

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity Cultural Study

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Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Singapore Cultural Field Guide DoD-2630-SGP-012-06

Singapore is made up of three main ethnic groups: Chinese, Malays, and Indians. The Chinese ethnic group makes up the majority (75 percent) of the population, followed by the Malays (15 percent) and the Indians (8 percent). Each ethnic group is internally diverse. However, in the view of most Singaporeans, the divisions within each ethnic group are far less significant than those between groups.

The government of Singapore makes a concerted effort to promote ethnic diversity while emphasizing a shared Singaporean identity among the population. This has generally been successful.

However, because of the predominance of ethnic Chinese in positions of power and income disparities that often follow ethnic lines, the policies also have of strengthened the cultural values and identities of each group. The variations between Singaporean Chinese, Malay, and Indian groups are reflected and generalized in several ways, including religion, language, social roles, and professional opportunities. The table below shows some of the generalizations about the three main ethnic groups in Singapore.

Generalizations of the Main Ethnic Groups in Singapore

Ethnic Group	Religion	Primary Language	Perceived Standing in Society	Professional Opportunities
Chinese	Mixture of Daoism, Christianity, Confucianism and Buddhism	Mandarin Chinese	Dominant	Full-range
Malay	Muslim	Bahasa Melayu	Disadvantaged	Lacking
Indian	Hindu or Muslim	Tamil	Polarized	Various

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Religion

Singaporeans practice a variety of religions, including Buddhism and ancestor worship, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The Chinese overwhelmingly practice Buddhism and ancestor worship; the Malays practice Islam; and the Indians mainly practice either Hinduism or Islam. People generally are encouraged to follow the religion that is historically associated with their ethnic group. The exception is for national religious festivals, when members of other ethnic groups may join in the festivities of another ethnic group. In addition, most Singaporeans, with the exception of some Malays, practice a mixture of religious beliefs—they are not devout to one religious faith. This is especially true of the Chinese, whose common religious practices combine elements of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, as well as folklore and traditions like feng shui.

Daoism

The term “Daoism” (also known as Taoism) encompasses a wide scope of folk and animist tradition. Daoism can best be defined as a comprehensive term used to describe the cosmology and ritual that gradually emerged over centuries in China. It is a polytheist religion, embracing gods that are recognized throughout China as well as many local gods. Daoist cosmology teaches that yin and yang, the spiritual and material components of everything in existence, are in constant change. Yang, the masculine force associated with light, heaven, and activity, mixes with the feminine yin, which is darkness, earth, and inactivity, to make up every being and object, and to create that object or person’s qi, or life energy. These concepts are evident in many aspects of Singapore’s Chinese society. For example, Chinese believe that foods exhibit properties of yin and yang, and an unbalanced intake of these foods will cause illness.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a set of beliefs that forms a basic world view for almost all Singaporean Chinese. It is not a practiced religion and does not necessarily contradict other religions. Thus a practicing Singaporean Chinese Buddhist or Christian would also likely identify with some principles and tenets of Confucianism. Confucius, called Kong Zi in Mandarin Chinese, lived in the 6th century A.D. He taught ancient rituals that organized society, relationships, and proper behavior. His world view espouses a series of relationships that ritualize certain behaviors to ensure that society is harmonious. Confucianism emphasizes moral education for males, and assumes that any man may become a good person if he is diligent in his studies.

Buddhism

Buddhists in Singapore follow the Mahayana tradition. Adherents generally are of Chinese descent. Buddhists believe that souls are reborn after death into humans, animals, or plants. One’s present state is a reflection of past behavior (i.e., karma), and present actions affect one’s future state. Due to this, many Chinese believe in yuanfen (destiny) as a consequence of one’s behavior in a former life. This belief emphasizes acceptance of hardship in this life through a belief that one has earned it. This cycle of death and rebirth continues until one has acquired sufficient merit through good deeds to be released from the cycle of rebirth. Buddhists worship many deities (as in Daoism), which include personalities who have escaped the cycle of rebirth.

Islam

Islam was founded on the Arabian Peninsula by the Prophet Mohammed between 610 and 632 A.D. Mohammed’s followers, called Muslims, consider him to be the last in the line of prophets that includes Abraham and Jesus. Today, Islam is the world’s second largest religion after Christianity; however, it is believed to be the fastest growing religion, due to natural population growth and a high rate of conversion. Islam has approximately 1.3 billion followers worldwide.

