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DRAFT

Abstract Drawing on Brown (in *Br J Sociol Educ* 11(1):65–86, 1990) and Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (in *Interchange* 47:189–210, 2016), this article explores the relationship between private supplementary tutoring and parentocracy using Singapore as an illustrative case study. It is argued that the ubiquity and affordability of private supplementary tutoring in Singapore indicate that parentocracy is embraced by the majority of parents who seek to give their children a competitive edge. Among the parents, better-educated parents with higher incomes adopt a more proactive interventionist parenting style by paying more for both academic and non-academic enrichment classes. The phenomenon of parentocracy has contributed to educational inequalities in Singapore as children from more privileged home backgrounds have access to more educational resources and opportunities. But the inequalities engendered by parentocracy are mitigated by high-stakes exams that ensure that admission to elite schools is still largely determined by exam results rather than the wealth and wishes of parents. This study offers a nuanced account of private supplementary tutoring through highlighting its diversity and appropriation by different parents in Singapore. The study also illustrates the co-existence of parentocracy and meritocracy where private supplementary tutoring is strategically utilised by parents in Singapore to give their children an equal opportunity to excel in terminal exams.

Keywords Meritocracy . Parentocracy . Private supplementary tutoring . Singapore

Introduction

A growing international trend in education is private supplementary tutoring (also known as shadow education). Private supplementary tutoring, evident in Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada and the U.K., is especially prominent in East Asian societies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Macao (e.g. see Bray 2003, 2007; Reay 2008; Lee, Park and Lee 2009; Tan 2009; Matsuoka 2012; Bray, Mazawi and Sultana 2013; Chan and Bray 2014; Li and Choi 2014; Manzon and Areepattamannil 2014; Zhan 2014; Zhang 2014; Angus 2015). To date, there is a growing body of literature that documents various aspects and impact of private supplementary tutoring on issues such as neo-liberal policy, school choice, student achievement, equity, social justice and well-being of students (e.g. see Bray 1999, 2003; Silova, Būdienė and Bray 2006; Windle 2009; Mori and Baker, 2010; Bray and Lykins 2012; Bray and Kwo, 2013; Smala, Paz and Lingard 2013; Song, Park and Sang 2013; Evans 2014; Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton 2016; Zhang and Bray 2016).

But what is relatively under-researched is the complex and dynamic relationships between private supplementary tutoring and parentocracy, particularly in

a context where private supplementary tutoring has become commonplace. Parentocracy is the ideology that a child's education is dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the abilities and efforts of students (Brown 1990). The extant literature informs us that upper- and middle-class parents aspire to buy a competitive advantage for their children's education through private supplementary tutoring and other strategies (e.g. see Brown 1990; Lareau 2000, 2011; Davies 2004; Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton 2016). Scholars have also maintained that parentocracy has resulted in greater educational inequalities in society, since not all parents could afford to pay for the extra classes (e.g. see Conway 1997; van Zanten and Darchy-Koehlin 2005; Reay 2008; Angus 2015). Underpinning the existing arguments on private supplementary tutoring and parentocracy is the assumption that private supplementary tutoring is coveted by and affordable to only a small segment of parents – those with the financial and social capital to give their children a head start in education. But what if private supplementary tutoring has become the norm rather than the exception in a country? What implications do the prevalence and accessibility of private supplementary tutoring have on parentocracy and educational inequalities? This article answers the above questions by examining the phenomenon of private supplementary tutoring in Singapore. The first part of the paper discusses the notion of parentocracy and its relation with private supplementary tutoring. The next section introduces the education system of Singapore, followed by an exploration of the salient characteristics of private supplementary tutoring in Singapore and its implications for parentocracy and educational inequalities.

Parentocracy and Private Supplementary Tutoring

The term 'parentocracy' was first coined by Brown in 1990 where he cautions against a shift from the ideology of meritocracy to an ideology of parentocracy in the U.K. According to him, educational parentocracy refers to a situation where "a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the *wealth* and *wishes* of parents, rather than the *ability* and *efforts* of pupils" (1990, p. 65, italics in the original). He asserts that parentocracy has contributed to educational inequalities due to the competitive advantage received by children of middle-class families:

The bare facts however are that a growing section of the 'old' and 'new' middle classes are undermining the principle of 'equality of opportunity', in the sense that educational outcomes should be determined by the abilities and efforts of pupils, not the wealth and preferences of parents. This form of 'social closure' is the outcome of an evaluation by the middle classes that educational success has become too important to be left to the chance outcome of a formally open competition (despite what the research evidence has taught us about social class and patterns of achievement) (Brown 1990, p. 78).

Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016) revisit and expand the notion of parentocracy by introducing two components to the term. Their conceptualisation serves to better explain the processes and mechanisms by which middle-class parents strategically manage their children's educational portfolios. The first component of parentocracy, according to Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton, follows the argument made by Brown in his 1990 article. The thesis is that parentocracy involves a socio-political logic that underscores parental consumer choice and free-market mechanisms as key ingredients for educational success and school improvement. The consumer choice aspect of

parentocracy is witnessed in the parents' freedom to pay for private supplementary tutoring as well as other measures such as choosing a school and transporting their child to school (ibid.).

Extending Brown's ideas, Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton introduce the second component to parentocracy that draws attention to a proactive interventionist parenting style adopted by middle-class parents. Such a parenting style is "premised on fostering child development (and strategically optimising life opportunities) through structured, progressive skill-enhancing educational and extra-curricular (value-added) experiences" (p. 193). These parents subscribe to 'cultivated cultivation' (Lareau 2000, 2011) where they develop their children's talents, opinions, and skills through a high level of involvement. Essentially, these parents practise intensive parenting by closely monitoring their children's activities and providing a cognitively stimulating environment for their children (Davies 2004). Through stimulating and rich programmes both in and outside of school, middle-class parents endeavour to orchestrate salutary life-skill promoting activities and experiences for their children.

Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton echo the assertion made by Brown and other scholars that parentocracy undermines the ideology of meritocracy by contributing to educational inequalities (also see Conway 1997; van Zanten and Darchy-Koechlin 2005; Reay 2008; Angus 2015). Conway (1997) contends that "the ideology of parentocracy is a symbolic manifestation which serves to mask the production and reproduction of structured social inequalities; that is, it symbolises choice, and therefore obscures the lack of choice of the disadvantaged because of their lack of economic and conceptual abilities to play the game of choice" (para 1.4). The educational inequalities engendered by parentocracy are exemplified in private supplementary tutoring. Although private supplementary tutoring is more widespread in societies with high-stakes exams (Bray 1999), it is increasingly visible in other countries due to parentocracy. Tutoring is utilised by upper- and middle-class parents to help their children succeed in schools and boost their children's 'home advantage' (Davies 2004). Private supplementary tutoring is "an arsenal constituted of para-school materials and outsourcing domestic help: private classes, psychopedagogy offices, specialised companies to follow up homework activities, etc." (Nogueira 2010, p. 259).

Private supplementary tutoring, as a product of the education market, works "in the interests of the already advantaged" (Coldron, Cripps and Shipton 2010, p. 26, cited in Angus 2015, p. 26). Angus (2015) claims that more-privileged parents "are likely to employ tutors to coach their children for entry examinations and to ensure that their children learn musical instruments and gain other cultural or extra-curricular experiences to signal to prospective schools their worthiness as students" (p. 404; also see Tsolidis 2006). Referring to private supplementary tutoring in Canada, Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton point to the trend of middle- and upper- class parents paying over \$800 CDN a month on academic subjects and homework completion skills for their children. They conclude that tutoring is perceived by these parents to be a more affordable form of school choice as opposed to private schools (also see Davies 2004; Eckler 2015). Commenting on the similar development in the U.K. where middle-class families could afford private tuition and after-school educational activities for their children, Reay (2008) posits that "few working-class parents can afford the cost of hiring private tutors and sending children to Kumon maths classes even if they have the inclination" (p. 643).

The Education System in Singapore

It is helpful, at the outset, to give a brief overview of the current educational system in Singapore. The majority of the schools from the primary to the pre-university levels are public schools (known locally as ‘national schools’) under the administration of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The prestigious schools in Singapore (in terms of impressive academic and non-academic achievements) from primary to pre-university levels are all public schools. Children in Singapore may be enrolled in a pre-school institution (private or government-run kindergarten or child-care centre) when they are between 4 and 6 years of age. Pre-school children in Singapore generally learn basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as bilingualism: English as the first language and a second language such as Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Education is compulsory for all Singaporeans only at the primary education level, i.e., all children above the age of six years must be enrolled in a national primary school where they receive six years of schooling and sit for a terminal exam, Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). Exceptions are given only to child with special needs, attending a designated school such as an Islamic religious school, or receiving home-schooling (Ministry of Education 2015). Enrolment in primary schools is determined by various conditions such as whether the child has a sibling who is currently studying in the school, whether the parent is in the school alumni association, and whether the child lives near the school.

