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**A STUDY OF COLLECTIVISM/INDIVIDUALISM  
AMONG SINGAPORE TEACHERS**

**Agnes Chang Shook Cheong**

Paper presented at the International Council of Psychologists  
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**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF PSYCHOLOGISTS  
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INTRODUCTION

Collectivism or communitarianism has been identified as one vital criterion which accounts for the economic miracles in the Newly Industrialized Economies, namely Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. As teachers play a pivoting part in preparing the young citizens for their roles in society, it is a paramount importance to understand the values held dear to the teachers, the national architects. Are Singapore teachers more inclined towards individualistic or collectivistic values, as identified by Schwartz (1992/1994)? Are they committed to the collectivistic values exhorted in the Five National Shared Values?

Values have been identified as mediating variables in the management of economic development (Hofstede, 1980; Kagitcibasi, 1990). They are desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Kluckhohn, 1981, Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994). They can be expressed at different levels

(universal, culture, group, or individual) and in different contexts (in policy, development and through management practice).

### HOFSTEDE DIMENSIONS

Hofstede (1980) derived four dimensions along which the dominant value systems in differing nations can be ordered. He sought dimensions of cross-cultural variation in 40 nations. The four dimensions were defined as

- power distance: "the extent to which members of a society accept [as legitimate) that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally".
- uncertainty avoidance: "the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity which leads them to support beliefs promising certainty and to maintain institution protecting conformity".
- muscularity/femininity: "a preference for a chauvinist, heroism, assertiveness and material success as opposed to a preference for relationship, modesty, caring for the weak, and the quality of life".
- individualism/collectivism: "a preference for a loosely social framework in society in which individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only as opposed to .... a preference for a tightly knit social framework in which individuals can expect their

relatives, clan or others in-group to look after them, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty".

Individualism/collectivism is the dimension that has been used most frequently used as an explanatory variable in recent research (Kagitcibasi and Berry 1989; Triandis, 1990). Triandis (1990) has elaborated broader conceptualizations of the dimensions of individualism/collectivism. He gives greater emphasis than Hofstede on the idea that individualism involves giving priority to personal goals over the goals of the in-group, while collectivism involves giving priority to the goals of the in-group over personal goals.

#### INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL AND CULTURAL-LEVEL VALUE TYPES:

#### SCHWARTZ' MODELS

In Hofstede's cross-cultural study (1980), it was the dimension of individualism which is linked to the high GNP of a nation. However, Singapore proves to be an exception as our rapid economic growth is associated with collectivism.

Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990) and Schwartz (1992, 1994) derived an alternative set of 10 individual-level Motivational Types of Values. These motivational values are Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-Direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity and Security. What is the

difference between Cultural-level value dimensions and Individual-level value dimensions?

- Cultural-level dimensions reflect the different solutions that societies evolve to the problems of regulating human activities, the different ways that institutional emphases and investments are patterned and justified in one culture compared to another (Schwartz, 1994).
- Individual-level value dimensions reflect the psychological dynamics of conflict and compatibility that individuals experience in the source of pursuing their values in every day life (Schwartz, 1992, 1994).

But social and psychological conflicts arise when people pursue their values. For example, the pursuit of achievement values may conflict with the pursuit of benevolence values. The pattern of plausible conflicts and compatibility among values priorities yields a structure for value systems that has been evident in cross-cultural work (Schwartz, 1992).

The 10 value types are organized on two basic bipolar dimensions. Each polar dimension constitutes a higher-order value that encompasses two or more of the 10 value types. One dimension opposes Openness to Change (Self-Direction and Stimulation), and Conservation (Conformity, Tradition and Security). The other opposes Self-Transcendence (Universalism and Benevolence) and Self-Enhancement (Achievement and Power). The bipolar structure is presented in Figure 1.

