

READINGS IN MALAYSIAN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPMENTAL STATE OR NEO-LIBERAL POLICY? HOUSING PROVISION IN MALAYSIA AT THE CROSSROAD

Syafiee Shuid

INTRODUCTION

Debates on the changing role of the state in East Asia focus mainly on Japan and other nations belonging to the first generation of New Industrializing Countries (NICs) such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea. However, there is still a lack of literature on the changing role of the state in the so-called 'Asian Four' or the second generation of NICs, namely Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, which are more typical of developing countries (World Bank, 1993, p. 2). East Asian countries have generally experienced long term political and economic stability, and they have constituted a self-reinforcing regional market (Jenkins et al., 2007, p. 292). Prior to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998, East Asia was one of the most successful developing regions in the world (World Bank, 1993; Richter, 2000). The economic success of East Asia through the last three decades of the twentieth century was spectacular, with booming growth rates, burgeoning exports and income gains. However a study by the World Bank (1993) suggests the policy approach in East Asia clearly did not 'fit' the neo-liberal development model.

Meanwhile the adoption of the neo-liberalism policy meant "...the reduction of all forms of government spending and regulations, particularly those that might inhibit people being active in the market" (United Nations, 2003, p. 43). Meanwhile, Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 2) describe the neo-liberalism ideology as a "...belief that open, competitive and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development". Most importantly, neo-liberal ideology not only transformed the political and economic landscape, but also every aspect of people's lives in any country touched by it. As explained by Moody (1997, p. 119) "*...neo-liberalism aspires to create a 'utopia' of free market liberated from all forms of state interference, it has in practice entailed a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention in order to impose market rule upon all aspects of social life.*" The proponents of neo-liberalism also believed state decisions were bound to be politically biased, depending upon the strength of the interest groups involved such as unions, environmentalist or trade lobbies. Similarly, state decisions on matters such as investment and capital accumulation were bound to be wrong because the information available to the state could not rival that contained in the market (Harvey, 2005, p. 20).

This chapter will be divided into four sections to discuss the East Asian developmental state, the neo-liberalism in East Asia, low cost housing provision in Malaysia and finally conclusion.