Core subjects such as English language, Mother Tongue Language (Chinese, Malay or an approved Indian language), Mathematics and Science are taken by primary school students enrolled in national schools. They also take part in Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) such as sports and music, and Community Involvement Programmes (CIP) where they complete service learning projects (for more details on primary education, see Ministry of Education, 2015). The PSLE is a high-stakes exam as it determines which academic stream (Express, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical)) and secondary school the student is eligible for. Competition for top-performing secondary schools is intense, resulting in many parents investing substantial time and resources to help their children excel in the PSLE. Students will be placed in an academic stream in a secondary school based on their performance in the PSLE. Students could also gain admission to school through the Direct School Admission scheme (more on this later). The stream that a student is in will also determine whether the student will receive four or five years of school and the type of national examination they need to sit for at the end of their secondary education. The General Certificate of Education ‘Ordinary’ Level (GCE ‘O’ Levels) is for students in the Express stream (the academically stronger students) whereas the General Certificate of Education ‘Normal’ Level (GCE ‘N’ Levels) is for those in the Normal stream (the academically weaker students).

Depending on the interests and academic performance of the students, they may proceed to pre-university education where they study in a two-year junior college or three-year centralised institute course, and sit for a terminal exam. Most students will sit for the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE ‘A’ Level) exam while a minority will opt for the International Baccalaureate (IB) and other exam systems arranged by specialised schools. Besides pre-university courses that prepare students for admission to universities, other post-secondary options include being enrolled in a vocational institution such as a polytechnic or the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), or specialised arts institutions. At the tertiary level, there

are six publicly-funded universities in Singapore and a number of private universities and institutions of higher learning. The current publicly-funded cohort participation rate (CPR) is 26% that translates into more than one in four students from each Primary One cohort obtaining a place in one of Singapore's publicly-funded universities (Ministry of Education 2015).

Academic performance in high-stakes exam is not the only avenue for students to gain admission to their choice schools. The MOE has introduced the 'Direct School Admission' (DSA) scheme since 2004 for students seeking admission to well-known secondary schools and junior colleges. The aim is to give students an opportunity to develop and display a more diverse range of achievements and talents such as sports and the arts in seeking admission to a secondary school or junior college before their results for the PSLE or O-Levels are released (Ministry of Education 2016a). But it should be noted that the DSA scheme does not replace the PSLE nor make academic results redundant; students who opt for a school or junior college under DSA must still achieve the minimum exam scores for them to be eligible for admission to a course being offered by their opted DSA schools. The proportion of student intake through DSA ranges from 10 per cent for fully government-funded schools to 50 per cent for Integrated Programmed schools (these are schools where students progress to junior college without taking the 'O' Levels) (Teng 2016a).

Singapore students have consistently outperformed other countries in international large-scale assessments such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (IEA 2011; TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Centre 2016; OECD 2015). Another impressive achievement is that Singapore (with only 1,640 students out of a global total of over 160,000 candidates) has produced more than 50 per cent (48 out of 81) perfect scores in the International Baccalaureate (IB) worldwide in 2015, along with a national average of 38.5 set against the global average of 30.98 (Ong 2016). The high-performing school system in Singapore has been attributed to the effective mechanism for teacher selection such that the right people are employed to become teachers; effective processes for training and development with strong emphasis on professional development for teachers; and effective systems and support structures to ensure that every student will benefit from the excellent instruction (McKinsey Report 2007).

Private Supplementary Tutoring and Parentocracy in Singapore

In Singapore, private supplementary tutoring comes in the form of 'academic classes' (what is known locally as 'tuition' that is tutoring in school subjects) or 'non-academic enrichment classes' such as learning a musical instrument or taking up ballet (En 2016). In all cases, the tutoring services are not provided by the school and are fee-paying (hence private and supplementary). It should be added that the difference between academic and non-academic enrichment classes is not always clear-cut in Singapore. For example, the Chinese Development Assistance Council runs a tuition programme that combines tuition (1.5 hours) and outdoor games or sports (half an hour) for students (Yang 2015).

