

BIG FISH, SMALL POND

by Thomas J. Bellows

Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, after 25 years of his rule, scarcely resembles the city young "Harry" Lee left behind him in 1946, and the transformation has been largely Lee Kuan Yew's own doing. But some things he has been powerless—or unwilling—to change. Some things are part of a city's nature. An elderly veteran of the prewar Malaysian Civil Service (ret.), returning after a long absence, might venture out of the old Strand Hotel on Bencoolen Street and encounter a city and an island in some respects still the same as he had known it.

The Raffles Long Bar is still there, as are many of the old Malay mosques and Chinese temples and Hindu shrines, and most of the fine colonial government buildings. Chinatown, with its red-tiled shop-houses and flapping window shutters and street hawkers, still exists, though, like the average Singapore family, it is continually getting smaller. The Selat Johor is still breached by a thin, umbilical causeway—the one the Japanese marched across in 1942—carrying a railway and a six-lane highway from the mainland, not to mention thousands of pedestrians and a pipeline pumping millions of gallons of cool, fresh water into Singapore from the rivers of West Malaysia. The calm blue surface of the Strait of Singapore is still dotted with freighters, and the murky green of the serpentine Singapore River remains choked with junks and sampans.

But downtown, a stand of striking new skyscrapers now dominates the city Thomas Stamford Raffles laid out. The tallest of them, I. M. Pei's 52-story Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation building, is higher than Bukit Timah, the highest (at a mere 581 feet) natural feature on the island. As in Houston or Miami, air conditioners aspirate the city. Singapore is clean, honest, efficient, and relentlessly rational, with heavy fines meted out for such offenses as littering or jaywalking or driving into center city during rush hour without a very good reason. There are virtually no slums. While the 238-square-mile republic is heavily urbanized, a policy of planting trees, shrubs, and flowers wherever bare ground is exposed lends a lush garden atmosphere to the whole island.

All of these accomplishments, and many others, can ultimately be credited to Lee Kuan Yew. As Prime Minister, Lee has governed Singapore since 1959—first during the period of receding British rule, then during the island's brief interlude as a component state within the Malaysian Federation, and finally,

after August 9, 1965, when it became a sovereign republic. The prospects for the tiny new island city-state, which is almost devoid of natural resources, were viewed skeptically on independence day. But Lee Kuan Yew insisted from the start that the only resource Singapore needed was its citizens; that "human skills and intellectual discipline can be expanded infinitely provided a people have the will and capacity to do so." And provided, one might add, that they also have Lee Kuan Yew.

It is helpful at times to think of Singapore not as a state but as a system, with Lee the governing intelligence. Brilliant, arrogant, and remote, fluent in Mandarin and Malay, his English as pure as that of a Cambridge don, Lee has shaped Singapore in his own image—but has not plastered that image, Mao-style, all over town. Cults of personality he finds abhorrent; there are no statues of Lee in Singapore, no portraits on billboards, no sycophantic paeans in the newspapers.

Indeed, Lee is not generally beloved. Little warmth flows to or from his people (to whom he refers coolly as "digits"). Even physically, he remains aloof, relishing the isolation of the Istana, the former residence of the British governor general, which is set in the middle of Singapore in an enclave of well-guarded parkland. Lee has no sense of humor and is ascetic in his habits. His public statements have tended to be crisply businesslike, bordering on the pugnacious. He reportedly visited his mother only once a year while she was alive, because each visit

The corporate towers of Singapore, self-proclaimed "global city," glisten on a summer night. "A socialist in Singapore," First Deputy Prime Minister Goh has said, "has to plan for a just society without upsetting the delicate machinery of trade."



required security police to sweep the area, a waste, Lee thought, of taxpayers' money. He remains distant from his brothers and sisters (though relations with his wife and three children are close). Some who have met Lee recently say he has "mellowed" in recent years, though it is hard to know what this means.

But Lee Kuan Yew is respected—that is all that matters to him—and Singapore has yielded to his will. "Whoever governs Singapore must have the iron in him or give it up," Lee once told his people. "This is not a game of cards. This is your life and mine. I spent a whole lifetime building this, and as long as I am in charge, nobody is going to knock it down." One measure of the awe in which Lee is held is that he can talk like this without needing the armed forces to back him up.*

Don't Litter, Study Hard

Today, three races—Chinese (76 percent of the population), Malays (15 percent), and Indians (seven percent)—live together harmoniously in Singapore, each striving, or at least urged, to live up to those ideals and standards of behavior decreed by the government to be appropriately Singaporean. Weed Out Industries That Use Manpower Poorly; Keeping Our City Clean Is A National Objective; Don't Litter, Study Hard; Learn From The Japanese: The slogans one reads on signs and hears on TV in Singapore reflect Lee Kuan Yew's personal habits: his passion for cleanliness, his austerity and capacity for working long hours, and his faith in an oligarchy of talent.

