

A Comparative Study on the Background of the Formation of “Shadow Education” Between China and Singapore

——Exploring the Perspective of “Historical Factor Analysis”

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Abstract: Nowadays, “shadow education” is popular worldwide, especially in East Asian countries. This paid form of extracurricular education aligns with mainstream education’s teaching objectives, content, methods, and means. This article selects China and Singapore as the research subjects, influenced by Confucian culture and exam-oriented education. The prosperous background of “shadow education” has many similarities. The focus of this study is to use the “historical factor analysis method” to perspective the economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds from a historical perspective, deeply explore the underlying reasons and impacts, and aspire to explore the similarities and differences in the background of the formation of “shadow education” between the two countries. At the same time, the author is reflecting on the current educational situation and policies reflected in the “shadow” of education, reflecting on the loopholes in mainstream education, and seeking reasonable countermeasures to promote the healthy development of mainstream education and the diversified development of various educational models.

Keywords: shadow education, elemental analysis, tracing back to history, China, Singapore

1. Introduction

Stevenson and Baker first proposed the term ‘shadow education’ in 1992. Later, Mark Bailey, Chief Professor of Comparative Education at UNESCO, further explained that “shadow education” is also known as “private tutoring” or “private supplementary tutoring”. In the past few decades, with the rapid development of society and economy, the demand for education has been increasing, and this form of education has gradually swept the world, with East Asia being the most prominent. Bailey pointed out that another meaning of the shadow metaphor can be explained by a sundial: just like the shadow of a sundial can tell people time, the shadow of school education can also reflect various problems in the school system and society. [1] To explore the underlying reasons behind the rise of shadow education and the problems it reflects in contemporary education systems, this article takes “shadow education” in China and Singapore as an example for comparative research. From the perspective of cultural factors, the education of both countries is deeply influenced by Confucian culture and has many similarities. From a political and economic perspective, the two countries

have different social and political systems and economic development characteristics, resulting in vastly different education systems. This article will use the historical factor analysis method to analyze and compare the development background of “shadow education” in China and Singapore from both vertical and horizontal perspectives and provide a shallow view of “shadow education” in the shadow. The aim is to inspire the selection and practice of future “shadow education”, reflect on the dross of modern education, and promote the better development of mainstream education, which is of great significance.

2. Theoretical Basis: Historical Factor Analysis Method

In comparative education research, the theoretical analysis framework plays the role of “examining educational problems, making explanations, and even solving problems”, providing a clear conceptual framework for the entire research and generating comparative dimensions for comparative research [2]. The “historical factor analysis method” advocated by Sadler, Kantor, Hans, and others for comparative education originated in the second half of the 19th century. It formed a complete scientific theory of comparative education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [3].

In 1900, Sadler published an article titled “What practical value can we learn from studying the education systems of other countries?” This article also marked the beginning of the formation of the disciplinary system of comparative education, and the discipline of comparative education entered a new stage of development. In Sadler’s theory, it has been demonstrated that education cannot be studied in isolation. Still, there is no clear explanation for the intangible spiritual and cultural forces that affect the education system [4]. Hans believes that a country’s education system is deeply rooted in its national history and influenced by various factors in its historical development process. Therefore, “analyzing and studying these factors from a historical perspective and comparing how countries solve the problems caused by these factors is the primary purpose of comparative education. Hans inherited and developed the comparative education ideas of Sadler, Cornell, and others, thoroughly and meticulously discussed various factors and forces that affect the education system and its development, and effectively combined the methodological ideas of historicism with specific factor analysis methods, thereby providing a clearer, more specific, and reasonable factor analysis structure for the factor analysis method of comparative education.[5]

The formation of the methodology of “historical factor analysis” prompts people to perspective education in various countries from a macro perspective and multiple dimensions. They should not isolate any factor to view and analyze education problems, understand history, learn from history, and bring more reference value to education research. It is also conducive to proposing more reasonable and timely development strategies for future education. This article attempts to analyze the prevalence of “shadow education” in China and Singapore from multiple factors such as social culture, political economy, and education system from a historical perspective, based on the theory of “historical factor analysis”. It also conducts a comparative study from multiple dimensions, such as development background, degree of development, and future development strategies.