Another characteristic of private supplementary tutoring in Singapore is that the teaching approach mirrors that in public schools where both content mastery and

inculcation of thinking skills are emphasised. Through various curricular reforms, schools in Singapore have gone beyond knowledge transmission to inculcate 21st century skills such as critical and inventive thinking, learning and life skills, values, character and citizenship, and socio-emotional competencies in students (Ministry of Education 2009, 2010). An example of an accent on higher-order thinking is the Primary Science syllabus that identifies “the development of reasoning and analytical skills” as providing a strong foundation in scientific knowledge and methodologies (Ministry of Education 2013). The exam paper for Primary Mathematics includes questions on ‘thinking skills and heuristics’ that comprise around 15% of the total marks. At the secondary level, Social Studies which is a compulsory ‘O’ Level subject tests students’ ability to answer questions based on case studies that may not be covered in the syllabus; likewise History which is taken at the ‘A’ Levels includes source-based questions that test skills in inference and critical analysis (ibid.). It has been reported that students are turning to tuition to learn critical thinking skills in response to syllabus changes that require greater analytical skills (Teng 2016c). Even students taking the International Baccalaureate (IB) are enrolled in tuition because, in the words of an IB tutor, “they need perspectives and to hear more people comment on their ideas” (cited in Ong 2016). As private supplementary tutoring serves to shadow the formal school system, it is unsurprising that tuition and enrichment classes have gone beyond rote-learning to nurture higher-order thinking skills that are tested in exams.

Private supplementary tutoring, parentocracy and educational inequalities

A distinctive feature of private supplementary tutoring in Singapore is its ubiquity and affordability that indicate that parentocracy is espoused by the majority of parents. A survey conducted by The Straits Times and research company Nexus Link Singapore with 500 parents reveals that 7 in 10 parents send their children for tuition (Davie 2015a). Nearly eight in 10 parents with children in primary school pay for tuition, six out of 10 parents with children in secondary school do so, and four in 10 parents with pre-school children (aged five and six years old) do so (ibid.). There are 850 tuition centres registered with the Education Ministry, up from about 500 in 2011 (Hio 2014). The prevalence of private supplementary tutoring is aided by its affordability. According to the above-mentioned survey, the median monthly amount spent on tuition for pre-school was S\$155, S\$205 for primary school and S\$260 for secondary school (Davie 2015a). A total of S\$1.1 billion a year is spent on tuition in Singapore, almost double the S\$650 million spent in 2004 (Davie 2015b; Teng 2016c). The amount spent on tuition (S\$155-S\$260 per month) is within the means of most Singapore households, given that the median household income from work was S\$8,666 in 2015 (Lim, 2016). Even poor families could send their children for tuition at subsidised rates or even for free. Ethnic self-help groups such as Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Singapore Indian Development Association (Sinda) and Yayasan Mendaki offering tuition at a rate of between S\$8 and S\$40 per subject monthly (Yang, 2015). These self-help groups also provide fee waiver schemes and further subsidies to those who may need financial assistance. Free tuition is also offered at non-profit organisations such as Life Edu Services and religious organisations such as Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (Teng 2015a). Students could also receive free tuition through online platforms. An example is an app called EduSnap where students can upload their mathematics and science

questions or a snapshot of their worksheets onto EduSnap and receive replies in real time from teachers at 13 tuition centres and four voluntary welfare organisations (Teng 2014).

Unlike the case in Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada and the U.K. where only the middle- and upper- class parents could afford to pay for private supplementary tutoring (Davies 2004; Reay 2008; Windle 2009; Angus 2015; Eckler 2015; Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton 2016), all parents in Singapore are able to do so, either by paying for such services themselves or receiving assistance from welfare organisations. And in contrast to the situation in Canada where parents turn to private tutoring as an affordable alternative to private schools (Davies 2004), parents in Singapore rely on tuition as the vehicle for their children to qualify for prestigious public schools and universities through exam results. A survey with 500 parents shows that the top two reasons for paying for tuition for their children are to improve their children's grades and to help them keep up with others (Davie 2015a). This suggests a mentality of parentocracy where parents wish to give their children a head-start in life and ace the high-stakes exams in a highly competitive society. A mother of a child who is in primary five said that her daughter performed poorly in school as she was the only pupil in her class who did not receive tuition (Davie 2015b). Another mother of a primary school child commented on the pressure to pay for private tuition for her child: "PSLE is a ranking exam and decides which stream and secondary school my child will enter. If everyone else is getting tuition to improve their results, then how can I not provide tuition for my child? She will lose out" (cited in Davie 2015b).