In business and the civil service, advancement is utterly meritocratic, highlighting Lee's belief that Singapore depends on that five percent of the population "who are more than ordinarily endowed physically and mentally. It is on this group that we must expend our limited and slender resources in order that they will provide that yeast, that ferment, that catalyst . . .

*The military in Singapore is totally subservient to civilian authorities, there is no rank higher than brigadier general, and there is no surplus of general officers—a pork barrel item in many Third World nations. (Lee Kuan Yew's son, Col. Lee Hsien Loong, is chief of staff.) Singapore's 35,000-man Army and its small, 3,000-man gunboat Navy are maintained by a universal draft: At age 18, every male Singaporean undergoes at least two years of military training. What Singaporean officials call "our young arms industry" has since 1980 manufactured and sold 50,000 lightweight assault rifles to customers in Southeast Asia, Central America, and the Middle East.

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which alone will ensure that Singapore shall maintain its pre-eminent place in the societies that exist in Southeast Asia."

"Pre-eminent" is the right word. Economically, the city-state has (partly) traded its role as the warehouse of Asia for that of factory while retaining, thanks to a cluster of free ports at key harbors and air terminals, its critical function as an entrepôt. Thousands of European and American corporations have set up shop on the island—banks, manufacturers, stockbrokers, service industries—and many others, fleeing the long-term political uncertainties of Hong Kong, are arriving every year. The 1980 directory of U.S. firms with factories or representatives in Singapore totals 117 pages, with seven to eight companies listed per page. These include Westinghouse, Comsat, Digital Equipment, Sunstrand, Abbott Laboratories, General Electric, Union Carbide, and Texas Instruments.

Yet, though industry and trade are the lifeblood of Singapore's economy, and high finance its heart, Lee Kuan Yew's government has not neglected the island's stomach. Only about 28 square miles on the island are devoted to agriculture—barely more than 10 times the land area occupied by its main commercial airport—but it is intensive agriculture. Singapore is self-sufficient in pork (important in the Chinese diet), chicken, and eggs, and grows about half of its vegetables and fruits.

Life after Lee

The island has also become a sorting house and first stop for tourists in the Orient, three million of them every year, each with a yen (or dollar or Deutsche Mark) for "Instant Asia"—an antiseptic Disneyland of the East. Gleaming new hotels such as the Shangri-La and the Dynasty have appeared downtown, and rising next door to the venerable Raffles Hotel is the 21st century's answer to the 19th-century bazaar: a magnificent steel and glass emporium, part office building, part shopping center, part hotel, part convention center. The government estimates that Singapore will need to almost double its present number of 15,800 hotel rooms by 1986.

Unlike the situation in neighboring Indonesia, the 2.5 million citizens of Singapore have shared in the island's wealth. While there are many millionaires in the republic, inhabiting villas in the old residential neighborhoods clustered around Singapore City, there is very little poverty. Singapore's people boast the third highest (after Japan and Hong Kong) per capita income in Asia: \$5,240 in 1981. Average life expectancy surpasses 71 years, about that of Scotland or Austria.

MR. LEE KUAN YEW

Journalist T. J. S. George begins his Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore (1973) with a quick character sketch of the man who has been Singapore's Prime Minister since 1959. Some selections:

As he began to weld a family and a state according to his ideals, Lee Kuan Yew began to mold himself into a highly disciplined individual. Like Jomo Kenyatta with his fly whisk or Sukarno with his general's baton, Lee adopted a personal symbol: a thermos flask. It contained Chinese tea which he sipped throughout the day as he trudged from labor meeting to court appearance to press conference to political council. To this day, Lee is afraid of catching a chill and avoids cold drinks.

That is only part of his health fad. He is sensitive in a hundred different ways. Careful about his weight, he has given up on an early indulgence—beer—and is never seen to drink hard liquor. Once a pipe-smoker, he now detests all tobacco. He rarely eats the Chinese staple diet of rice and avoids bread. His breakfast is spartan and the principal meal, dinner, is light. He is fussy about keeping his nails trimmed and filed, washing his hands several times a day, polishing his shoes to a dazzling shine. . . . Air conditioners are adjusted to keep his bedroom at 66 degrees Fahrenheit, the office temperature at 72. He exercises religiously with a morning round of press-ups, skipping, and weightlifting. . . .



