



Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC)
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The elite school as a 'cognitive machine'?

Developing transnational capitals for the national 'field of power'

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Chair: Yang Rui

In *The State Nobility: Elite schools in the field of power* (1989), Bourdieu exposes the central role of elite schools (universities) in consecrating social hierarchies through what he calls an 'operation of social alchemy'. The 'field of power' is the French state and the 'state nobility' consists of what Loic Wacquant, in his Foreword, calls an 'aristocracy of credentials'. Also, following Bourdieu, Wacquant argues that *The State Nobility* provides 'principles' that are 'equally operative in other countries and epochs'.

But we ask, given the globalizing practices of elites and elite schools, how well do these conceptual principles travel over time and place, particularly to elite schools in countries that were subjected to British, not French, imperialism? We address these questions, drawing from major study called *Elite Independent Schools in Globalising Circumstances: a multi sited global ethnography*, focusing on our first round of fieldwork in an elite secondary school in Singapore. We will show (1) that the 'cognitive machine' of the school's meritocracy has been central to the development of a 'rooted' transnational capital that will serve the nation state both within and beyond its 'vulnerable' borders, and (2) how transnational character capital is regarded as essential for Singapore's mobile 'state nobility' which has the 'world as its hinterland'.

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