Rather than viewing private supplementary tutoring as resulting in greater educational inequalities, most parents in Singapore perceive it as a means of promoting equal opportunity and social mobility by improving their children's test scores. The majority of parents, and not just the more wealthy and better-educated ones, are keen to optimise the learning conditions for their children through tuition and enrichment programmes. In so doing, they evince their desire and commitment to assist their children to succeed in schools and boost their children's 'home advantage' (Davies 2004). Unlike the case elsewhere where private supplementary tutoring works "in the interests of the already advantaged" (Coldron, Cripps and Shipton 2010, p. 26), tutoring is welcomed by and accessible to all parents, even low-income families, as a tool to upgrading one's station in life (Yang 2015). The massification of tuition in Singapore reflects a socio-political logic of parental consumer choice and free-market mechanisms (Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton, 2016). Parents in Singapore are willing buyers and consumers of tutoring services in an affluent and exam-oriented society where academic excellence is valued.

Parentocracy from better educated parents with higher incomes

Although the majority of parents in Singapore subscribe to parentocracy, the better-educated parents with higher incomes adopt a more proactive interventionist parenting style by paying more for both academic and non-academic enrichment classes. Families with monthly household incomes of more than S\$6,000 spent a median sum of S\$200 each month on tuition for children in preschool, compared with S\$100 for those who earned S\$3,000 and below (Teng 2015c). Likewise, parents who are university graduates spent S\$500 on their preschool children, as compared with those with only primary school education who spent S\$100. To cater to the demands

of more wealthy and better-educated parents, a buffet spread of enrichment programmes for children and youths has proliferated, ranging from learning a musical instrument to taking up martial arts and mastering a new skill such as sewing. Beyond the usual courses such as phonics as well as speech and drama are programmes on life skills such as ‘leadership’ and brain training programmes for children as young as 18 months (ibid.). Tuition and enrichment centres are also marketing themselves as not simply churning out exam-smart students but also individuals who are future-ready. A case in point is a high-end tuition centre that charges relatively high fees (from S\$30 to \$50 per hour). Guided by the motto ‘nurturing the love of learning’, the centre states on its website:

Beyond their academic goals, we want our students to be *world-ready*. Lessons at our tuition centres include *fundamental personal enrichment and critical analytical skills* that help them apply what they have learnt in class to the world around them. [...] Coupled with our range of holiday programmes and specialty workshops as part of our *Future Leaders Programme*, TLL [The Learning Lab] goes beyond the extent of a tuition centre to provide multiple platforms to develop your child’s *life skills* that will help set a strong foundation for their future (The Learning Lab 2017, italics added).

The ideology of parentocracy has contributed to educational inequalities as children from more privileged home backgrounds have access to more educational resources and opportunities. The investment of their parents is a manifestation of ‘cultivated cultivation’ (Lareau 2000, 2011) where they seek to provide a holistic education for their children through “structured, progressive skill-enhancing educational and extra-curricular (value-added) experiences” (Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton 2016, p. 193). It has been reported that more parents are enrolling their children in pre-school enrichment classes as they are keen to give their children a leg-up in school (Philomin 2014). A mother who has enrolled her four-year-old daughter in three enrichment programmes at three different centres opined, “It’s more about letting her learn from young and take learning as part and parcel of her school life” (cited in Teng 2015c). An academic from Singapore affirmed that not all parents who send their children for tuition are motivated by grades, and may instead be hoping to give their children self-confidence or personal guidance (Hio 2014).

Some parents are also motivated by the pragmatic consideration to increase their children’s chance of being admitted into elite schools via DSA scheme through non-academic enrichment classes. A discernible trend is for parents to sign their children up for talent development courses such as sports training and Grade 8 music certificates as well as programmes that prepare their children for entrance tests and interviews for DSA (Teng 2016a; Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. 2014). Given that these classes do not come cheap, charging up to \$300 per hour (Teng 2016a), they are targeted at more-privileged parents who aspire to equip their children with all-rounded attributes that “signal to prospective schools their worthiness as students” (Angus 2015, p. 404). Using the term ‘parentocracy’, a member of parliament claims that it is an “open secret” that the DSA scheme benefits children from wealthier homes as they have the means to be nurtured in specific areas from a young age (Lee 2016).

