does make a contribution to the study of elite schools by exploring the role of symbolic and discursive practices in shaping educational prestige. Further, it is important to remember that RI and ACS had established themselves as elite schools during Singapore's colonial period, and that the material and social advantages gained had largely been carried over to the new postcolonial national context. The puzzle is how and why this was possible, as well as how and why their persistent claims to prominence continued to be accepted.

1.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis makes two modest and interrelated contributions. First, it adds to the existing corpus of scholarly work on education in Singapore by bringing to the forefront *inter-school relations* and its effects in shaping the schooling arena during the formation of the national system of education. Second, my attempt to theorize schooling during this historical juncture as a particular sort of Bourdieusian field with its own field-specific form of symbolic capital is an attempt to provide important evidence for Steinmetz's (2011) recognition of the historicity that underlies Pierre Bourdieu's concepts.

1.5 Prospectus

In a nutshell, this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 has set out and contextualized the research problematic of how and why some schools become distinguished as elite schools and are able to continue to preserve this distinction within the relevant scholarly literature. I have also outlined the method by which I will attempt to engage this problematic. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I show that the dominant theoretical perspectives on education remain unable to provide an adequate explanation because they do not pay enough attention to inter-school relations. I then assert that Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital will be particularly useful to engage this lacuna. Following this, Chapter 3 delves into the historical development of schooling in Singapore. Its main point is to show that the state-led transition to a national system of education was an important condition in order for schooling in Singapore to begin to function as a settled Bourdieusian field.

Subsequently, Chapter 4 contends that schools within this settled field of education would begin to compete for a specific form of cultural/symbolic capital: pedagogic capital. Schools like RI and ACS that were able to amass recognition of their holdings of this capital—along the loci of scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, prolific and loyal alumni and the capacity for civic and moral training—would become acknowledged as elite schools during that period. Chapter 5 then trains its sights on the ability of RI and ACS to persistently elicit acknowledgement of their distinction in spite of challenges to their eminence in the educational arena. This chapter concludes that these

schools were able to preserve their claims to distinction by discursively engaging, and at times resolving, the tension between equality and distinction that underwrote the formation of the national system of education in Singapore during that period.

Chapter Two – Analytic Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to set up the framework this thesis employs to interpret *and* explain how and why RI and ACS preserved their distinction as elite schools in Singapore between the 1940s-1980s. As stated in the previous chapter, the principal contention of this dissertation is that the acquisition of elite stature by these schools during 1940s-1980s is the successful outcome of a constellation of distinct attempts to (re)secure recognition of prestige. In the first section, I consider some of the main perspectives that have been utilized to examine education in Singapore. I find that these frameworks are somewhat unhelpful to address my research problem because they do not pay enough attention to the school itself or to the relations among schools. Next, I introduce Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital in the following section. I contend that applying these concepts to understand RI's and ACS's constitution as elite schools between 1940s-1980s will be extremely fruitful in light of Bourdieu's emphasis on the constant "search for recognition" that takes place among actors as they jostle for cultural/symbolic advantage within historically situated and sufficiently discrete spaces of competition.

2.2 Perspectives on Education and Schools in Singapore

Scholarly analysis of education in Singapore has focused predominantly on evaluating the positive functions of modern education in society (see for example Gopinathan, 1974, 1976, 1995, 1997; Hill & Lian, 1995; Tham, 1979,

1989). Thus, modern education is deemed especially instrumental for two main purposes: first, to ensure the development of a suitable workforce to meet the needs of an industrializing economy and second, to facilitate the diffusion of a set of norms and values that will, it is believed, produce decent, useful and dedicated citizens. In other words, education in Singapore is thought to 'arouse and develop…a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of [the individual] by both […] society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is destined' (Durkheim, 1956: 71).

Works framed along this perspective often do little more than mirror—though at times, critically—existing state discourses and ideologies on education as integral to 'national cohesion and economic viability' (Gopinathan, 1995: 102) and as underpinned by a 'constant emphasis on merit as the criterion for upward mobility and privilege' (Gopinathan, 1976: 75). Accordingly, a key feature of this perspective is its positioning of schools as 'guardians of national character' (Gopinathan cited in Hill & Lian, 1995: 199). What this approach belies, then, is the twin conjectures that schools are merely a simple *extension* of the education system whose form and content is, in turn, *determined* by the needs of the larger society (see Sharpe & Gopinathan, 1997; Pang & Lim, 1997; Tan & Ng, 2005).

On the other hand, for scholars such as Christopher Tremewan, it is the political economy that plays a key role in determining the current education system; the education system, for this reason, must be seen as an integral part of a state helmed network of social control that has 'shaped and

regulated [Singapore society] in accord[ance] with the government's economic strategy' (1994: 1). Consequently, education in Singapore is 'the premier institution for putting [people] in their social places' (Ibid.: 74). With this in mind, Tremewan argues that the education system in Singapore has two main tasks that cater specifically to 'the needs of foreign capital and PAP-state hegemony' (Ibid.: 86): first, to reproduce an English-speaking and pro-Western capitalist class and second, to ensure the reproduction of a cheap, disciplined labor force.

Similarly, Lily Zubaidah Rahim contemplates the 'trend towards educational elitism and its implications for equal educational opportunity' (1998: 117) amidst an educational system 'strongly influenced by *political* rather than educational considerations' (Ibid.: 121, emphasis mine). Her analysis leads her to conclude that the educational system in Singapore is oriented to 'disadvantage groups that do not have the cultural and material capitals to compete on equal terms with a privileged minority who have had a head start in the educational race' (Ibid.: 133). Most importantly, she demonstrates a *correspondence* between educational marginality, socio-economic subordination and political impotence. While her focus is trained on the Malay community, her wider concern is that structural biases that consistently favor particular social groups at the expense of others can only serve to reproduce class, gender and ethnic divides in the process of stabilizing the economic and political order.

Both Tremewan and Rahim are convincing in their critiques of education and meritocracy in Singapore as tools of capitalist hegemony and ideology. While Tremewan purports to expose how schools work to reproduce the capitalist social order, Rahim lucidly draws attention to the myriad 'affirmative-action based policies' (Ibid.: 179)—for example, the establishment of Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools that demonstrated a clear linguistic bias towards Mandarin—that continue to disproportionately advantage specific sections of the population. However, both Tremewan and Rahim share in the common assumption that partisan economic and political interests are, in large part, simply *reflected* in the content and form of schools (see in this regard Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Further, Tremewan and Rahim neglect the possibility that the relationship between the educational system and economic as well as political interests might instead be characterized by *relative autonomy*. This would, in turn, necessitate a more complex analysis of the correspondence between the struggles within the educational sphere and the conflict in the economic and political sphere.

With this in mind, the work of Johannes Han-Yin Chang, in depicting education in Singapore as 'an increasingly important means…for the upward mobility of lower class people' (2002: 130) as well as playing a crucial 'role in bringing about social stratificational change' (1997: 74-75), seems to add weight to the abovementioned notion that the education system is and its schools are not simply determined by larger economic or political interests. Indeed, Chang claims to highlights the 'enormous transformational power' (Ibid.: 75) of the modern education system by arguing that it has expanded

the proportion of the upper division of society as well as re-constructed its social composition. Still, the most immediate problem with Chang's work is his apparent presumption that increased educational attainments is sufficient for membership in the upper echelons of society.

Here, Randall Collins' (1979) notion of 'credentialism' is particularly useful. For Collins, it is the conflict between different social status groups in industrializing society that drives the expansion of education. Accordingly, jobs begin to require more advanced qualifications. Greater educational credentials, then, cannot be held to correspond to upward social mobility. Furthermore, while all groups might achieve higher educational attainments on an absolute level, some groups will continue to lag behind relative to other groups within the arena of educational competition. Thus, Collins' conclusion is that the expansion of education 'has had no effect at all for increasing mobility' (1979: 182, see also Lee, 2006: 6-7). In this regard, the main shortcoming of Chang's work is his somewhat simplistic treatment of the relationships between modern education and the other 'external forces' that shape—and often, work to *limit*—the 'realization of its [transformative] capacity' (Chang, 1997: 75).

Lee Kiat-Jin's recent extension of the theory of "cultural reproduction" to the context of Singapore is especially valuable in this regard. As part of a larger project that aims to explicitly consider the processes that mediate between social origin and employment, Lee is concerned to elucidate 'educational sorting practices' (2006: 7): specifically, how 'schools reproduce

and legitimize the status quo despite the development of mass education and industrialization' (Ibid.: 268). In essence, Lee highlights the role schools play in perpetuating social inequality despite the widening of the pedagogical opportunity structure. Furthermore, he is concerned to reveal the formation and persistence of *schooling hierarchy* within the new postwar educational arena that continued to mediate the relationship between education and inequality. However, given Lee's broad focus, he does not pay much attention to how and why this schooling hierarchy been assembled and sustained.

Such an inquiry requires an investigation into the *internal dynamics* between schools in Singapore, as well as a consideration of how these dynamics are shaped by external influences. Thus, I propose that Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital allow us to identify and explain the different mechanisms that structured the pedagogical arena during the period under study and that underlie schooling hierarchy in Singapore. This, in turn, will allow us to better understand how and why schools like RI and ACS successfully (re)achieved distinction as elite schools.

2.3 Field and Capital

The concept of the field (see Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu, 1996b) has been fruitfully applied and extended to a wide variety of studies: ranging from the scrutiny of architecture (Stevens, 1998) and theater (Chong, 2011) to an assessment of journalism (Benson & Neveu, 2005) and economic policy (Gemici, 2010). Succinctly, a field may be defined as a circumscribed space of competition, within which constellations of contests among members to define

and establish *recognition* of difference take place. While the specific forms these contests take may vary, antagonisms in a field are often primarily between agents that have managed to become dominant, who work to defend acknowledgment of their distinction, and new agents who enter the field and try to compete either for the same distinction or attempt to subvert existing definitions of distinction while setting up their own (Bourdieu, 1993: 72).

Thus, a most crucial feature of the field is revealed: namely, that all members who engage in struggles within a field accept and agree, either tacitly or explicitly, that the competition is a valid one. In other words, this means that both '[c]hallengers and incumbents share a common interest in preserving the field itself even if they are sharply divided on how it is to be controlled' (Swartz, 1996: 80-81). Conceptualizations of fields as 'site[s] of endless and pitiless competition' (Wacquant, 2008: 264) are then, at best, partial. The field is also very much a space organized around demands for the mutual recognition of the advantages and status each member wields (see Steinmetz, 2008: 596; Steinmetz, 2006: 454).

As such, competition among members in a field are structured around competition for particular species of cultural/symbolic capital. Here, I deliberately emphasize the double form the concept of capital takes in Bourdieu's work: for any form of capital to be configured as symbolic capital it must be 'grasped through the categories of perception that *recognize* its specific logic or, if you prefer, misrecognize the arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 119, original emphasis). For

example, in Bourdieu's re-conceptualization of the state apparatus as a bureaucratic field, he identifies the competition for public capital as the key locus of antagonism that shapes struggles for recognition in this space (Bourdieu, 2005: 51). Similarly, George Steinmetz theorizes the (German) colonial state as a social field fundamentally ordered around competition among colonial officials for acknowledgement of their 'ethnographic acuity' – ethnographic capital (see Steinmetz, 2007a; Steinmetz, 2008). Postwar American sociology for Steinmetz, on the other hand, takes on the characteristics of a disciplinary field primarily organized around claims to certain definitions of social scientific capital (Steinmetz, 2007b).

Next it is important to distinguish between field autonomy and field settlement (Steinmetz, 2008: 595-596). In a nutshell, the difference in classification between the two is as follows. An autonomous field—always only *relatively* autonomous and never simply immune a priori to external pressures—is a one that has become dominated by a certain type of capital that is recognized by all members of that field as valid. However, these members might continue to disagree about the principles along which this field-specific capital is distributed and defined. Still, the main point here is that any alterations and transformations that take place within an autonomous field are primarily driven by internal efforts rather than by external influences. It is important to keep in mind though that fields may lack this sort of autonomy: for instance, a field might come under the influence of substantial exterior forces that will either threaten or successfully undercut and disrupt its autonomy.

In a settled field, there is consensus not only on the type of capital that structures competition but also on the criteria along which recognition of the "possession" of this capital will be judged and calculated. Steinmetz observes that this sort of field settlement is possible only when a particular institution—he provides the examples of the Catholic Church or the colonial state—is able to decisively influence definitions of distinction within a particular field; these definitions become doxic. For example, and as I will argue in greater detail later, forceful initiatives by the state to mould the newly independent Singapore society into a "rugged" community was refracted in the schooling arena as the push for schools to exhibit sporting excellence. As a result, prowess in sporting competition became an important mechanism of distinction among schools as education in Singapore began to attain the properties of a field; that is, as a space where members begin to contend for recognition of their holdings of a specific type of symbolic capital.

I hope to have shown thus far that fields are best thought of as dynamic spaces and not simply 'collections of static positions' (Steinmetz, 2009: 8). Therefore, I am in agreement with Steinmetz that 'Bourdieusian fields are entirely historical' (2011: 54). This means that fields 'do not [simply] exist in all times and places' (Ibid.). Rather, the emergence of a field indicates the historically contingent creation of a continually contested but unified "world" of practice with its own sets of stakes that was not present before. Similarly, Bourdieu's conceptualization of systems of (cultural) capital that work to unequally distribute advantage is intrinsically historical because these

systems can only function in the specific context of a consolidated cultural "market" with institutionalized mechanisms, such as the state, that work to regulate conversion of various capitals into field-specific forms of symbolic capital (Steinmetz, 2011: 56).

With this in mind, criticisms regarding the limited degree of 'transcultural transferability' (Robbins, 2004; see also Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Lamont, 1992: 182-183) of the Bourdieusian field are often misplaced because they tend to work with the assumption that fields must be closed or stable. I hope to have highlighted instead that fields have the potential to be both settled and unsettled: closed and stable, or 'open, fluid and subject to rapid movements' (Lury, 2011: 95). What is of utmost importance, then, is the historical context in which the field forms.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set up the conceptual scaffolding on which this thesis's inquiry into elite schools in Singapore is based. I showed first that existing perspectives of education in Singapore were insufficient to deal with the problem of how and why RI and ACS were constituted as elite schools because they neglected to pay sufficient attention to schools and *inter-school* competition. Accordingly, I contended that Bourdieu's concepts of the field and capital would be particularly useful to begin to theorize inter-school competition in Singapore. I concluded by emphasizing that these concepts were resolutely historical ones. In light of this, the next chapter attempts to show the historical development of education in Singapore, and will argue that

schooling in Singapore between 1940s-1980s began to attain the properties of a *settled* Bourdieusian field.

Chapter Three – Education in Singapore as a Field

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will chart the historical development of schooling in Singapore and is divided into two parts. First, it will show that the colonial period until the onset of World War Two was generally marked by an uneven implementation of education policy. This, in large part, was due to the overall absence of clear political direction intended for the colony. Consequently, the result was the formation of a pedagogical sphere structured along linguistic and ethnoracial lines which, in turn, served as the foundation for a divided society. Next, this chapter will illustrate the postwar drive to integrate the diverse social groups present under the aegis of nation-building. This impetus was reflected in state-led attempts to construct a single national system of education out of hitherto separate schooling paths—though, not without problems.

Education in Singapore had always been an important arena in which to secure material, social, and symbolic privileges. For example, during the colonial period, English-education was a key requirement to participate in the fledgling civil service economy that promised, among other things, significant pecuniary rewards. Those with exclusively vernacular educations were thus barred from these occupational opportunities. Similarly, having a Chinese education opened up different employment prospects—for example, in vernacular businesses or as language teachers—and also served as an important identity marker for the overseas Sinic communities in Singapore.

Gradually, these pathways that linked social origins, education, employment and community identity during the colonial period ossified into a sharply segmented and overtly stratified society. This would change with the various state-led attempts in the post-war and post-independence periods to institute an integrated national system of education. Accordingly, this chapter's principal contention is that these state-led attempts to incorporate all schools into a national system of education marks an important historical transition during which the schooling arena in Singapore would begin to attain specific properties of an expanded and settled Bourdieusian field. This, however, does not mean that that the colonial system of education did not already exhibit field-like properties, and it is not my intention to suggest a complete break or discontinuity between the two systems. Instead, I hope to use this transitional period where different educational streams were merged as a means to demonstrate the evolving continuity between the two systems, and, in doing so, offer a characterization of the developing field of education in Singapore.

