DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION IN SINGAPORE*

by **Jon Quah Siew Tien****

I

What does development administration mean? Of the nine articles listed under the third section on "Development Administration" in Raphaeli's *Readings in Comparative Public Administration*, only the article "Development Administration: An Approach" by V.A. Pai Panandiker addresses itself to this definitional problem.[1] Panandiker defines "*developmental* administration" as "... the structure, organization and organizational behaviour necessary for the implementation of schemes and programmes of socio-economic and political change undertaken by the Governments in India."[2] Ferrel Heady does not define development administration himself but refers to the classic definition provided by Weidner in his seminal paper,"Development Administration: A New Focus for Research." In the Latter, Weidner first reviews the various uses of the term "development administration", and then proceeds to define it as "... the processes of guiding an organization toward the achievement of progressive political, economic, and social objectives that are authoritatively determined in one manner or another."[4] This definition is not useful for our purposes here for two reasons. In the first place, the definition is vague as it does not specify what the "process" or "progressive political, economic, and social objectives" mean. Second, as Panandiker has observed, "... Weidner did not proceed to provide an operational framework indicating the kinds and nature of administrative change that will be necessary to transform a non-developmental system into a developmental one."[5]

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*The purpose of this paper is to describe the characteristics of development administration in Singapore. However, before this can be done the meaning of development administration has to be clarified and this is attempted in the first section of the paper. Section II describes the conditions prevailing in Singapore and shows how these factors influence development administration in that country.

**Jon Quah Siew Tien, an instructor in Department of Political Science, University of Singapore.

1 V.A. Pai Panandiker, "Developmental Administration: An Approach," in *Readings in Comparative Public Administration*, ed. by Nimrod Raphaeli (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1967), pp. 199–210.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

3 Ferrel Heady, *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 10; Edward W. Weidner, "Development Administration: A Focus for Research," in *Papers in Comparative Public Administration*, ed. by Ferrel Heady and Sybil Stokes (Ann Arbor: Institute of Public Administration, University of Michigan, 1962), pp. 97–115.,

4 Weidner, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–98.

5 Panandiker, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

More satisfactory definitions of development administration have been provided by the Asian participants of the Seminar on Development Administration in Asia, held at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii, from June 13 to July 15, 1966. Five definitions of development administration were formulated and these have been summarized by Hsueh,[6] the sixth Asian participant, in the following way:

> Jose Abueva (Philippines) defines development administration as the administration of development programs in the economic, social and political spheres, including programs for improving the organization and management of the bureaucracy as a major instrument for national development.
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> Inayatullah (Pakistan) describes development administration as the complex of organizational arrangements for the achievement of action through public authority in pursuance of (1) social and economic goals and (2) nation--building. It presupposes policies, plans, and programs with a distinct developmental bias as well as a bureaucracy which consciously and continuously seeks to modernize itself to meet the demands of planned change.
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> B.S. Khanna (India) regards development administration as an administration geared to the tasks of economic, social, and political development, which has been induced by an increasing tempo, momentum, and diversity emanating from the elite and groups of people.
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> Hahn-Been Lee (Korea) defines development administration as the problems involved in so managing a government or an agency thereof that it acquires an increasing capability to adapt to and act upon new and continuing social changes with a view to achieving a sustained growth in the political, economic, and social fields.
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> Nguyen-Duy Xuan (Vietnam) considers development administration to mean the administration of development programs, that is, programs designed to achieve nation-building and to promote socioeconomic progress. It is a two-element concept: (1) the appropriate training of personnel and (2) the improvement of existing and administrative organizations and establishment of new institutions for the implementation of development programs.

From the preceding discussion it is apparent that all the five definitions of development administration listed above place emphasis on the creation of an effective administration that is capable of bringing about nation-building and socioeconomic progress, the "two fundamental

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6 Shou-Sheng Hsueh, "Technical Co-operation in Development Administration in South and Southeast Asia," in *Development Administration in Asia* ed. by Edward W. Weidner (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1970), pp. 341–342.

and interrelated goals" of the new states in Asia and Africa.[7] In short, the term "development administration" as used in this paper refers to the administration of programs that are designed toward the attainment of the twin goals of nation-bulding and socioeconomic development.