3. The Background of the Emergence of “Shadow Education” in China and Singapore

3.1. Political and Economic Background

Schultz’s theory of human capital believes that “among the factors that affect economic development, human beings are the most crucial factor, and economic development mainly depends on improving human quality, rather than the abundance or scarcity of natural resources or the amount of capital. Alfred Marshall (also in” The Principles of Economics “) said,” Among all capital, only investment in human beings is the most valuable capital [6]. Education is an effective

way to advance to the next level. “No matter how hard it is, no matter how poor it is, no matter how poor it is, no matter how poor it is.” Modern people are constantly investing in education for their children. From a historical perspective, such ideas have existed for a long time.

3.1.1. The Impact of Political Economy on China’s “Shadow Education”

In the 1980s, Comrade Deng Xiaoping proposed the great decision of “reform and opening up” to liberate and develop productive forces and promote China’s modernization process. After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the reform of the economic system was continuously promoted, and a socialist market economy centred on commercialization was gradually established. This led to a change in the supply and demand relationship in China’s market, from the state distribution during the previous planned economy period to the regulation and control of supply and demand by the majority of the market, and the education market is no exception. Market regulation of supply and demand created a loose external environment for private education subsidies [7]. Deng Xiaoping proposed the concept of “producing results early, producing talents early”. To this end, we need to concentrate human and material resources to establish key schools, gather the best teachers and students in key schools, and ensure the cultivation of a certain number of high-level talents [8]. On April 22, 1978, in a speech at the National Education Work Conference, the chief designer mentioned: “Especially primary and secondary school teachers and early childhood educators, they have the responsibility of cultivating the seedlings of revolutionary successors.” Since the reform and opening up for more than 40 years, it is also a history of China’s educational changes. On the basis of positive economic development, it is self-evident that the country attaches great importance to education. By implementing major projects such as the “School Safety Project” for primary and secondary schools, the “Thinning Project” for schools in poverty-stricken areas, and the Rural Compulsory Education Student Nutrition Improvement Plan, the urban-rural gap, regional gap, and group gap have gradually been reduced. Education equity and quality have been continuously improved. Allowing the majority of the people to have a certain surplus to invest in education, in addition to meeting their basic needs, has provided a consumer group for the formation of “shadow education”.

3.1.2. The Impact of Political Economy on Singapore’s “Shadow Education”

The rise of shadow education in Singapore is closely related to social, political, and economic development. Due to its unique geographical advantages during the early civilisation period, Singapore was an essential hub for connecting the East and West Sea routes. Singapore has rapidly risen with the continuous development of shipbuilding and maritime technology. The brilliant and glorious Lion City Dynasty lasted only a century and was defeated by the northern and southern attacks of the Manchu Boyi and Siam. It was like a flash in the pan of Singapore’s history, and in the following centuries, Singapore collapsed and became a territory of other countries. During the British colonial period, a large influx of immigrants led to a significant increase in the population of Singapore, which initially formed a sizable multi-ethnic immigrant society. During the Japanese occupation period, Singapore experienced three years of suffering and sworn resistance, and Japan officially surrendered in September 1945. After experiencing a difficult period of unity and resistance from foreign enemies among people of all ethnic groups, the mindset of the Singaporean people has undergone a significant change - they have realized that the once “Sunset Eternal Empire” was not invincible. During the national crisis, the slightly “unreliable” British people have given Singaporean immigrants a strong desire to find their political affiliation and identity [9]. It is precisely because of Singapore’s unique history of national rise, prosperous economy, and united and harmonious society that provide a suitable environment for the development of education.