For that reason, this chapter will highlight how this process of incorporation brought with it certain 'conditions of entry' (Steinmetz, 2008: 595) imposed by the state that would advantage certain schools while tending to disenfranchise others. For example, a majority of Chinese schools would continue for a long time to insist on identities premised on explicit segregation. Thus, these schools found themselves excluded from the national arena of education as long as their demands for distinction were incongruent with the forms of distinction supported by the state. On the other hand, schools like RI and ACS, already well-established elite schools during the colonial period, largely

accepted these conditions and attempted to distinguish themselves along these lines. In time, these schools would be more successful in re-establishing and re-constituting *recognition* of their prestige.

3.2 Education and Schools in Early Singapore, 1819-1866

There was already some simple community-based instruction taking place in Singapore even before the arrival of the British in 1819. These informal efforts were usually oriented around imparting basic religious knowledge or providing specific training to ensure that children would become useful members of their respective communities. For example, Chinese males were provided with just enough guidance to help run and maintain family businesses while Malay-Muslim males were sent to learn Arabic and the Koran from religious teachers (Erb, 2003: 18; see also Chelliah, 1960: 35). However, with the official ceding of Singapore to Raffles and the East India Company, a rudimentary educational landscape began to take shape.

One of the most significant events during this time involved the influx of missionaries into Singapore who promptly began to open and manage both English as well as vernacular schools. Although most mission organizations were using Singapore as a platform to consolidate themselves before departing for China, they still endeavored to provide basic educational instruction as well as promote 'a better standard of moral life based on the tenets of Christianity' and were 'open to children of all races and creeds' (Wong, 1973: 131). With this in mind, some of the first schools to be established by missionaries, and that continue to flourish to this day, include

the St. Margaret's School set up by the London Missionary Society in 1842, the St. Joseph's Institution created by the Roman Catholic Mission in 1852 and the St. Andrew's School formed by the Anglican Church Mission in 1862 (Doraisamy, 1969:16-20).

Another noteworthy episode during this period was the precarious establishment of the Singapore Institution by 1856; it would finally be renamed the Raffles Institution in 1868 and go on to be one of the premier schools on the island. Whilst Raffles had harbored great hopes for the role of education when he founded the Singapore Institution in 1823—he hoped to use education as a 'means to civili[ze] and bette[r] the conditions of millions' (Turnbull, 1977: 26)—other British officials simply did not share his enthusiasm. Rather, they were guided by more practical and commercial concerns. Their reluctance eventually resulted not only in Raffles' didactic ambitions being left unrealized but also in an unfinished building that for a long time was unflatteringly described as an "eye-sore" (Doraisamy, 1969: 10). Still, the Singapore Institution was able to garner enough financial support over time, most importantly securing the fiscal backing of the government, and gradually developed into one of the first English-speaking primary school. Still, the school was plagued with many problems during this time ranging from a shortage of suitable teachers to the lack of proper textbooks and educational materials (Doraisamy, 1969: 22).

At this point, it is crucial to remember that the British Indian government and the East India Company played, at best, a limited role in facilitating the

development of education in Singapore during this time: for example, the institution of a grants-in-aid system provided minimal financial support to selected Malay and English educational organizations based on the results these schools were able to attain (Wilson, 1978: 24). Ultimately however, both were content to leave fledgling pedagogical initiatives to wealthy individuals, local communities and missionary organizations. This may be attributed to two interrelated reasons. First, Singapore was acquired for its potential commercial advantage, thus since the expansion of education was thought not to directly buttress this—except, in its capacity to produce a limited number of literate and numerate local staff for government or business enterprises—it was largely sidelined. Second, the glaring lack of coherent or even consistent educational policy on issues such as 'the purpose of education, the most suitable medium of instruction, and the kind of knowledge to be imparted' (Wilson, 1978: 25) could only have served to hinder the government from effectively influencing and supervising the development of schooling at the time.

Accordingly, there were two main consequences that resulted from this "laisser-faire" attitude. First, there was a severe neglect in providing adequate vernacular education. As a result, there was a rise in the number of colloquial schools solely reliant on private sources of funding as well as on the generosity of various local communities that recognized the benefits of an education. Second, there was the gradual materialization of an English-speaking group with members drawn from the various ethnic communities: materially advantaged, but 'ill-at-ease with the other communities of the

island' (Wilson, 1978: 23). Hence, there began to emerge a 'separation among the various vernacular groups [as well as] the divorce of an [English] "educated" elite [predominantly trained by missionary schools] from the rest of society' (Doraisamy, 1969: 23). These schisms would be further solidified in the next phase of Singapore's educational expansion.

3.3 The Colonial Development of Education and Schools, 1867-1942

This section will be primarily concerned to elaborate on *how* educational growth occurred in Singapore following its transfer to the colonial office in London in 1867; as well as *why* educational development in the Crown Colony culminated in the segregation and compartmentalization of the different communities present. As such, this section trains its sights specifically on the *differential development* of the various streams of education. First, it will chart how English-medium education became the academic stream of the establishment. It will show how this process of consolidation resulted in the (un)intended but blatant social exclusion of a majority of the population from the potential advantages an English-medium education bestowed. Further, it will draw attention to the fact that a majority of the schools within the English stream benefitted from significant structural and material advantages. Next, this section will highlight the struggles of Chinese-medium schools to institute themselves as a legitimate parallel educational stream, in spite of being almost completely neglected by the British. This, at times, would include direct confrontations with the colonial state. Finally, this section will consider how

Malay-medium and Tamil-medium schooling came to be constituted as dead-end educational trajectories within the colonial pedagogical sphere.

As early as 1870, the Woolley commission had come to the conclusion that 'the progress of education [in Singapore] ha[d] been slow and uncertain' and that the state of schooling in the Crown Colony ' ha[d] been and [was] in a backward state' (Bazell, 1921: 463). Still, the authorities largely ignored most of the recommendations made by the commission; the only noteworthy changes were the appointment of an Inspector of Schools in 1872 and the implementation of a more organized system of grants-in-aid to schools (Erb, 2003: 22; Doraisamy, 1969: 27-28). In this regard, the colonial government remained content to continue to let its financially supported mission schools and other private bodies impart the bulk of English-medium education. Significantly, this resulted in the building of more non-government schools including the Methodist run Anglo-Chinese School in 1886, the Methodist Girls School in 1887 as well as the Singapore Chinese Girls' School in 1899 that was set up by Straits Chinese businessmen.

However, the shifting political economy during this time brought with it a swelling public demand for English education. Specifically, this "thirst" for English education accompanied Singapore's transition to financial capitalism and the concomitant centralization of the colonial state apparatus. This was because it was an English education that would facilitate entry into the newly rising dominant occupational niches in the civil service. Accordingly, the colonial government slowly but surely became increasingly involved in the

supplying of educational facilities, finally committing itself to the provision and administration of English-medium primary education through the 1902 Education Code. One year later, the government took control of Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls' Schools, selecting Raffles Institution, which had already begun to offer post-primary education since 1884, as the first government secondary school. More notably, Raffles Institution was also structurally positioned at the apex of the education system: as a destination for pupils who had excelled in their primary school examinations (Song, 1967: 340-341, cited in Lee, 2006: 104).

Still, it is important to keep in mind that the colonial administration during this period was guided by an overarching concern for its own commercial and organizational interests rather than a consideration of what would most benefit the local population. Thus, on the one hand, the 1920 Educational Ordinance certainly augmented English-medium education by bestowing unrestricted subsidies to aided schools. The resultant proliferation of English-education meant the continued production of clerical and administrative staff. However, this was also accompanied by an increase in school fees for government and aided English-medium schools that effectively excluded a vast majority of the population from participating in English education simply because they could not afford it (Wilson, 1978: 39). Even so, the colonial government remained adamant that the cost of education should not be inexpensive because this would result in, what was perceived to be, the more pressing issues of inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Doraisamy, 1969: 43).

This process of exclusion was further compounded when we take into account the introduction of the system of external Cambridge examinations in 1891 and the establishing of Queen's scholarships in 1889 to identify bright local students and give them the opportunity to pursue higher education in the metropole. These initiatives were ostensibly meant to 'create a healthy spirit of rivalry among the schools and [to] promote higher standards of education' (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 9). Yet, what these schemes did was basically to entrench the advantage of English medium schools and the English educated, in effect almost guaranteeing that the upper echelons of commercial and civil service employment would only be open to a limited number of "educated" elite.

In sharp contrast to the growth of English-medium education, Chinese-medium education expanded no thanks to British government support or intervention. In fact, Chinese vernacular education was almost completely disregarded by the authorities for a significant period of time. Chinese schools were instead predominantly founded and run by clans, philanthropists, entrepreneurs and even by the Mainland Chinese government in the hope of retaining some influence over emigrants (Erb, 2003: 24; Doraisamy, 1969: 29). Thus, in spite of official neglect, there was a proliferation of Chinese schools in the Crown Colony.

In view of the fact that Chinese-medium education was developing autonomously, the characteristics of Chinese schools were often markedly different from that of English schools. Education in English schools was

oriented around the conferring of technical and linguistic competence**s**, while also attempting to inculcate obedience to the colonial government (see Lee, 1991; Watson, 1993). On the other hand, Chinese schools emphasized allegiance to China by making pupils participate in military drills as well as through the singing of nationalistic songs. The curriculum in these schools was also frequently similar to the curriculum adopted by schools in China. Nevertheless, Chinese schools began to incorporate practical education, female education, post-primary education and adult education, eventually developing a remarkable system of primary and secondary schools by the beginning of the 20th century (Doraisamy, 1969: 85-86; Wilson 1978: 55-56). This period of relatively unfettered progress for Chinese-medium education would come to an abrupt end in 1919.

Reverberations from the antagonisms still present at the closing stages of World War One and the passions that culminated in the May 4th Movement in China were also felt in Singapore as the Chinese schools began to organize and participate in—at times, unruly—demonstrations of patriotism. The colonial state, caught off guard by the politicization of Chinese education, had to quickly regain control and did so by passing the Educational Ordinance in 1920. This made it mandatory for all independent schools and teachers to register with the government. Moreover, any school could be unilaterally deemed "unlawful" and shut down if the content of the curriculum or the pedagogical instruction was found to be "revolutionary" or clashed with state interests. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese population saw this state intervention as

little more than a pernicious attempt to control them and vigorously protested (Wilson, 1978: 61-64).

It is important to keep in mind that this sudden state intrusion into their affairs would have seemed especially bewildering to the Chinese schools, given the fact that they had hitherto been left to their own devices. Thus, even in spite of a later attempt by the colonial government in 1923 to extend the grants-in-aid system to Chinese schools, albeit with equally stringent requirements attached, many schools continued to reject these grants because they perceived the acceptance of financial aid and the subsequent string as the effective surrender of their autonomy and distinctiveness. Still, even as Chinese education continued to develop within these constraints, new tensions began to emerge. These animosities largely revolved around the widening chasm between Chinese-medium and English-medium schools: specifically, the fact that Chinese schools were increasingly unable to provide recognized qualifications for many forms of lucrative employment (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 23). Consequently, Chinese education was perceived as being subordinate to English education. This would form a key locus of contestation and confrontation during the postwar attempt to create a national education system.

Malay-medium and Tamil-medium schools constituted the lowest rungs of the colonial educational hierarchy, though for very different reasons. While Tamil education floundered due to blatant colonial neglect as well as due to limited enrollment, Malay education suffered because it was consistently

subject to the Orientalist caprices of the colonial authorities. For instance, Richard O. Winstedt, a Director of Education in the early 20th century—who saw the Malays as "noble savages," whose way of life could be improved, but above all had to be preserved. Similarly, Sir George Maxwell, a colonial officer who held the positions of British High Commissioner in Malaya as well as Governor of the Straits Settlements, shared similar views regarding improving the natives' condition has long as it did not challenge the status-quo:

> '[t]he aim of the Government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, nor yet numbers of less well-educated boys: rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him' (cited in Wong & Gwee, 1980: 2)

Subsequently, Malay education was exclusively monolingual and stressed the training of fishing, gardening and basket-making (Erb, 2003: 23). Hence, it was almost predictable that Malays demonstrated no inclination towards an education that would obviously not prepare them for the rapidly changing economic and social context. Thus, the life chances of pupils who remained in both Malay-medium and Tamil-medium schools were bleak.

Over all, the pedagogical system under the colonial government was a sharply segmented and an *overtly stratified* one. At the top of the schooling hierarchy, government and aided English stream schools monopolized state concern and financial support. In addition, the institutionalization of a system of external examinations and scholarships that privileged pupils from the English stream gave them a substantial advantage in terms of employment prospects, and further excluded the students from other streams from many

opportunities. Consequently, vernacular educations became 'ghettoiz[ed]' (Doraisamy, 1969: 43) to varying extents; only students who were able to successfully cross over to the English stream had any real chance of educational progression and, perhaps, social mobility. Ultimately, the pre-war education system would leave a 'legacy of bitterness and mis-understanding' (Gopinathan, 1974: 1). Still, it is important to note that this differential development of the various educational streams does not mean that the colonial educational field was a fragmented or a neglected one. While opportunities for the vernacular streams were limited, the British played an integral role in constructing a relatively well-established schooling system with a centralized meritocratic examination and progressive curriculum in place.

3.4 Education and Schools in Immediate Postwar Singapore, 1945-1955

Educational developments in Singapore were interrupted between 1942-1945 because of the Japanese Occupation. During this period, the Japanese were more concerned to utilize school buildings for military and administrative purposes instead of pedagogical ones. Moreover, the few schools that were kept open had their curriculums forcibly reoriented to suit Japanese imperial objectives. The provision of schooling during this period was thus severely deficient. Although the eventual liberation of Singapore on 5th September 1945 seemed to simply mark the beginning of the reinstatement of British governance, the immediate postwar period would also serve as a crucible for attempts at educational change.

Efforts at constructing a new education system during this time were geared toward the long-term goal of finally granting self-government to Singapore. Hence, this section will focus on the first main postwar initiative, the *Ten-Year Programme* (Department of Education, 1949) for education policy drafted in 1946, which purported to introduce a schooling system premised on equal educational opportunity. However, this section is also concerned to highlight the discrepancies between the Programme's stated intentions of egalitarianism and the actual implementation of educational policy that served only to resuscitate and reinforce the lines of exclusion that had been drawn during the prewar colonial period.

The *Ten-Year Programme* has been described as 'the first effort in Singapore's history to seek to relate educational policies to clearly defined goals' (Gopinathan, 1974: 7) and as 'practically the introduction of a new system rather than the extension of an already widely based one' (Wilson, 1978: 130-131). Indeed, the explicit aims of this Programme were framed around three previously unheard tenets. First, education was now seen a key means by which to prepare the colony for self-government as well as to inculcate civic allegiance. Second, educational opportunity was to be offered to all children, regardless of race. Third, primary education in all language streams was to be provided at no cost; subsequent secondary and higher education would be supplied in line with the colony's needs (Doraisamy, 1969: 47-49).

Although the Programme espoused admirable objectives, the implementation of these aims was plagued by a number of issues. First and foremost, educational infrastructure was severely lacking. Thus, schools could be not built fast enough and there was a glaring shortage of adequately trained teachers (Erb, 2003: 28-29). Next, in spite of advocating equal educational opportunity for all, a disproportionate amount of resources continued to be spent on encouraging English education, even though it must be noted that a significantly greater amount of grants was also provided to schools from other language streams. Ultimately, vernacular educations remained relatively neglected (Gopinathan, 1974: 9). Further, the maintenance of the different examination streams and the corresponding differential employment opportunities that still clearly favored those with an English education only served to deepen the social partitions among the population (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 61).

As a result of this disjuncture between rhetoric and reality, it should come as little surprise that the educational policies of the Ten-Year Programme were interpreted as being part of an implicit effort at enticing children away from Chinese-medium and other private vernacular schools and into state managed educational institutions (Doraisamy, 1969: 49-50). The lopsided focus on the building of English schools and the recent clause that granted parents of all social origins the ability to enroll their children in English schools had also begun to result in a situation in which an ever increasing proportion of the population was choosing to register in the English stream—at the

expense of vernacular schools. In fact, the projections of the Ten-Year Programme estimated that enrollment in English schools would rise from 42,000 to 128,400 while registration in vernacular schools was expected to fall from 72,000 to 25,000 (Wong, 2002: 132).

As such, vernacular schools began to fear ‘cultural extinction’; this apprehension was particularly marked in the Chinese community (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 61). Wong has noted in a comparative study across Singapore and Hong Kong that Chinese schools have often defined themselves by insisting on ‘cultural exclusiveness’ (2002: 128). Thus, faced with a situation in which they risked being “substituted” by the ever-increasing number of English schools, Chinese schools responded by collectively articulating their grievances to the director of education at the time (Doraisamy, 1969: 92), while simultaneously continuing to pressure the colonial state for funding and concessionary measures (see Wong, 2002: 129-135). This longstanding hostility between the state and Chinese schools would eventually result in the 1955 *All-Party Report on Chinese Education*: the most sustained inquiry into how best to incorporate the Chinese schools into a single educational system.

