

**VALUES AND DEVELOPMENT
IN SINGAPORE**

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to write this short foreword to introduce the Department's Seminar and Occasional Papers Series. The series provides the opportunity for staff members of the Department as well as scholars of Malay Studies in general to have their research findings on Malay subjects made known to a wider audience. It is also hoped that this initiative will provide the avenue for a beneficial exchange of ideas and viewpoints on Malay issues between town and gown.

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I. PROLOGUE

Development inheres values whether implied or expressly stated. This paper will not attempt to explicate the role of values in fostering development nor will it examine the causal nexus between values and development. Its essential task is to identify the values given priority in national development and following that to explain the reasons and assumptions for their choice. In doing so, an attempt will be made to set down some general observations on values in the construction of a coherent development strategy in multi-racial, multi-cultural Singapore.

There are two ways of looking at values as praxis. First of all, values as desirable standards or end-objectives may be actively sought either for their own sake or for some imagined good. Such values normally reflect a community's sense of identity and well-being both psychologically and culturally. Secondly, values are also pursued because they are seen to have existential consequences. Failure to internalize and realize such values would, as implied, have adverse effects on physical and material well-being. In this respect, failure to adapt is also a failure to internalize the requisite values. The two modes of value praxis as explained should not be seen as separate or mutually exclusive. In certain areas or aspects of development they cohere or overlap in which case there is mutual reinforcement.

II SURVIVAL AS IMPERATIVE

Notwithstanding three decades of more or less uninterrupted growth in Singapore, the question of economic and political survival remains embedded in national consciousness. The reasons for this are not difficult to find. The total land area of Singapore (including that of the smaller islands) is 641.4 square kilometres. Other than its strategic position and first class port, it has no natural resources of any

consequence. As a multi-racial society, Singapore has had its share of communal conflicts in the past, especially when it was a part of Malaysia. In the 1950s strikes, unemployment and political unrests were rampant. These and other conditions created great uncertainty concerning its future. This was to reach traumatic proportions in 1965 when Singapore was forced out of the Federation of Malaysia. No doubt feelings of vulnerability have receded to some extent especially among those of the post-independence generation. Nonetheless, this does not alter the essential challenges of survival that Singapore has to cope with. Singapore has and remains to be a small independent state dependent for its well-being on favourable external conditions and perhaps more critically its internal dynamism. The political culture governing debate on issues of national importance is therefore premised on these parameters of survival.

III SURVIVAL AND VALUE DEVELOPMENT

There is no doubt that survival entails two interrelated parameters: one the institutionalization of a value-system that maintains national unity and promotes common purpose and the other the institutionalization of a value-system that motivates economic attainment. Both as can be seen hinge on internal dynamism as a pre-requisite of success.

In Singapore's multi-racial society, national unity is achieved by a variety of strategies. It entails not only the protection of legitimate civic rights irrespective of class, racial and religious affiliation but equally the rule of law. Both aspects have and continue to undergird all dealings between individuals and between individuals and the state. If anything, the courts of law or the judicial system is seen as the the highest and most legitimate arbiter of right and wrong within the ambit of the Singapore constitution. Attempts to impugn or question its integrity amount no less to undermining Singapore's stability.¹

¹ In this connection, it is instructive to mention the case of Dr Christopher Lingle, a former lecturer in European Studies at NUS who published an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1994 impugning the integrity of the Singapore judiciary. He was cited for contempt of court and fined S\$10,000.

Race as a factor remains critical to internal political stability. Its potential threat to peace and harmony continues to be taken seriously notwithstanding the growing openness and sense of common purpose. Early initiatives to diffuse its threat began with the promulgation of a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural nation-building policy. To give form to the policy, multi-lingual schools were established with parity of status and treatment. The on-going rationale seems to be that in matters of language, culture and religion, it is best that the government be absolutely impartial. Should it intervene at all it should do so in the interest of maintaining cultural-linguistic equality. Such an even-handed, yet firm approach has and continues to pay handsome political and economic dividends as we shall see later. Since then, a vital development approach has been to encourage communal self-help on behalf of deprived or disadvantaged groups in society.² This political philosophy not only reaffirms the correctness of multi-racialism as policy but more pertinently gives form and meaning to that policy. It requires essentially, community-wide mobilization of resources for communal uplift - socially, educationally and culturally. In this, each community is seen as a partner in development with the government, with the latter playing a facilitative and enabling role.³ This more recent manifestation of development philosophy based on multi-racialism and multi-

² There are three registered community self-help organizations at the moment viz. MENDAKI (Council for the Development of the Singapore Muslim Community); CDAC (Chinese Development Assistance Council); and SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Association). For the Malay-Muslim community there is also the AMP (Association of Muslim Professionals) whose objectives are broadly similar to MENDAKI. It too receives an annual grant from the government to fund its activities. Recently, the Eurasians of Singapore have also set up an association of their own with somewhat similar objectives. Thus far communal self-help programmes have focused on educational support, cultural development, social welfare and religious education.

