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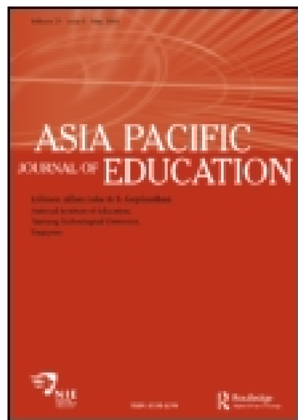

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Education as a political tool in Asia: an essay review

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REVIEW ESSAY

Education as a political tool in Asia: an essay review

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Education as a Political Tool in Asia, edited by Marie-Carine Lall and Edward Vickers (Eds.), London and New York, Routledge, 2008, 272 pp., US$44.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-59536-0

Introduction

Education as a Political Tool in Asia is an edited anthology of seminal articles that discusses "how education is used by governments as an instrument for various projects of political socialization" (p. 1), with particular reference to Asia. The editors of the volume – Marie-Carine Lall and Edward Vickers – have collected well-researched case studies to emphasize the critical role that education and schooling plays "in the construction of political identities and, through that, in the broader process of state formation" (p. 10). The volume explores the "nexus between state ideology, different forms of nationalism and the socialization of the young through curriculum and textbooks" (p. 3) in distinct and unique political, historical, cultural, and economic contexts of the nine Asian countries – Japan, China, and Hong Kong from East Asia; Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam from South East Asia; and India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan from South Asia.

Education as a Political Tool in Asia contains 10 chapters in addition to a brief "Introduction" by Marie Lall and a "Foreword" by Michael Apple. In the next section, I briefly summarize the theoretical arguments of Edward Vickers' synoptic chapter to this volume as well as the major arguments and findings of the nine case studies.

A synoptic chapter and nine case studies

Edward Vickers's Chapter 1 provides a historical and comparative overview of the role of education in the processes of state-formation and nation-building in Asia. Vickers accomplishes three tasks in his chapter: 1) a brief analysis of four Asian countries – Japan, India, Singapore and Taiwan – with distinct experiences of state-formation; 2) a theoretical discussion of the complex and nuanced process of nation-building and the role of schooling in it; and 3) consequences and implications of using education as a political tool.

While discussing the process of state-formation in Japan, Vickers questions the prediction of Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist, that rampant economic development and consumerism are irreconcilable or negatively related with a chauvinistic brand of nationalism (Veblen, 1915). According to Vickers, the present state of many Asian countries, including Japan, China, Singapore, and India, shows that "ideologies of

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populist ethno-cultural nationalism can offer a means for established political elites to sublimate the strains and division caused by rapid and unequal economic development" (p. 15). In addition to discussing the cases of Japan, India and Singapore where neoliberal global capitalism has evoked ethno-cultural and primordial forms of nationalism (as readers will see in Chapters 2, 5 and 8 of this volume), Vickers also analyses the case of Taiwan, which has experienced a rather different impact of the process of globalization. From the 1940s until the 1990s schooling played a key role in the Chinese nationalist indoctrination of the Taiwanese youth. However, since the 1990s when the martial law came to end and the processes of democratization and economic development began, "the mirage of Taiwan as an outpost of a 'Republic of China' ... quickly evaporated" (p. 22). Kuomintang's (KMT) generous investment in basic schooling, the high status of the teaching profession, development of the secondary and tertiary sectors of her economy, has tremendously contributed to the growth of the Taiwanese economy with an increasingly equal distribution of its benefits. Most significantly, "Taiwan now stands apart from most of its Asian neighbours in its renunciation of the sort of intimidation of critics practised in Singapore, and in the fervour with which it seeks to embrace globalization. Indeed, far from being portrayed as threatening the integrity of indigenous culture, in Taiwan globalization is nowadays widely viewed as the salvation for hopes of preserving political autonomy in the face of threat from China" (p. 22).

Vickers also provides a very invaluable and theoretically nuanced discussion on the process of nation-building and state formation. More specifically, he discusses the arguments, assumptions, and philosophies – rooted in history and/or myths – that lie underneath the search of a primordial, ethno-national, and essentialist identity in a majority of the countries in Asia. Such assertions of a unique identity among Asian nations, Vickers thinks, have historically been a response to the so-called Western civilization in general and colonialism in particular. In the contemporary world, especially since the 1970s due to the accelerated pace of globalization and the rising economic inequalities, the desperation on part of leadership in Asia has tremendously increased (as is evident in several case studies in this volume) to use education, among other things, as a strong political tool to create a patriotic, but uncritical, citizenry. In his conclusion, Vickers briefly ponders upon such critical questions as: "[C]an we distinguish between benign and malign forms of patriotism and, if so, how; and insofar as malign forms of patriotism can be identified, under what circumstances do they tend to arise and spread – and what is the role of education in this process?" (p. 30).