His austerity extends beyond physical matters to his habits of mind. He never listens to music, sees no movies, reads no novels, has no hobbies—golf is his only indulgence. To some people, his uprightness and singleness of mind are positively alarming. He is the only Asian politician about whom no personal scandal has ever been published. . . .

A personal and intellectual alienation completes the picture. Lee is so conscious of his intellectual superiority that others find him arrogant. . . . Most of those who work for him hint that he reduces them to the status of messenger boys. His wife is perhaps the only person with whom he can drop the mantle of super-ruggedness and can communicate on a basis of mutual respect. Professor C. Northcote Parkinson, who spent a career in Singapore teaching history at the University, wrote of Lee: "Utterly without charm, his expression is one of barely concealed contempt; for his opponents, for his followers, perhaps for himself. . . . One cannot imagine that he is even capable of friendship."

In the context of other Southeast Asian nations, the Republic of Singapore undoubtedly looks good. But it is not devoid of blemishes. The city-state has its problems, some of them serious, some of them perhaps insoluble. Can a young generation, reared in affluence, retain and pass on the more or less puritan ethic that has made Singapore what it is today? Can an island too small to support a large population but so industrialized that it requires a large labor force make a successful transition to capital-intensive, high-technology industries? Can the country survive the passing of its present generation of leaders, who have guided the republic for a quarter of a century? Above all, can it get along without Lee Kuan Yew?

Promoting 'Groupthink'

Clearly, too, there exists dissatisfaction with Singapore's brand of benevolent authoritarianism, no matter what the regime's achievements. Educated Singaporeans, of whom there are more and more each year, complain that they are made to feel like schoolchildren, incessantly exhorted, scolded, and cajoled. In private, they lament the excessive regimentation and the cultivation of "groupthink." Perhaps partly as a result of the government's *modus operandi*, some of the more intangible qualities necessary to sustain a modern nation over the long haul—civic consciousness, intellectual autonomy, self-sacrifice, social awareness—are still not firmly rooted in Singapore.

The republic's remarkable ruling elite, the handful of so-called "high-flyers" assembled by Lee Kuan Yew, many of them British-educated, demonstrate how quickly a dedicated cadre of astute administrators can create a materially successful country where "trickle-down" economics is a fact of life. Whether these men can nurture a "good society," not to mention a truly democratic society, much less something we might recognize as a "nation," remains to be seen.

But let us not be niggardly. The island has come a long way since 1950, when barrister Lee Kuan Yew returned from England with a Chinese fiancée (like him, a graduate of Raffles College and Cambridge) and every intention of entering politics. He found a Singapore where unemployment was in the double digits and overcrowding a fact of life—in some places as high as 1,000 persons per acre. In tenements, privacy was nonexistent, plumbing not even contemplated. Few schools or parks were available to most Singaporeans. Hundreds of thousands of people lived in squatter shantytowns.

Not surprisingly, Lee Kuan Yew also found not only Singa-

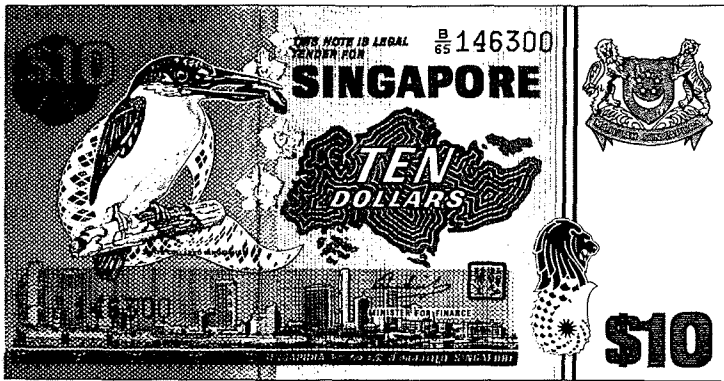
pore but all of Southeast Asia beset by Communist agitation—leading to riots and strikes if not outright insurgency—as the British prepared their Asian possessions for some measure of self-government. In neighboring Malaya, a bloody guerrilla war had been underway since 1948. (At its height, the conflict engaged as many as 100,000 British troops and Malay police; more than 11,000 combatants on both sides were killed.) Lee was not himself a Communist, but he admired the party's organizing skill and envied its popularity. Opening a law office with his wife, Lee sought and won Communist trust by defending radical trade union leaders and student activists in court.