Islam is a monotheistic religion. The main scripture of Islam is the Koran, regarded as the word of Allah or God. Muslims believe in five basic duties, known as the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; prayer five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during the month of Ramadan; and at least one pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Muslims gather collectively for worship on Fridays at the mosque, which is also a center for teaching of the Koran. The community leader, the imam, is considered a teacher and prayer leader.

Most Muslims follow the Sunni branch of Islam and most Muslim Singaporeans (which include many of Malays and some Indians) are Sunni. When Islam came to Southeast Asia, it did not completely supplant existing spiritual beliefs and systems of social law, so some aspects of Islam in Singapore include Hindu and even pre-Hindu influences. Islam is recognized as a formal religion by the Singaporean government. It is important to the country's Muslim population, but the relatively recent threat of radical Islamic terrorism is prompting most non-Muslim Singaporeans to learn more about the religion and how it affects the country. Some Singaporeans have advocated a more inclusive policy toward Muslims to stem the spread of Islamic radicalism.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions, dating back more than 5,000 years. It is believed to have originated near the Indus River in South Asia. It has more than 900 million followers worldwide. Though Hinduism does not have a codified system of beliefs or links to a known founder, there are some tenets that are held by all Hindus. Among the most important is the belief in one Supreme Being referred to as Brahman, who is present in all living things, and is also embodied in countless lesser Hindu gods and goddesses. The most common include Lord Vishnu, the preserver of life; Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, both considered to be incarnations of Vishnu; Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed god known as the Remover of Obstacles; Lord Shiva, the god of destruction and transformation, often depicted in the form of a linga; and Sri Mariamman, a goddess worshipped mainly by Tamils.

Hindus (like Buddhists) also believe that all living things have souls, and after death, the soul is reincarnated in another form. One's present state is a reflection of past behavior (i.e., karma, the same term used in Buddhism), and present actions will affect one's future state. Hindus refer to karma to encourage good actions and to explain both good and evil events that occur in a person's life as a consequence of past actions. This cycle of life, death, and rebirth continues until the soul achieves moksha, or release from the cycle of reincarnation. Moksha is achieved only after a long journey of observing proper behavior over many lifetimes, and is the ultimate goal of all Hindus.

An important aspect of Hinduism is the scriptures references to the social ordering of people. This groups people into four varnas (castes). Each varna has rules of conduct regarding diet, marriage, and contact with people of other varnas. Initially, these varnas were used only to describe people from various communities or occupations. Though a person was born into a specific varna, he or she could move to another. However, over time, through the influence of the elite classes, the caste system developed into an enforced social hierarchy, in which people were prejudiced based on caste, and their social mobility was limited. Though the influence of castes has declined, it continues to be invoked by some Singaporean Hindus with regard to specific issues, such as marriage.

Religious Impact on Actions

Religious practice varies greatly between people in Singapore. Many Malays have a strong attachment to their Islamic beliefs, and define themselves by their religion. In contrast, many Chinese and Indians adhere to several different religious traditions simultaneously. A Chinese Singaporean could, for example, attend Christian church and practice Chinese folk traditions respecting one's ancestors. At the same time, religion (as well as language) has been incorporated into the definition of ethnic identity in Singapore, so the ethnic groups are kept distinct from one another in terms of government policy and self-identity.

The Singaporean government provides support to religious organizations, which in turn provide social welfare benefits to members of their communities. So, a portion of each Singaporean's income is redistributed to the ethnic community to which they belong. The result is that ethnic-based social services are funded by the central government, but administered largely through religious, educational, and community organizations associated with the particular ethnic group of which one is a member. For example, Chinese social welfare income deductions are not used—or even allowed to be given—to an organization that is associated with Islamic (Malay) or Hindu (Indian) groups. The arrangement allows officially-sanctioned ethnic organizations to continue to provide social welfare services, while the government provides funding, infrastructural support, and central guidance. This gives the government a powerful role in controlling the religious organizations of the Malay and Indian ethnic groups in particular, and ensures that religion does not take on a fundamentalist or radical role in Singapore.