In Chapter 2 "The Inescapability of Politics? Nationalism, Democratization and Social Order in Japanese Education", Peter Cave provides an in-depth analysis of the intimate relationship of education and politics in Japan. Since the creation of a modern Japanese state after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and until the 1930s, education served as a tool of modernization in Japan, with emphasis upon cultivating a "Japanized version of modern civilization and instilling a national consciousness" (p. 49). From the 1930s until the end of World War II in 1945, education was used in Japan as a tool to propagate imperial ideology and advance ultra-nationalism and militarism. After her defeat in World War II at the hands of Allied Powers, Japan came under Allied Occupation from 1945 to1952. During the Occupation, Allied Powers used education as an instrument to counter chauvinism and militarism and foster the principles of democracy. While the political system largely remains democratic since the Allied Occupation ended in 1952, education continues to function as an ideological tool and a battleground between Right and Left where the former conceives education as a way to cultivate love and pride for Japan, while the latter emphasizes educating children to be critical citizens.

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In addition to providing a historical analysis of how education has been used and manipulated as a political tool by people in power to serve their purposes, Cave renders an intriguing and detailed analysis of educational controversies related to three key aspects in Japan after the 1960s: 1) content of school history textbooks; 2) use of the national flag and anthem in school ceremonies; and 3) the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education. Below I discuss the controversies related to the content of the textbooks.

The content of the school textbooks has been an ideological conflict zone between the conservatives and the leftists since the 1950s. Conservatives have been against the free choice of textbooks, especially the ones that present various ideological viewpoints over a sensitive historical issue. In their desire to perpetuate among children unconditional love and pride for Japan, conservatives have tried their best (primarily through influencing the textbook screening process) to remove any content from the textbooks that is critical of Japan. The most significant example of the misuse of the screening process is related to the history textbook written by Professor Saburo Ienaga. Ienaga's book, which included controversial issues from Japanese history like Nanking Massacre, the Battle of Okinawa, and Unit 731, was subjected to repeated rejection or unjustified revisions. Ienaga did not succumb to the pressure of the government and took the case to court. After a legal battle that lasted almost four decades the Supreme Court of Japan declared the Ministry of Education's screening process excessive and unlawful. While the victory of Saburo Ienaga brought new hopes that continued to be carried forward by the left-leaning individuals and groups, conservatives continue to make their efforts to manipulate school education to serve narrow nationalistic interests. In summary, education in Japan continues to be a space where different groups wage their ideological wars.

Edward Vickers in Chapter 3, "The Opportunity of China? Education, Patriotic Values and the Chinese State", provides a critical account of the changing political ideology and development strategy and their impacts on the conception of education in modern China. Vickers's intriguing accounts are based on his well thought out and careful analysis of changing political ideology and developmental strategies of the Chinese Communist Party as well as the content of the moral education school textbooks (*Thought and Values* and *Thought and Politics*) and his understanding of the works of A. Jones (2005a, 2005b) regarding the nature of history education in Chinese schools.

According to Vickers the key characteristics of contemporary China are the "effective abandonment of the socialism and pursuit of rapid marketization and capitalist growth ... with the promotion of state-centred patriotism ...." (p. 54). Such a paradigm shift in political ideology and development policy has also brought a radical change in the conception of education, which "served largely [, influenced by Mao's vision,] as a tool for social engineering, socialist indoctrination and the inculcation of the loyalty to the Party ... [but which is now concerned with] promoting skills necessary for building a strong, wealthy, modern and advanced nation" (p. 55).

Paul Morris' Chapter 4, "Education, Politics and the State in Hong Kong", explains the ways in which changing political status – from a British Colony after World War II until 1 July, 1997 to a Special Administrative Region of China thereafter – has had its effects on education in Hong Kong. Morris identifies three distinct phases in the history of Hong Kong to show how political ideologies control education. The first phase – 1945 to 1966 – was primarily characterized by the colonial government's concern for its own survival without any consideration for the development of active citizenry or socializing the public to aspire to have an identity with Britain. The primary educational objective of the colonial government was to curb any subversive or anti-colonial sentiments through: 1) exercising bureaucratic control over schools and pursuing direct action against "subversive" teachers

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and schools; 2) depoliticizing content of the school curriculum; and 3) subcontracting the provision of mass schooling to non-governmental agencies (e.g., missionary bodies), which did not have hostile attitudes toward the colonial government.