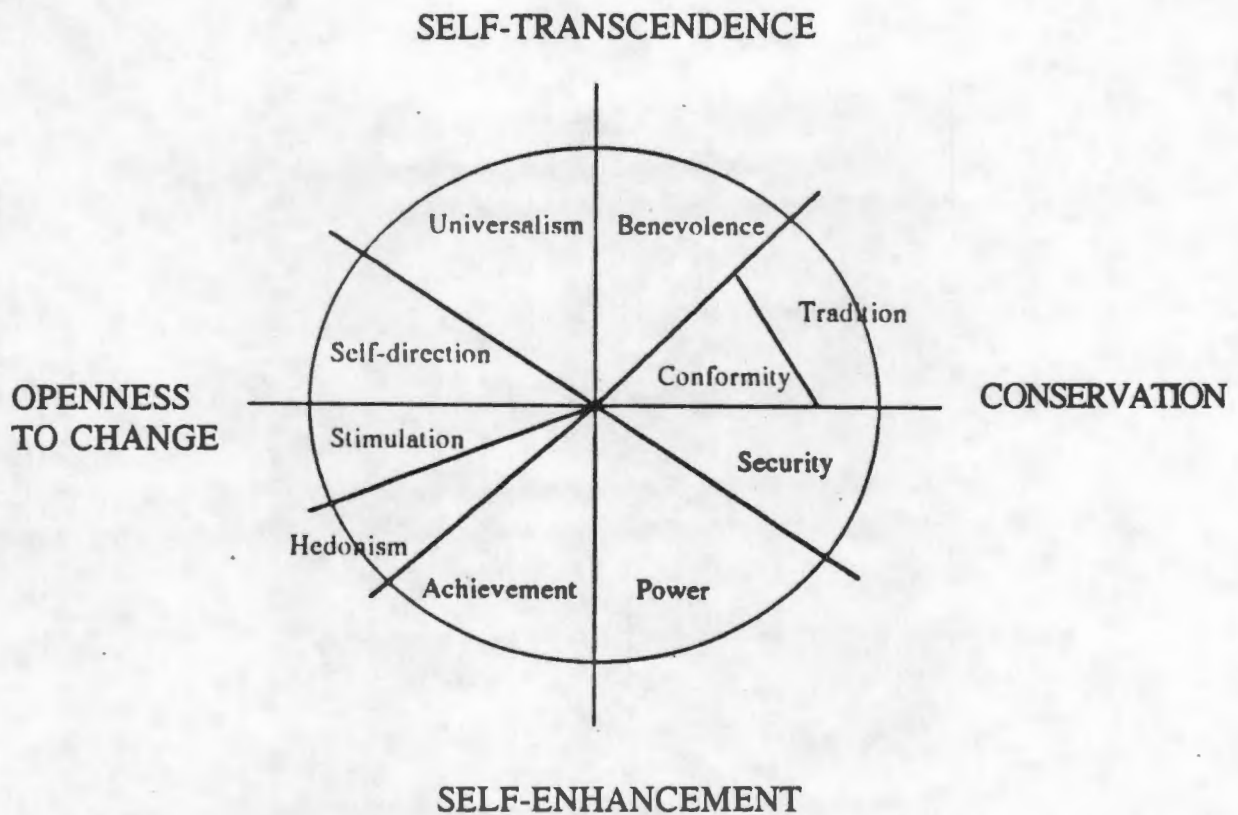