It is worth mentioning here that the proliferation of government built English-schools during this period has often been viewed solely with regard to the implications for Chinese and other vernacular educations. Historians and sociologists of education in Singapore repeatedly concluded that existing government schools and aided mission-schools would display little opposition to the spread of English-medium education as well as to increasing state

control simply because ‘they had always had support [from the government] and thus had no cause to feel threatened’ (Gopinathan, 1974: 11). Yet, this thesis will demonstrate that these schools were not simply passive recipients of state support. Rather, I will show how they established and defended distinctive reputations, within the constraints of the largely state-driven consolidation of a single education system, in attempts to maintain their prestige. In doing so, these schools also played an important role in helping to shape the evolving educational field. The schools that were the most successful in this regard, such as the RI and the ACS, would best be able to preserve their educational prominence in the eventual national education system.

Still, for the moment, suffice it to say that education policy in the immediate postwar period had ‘failed [in its aim] to promote equality of opportunity or unity of purpose’ (Wilson, 1978: 178). The next phase of educational development in Singapore would thus be oriented around a different approach even as it continued to espouse a similar intention to integrate the different educational streams and their schools.

3.5 The Beginning and Consolidation of a National Education System, 1956-1978

The antagonism between the Chinese schools and the state was not limited to the educational arena. A number of Chinese school students were also implicated in instances of broader political and social unrest: for example, in demonstrations opposing the National Service Ordinance in 1954 and in

support of the 1955 Hock Lee Bus Riots. As such, an All-Party Committee was finally convened to probe the origins of Chinese school dissent and offer suggestions on how best to align Chinese schools and their seemingly divergent interests with the larger state-led initiative to build a cohesive population ready for self-government and, eventually, independence (see Wilson, 1978: 184-189). Hence, this section will focus on the recommendations of the *All-Party Report on Chinese Education* (All-Party Committee, 1956) and the subsequent legislation enacted by the *White Paper on Education Policy* (Legislative Assembly, 1956) that proposed a single education system advocating a 'fundamental alteration' (Gopinathan, 1991: 274) to existing pedagogic policy: the *equal treatment* of all educational streams.

In essence, equal treatment as envisioned by the All-Party Committee consisted of the following. First, all educational streams would be given room and even encouraged to maintain their individual characteristics. Nevertheless—and here is the key distinction from all previous educational policy—these differences between educational streams would not, and should not, be allowed to form the basis of pedagogical hierarchy. Thus, it was hoped that such an approach would serve as a more suitable basis to accommodate as well as incorporate the different educational streams into a single schooling system—especially in light of the reactions of the Chinese and other vernacular schools to the *Ten-Year Programme* and its prior attempt to create a unitary education system.

Still, in order to even begin to accomplish this push for educational equality, the All-Party Committee came to the realization that purposeful steps had to be taken to bridge the historically entrenched institutional separation between various schooling streams. Some ideas proposed to achieve this included implementing the teaching of a common civics curriculum, facilitating the movement of teachers between streams and encouraging the utilization of Malayan oriented textbook for all streams (Gopinathan, 1974: 22). More substantial recommendations made by the Committee, and later implemented by the Labour Front led government, included improvements of all educational institutions' material conditions and teachers' working environments. These encompassed the rescinding of the Educational Ordinance of 1950 that governed only the Chinese schools in favor of a new 1957 Educational Ordinance that was applicable to all schools, extending full grants-in-aid to Chinese schools as was the case with English schools and remunerating teachers in Chinese schools on par with their English school counterparts (Wong, 2002: 140; see also Doraisamy, 1969: 52-56)

As we have seen from the above paragraph, the initiative to balance the different educational streams necessitated copious amounts of state intervention. In this regard, a most important example of state involvement was its effort to ensure that the qualifications from schools in the different educational streams were on par. Up to that time, one of the most 'intractable problems' (Wilson, 1978: 215) of education in Singapore was the fact that the possession of English stream qualifications usually guaranteed its holder a place in the upper professional strata. As long as this practice continued, any

claim at equalization would ring hollow. Hence, the Ministry of Education—set up in 1955—embarked on the difficult task of introducing common curricula and universalizing schooling standards across the different educational streams (Gopinathan, 2001: 25).

Accordingly, this also meant that all schools came under a markedly greater deal of centralized control. Further, gradually increasing state encroachment would result in the establishment of a series of national examinations, from the Primary School Leaving Exam in 1960 to the Singapore-Cambridge GCE Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations in 1971 and 1975 respectively (see Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 74-83). Ultimately, the state-led drive to create a National School System 'brought together schools of [all] language streams, under a unified education system, with a common curriculum [and a] common provision of physical and financial resources' (Giam, 1992: 7).

Even so, these changes were not simply implemented without resistance. A most pertinent example here would be the 1961 examination boycott in which some students from Chinese schools continued to fear the consequences of "equality" for Chinese education and protested the standardization of educational qualifications (see Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 90-105). Further, while most of the Chinese community was at peace with the alterations to the educational system, there remained the radical leftists who continued to be intensely critical of government measures: this would eventually culminate in a distinctive "split" in the Chinese community.

However, what is more important for our purposes is to note the fact that no major Chinese school chose to stay outside of this centralized school system after this period of state intervention (Soon, 1988: 6). At the end of the day, the process of construction of a new National Education System during this time went a long way in convincing the majority of the population that the government was in fact concerned to improve the conditions of all schools without implicitly trying to subordinate or marginalize any particular vernacular culture or education. This was especially important in light of ongoing political changes that electorally enfranchised many new groups in the population.

With this in mind, I want to emphasize that the main point of this section is not merely to elucidate how English, Chinese and other vernacular educations were integrated into a single educational system. Rather, my aim is to highlight the *politics of consolidation, oriented around the ideal of equality, which would form the basis of the state-helmed national field of education*. As I have contended earlier, incorporation into a national education system embracing an ideal of egalitarianism will not expunge educational hierarchy or simply result in a situation in which schools would exhibit total compliance with state directives. What is more interesting, then, is to examine how different schools maneuvered within the boundaries of this new national arena of education in attempts to successfully distinguish themselves. In other words, more schools were now compelled to draw on a similar set of principles of distinction provided by the growing educational field even as they competed to have their differences recognized.

3.6 The Differentiation of the National Education System, 1979-1986

This section takes as it starting point the *Report on the Ministry of Education* (Goh et al., 1978), more commonly referred to as the *Goh Report*, which was intended as the first sustained analysis of Singapore's fledgling national education system. This initiative was a product both of new economic demands that brought with them the need to revamp education (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008: 91) as well as the growing recognition that existing pedagogic policies—for example, the compulsory implementation of bilingualism in schools—were having adverse effects on the student population (Yip et al., 1990: 14). As I have outlined in prior sections, the state thus far had been mainly concerned to do two things. First, it had aimed to depoliticize education by establishing a schooling system premised on equality. Second, because of the growing demand for education, the state had aimed to quantitatively expand the schooling system, eventually achieving universal primary and lower-secondary education. However, it was becoming increasingly clear that a rigid "one-size-fits-all" system was not going to be adequate.

In this vein, the findings of the *Goh Report* fundamentally revolved around the contention that the uncompromising schooling system was, in effect, resulting in a high "educational wastage". For example, almost 20 to 30 per cent of students were still unable to cope with the conditions of bilingualism that had been in existence for almost twenty years since being implemented following the *All-Party Report* in 1956. In a nutshell, bilingualism in Singapore at that time meant the mandatory learning of English as well as a second

language at an equivalent level. English was construed as the main linguistic medium that would facilitate modernization; while the learning of second language was to help in 'fortifying the resilience of [the different] Asian communities against "undesirable changes" precipitated by rapid economic development' (Hill & Lian, 1995: 84).

However, schools struggled with this requirement simply because most students did not speak either English or the second language they were assigned to learn at home. Students educated in vernacular schools rarely spoke English, the patois of the local elite. Further, a majority of the Chinese communities who continued to converse predominantly in dialect would struggle with the injunction to learn both English and Mandarin. Although much attention has been focused on the implications of bilingualism for students in the vernacular streams, pupils in English-medium schools were also adversely affected. For example, the ACS Board of Governors commissioned an investigation into the 'poor results of students studying Mandarin' and to the obstacles preventing ACS from producing effectively bilingual pupils (1970: 1). The report concludes that ACS was not able to mould bilingual students because although a majority of the students came from a milieu that was predominantly English speaking, the curriculum materials used to teach second-language presumed that Mandarin (and Malay) were the students' native tongues. There report concludes with the recommendation that the curriculum be altered to take into account this disjuncture.

The abysmal statistics the *Goh Report* provides is another way to describe the widespread failure of bilingual educational policy up to this point in time: at the PSLE, almost 60 percent failed either one of both languages. Consequently, many students were disqualified from the educational system at an early stage, resulting in a related problem of atrocious literacy levels among the population. Thus, only 71 percent of primary schools pupils would move to secondary education while a dismal 14 percent would sit for the GCE 'A' Level examinations. Clearly, 'a single system of education imposed on children of varying abilities…[was] the main reason for the weaknesses of the system and for [the] high attrition rates' (Goh et. al (1978), cited in Hill & Lian, 1995: 85)

As such, one of the things the report called for was the implementation of ability-based streaming, differentiated syllabi and varying durations of schooling tailored to student aptitude (Gopinathan, 2001: 27; see also Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 112-118). Thus, in spite of substantial criticism that labeled the new system as elitist, educational organization became oriented around efficiency: 'motivat[ing] student enrollment and performance by eliminating education dead-ends and enabling each student to advance as far as their interest and ability might take them' (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008: 93). Still, educational streaming was not without its (un)intended consequences. By assigning pupils to streams with differentiated curricula and examination requirements based on their perceived knowledge acquisition abilities, it gradually became increasingly difficult for students from the slower-pace streams to move to the other streams. Hence, pupils in these lower streams

would become entrenched in devalued schooling paths that would subsequently lead them into lower-rung professions.

The *Goh Report* is particularly important for my attempt to theorize education in Singapore during this period as beginning to exhibit specific settled field-like qualities for two reasons. First, was its role in the entrenching the 'competitive principle' within the education system (Hill & Lian, 1995: 86). This would mean that schooling would increasingly become oriented around a common yet distinct set of "stakes" and criteria of evaluation that was not simply a reflection of economic or political interests. Second, was the Report's recommendation that the top 8 percent of Chinese-medium students be sent to exclusive Chinese-medium secondary schools under the Special Assistance Plan (SAP). The formation of SAP Schools within the national arena of education was a crucial step by which a group of Chinese-medium schools were incorporated as a set of potentially *heterodox* challengers—an opposing alternative—to the status and prestige of established schools like RI and ACS. This is critical in thinking about education in Singapore as a field (see Steinmetz, 2011: 53; Bourdieu, 1996).

Still, the *Goh Report*, despite its valiant attempts at educational reform, continued to reflect a fundamental characteristic of the national schooling system. In short, the push for educational change and diversification in Singapore remained strictly "top-down". Further, schools within the system were treated as 'mechanically fed by a bureaucratically designated and rigid curriculum' (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008: 93). Hence, there was a stark neglect

for a consideration of practices different schools were engaging in to distinguish themselves even as the educational landscape began to exhibit particular characteristics of a settled Bourdieusian field. Educational decentralization in the late 1980s would seemingly address this issue, granting more autonomy to schools, and the educational sphere would become conceived of as an arena of "free" competition in which all schools contended to achieve educational excellence.

3.7 Towards Educational Excellence or, the "Stratification" of Schooling in Singapore, 1987—

In 1987, the Ministry of Education revealed that four schools—the Anglo Chinese Secondary School (ACS), St. Joseph's Institution (SJI), the Chinese High School (CHS) and Raffles Institution (RI)—would begin to function with a greater degree of independence (Singapore Government Press Release, 1987: 1). These schools would be managed by their respective Board of Governors who would, in turn, appoint and select the Principal. These schools would also have the latitude to decide on matters such as the school budget and the appointment of teachers. This emergence of independent schools within the national system of education marked the culmination of a trend towards decentralization that had been taking place throughout the 1980s. In the language of fields, this marked the beginning of the formation of an autonomous sub-field within education in Singapore.

Prior to this announcement, the Singapore government had commissioned a team of school principals to examine "high quality" schools in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The main aim of this expedition

had been to ascertain how Singapore's education system could adapt itself to better meet future needs in a rapidly shifting and globalizing world. Their analysis concluded that the continued pursuit of educational excellence within what was being called the "knowledge economy" could best be achieved by establishing schools that were largely self-governing (Gopinathan, 2001: 27; Soon, 1988: 34-35; see also Ministry of Education, 1987).

This led to a situation in which a small number of already well-established schools, four of which were mentioned at the beginning of this section, were selected to lead the way in establishing the independent school scheme. These schools were selected simply because they were accepted as 'top schools…[that] were…high achieving schools with strong school cultures' (Gopinathan, 2001: 33). Following this the government declared that only the "very best" schools could apply to go independent; the number of schools granted independence was eventually capped.

The onset of the independent school scheme was followed by a period of intense reforms to primary as well as to secondary and post-secondary education. On the one hand, the Normal (Technical) course was introduced together with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) in 1991 to cater for pupils who were less academically inclined. On the other hand, the vision of Thinking Schools, Learning Nations aimed provide pupils with 'the ability to apply knowledge and to be creative and innovative' (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2008: 127). School curricula were structured around "thinking skills" rather than the ability to recall factual knowledge. Further, information technology was infused

to encourage communication skills and collective as well as independent learning.

Ultimately however, the emergence of a diverse and multifaceted pedagogic landscape that was needed to confront the growing need for creativity, innovation and enrichment, was in fact responsible for entrenching schooling hierarchy. This was compounded by the state's gradual reduction of its budget on education and the concomitant trend toward the privatization of education in subsequent years (see Hing *et al*., 2009: 760-761). While the decentralized education system certainly offered a greater flexibility and choice, it also gave rise to an increasingly stratified educational landscape.

3.8 Conclusion

In a nutshell, this chapter has been concerned to illustrate how education has served as an important site of exclusionary practices throughout Singapore's history. This exclusion was overt in a colonial pedagogical sphere that openly circumscribed the differential privileges available to students of the various schooling streams (see Lee, 2006: 99-111). In a national education system based on the plinth of educational equality, such exclusionary practices were no longer sustainable. Still, as I have consistently argued, state-led incorporation and formal exhortations of equality do not entail the end of practices of segregation and hierarchy. In this vein, my contention was that education in Singapore during this period began to exhibit the properties of an expanded and settled Bourdieusian field. This necessitates an analysis of two processes. First how did schools in Singapore's expanded national field

of education successfully appropriate and secure recognition of their distinction? Second, how did schools successfully define and defend their monopolization of these advantages? The next two chapters in this thesis will take up each of these questions in that order.

Chapter Four – The Principles of Pedagogic Capital

'A nation is cradled in its homes, but made in its schools'
- Ong Pang Boon, Minister of Education[1]

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter 3), my primary objective was to broadly outline the historical development of the educational arena in Singapore. I showed first the formation of an educational field, characterized by a differentiated and hierarchical schooling system, which overtly privileged English-language stream schools during the colonial period. I next documented how the initiative to consolidate the sphere of education around the equality of status for schools in all language streams eventually replaced the previous pedagogical order. Significantly, I argued that this new national system of education increasingly began to take on the characteristics of an expanded and settled Bourdieusian field. In this chapter, my main aim will be to map the emergence of the different axes along which schools competed to distinguish themselves within the national educational arena, even as it was in the process of being reconfigured following the colonial period.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, I draw attention to the new nation-building role all schools were tasked to play in the postwar educational arena. This marked a clear break from schools' prior role in the colonial educational order during which they had been largely left to reproduce either different segments of the labor force or the various ethno-linguistic

[1] *The Straits Times*, 8th August 1970, 'Top Spirits and Proud Smiles Mark School Parade Despite Steady Drizzle'

communities that populated Singapore, hence maintaining the status quo. Conversely, this latest overarching imperative of nation-building would increasingly place all schools in competition for a specific form of cultural/symbolic capital: pedagogic capital. Simply put: pedagogic capital, as a form of cultural capital in the emerging field of education in Singapore between 1946-1980s, might be defined as a school's ability to cultivate members of the nation by investing the proper resources in students' development and offering them appropriate educational experiences. The display and *recognition* of this capacity would then facilitate the conversion of pedagogic capital into its field-specific form of symbolic capital. Accordingly, schools acknowledged to "hold" this symbolic capital would gain in prestige.