In the second phase, which began after the riots of 1966 and continued until 1997, the colonial government's focus shifted from being subversive to becoming an agent of social harmony by means of co-opting dissenting voices and minimizing conflict between government and key interest groups. A major landmark of this period was the Joint Declaration between Britain and China in 1984 whereby the retrocession of Hong Kong to China in 1997 was confirmed. After the Joint Declaration, the colonial government actively promoted the study of contemporary Hong Kong through curricular changes; however, the content about the People's Republic of China was kept to a minimum.

In the third and the current phase, which began after Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China on 1 July, 1997, the new government has been promoting a far stronger sense of patriotism and national identity. "This pattern," Morris argues, "suggests a degree of convergence with what happened on mainland [China] where the shared sense of identity is now promoted primarily through a cultural and nationalistic agenda rather than through Mao's interpretations of the tenets of Marxism/Leninism or of an allegiance to the [Chinese Communist Party]" (p. 89).

In Chapter 5, "Creating Good Citizens, or a Competitive Workforce, or Just Plain Socialization? Tensions in the Aims of Education in Singapore", Christine Han discusses how in Singapore education has been used to propagate a passive model of citizenship, which focused on developing a productive workforce and loyal population instead of a critical and creative citizenry. More specifically, based on her analysis of economic imperative of the educational policies and textbooks of subjects such as Civics and Moral Education, National Education, and mother tongue languages, Han concludes that in Singapore a single, dominant discourse of education is being used primarily to: 1) prepare children who think "creatively" and "critically" to ensure the production of human capital necessary for a global knowledge economy; 2) foster values of honesty, discipline, good behaviour as well as "Asian Values", which, among other things, imply respect for elders and authority; and 3) develop unconditional and uncritical love for their country. In her final analysis, Han argues that since curriculum and pedagogy in Singaporean schools does not allow the development of abilities to critically question authorities and participate politically, there is a greater possibility that the prevalent model of education – that is passive, transmissive, and uncritical – can neither produce a creative and critical industrial workforce who can face the challenges of globalization nor the individuals with moral and intellectual autonomy and judgement to handle the complexities of life in personal and social spheres.

Elwyn Thomas in Chapter 6 "'Reverse! Now Play Fast Forward' Education and the Politics of Change in Malaysia" discusses the "politics of reversal" in Malaysian educational policy – from prioritizing and supporting Bahasa Malaysia as the primary language of instruction in order to cultivate a strong national identity to the adoption of English to keep pace with the global knowledge economy, raise employment levels, and minimize inequalities in society – as a consequence of the changing economic reality of the nation of Malaysia. In addition to providing a brief picture of Malaysia's socio-cultural, political, economic, and educational contexts as well as how it compares with some of the other nations in East and South East Asia, Thomas provides a detailed account of the shifts in Malaysia's policy regarding the language of instruction and its impact on higher education. After Malaysia became independent in 1957, a key policy pronouncement was related to the language of instruction in educational institutions.

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The Razak Report of 1956, which formed the basis of the Education Ordinance of 1957, recommended that while the mother tongue instruction should be provided in vernacular schools along with the teaching of Malay as the national language, Malay rather than English should be the default medium of instruction in the institutions of higher education. Since the majority of the rural and poor population was Malay and English was the language of administration, business, and industry during the colonial rule, it was hoped that by establishing Bahasa Malaysia as the language of instruction at the level of higher education the opportunities for Malays would be enhanced.

The language policy of the government experienced a "reverse" in 2002 when the government announced that the English language should be used as the medium of instruction to teach courses in maths and science not only in the universities but also at the school level. Such a shift reflects, Thomas points out, "a perception that intensifying global economic competition, together with the vast increase in the knowledge and skills in science, technology (including information technology), trade and financial services, presents politicians not [only] in Malaysia but [also] in other emerging economies with serious dilemmas" (p. 128). There are three basic areas, which, according to Thomas, are facing major challenges due to such a change in the policy: 1) balancing the growth between the public sector, where the language of communication is primarily Malay, and the private sector (where the language of communication is English); 2) adopting English as the medium of instruction in the universities, especially in the areas of science, technology, business, and finance, to increase the employment prospects of graduates from the Malaysian universities. Such economic goals, however, are to be balanced by promoting Bahasa Malay as a national language; and 3) harmoniously accommodating multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious Malaysian society through creating and implementing a multi-cultural curriculum (e.g., "Vision School") and an equable higher education.

