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Neoliberalism and the Good Daddies and Bad Daddies of Academic Freedom

*Stewart Chang**

The announcement that Yale was opening a satellite campus in conjunction with the National University of Singapore sparked debate regarding academic freedom.¹ Critics questioned whether Yale was compromising its duty to foster academic freedom by opening a campus in a country known for its restrictions on free speech² and association.³ The Yale-NUS controversy illustrates some of the problems with promoting freedoms associated with liberal democratic states in the transnational context, which speaks to Stanley Fish's inquiry, "What is the relationship between academic freedom and democracy?"⁴

Fish argues that professors are obligated to promote academic freedom insofar as it is part of their job "by contract and by the course catalogue rather than by a vision of democracy or world peace."⁵ Fish contrasts his "it's just a job" school of academic freedom with what he describes as Robert Post's "for the common good" vision, that the academy has a responsibility to produce informed civic participants in democratic society. Post believes that good participatory subjects are trained in the academy through exposure to more information representing diverse viewpoints, and "that academic freedom exists to protect the distinct value of free and critical inquiry"⁶ necessary for participatory subjects to make informed decisions. Thus in America, the academy arguably serves a paternalistic role by nurturing state subjects willing and prepared to contribute to the democratic process.

Singapore similarly values the role of higher education in promoting participatory state subjects. In 2002, Singapore launched the Global Schoolhouse Initiative, a program for transnational higher-education

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¹ Tracy Quek, *Yale-NUS College Plan Sparks Debate*, STRAITS TIMES (Sing.), Sept. 16, 2010, at A3.

² CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE Aug. 9, 1965, pt. IV, § 14.

³ Public Order Act, 2009, c. 257A, pt. II, § 5 (Sing.).

⁴ STANLEY FISH, *VERSIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM: FROM PROFESSIONALISM TO REVOLUTION* (forthcoming 2014) (manuscript at 8) (on file with FIU Law Review).

⁵ *Id.* (manuscript at 10).

⁶ MATTHEW W. FINKIN & ROBERT C. POST, *FOR THE COMMON GOOD: PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN ACADEMIC FREEDOM* 43 (2009).

development “to bring[] together networks of ideas, knowledge, technology, and world-class universities, aligning them with the professional aspirations of people who are anticipated to contribute to Singapore’s knowledge economy ambitions.”⁷ Under this vision, the role of higher education in Singapore was to develop state subjects who could contribute to the capitalistic growth of the nation. Since its inception, the Global Schoolhouse Initiative has facilitated the establishment of several transnational campuses in collaboration with prominent Western universities, including Yale. However, Singapore has balanced its treatment of education as a facilitator of participatory capitalism with an ambivalent suspicion over certain liberal values associated with capitalism.

Under Post’s model, good citizen subjects in America mature through enjoying open access to all types of information, learning to differentiate between the good and the bad, and forming individual critical thinking. On the other hand, the Singaporean government believes good citizen subjects are best nurtured when protected from information it deems harmful. To America, this “State Father-knows-best” approach⁸ might seem overly restrictive, paternalistic, and oppressive. Yet from the alternative perspective, Singapore could equally criticize the United States as an overly permissive parent.⁹ This critique of liberal democracy, raised in the Yale-NUS controversy, demonstrates how academic freedom in the transnational context promotes only a particularly Westernized version of participatory government.

⁷ Ravinder Sidhu, *The ‘Brand Name’ Research University Goes Global*, 57 HIGHER EDUC. 125, 129 (2009).

⁸ Geraldine Heng & Janadas Devan, *State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore*, in NATIONALISMS AND SEXUALITIES 343, 343-64 (Andrew Parker et al. eds., 1992).

⁹ JOTHIE RAJAH, *AUTHORITARIAN RULE OF LAW: LEGISLATION, DISCOURSE AND LEGITIMACY IN SINGAPORE* (2012).