Still, what were the criteria that emerged to assess the distribution and recognition of pedagogic capital? In order to elucidate the specific principles involved, I examine historical representations of the Raffles Institution (RI) and the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), two schools that have been particularly successful at amassing honor in Singapore's educational arena. Drawing on my analysis of a number of public newspapers, I identify four dominant loci of practices around which representations of RI and ACS exhibit these schools' disproportionate pedagogic capital. Specifically, these are: scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, prolific and loyal alumni, as well as the capacity for civic and moral training. More importantly, I reveal that these four specific principles, more so than others, gained traction as bases of symbolic capital in Singapore's field of education because they were

congruent with broader initiatives set in motion by the state as it worked to mould a postwar and later independent "Singapore society".

4.2 Schools and Nation-Building

As I have shown in the previous chapter, most schools in Singapore during the colonial period were left largely to their own devices. Schools that received some form of aid from the colonial state usually performed basic roles such as ensuring the reproduction of certain segments of the workforce. Conversely, schools that posed a threat to the imperial order were placed under strict surveillance or, even, at times, closed down. However, the decolonization and subsequent independent periods, following the end of Second World War, brought with them 'new educational currents'[2].

As early as 1946, the recognition that schools and education policy would play an important role in shaping new collective Singaporean and Malayan identities was already palpable.[3] In this regard RI, ACS and other already established schools, began to be portrayed as sites of aspiration where future citizens of Malaya, no longer content to occupy low-level clerical and administrative positions, were encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and shape their own destinies.[4] In due time, all schools in Singapore would become positioned as frontline organizations with a vital part

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[2] *The Rafflesian*, 1967, p. 8

[3] *The Straits Times*, 25th May 1946, p. 4, 'The Malayan Melting Pot'; *The Straits Times*, 15th September 1946, p. 6, 'Thinking As Malayans'

[4] *The Singapore Free Press*, 6th September 1948, p. 5, 'ACS Expansion'; *The Singapore Free Press*, 27th February 1950, p. 5, 'Singapore Students Aim Higher'; *The Straits Times*, 7th June 1950, p. 8, 'Boys told: Shape your destiny now'

to play in constructing 'a new and virile nation struggling hard for…self-preservation, and independence'[5] (see in this regard Harp, 1998; Benei, 2008). By 1964, *The Rafflesian* printed:

> 'The part that schools have to play today is quite different in aim from that of former years. All our children in school must realize this – that where in former times [before World War Two] you would merely have been educated for a job and educated for blind obedience and passive submission, today you must be educated for greater responsibilities. These are the greater responsibilities: training for leadership, for industrial and national development and construction, training for right, independent thinking, training for self-reliance and initiative, and training for real active participation in the development of our society and country. This, therefore is the changing face of schools'[6]

Thus, this nation-building role that schools were tasked with would form the centerpiece of the educational arena in 1946-1980s Singapore. Consequently, this new pedagogical imperative would now pit schools, previously on distinct tracks, directly against one another in competition for educational stature. In spite of the fact that a number of vernacular schools resisted incorporation into this new schooling arena for some time, many established English-medium schools saw this as a direct threat to the privilege they had wielded in the colonial educational hierarchy. RI, one of the top schools in that order, best articulates the growing awareness of this changing educational landscape:

> 'Our School is now no more the unchallenged premier School in Singapore. At most it can only claim to be the best among schools of the same kind…There is, too, the added challenge of adapting ourselves to the new demands of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society'[7]

> 'Raffles Institution in the years before the war was probably the secondary school in Singapore which had the best teachers and the best students. I am sorry to say that it

[5] *The Rafflesian*, 1957/2, p. 11
[6] *The Rafflesian*, 1964, pp. 4-5
[7] *The Rafflesian*, 1959/1, Foreword (n.p.)

> no longer for the time being occupies that pre-eminent position, partly because of the rapid expansion that has taken place in our educational system…'[8]

In such an educational setting, all schools were compelled to produce, as well as to compete for, a specific form of cultural/symbolic capital: pedagogic capital. As I mentioned in the previous section, a school's pedagogic capital during this period was signified by its *recognized* capacity to cultivate members of the nation. With this in mind, we can begin to understand why RI and ACS would immediately embark on campaigns to position themselves as being archetype schools that were—and, in fact, had always been—the best equipped to fulfill this requisite:

> 'The whole process of education has [become] geared to the national need. As Rafflesians, we have…always endeavored to look beyond our books and open our minds to refreshing experiences that help to bring us a step nearer towards really educating ourselves. Physical fitness, civic consciousness, military training and patriotism, apart from being worthwhile ends unto themselves are the means to that greater end – the true Singaporean'[9]

> 'Over the past 81 years, the policy of the ACS to provide an all-round education had been productive of remarkably excellent results in the training of our students to be responsible, loyal and useful citizens and leaders of their communities…the ACS must continue to play a dynamic and constructive role in helping to build a rugged and robust society of dedicated, loyal and God-fearing people who will make a distinct contribution to the life and progress of our nation'[10]

The success of these attempts by RI and ACS to *convey* superior caliber in molding exemplar members of the nation-state were further validated by newspaper articles that began to frame these schools as part of a select group of 'schools that built [the Singapore] nation'[11]. Nevertheless, we must first uncover some of the practices by which RI and ACS were able to

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[8] *The Rafflesian*, 1969, p. 13
[9] *The Rafflesian*, 1967, p. 4
[10] *The ACS Magazine*, 1966-67, p. 2
[11] *The Straits Times*, 9th July 1978, p. 17, 'Keep the Schools that Built a Nation'

produce, accumulate as well as secure recognition of their pedagogic capital. An analysis of a number of public newspapers published during 1946-1980s—*The Straits Times*, *The Singapore Free Press*, *The Eastern Sun* and *The Malay Mail*—reveals at least four mediating principles. These are: representations of scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, prolific and loyal alumni as well as the successful capacity to discipline students along moral and civic lines. For the remainder of this chapter, I consider not only how each of these principles was constituted but also why each principle was (mis)recognized as a locus of segregation among schools in Singapore during that period.

4.3 Scholastic Achievement

One of the most frequent portrayals of RI and ACS revolves around representations of their outstanding performances in examinations: first in the Cambridge School Certificate (CSC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC), and later in the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate (GCE). Both schools also display a consistent ability to produce Queen's—and afterward, President—scholars: these scholars are the students who top the examinations each year. In this section, my concern is not so much to explicate how RI and ACS are able to produce such results. Rather, my aim is to explain why and how the *display of these specific forms of scholastic achievement* became an integral principle by which to recognize a school's pedagogic capital.

The resumption of exams in postwar Singapore displayed a remarkable continuity with the colonial period, and initially remained structured along linguistic lines. Thus, English-medium secondary schools began once again to prepare their pupils for the CSC (Tan, Chow & Goh, 2007: 64). At this early stage, the majority of, as well as the best performing, candidates were described as being from already reputed English-medium schools such as RI and ACS.[12] Further, RI in particular would display a remarkable propensity for producing Queen's Scholars. This scholarship allowed students who topped the Cambridge examinations to continue their tertiary education overseas.[13] Still, in order to understand the precise symbolic significance of these particular examination successes, we must first be cognizant of the huge increase in the demand for as well as in the supply of English-education in the immediate postwar period and its impact on the scholastic market.

The increasing demand for English-education has thus far largely been attributed to the growing clamor for employment opportunities in the postwar labor market. However, it is also crucial to note that English-education had begun to be framed as the primary vehicle through which a 'new Malayan public'[14] would be shaped, by cultivating the 'character and conduct'[15] of Malayan and Singaporean children. Hence, the English school that taught its

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[12] *The Straits Times*, 8th March 1947, p. 6, 'Cambridge Exam Results'; *The Straits Times*, 5th April 1947, p. 3, 'Cambridge Exam Successes'; *The Straits Times*, 30th November 1947, p. 3, '471 Students to Sit for Exams'

[13] *The Straits Times*, 13th May 1947, p. 5, 'Queen's Scholar Named'; *The Straits Times*, 16th November 1948, p. 6, 'Queen's Scholars since 1885 in Malaya'

[14] *The Straits Times*, 14th January 1947, p. 6, 'The New Public in Malaya'

[15] *The Straits Times*, 3rd February 1946, p. 2, 'English Education in Singapore – It's Aims and it's Spirit

students to 'become unconscious of racial differences [and] to meet on common ground' became figured in the public imaginary as the ideal 'crucible of…citizenship' and as a key site of nation-building.[16] Thus, these schools were becoming conceived of as vital sites of communion where the 'deep-horizontal comradeship' integral to Benedict Anderson's conception of the modern nation as an "imagined community" was formed (1991: 7). In this context, the portrayal of RI and ACS as English-medium schools that were at the forefront working to advance English-education by pioneering 'post-certificate classes'[17] as well as their well-publicized displays of superiority at the Anglo-centric CSC and later the HSC would position them as such crucibles of nation-building *par excellence*.[18]

In this vein, scholastic achievement in these exams by RI and ACS was no longer simply a matter of producing model students. Instead, these schools' success in English-medium examinations would become tied to the ability to produce exemplary members of a 'rising generation [ready] not only for the tasks of self-government but to think as Malayans'[19]. RI's capacity to nurture Queen's Scholars during this early period would also resonate with declarations that it was not simply content to cultivate citizens, but instead

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[16] *The Straits Times*, 25th May 1946, p. 4, 'The Malayan Melting Pot'
[17] *The Straits Times*, 15th March 1949, p. 4, 'Schools Start Post-Certificate Classes'; *The Singapore Free Press*, 10th January 1950, p. 5, 'Pupils prepared for "varsity"'
[18] See for example *The Straits Times*, 5th March 1955, p. 8, 'Cambridge Results, all the Singapore Results'; *The Straits Times*, 6th March 1956, p. 4, 'Cambridge Examinations – all the results'
[19] *The Straits Times*, 15th September 1946, p. 6, 'Thinking as Malayans'

endeavored to mould pupils for national leadership roles.[20] The analysis so far resonates with, and adds to, the findings of other works that have outlined the crucial role of the school in nation-building. For instance, Advani (2009) has similarly detailed the critical role of English education in shaping the modern Indian citizen-subject. Others have pointed to the school—in line with what I have shown above—as a key site of "civil enculturation", in contexts as diverse as Hong Kong (Matthews et al., 2008), Europe (Schiffauer et al., 2006) and the USA (Feinberg, 1998), where ethnic and cultural differences are not ignored but brought together to forge national identities and create a sense of belonging.

Next, and as I have outlined in the previous chapter, the 1960s and 1970s brought with them a centralization of the exam system as the now independent Singapore state worked to mould the population into 'well-educated, skilled and responsible citizens' (Hill & Lian, 1995: 81). This culminated in the formation of the GCE Ordinary and Advanced Level certifications; these certifications would soon become the only recognized educational qualifications on the scholastic market. As such, the overall performance in these exams would develop into a primary locus of distinction between schools as they competed for the recognition to bestow 'legitimate competence' (Bourdieu, 1993: 82) on their pupils. Therefore, recurrent representations of RI and ACS as part of a group of schools that consistently

[20] *The Straits Times*, 8th June 1950, p. 9, 'Their aim: To Train Leaders'

'dominated [these] examination results and performances'[21] and often constituted a 'keen rivalry'[22] for top position worked in no small part to accrue pedagogic capital to these schools.[23] This is because the consistent capacity for scholastic achievement would signal that RI and ACS were institutions able to confer on a majority of their students a proper educational experience that would allow them to excel not only in school, but also later on in the society. One of the main ways this link would be fashioned was between these schools and the civil service: many graduates from these schools, selected on merit, got top positions in its upper echelons.

Articles regularly highlighting RI's and ACS's inclusion among schools that demonstrated the consistent ability to produce President Scholars—the new epitome of educational excellence—would thus also play an important part in focusing the recognition of pedagogic capital in these two schools.[24] President Scholars were described as the 'best of our youth'[25] and would often go on to occupy top positions in government as well as in the expanding civil service. Therefore, perceptions of the close correspondence between schooling at RI

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[21] *The Straits Times*, 3rd March 1967, p. 1, 'Highest Passes to Raffles Girls'; *The Straits Times* 4th March 1967, p. 5, 'First Five Positions in Exams Go to Boys'

[22] *The Straits Times*, 13th March 1963, p. 16, 'Sons of a Professor and a Taxi Driver Top Cambridge Exam List'

[23] See also for example *The Straits Times*, 23rd February 1977, p. 9, 'ACS student scores 8P1s in exam'; *The Straits Times*, 8th March 1970, p. 12, 'Three from Raffles top HSC exam'

[24] *The Straits Times*, 24th April 1966, p. 1, 'Nine Top Pupils Receive the President Scholarship'; *The Straits Times*, 5th June 1974, p. 7, '8 President Scholars this Year'; *The Straits Times*, 1st July 1975, p. 11, 'Seven New President Scholars'; *The Straits Times*, 9th March 1983, p. 40, 'Meet the Top 13'

[25] *The Straits Times*, 2nd July 1974, p. 25, '8 President Scholars this Year'

and ACS and eventual membership in the Singapore 'state nobility' (see Bourdieu, 1996) would slowly begin to congeal. Accordingly, these schools would eventually become recognized within society and by the state as the best ones in terms of offering institutionalized criteria of evaluation through assessments and exams.

Of course, as I have detailed in the previous chapter, this is not to suggest that the conditions that unevenly facilitated the recognition of RI's and ACS's scholastic achievement as pedagogic capital were uncontested – far from it (see section 3.5). At this point, it will be instructive to see how some of these contestations were played out in the representational medium of the public newspapers. For example, a *Straits Times* article in 1969 describes how the introduction of second-language as a compulsory subject in the GCE examinations as part of the policy of bilingualism compromised RI's overall results.[26] However, this concession in scholastic achievement is framed as a 'sacrifice' that, if anything, demonstrates RI's support for a state policy that purports to play a key role in nation-building. Further, RI's top students for that year are represented as willing to bear the academic anguish of not performing as well as they should have because of their support for bilingualism. Thus, RI is represented as having the capacity to nurture student-citizens ready to incorporate the necessary, often painful, transformations and transitions that accompany nation-building.

[26] *The Straits Times*, 19th March 1969, p. 4, 'Top Five's Sacrifice—for Bi-lingualism"

Another article around the same period begins an inquiry into the academic standards of schools that usually perform well in examinations such as ACS and wonders if they are, in fact, falling.[27] Eventually by the 1980s, reports of 'lesser known schools sharing the limelight with high flying schools' even as the schools like RI and ACS continued to produce 'their usual handful of top students' in the GCE examinations begin to surface.[28] A simplistic reading of these articles will conclude that scholastic achievement is now no longer exclusive to schools like RI and ACS, as an increasing number of schools begin to mount competing claims for recognition of their own ability to produce the top national students. However, a closer reading might allow us to conclude just the opposite.

While more schools are indeed sharing the fame of scholastic success, schools are still labeled with ascribed identities of either 'lesser known' or 'high flying' with regards to academic achievement; moreover, it is already a preconceived notion that RI and ACS will and should produce their 'usual' top students. Thus, even counterintuitive representations that seem to challenge of RI's and ACS's monopoly of scholastic achievement can work to implicitly reinforce the recognition of these schools' pedagogic capital. Indeed, a reputation of excellence does not happen overnight, but is one that has been accumulated over time. Most importantly however, by this time, it had become

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[27] *The Straits Times*, 15th March 1970, p. 3, 'Fewer S'pore HCS Passes this Year'; see also *The Straits Times*, 13th May 1984, p. 19, 'Have Standards in Mission-Schools dropped?'

[28] *The Straits Times*, 4th March 1981, p. 6, 'Lesser Known Ones Share Limelight with Top Schools'.

doxic that scholastic performance in the GCE examinations was an important principle by which to recognize a school's pedagogic capital.

4.4 Sporting Excellence

A second locus of representation concerning RI and ACS revolves around the sporting dominance exhibited by both schools. In this section, I examine how and why representations of superior performance in sports became a key principle by which to *recognize* a school's pedagogic capital.