³ The community-based self-help organizations mentioned in Footnote 2 collect varying monthly amounts from working individuals. In this, an automatic deduction system has been instituted through the CPF scheme (Central Provident Fund). All working Malay-Muslim adults pay S\$3/- per month to MENDAKI. Chinese Singaporeans pay S\$1/- per month to the CDAC while Indian Singaporeans pay S\$2/- per month to SINDA. Individuals who do not wish to contribute could ask to be excluded.

culturalism is not only seen as politically correct but potentially beneficial given Singapore's desire to grow an 'external wing' or go regional.

Another related dimension in the political philosophy enunciated by the People's Action Party with value implications is its belief that to sustain Singapore's developmental momentum, the government cannot and should not yield to moral softness⁴. It is maintained that a society works best only if its members value self-effort and self-reliance. State welfarism, however well-intentioned, it is argued can only lead to the erosion of the work ethic and with it weakness and failure. The operating paradigms suggest the need for clear value direction and robustness of approach.

This aspect of political philosophy or value outlook is perhaps best illustrated by the organizational norm adopted to create a meritocratic society transcending racial, class and cultural barriers. Essentially, the meritocratic norm of social organization envisages the creation of a social structure based on talent and economic efficiency. Accordingly an individual's socio-economic status becomes a function of his/her contribution to the overall development process. Such a social structure is fundamentally rational since it rests on objective norms. More importantly it serves two powerful functions in the context of Singapore's multi-racialism and the need to succeed economically and politically. The meritocratic norm of social organization denies the importance of race, class and cultural affiliation and therefore provides assurance of equality of treatment and access to scarce positions and resources. In this way, the logic of multi-racialism and multi-culturalism is re-affirmed. Moreover, the meritocratic approach adopted will ensure that development initiatives succeed where reward or recognition is made a function of performance and work achievement. No doubt, the meritocratic approach works well because it appeals

⁴ The People's Action Party (PAP) has ruled Singapore since 1959. For a brief spell of 2 years (1963-1965) PAP rule was subsumed under a Federal system based in Kuala Lumpur. Following separation from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, the PAP set in motion a new development strategy to ensure Singapore's viability as an independent state.

more to the egotistic drive. Be that as it may, it has propelled the economy to its present heights. There is then a powerful underlying logic to the meritocratic approach, providing reaffirmation to the Mencian adage that "a country is at peace when its people are well-fed and their energies productively channelled".⁵

The meritocratic principle as it relates to Singapore's development philosophy inherently advances political stability and economic growth. Since its central emphasis is on proven talent irrespective of race and social status, it upholds standards of objectivity in status determination. Furthermore, because it puts a premium on talent and performance, it shapes values that have potential positive effects on the economy.

The two basic imperatives as perceived in development philosophy viz, the imperative of political stability and the imperative of economic security not only shape value concerns but also the policies implemented to realize them. Actualization of the former has assumed a variety of forms, among them: the institution of a system of compulsory national service over 2½ years for all male Singaporeans above 18 years of age; the growth of the bi-lingual national school founded on shared political values; and the tightening of legislation against the misuse of religion for political ends as exemplified in the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, 1991.

The means available to enhance economic security are largely confined to two viz, the cumulative raising of the educational standards of the population as a whole and the intelligent utilization of Singapore's strategic position as a communicational and service hub for Southeast Asia and beyond. In the process, Singapore will also rely on enlarging its manufacturing and industrial capacity, in particular in relation to information technology. To actualize the former, the Ministry of Education has restructured the school system to enable more students to pass critical examinations to acquire higher training qualifications over an extended year of study (and therefore

⁵ Chen Huan-Chang, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and his School*, Vol 1. Longmans, Green & Co, Columbia University, NY 1911, p 136.