II

According to Ferrel Heady, the developing nations exhibit the following five patterns of administration: (1) the "basic pattern of public administration is imitative rather than indigenous"; (2) the "bureaucracies are deficient in skilled manpower necessary for developmental programs"; (3) the "bureaucracies emphasize "orientations that are other than production-directed;" (4) formalism (as defined by Riggs[8]); and (5) the bureaucracies have "a generous measure of operational autonomy."[9] As Singapore is a former British colony it has political and administrative institutions patterned after the British prototype. For example, the Public service Commission in Singapore (as well as in other former British colonies such as Ceylon, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Pakistan) is the adapted version of the United Kingdom Civil Service Commission.[10] In short, the first characteristic mentioned by Heady applies to Singapore.

On the other hand, the other four features are not applicable in the case of Singapore. In other words, the characteristics of development administration in Singapore are different from those in the new states in general. The reason for this is that Singapore is in many respects an atypical transitional society because of the following features: (1) its strategic location and its reliance on entrepot trade (which is increasingly being supplemented by industrialization and tourism); (2) it is the fourth largest port in the world; (3) it is a small island with an area of 226 square miles and a population of 2 million (1968); (4) it has a well developed infrastructure and in this respect has been described by one writer as "a place of efficiency and expertise in processing, in financing and, increasingly, in the supply of manufactured goods and technical know-how"[11];

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[7] Milton J. Esman, "The Politics of Development Administration," in *Approaches to Development: Politics Administration and Change*, ed. by John D. Montgomery and William J. Siffin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), p. 59.

[8] Fred W. Riggs, *The Ecology of Public Administration* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 91–92, defines formalism as follows: "By *formalism* I wish to distinguish the extent to which a discrepancy exists between the prescriptive and the descriptive, between the formal and effective power, between the impression given by constitution, laws and regulations, organization charts and statistics, and actual practices and facts of government and society. The greater the discrepancy between the formal and effective, the more formalistic is a system."

[9] Heady, *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective*, pp. 69–72.

[10] See Jon Siew Tien Quah, *The Public Service Commission in Singapore: A Comparative Study of (a) its Evolution, and (b) its Recruitment and Selection Procedures vis-a-vis the Public Service Commissions in Ceylon, India and Malaysia* (unpublished M. Soc. Sc. Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Singapore, 1970), pp. 5–7.

[11] Fred Emery, "Singapore is afraid that time is running out," in *Problems in Political Development: Singapore*, ed. by Peng-Khaun Chong (Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1968), pp. 103.

and (5) its negligible "rural" sector. The most important point to note here is that the small size of Singapore is an advantage as problems of communication seldom arise and there is also relative ease of political control by the leadership.[12] Furthermore, "Smallness can facilitate administrative coordination and integration and promote responsiveness of officials and employees to the public will."[13] In addition to all these assets, Singapore is blessed with a stable, dedicated, pragmatic, and efficient leadership, whose task undoubtedly has been made easier because of the above-mentioned features, but nevertheless, whose achievements in nation-building and socioeconomic development ever since it came into power in May 1959 should be recognized.[14] Thus, it is not surprising that Singapore ranks second after Japan in a rank ordering of nations in Asia by ten indices of development.[15]

Singapore was found in 1819 by Stamford Raffles and remained a British colony until May 1959 when self-government was granted by Great Britain. The People's Action Party (PAP) came into power after winning 43 of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly.[16] In September 1963, Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the Federation of Malaysia.[17] However, her sojourn in the Federation of Malaysia was short-lived and Singapore seceded from the Federation on August 9, 1965 and became an independent nation.[18] Having

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12 See Ooi Jin-Bee, "Singapore: The Balance Sheet," in *Modern Singapore*, ed. by Ooi Jin-Bee and Chiang Hai Ding (Singapore: University of Singapore, 1969), p. 5; for a different assessment see Donald B. Keesing, "Small Population as a Political Handicap to National Development," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXIV:1 March 1969), pp. 50–60.

13 Jacques Rapoport, Ernest Murteba, and Joseph J. Theratil, *Small States and Territories: Status and Problems* (New York: United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 1971), pp. 148–149.

14 For an account of the rise of the ruling political party in Singapore, see Pang Cheng Lian, "the People's Action Party, 1954–1963," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, X:1 (March 1969), pp. 142–154.