The Singaporean government also instills in its citizens a feeling of pride in the modernization and development of their country, as well as an individual ethos of personal and material advancement. This concept clearly separates the Singaporean Chinese, Malay, or Indian from any association he or she may have toward their hereditary land of origin. To a large degree, this national pride influences personal behavior. For example, ethnic groups in Singapore distinguish themselves from citizens of China, Malaysia, or India by Singapore's superior material development, efficiency, and level of public cleanliness.

Language

Language is used as a tool to sustain ethnic self-identity for many communities. As a result, each ethnic group emphasizes the teaching of its own language, in addition to English. Consequently, virtually all Singaporeans, regardless of ethnicity, speak some English or Singlish (an extremely informal slang language that is a mixture of Hokkien Chinese, Malay, and English) as well as their hereditary language dialect. Most signs in Singapore are written in English, some also in Chinese. Older Singaporeans are more likely to have difficulty understanding or speaking English because its use was not made common until the 1970s. In addition, Malays have a particularly strong attachment to their language, and consequently may not be as proficient in English as members of other ethnic groups.

The particular dialect a Singaporean speaks reflects his or her ancestral origins and their needs in Singaporean society. For Indians, the dialects include Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi, Gujarati, Telegu, Bengali, and Hindi. For the Chinese, the dialects include Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, and Foochow. For the Malays, dialects include variations in Bahasa, and a fusion of Chinese and Malay called Peranakan, and Arabic. Singaporeans who can speak English and Mandarin Chinese are most likely to be successful politically and professionally.

Cultural History

Overall, most Singaporeans think of themselves as Singaporean first, followed by their ethnicity background. This has been a deliberate goal of the Singaporean government since independence was established in 1968. At the same time, the ethnic groups maintain separate identities and see little difference between race and culture. As a result, someone who is ethnically Indian is expected to act and think like an Indian, not like a Chinese. These stereotypes persist in Singapore and factor into various issues related to military operations,

including who leads, who gets promoted, and who is excluded. In general, the ethnic Chinese advance to top positions while the Malays do not.

The dominance of the primarily Chinese and Indian People's Action Party (PAP) began in the mid-20th century, when a charismatic and enduring Chinese leader, Lee Kwan Yew, took over Singaporean politics. Although he recognized and tacitly accepted Chinese dominance in Singaporean politics, Lee Kuan Yew also believed that the island's success depended on racial harmony and a government publicly free of "Chinese chauvinism." Therefore he created a constitutionally multiracial state, but one that drew on Confucian values of strong family and powerful government. He also made economic development a national priority, and to a large degree successfully instilled this sense of purpose in Singaporeans. As a result, Singapore is one of the most modern and advanced countries in the world.

Singaporeans have not forgotten past ethnic clashes, particularly the 1964 riots between Chinese and Malays. The government is sensitive to Chinese chauvinism, and tries to balance Chinese identity with that of other ethnic groups and a greater Singaporean nationality. This means that Chinese are somewhat limited politically—advocating for Chinese values and rights, for example, is virtually impossible.

Material development also does not benefit all ethnic groups equally. The Chinese continue to dominate most sectors of the Singaporean economy, government, and military. Their long-term success largely comes at the expense of the Malays, who at one time not only made up the largest ethnic group, but also held high positions in the colonial administration, especially in areas of internal security and public safety. The Malays today, by contrast, are the poorest ethnic group, and they are often excluded and discriminated against in subtle ways.

Malays tend to obtain a lower level of formal education than members of the other ethnic groups. Those who continue past high school tend to specialize in vocational education programs. Malays make up only a small percentage of university graduates and students enrolled in higher education. As a result, as of the 1990s, 86 percent of Malays had low-level occupations. Only roughly ten percent could be classified as professional and technical workers (including schoolteachers), or administrative and managerial personnel.

Discontent among Malays is now associated with radical Islam. The issue has become more pronounced since the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the arrest of several Jemaah Islamiah terrorists in Singapore in December of 2001. In the minds of most Singaporeans, Malay ethnicity is tied to the Islam. Singaporean Malays are overwhelmingly Muslims, and are less integrated into daily Singaporean life than the other ethnic groups. For many Singaporean Malays, Islamic law provides important guidance in various aspects of their life, ranging from family and economic affairs to social etiquette and politics.