in the process reduce attrition and drop-out rates); reduced the staff-student ratio to provide quality teaching, and implemented the Independent school - an educational institution that is given freedom and flexibility including financial and infrastructural support to vary its subjects and course offers to develop talent and promote creativity. At a more fundamental level is the government's approach to enhancing economic security through the Gifted Education Programme - a programme that mixes mentorship with self learning activities to nurture talent and creativity. Two years ago, the government instituted EDUSAVE to finance programmes aimed at educational enrichment. Much earlier in 1983, the then PM Mr Lee Kuan Yew (now Senior Minister) had broached the danger of Singapore's genetic pool being depleted because university graduates were not marrying among themselves in sufficient numbers. Controversial through the prognosis it nonetheless underpinned the government's fear that without a good talent pool, Singapore's ability to compete and survive would be reduced commensurately. Since then, a facilitative body called the Social Development Unit (SDU) has been instituted to address the problem. It can be expected that investment in human resource development will continue to be the major strategy for economic development.

The perceived imperatives of political stability and economic survival as outlined thus far have been, and continue to be the propelling agents of value development. One may quite rightly asked at this point whether there are legitimate (perhaps even higher) value concerns beyond those driven by existential-pragmatic considerations?

IV POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION AND THE DISAMBIGUATING OF THE AMBIGUOUS

The PAP has ruled Singapore since 1959. A major factor of its success continues to be its ability to identify the salient issues at each stage of the development process, work out the strategies required for their resolution and finally to prepare the minds of the people for their execution. In this it has succeeded brilliantly in particular, in the field of economic planning and development.

In maintaining internal political stability (which implies the effective management of race relations), it has and continues to adopt a quadripartite approach viz, to ensure that all the major ethnic communities are adequately represented in Parliament on the Groups Representation Constituency (GRC) formula; (b) to respond swiftly to attempts to sow racial or religious discord by recourse to the authority vested in the courts (c) to delineate clearly the two levels of public responsibility, the communal and the national and to allocate that responsibility according to criteria of appropriates vis-a-vis benefits accruable to the community concerned and benefits accruing to the nation as a whole and (d) to promote and facilitate multi-ethnic or multi-communal contacts through nationally supported institutions such as schools, community centres, national service, trade unions and sports activities. To add force to these measures, there is the Presidential Council for Minority Rights in Singapore.⁶

The foregoing conditions, including three decades of separation from Malaysia and the general economic well-being achieved since 1965 have helped to crystallize certain shared viewpoints among all the major communities concerning the survival imperatives of Singapore. These perceived imperatives have attained a force akin to a 'collective conscience' serving as implicit as well as explicit parameters guiding public discourse on national issues. Attempts continue to be made to socialize the young to the facts of survival and Singapore's vulnerability though with increasing difficulty. As the Senior Minister Mr Lee have been reported to say: "The younger generation have grown up without an understanding of the early struggles and hardships their elders went through. They expect things to get better and better all the time"⁷. It is a concern that many thoughtful Singaporeans share. Yet effective

⁶ The present Council is chaired by the Chief Justice, Mr Justice Yong Pang How of the Singapore Supreme Court. Its members include 6 ethnic Chinese; 3 ethnic Malays; 3 ethnic Indians; and 2 Eurasians. In this connection, the Feedback Unit of the Government also contributes importantly to reducing potential racial tension and misunderstanding.

⁷ This is a summary of his views expressed in a number of public meetings and interviews. Recently, PM Goh Chok Tong in a speech at the official opening of Raffles Girls' School spoke on the same concern again. He stressed that students should be taught 'lessons of survival (and) about Singapore's permanent constraints and fragility". *Sunday Times*, 5 March 1995.

economic development strategies and sensitive management of ethnic relations are seen as insufficient to take Singapore into the distant future. To make possible Singapore's continued well-being in that future one has to ensure that those in positions of power in particular, are people of integrity and imbued with honesty and probity in public life. The importance of maintaining high moral-ethical standards in government is not a matter of recent concern. However, existential circumstances have etched more clearly the need for more tangible strategies in addressing it - the best example being the recent pegging of ministers and civil servants' salaries at levels comparable to the leading income earners in the private sector.⁸ Such an approach as argued by the political leadership in power will meet two objectives viz draw those with the moral and leadership qualities into politics (for otherwise they would not because of the attractive salaries offered by the private sector) and reduce the prospect of corruption seeping into the corridors of power thus undermining the entire political system.⁹ Indeed the People's Action Party views political leadership as the most critical parameter in maintaining Singapore's stability and prosperity. Paying ministers, permanent secretaries and other high ranking civil servants well, though adding to the quantum of annual public expenditure is in a direct sense investing in Singapore's future. While such values as service to the nation for its own sake, civic responsibility, sense of loyalty and patriotism are not thrown overboard yet implicitly they are seen more as virtues that need to be cultivated or encouraged but less as realistic options for the recruitment of high calibre and responsible leaders and administrators. It can be seen in this regard, that state craft