3.2. Socio-cultural Background

Confucian culture originated from the Spring and Autumn period in ancient China, with a history of over 2500 years. It has had a subtle and profound impact on China's education and has been widely spread worldwide. Among them, Confucianism has achieved radiative dissemination in East Asia, forming a regional cultural circle with high cultural commonality. East Asian social countries, represented by China, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, caught up with and surpassed the modernization process of education completed by Europe in the second half-century or so after World War II, showing typical modern development characteristics of "catching up and surpassing" and "compressing" [10].

3.2.1. The Impact of Cultural Background on China's "Shadow Education"

Confucianism emphasizes the lofty educational ideals and goals of "excellent learning leads to official career" and "all things are inferior, but only reading is high", which urged ancient people to seek education and actively enter the world. In China, the imperial examination system, implemented in the third year of the Sui Dynasty's Daye reign (607 AD) and ceased in the third year of the Qing Dynasty's Guangxu reign (1905 AD), has a history of over 1300 years. As an examination system for talent selection in ancient China, it was deeply influenced by the Confucian culture of "learning to excel is the key to success" [6]. Confucianism advocates for "self-centered learning", emphasizing the integration and unity of "knowledge mastery" and "moral internal improvement". However, since the implementation of the imperial examination system, "learning" has gradually deviated from the standard value of "cultivating oneself with respect" and has become a tool for "entering politics" [11]. The symptoms and pathology of the academic burden problem in East Asian education, as well as the ways to prevent and eradicate it, have led people to take the scientific examination one after another, with a focus on pursuing fame and profit and shining the family's reputation. The competition is extremely fierce. Although the system of scientific examination no longer exists, the legacy of scientific examination has a long history. This research asks whether the current primary school entrance, middle school, and college entrance examinations, with a single mode of enrollment and education, are not a "reproduction" of the scientific examination system. In order to prevent children from falling behind in competition, after receiving school education, children also need to participate in various training programs, such as "cultivating excellence" and "filling gaps", which have caused "academic infidelity". These are all the subtle influences of the Confucian "virtuous and capable governance" elite education ideology on future education concepts. It can be seen that Confucian culture is an inevitable factor in the rise of "shadow education" in China.

3.2.2. The Impact of Cultural Background on Singapore's "Shadow Education"

Unlike traditional nation-states, Singapore has not formed a local ethnic group or traditional culture in its history and has established a nation first and then a nation. Due to the complex background of social formation factors, Singapore has formed a diverse and heterogeneous immigrant society and culture dominated by British colonizers and dominated by Chinese [7]. Based on accepting the elite education ideas of the Western system, Singapore's education is also profoundly influenced by Chinese Confucian culture and attaches great importance to the education of its children. Confucian culture not only conveys the educational ideology of complex study and hard struggle but also has a subtle and binding effect on the moral qualities of Singaporean citizens. In addition, as a predominantly Chinese immigrant country, new immigrants face challenges such as crossing cultural and linguistic barriers to integrate into society, enhancing competitiveness in foreign lands, and facing better opportunities. At the same time, the responsibility of learning and inheriting

traditional Chinese culture, improving native language proficiency, and enhancing ethnic identity is also engraved in the bones of Chinese people. Most new Chinese immigrants are young and strong, and due to the factors of “super selection” for international immigrants, they mostly have superior educational levels, professional backgrounds, and income status. They are high-end middle-class talents with good economic integration in Singaporean society and upper-middle-class social status [12]. Therefore, new Chinese immigrants are full of expectations for their children’s education. They not only cannot fall behind in school curriculum but also need to consider the international environment in which their future development is located. Therefore, curriculum tutoring and bilingual education have become mandatory for many new immigrant children.