Shaking Hands with Tomorrow

In 1954, he founded the People's Action Party (PAP)—symbolized by a lightning bolt—and a year later was one of three PAP candidates, all running as leftists, with broad Communist support, to win assembly seats in Singapore's first popular election. In office, Lee played a shrewd game, publicly defending the pro-Communist wing of the PAP, secretly aiding the British in their periodic sweeps against Party leaders, and then acting as attorney for his unsuspecting allies (usually, and conveniently, to no avail). The rationale was simple: Lee needed to keep Communist votes and lose Communist rivals. The strategy worked. Indeed, the PAP by the late 1950s had attracted a diverse following on both Left and Right. It was, as Lee's biographer, T. J. S. George, observed, "very much an Asian banyan tree under which nothing else would grow." In the 1959 elections, as Singapore was granted full responsibility for its internal affairs, the People's Action Party took 43 of the 51 assembly districts, and Lee Kuan Yew, aged 36, became Prime Minister.

Political bloodletting followed. Lee repudiated the Communists, who formed a new opposition party, the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front), in 1961. Two years later, with the Malaysian experience in mind, Lee mounted Operation Cold Store—a roundup of more than 100 Communist leaders, some of whom, like Lim Chin Siong, would be held in prison, without trial, for many years. Calling elections a few months later, Lee resorted to a battery of "legal fixes" to make sure Barisan Sosialis was spurned at the polls.* It was. Since then, Lee Kuan Yew's lead-

*In 1963, Lee resorted to such devices as flooding local printers with orders for government documents, ensuring that opposition candidates would be unable to print and distribute campaign literature. In subsequent years, he occasionally resorted to detention of candidates on technically legal grounds under the Internal Security Act. His favorite method of political intimidation now seems to be suing rivals for slander, usually with some success, for charges made during the campaign.



A Singaporean 10-spot, worth about U.S. \$4.60. The average Singaporean spent only 16 percent of his income on housing but 45 percent on food and drink. American and European brand-name products, from Nescafé to Martell brandy, are making deep inroads according to a 1981 marketing survey.

ership has never been seriously contested, and even minor challenges have met major obstacles.

Lee Kuan Yew has kept himself in power by responding to his island's material needs rather than to its spiritual wants. During the early 1960s, those needs were chiefly two. First, he had to revive the island's sluggish economy—unemployment was regularly running at 15 percent and at times even higher. Second, he had to find places for his people to live.

In 1961, he set up an Economic Development Board (EDB) to promote industrial investment, provide financing, and oversee the creation and management of industrial parks. The first of its many successful ventures was the huge Jurong industrial estate on a tract reclaimed from swampland in the undeveloped southeast corner of the island. Foreign multinationals were wooed unrelentingly. "Singapore is where it's happening," read advertisements in Western newspapers. "Yesterday shakes hands with tomorrow and it's yours—today!"

With its inexpensive pool of labor (in 1965, the average Singapore factory worker earned 31 cents an hour, the average American \$2.61), its efficient administrators, and its relative absence of red tape, the island proved attractive. The first industries were labor-intensive—to relieve unemployment—and produced such items as nails, textiles, footwear, and paint. But as industrial employment expanded (from 31,000 people in 1959 to 126,000 in 1970), Singapore shifted away from polo shirts and plastic flowers toward more skill-intensive enterprises: chemi-

cals, petroleum products, machine components. By the late 1970s, the island was producing everything from batteries to pharmaceuticals to engines to oil rigs; with its four refineries, Singapore was the petroleum processing and distribution capital of Asia. Engrossed in economic pursuits, Singaporeans pretty much forgot about politics.

Singapore's economy is profoundly sensitive to regional politics and local demographics. The country first began to look outward—toward exporting its way to prosperity—after its expulsion from Malaysia dashed any hopes of participating in a Malaysian common market. The export strategy became even more crucial after the 1971 withdrawal of British military forces from “east of Suez” and the consequent shutting down of Britain's large naval base at Singapore. The lowering of the Union Jack over Admiralty House abruptly cost the republic 50,000 jobs and 20 percent of its gross national product.

A Choosy Customer

Singapore's problem today is a labor shortage. With an economy growing by eight percent annually during the 1970s, the island began to run out of people. To lure workers, companies began offering TV sets to new employees or enrolling them in special lotteries. Last year, some 150,000 foreigners, mostly Malays but also including Thais, Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Indians, and Indonesians, were granted work permits in Singapore, usually taking jobs that Singaporeans now find unacceptably menial or low-paying. Needless to say, the government's successful efforts at population control—required to prevent overcrowding on the small island—have done nothing to relieve the manpower shortfall.