Almost immediately after the war, inter-school sporting competitions would resume.[29] These events, however, were initially hindered by a lack of suitable venues and facilities as well as a shortage of participants, and would often involve only schools already established in that particular sport (see also Horton, 2003).[30] Still, from early on, there was already a conspicuous attempt to get more schools involved in the various competitions. One prolific example of this was the then Director of Education J.B. Neilson's appeal for more vernacular schools to participate in sports meets held by the English-medium schools.[31] By 1949, the sports scene in Singapore was abuzz with a 'new spirit of enthusiasm' as various sports gained in popularity[32] and an ever

[29] See for example *The Straits Times*, 28th December 1946, p.9, 'Singapore Chinese Swimming Club Aquatic Championships'; *The Straits Times*, 26th July 1947, p. 12, 'Singapore Joint School Sports'; *The Straits Times*, 15th February 1948, p. 11, 'First RCU Post-war Athletics'

[30] *The Straits Times*, 20th December 1947, p. 11, 'Shortage of Suitable School Grounds Hamper Sporting Activity'; *The Straits Times*, 27th June 1948, p. 11, STTA Tourney Starts Thursday'

[31] *The Straits Times*, 26th July 1947, p. 12, 'S'pore Joint School Sports'

[32] *The Straits Times*, 16th October 1948, p.4, 'Rugby Gains Popularity in Schools'; *The Straits Times*, 26th October 1949, p.12 'Hockey Plans for

'increasing number of schoolboys…[participated] in their schools' events'[33]. Finally, in the late 1950s, as calls for even more schools to participate in inter-school sports increased[34], the recognition that contests between schools for sports titles had also become competitions for status began to materialize.[35]

These initial attempts to encourage sport by the postwar colonial state in Singapore can best be understood only when we consider that sports and sporting culture played essential roles in European and, more specifically, British identity formation (see for example Holt, 1992; Holt & Mason, 2000; Mangan, 2000a). It was thus along these lines that sport came to be seen not only as a cornerstone of the British Empire but also as a means by which to eventually 'emancipat[e] the subject nations from tutelage' (Perkin, 1992: 211; see also Guttman, 2005). Sport was perceived by the British to be a key conduit of elite virtues such as 'self-confidence, self-reliance, leadership, team spirit, and loyalty to comrades' (Perkin, 1992: 213); although these dispositions was initially thought vital to produce governable colonial subjects, they were later framed as being integral towards facilitating the smooth transition of colonies to independence. The corresponding focus on the school as a key site at which these dispositions could be cultivated—a focus that would later be mirrored by the postcolonial leaders—is also of little surprise,

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Schools Welcomed'; *The Singapore Free Press*, 1st March 1950, p. 10, 'More Colony Schools Take Up Basketball'

[33] *The Straits Times*, 31st December 1949, p. 11, '1949: A Big Year for Sport'

[34] See for example *The Straits Times*, 18th July 1956, p. 16, 'School Tennis has Been a Success'; *The Straits Times*, 15th September 1956, p. 16, 'New Plan to Win Elusive Blues Cup'; *The Singapore Free Press*, 19th April 1960, p. 11, 'Give All a Chance Policy For Schools'

[35] *The Straits Times*, 5th July 1955, p. 14, 'Three Teams in line for Colony Athletic Title'

given that a majority of the colonial officials and administrators were themselves imbibed with a similar ethos during their time in the various British Public Schools (see Mangan, 2000b; Schirato, 2007: 47-53).

Thus, within this expanding postwar inter-school sporting arena, RI and ACS, among other earlier established schools, would attempt to (re)instate their supremacy in various sports and games. There are numerous articles from the 1940s and 1950s announcing successful record-breaking performances and examples of 'athletic prowess'[36] by sportsmen from these schools, as well as the developing rivalry between schools in various games.[37] By the start of the 1960s, ACS was already well recognized for its dominance in athletics[38] and swimming while RI had developed a niche in rugby – although the Saint Andrew's School still dominated the sport during that period. The sporting successes of these schools are also often spectacularly described. RI and ACS were part of a group of schools that not only consistently won but also displayed an 'all round superiority'[39] and 'sweep[t] aside [their] rivals'[40].

[36] The *Straits Times*, 1st March 1952, p. 11, No Title

[37] See for example *The Straits Times*, 21st August 1948, p. 7, 'Athletic Talent in Schools is Promising'; *The Straits Times*, 27th July 1950, p. 12, 'Raffles Win Inter-School Athletics'; *The Straits Times*, 8th July 1955, p. 14, 'ACS Sets First of Six Records and Take Schools Athletic titles'

[38] See Ivan Goh (2007). *Lasting Strides: The Story of Singapore Athletics*. Singapore: Ivan Goh, p. 9.

[39] The *Straits Times*, 13th June 1963, p. 15, 'Sweep by ACS, Raffles'

[40] *The Straits Times*, 21st May 1971, p. 27, 'Mark and Bee Lian Make the Grade'

Occasionally, 'unfancied' schools did mount challenges, and, at times, succeed in unsettling the dominance of schools widely expected to win.[41] Still, the point for us here—as in the previous section on the scholastic achievement of schools—is the fact that some schools like RI and ACS were able to capture reputations for sporting excellence whereas other schools found themselves persistently framed as 'outsiders' or, even, 'no-hopers'.[42] How was this boundary maintained, in spite of these challenges? While I will address this in more detail in the next chapter, Bourdieu provides us with a cursory way to think about this for the moment with his reminder that the expansion and popularization of sport is 'necessarily accompanied by a change in the functions [and the logic]…assign[ed] to these practices' (1993: 126).

Thus, I suggest that RI's and ACS's initial successes in the sporting arena, from swimming to badminton to cricket, were more about the ability of these schools to metamorphose their pupils into *sportsmen* rather than about the sporting victories themselves. However, as the arena of sporting competition expanded, the focus shifted to a consideration of the number of titles and victories a school was able to chalk up. Still, unanticipated victories by 'unfancied' schools would not be sufficient to allow these schools to symbolically transgress on RI's and ACS's claims to sporting excellence

[41] *The Straits Times*, 8th April 1976, p. 23, 'SJI Players Weep in Defeat'; *The Straits Times*, 29th March 1977, p. 22, 'New Town in the Final'; *The Straits Times*, 9th March 1979, p. 29, 'Surprise by Jalan Lama: Their Girls Grab Three Titles'; *The Straits Times*, 31st March 1979, p. 31, 'Mei Chin Surprise'
[42] *The Straits Times*, 1st April 1971, p. 11, 'Who Says Monfort is an "Outsider" School?'; *The Straits Times*, 27th April 1973, p. 28, 'Tuan Mong Score Another Easy Win'

because these underdog schools were not able to contest RI's and ACS's capacity to produce sportsmen.

Still, what is more important for us for the purposes of this chapter is how and why a school's prominence in the inter-school sporting arena developed into a mechanism by which to *recognize* the symbolic capital of schools? To address this question, we must first determine what the value 'collectively bestowed' (Bourdieu, 1993: 124) on sports in independent Singapore was:

> 'We live an artificial city life. Too many people take the lift, briefly amble to a bus stop, and take another lift to work. Many do not make daily exercise a habit. Sports can help. Through mass sports…a keen, bright, educated people will lead better and more satisfying lives if they are fit and healthy.'[43]

The above quote encapsulates the state-led project that explicitly prioritized 'foster[ing] a healthy nation by promoting participation in sports at all levels [to] enhance the quality of life as well as contribute to nation-building' (Singapore Sports Council, 1994: 16; see also Horton, 2003: 254). This was markedly different from the earlier colonial period in which opportunities to regularly participate in sports were restricted to members of exclusive clubs (Singapore Sports Council, 1994: 15). Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the state's initiative to encourage mass participation in sports was grounded by the intention to cultivate a 'vigorous and free people'[44] as part of a productive labor force that would embrace economic growth. Such a

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[43] Speech by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of the National Stadium on 21st July 1973. Cited in Singapore Sports Council (1994). *On Track: 21 Years of the Singapore Sports Council*. Singapore: Times Editions, p. 16

[44] *The Straits Times*, 26th February 1978, p. 21, 'Sports Council is Geared to Upgrade Standards'

utilitarian approach to sport is still very much part of state rhetoric as the Singapore Sport Council Chairman stated in 1998:

> 'The role of sports in promoting certain traits—such as mental toughness in the face of adversity—cannot be underestimated. These traits in turn give us that competitive edge in economic development.'[45]

This state attempt at social engineering through an emphasis on "sports for all" would have specific implications for schools. Although physical education had played a significant role in most schools since the pre-war period (see Wee, 2010a), it was now a compulsory part of the curriculum. As I mentioned earlier, schools would once again become important sites for the expansion of sports and games (Wee, 2010b: 20).

One of the main ways would be through the proliferation of inter-school contests, as I have detailed above. Thus, dominance in inter-school sporting competitions by schools like RI and ACS positioned them as schools that flourished in nurturing not only members but *leaders* of a rising, rugged and robust nation. This coupling between schools, sports and nation was further strengthened by the call upon schools to produce sportsmen for the nation:

> 'We expect our sportsmen of tomorrow, the sportsmen who will one day represent Singapore in international meets…to come from the schools.'[46]

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[45] Singapore Sports Council Chairman Mr. Ng Ser Miang, cited in Chula, C.J. (1998). *A Nation At Play: 25 Years of the Singapore Sports Council*. Singapore: Times Editions

[46] *The Straits Times*, 1st June 1967, p. 19, 'Schools will provide sportsmen of future'; see also *The Straits Times*, 15th September 1960, p. 13, 'Sports Factory is Set Up'

In this context, newspaper articles consistently highlighted that the sportsmen and sportswomen who led RI and ACS to sporting successes were also top national sports representatives. For example, ACSian swimmers were featured as performing exceptionally well during Asian Age Group Meets while RI schoolboys formed an integral part of the Singapore 's bid for the Asian Youth Soccer Championships.[47] Further, how these athletes performed, and were perceived to perform, in these sporting events would also have implications for the international image of Singapore. In another context, O'Mahony (2006) shows how Soviet athletes projected as exemplars of *fizkultura* (a physical culture geared towards preparing young people for work and military defense) during international events played a key role in shaping foreign perceptions of social and cultural life in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Williams (2003) demonstrates that English opinions that Pakistani cricket players and umpires were rampant cheats repeatedly fuelled antagonisms and animosities between the two sides.

With this in mind, the firm intertwining of RI and ACS with national athletes who performed admirably at their respective sporting events contributed to the recognition that these schools were outclassing other schools as well as disproportionately supplying quality athletes to meet the national demand. Given the emphasis on and value ascribed to sports, this would therefore

[47] *The Straits Times*, 21st March 1971, p. 22, 'Khong Routs Alan'; *The Straits Times*, 13th June 1973, p. 20, 'Teng Chuan Wins Berth to Bangkok'; *The Straits Times*, 8th April 1970, p. 24, '3 Schoolboys in Singapore Youth Team to Manila'

result in the recognition of a concentration of symbolic capital in these schools.

4.5 Alumni

A third foundation for the recognition of RI's and ACS's pedagogic capital I have identified is embedded in representations of these schools' alumni. In this section, I contend that newspaper articles collectively portray RI and ACS "old boys" as prolific and successful members of society who continue to exhibit great loyalty both toward their alma maters as well as toward Singapore. In this way, RI and ACS are attributed indispensable nation-building roles. In addition, these schools are able to offer a durable exchange-based social network to their students who might subsequently be able to effectively mobilize elements of that group. Hence part of RI's and ACS's pedagogic capital is located these institutions' ability to produce a powerful "bonding" social capital for their students—both past and present (see, in this regard, Munn, 2000; Chen, 2008).[48]

Alumni of RI and ACS are, first and foremost, most evidently represented as being extremely successful. This success is framed along various lines. First, there are plentiful announcements of former students from these schools who have managed to secure places at prominent overseas

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[48] One of the most frequent ways this "bonding" process is represented is through the numerous "Past vs. Present" games, competitions and events organized between current students and alumni. See for example The Straits Times, 18th February 1965, p. 6, '1000 invited to Founder's Day Dinner';

universities for further study.[49] At times, alumni are presented as having overcome great obstacles and odds to do so.[50] Second, there are numerous articles extolling the alumni of these schools for their outstanding academic awards and accomplishments.[51] Often, alumni who win these honors are also often described as being the first overseas students or the first students from Singapore to do so. At a most basic level of interpretation, RI and ACS are thus figured, through their alumni, as schools at the forefront of the Singaporean endeavor to establish and distinguish itself on an international level.

Third, the alumni of these schools are portrayed as occupying prominent roles in Singapore society. Articles announce the crucial 'part played by the old boys of the Anglo-Chinese School in the public life of the Colony'[52] and the 'important part Old Rafflesians were playing in Singapore life'[53]. Specific examples of this include the appointment of old ACS boys such as Tan Chin Tuan[54] and Goh Keng Swee[55] to the post of Deputy President of the

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[49] See for example *The Straits Times*, 16th October 1947, p. 7. 'ACS Boy in the USA'; *The Straits Times*, 17th July 1950, p. 5, 'RI Old Boy's Success'; *The Straits Times*, 13th September 1961, p. 23, 'Jega Gets Offer to Study in US Varsity'; *The Straits Times*, 20th February 1985, p. 7, 'Why Rhodes Scholar is Mixing Medicine with Law'

[50] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16th September 1950, p. 1, 'Hawker Sent His Son to Varsity'

[51] *The Straits Times*, 10th May 1961, p. 7, 'Former ACS Student Wins Journalism Award in US'; *The Straits Times*, 5th August 1950, p. 5, 'UK Prize for Singapore Man'; *The Straits Times*, 18th March 1966, p. 4, 'Oxford Prize for Singapore Student'

[52] *The Straits Times*, 2nd March 1949, p. 7, 'Flying Bishop was Just in Time'

[53] *The Straits Times*, 7th June 1949, p. 7, 'A Dream Come True'

[54] *The Straits Times*, 24th June 1951, p. 4, 'Young Banker Becomes Deputy Governor'

[55] *The Straits Times*, 4th March 1958, p. 1. 'Top Job for Brilliant Dr. Goh'

Singapore Legislative Council and Economic Adviser to the Chief Minister respectively. Old Rafflesians such as Lim Boon Keng[56] and Lee Kuan Yew[57] are also positioned as alumni of RI that have had an unmistakable influence on Singapore's progress. At a more general level, there are a significant number of articles that consistently link ACS alumni with the financial sector.[58] These articles together give weight to the commonly held perception that ACS alumni are disproportionately dominant in the fiscal sector and monopolize pecuniary networks. RI alumni, on the other hand, would from early on make their appearances more closely linked to the developing state institutions. For instance, old Rafflesians were portrayed as playing significant roles and 'holding responsible positions' in the Legislative Council, Municipal Commission, Straits Settlement Civil Service and the Colonial Admin Service.[59]

Still, how might we probe deeper into the "fact" that the alumni of ACS seem to disproportionately excel in finance while a large number of old Rafflesians go on to serve in the public service. One way to address this inquiry would be to focus on how schools like ACS and RI (un)intentionally

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[56] *The Straits Times*, 22nd October 1948, p. 4, 'The Sage of Singapore'

[57] *The Straits Times*, 26th July 1965, p. 6, 'We Aim to have the Right People Succeed Us: Lee'

[58] See for example *The Straits Times*, 1st December 1948, p. 7, 'Colony Boy's High Post'; *The Straits Times*, 23rd June 1953, p. 10, 'Leaders of Business in Malaya'; *The Straits Times*, 18th May 1966, p. 10, 'Assistant Manager is Local Citizen'; *The Straits Times*, 15th April 1972, p. 22. 'Meet the People who Make the Bank Tick'; *The Straits Times*, 10th June 1980, p. 8, 'Banker Tipped to be New IBF Director'

[59] See for example *The Straits Times*, 7th June 1949, p. 7 'A Dream Come True'; *The Singapore Free Press*, 30th November 1949, p. 5, '1,500 Quizzed on Medical Plan'

cultivate particularly advantageous sets of dispositions in their students that then facilitate their dominance in the fields of finance and public service respectively (for a most recent example see Khan, 2011). This, however, will necessitate a detailed analysis of, for example, the curricula these schools provide and the social origins of students—and unfortunately falls well outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, representations of the growing presence of RI and ACS alumni within certain sectors provide valuable evidence for the argument that underlying and interlocking networks between these schools and specific occupational sectors are beginning to congeal.

Eventually, by the late 1970s, RI and ACS would achieve recognition as 'super schools': particularly, as schools that exhibited an 'elite aura' because of the reputations of past and present pupils.[60] However, the conclusion that RI and ACS "possess" this quality by tapping on the collective prestige of their alumni is still vague; at worse, it is simply tautological. Thus, it is imperative that we interrogate the exactly process by which representations of RI's and ACS's prolific alumni drive the recognition of these schools' pedagogic capital and, in so doing, set these schools apart in the emerging field of education. After all, there are a number of other schools that were just as successful in producing famous alumni but were still less successful in getting themselves recognized as "elite schools".[61]

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[60] *The Straits Times*, 18th December 1978, p. 16, 'The "Super Schools": An "Elite" Aura since its Founding'

[61] See for example *The Straits Times*, 1st April 1971, p. 11, 'Who Says Monfort is an "Outsider" School?'