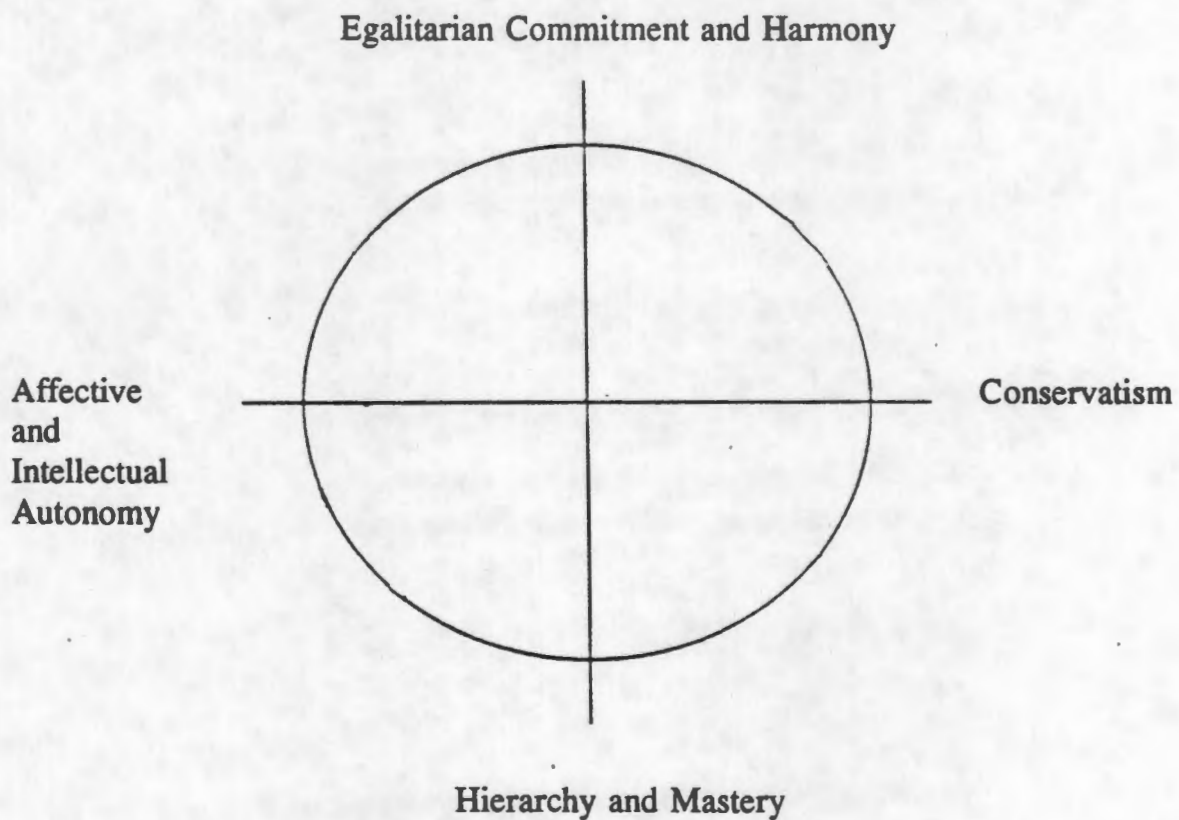