The government of Singapore rules with very little opposition based on ethnicity. In fact, Singapore's culture has reached a point where overt ethnic politics almost has become taboo. Instead, the primary focus is on finding a comfortable balance between maintaining ethnic identity while promoting a greater, Singaporean national identity. Within Singapore, there has been a concerted effort by the government to create a national identity and definition of what it means to be Singaporean. The national identity cuts across all ethnic groups and includes notions of civic responsibility, peaceful multiculturalism, and economic achievement. Government policies related to education, National Service (compulsory military service), and housing are helping to unify the population. In fact, National Service is considered the great leveler in Singaporean society. As a result, although Indians, Chinese, and Malays all maintain

distinct cultural customs and traditions, they tend to view themselves as Singaporeans, and their allegiance to Singapore is as important to them as their ethnic or cultural heritage.

Customs

The Singaporeans have adopted a mix of traditional Asian values along with the particular practices of each ethnic group. Many of the customs, gestures, and values are similar between ethnic groups, even though they may have a different origin. Most Singaporeans share a respect for tradition and culture, close ties and obligation to one's family, and a respect for hierarchy, which translates into deference to age and education. Elders and teachers therefore are given special consideration and respect.

Greetings

Handshakes are customary greetings in business settings. Handshakes are less firm than in the West. Women can shake hands with members of either sex, but they are expected to initiate the gesture with a man. Women and men may also nod politely when introduced. It is polite to bow slightly when passing someone or meeting them for the first time. Business cards often are exchanged when meeting in business and social situations. It is customary and polite to give and receive the cards using both hands. English greetings are generally acceptable and understood by most Singaporeans. Singaporean children often address older adults as "auntie" or "uncle," even those whom they do not know. This is done as a sign of respect.

Malay Singaporeans may greet each other with the Muslim greeting of, "*Ahsalaam alaikum*," ("Peace be upon you"). The proper response is, "*Wa'alikum ahsalaam*." Malays also greet by performing *salaam*, which is performed by two people bring their right palms together (as if they were going to shake hands), touching hands, sliding them apart; and then placing their hand over their heart. Malay greetings also can include, "*Selamat pagi*," ("Good morning"); "*Selamat petang*," ("Good afternoon"); or, "*Selamat malam*," ("Good evening"). More formal Malay terms include, "*Seleamat sejahtera atas anda*," ("I wish upon you peace and tranquility").

Singaporean Indians traditionally greet each other by putting their palms together in front of the chest, similar to a position of prayer, and saying, "Namaste," (among North Indians) or "Vanakka'," (among South Indians). Indian Muslims may greet each other by saying "Assalam alaikum," and responding with, "Wa'alaikum salam."

Gestures

- One gets another person's attention by waving all fingers of the right hand with the palm facing down in a downward fanning motion. It is considered rude to wave by curling the fingers with the palm facing up.
- Pointing at someone or forming the okay sign with the forefingers and thumb is considered rude. To point to something or someone, it is best to open the palm facing upwards and extend the hand in that direction.
- It is always better to use the right hand to give and receive objects or to point.
- Prolonged direct eye contact may be interpreted as a sign of aggression. It is polite to catch a counterpart's eyes for a second, then lower the head and look down.
- The head is the most sacred area and should not be touched by others unless absolutely necessary. Conversely, the foot is considered the lowest part of the body, so it is rude to show the bottom of one's feet or soles or to move important objects with a foot. As a result,

most Singaporeans cross their legs at the knee when sitting instead of resting the ankle on the knee.

- Tapping the foot implies a lack of interest.
- Pounding a fist into an open palm is considered rude.

While conversing or listening to something, Indians commonly shake their head from side to side in a circular way resembling the way Americans signal “no.” For Indians, this movement signifies consent or agreement with what is being said, or appreciation for what they are hearing.

Visiting

- It is generally impolite to arrive late for meetings or business events, though the Chinese may not be as punctual for social events.
- It is common to remove shoes before entering private homes and most sacred sites.
- All ethnic groups place a strong emphasis on family, and tend to visit relatives often.
- It is usually impolite to refuse initial offers of food or drink. To refuse seconds, place the hand above the plate. When finished, place the utensils together perpendicularly on the plate. If they are not placed together, more food may be offered.