In Chapter 7, "Đêi mói, Education and Identity Formation in Contemporary Vietnam", Matthieu Salomon and Vu Doan *Kêt* provide a critical analysis of two key dimensions – "essentialist and xenophobic ethno-cultural nationalism" and "contemporary socialism" (p. 146) – of Vietnamese national identity, as represented in the school history textbooks. According to Salomon and *Kêt*, the idea that nationalism and communism – the two sides of the same coin in Vietnamese Communist Party's ideology – are not in conflict with each other is key to understanding the use of education as a tool in the formation of a Vietnamese national identity in the Đôi mói (Renovation) Vietnam. While the construction of Vietnamese national identity happens through many channels – media, family, and mass organizations – it is the schools and their curricula, particularly history curricula, which play the fundamental roles (p. 141). Based on their analysis of the school history textbooks, Salomon and *Kêt* concludes: "The most striking point in official and popular national identity education in Vietnam is the fact that "'Vietnamese-ness' is always presented in essentialized and eternal terms, and portrayed as based on a specific and homogenous ethnic identity ... [eternally engaged in] resistance against the northern 'Big Brother', China" (p.143). After Đôi móii (Renovation), Salomon and *Kêt* asserts, while there are slight softening in the official narrative vis-à-vis China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) primarily because of the economic considerations as well as marginal challenges from the intellectuals and historians for a more "detached and 'objective approach' to constructing national identity in national autobiography, the national story is clearly unlikely to be 'denationalized' anytime soon" (p. 153).

Marie-Carine Lall has authored Chapter 8, "Globalization and the Fundamentalization of Curricula: Lessons from India", wherein she mainly describes how the Bhartiya Janta

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Party (BJP), a right-wing, conservative party which headed the ruling National Democratic Alliance between 1998 and 2004 used education as a means to propagate a Hindu Nationalist ideology. Lall critically analyses, based on relevant documents and texts, the ways in which the BJP attempted fundamentalization of education in various spheres and levels, including: 1) replacing key officials in the central government's education department, National Council of Educational Research and Training; 2) writing and publication of school history textbooks that primarily asserts, without scholarly evidence, Hindu cultural superiority vis-à-vis other cultures and demonizes Islam in particular; 3) providing support to the establishment of a large number of schools by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – a cultural organization that was set up in 1925 to promote India as a Hindu nation wherein minority religious groups would be subordinate to Hindus; and 4) intimidating authors and publishers of books critical of Hindutva ideology. Interestingly, based on her study of the works of Varadarajan (2004), Lall believes that the case of India under BJP rule, characterized by the promotion of religious nationalism through educational means, represent a "state-controlled discursive mechanism … to contain and deflect potential dysfunctionalities produced by the effects of globalization in societies" (p. 176).

Marie-Carine Lall also authored Chapter 9, "Education Dilemmas in Pakistan: The Current Curriculum Reforms", which gives an account of the complex relationship between religion, national identity, politics, and education. While Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founding father, originally conceived of Pakistan as a secular democracy, successive post-independence governments have used Islam to define Pakistan's national identity. After Bangladesh's secession from Pakistan in 1971, Islamiyat (the study of Islam) became a compulsory school subject under the presidency of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. While Bhutto saw Islam as a unifying force, General Zia-ul-Haq, who led a military coup in 1977, used Islamaization as a fundamentalist project in schools and other social spheres. Based on her study of the work of many scholars (e.g., Aziz, 2004; Crook, 1996; Kumar, 2001, Rosser, 2003; Salim and Khan, 2004; and Zaidi, 2003) who have critically analyzed school textbooks in Pakistan, Lall discusses the features that characterize the nature and scope of Pakistan's school textbooks, among them: 1) Islamic references in curricula and textbooks for all school subjects, including sciences and social sciences; 2) the difference between the cultures of Hindus and Muslims; 2) the need for an independent Islamic state; 3) the malicious intentions of India against Pakistan; 4) The Kashmir dispute; 5) the need for defence and development of Pakistan; 6) removal of Aryan, pre-Islamic history references; and 7) portrayal of Gandhi as a Hindu leader and Congress as a Hindu organization intent on subjugating the Muslims of the subcontinent. The fundamentalization of the curriculum – characterizing the ideology of hate and otherness, Pakistan's need for a "security state" and her military defined "national interest" – that began in Zia's rule continued during civilian governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

A major change in the educational system of Pakistan occurred when, after the coup of 1999, General Pervez Musharraf started the Education Sector Reforms, which, among other things, included the de-Islamization of textbooks used in state schools, increasing private sector investment in secondary and higher education, incorporating teaching methods to instil democracy, and financing and modernizing madrasas. Notably, after September 9/11, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided 100 million dollars to support Pakistan's education reform. Drawing upon the interviews conducted with members of the curriculum wing of the Ministry of Education, Lall learned that the alleged de-Islamaization and secularization of school textbooks was underway. While a progressive move on the part of Musharraf, curriculum reforms faced

severe challenges not only from the religious groups but also from the moderates, who thought that such reforms represented the imposition of "Westernization from above". Instead of wasting time and energy on politicizing and fundamentalizing education, Lall urges that "Pakistan's current education debate should focus on issues dealing with the large number of children who do not have access to education, the issues of adult literacy and equal education access for girls" (p. 196).