But the inequalities engendered by parentocracy are mitigated by high-stakes exams that ensure that admission to elite schools is still largely determined by exam results rather than the wealth and wishes of parents. The function of PSLE as a

screening and placement exam based on the pupil's exam results explains why as many as 80% of primary school children receive tuition (Davie 2015a). The enactment of the DSA scheme has not diminished the centrality of terminal exams. Only around 6 per cent of students (2700 out of 42, 217 secondary one students) are admitted to secondary schools via DSA (Teng 2016a; Ministry of Education 2016b). A mathematics tutor noted that tuition is viewed as a must-have by parents as the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) is a "do-or-die exam and a ticket to a good school. Parents will do their best to maximise their kid's potential" (cited in Lee 2015). That the majority of parents – regardless of wealth and educational qualification – are prepared to fork out money on tuition shows that they believe in the meritocratic process of achieving academic success through a formally open competition, whether it is the PSLE, GCE 'O' Levels, GCE 'A' Levels or IB. Rather than attempting to "re-direct the future determined by school results (through private lessons, for instance)" (van Zanten and Darchy-Koechlin 2005, p. 18), parents in Singapore seek to *direct* the future determined by school results through intensive and sustained private lessons. The wash-back effect of high-stakes exams has triggered down to pre-school education where parents of young children rely on tuition to prepare their children for primary education. As noted by a parent, "In the past, it was all play and just learning the ABCs in kindergarten. But now, by K1 [Kindergarten Grade 1], you need to learn how to count and read, to be on a par with everyone else" (cited in Teng 2015b).

Conclusion

The example of Singapore builds upon and extends the conception of parentocracy by Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016) by illuminating the nature of parentocracy and its relation with private supplementary tutoring. On the one hand, parentocracy in Singapore reflects two components of parentocracy identified by Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016): a socio-political logic that underscores parental consumer choice and free-market mechanisms, and a proactive interventionist parenting style adopted by middle-class parents. But the Singapore case extends the existing research on parentocracy in three main ways. First, the study on Singapore illustrates that parentocracy is not confined to upper- and middle-class parents, as maintained by many scholars. Rather, it is embraced by the majority of parents in Singapore who seek to give their children a competitive edge through tuition and enrichment classes. Private supplementary tutoring is interpreted and manipulated by the majority of parents in Singapore to provide a more level-playing field for their children. The Singapore example demonstrates how private supplementary tutoring is interpreted and manipulated by parents to enable their children to access the best available educational resources and experiences. The study offers a nuanced account of private supplementary tutoring by highlighting its diversity and appropriation by different parents. It foregrounds not just the existence and quantity of private supplementary tutoring but more importantly, its diversity and appropriation by different parents in a competitive and high-performing school system.

The second way in which our study on Singapore has extended Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016)'s conception of parentocracy is its analysis of the nature of parentocracy. Parentocracy in Singapore is further differentiated in terms of the aspirations and strategies of different parents based on their educational qualifications and incomes. Parents who are university graduates with more

disposable cash are more inclined to pay more for salutary life-skill promoting activities and experiences for their children. These parents exhibit intensive parenting by paying close attention to their children's education, providing a cognitively stimulating environment and closely monitoring their children's activities. The competitive edge of children of the more privileged home backgrounds lies not in whether they have received private supplementary tutoring but in the nature and quality of tutoring. Through an array of non-academic enrichment classes, these children go beyond disciplinary knowledge and exam techniques to acquire 21st century competencies and middle-class dispositions. The illustrative case study of Singapore adds to the existing literature by offering a nuanced account of private supplementary tutoring.

The third contribution of this study to the existing research on parentocracy concerns the relationship between parentocracy and meritocracy. The experience of Singapore challenges the view that parentocracy necessarily involves a shift away from meritocracy. It is arguable that private supplementary tutoring in Singapore is an extension of meritocracy as such tutoring gives all children an equal opportunity to improve their performance in high-stakes exams. The prevalence and affordability of private supplementary tutoring means that all parents, not just those with stronger financial and social capital, are able to give their children the extra help needed to ace the exams. In contrast to countries where children from more disadvantaged homes lack the economic and conceptual abilities to play the game of choice (Conway 1997), all children in Singapore can access tuition – whether paid or free – from multiple service providers. Rather than school choice where more affluent and influential parents mobilise their social capital to enroll their children in elite schools, the terminal exams at the primary, secondary and pre-university levels in Singapore ensures that the child's performance in these exams is the ultimate determining factor. A shared belief in the fairness and transparency of a formally open competition via high-stakes exams explains why parents are keen to provide tuition for their children.

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