3.3. Education System

3.3.1. The Impact of the Education System on China’s “Shadow Education”

The key school system triggers the emergence of “shadow education”. In the 1950s and 1960s, China learned from the Soviet Union in education and implemented a key school system in primary and secondary schools, aiming to select “elites”. In 1953, the Ministry of Education issued the policy of “focusing on running some middle schools and normal schools” to achieve industrialization goals and provide talent and intellectual support for national defence construction in the early stages of the founding of the People’s Republic of China [7]. Better teaching staff and teaching conditions have become the standard configuration for key schools, allowing students to receive a more professional and systematic education. Every parent hopes that their child can receive a “high-quality education”. In order to ensure that their child can be admitted to a better school in the entrance examination, they enrol their child in extracurricular classes for improvement. In the final analysis, the emergence and popularity of a large number of tutoring classes are rooted in “exam oriented education” and “uneven distribution of educational resources”. From rural to urban areas, from underdeveloped areas to developed areas, it is evident that generally “good schools”, whether primary, secondary, or even universities, are located in the latter. The current college entrance examination system has evolved from ancient scientific examinations, breaking the monopoly of hereditary positions and wealth, and is a relatively fair selection system. The college entrance examination system is understandable, but what needs to be changed is the “equalization of educational resources”. The emergence of tutoring classes has met everyone’s desire for better education, completed the “replenishment” of resources, and the tremendous inner demand has driven the market demand for “shadow education”, which is developing and proliferating.

3.3.2. The Impact of the Education System on Singapore’s “Shadow Education”

In Singapore’s unique historical evolution, education can be summarized as two primary purposes: firstly, education must contribute to establishing a cohesive multi-ethnic society; Secondly, education has become a means of developing Singapore’s only natural resources, namely human resources [7]. In order to make education serve economic development and enhance national competitiveness, the Singaporean government has designed an education system from top to bottom, advocating for elitism and the principle of ‘only use’ and using examination and diversion systems to guide the direction, quality, and standards of education [12]. The “Gifted Education Program” in the third grade of primary school and the “Primary School Leaving Exam” in the sixth grade play a crucial role in the education path for children’s future opportunities. This institutional design forces Singaporean families and parents to spare no effort in investing in their children’s educational development. Secondly, Singapore implements a half-day school system, where only half-day courses are taught. Under the mentality of being afraid of losing, many Singaporean parents choose to have their children attend various extracurricular tutoring sessions in the remaining half of the

day. Furthermore, Singapore is a multi-immigrant country known as the “World Ethnicity Museum” [13]. In order to adapt to the diverse and international cultural and social development, language education has also become another extracurricular tutoring market in Singapore.

4. Conclusion

There are many similarities in the background of the formation of “shadow education” between China and Singapore, which coexist in East Asia. However, there are also differences due to the specificity of the country’s development history. In terms of social and economic background, the economic development level of both countries is constantly improving, and their economic strength is becoming increasingly strong, providing a good development environment for high-quality education. However, Singapore’s overall economic level is relatively high, and China has a clear characteristic of imbalanced economic development. Therefore, there are significant differences in the education level and scope of the two people.

Regarding cultural background, both countries have been deeply influenced by Confucian culture, presenting an educational concept emphasising achievement and “knowledge changes fate”. Compared to the ancient Eastern civilization with a history of 5,000 years in China, Singapore’s culture is more diverse and heterogeneous. Hence, its education is, to some extent, more open and accessible. In terms of educational background, due to the influence of Western capitalist systems, Singapore places more emphasis on elite education and bilingual education. China implements a nine-year compulsory education system, emphasizing the popularization of education for all. However, influenced by Confucian culture, both countries have talent selection systems similar to the imperial examination system, which fundamentally contributed to the development of “shadow education”.

This study attempts to explore the most profound reasons behind “shadow education” from a historical perspective, but there are some limitations. Firstly, this article is an expansion based on the study of existing literature, lacking field research and some timeliness and intuitiveness. Secondly, this is a manifestation of cognitive ability in the short term, and more profound and valuable research results should continue to be followed up. Finally, further analysis can be conducted from the perspectives of human capital and structural functions. This study is conducive to promoting understanding of “shadow education”, reflecting on the problems existing in mainstream school education in the era of “shadow education” prevalence, and assisting in the joint development of diversified education, contributing to the national education construction cause.

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