The final chapter, "Non Più Andrai: Bullets, Burqas, Books: Education Policy and its Discontents in Communist and Taleban Afghanistan", is authored by Patrick Belton. By way of providing a detailed historical evolution of the state of Afghanistan, Belton shows the victimization of education at the hands of ruling powers. Belton argues – against the commonsensical belief that education leads to peace and social justice – that a "close scrutiny of the Afghanistan case reveals that education can also foster attitudes liable to . . . violence and societal breakdown" (p. 198). Belton substantiates his claim by means of analysing contemporary history of educational politics in Afghanistan, with a particular focus on the communist and Taleban regimes from 1978 to 2001. He also provides brief accounts of the role of politics in controlling education before the Communist regime and after the demise of the Taleban rule.

Afghanistan's first educational reform began under the leadership of King Amanullah right after its autonomy from the British Empire in 1919. However, Amanullah's efforts to implement programmes of universal education and women's emancipation were thwarted by "the restive conservative countryside, buttressed by the disgruntlement of the country's Ulema at the attempt to wrest control of education from the informal network of madrasas" (p. 200). After Ammanullah's exile and until the end of World War II the process of educational reforms in Afghanistan remained rather stunted. It was in the post-war period, when Afghanistan developed close relations with Soviet Russia, that the process of educational reform became an important agenda under the leadership of Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan from 1953 to 1964 and Zaher Shah from 1964 to 1973. While Khan advocated co-education and entry of women in the workplace, Shah by means of a new constitution, granted legal equality to women and legislated for a secular education and an elected parliament. Increased budget for education ensured expansion of secondary and higher education. Although Zaher Shah's monarchy was toppled over by the Daoudist Coup of 1973, the new Republic of Afghanistan under Daoud's leadership kept the education policy intact. However, finding the pace of Daoud's reform too gentle, the Marxist People's Democratic Party based in the University of Kabul, launched a coup in 1978 and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Shortly after the coup, Marxist cadres started a mass literacy campaign, which was responded with a rebellion from the traditionalists, especially in the countryside, because the campaign forced countryside women to attend classrooms with male teachers. The rebellion was suppressed by the Soviet invasion in 1979.

From 1979 to 1989 Afghan educational policy developed in close collaboration with the Soviet education model. The main changes introduced in the educational policy included: 1) minimization of religious education; 2) introduction of lessons in Russian; 3) teaching of content about Soviet-Afghan friendship; 4) adoption of textbooks written from a Marxist-Leninist perspective; 5) textbook depiction of Afghanistan as a cultural, linguistic, and historical part of Central Asia, with little connection with Pakistan or Iran; and 6) articulation of a legal basis to punish parents or guardians if they prevent their children from acquiring primary education. With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the failure two years later of the socialist Massoud administration, Afghanistan experienced lawlessness due to conflicting Mujahideen groups.

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The emergence of Taleban as the major power led to Islamization and fundamentalization of education in Afghanistan characterized by anti-democratic, anti-women, and anti-secular orientations. Since 2007, the post-Taleban phase, while USAID and UNICEF have been successful in raising enrolment among primary school children, Belton points out, they have been unable to pay much attention to the quality and the content of education (p. 212).

Critical evaluation

The editors and majority of the contributors of *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* belong to the prestigious department of International and Life Long Learning at the Institute of Education (University of London), which gives this volume credibility in terms of the originality and significance of research. The chapter authors are experts in their areas and have used relevant documents and sources to substantiate and emphasize their arguments and findings.

This volume will be appreciated not only by comparative educators and international curriculum studies students and scholars in Asia but worldwide for bringing together well-researched nine case studies from different historical, political, social, and economic contexts that provide nuanced and rich analyses of how education is used as a political instrument by elites of different Asian countries to construct specific national identities.

All the case studies in the volume successfully meet the major purpose of the volume, which is to investigate the intricate and complex relationship between education, politics, and national identity. The chapter authors have critically analysed how the people in power construct and propagate their preferred images of their nations vis-à-vis "others". Besides, the chapter authors also highlight the ideological tensions that exist between people in power and the dissenters – political, religious, or academic – in the chosen countries.