With this in mind, it is my contention that the key principle that underlies the recognition of RI and ACS pedagogic capital is not merely the association of these schools with prominent alumni but also the propensity of these schools to display a capacity to cultivate alumni loyal to their alma mater and, perhaps more importantly, dedicated towards Singapore. One of the primary means by which alumni loyalty was directed was through the respective Old Boys' Associations—the Anglo-Chinese School Old Boys Association (ACSOBA) and the Old Rafflesians Association (ORA)—which were both re-established after the end of the war.[62] ACS alumni, in particular, would consistently and publicly demonstrate their continued allegiance to their alma mater through a series of donations to defray costs of a new school building during the 1950s and, later, to offset the building a new swimming pool and sports complex:

> 'Old boys [of the school] who have succeeded in life have not forgotten their alma mater. They are prepared to give of their time, money and expertise so that the school can live and grow'[63]

The ability to symbolize alumni loyalty is especially important in the historical context of nation-building because it signals the successful capacity of these schools to build communities – comprising of past and present students. The numerous articles covering the countless "Past versus Present"

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[62] *The Straits Times*, 10th February 1948, p. 2, 'S'pore Anglo-Chinese Old Boys Association'; *The Straits Times*, 3rd April 1947, p. 12, 'Raffles OBA to be revived'

[63] *The Straits Times*, 2nd March 1973, p. 7, 'Ong: Do Not Despise Manual Labour'; See also *The Straits Times*, 28th February 1956, p. 4, 'The $10, 000 Dinner' and *The Straits Times*, 2nd March 1956, p. 8, ' "Best is Yet to Be" – 70th Time'

games that ACS and RI alumni engage in with current students as well as the scores of alumni and students who attend school dinners during their respective Founder's Days provide other salient examples.

This dedication of RI and ACS alumni toward their alma maters is also entwined with multifarious descriptions detailing the unfailing commitment of these alumni to Singapore. Articles express the mandate the ORA are bestowed with to promote meritocracy by 'bring[ing] about a society based on equal opportunity'[64] while ACS alumni are characterized 'the kind of people for the Republic of Singapore who…would help to create a more just and equal society'[65]. Further, memorials to old Rafflesians who lost their lives during the two world wars are erected with the explicit intention of reminding everyone about 'the school's loyalty toward the British commonwealth…during the two world wars'[66]. In the same vein, ACS is framed as 'a certain order of knighthood' whose knights must go out and be of service to the community.[67] Ultimately, the recognition of RI and ACS pedagogic capital is attributed to representations of these schools' capacity to produce prominent members of Singapore society who are inculcated with 'loyalty first to the nation and then to [their] schools'[68].

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[64] *The Straits Times*, 18th September 1966, p. 10, 'A Classless Society—The Goal'

[65] *Eastern Sun*, 3rd March 1969, 'ACS to Introduce Technical Education'

[66] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16th June 1950, p. 5, 'Raffles War Dead are Remembered'

[67] *The Straits Times*, 2nd March 1962, p. 4, 'Banker Yap Speaks of "Knights" of Anglo-Chinese School'

[68] *The Malay Mail*, 8th August 1967, 'National Loyalty—Theme of Barker's Message at ACS'

4.6 Civic and Moral Training

A fourth locus of pedagogic capital I have identified comprises representations of a school's capacity for civic and moral training. In this section I argue that RI's and ACS's struggles and successes in these areas were framed as congruent with the broader state-led educational initiative to nurture 'loyal, patriotic, responsible and law abiding citizens' (Ong *et al.*, 1979: 3). Accordingly, this would play a significant part in the recognition of these schools' nation-building capabilities. First, I show how RI and ACS were characterized as part of a group of schools that pioneered the teaching of civics, and as central sites where 'social and moral development'[69] was taking place. Next, I examine a particular episode in the 1980s involving the ACS, in which the school was accused of producing snobs. I illustrate that the coverage of the school's subsequent "anti-snob" drive provides a clear example of how certain schools were able to cultivate an acknowledgment of their pedagogic capital along the lines of civic and moral training.

From early on, RI and ACS were positioned as part of a group of schools—which also included schools such as the Raffles Girls School (RGS) and the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ)—that included civics courses. These courses were meant to 'promote a keener interest among students in the civic affairs of [the] country' and 'give students information and general knowledge

[69] *The Straits Times*, 8th January 1976, p. 27, 'Chua: ECA Helps Development'

that [would] be of use to them when they [left] schools'.[70] RI's students, for example, were 'expected to do…fortnightly review[s] of… book[s] and jot down notes on current affairs'[71] while ACS held regular declamation contests to 'help students [learn to] use [their] future electoral rights'[72].

These plans to introduce civics took place in a context where the subject, while encouraged, was initially not considered to be a necessary part of school syllabi:

> 'Although the Education Department [has] not stipulated a civics course for…schools, headmasters [are] at liberty to make their own arrangements to give such useful training to their pupils. The promotion of a wider outlook among schoolchildren was a commendable step and we wish to encourage the heads of all schools to introduce consciousness in civics or any branch of public life'[73]

Eventually, civics training would become institutionalized in all schools by 1966 as part of the Ministry of Education's (MOE)—heir to the above mentioned Education Department—push to 'develop in our pupils a sense of social and civic responsibility' (Ong et al., 1979: 2). In this context, RI and ACS were two schools that would be commended time and again for their eminent capacity to cultivate a 'growing civic consciousness among the younger generation'[74]. For instance, ACS was praised by the Singapore Blood

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[70] *The Straits Times*, 26th January 1950, p. 5, 'Civics in Colony Schools'; See also *The Singapore Free Press*, 17th April 1950, p. 5, 'Full-Time Men Should Teach Candidates'
[71] *The Straits Times*, 26th March 1950, p. 9, 'Children are More Adept'
[72] *The Straits Times*, 4th October 1950, p. 7, 'Student's Crack at Girls Wins Him a Gold Medal'
[73] *The Singapore Free Press*, 5th November 1947, p. 5, ' Civics Course Favored for Schools'; See also *The Singapore Free Press*, 4th April 1950, p. 5, 'Civics Need Not Be Compulsory'
[74] *The Straits Times*, 13th July 1952, p. 9, 'Singapore Students Praised for Blood Donations'

Transfusion Service for its 'exemplary and splendid efforts' to get students to donate blood as part of community service.[75] RI, on the other hand, was lauded for being the 'school at the forefront'[76] of the fund-raising campaigns for the National Defense Fund and for displaying the ability to 'cultivate a certain awareness of society's problems and a grim determination to strive for solutions'[77]. Undoubtedly, these representations would facilitate the recognition of RI's and ACS's claim to pedagogic capital.

The teaching of ethics and morals was incorporated from an earlier stage as the MOE in 1959:

> '[P]ublished a syllabus for the teaching of Ethics in primary and secondary schools [with] [t]he objective of…inculcat[ing] in the pupils ethical values such as politeness, honesty, perseverance and kindness…to lay the foundation for character development in young children so that they would develop into self-respecting individuals and good citizens' (Ong *et al.*, 1979: 2)

Since then, the teaching of ethics remained a component in both government and aided schools (Doraisamy, 1969: 57), the most recent curriculum revamp coming in 1979 with the publication of the *Report on Moral Education*. With this in mind, it will be instructive to consider an incident in the 1980s during which the snobbish behavior of ACS's pupils made headlines. This accusation was especially poignant given ACS's reputation as a mission-school that emphasized a religiously based approach to moral teachings and character development. Still, what is interesting for us here will be to scrutinize how ACS

[75] Ibid.
[76] *The Straits Times*, 27th April 1968, p. 5, 'Spirit That Money Cannot Buy'
[77] *The Straits Times*, 29th April 1968, p. 4, 'MP Lauds RI Students for "Right Response"'

was represented as confronting this issue as well as its ensuing strategies to preserve, and, I argue, further augment its claims to pedagogic capital.

The allegations that ACS had acquired a name for being a 'snob school'[78] find their clearest expression in newspaper reports that describe Dr. Tony Tan's, the then Senior Minister of State for Education, Founder's Day address to the school. This portrayal bears citing at some length:

> 'Anglo-Chinese School would have failed in its role as an educational institution if it does not correct the social snobbery existing among its students…the prevalence of snobbery is a social disease in Singapore…as a Christian institution, it should try to sow moral values in the children under its charge…[However] [o]ver the years, the emphasis in ACS has been the number of scholarships won, the number of wealthy and successful graduates it has produced, and the grandiose and luxurious school facilities available…all these have overlaid the school's Christian commitment and it is not easy to differentiate between the aims of ACS and those of a good government school…'[79]

The above quote is worth sustained analysis. First, snobbery in schools is framed as a symptom of a "disease" that threatens a Singaporean social fabric grappling with the increasingly pervasive emphasis on material success. The "at risk" segment of the population is an emerging affluent class. ACS is thus positioned as a school very much caught up in these tensions of nation-building during this period precisely because a significant proportion of its pupils hail from this class. On the one hand, the school is lauded because of its reputation as an exemplar institution that has been integral to national development and prosperity through, for example, its affiliation with wealthy and successful members of society. Simultaneously however, there is an

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[78] *The Straits Times*, 25th May 1980, p. 1, 'Dr. Goh Defends Slow Learners'

[79] *The Straits Times*, 2nd March 1980, p. 5, 'Out With This Snobbery'; *The Straits Times*, 3rd March 1980, p. 10, 'Those Snobs Among ACS Boys'

expectation that ACS's "Christian commitment"—that is, for example, the Christian values of humility and sincerity—would serve as a ballast to withstand the negative effects that come with increasing industrialization and economic growth. In fact, it is clear that this element is integral in order for ACS to be distinguished from a "good government school"; once this aspect is compromised, ACS's distinctiveness becomes blurred.

This idea that ACS, as a mission-school, should have excelled in cultivating moral attitudes and behaviors in its pupils is not at all surprising. Yet, what is intriguing for us is how this impression was salvaged in a context in which the *Report on Moral Education* was 'not able to establish any clear differences' between the moral attitudes of students in mission-schools and non mission-schools and proposed an entire overhaul of the teaching of values (1979: 7-8) Here, I find that one of the main ways recognition of ACS's distinct capability to inculcate moral and civic values was reinforced was through depictions that focused on the *recuperation* of this capacity. As such, representations of ACS's response to its positioning at the heart of the 'snobbery controversy' are must be closely examined.[80]

Almost immediately—within the same month the accusations were leveled—an announcement was made that ACS would embark on a series of new measures as part of an 'anti-snob drive'.[81] During this period forum letters were published emphasizing that ACS imbibed its students with 'intangibles

[80] *The Straits Times*, 8th March 1980, p. 1, 'Anti-snob drive by ACS—the details'
[81] Ibid.

that shaped character' such as 'perseverance, helpfulness [and] integrity…not the vulgar display of wealth and its appurtenances, practiced by and handful of pampered brats who tarnish the school's good reputation'.[82] Other measures employed included a proposed substitution of ACS's existing civics program with a Bible-based curriculum of Religious Knowledge in an attempt to 'stamp out' social snobbery.[83]

As a result of these measure and less than a year after the accusations were made, ACS was re-diagnosed by the MOE and it was announced on the front page of the newspapers that the school had been conferred a "clean bill of health". The Ministry also concluded that there was now 'little flaunting of wealth' in ACS and that the school would continue to 'inculcate values and attitudes consistent with [Singapore] society'.[84] Thus:

> '[MOE] is satisfied that the ACS has done a good job in fighting snobbery, and so has given the green light for the schools to proceed with developmental projects…before the four Anglo-Chinese schools [had successfully implemented its] anti-snobbery measures, the Ministry had withheld assistance from them.'[85]

The implication here is that a school's, and by extension a nation's, progress and advancement can only best continue when it is firmly grounded in a set of core values. In this same vein, other newspaper articles would consistently make repeated references not only to ACS's ability to cultivate moral Singaporeans, but also describe the school's concerted attempts to ground

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[82] *The Straits Times*, 15th March 1980, p. 18, 'Taught Values That Shaped Character'
[83] *The Straits Times*, 26th June 1980, p. 12, 'Back to the Bible'; See also *Straits Times*, June 24th 1980, 'ACS's Bid to Snuff Out Snobbery'
[84] *The Straits Times*, 6th November 1980, p.1, 'Snobbery: ACS Gets A Clean Bill of Health'
[85] Ibid.

itself in service to the community—still, the specter of snobbery is constantly invoked and suggests that ACS's effort to reconstitute its pedagogic capital was always, at best, a work-in-progress.[86] This reflected the school's battle to maintain its preeminent position within the Bourdieusian field of education.

Ultimately, RI's and ACS's pedagogic capital along the lines of moral and civic training was recognized because they were figured as exemplar 'guardians of national character' (Gopinathan, 1980: 174) that buttressed "Singaporean society" against the vicissitudes of growth and development.

<u>4.7 Conclusion</u>

In this chapter, my primary objective was to attempt to map out the emergence of difference axes along which schools in Singapore's expanded and settling field of education competed for distinction from 1946 to the 1980s. I argued that this competition for distinction was oriented around a key form of cultural/symbolic capital: pedagogic capital. Specifically, the distribution and recognition of pedagogic capital during this period was based on a school's ability to signal its competence in producing exemplary members of the nation. Through an analysis of newspaper representations of RI and ACS, I shed light on four important loci that structured these schools' attempts to display their capacity to cultivate *model* members of the nation: scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, prolific and loyal alumni, and finally the aptitude for civic and moral training. Finally, I showed that the successful conversion of each of these loci to field-specific symbolic capital

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[86] See for example *The Straits Times*, 21st January 1986, p. 15, 'ACS in Operation Clean-Up'

was integrally tied to its congruence with broader, often state-led, initiatives at nation-building.

Chapter Five – Defending Distinction

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I showed that the sweeping post-war injunction for education in Singapore to spearhead nation-building would orient recognition of a school's pedagogic aptitude, first and foremost, in this direction. Hence, a number of schools during this period would compete to display their capacity to mould members of the new nation. Drawing on newspaper representations of two schools—RI and ACS—that were portrayed as particularly triumphant in this regard, I revealed four key principles that mediated the *recognition* of a school's pedagogic ability: scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, the association with prolific and loyal alumni as well as the school's capacity for civic and moral training. Further, I illustrated how each of these principles of distinction between schools congealed, closely entwined with broader state-led initiatives, to constitute Singapore's educational arena during this period as an expanded and settling Bourdieusian field.

Still, the constellation of tropes I identified as being integral to discerning distinction among schools during this period is only part of the picture. I have also shown that it was patently not the case that schools like RI and ACS simply enjoyed an unchallenged dominance. Rather, RI and ACS faced increasing competition for distinction from other schools, and periods of inconsistent if not declining performance that threatened to compromise recognition of their eminence. Still, a puzzle remains: in spite of these

challenges, frequent acknowledgement of RI's and ACS's continued distinction as elite schools persisted. With this in mind, the following question becomes pertinent. How did these schools successfully preserve their status in spite of these exigencies? In this chapter, I argue that one of the ways RI and ACS accomplished this was to discursively define and defend themselves as bearers of *legitimate distinction* within Singapore's educational arena. They would do so by incorporating particular ideas about distinction into the field of education.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I highlight the critical role discourse plays in shaping classification contests among actors all seeking recognition of their symbolic capital within a circumscribed space of competition. Next, reading a series of RI and ACS annual magazines and focusing on these schools' descriptions of their performances in scholastic and sporting matters, I disentangle three characterizations of distinction these schools discursively constructed in order to set themselves apart. Specifically, by variously articulating their status as elite schools as premised on "dominance", "ethos" and "determination", I show how RI and ACS engaged and attempted to resolve a fundamental tension between equality and distinction that underwrote the formation of the national schooling landscape. Consequently, I suggest that this was an important reason why they were able to safeguard recognition of their educational prestige during this period.

5.2 Defining Distinction

In the previous chapter, I assembled four principles along which the recognition of RI's and ACS's superior pedagogic capacity in the national arena of education was structured. My main objective here was to outline some of the main stakes all schools incorporated into this new consolidated educational arena—tacitly or not—would have to compete for in order to (re)establish themselves. The identification of these principles also formed an important part of my attempt to theorize Singapore's educational arena during the 1940s-1980s as a symbolically mediated space of competition among schools – most usefully scrutinized through Bourdieu's concept of the field.

At the core of the Bourdieusian field, settled or not, is the axiom that all actors will consistently pursue recognition of their possession of symbolic capital (see Steinmetz, 2006; see also Steinmetz, 2007; Steinmetz, 2008). This is then a useful conceptual standpoint from which to try and explain my empirical observation that RI and ACS were largely able to maintain their distinction as elite schools in spite of threats and challenges. In this regard, one of the main ways actors insist on recognition of their symbolic capital is by producing discursive representations of their practices and performances. Thus, we must examine the role of discourse in the struggle for distinction within fields (see for example Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002: 72-73). A focus on the discursive aspects of a field is critical to understanding the struggle to continually 're-contextualize' (see van Leeuwen, 2009) and re-define prestige.