⁸ For details, see the *White Paper* on 'Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government'. Singapore National Printers, 1994. The statement of validation reads as follows: "Competent political leadership is crucial to good government. Singapore must draw its Ministers from among its most outstanding committed citizens. It must find a continuing flow of men and women of ability and integrity, who will govern the country, mobilise the population, and chart future directions for the nation. (Otherwise) It will lose the competitive edge over other countries which enables it to thrive and prosper and compensate for its smallness, vulnerability and lack of resources".

⁹ This aspect of moral-ethical concern should be seen in relation to the People's Action Party's on-going efforts at leadership renewal viz the careful selection of potential party candidates for election and the obligatory period of testing to ensure suitability prior to elevation in the government/party hierarchy.

as perceived by the People's Action Party leadership remains to be quintessentially pragmatic - the guiding principle being a concern with what works in politics and economics as a first charge and only incidentally with what might be termed 'higher ideals' such as public service for its own sake without expectation of personal gain or reward.¹⁰ As the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Dr Goh Keng Swee opined "it is impossible to know completely what goes on in the minds of people." The government's responsibility as he implied was to make known its policy intentions whilst simultaneously alert the public to the consequences, whether positive or negative as the case may be should they be ignored.

It can be seen that the values espoused up to this point of the discussion are existentially driven. The underlying belief being that failure to internalise and act on these values would lead to dire political economic consequences. The central thematic frame validating these values is that of national survival. The political, economic and moral-ethical values promoted in this regard share a common identity being logically and meaningfully integrated.¹¹

Values shaped merely by existential circumstances or are the emanations of a struggle for survival to be effective in the long term need to be validated and rationalised by recourse to a shared historical-cultural past both real and imagined. It is in this context that one should view efforts by Chinese Singaporeans who constitute 78% of the population to rekindle interest in Confucian philosophy, not as some are wont to believe in its entirety but selectively guided by the criteria of relevance, compatibility, appropriateness and practicability within the general framework of Singapore's multiculturalism.

¹⁰ In recent years, the matter of developing a civic culture has drawn some public attention. This arose from a speech made by the present Minister for Information and the Arts, BG Yeo. Briefly, the Minister argued that a strong and broad-based civic culture was necessary to provide a human face to Singapore's development.

¹¹ The term "logical meaningful integration" is taken from P Sorokin's, *Socio-Cultural Dynamics*.

The key Confucianistic values identified include: respect for properly constituted authority; society before self; the family as the fount of morality and as a microcosm of the state; respect for education and knowledge as a means for socio-economic renovation; work as a basic virtue; frugality and judicious management of finances; initial sacrifice for enhancing future well-being; sense of shame; communitarianism; fidelity among friends; and not the least, moderation in thought and behaviour - the well-known Middle Way of Confucius.¹²

These values in their shades and nuances are inculcated in the schools through the Confucian Studies Programme and the Bilingual Policy: a policy which requires every school pupil to acquire competence in the mother-tongue over a span of 10 years for secondary pupils and 12 years for post-secondary (pre-university/junior college) pupils, to serve as a basis for cultural enrichment and therefore, value reinforcement.

The foregoing values are, of course, not exclusive to Confucianism. However, to understand their perceived importance to Chinese Singaporeans, one has to adopt a dual perspective viz the historical and the contemporary. From the historical perspective Confucianism despite its purported historical flaws is a uniquely Chinese creation. It puts stress on duties and responsibilities: a concern completely in accord with the requirements for meeting a modern state characterised by social pluralism and relatively new institutional structures. In a Confucian society, political leaders are expected to be moral exemplars, to lead responsibly and to be caring of the people. Its essential philosophy does not depart from the philosophy inherent in the great religious traditions of mankind. Chinese Singaporeans in this regard are most

¹² The more important values espoused by Confucianism have a resonance in Islam, the religion of Malay Singaporeans and Hinduism, the religion of most Indian Singaporeans. The state ideology proposed by the Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong in 1988 include as its dominant values the following: consensus not confrontation as a basis for resolving issues; society above self; communitarianism; the family as the building block of society and stress on religious tolerance and harmony. These values are shared by the major religions of Singapore and therefore enjoy universal acceptance. Muslim/Malay Singaporeans as in the case of Hindu Singaporeans however, continue to learn their own mother tongues and in extension their respective cultural-religious values.