The solution Singapore settled upon in 1979 was called the Second Industrial Revolution. To make room for new capital-intensive “brain industries” and services (mostly foreign-owned) that would yield more profit with fewer workers, the government began to weed out labor-intensive manufacturers (mostly Singaporean-owned companies whose profitability was waning as the island's prosperity drove up wages). It accomplished this simply: The National Wages Council decreed that all wages would increase by 20 percent in 1979, 19 percent in 1980, and 10–14 percent in 1981. The government estimates that by 1991 it will have eliminated the need for foreign workers—Singapore does not want a German- or Swiss-style “guest-worker” problem—while edging the island's economy further into the “postindustrial” world of banking, consulting, insur-

ance, electronics, and computers.*

With the political future clouded for Hong Kong—whose lease on the New Territories runs out in 1997—Singapore may even supplant the far more free-wheeling Crown Colony as Asia's financial Switzerland. Already, anxious individuals and corporations are quitting Hong Kong and seeking to relocate. Singapore has found it can be choosy. It gives preference to Hong Kong's electronics and computer companies, and the asking price for citizenship is S \$1 million (U.S. \$460,000). Not everyone with the cash is welcome. Singapore reportedly favors Shanghainese and Teochew businessmen because these groups are thought to have more industrial savvy than the Cantonese, who dominate Hong Kong's retail trade.

The bottom line of Singapore's role as the banking, manufacturing, repairing, refining, and service center of Southeast Asia is the foreign exchange surplus it has run in each of the past 19 years. First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee, the second most powerful man in the government, recently boasted that Singapore was "accumulating U.S. dollars every year—millions of them." A Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GSIC), with assets of about \$7 billion, was set up in 1981 to channel those dollars into holdings outside Asia. Among other U.S. properties, the GSIC owns 4 Penn Center, a \$46.5 million, 23-story office building in Philadelphia.

Building Homes

Soon after Lee Kuan Yew assumed office, with his economic program barely underway, he launched a parallel drive for construction of public housing—at a rate of 9,000 one-, two-, or three-room units a year during the early 1960s. (Back then, a one-room flat rented for \$15 a month.) In recent years, as many as 29,000 new units have been built annually by the Housing and Development Board. Today, more than 70 percent of Singapore's people live in government-built housing (versus nine percent in 1959). Most public housing units can be purchased outright by their occupants—a three-room flat outside the downtown area goes for about \$14,000. For a downpayment or

*Singapore has a "mixed" economy—so mixed that public and private sectors are sometimes impossible to sort out. The government has several directly owned subsidiaries, such as the Development Bank of Singapore and Intraco (the state trading company, used principally for dealings with communist countries). Through statutory agencies such as the Economic Development Board and holding companies such as the state-owned Temasek Holdings Pte., Ltd., the government has also invested in hundreds of private companies. As a result, civil servants representing the Republic of Singapore sit on the boards of innumerable concerns, often with a controlling interest; they act in concert with the central government when it wishes to massage, stimulate, or redirect the economy.

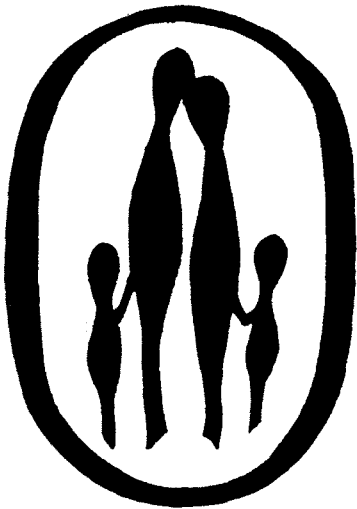
to subsidize the monthly mortgage, citizens can draw on the compulsory contributions—22 percent of wages—that they have already made to the Central Provident Fund, which is Singapore's (solvent) version of Social Security.

Lee had many good reasons for pulling out the stops on public housing. Housing construction helped win over the poor. It provided employment for tens of thousands of workers. (Even today, stepped-up construction of new flats becomes, in effect, a jobs program during times of recession.) But the Prime Minister also had subtler motives. Historically, newcomers to Singapore had settled among their own in one of the many ethnic *kampongs*; Lee hoped instead to create a distinct Singaporean identity. As the slums were cleared, the inhabitants were dispersed—regardless of dialect or heritage—among the new flats. Not infrequently, Lee's aim was purely political: Neighborhoods with a history of opposing the government were often the first to "benefit" from urban renewal, the old tenements torn down and their occupants scattered throughout the island.