At this point, we also need to try and engage the question of *why* certain descriptions of distinction would be taken up more successfully than others. This is something that a Bourdieusian approach is less helpful with:

> 'Bourdieu's theory is best equipped to account for the workings of consolidated, settled fields, but its analysis of the origins of or substantive contents of any given "settlement" is less compelling. At best, it indicates what kinds of ideological framing are likely to be directed at practices and perceptions whose distinction is already being promoted. It points to the general kinds of arguments that will be mobilized by anyone trying to control a field. But Bourdieu cannot explain *why certain definitions of distinction will be more successful than others*' (Steinmetz, 2005: 290, emphasis mine)

To begin to address this limitation, I suggest that we turn our attention to what Collins has called 'the missing contradiction' in Bourdieu's work (Collins, 1993: 126-128). This contradiction finds itself manifested within the sphere of education—exemplified in the formation of the educational arena in Singapore—as the 'dilemma [between]…profess[ing] egalitarian ideals while rationing class privilege' (Collins, 1993: 128). With this in mind, the plight of schools like RI and ACS within Singapore's national arena of education between 1940s-1980s illustrates this predicament. These schools had managed to establish recognition of a distinctive status in the colonial pedagogical order but now had to come to terms with a latest injunction of equality that structured the national arena of education. In this chapter, I will present three examples by which RI and ACS attempted to insist on their educational prestige as elite schools by discursively engaging this tension between equality and distinction. In each case, I suggest that these attempts were particularly efficacious because they seemed to convincingly resolve this tension.

5.3 Distinction as Dominance

In the immediate post-war period, one of the most striking ways RI and ACS articulated their various achievements in the educational arena was the almost fervent emphasis on how overwhelming these successes were. For instance, the scholastic results achieved by these schools in the CSC and HSC examinations were framed as 'brilliant'[87], 'marvelous'[88] or even 'phenomenal'[89] achievements. Further, these schools would often go into great detail when describing the scope and the extent of their dominance:

> 'In the [CSC] Examination of 1962, [ACS] scored a record breaking high percentage of 98.4%—among the highest in Singapore…To cap it all, the school produced the two joint top boys in Singapore and Malaya…both of whom scored 8 distinctions. The results of the Higher School Certificate Examinations were equally worthy of note. Our students scored the highest percentage of passes in the whole of Singapore—73.44%...So exceptional were the HSC results that 11 of the top scholars were awarded Singapore Government Scholarships which are tenable in foreign universities.'[90]
>
> '[RI] work[s] for the highest academic levels comparable to any school of a similar category in any part of the world…Perhaps the most gratifying factor of our achievements in the Higher School Certificate Examination is the large number of Scholarships we have been able to win for the school. Out of the 30 Colombo Plan Scholarships offered to [HSC] students, we won 10 scholarships…2 students won Japanese Government Scholarships and 1 student won a Shell Scholarship…22 of our students were able to gain admission to the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Singapore and this I think constitutes a record.'[91]

The issue for us here should not simply be why RI and ACS went to such extents to display their superiority. After all, every school emphasizes—and, often, exaggerates—its accomplishments. Further, this is to be expected more so in texts such as annual magazines that are produced and published by the

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[87] *The Rafflesian*, 1958/2: 3
[88] *The Rafflesian*, 1958/2: 4
[89] *The ACS Magazine*, 1962-63: 1
[90] *The ACS Magazine*, 1962-63: 3
[91] *The Rafflesian*, 1964: 12

schools themselves. Instead, the question we should ask is why RI and ACS attempted to display such tremendous superiority during a period where the emphasis in the educational arena was explicitly on ascribing equal status to all schools? This emphasis finds its clearest expression in the recommendations of the *All-Party Report on Chinese Education*:

> '[A]n educational advisory council in which the interests of *various types* of schools will be given adequate representation should be established in a new education ordinance as set out in one of the recommendations…That an assurance should be categorically given by government that from henceforth there will be *equal treatment* for all schools.' (1956: 5, emphases mine)

These recommendations of the All-Party Report, subsequently ratified by the *White Paper on Education Policy*, established a national arena of education based on a fundamental tension between dissimilarity and equality. In other words, schools from the different linguistic streams would continue to be recognized as distinctive; however, the colonial ascription of a hierarchical 'mutual exclusiveness between the [English and vernacular] streams of education' (1956: 47) that positioned English-stream schools at the top of the educational order was dissolved in favor of "equal treatment". The consequences of this push towards surmounting the overtly differential treatment of schools have often been analyzed with respect to vernacular education—most of all, trained on the responses and reactions of the Chinese schools. Less attention however has been paid to the implications of this loss of exclusivity for English-steams schools like RI and ACS since the consensus is that most of these schools appear to have largely retained their earlier status, even in the face of these educational vicissitudes. Hence, a second question emerges: how have these schools managed to do so?

At this point, it is tempting to conclude that English-stream schools like RI and ACS must have defended their distinction in the face of this "enforced equality" by simply insisting on the recognition of their continuing supremacy. However, given that all schools were now compelled to work within this new terrain of egalitarianism, I contend that RI and ACS would have to also reconfigure what exactly distinction in this new educational arena meant. Accordingly, they would emphasize that distinction did not inhere in the schools themselves but rather in a school's capacity to achieve convincingly dominant performances. Thus, the flamboyant descriptions of scholastic achievement at the start of this section were similarly mirrored in ACS's articulations of its sporting successes during this period:

> 'The [ACS] has *never before displayed so much of its power and glory as was displayed on that final day of the Inter-School Championships this year*. Our athletes were *simply magnificent*. Out of the 21 championship events we collected points from 20 events and were first in 15 events. We were 94 points ahead of [SJI] who were runners-up.'[92]

> 'Our swimmers have also been equally outstanding…the School swimmers and water-polo players showed themselves to be *superior to anything the Federation school boys could produce*…We again proved supreme in the District Swimming Championship when we took top places in all divisions…The standard of cricket is as high as ever. The School team *swept aside all opposition* to with the District Championship, while 9 of the 11 players in the District team…were from ACS. The School team proved once again that ACS is the leading cricketing school in Singapore when it won the Premier League Cricket Championship.'[93]

These articulations of dominance did not function in a vacuum but also implicitly attempted to transpose a post-colonial continuity in eminence. Thus, descriptions of standards "as high as ever" and the establishment "once again" of superiority draw attention to ACS's long history of disproportionate

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[92] *The ACS Magazine*, 1957-58: 64, emphases mine
[93] *The ACS Magazine*, 1962-63: 3, emphases mine

resources and advantages. Further, my reading of these descriptions of ACS's 'Golden Age of Athletics'[94], supremacy in swimming and reign as the "leading cricket school" as strategic attempts to re-inscribe distinction through dominant performance gains traction when we consider RI's depictions of its own 'modest'[95] sporting successes during this period:

> '[RI's] school teams, in general, fared somewhat better against other school teams…*but in none of these games activities could the school have been described as the "Champion School*"…The Rugger side, though still unable to beat their greatest rivals, were more than a match for other school sides…the Soccer side did not fare very well but *the Basketball team developed into one of the best school teams in Singapore*.'[96]

> 'School games were not neglected…Rugger has come to stay and the keen interest shown in it augurs well for the season…[the school teams] had their measure of successes although [they] were unable to defeat their greatest rivals…In swimming *there were no spectacular achievements* but we managed to hold our own in the various competitions.'[97]

> 'In reviewing our efforts and achievements in athletics this year, *we cannot claim to have been anywhere near the forefront* of inter-school athletics—we did not have the necessary star performers to bring it in the points.'[98]

Here, while RI articulates the capacity to achieve a certain respectable degree of success, the concomitant stress on its shortage of "spectacular" results or its lack of ability to be at the "forefront" of the sporting arena provides further evidence that the capacity to display dominant performances was an important criteria for schools like RI and ACS that were defending their status as elite schools during this period.

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[94] See *The ACS Magazine*, 1957-58: 61; *The ACS Magazine*, 1961-62: 51
[95] *The Rafflesian*, 1956(2): 36
[96] *The Rafflesian*, 1956(2): 6-7, emphases mine
[97] *The Rafflesian*, 1957 (2): 7-8
[98] *The Rafflesian*, 1958(2): 44

Still, the concentration of dominant performances in the hands of some schools ostensibly threatened to undermine the founding fiction of equality that underwrote the formation of the national arena of education. How did RI and ACS continue to defend dominant performances as a legitimate criterion to assess distinction? Consider RI's description of what the school describes as one of its more "convincing" sporting victories:

> 'At last [RI] rugby team has, after some years, succeeded in dethroning the champions, St. Andrew's School (SAS). A year ago, no one who knew anything about rugby would ever have ventured to speculate on the defeat of the Saints and, least of all, on the ability of [RI] to perform that feat. Yet Rafflesians lived up to their motto when…[they] scored a convincing defeat over [SAS]…They had striven hard for the sake of their school and had once again done justice to the name of [RI].'[99]

ACS's acknowledgements that it regularly "shared" sporting glory with the Chinese High School (CHS) can also be positioned in the same vein:

> 'In sports, our banner has been kept flying in the District and Inter-District Sports, where our athletes have indeed put up commendable performances. *We shared honours with the Chinese High School as the best in athletics in the Bukit Timah District, and therefore in all Singapore*…'[100]

> 'In the sports field, we continue to show our supremacy. In the Inter-district Athletics Competition *our school shared honours with the Chinese High School* in winning the District Championship.'[101]

These excerpts may seem peculiar, at first glance. After all, why would RI admit that it had struggled for so many years to wrest the rugby title away from SAS? Would this not compromise constructions of its own capacity for sporting supremacy? Similarly, why would ACS disclose sharing honors in athletics with CHS even as the school inscribed onto itself the distinction of

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[99] *The Rafflesian*, 1957(2): 28
[100] *The ACS Magazine*, 1959-60: 4, emphasis mine
[101] *The ACS Magazine*, 1960-61: 5

being the best in the nation? In each case, these discursive moves have a specific purpose: they attempt to elide the tension between equality and distinction in the newly formed educational arena and in doing so strengthen RI's and ACS's discursive framings of the capacity for dominant performance as a legitimate criterion for educational prestige.

Thus, RI's victory against the "champion school" contributes to the recognition of its status as legitimate because it is an achievement against the odds rather than because of some pre-determined advantages. In this way, RI's discourse engages the trope of equality between all schools, emphasizing that its position at the top of the sporting hierarchy for the year is based on dominant performance. Similarly, ACS's inscription of equivalence between itself and CHS is an attempt to demonstrate that all schools, regardless of language-stream, have the capacity for dominance and that excellence is no longer exclusive to a pre-ordained set of schools. Therefore, ACS and RI stress that what defines them as elite schools is their capacity not only for dominant performance but their capacity to build reputations along these lines:

> '[RI's] recurring achievements at examinations are now taking the stature of another tradition…it should not be difficult to maintain the "habit" of achieving outstanding results in academic and non-academic fields.'[102]
>
> 'The record with which the [ACS] Singapore has steadily built up had become so phenomenal…'[103]
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> 'For the sixth time in the past six years, our School has shown that she can jump higher and run faster than the other schools in Singapore'[104]

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[102] *The Rafflesian*, 1956/2: Editorial (n.p.)
[103] *The ACS Magazine*, 1962-63: 1
[104] *The ACS Magazine*, 1957-58: 5

Nevertheless, the criterion of capacity for dominant performance as a marker of distinction would no longer be sufficient as ACS and RI began to face a period of diminishing results.

5.4 Distinction as (Sporting) Ethos

The next discursive strategy employed by schools attempting to safeguard recognition of their distinction as elite schools must be understood as a response to the—often, equally well-publicized—experience of *declining performance*. In this section, I specifically examine ACS's acknowledgement of its falling sporting accomplishments during the mid and late 1960s and descriptions of its later "recovery" in these contests. I demonstrate how ACS discursively divided its sporting performance from a characteristic sporting ethos during this period. The school's emphasis that this distinctive ethos was uncompromised during periods of falling results and was, in fact, integral to its re-emergence as a sporting powerhouse is key to understanding how schools like ACS were able to preserve their status as elite schools in the face of declining performances.

As I showed in the previous section, one of the strategies ACS utilized to preserve its standing in the face of changes in the educational landscape was to repeatedly valorize its capacity for dominance performances. However, in the mid and late 1960s, discernible shifts begins to take place:

> 'Impressive as these results may be, they are not our utmost – we can certainly do better! They are, however, of service, as incentives to inspire us to new landmarks.'[105]

> 'We should not rest on our past laurels but should, instead, strive for ever greater heights.'[106]

> 'These results may seem impressive but they are by far not our best for we can do much better. They act as an incentive and as a reminder that the best is yet to be.'[107]

> 'Teachers too often prod their students to strive for the best possible [results] as if these are the end-all and be-all of education. How often in [this] pursuit…have we failed to grasp the wonderful opportunities of building and strengthening one's character, and the importance of training in social responsibilities, fair play, sportsmanship and espirit-de-corps, as well as the pursuit of things beautiful and truthful.'[108]

Although these excerpts continue to highlight ACS's solid performances, it is clear that their intentions are no longer simply limited to exhorting the school's capacity for achievement. Instead, there is now the additional emphasis on the need to strive: not only to maintain and improve on a high standard of performance but also in the pursuit of more intangible goals like cultivating "sportsmanship" and "esprit de corps". How might we explain this shift in orientation? I suggest that the increasing frequency of 'slight drop[s]' and a 'noticeable fall[s]' in ACS's results during this period provides an important clue.[109] This is most clearly seen in the school's descriptions of its sporting performance.

By the mid-1960s, ACS had become 'famous for its accomplishments as a sporting body'[110]. However, by this time, there was also a resignation that this period was 'the last of the Great Days in which ACS was the dominating

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[105] *The ACS Magazine*, 1965-66: 6
[106] *The ACS Magazine*, 1966-67: 8
[107] *The ACS Magazine*, 1967-68: 26
[108] *The ACS Magazine*, 1969-70: 2
[109] *The ACS Magazine*, 1969-70: 4
[110] *The ACS Magazine*, 1963-64: 4

power'[111] in the sporting arena. The onset of these anxieties can be traced both to ACS's perceptions of its 'loss of top-flight athletes'[112] as well as the concurrent onset of 'strong competition'[113] from other schools. Thus, in spite of consistently credible performances in its forte sports of athletics, badminton and swimming, ACS's discourse begins to vacillate between emphasizing the 'promise' of upcoming supremacy and the acceptance of 'very bleak' sporting future.[114] By the late 1960s, a firm awareness that the school's capacity for dominance in the sporting arena was under threat had taken root:

> 'Our supremacy in sports is faltering through we are still the A division champions in the Bukit Timah District and the 9th Combined School Athletics Championships. This is because of the poor performance of the B and C division athletes…In badminton, our team unfortunately lost to Whitley Secondary School in the Bukit Timah District Finals but managed to emerge champions in the Inter-District Tournament…Our high point, however is swimming. We have a team of extremely high quality and unprecedented standard. Seven of our swimmers have represented the state and won international honours meet held in Singapore and elsewhere…We have no rivals in Singapore Schools for some time now: we must aim for higher standards, up to the Olympic Games.'[115]

> 'This year has not been encouraging for ACS in the field of sports and games. We take pride that we are the Schools National Champions in Tennis and Swimming…We look, however, in despair at the Football, Basketball, Volleyball and Athletics teams for finishing poorly in their competitions. It is hoped that the younger students will realize that only through specialization can the quality of their ability in a game be raised, and when this happens, it will not be long before ACS makes its mark in sports again. There is still a note of satisfaction. *The spirit of true ACSian sportsmanship has not been lost through matches won or lost*. We have continued to play the game. May we strive harder in the future.'[116]

The emergence of this latest emphasis to "aim" and "strive" for greater success can thus be understood as a response to surmount the anxieties that falling performances brought with them. This is clear when even a sport like

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[111] *The ACS Magazine*, 1963-64: 88
[112] *The ACS Magazine*, 1963-64: 4
[113] *The ACS Magazine*, 1965-1966: 4
[114] *The ACS Magazine*, 1963-64: 4, 88.
[115] *The ACS Magazine*, 1967-68: 26
[116] *The ACS Magazine*, 1969: 4, emphasis mine

swimming, where ACS enjoyed an unrivalled dominance, was not exempt from repeated injunctions to outdo its already "high quality" and "unprecedented standard". Still, what is more significant during this period is the revelation of a "true ACSian sportsmanship". This would mark the discursive emphasis by the school to disentangle and purposefully *reveal* a distinctive ethos underlying sporting performance:

> 'In the final analysis it is not winning that matters although this could be developed into a very pleasing habit. In essence it is participation at the different levels – Schools, district, combined Schools and National. By our participation we develop the qualities of sportsmanship and citizenship so essential in forging our national identity and even if we did not win, we still could have gained qualities that would eventually make us better citizens.'[117]
>
> 'In the arena of sports…we should not be carried away with the idea of winning honours all the time. We should participate in competition with the true spirit of sportsmanship.'[118]
>
> 'Victory on the sports field is desirable, but how it is celebrated in school, the spirit in which the prize is received, and the way in which our pride, justifiable or otherwise, is expressed: these are perhaps even more important than the act of winning. To win graciously is sometimes more difficult than to lose sportingly.'[119]
>
> 'Our swimmers won for the school the national swimming championships for the 20th successive year. Our boys also won the schools national badminton trophy, for the 4th successive year. These results are the fruits of their long hours of training. We did not fare quite as well in other sports, but if competing with sportsmanship, courage and determination counts just as much as winning, then we are justly proud of winning.'[120]

The above excerpts bring to light the two interrelated elements through which ACS's attempts to constitute its distinctive ethos: the capacity for participation and the display of sportsmanship. What is important now, ACS insists, is not whether a school wins or loses in competition; it is rather *how* a school competes that is of utmost significance. In fact, simply competing with

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[117] *The ACS Magazine*, 1966-67: 172
[118] *The ACS Magazine*, 1975: 7
[119] *The ACS Magazine*, 1979: 17
[120] *The ACS Magazine*, 1979: 21

"sportsmanship, courage and determination" is made equivalent to winning. Further, the more times the school participates in competition, as ACS is able to do, the greater its capacity to cultivate this ethos. This would distinguish the school not only within the educational arena but allow the school to demonstrate its wider ability to cultivate qualities that resonated with citizenship and national identity.