of them in different degrees moral-ethically Confucius; though spiritually they could be Buddhist, Taoist, Christian or Muslim. Hence, maintaining identity with Confucianism as proposed for Chinese Singaporeans is seen as natural and being Chinese. Contemporary developments consequent on a variety of factors (the main being the economic strides made by societies founded on Confucian values and the apparent lack of clear moral-ethical directions in Western societies which overtly stress individual rights at the expense of social responsibility) have added meaning and credence to the importance and appropriateness of Confucian values as perceived.¹³ To be sure Confucian philosophy stresses moral-ethical integrity and social responsibility as the pre-requisites of political leadership. This precisely is what the government under the People's Action Party is committed to uphold.

The contemporary perspective on Confucian values and their moral-ethical import for development suggests what Mannheim terms a "conjunction", that is to say, a convergence of factors, both historical and contemporary at a moment, shaping awareness and understanding of things and events.¹⁴ For Chinese Singaporeans, Confucian teachings exemplify historical continuity and cultural authenticity. The continuing support of the family as the core institution of society and as the provenance of moral-ethical virtues as emphasized in Confucian teachings represents the most profound evidence of the living presence of the Confucian tradition.¹⁵ The essential underlying philosophical assumption is that if the family is cohesive and

¹³ This paper will not go into the on-going fractious debate concerning the similarities or differences between Confucian and Judeo-Christian values nor will it attempt to defend or condemn as the case may be the opposing opinions expressed thus far on democracy and human rights. These issues are best left to separate fora, suffice to say that there is no single exemplary approach for solving the diversity of problems touching on human development. In this regard, a biblical quote may be appropriate: "Let him who has no sin, cast the first stone".

¹⁴ Mannheim, K. *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. London, 1971, pp 82-86 (4th Impression).

¹⁵ Among Chinese, a person who has poor manners or has failed to meet expected obligations is quite often labelled as 'without family teaching'. It is taken as a real insult by an undeserving person and for the deserving a sense of shame.

functional society would be moral and secure.¹⁶ The relationship between the family as microcosm with the society as macrocosm as emphasized in Confucianism remains relevant.

Recent societal developments would seem to suggest the need for more systematic and focused policies to strengthen family values and ties. In the last two decades Singapore had witnessed important structural changes in the working population as a whole. First of all, the demand for more skilled workers had made it necessary to (in view of the small population base currently reaching 3 million) encourage females to enter the labour market. The enrolment of females in the institutions of higher learning is now on par with their male counterparts. More critically, in the sociological sense, is their increasing preference to take up a full-time employment even after marriage. This obviously has important implications for child-care, family relations, marriage stability and care for the aged to name a few. Secondly, there is the looming problem of a greying population. The 1990 Census of Population records a fall in the age dependency rate from 54 per hundred in 1980 to 48 per hundred in 1990¹⁷.

This study on values will not go into the two issues in detail suffice to say that in the last decade there has been a rise (though not serious by any means compared to figures available for developed Western societies) in the incidence of divorce.¹⁸ The

¹⁶ The core values proposed for the family by the National Advisory Council on the Family and the Aged are: (1) Love, Care and Concern (2) Mutual Respect (3) Filial Responsibility (4) Commitment and (5) Communication. *Singapore Family Values*, Ministry of Community Development, Singapore. At the World Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, the Acting Minister of Community Development once again drove home the point that strong family ties and self-reliance form the bases of morality and economic vitality.

¹⁷ The age dependency ratio is defined as persons aged below 15 years and 60 years and over to persons aged 15-59 years. Perhaps the major cause of this is the Government's two-child policy which has since been reversed. Various incentives are now offered (including tax rebates) to arrest the population trends.

¹⁸ The rate of divorce recorded for non-Muslim marriages under the Women's Charter was 11.1 per 100 marriages in contrast to 21.4% per 100 marriages among Muslims

perceived neglect of ageing/dependent parents prompted the passing of the Support for Parents Bill in 1994 which requires working children to support their dependent parents should the latter lodge a complaint of neglect. Following closely on this was the institution of the Family Court to provide legal recourse to family members suffering abuse and neglect. Not the least important is the role played by the Family Counselling Centres (FCS) of the Ministry of Community Development in providing marital and pre-marital assistance/advice on family and family related matters. A special scheme to enhance the future prospects of poor families was the implementation of the Small Families Improvement Scheme in 1993.¹⁹ Closely associated with the issue of poor families is the drug problem. Though, once again, by no means as critical a problem as in other modern societies, nonetheless is seen as insidious with the potential to cause breakdown in family life and in the process undermine the social fabric.²⁰

These initiatives to consolidate the family should be seen as both reactive and proactive guided by clearly delineated values to achieve social cohesiveness and national vigour without which Singapore's ability to meet the demands of survival would be weakened.²¹ Inherent to this argument, is the basic concern with

in 1991.