Negotiations

The concept of saving face is important in negotiations with all Singaporeans, and most importantly with the Chinese. A person loses face by making a mistake, failing to live up to others' expectations, demonstrating ignorance, or losing composure. One gains respect by remaining dignified and by giving face to others—showing care for guests, arriving early or on time to a meeting, praising someone in front of that person's superior, and not drawing attention to others' mistakes in public. This concept is important for negotiations; if negotiators feel at any time that their own face or the face of their organization or country has been harmed, they may terminate the discussions. It is also considered a loss of face to say “no” outright. Phrases like, “It is difficult,” or, “It is inconvenient,” are used instead to express a negative response. Raising one's voice is not likely to be productive, as it causes a loss of face for all involved.

Displays of Affection

Singaporeans maintain a separation of the sexes in terms of displays of affection. They generally do not touch members of the opposite sex in public; public displays of affection are inappropriate. However, this is changing among the younger generations. The concept of public displays of affection is hotly debated. Chinese and Indians hold hands, but Malays do not.

Business

Singapore is renowned for its strong business ethics and the high values the nation places on honesty and openness. At the same time, most Singaporeans believe that successful business relationships are built on trust and, therefore, rely heavily on family and personal connections. Therefore, nepotism may be considered good business practice instead of corruption. Introductions or referrals are extremely important for an outsider conducting business in these cases. It is customary to arrange meetings in advance, and meetings are generally more successful when arranged by a mutual acquaintance if the parties do not initially know each other.

Other considerations relating to business include:

- Handshakes before and after a business meeting or social occasion are expected of all in the room. Firm handshakes may not be common. It is polite to bow slightly while shaking hands.
- Westerners are expected to be punctual for social occasions and business meetings. It is a sign of disrespect to arrive or provide product or service late.
- Business cards are exchanged after being introduced. Exchange business cards with both hands after being introduced and treat the card with respect (e.g., do not write on it, fold it, or put it in a wallet in front of the person it represents).

Gifts

When visiting a home for the first time, it is acceptable to bring food such as fruit or cakes as an initial gift. Alcohol should be avoided as a gift for Malays. On a special occasion, an expensive or auspicious gift would be welcomed, but gifts should never be extravagant or beyond the recipients ability to reciprocate. Gifts are not immediately opened.

Values and Practices

Most Singaporeans exhibit some Western manners and behaviors but also retain distinct cultural values at the same time.

- The Chinese tend to value success, measured in academic and economic terms; members of the Chinese community tend to be better educated than those of the other ethnic groups.
- Malays are particularly sensitive toward their religious faith. Customary law, guides the important ceremonies and events in life such as birth, coming of age, and marriage.
- Singaporean Indians who trace their origins from Southern India tend to be more conservative and traditional than other Indians.

Particular Cultural Etiquette of the Chinese

- At banquets, seating is often hierarchical; one should wait to be shown to a seat.
- It is generally considered rude to offer samples of a meal to others.
- Never stand your chopsticks in a dish or rice bowl; this symbolizes death.
- When finished eating, Chinese typically leave a little on their plate; an empty plate means you are still hungry.
- After dessert, the guests leave while the host stays to pay. It is considered rude to offer to split the bill. If time allows, it is polite to reciprocate with another meal.
- Colors are very important in Chinese culture. Red symbolizes life—it is used for decorations during festivals and holidays. White and black are traditional mourning colors, so choose clothes that are not all-white or all-black.

Centers of Authority

Singaporeans greatly value the stability and cohesion of family and society. Because of this, they defer to figures of authority, including elders and social and political leaders. In addition, the ethnic mix of the population and the Chinese-dominance of a country in a Malay region creates a great potential for ethnic tension and civil unrest. To counter this, the government actively and sometimes invasively takes responsibility for social and cultural issues. The

centralized and authoritarian government, with little emphasis on civil liberties or limits to state power, emphasizes non-partisanship, unity, and the prosperity of the State. This regulation of daily life is plainly visible to everyone in Singapore. Singapore imposes heavy fines for smoking in undesignated areas, littering, and most famously, for improperly spitting out chewing gum. Most Singaporeans readily accept this level of regulation in exchange for the social cohesion and stability that it provides. This respect for law and order trickles down to most members of Singaporean society, who take great pride in cleanliness and order in their society.

The government plays a prominent role in all Singaporeans' lives, and affects their daily behavior and relationships within and across ethnic groups. The government regulates its citizens' behavior down to the smallest details. There is a running joke that Singapore is a "fine" city due to its strict laws, imposing fines, and other punishments for what would be considered small or overlooked infractions in other places. The government also influences where people are allowed to live and the type of civic participation allowed.