Figure 1 : Schwartz' Model of Individual Level of Motivational Types of Values

The basic structural organization of values into competing types is similar at the cultural and individual level. Just as the four higher-order value types form polar dimensions at the individual level, because of the psychological and social incompatibility of pursuing them simultaneously for the individuals (Schwartz, 1992), so they form polar dimensions at the cultural level, because of the conflicts that would arise, were institutions structured to emphasize and promote them simultaneously. In sum, two culture-level dimensions, consisting of opposing value types, are hypothesized;



1. **Autonomy (Affective and Intellectual) vs Conservatism** (parallel to individual-level **Openness to Change vs Conservation**, and closest to the core idea of **Individualism/Collectivism**).
2. **Hierarchy and Mastery vs Egalitarian Commitment and Harmony with Nature** (parallel to individual-level **Self-Enhancement versus Self-Transcendence**). (Refer to Figure 2)



**Figure 2 : Schwartz' Model of Cultural-Level Motivational Types of Values**



## METHODOLOGY

The survey was carried out in three primary and two secondary schools. One primary and one secondary schools are church schools. A total of 183 teachers participated in the Singapore study.

The survey questionnaire was designed by Schwartz and contained 56 single values selected to represent 11 potentially universal types of individual-level value types. An extra section was added to Schwartz' original questionnaire to ascertain Singapore teachers' commitment to the National Shared Values. The five values were broken down into eight items. In order to express directly the definition of value as guiding principles in the life of a person or group, the survey asks respondents to rate each value "AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN MY LIFE", using a scale from 7 (of supreme importance) to 0 (not important, and -1 (opposed to any values). For the National Values, a 10-point Likert scale, 0 to 9, was used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Schwartz, the term individual value types could be sub-grouped under Collectivism and Individualism.

Collectivism: Conformity, Tradition and Benevolence

Individualism: Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation and Self-Direction

Collectivism/Individualism:      Universalism and Security.

For the purpose of my study, I would clarify Universalism under Collectivism. Table 1 presents the mean importance individual-level motivational value types of teachers in Singapore. The data of six other Asian countries were also tabulated for comparison purposes.

Singapore respondents had higher scores for Conformity (4.63), Tradition (3.65), Benevolence (4.74) and Universalism (4.32) than the values reflecting Individualism. Values like Stimulation (2.85), Hedonism (2.98) and Power (2.54) have lower scores. But it is interesting to note the high scores for Security (4.78) and Self-Direction (4.04). For a small country like Singapore, national security, international recognition, national dignity and racial harmony are of vital importance to us. In order to keep up the competitive edge as a Newly Industrialized Economic, the citizens of Singapore have been encouraged to be innovative and creative and to develop the risk-taking spirit of an entrepreneur.

It is interesting to note the exceptionally high scores in Security for Taiwan, in Hedonism for Thailand and Japan, and in Power for Thailand and China. By comparison, Japan stands out by having a lower score in Conformity than all the other Asian countries. China scored the lowest for Tradition and next in line is Taiwan. This is quite surprising. Confucianism originates in China and Confucianism and

Taoism are practised in Taiwan.

At the culture-level, Collectivism is associated with Conservatism (concerned with Security, Conformity and Tradition), Hierarchy (refer to Hofstede Value Dimension), Egalitarian Commitment (concerned with Benevolence and Universalism) and Harmony. From Table 2, it can be seen that Singapore teachers accorded relatively high importance to Conservatism (4.38), Hierarchy (2.75), Egalitarian Commitment (4.79) and Harmony (3.73) when compared to Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and China. At the same time Singapore teachers rated Affective Autonomy (3.04), Intellectual Autonomy (3.68) and Mastery (3.93) as less important to them. Affective Autonomy, Intellectual Autonomy and Mastery are associated with individualism. Some East Asian countries are high in Conservatism (eg. Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan) but also in Mastery and Autonomy. This demonstrates that a clear understanding of the value aspects of their culture requires a different dimensional analysis from what Individualism/ Collectivism permits.

The Shared National Values of Singapore stress on Collectivism (eg. Society above Self; Consensus instead of Contention; Racial Harmony; Religious Harmony; Community Support). Table 3 shows that for almost all the values, the mode of scores is 6. The mean score is nothing less than 4.7 when the maximum possible score is 9. The values which scored the highest ratings are Family as Basic Unit of society (5.09), Racial Harmony (5.5), Religious Harmony (5.1) and Community Respect for

the individual (5.2). The repeated exhortation on the sacrosanctness of the family in laying the stable foundation of society is taken seriously by the teachers. We are made aware of the threat of racial and religious conflicts in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. The senseless tragedies in countries near and far have sent sobering signals to us living in a small country. We can only survive if we work together towards the progress of the nation and the betterment of the quality of life for every citizen.

It is heartening to realise from the data reviewed that Singapore teachers are committed to the collective values necessary to keep the nation clean, lawful, civilized, secure and harmonious. Teachers are partly responsible for the moral development of their young charges. If they are strongly committed to these values, they will be able to speak with convictions to their students about these values.