¹⁹ Under this Scheme poor families will receive (a) bursaries for school going children worth S\$200/- a year for those in primary school; S\$400/- a year for those in secondary school; and S\$800/- a year for those in junior college/pre-university classes and (b) housing grant of S\$800/- paid into the CPF account of the wife until she is 45 years old or for 20 years whichever is sooner. The total grant is worth S\$16,000.

²⁰ At the National Seminar on 'Community Action Against Drug Abuse' organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs in October 1994, new strategies were announced to combat the problem of drug abuse. In general tougher measures were proposed with greater vertical and lateral integration of efforts in the areas of preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation, and aftercare.

²¹ As recent as February this year, the Deputy Prime Minister BG Lee Hsien Loong in a lecture to students of the National Technological University (NTU) had identified 3 long-term issues for Singapore viz ensuring social cohesion; keeping the nation's vigour and; handling high expectations of the people. *Straits Times*, 11 February 1995, p 1.

preserving Singapore's competitive edge in the international economy. It can be seen, therefore, that Singapore's recipe for survival and economic prosperity rests on essentially 3 fundamental principles viz progressive upgrading of the quality of education; cumulative strengthening of the social infrastructure; and preserving inter-communal harmony. The values espoused and promoted are in turn aimed at realizing those 3 principles which if effectively managed would ensure Singapore's survival and prosperity.

V MANAGING COMPETING VALUES

It can be convincingly argued that a value system shaped by survival considerations needs to be extremely adaptable and resilient. In other words, it must be able to accommodate and tolerate apparent contradictions within itself or at least locate such contradictions appropriately and in such a manner so as to minimize if not pre-empt ethical uncertainties and dilemmas. Failure to manage values effectively could lead to social breakdown and economic disorientation with all its adverse consequences.

In Singapore's case given the development constraints (small land area, lack of natural resources, modest population size and dependence on internal and external stability) no one-sided approach to value development will suffice. It needs to promote values that encourage creativity and innovativeness to ensure that its people are in the front-line of the scientific and technological revolution currently unfolding in particular in the areas of information technology and biogenetics. To do so effectively, it has to recognise and reward talent in tangible ways (better pay, more rapid promotion and access to privileged positions as board members in public and private companies). This way of promoting creativity or innovativeness inevitably leads to greater individualism, if not self-centredness. The result is the downgrading of equally important values such as community responsibility, readiness to compromise and concern for the less fortunate: in short values that make possible a cohesive society. It is small wonder then that the People's Action Party leadership had consistently reminded the more successful (in particular beneficiaries of the state's colleges and universities) to put back something into society to demonstrate their gratefulness for benefits received. Similarly, the proposed state ideology for

Singapore with its stress on 'society above self' should be seen as a way of tempering perceived rampant individualism. The recent admonition by the political leadership against ostentatious living has also been a subject of concern. Therefore, somehow, a workable balance has to be achieved between values that are divisive in their impact against those that are integrative.

The promotion of values to consolidate the family as a basic institution in society implies the prioritization of family-centred interests and concerns - a process if not intelligently and sensitively handled could lead to adverse consequences for society at large. To appreciate this, one has to reflect on traditional Asian societies when unqualified family loyalty frequently led to nepotism and corruption in public life. This is an inherent danger though selection mechanisms set-up to determine appointment to high office in the public sector are transparent and accountable. Otherwise, it would destroy the very moral-ethical foundation on which so much of Singapore's success rests. Be that as it may, there is obviously a need to balance the moral-ethical demands of the family with those of the society at large - a situation which once again calls for an enlightened handling of potentially conflicting value demands.

Another area of apparent value divergence is the government's handling of certain community development programmes in the areas of community welfare, educational upliftment (such as in organising remedial and tuition classes for pupils poor in certain school subjects in particular, English Language, Science and Mathematics) and culture. In the last few years four community based self-help organizations have been established with government support viz MENDAKI for ethnic Malays; CDAC for ethnic Chinese; SINDA for ethnic Indians; and the EDA for ethnic Eurasians.²²

²² MENDAKI - Council for the Development of the Singapore Muslim Community, CDAC - Chinese Development Assistance Council, SINDA - Singapore Indian Development Association; and EDA - Eurasian Development Association. In supporting these Community Self-Help organizations, the Government has facilitated the automatic deduction of monthly contributions to support their work. In all cases, the Government has also provided buildings and premises to house offices and hold activities. Matching grants for selected activities and programmes are also offered.