Ethnic and religious organizations play an important role in the lives of virtually all Singaporeans. They work to protect the social well-being of the community and the interests of ethnic groups. They serve as a means for the central government to manage ethnic politics through disbursement of funds and political recognition. The most prominent Malay organization is Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS, the Singaporean Islamic Council), which plays an important role in the organization of Islamic affairs and charity efforts in the Muslim community and various development organizations. The most prominent Indian organizations are the Hindu Endowments Board and the Hindu Advisory Board. The Chinese are represented primarily through their political party, PAP, which dominates national policy, and through a variety of ethnic Chinese organizations such as the very influential Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Hokkien Association. Commercial groups are especially powerful as they provide a forum for developing and maintaining business contacts. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, an ethnic Chinese and the founder of Singapore, strongly supports an Asian values movement that advocates strong family relations, a powerful government, and economic prosperity (all based on Confucianism).

Role of Family

The most important unit of society for all Singaporeans is the family, including the extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Parents often have significant say in their children's choice of studies, career, and even in their selection of a spouse.

The issue of marriage is an important one in a society as ethnically sensitive as Singapore. Most Singaporean ethnic groups view marriage as a means to preserve their ethnic and cultural heritage. There typically is significant pressure to choose a suitable person—i.e., someone who shares the same social class, educational background, religion, and ethnicity. As a result, interracial marriages are not common.

Role of Men and Women

Within the family, conventional concepts of the roles of men and women persist. Men traditionally are viewed as the providers and dominant decision makers. Women increasingly are becoming empowered and involved in positions outside the home; but they are still underrepresented in positions of authority. Gender discrimination is not severe in Singapore, particularly for an Asian society, and females serve in some combat positions.

Role of Self

In Singapore, the interests of the society take precedence over those of self. For each ethnic group, the concept of self is deeply rooted in family and consequently, a shared tie to an ethnic heritage. Members of virtually all families seek to instill a sense of pride toward their ethnic group, while promoting a “Singapore first” mentality.

Cultural Economy

The Malays were dominant in Singapore before colonization, and held positions of power even into the British administration. However, since the 1950s, the Chinese have been taking an increasingly larger share of economic and political power. This is due to Chinese business networks, often called bamboo networks, that are used to foster business relations between people based on kinship, common dialect, trade association, education, and other commonalities. As a result, Chinese family businesses are extremely common in Singapore. They combine elements of Chinese business style and Western management practice. These networks have contributed greatly to Singapore’s rapid economic development over the last half-century. While Chinese enterprises and business have helped develop Singapore’s economy, the development of the economy has, on the whole, helped to smooth intra-ethnic tensions among the Chinese and between ethnic groups. However, as Chinese businesses on the island continue to look to mainland China for business, it is increasingly difficult for non-Mandarin speakers to find jobs in business.

The Indians hold a disproportionate share of the jobs at the very top and bottom of the economic and political scale. Many of the recent arrivals to satisfy Singapore’s need for foreign labor are Indians, but ethnic Indians also make up a relatively large portion of successful Singaporean businessmen, attorneys, and politicians.

The Malays leave benefit among ethnic groups in Singapore. Most Malays work as production workers or in other less-skilled professions; less than two percent of all administrative and managerial workers are Malay. The Chinese tend to blame the Malays cultural lack of emphasis on work and education for the Malays’ problems, while the Malays tend to think Chinese persecution and exclusion prevent their advancement. Many Malays from Johore, Malaysia, come daily to work in Singapore.

View Towards the United States and U.S. military

Popular culture of the United States, including music, movies and fashion, is very popular in Singapore. The and Singapore share strong relations and cooperate on economic and security issues. The role in the region is perceived to be critical in maintaining peace and regional security. The Singapore and military share very close relations; Singaporeans wholly favor the military. Personal behavior by Singaporeans toward service members will be very professional and courteous, with little hostility or negativity. However, Singapore’s public has expressed concern over operations in Iraq and the subsequent potential to radicalize Muslims in their country. Malay Muslims are particularly sensitive to actions affecting Muslims in other countries and may be more likely than members of other ethnic groups in Singapore to view U.S. operations and armed forces personnel critically.