Education as a Political Tool in Asia is also a significant contribution not only because it makes explicit the differences within distinct and unique contexts, but it also shows how these apparently distinctive cases may have many similarities. This volume can be used for teaching graduate courses in international and comparative education and as a starting point for researchers interested in exploring the relationship between history, politics, national identity, and education, with special reference to the countries of Asia.

Most of the chapters in the volume are very well-written. Editors and authors have provided accurate and invaluable endnotes and bibliography to give contextual information, substantiate their theses, and disclose the sources behind their arguments. The illustrations from textbooks and other educational documents nicely contextualize the authors' arguments.

In spite of its strengths, *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* also has certain limitations that the readers should keep in mind. I will discuss my criticism of each chapter first followed by more general comments.

There are two concerns that I have regarding Chapter 1 by Edward Vickers. First of all, while it was informative to read Vickers's brief analysis of "four Asian states [Japan, India, Singapore, and Taiwan] with very different experiences of modernization and state formation" (p. 11), I could not understand in what ways such analyses added value to the much detailed nine case studies already present in the volume. In my opinion what is more valuable in his chapter is the nuanced, rich theoretical discussion in the section "The Shock of the Modern, the Construction of National Identity and Strategies for Social Control in Asia". Instead of devoting considerable space to "four Asian states", he could have elaborated more on the theoretical discussion, which is more or less absent from the

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entire volume, as I will also point out later in my general criticisms. Second, Vickers's discussion of Taiwan suggests that the latter has emerged as a unique case characterizing the "most democratic polity in Asia" (p. 30) and as a country where globalization is accepted in a rather positive vein unlike most other Asian countries discussed in this volume. I am puzzled as to why, if Taiwan represented such a unique and interesting case, did the editors not include a separate case study on her in this volume?

In Chapter 2, while Peter Cave provides an excellent analysis of the government policy as well as the ideological conflict between the Right and the Left vis-à-vis the nature of history textbooks, it does not do an in-depth analysis of the textual material itself. In his entire essay, Cave does not provide a single paragraph from the actual textbooks to illustrate his claims. In addition, I could not understand how the author almost equated "leftist" with "liberals". These two are quite different categories of political thought. The author also seems to suggest that Japanese schools have been able to cultivate "democratic citizens" by means of developing "disciplined selves, and as a corollary, the creation and maintenance of social order" (p. 49). Is being a "democratic citizen" equal to having the ability to maintain "social order"? Hursh and Ross (2000) in their *Democratic Social Education*: *Social Studies for Social Change* suggest the contrary: Democratic education is not something that maintains social order; on the contrary, democratic education critically examines and engages with the dynamic social reality and contributes towards its reconstruction for a more democratic and just world. As well, Cave does not mention the issue of *Kokoro* education while discussing about National Council of Education Reform. *Kokoro* education emerged as a key issue on Japan's educational landscape since 2002.

According to Higashi (2008), *Kokoro* refers to the intangible value systems that presumably govern the Japanese mind. The Japanese government has spent a huge amount in producing and distributing *Kokoro* books and training *Kokoro* teachers. *Kokoro* notebooks and those who hold supporting views towards *Kokoro* have come under severe attack by citizen groups and educators who are highly critical of the use of *Kokoro* notebooks in schools today as these reflect the pre-war sushin (Meiji government's Imperial Rescript of Education [1894] that reflected the Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty toward the state, which all Japanese were expected to adhere to) moral education textbooks that highlights the visual images of Japan, for examples as isolated islands surrounded by ocean and Mount Fuji rising above the clouds. In the current state of globalization with the increasing number of students from other nationalities in Japanese schools and the Japanese students who are going to study in other parts of the world, Higashi points out, what is more important is equipping young with skills to voice doubts rather than accept the state-led moral principles so that they may become able to communicate with people who carry different world views. Given its educational and political significance, I think Cave should have also devoted some space to discuss about *Kokoro* while he analyses the National Commission on Education Reform and similar issues on pages 46–47.

Although Vickers cites very good examples from Chinese moral education school textbooks – *Thought and Values and Thought and Politics* – to substantiate his arguments, he also greatly depends on secondary sources (particularly Jones (2005a; 2005b)) for understanding the issues of Chinese school history textbooks. I think that the quality of his excellent chapter would be further enhanced if he could provide direct examples from the history textbooks to substantiate his points. I found Vickers's chapter excellent overall except for the fact that I could not understand why he resorted to comparing the circumstances in contemporary China with Meiji-Era Japan in his

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conclusion. Moreover, he also makes an inadequate attempt to discuss the possibilities of harmonious resolution of China's internal and external contradictions. While both these issues are significant and merit attention, they should be considered more carefully and, preferably, be part of his first synoptic chapter.