Lee Kuan Yew may not yet have brought forth a new race of Singaporeans, but he has certainly established a country of racially mixed apartment-dwellers while at the same time controlling urban growth. Admiring Third World delegations, their members resplendent in guayaberas and dashikis and Nehru jackets, frequently call on Singapore to learn the secret. And admittedly, some of the newer satellite towns, with their relatively

spacious three- and five-room units clustered into small neighborhoods and built around markets and playgrounds, are quite attractive.

But many of the older high-rise buildings—the row upon



"Singapore Wants Small Families." Family planning efforts in Singapore have succeeded beyond expectations. Contraception, legal abortion, and voluntary sterilization, backed by an array of financial incentives, have helped cut the island's population growth since 1953 from 5.7 to 1.4 percent a year.

row of shoe-boxes standing on end that every visitor sees—are inhabited by the less affluent and sometimes located far from jobs and schools. Grousing is contained by the residents' awareness of conditions in neighboring countries, but even so, circumstances may be far from pleasant. Crime, clutter, noise, and poor maintenance must often be stoically endured. One study reported that, in the high-rises, there was little social interaction among neighbors, and fewer than 10 percent of all children were allowed to play outside the flat, it being difficult to supervise the kids in play areas from the 10th or even the third floor.

With the erosion of community spirit—something the *kampongs* always sustained—life in many parts of Singapore is now intensely focused on the nuclear family, where isolation and over-familiarity can be two sides of one problem. The consequences are several. Among other things, as Riaz Hazzan observed in *Families in Flats* (1977), “the fact that the smaller children are continually underfoot and the TV is almost continually on makes it exceptionally difficult for older children to do their homework. As a result, children from the one-room flats are almost always well behind in their work.”

Skimming the Cream

This is not a welcome state of affairs in a society where education is important. Primary and secondary education has been universally available in Singapore since the early years of Lee's regime. During children's first three years in school, the emphasis is on language—learning to read and write English and one other tongue (usually Mandarin). Only after third grade does instruction turn to science, math, social studies, and so forth. Students are “tracked” into academic or vocational courses as early as age seven or eight.

Schools are good in Singapore, but, like much else about the island, they have flaws where you might not expect them. For one, the regime never made primary, much less secondary, education compulsory. In part, it did not need to, since learning is prized among the Chinese. Yet the government's position also stems from Lee Kuan Yew's entrenched elitism, his belief that the cream will rise regardless. Lee may be right. But the happy few aside, what about the highly skilled work force a “high-tech” Singapore will need?

Adult literacy on the island today is only 75 percent, below that of much poorer countries like Jamaica or the Philippines. This is attributable to some extent, of course, to the fact that many Singaporeans reached maturity well before Lee Kuan

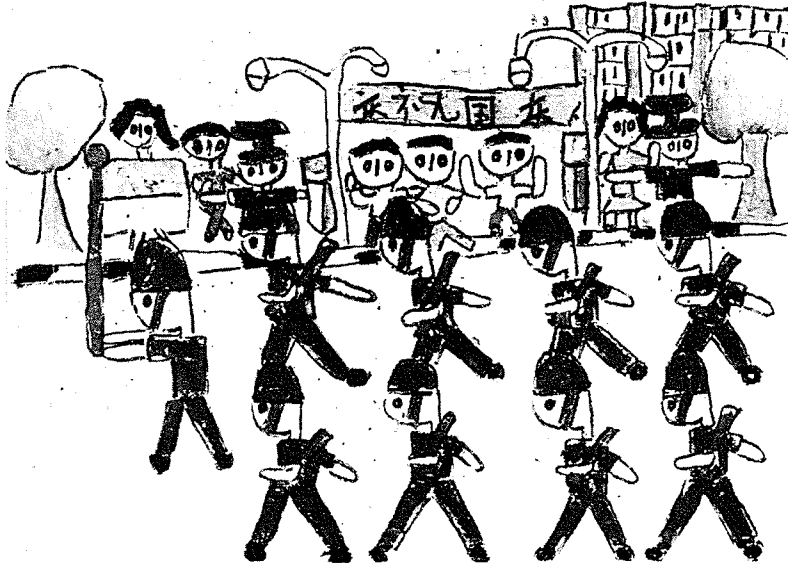
Yew and his school system appeared on the scene. But it also reflects high attrition. During the mid-1970s, 29 percent of all students dropped out at some point during their first six years in school. The proportion of all Singaporean first-graders who eventually enter the 10,000-student National University of Singapore or one of the island's polytechnics or who matriculate abroad is only nine percent, compared with 20 percent receiving higher education in Taiwan and 40 percent in Japan.