View of Other Regional Groups

Due to the historical ties with Malaysia and Indonesia to Singapore's founding, Singapore is careful in its relations with each of these countries.

The fact that Singapore is a developed, ethnically Chinese-dominated island lying between two larger, Muslim countries also makes the average Singaporean more aware of the potential for regional conflict and ethnic tensions. This has affected military strategy as well as diplomatic relations. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in the region and recent threats against Singapore has made Singaporeans more conscious of the importance of harmonious ethnic relations.

Quotes

"The Singaporean Chinese is very different from the Chinese Chinese. We keep telling ourselves not to be deceived by skin color." – Hui Boon

"I don't like people to say that I'm China Chinese. I'm Chinese I know, but I'm also Singaporean. We are very, very different, because of our mentality and behavior, I would say." – Jacintha.

Although the ethnic Chinese in Singapore derive much of their cultural heritage from mainland China, they draw a distinction between themselves and Chinese in China. Those that visit or work in China are often shocked by the major cultural differences that have developed, and comment that mainland Chinese behavior is impolite and crude.

Singaporean Chinese and Indians are active throughout Southeast Asia. In most cases they enjoy good relations with the other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. However, in recent years Indians have privately complained about the increasing Chinese character of Singapore. Indians have voiced concern that in recent years Singapore's immigration policies appear to favor Chinese coming from Hong Kong while Indians constitute a disproportionately high percentage of Singaporeans emigrating to other countries. Tensions between the Indian and Chinese ethnic communities are also visible—for instance, disputes have arisen over the encroachment of Chinese retailers into the area known as Little India, and Chinese residents of Little India have resented the crowds of South Asian migrant workers who congregate in the area on Sundays.

The Military

The tense withdrawal from the Federation of Malaya in 1965 left Singapore with a sense of great vulnerability to its larger neighbors. Adding to their concern, regional Islamic groups have expressed desires to incorporate Singapore into a greater pan-Islamic Southeast Asia. Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) operate under the assumption that a strong defensive and deterrent force is necessary because of the country's small size, dependence on outside natural resources (including water), and foreign investment and trade. Chinese tradition frowns on military service, but the government manages to portray SAF service, particularly at the officer level, as a noble and profitable occupation.

In addition, all Singaporeans are imbued, starting in elementary school, with the concept of ownership of their country's defense and the virtues of nationalism. Singapore's defense relies heavily on a compulsory military service, called National Service. On completing high school, all males must serve full-time in the Army for two years. Following National Service, all men are obligated to serve in the reserves until the age of 40 (50 for officers). Most Singaporeans do not look forward to National Service or service in the reserves, but accept it as a civic duty.

Recruitment and Training

Singapore identifies future top military leaders early by reviewing high school examination results and persuading top performers to sign on for a military career. Those students who accept the offer are dubbed scholars. Scholars receive opportunities to study at prestigious schools in the United States and United Kingdom, and they are promoted quickly. To date, all scholars have been ethnic Chinese. Some scholars have achieved the rank of colonel or general officer by the age of 35. SAF officers are promoted faster than U.S. soldiers and have less experience than their U.S. counterparts with equivalent ranks.

Singapore's soldiers understand that they should be ready to fight and defend their small nation without any foreign assistance. However, they welcome training opportunities with counterparts with operational experience, especially personnel from the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Israel. SAF personnel are trained to comfortably use sophisticated equipment.

Officer and Enlisted Positions

The SAF follows a strict hierarchical system based on Chinese traditions of saving face and deference to elders. Due respect to those of higher ranks is expected on and off duty, even by foreign soldiers. SAF officers are expected to behave in a manner befitting their rank at all times. Subsequently, these officers tend to avoid unofficial social gatherings.

There is almost no fraternization (social or official) between commissioned officers and enlisted men (on or off duty). The greatest amount of mixing in the armed forces occurs at the junior officer level, where commissioned and noncommissioned officers attend defense schooling and other military training together.

Inter-Service Characteristics

There is little integration among the three military services (Army, Navy, Air Force). Aside from the strict top-down hierarchy, each service has its own defining characteristics and stereotypes, which are similar to militaries around the world. For example, the Air Force is viewed as a service for very intelligent people who are not interested in field activity. Army personnel are viewed as physically fit people who are not as academically or technologically savvy as members of the other services. The Navy's make-up is viewed as a combination of the other two services.

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