In his chapter, while Paul Morris briefly provides a theoretical framework, he was unable to integrate it with his analysis throughout the chapter. Besides, in the "Education and Politics" section of his chapter he abruptly starts a discussion on the economy of Hong Kong on page 85 without linking it appropriately to the subject matter of his chapter before or after. Similarly, while the "Academic Autonomy and the State" section of his chapter provides instances of government control over institutions of higher learning (e.g., Hong Kong Institute of Education), it was not clear to me how it was related to the rest of the chapter. As well, Morris does not provide references or basis for his conclusions regarding the influence of the use of "flags", change in the curriculum package for the kindergartens, as well as the impact of the media in the system of education during the 1990s, as discussed on page 98. He also does not cite examples from the school history textbooks to support his assertions.

Although Christine Han provides a critical assessment of the current texts of Civics and Moral education, the "Education as a Political Tool" section of her chapter needs to be more critical. Like Vickers, Han also introduces two new things in her conclusion – teachers' "pedagogic expertise" in teaching desired values and attitudes and students' attitudes toward the latter – in a rather hasty and underdeveloped manner. Moreover, I think Han's analysis missed an important area: Western versus Asian values. I think it would be very significant if Han could show how arbitrary and superficial such distinctions are, especially in a country like Singapore where the economic system is capitalist and the education system is developed from a highly Westernized model, which respects individualism and competitiveness. Moreover, the notions of democracy, civic participation, and welfare state are Western in orientation and criticize unconditional and uncritical patriotism (see Adler & Sim, 2008).

While discussing "Ways Forward" to tackle the challenges faced by Malaysian society, Thomas' ideas are more descriptive than critical. Among other things, he suggests the "upgrading of teaching profession" and "setting up of high profile research institutes." These certainly are important considerations, but his vision of upgrading of the teaching profession and educational research is primarily associated with governmental concerns. His discussion does not incorporate the importance of critical thinking, social criticism, and self-reflection in teacher education and research. It seems that he primarily supports the instrumental purposes of education instead of emphasizing its critical, transformative, and creative potentials. Moreover, in the entire chapter, one will not find the actual problems that the students, teachers, schools, and parents face in the process of teaching and learning as a consequence of shifts in the language policy. Finally, in his discussion of the issues pertaining to language of instruction, it seems Thomas wholeheartedly supports instruction in the English language to meet the economic challenges Malaysia is facing. While these concerns are legitimate on the economic front, a more nuanced discussion, from the perspective of the post-colonial vision of the subjugation and marginalization of culture, could have been incorporated.

Salomon and *Kêt*'s chapter provides a very intriguing and critical analysis of the instrumentalization of education in constructing and maintaining a Vietnamese identity. Whereas the authors mention the relevant instances from the textbooks, their chapter would have been even stronger if they could incorporate more excerpts from the textbooks. Again, like other chapters, readers will be left wondering how teachers and

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students in schools respond to these conditioning influences in schools. Are there no dissenters or critical educators in Vietnam? If yes, what challenges do they face? If no, what kind of teacher education institutes exist in Vietnam? Salomon and *Kết* point out that "[t]here are also very strong and recurrent criticisms of the Vietnamese education system. Many observers have vigorously criticized the Ministry of Education and Training" (p. 152). However, readers are left wondering who these observers are and what issues they raise against the Vietnamese education system. Finally, while Salomon and *Kết* discuss the political and educational dimension of Đôi mói (Renovation), they do not discuss much about its economic characters, and the ways in which globalization and neoliberalism are impacting the education sector, as clearly visible in Vietnam's neighbouring countries.

Unlike the majority of the chapters in the book, Lall makes an attempt to discuss the theoretical sources behind her arguments. However, these are not very well integrated throughout her chapter. In the section "What Kind of a Nation is India?", she devotes a single paragraph to discuss the emergence of India as a secular state. In the following subsection she moves to discussing "Globalization and Glocalization in India". In the next subsection "India's Education System – a Historical Background", Lall starts with an inadequate discussion of the background of India's education system after independence. She fails to acknowledge, unlike her colleague Vickers in Chapter 1, that India's contemporary education system, to a large extent, is still rooted in British colonial history (see Kumar, 2004; 2005). Overall, the discussion does not effectively respond to the question she raised: What kind of a nation is India? Additionally, one of the central theses of Lall's chapter is to argue for a strong link between liberalization and globalization and increasing fundamentalization in India under BJP rule. First of all, this issue was insufficiently discussed in spite of being very important. Second, the current importance of the issue fails to hold in the aftermath of the demise of BJP rule in 2004. Although India is increasingly becoming global since 2004, Hindu fundamentalism and extremism does not seem to be a dominant feature of political landscape at the moment. Finally, while Lall's chapter discusses significant aspects of the educational politics of India during BJP's rule, it is now outdated. Since 2004, after Congress-led United Progressive Alliance came to power, India has been going through a radical curriculum reform – that completely reversed the undemocratic and fundamentalist views of education by emphasizing upon experiential, critical, and democratic teaching and learning – under the leadership of a highly progressive and iconic educator, Professor Krishna Kumar (Kumar, forthcoming). Given the fact that this volume was published in 2009, readers may expect an updated version of this chapter.