## CONCLUSION

The Singapore teacher profile shows a profile that is closest to the pure Hofstede conception of Collectivism, high in Conservatism and Hierarchy and low in Autonomy and Mastery. Though high in the Hierarchy scores, the individual is not forgotten by the teachers. From the ratings of importance given to the National Shared Values, Community Support and Respect for the Individual are considered to be of great importance to the teachers too. Hence for the teachers, there is a fine

balance between their commitment to the collective values which are important for the progress and security of the country and their need for respect and dignity for the individual.

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TABLE 1 MEAN IMPORTANCES OF INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL MOTIVATIONAL VALUE TYPES IN TEACHER SAMPLES FROM 7 NEWLY INDUSTRIALIZED ECONOMIES

COUNTRY	VALUE	SEC	CON	TRAD	BEN	UNIV	S.DIR	STI	HED	ACH	POW
SINGAPORE		4.78	4.63	3.65	4.74	4.32	4.04	2.85	2.96	3.67	2.54
MALAYSIA		4.84	4.90	3.20	4.52	4.20	4.15	3.29	3.06	4.10	2.63
THAILAND		4.42	4.41	3.97	4.07	4.10	4.50	3.13	4.06	3.62	3.45
TAIWAN		5.15	4.40	2.95	4.49	4.44	4.31	2.79	3.62	4.01	2.59
HONG KONG		4.38	4.12	3.21	4.68	4.25	4.56	2.54	3.51	4.03	2.48
JAPAN		4.31	3.94	3.28	4.50	4.43	4.86	2.98	4.13	3.97	2.29
CHINA		4.66	4.12	2.61	4.37	4.19	4.69	2.94	3.82	4.64	3.64

SEC = Security  
 CON = Conformity  
 TRAD = Traditional  
 BEN = Benevolence  
 UNIV = Universalism  
 S.DIR = Self-Direction  
 STI = Stimulation  
 HED = Hedonism  
 ACH = Achievement  
 POW = Power

**TABLE 2 MEAN IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE-LEVEL VALUE DIMENSIONS IN TEACHER SAMPLES FROM 7 NEWLY INDUSTRIALIZED ECONOMIES (Data from Schwartz, 1994)**

VALUES COUNTRY	CONSERVATISM	AFFECTIVE AUTONOMY	INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY	HIERARCHY	MASTERY	EGALITARIAN COMMITMENT	HARMONY
SINGAPORE	4.38	3.04	3.68	2.75	3.93	4.79	3.73
MALAYSIA	4.46	3.16	4.07	2.43	4.34	4.66	3.50
THAILAND	4.22	3.62	4.08	3.32	3.90	4.34	3.93
TAIWAN	4.31	3.21	3.93	2.85	4.11	4.68	4.17
HONG KONG	4.04	3.11	4.08	2.83	4.18	4.85	3.34
JAPAN	3.87	3.54	4.68	2.86	4.27	4.69	4.07
CHINA	3.97	3.32	4.27	3.70	4.73	4.49	3.71

TABLE 3 SINGAPORE TEACHERS' COMMITMENT TO THE NATIONAL SHARED VALUES  
(N = 183)

VALUE	MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SCORE	MAXIMUM SCORE	MINIMUM SCORE	MEAN	S.D.	MODE
NATION BEFORE COMMUNITY	9.0	9.0	0	4.9	1.6	6.0
SOCIETY ABOVE SELF	9.0	9.0	0	4.6	1.6	6.0
FAMILY AS BASIC UNIT OF SOCIETY	9.0	7.0	3.0	5.9	1.1	6.0
COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL	9.0	7.0	0	4.6	1.4	5.0
RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL	9.0	7.0	1.0	5.2	1.4	6.0
CONSENSUS INSTEAD OF CONTENTION	9.0	7.0	0	4.7	1.6	6.0
RACIAL HARMONY	9.0	7.0	1.0	5.5	1.3	6.0
RELIGIOUS HARMONY	9.0	7.0	0	5.1	1.6	6.0