The New Mandarins

Meanwhile, the school system seems to be in a continual state of flux, as if learning in Singapore could be as finely tuned as the nation's economy. So frequently does the Ministry of Education tinker with local school systems that it is commonly referred to as the Ministry of Changes. The latest kick is an effort to inculcate Confucian values—an attempt, finally, to provide moral education as a firmer basis for national cohesion than self-gratification and “money-theism.”* With its emphasis on hierarchy, order, reciprocity, loyalty, and rule by the most able and virtuous, Confucianism seems admirably suited to encourage the “team spirit” Lee Kuan Yew wants to see in Singapore. Increasingly, that spirit has given way to a “what's in it for me” attitude, reflected in widespread job-hopping and demands by workers for overtime pay for playing in company-sponsored athletic competitions. Newspaper editorials lament the rise in juvenile delinquency, drug use, and what the Prime Minister calls “yellow culture”—immorality, hedonism, and other “seamier by-products of prosperity.”

Lee's educational reforms are designed in part to ensure that Singapore's next generation of leaders is as honest and able as the present one, and as devoid of “mediocrities and opportunists.” While the government hopes to enlarge “the number of key digits,” no one doubts that Singapore's 64,000 bureaucrats will continue to be dominated by a “coordinated hard core” of perhaps 300 high-flyers—skilled administrators and technical managers. (Lee Kuan Yew once observed that the country would disintegrate if “all 300 were to crash in one jumbo jet.”) High-flyers make up Singapore's elite Administrative Service—a British legacy—which in turn is overseen by a 15-member cabi-

*Confucianism will be introduced in the schools no later than 1984 as part of a broader religious knowledge program. Other courses include Buddhism, Hindu, Islam, Bible studies, and world religions. The humanities have not had high priority in Singapore in recent decades. One ironic result was that the country had to import eight Confucian scholars from Yale, New York University, Stanford, and other U.S. institutions to help determine which variant of Confucianism to teach.



A Singaporean child's depiction of the National Day (August 9) parade. It marks Chinese-dominated Singapore's final separation from Malay-dominated Malaysia in 1965 on grounds of mutual incompatibility. At the time, Singaporeans held their breath and wondered what was next.

net. The cohesion of the ruling class, and its ability to march in step, is enhanced by other Singapore institutions, such as the elegant Pyramid Club, whose membership is restricted to about 150 of the island's most senior ministers, members of Parliament, civil servants, businessmen, military officers, lawyers, and academics.

The integrity of those who exercise power in Singapore is ensured by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau. (Its name in Chinese is the Foul Greed Investigation Bureau.) The Bureau is empowered to investigate all charges of corruption in both the public and private sectors. No individual is immune. The Bureau's powers of search and seizure are practically unlimited, and the efficiency and sophistication of its 70 staff members are held in awe by Singaporeans of whatever station.

Recruitment of younger men into the ranks of what used to be called the "mandarinate" has been underway for a decade. In the cabinet, for example, seven of the 15 ministers have served for more than 12 years but the other eight have held their portfolios for fewer than six. The average age of the younger ministers is 44. The selection process is designed to winnow out the merely ordinary. "We can find out a man's record in school and

NO NONSENSE: A LEE KUAN YEW SAMPLER

On the importance of following the rules:

"We have all got to travel either on the left or on the right side of the road. We have all got to agree that when the light is red, we stop. When it is amber, we take heed. When it is green, we go."

On three hippie tourists whose hair was cut off by Singapore police:

"Things like this happen in the best of places. If any embarrassment has been caused, we can send them three wigs. We make wigs here."

On Singapore's leadership:

"My colleagues and I are by nature and by training calculators, not feelers; we like to make sure."

On training the young:

"We will be to blame if youngsters ten years from now become hooligans, ruffians, and sluts. They can be trained to be otherwise. Even dogs can be trained, as proved by the Police Training School where dogs, at a whistle, jump through a hoop, sit down, or attack those who need to be attacked."

To a group of university students:

"I often wonder whether you understand, whether you have a grasp of the realities of the society in which you are living. I have the feeling very often that because the administration is so effective, you are living like fishes in aquariums."

On "social delinquents":

"Our problem is how to devise a system of disincentives so that the irresponsible . . . do not believe that all they have to do is to produce their children and the government then owes them and their children sufficient food, medicine, housing, education, and jobs."