In her chapter on educational dilemmas in Pakistan, Lall very briefly discusses the nature and character of education during the political regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Although it is true that these regimes were not entirely different from Zia's military rule, there might be specific instances or policies that could be mentioned instead of skipping the whole of the 1990s. On page 190 Lall mentions about her fieldwork in Pakistan without discussing its specific purposes, techniques, and methodology. Readers may like to know more about her fieldwork. Finally, the chapter would become stronger if she provided excerpts from the old and the new textbooks instead of depending entirely on other scholars' analyses and her interviews with the members of the curriculum wing of Ministry of Education.

The major problem with Patrick Belton's chapter is the lack of education-related content. Belton gives more space to discussing the history of Afghanistan instead of analysing in greater detail the educational documents – policies as well as textbooks – that

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were developed during the historical periods he discussed in his chapter. While he refers to educational documents, his emphasis is more on the quantitative changes in the educational system (e.g., number of schools, teachers, and students) during different regimes. I think his chapter would be stronger if he had incorporated more excerpts from the educational documents with their detailed critical analysis.

My first general criticism is related to the lack of empirical studies in *Education as a Political Tool in Asia*. All the chapters – except Lall's Chapter 9 where she shares information she received from interviewing Pakistani officials – are primarily based on the analysis of the texts and documents, which, while very important, do not give a sense of how things operate in the living reality of the classroom. Although editors clarify that they were not concerned with the "life-world" of the classroom, in my opinion in order to make explicit the relationships between politics and education, which is the primary goal of the volume, editors and authors should have incorporated empirical studies. I think the next step that these contributors or other interested researchers might take is to study how things actually operate in the living reality of the classroom, as Michael Apple alludes to in his "Foreword" to this volume: "Policies, texts, and curricula can have multiple meanings [not only textually but also contextually] and can serve multiple purposes" (p. xii).

Likewise, the majority of the chapters do not articulate in detail their theoretical positions and methodological approaches. In spite of the fact that this volume provides excellent knowledge about the use of education as a political instrument in the nations and regions of Asia, it fails to enlighten the readers, especially researchers, regarding the theoretical (postcolonial theory, new sociology of education, critical theory etc.) and methodological approaches (content analysis, critical discourse analysis etc.) needed to investigate such issues, which, in turn, weakens its ability to support the work of researchers in the area of international and comparative education.

While all the essays provide important analyses of the relationship between politics and education, none of them articulate their normative positions. In spite of the dangerous implications of the chauvinistic nationalism, readers will not find any criticism of the notion of nationalism itself (although Vickers insufficiently tries that in his Chapter 1). None of the authors sees nationalism as a breeding ground for conflict and division in the world. Neither do any of the chapters offer future directions to view the world as free of these groups that divide people through ethnicity, religion, nation-states and so on, and look for ways that can take care of the entire planet instead of one group against the other.

Finally, *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* lacks representation of regional scholarship. The majority of the scholars in this volume are from the Institute of Education of the University of London, which no doubt is a highly regarded institution. However, why were indigenous scholars from the countries chosen for the case studies not invited to contribute chapters to this book? In my view, incorporation of regional voices could have strengthened the arguments and discourses within the book and provided a balanced perspective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I consider *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* to be an invaluable contribution to international and comparative education and international curriculum studies. The editors have made a significant contribution by bringing together nine well-researched case studies from distinct and unique historical, political, cultural, and educational contexts of Asia. Readers will find this volume immensely useful in understanding the complex relations among politics, education, and national identity, with

particular reference to Asia. However, I suggest that readers keep in mind that *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* does not report any empirical studies to understand the intricate relationship of education and politics in the life-world of the classrooms. Moreover, the volume lacks a rich discussion regarding the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches to carry out such research work. Finally, the editors and contributors of the volume do not share their normative positions regarding the central issue of nationalism that has kept Asia as well as the rest of the world divided among conflicting factions, and that inhibits our capacities to work together to create a harmonious and peaceful world.

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