15 Robert O. Tilman, ed., *Man, State and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 587, Table 14, "Asia: Rank Ordering by Ten Indexes of Development." The ten indices of development are: (1) Percentage of labor force *not* in primary industry, (2) Per capita energy consumption, (3) Per capita steel consumption, (4) Literacy, (5) Ratio of school enrollment to school-age children, (6) Daily newspapers per 1,000 population, (7) "Money" per capita GNP, (8) "Real" per capita GNP, (9) Origin of Gross Domestic Product *not* from primary industry, and (10) Per capita Gross Domestic Product.

16 For more details, see Michael Leifer, "Politics in Singapore: The First Term of the People's Action Party, 1959–1963," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, II:2 (1964), pp. 102–119.

17 For a background to politics in Singapore during the Malaysia period (September, 1963, to August, 1965) see Michael Leifer, "Singapore in Malaysia: The Politics of Federation," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, VI:2 (1965), pp. 54–70; and Jon Siew Tien Quah, 'The Political Thought of Lee Kuan Yew (1963–1965)," *Journal of the Historical Society* (University of Singapore), 1969/1970 (July 1970), pp. 48–54.

18 For accounts of the causes and consdquences of Singapore's separation from Malaysia see Nancy McHenry Fletcher, *The Separation of Singapore from Malaysia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1969), and *Separation* (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, 1965).

provided a very brief outline of Singapore's constitutional development, I will now proceed to show that the bureaucracy in Singapore does not exhibit the four characteristics described by Heady above.

First, the Singapore Civil Service is not deficient in skilled manpower necessary for developmental programs for the following reasons: (1) the *gradual* replacement of trained British personnel by trained Singaporeans, and (2) the training of the civil servants is in the hands of the Public Service Commission which forecasts the manpower needs of the State and selects candidates for the civil service as well as for training abroad.[19] Second, the Singapore Civil Service emphasizes production-directed orientations rather than those that are not. In Milne's opinion, "The Singapore civil service is efficient and relatively free from procedural delays." He further attributes this to "a *need* to be efficient in order to prosper or even to survive" for "Singapore's success as a free port depended partly on the services she provided, including governmental services."[20] Moreover the Public Service Commission is responsible for the recruitment and selection of candidates to Divisions I and II of the Singapore Civil Service.[21] Selection is by merit i.e., by achievement and not ascriptive criteria.[22] Furthermore, "the civil service under the PAP has the reputation of being notoriously incorrupt...."[23] and there is a Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau to check corruption in the civil service. Third, it follows from the previous two characteristics and Singapore's assets that formalism is not widespread in Singapore's public bureaucracy. Finally, unlike its counterparts in other developing countries, the Singapore Civil Service does not have "a generous measure of operational autonomy" as it is under the control of the political leadership, the PAP, which has all the 65 seats in Parliament. In part, this reflects the British Civil Service tradition of the control of the bureaucracy by the legislature, as well as the predominance of the PAP on the Singapore political scene.

To illustrate my comments on the characteristics of development administration in Singapore, I will refer to the achievements of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in the Ministry of Law and National Development. The HDB was established in February 1960 after the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) had failed to solve the housing problem. By the end of 1960, only 1,682 units of housing were completed although some 6,608 other units were still under construction.[24] By the end of 1962, the HDB built a total of 21,232 units of housing. Even at that

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19 See Quah, *ThePublic Service Commission in Singapore*, pp. 131–132 for a fuller discussion.

20 R.S.M ilne, *Government and Politics in Malaysia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967), p. 208.

21 See Quah, *The Public Service Commission in Singapore*, pp. 186–188 for more details

22 See *ibid.*, pp. 218–220 for a detailed treatment.

23 Milne, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

24 *Housing and Development Board Annual Report* 1960 (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 10.

time, this was a creditable record as the SIT had only completed 23,019 units in its 32 years of existence.[25] In June 1969, the HDB completed 100,000 units of public housing.[26] In spite of the population increase and the demand of resources for other economic and social activities, Singapore is one of the very few developing countries which has been able to achieve the housing target set by the United Nations Committee on Housing, Building and Planning.

In conclusion, development administration in Singapore is different from that in most of the other new states in Asia and Africa, and this can be attributed to Singapore's many assets which set her apart as an atypical transitional society.

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25 These figures are obtained from Housing and Development Board, *First Decade in Public Housing* 1960-69 (Singapore: Housing and Development Board, 1970), p. 8.

26 *Housing and Development Board Annual Report* 1969 (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 16.