On his own intellectual capabilities:

"At Cambridge I got two firsts and a star for distinction. Harold Macmillan did not."

the university," Lee has explained, "how active he was apart from his profession, and even simulate crises to put him under"—like giving him two or more demanding jobs at once and shuffling him around rapidly among ministries to see if he can handle a rapid succession of diverse responsibilities.

Finding capable young technocrats is one thing, finding capable young *politicians* quite another. Lee and his People's Action Party learned that lesson in 1981 during a by-election in the downtown Anson district, adjacent to the harbor. The PAP had many times before asked older members of Parliament to resign, making room for "new blood." But this time, as a test, PAP officials deliberately left the running of the campaign entirely in the hands of second generation politicians. The PAP candidate for the vacant seat in Parliament, hand-picked by Lee, was 32-year-old Pang Kim Hin, scion of a wealthy family and a mechanical engineer with a B.S. from Canada's McGill University. To everyone's surprise, Pang lost to a personable Sri Lanka-born lawyer, J. B. Jeyaretnam, the candidate of the Workers' Party.

What Next?

Since 1966, the PAP had never lost an election. In the 1980 general elections, it had captured all 75 seats in Parliament; in the 38 districts where one or more of Singapore's 19 opposition parties—most of them small "mosquito parties"—fielded candidates, the PAP had won with an average of 75.5 percent of the vote. In the aftermath of the Anson vote, the Prime Minister conceded with typical bluntness that the second generation, for all its costly training, had yet to demonstrate "that sensitive political touch which is essential for rapport between government and the people." Meanwhile, though his presence in Parliament hardly threatens the PAP's hold on power, J. B. Jeyaretnam receives considerable public sympathy and attention as the lone opposition MP. He is quoted but hardly lionized by the press, where self-censorship rather than overt government intervention is the rule.*

The critical question facing Singapore is what the future holds. "If I were in authority in Singapore indefinitely," Lee Kuan Yew once remarked, "without having to ask those who are being governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern much more effectively in their own interests." But he will not be in authority indefinitely, and his successors will probably have to seek popular approval for their policies to a greater extent than Lee has ever done or had to do.

*Censorship works in many ways in Singapore, and does not work consistently. All printing presses must be relicensed annually by the government—which amounts to a very short leash. The most prestigious newspaper in Singapore, the *Straits Times*, is run by S. R. Nathan, a former chief of Singapore intelligence, who has the full confidence of the government. At the same time, the National University of Singapore publishes academically credible books critical of government policies, and newspapers present the opinions of columnists who often hold the regime up to mild ridicule.

They will also have to deal with the sensitive issue of the quality of life. "One of the most important purposes of all this planning and effort," Lee has said, "is that at the end of each day's toil, life should be more than just existence and the business of making a living." Singapore is not there yet. Nor has a sense of national identity really begun to jell. On such matters as possible reunification with Malaysia, admiration for Lee Kuan Yew, the importance of bilingualism, or even acceptance of the word "Singaporean," cleavages in public opinion are evident to this day among Chinese, Malays, and Indians. On the two local television channels, there is little domestic programming. Most of it comes from the BBC or from U.S. networks—"Dallas," "Love Boat," and "Diff'rent Strokes" are all popular—or from Hong Kong in the form of soap operas, with the original Cantonese dubbed over in Mandarin.

Beyond this, Singapore may face the task of reconciling its need to function as a unified society with the growing demands for greater individual freedom and political pluralism. Perhaps the two are not reconcilable. Singapore is too small to readily absorb the shock of big mistakes. Prime Minister Lee noted once that, "put bluntly, the role of an opposition is to ensure bad government"—his rationale being that the opposition does not enter Parliament to help a government govern well. Yet, he has also come to believe that, with economic prosperity now a tenuous fact of life, opposition from political "sparring partners" may be the only way to keep the newest generation of PAP politicians fit and agile.

Shadows of one sort or another hang over all of Asia's "little tigers"—Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea are the others—and by comparison, Singapore's lot is in some ways enviable. It faces no military threat; relations with neighbors may often be no more than correct but they are not hostile. There is no denying the republic's internal flaws, and the republic does not deny them. Its leaders, historically, have been alert to dangers and willing to confront them. They do not like washing their dirty linen in public, but they try to wash it somewhere.

There is a saying in Washington that God watches over fools, drunks, and the United States of America. I suspect that, out of one corner of His eye, He's had Singapore in view as well.