No surprise, then, that ACS's gradual re-ascent to the apex of sporting competition in the 1970s was framed as founded of its "possession" of this distinctive ethos:

> 'Undisputedly, we have the goods. Regular steady efforts are paying dividends. We have as yet to produce top-flight stars (through we are close enough) but mass participation and co-operative teamwork has proved to be profitable qualities. Some of our swimmers earned the privilege of representing the Combined Schools and Republic at various meets. We congratulate them for bringing glory to themselves and the School…The Rugby boys can justly earn the title of being the "most improved team" in School…On many occasions they had won and they have indicated that they will try to continue doing just that.'[121]

> '[G]iven the opportunity, the school has much reserve talent that is just waiting to surface. Sports in the school has [*sic*] always been the right of an ACSian…We are proud to state that our school is a very active, robust and healthy one. Some of the activities conducted bear testimony to our policy…From an active participation at grass roots level a talented crop of sportsmen has emerged. This has led to a very successful season…Physical training in school inculcated the good habits of exercise and physical fitness, an improvement in the general fitness of all in the school will lead to the raising of standards in competitive sports. To this end we must be totally committed.'[122]

At this point, it is important to address why displaying an ethos based on participation and sportsmanship could have successfully functioned to secure ACS's distinction as an elite school in the national schooling arena. I argue that this was the case because the emphases on participation and

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[121] *The ACS Magazine*, 1975: 74
[122] *The ACS Magazine*, 1977: 92

sportsmanship addressed the tension between equality and distinction in two ways. First, ACS's stress that it was *mass* participation, rather than a reliance on the ability of a few star performers, that was at the core of its sporting performances minimized potential accusations that the school enjoyed any sort of "unfair" advantage in sporting competitions. Instead, the school was positioned as on similar footing with all other schools and as having to train 'seriously and conscientiously' in the face of 'fierce' inter-school competition if it wanted to gain in any sort of prestige.[123] Concomitantly, ACS's attempts to demonstrate its commitment to developing in its students the "spirit of sportsmanship" served as a form of mitigation to ensure that the school's attempts to establish itself at the top of the sporting hierarchy was deemed acceptable.

Thus, this ethos was recognized to drive ACS not only to continue to perform well in sports it had traditionally been strong in but also help in 'add[ing] new laurels to a long list'[124] of successes:

> 'In the field of sports, we have had our fair share of success. We continued to dominate the swimming scene when our secondary swimmers captured the National title for the 18th consecutive year. Our chess team emerged joint-first in the inter-school championships while our shuttlers successfully defended the National title they won last year. Our lower secondary boys created rugby history by winning their National finals.'[125]

> 'Special mention must be given to the lower secondary team for carrying the school into the stronghold of St. Andrew's School and Raffles Institution. This year, our school has shared rugby honours with the kingpins of rugby by stealing the lower secondary title and winning the Dr. Goh Keng Swee Challenge Shield, from the Saints in the National Finals. They have proved that rugby is to be a sport to be closely associated with the school in the near future…We hope that in the future we

[123] *The ACS Magazine*, 1978: 123
[124] *The ACS Magazine*, 1978: 25
[125] *The ACS Magazine*, 1977: 17

> can look back to this successful year and see it as a turning point of our dominance in this tough game.'[126]

Ultimately, ACS was able to claim distinction based on more than an ability to produce leading performances. Even as the school worked to 'impose [its] authority' on different sports and games, the school and its athletes were also set apart from other schools and their students because, whether or not ACS teams were successful in winning championships, all ACS teams became recognized as sides that 'fought the good fight'.[127]

5.5 Distinction as "Dogged Determination"

One of the most significant challenges to schools like RI and ACS that were attempting to re-establish their claims to educational prestige in the national arena of education was the formation of state supported Junior Colleges (JCs) and Special Assistance Programme (SAP) schools in the 1970s-1980s. The JC was started with the intention to intensively prepare high performing pupils to enter university. The establishing of SAP schools, on the other hand, can be read as the latest attempt by the Singapore state to salvage its bilingual policies; students at schools conferred SAP status would receive both English and Mother Tongue as first languages. In this section, I scrutinize how RI responded to and positioned itself in relation to the insertion of JCs and SAP schools into Singapore's field of education. My broader aim is to show how RI would insist on the recognition of its exclusive symbolic capital in the face of these new competitors for distinction.

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[126] *The ACS Magazine*, 1977: 103
[127] *The ACS Magazine*, 1979: 27

Still, before I examine RI's responses to the introduction of JCs and SAP schools, I must first sketch RI's perceptions of its position as one of the leading schools during this period. Although RI had been able to maintain respectable performances in both scholastic and sporting achievements, we can discern an emerging anxiety over the increasingly 'grueling' and 'unnerving' competitions for distinction in the national educational arena.[128] One of the main factors here was the drastic proliferation of schools:

> 'Competition is keener today than ever before. When Raffles ruled the fields years ago, there were only 5 or 6 secondary schools challenging its supremacy. Today…there are 93 secondary schools all seeking the distinction of toppling Raffles from its traditional leadership.'[129]

Significantly, RI's anxiety is based not on the emergence of competition per se; rather, it is the perception that all schools harbor intentions to displace RI from its historical position at the apex of schooling at Singapore. This reading of the alleged assault on "traditional leadership" can better be understood when we consider RI's concomitant acknowledgements that its own performances were experiencing periods of inconsistency and decline—more so when compared to the school's earlier achievements:

> 'We do not conceal the fact that these results are not good enough, not quite of Raffles' usual caliber, and we attribute them to our perennial shortage of staff and to too frequent change of teachers.'[130]

> 'Rafflesian rugby is beginning to show signs of wobbling, and the once excellent reputation of Raffles toppled to its worst last year. What is happening to these once-supreme players? Where has the urge to win gone? Is RI becoming "unrugged"? Have our so-called rivals become superior and unbeatable? Rafflesians can boast that they were the first students throughout Singapore to run with a rugby

[128] *The Rafflesian*, 1984: 17
[129] *The Rafflesian*, 1968: 11
[130] *The Rafflesian*, 1970-71: 7-8

> ball…However the supremacy of rugby began to show signs of decay…We were told that way back in 1971, the Rafflesian were supreme…they were in fact looked upon as the "rugger kings" of the Singapore Schools…'[131]

It is in this context of a perceived waning dominance that RI confronted the emergence of the JC and later SAP schools.

Nevertheless, how did RI insist on the recognition of its symbolic capital? This assertion was made in two interrelated moves. The first is embedded in RI's descriptions of the "rise" of JCs and SAP schools:

> 'RI [does] not, however, enjoy *the recognition and the rights accorded to junior colleges*: our teachers are not freed from physical education and extra-curricula activities, we do not enjoy the services of a full-time librarian, the comfort of an air-conditioned library. We cannot be as elitist as junior colleges in the selection of pre-university applicants nor do we want to be…'[132]

> 'During these three years [1978-1980], [RI] also had to struggle very hard to hold our own, vis-à-vis the emergence of "superschools" [SAP Schools] and certain junior colleges, which had *strong special support for their special courses and in the posting of quality teachers*. It is to the credit of Rafflesians and their teachers, therefore, that the school was able "to face the challenge of the day" and continue to "reign supreme in every sphere", to quote from our school Song.'[133]

> 'Although a good number of our scholars were *persuaded by the Government* to proceed to Hwa Chong Junior College this year, we are continuing with the Oxbridge Tuition Programme for the remaining scholars who decline to go to Hwa Chong because of their loyalty to RI.'[134]

> 'RI's claim to premier status is hard earned, through one and a half centuries of sweat and toil by generations of loyal Rafflesians and their dedicated teachers, unlike the "super" or "SAP Schools" and certain "fortunate" junior colleges *that have had greatness thrust upon them, in recent years by State Policies that favored them*…Hence, our dismay recently, when new "yardsticks", favoring SAP Schools, were suddenly brought in, with the sole objective of proving that old established schools, like RI, are losing out to the SAP Schools.'[135]

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[131] *The Rafflesian*, 1973: 63
[132] *The Rafflesian*, 1976-77: 70, emphasis mine
[133] *The Rafflesian*, 1978-1980: 7, emphasis mine
[134] *The Rafflesian*, 1979-1980: 24-25, emphasis mine
[135] *The Rafflesian*, 1983: 16, emphasis mine

Most evidently, the success of JCs and SAP schools is figured as intertwined with ascribed advantage. These educational institutions wield the "special support" of the Singapore state: they are disproportionately provided with better resources and facilities, allowed to exercise a significant amount of discretion in pupil selection and have better teachers assigned to them. Further, the state is willing to go so far as to intervene directly into the schooling arena in the hope of "persuading" bright pupils from schools like RI to move into these institutions.

Still, we must resist the temptation here to conclude that RI is simply trying to undermine or discredit these new additions to the educational landscape – the strategy is a more complex one. As I will show next, it is precisely the advantages that the state supported JCs and SAP schools wield that is the foil against which RI's insists on the legitimacy of its symbolic capital. Thus, in the second move, RI is adamant that it *does not share* in the "greatness" JCs and SAP Schools are recognized to wield, that has been "accorded to them" and "thrust upon them". How does RI position itself in relation to this "greatness"?

> 'Last year's GCE 'A' Level examination results were gratifying…this gave [RI] second position among all the schools and Junior Colleges offering candidates for this examination. We take quiet pride in this achievement in view of the fact that we presented the largest number of candidates, no less than 108 candidates more than the National Junior College…'[136]
>
> 'With such an increasing enrollment, one ought to expect a decline, especially in academic standards, but our passes in the 1975 Singapore-Cambridge final examinations have been maintained at their traditionally high level…[RI] has been presenting the greatest number of candidates for the 'A' Level examinations despite the competition of Junior Colleges…and we obtained 83.1% passes against NJC's 84.4% and Hwa Chong's 82.2%. *Our performance is all the more remarkable because, unlike the Junior Colleges, our admissions have been less selective and preferential*. Junior Colleges, of course, limit by selection only those who will boost

[136] *The Rafflesian*, 1975-76: 13-14

their percentage passes…True to traditional form our students have been awarded a very fair share of the higher scholarships available today…the Republic's own most prestigious President's Scholarship was awarded to [our pupil], and two of our boys…obtained Singapore Armed Forces scholarships.'[137]

It is clear that RI's assertion that it does not to share in the "greatness" of JCs and SAP Schools does not in any way signal resignation or compromise in terms of achievement. Instead, RI frames its own consistently comparable successes as "more remarkable" because it does not share in this ascribed "greatness" and yet is still able to perform at such high levels:

> 'Our boys and girls possess a *dogged determination* to excel both academically and in the sports field. This is in fact a hallmark of a Rafflesian…It is therefore not surprising that in sports and games we have retained our eminence as the "sports king-pin among all the schools in Singapore". *Several other schools have eyed us with awe and admiration* and many would have counted it a privilege just to play against us…'[138]

> '[O]ur prowess in sports and games have received their just rewards and some little recognition…Our students train right through the year, even through the school holidays. And our teachers sacrifice their holidays to be with them, either coaching them in the field or giving them extra lessons. *Our successes did not happen by accident. They had to be worked for and it was always through the hard way. There are no short cuts to success.* Behind every victory there have been sweat and agony, hours of labour and toil. But right through it the spirit of our boys and girls has shone through, unquenchable.'[139]

Accordingly, RI insists that its achievements and performances are underscored by hard work, perseverance, commitment and a "dogged determination": this is what sets RI's excellence, exhibited both in the school's triumphs and defeats, apart from JCs and SAP Schools, who have simply taken "short cuts to success". In this regard, RI defends the prestige it has acquired as a 'leading centre of learning, open to all children, irrespective of

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[137] *The Rafflesian*, 1976-77: 9, emphases mine
[138] *The Rafflesian*, 1975-76: 14, emphasis mine
[139] *The Rafflesian*, 1976-77: 70, emphasis mine

which strata or society or group they hailed from'[140] as *legitimate* because it is gained not from the benefit of prior advantage but because of constant and consistent effort and labor, at times, even against the odds. Similarly, RI's students and alumni are framed as uniquely capable of facing the psychological and physical stresses required of leaders and pioneers in the building of the Singaporean nation.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, my objective was to offer an explanation as to how RI and ACS were able to maintain recognition of their educational prestige as elite schools in spite of increasing competition and inconsistent, if not declining, performances in Singapore's educational arena 1940s-1980s. I argued that one of the main ways these schools achieved this was by casting themselves as bearers of legitimate distinction. In this vein, I showed by reading as series of school publications during this period that these schools attempted to discursively define their distinction as premised on "dominance", "ethos", and "determination". These various definitions of distinction were successful because they engaged and attempted to resolve the fundamental tension at the heart of the national arena of education in Singapore – between the injunction of equality and the establishing of new forms of distinction.

[140] The Rafflesian, 1983: 16

Conclusion

In this thesis, I engaged the puzzle of how and why schools are able to persistently achieve distinction as elite schools. Drawing on the specific case study of Singapore, I explained how and why RI and ACS acquired and secured prominence as elite schools during the 1940s-1980s. This period is particularly significant because all schools—some previously on distinct tracks during the colonial period—would come under the centralized control of the state, even as the educational arena was consolidated as a national system of education.

I first considered the different perspectives that have been utilized to examine education and schools in Singapore. The main shortcoming with these frameworks is their neglect for the specific role of the school and the relations between schools. Thus, I drew on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital in an effort to theorize the educational arena as a discreet space of competition among schools with its own set of distinct stakes. Next, I argued that the state-led integration of the schools from the different linguistic streams set up during the colonial era created the historical conditions necessary for the educational arena in Singapore to begin to function as an expanded and settled Bourdieusian field.

Following this, I outlined the different principles that structured competition within Singapore's national field of education for a field-specific cultural/symbolic capital: pedagogic capital. In a nutshell, this form of symbolic

capital signaled the ability of a school to cultivate model members of the nation. The principles are scholastic achievement, sporting excellence, prolific and loyal alumni as well as the capacity for civic and moral training. I demonstrated how, by excelling along these specific lines, RI and ACS were able to convert their successes into symbolic advantage and, in doing so, accumulate prestige in the educational field.

Concomitantly, I showed how RI and ACS worked to defend their claims to this field-specific symbolic capital from competitors by discursively incorporating specific ideas as to what constituted legitimate distinction. By construing distinction variously as “dominance”, “ethos” and “determination” RI and ACS engaged and attempted to resolve the tension between equality and privilege that underwrote the field of education in Singapore. By doing so, these definitions were particularly efficacious for safeguarding the prestige of these schools, even as the educational field continued to evolve.

Ultimately, what is an elite school? My principle contention in this thesis has been that an elite school is the product of a constellation of contests for symbolic advantage within an educational arena. Still, the notion an elite school remains a capacious term that, while appearing coherent, masks tremendous variation; and is as much ‘a discursive strategy as…an objective historical category’ (Calhoun & VanAntwerpen, 2007: 410). What lies ahead will be to make sense of this variation by tracing the trajectories of other schools and their classification struggles – both successful and unsuccessful.

In this way, we might reveal more of the inter-school arena that shapes schooling differentiation and hierarchy.

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