These organizations are community based and inspired leading to a widespread belief that they are potentially disintegrative, tending toward strengthening communal loyalties at the expense of national or trans-communal political commitments. It is a legitimate concern particularly should the management of such self-help organizations goes awry or falls into inept hands.

The government's support for the establishment of community self-help organizations is guided by the over-arching policy of multi-racialism and multi-culturalism. More recently the concept of partnership between the government and community organisations in national development has also been advocated. This means allowing and indeed encouraging each community to have a direct role in shaping its future and in that way strengthen the community's sense of belonging and identity. This makes tremendous sense, since each community is more likely to understand its needs better and in the process more likely to be successful in mobilizing support for its programmes and activities.

Detractors, however, see this as a contradiction in nation-building approach. To them national integration requires no less the reduction of ethnic/cultural loyalties in favour of national loyalties. The institution of community self-help organizations would in their view harden ethnic/cultural attitudes rather than soften them.

Taken at face value, the view as expressed carries a powerful logic. However, here again one is confronted with the pragmatics of the problem viz, how can the cultural traditions and practices of the different communities be brought together as one to serve as the foundation for national integration? In other words, the creation of a representative national culture. This issue needs to be considered if, as one school of thought argues, national integration in an ethnically-culturally diversified state requires the creation of a common/national culture.

Official view in Singapore, however, perceives the problem quite differently. Its essential underlying belief is that national loyalty and ethnic-cultural loyalty can co-exist side by side without contradiction or conflict. In adopting this line of thought,

the political leadership is guided by its experience in handling ethnic-cultural issues in the past with the added benefit of informed judgement based on observations made of comparative situations elsewhere in the world. Therefore, to mitigate possible extreme ethnic-cultural loyalties, the government has relied on variety of strategies the main being: (a) the inculcation of common political values in the schools (b) the institution of compulsory national service for all males above 18 years of age (c) the creation of multi-ethnic housing estates to prevent communal division into enclaves (d) the maintenance of elite cohesion in addressing issues of national importance.²³

It can be seen that there is no easy or even fully reliable way to manage the various competing value demands as required. Yet, given the commitment to build a cohesive, prosperous and moral-ethical society, there is no alternative but to monitor and whenever necessary to correct and check value deviations and extremes. The lesson seems to be to avoid imbalance in value emphasis.

The need to avoid imbalance in value concern can also be examined from another perspective in the context of Singapore's overall economic thrust. There is no doubt that the success of its economic policies has contributed to the emergence of a wealthy minority. This minority cannot be understood as a class in the classical Marxian sense because their high socio-economic status is the result of efforts made in an open competitive system. Collectively, they represent tangible evidence of the correctness of the values espoused for Singapore's economic development and therefore should be supported. Yet, at the same time there is concern that a selfish and arrogant economic elite is potentially threatening to the social fabric. It is a situation that calls for a re-equilibrium in values as exemplified in the emphasis on

²³ The offer of Telecom shares to citizens two years ago at below market value and the recent (March) Share Ownership Top-up Scheme (SOTUS) represent initiatives at strengthening national loyalty. It is probable that such a strategy will be repeated. The government's thinking in this regard is to enable all citizens to have a share in the ownership of the country's most vital assets. It has also, in this connection made intelligent use of the tax system (as evidenced in the recent budget announcements) in the offer of various forms of rebates and exemptions to achieve the same effect (not to mention social levelling as well).

putting society before self and the call to create a caring society. In recent years in recognition of the income gap existing the government has taken initiative to intervene directly to assist low income groups in Singapore such as granting such groups higher rebates and deductions in HDB conservancy charges and adopting a more favourable formula in computing salary increases annually. Elsewhere generous scholarships have been offered to assist poor students with good examination results to pursue higher education. In doing so, the government has made known that it is not providing handouts or compromising those values that have brought economic success to Singapore viz self-reliance, hardwork and willingness to learn and adapt. Yet, a more recent variation of the problem relates to the rising expectation of young Singaporeans for a better and more visible material life-style: an expectation jokingly described as the four Cs viz, career, credit card, car and condominium. Singaporeans of the present generation have been schooled in the values of hardwork and success and thus understandably expect to receive commensurate benefits. Yet, given Singapore's resource constraints it would not be possible to meet every demand for a car or a landed property indefinitely. Not surprisingly, the Deputy PM, BG Lee in a speech to undergraduates of Nanyang Technological University in February 1995 intimated that one of the three most urgent problems facing Singapore in the future is the management of the rising expectations of the young. The young, he advised, should try "to be realistic in what they can achieve or obtain from the system." It was, in fact a tacit appeal for a moderation of drive and ambition - value qualities that had and continue to propel Singapore's economic performance forward.

