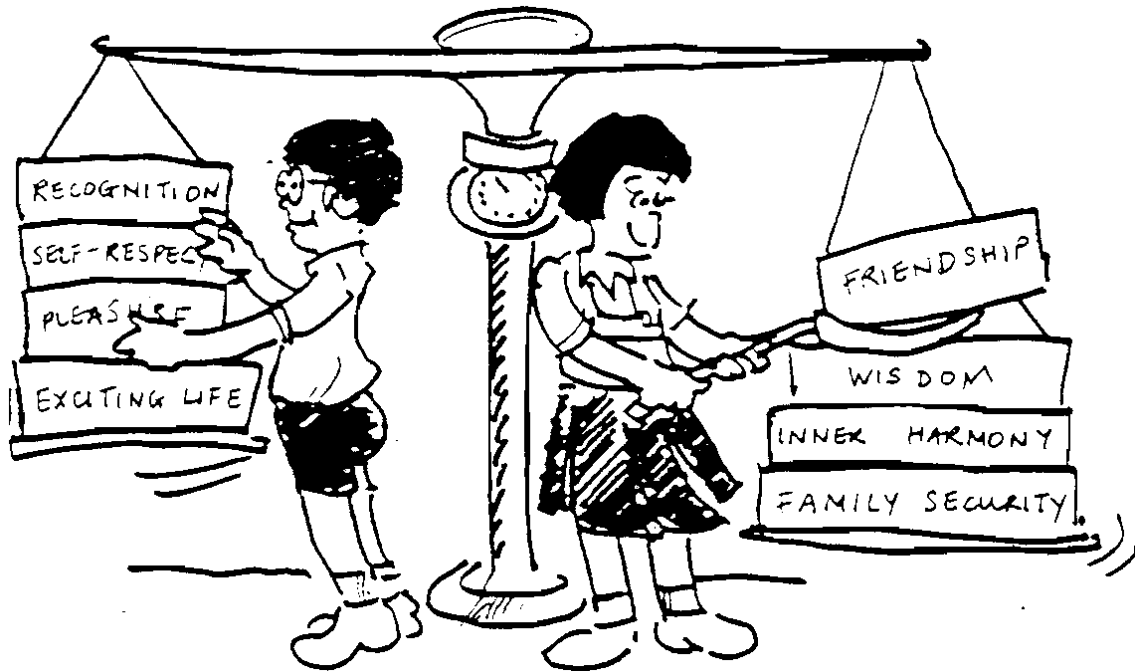

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WHAT DO SINGAPORE YOUTH VALUE?

Review by
Soh Kay Cheng



It is a truism that all school systems, irrespective of their diverse cultural backgrounds and political ideologies, are explicitly concerned **with** the inculcation of the 'right' kind of values in young people. This is the means by which the nation re-constructs or preserves itself to ensure continuity and **stability** culturally and politically. Hence, the study of youth values is not only of **academic** interest but, perhaps more importantly, has significance beyond education as **socialization**. Such a concern is evidenced by studies which appear one after another, though **intermittently**, over the past decades.

WORLD YOUTH SURVEY

The most recent World Youth Survey involving 11 nations is the fourth in a series of youth surveys (Youth Affairs Administration, 1989). This study compared young people's **attitudes** towards and opinions on various life areas. The survey covered 1,000 young people aged between 18 and 24 in each country. Some of the findings relevant to Singapore youth are summarized here:

- Singapore youth ranked fourth among those of other nations in satisfaction with home life (**71.2%**), after Sweden, Brazil and USA. And hence, as would be expected, the proportion of them who had real clashes with the parent was rather low (13.2%).
- Singapore youth ranked third in satisfaction with school life (**56.0%**), after USA and **UK**. Good friendship was mentioned as the highest gain (83.9%) in the schooling experience, followed by gain in general basic knowledge (76.8%). As for the factors determining **success**, personal abilities (67.6%) were considered more important than personal effort (**57.9%**).

- Although Singapore youth ranked fourth among those of other nations in satisfaction with life at work (52.8%), after Brazil, USA, and UK. there was a much larger proportion finding satisfaction with 'life outside job' (54.0%) than with the job itself (33.7%).
- Singapore youth held the nation in high esteem for her standard of living (82.3%), level of education (67.6%), social stability (60.1%) and potential for future development (54.3%). A commendable 69.8% responded affirmatively to the question whether they would be sacrificing their own interests in serving the nation, thus placing Singapore youth at the top of the list of the nations surveyed.
- As for their goals in life. Singapore youth placed the highest value on *To live as I like* (57.2%), followed by *To get rich* (19.0%), *To work on behalf of* society (10.4%), and *To acquire social position* (10.3%). The concern for personal freedom (*To live as I like*) placed Singapore youth at the sixth highest rank among those in the nations surveyed, after Sweden, Australia, USA, West Germany, and Korea.
- With regard to worries and concerns among Singapore youth, the highest proportion was for money (24.5%), then school work (21.2%), work (17.8%), personality problems (11.2%), and getting a job (11.94), in this descending order.
- All in all, Singapore youth were satisfied or more or less satisfied with friends (97.0%), home (96.0%), society (94.8%), school (94.2%), and work (87.1%). These compare very favourably with the responses of the youth of other nations involved in this international study.

STUDIES OF SINGAPORE YOUTH

In Singapore, the Ministry of Community Development commissioned a study of Singapore youth's perceptions and aspirations (Singapore, 1988). The project team used the focus group discussion technique for collecting information from thirteen different groups from a total of 115 informants. The 10 'A' Level students (four males and six females) who participated in the discussion were characterized thus:

- The students regard going to **school** as something they had to do; **something** required of them in order to fit into the **adult** world of careers and other responsibilities,.
- But what came through clearly **was** the importance of companionship during their leisure, especially with those with whom they shared interests.
- The students appeared to be very vague and unsure about their own aspirations. Several mentioned wanting to go into business when they finished school.
- They talked a lot about their expectations of the country and government, especially the latter.

In a more recent study (Soh, 1990), 120 male and female students from one pre-university institute indicated their life goals (or terminal values) and the path to these goals (or instrumental values). There were 18 **terminal** values and 18 instrumental values for the **students** to rank in **terms** of importance to them. Although the sample is not necessarily representative of Singapore at large, the findings nevertheless provide a glimpse of the young people's value system.