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Kho Ee Moi. 2013. The construction of femininity in a postcolonial state: Girls' education in Singapore. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press. ISBN 978-1-60497-851-3. xiv +242pp.

The author is a professor at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. The book presents the findings of her doctoral thesis on girls' education in Singapore. It focuses on the role of state discourse in education policy in contributing towards the "complex blend of modernity and traditionalism" (p. xiii) to be found in the contemporary Singapore woman.

Chapter one presents statistical data that document the tremendous advances in educational attainment and workforce participation that Singapore women have made in the past five decades. At the same time, though, there remain significant wage disparities between male and female workers, as well as a dearth of women in leadership roles, particularly in politics. In addition, gender stereotyping continues to play a part in determining male and female representation in various courses of study at the higher education level. The author lays out the major thesis of her book, namely, that schools have played a major part in shaping gender ideologies and maintaining patriarchal relations. She also calls into question the underlying motivation of the governing People's Action Party (PAP), which has enjoyed uninterrupted political power over the past five decades, for supporting women's education and economic participation.

In the second chapter, Kho interrogates the PAP's gender discourse between 1956 and 1965. This period covers the decade immediately prior to the attainment of political independence. Kho demonstrates the "discordant and contradictory" (p. 44) discourse and policies surrounding women's education and workforce participation. While the PAP advocated greater educational and

workforce opportunities in order to maximize women's economic potential, it continued to emphasise the primacy of women's domestic roles.

Chapter three continues in the same vein, centring this time on post-independence state discourse between 1966 and 2010. Patriarchal ideologies rear their head for instance, in terms of, curricular differentiation in policies on lower secondary girls' and boys' participation in domestic science and technical studies. Another example of gender inequalities was the official decision in 1979 to limit female enrolment to one-third of the University of Singapore's annual medical faculty intake. This decision was justified on the grounds that many female doctors withdrew from the workforce after getting married and having children, which meant that the state investment in their education had not yielded sufficient returns. Yet another controversial policy was the 1985 decision to make home economics a mandatory subject for lower secondary girls. Kho argues that far from empowering women, the PAP appeared to entrench the subordinate status of women.

In further support of her major thesis, Kho embarks in chapter four on content analysis of state-approved syllabi and textbooks in home economics between 1959 and 2008. During much of this period, these textbooks present stereotyped notions of femininity, such as "neatness, gentleness, hospitality, and attention to personal grooming and hygiene" (p. 97). Major changes incorporating men's participation in domestic activities appeared only after a major decision in 1991 to make home economics mandatory for lower secondary boys too. Besides home economics, Kho presents evidence of stereotyped gender representation in history, social studies and technical studies textbooks.

Chapter five further advances Kho's major argument by arguing that the process of gender socialization takes place in the hidden curriculum. Examples of

Ministry of Education policies examined in this chapter include the prohibition of corporal punishment for girls, and the overt official concern with girls who are deemed to be sporting 'unfeminine' hairstyles and dressing in 'unfeminine' ways. Kho argues that the rise in the number of cases of female teenage delinquency represents a rejection of traditional notions of femininity.

This book is the first academic book to offer an alternative view of Singapore women's progress in educational attainment. Kho has marshalled an array of evidence to show the tension between education for female empowerment and education for female subordination. She points out that females do not passively acquiesce in their own subordination but instead are increasingly able to subvert official attempts to impose its notions of femininity on them.

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