Be that as it may, the value development process as observed represents largely a dialectic: the interaction of apparently divergent values, none of which can be ignored without some adverse implication for the efficient functioning of the whole socio-economic system founded on a concern for survival. Indeed, a similar rule applies in the manner the ageing problem is managed where the young and gainfully employed are encouraged to care for the aged and to accord them dignity and respect. Indeed, the CPF top-up scheme (primarily to increase the quantum of savings in the Central Provident Fund account of the father/mother through payments made by

earning children) instituted by the government is tangible evidence of this concern.²⁴

Yet once again, the demands of the economy for younger more productive, better educated and more highly motivated workers inherently works against the status and interests of the ageing in the work force as indeed the aged as a whole. In such a situation, a person's social worth is also measured largely by his economic worth. Economic logic thus dictates value correctness. How then can the apparent value contradiction be resolved? The answer once again lies in achieving a workable accomodation. This precisely has been the government's basic approach to the management of values.

IV CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What has been presented thus far should not be seen as a case of value dilemma. Certainly, the multi-ethnic mix and the inherent constraints put on development have a direct impact on values and their development in Singapore. Survival remains the most powerful impetus shaping and energizing national development.²⁵ Survival is also seen as coterminous with on-going efforts to create a stable, moral-ethical and distinctive society. There is no doubt that this dual but unified concern has and will continue to determine value preferences as well as their relative influence in national life. Singapore's concern is to ensure that the economy will continue to thrive. This, as emphasized serves as the basis for unity at the communal and national levels.

The economic success of Singapore is due as much to the will to meet the demands of survival as it is to the society-wide acceptance of the values required to achieve it. From the perspective of the population at large, expectation of material reward and an ever increasing standard of living have and continue to provide powerful impetus

²⁴ The payments made are subject to a maximum and are tax exempted. In topping up, CPF account holders with low savings can look forward to a larger amount to spend on retirement. As a devise, it is ingenious as it helps to re-inforce family values.

²⁵ In a recent speech to cadre members of the People's Action Party in February 1995, the Deputy Prime Minister, B G Lee once again iterated that Singapore cannot slow down the pace of economic growth for to do so would risk losing out to competitors. To lose meant economic and political demise.

to work.

The question then is whether the ambitions and expectations of the younger generation can be met fully given Singapore's physical constraints. If the prognosis of the Deputy PM BG Lee (quoted earlier) is correct then it would require a moderation of expectation and ambition accordingly. And if this is the case, will it have an adverse impact on those values that have made Singapore work, among them hardwork, achievement, ambition, success and self-improvement? Or alternatively, will the younger and emerging generations of well-educated Singaporeans accept a modest but comfortable lifestyle while at the same time maintain those same values that have worked well in Singapore? The latter calls no less for a fundamental shift in material expectation to intangibles viz contentment with one's vocation whatever the level of material reward granted; doing one's duty to the nation; regard and respect for one's fellow citizens irrespective of social status and nature of vocation and; sharing in the triumphs and failures of the nation. The correctness of this interpretation of the value process rests on the idea of an 'optimum', that is to say the limit imposed by resource scarcity and the need to moderate, modify or even alter expectations. In doing so, new values are demanded or at least less dominant values with integrative potential are allowed to ascend to prominence. Thus far, the approach adopted has been to motivate (and therefore give prominence to achievement oriented values) economic success whilst at the same time appeal to social conscience: a way of equilibrating two seemingly dichotomous demands in Singapore's development strategy involving values. Whether this approach is adequate given the challenges posed by the concept of an 'optimum' remains to be seen.

It can be expected that the government will continue to shape and influence the value process in Singapore for two essential reasons viz, the fact that Singapore is a secular state which disallows any religion taking the front seat, and the perceived need that as an evolving multi-racial and multi-cultural society it must lay down clear value guidelines for nation-building. With Singapore's increasing openness both as an economy and as a society the need to guide the value process would be all the more pressing.

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