Social Implications of the Relationships Between Mediums,¹ Entourage, and Clients in Singapore Today

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Introduction

When we want to study a certain group of people and want to know what implications their relationships have for society as a whole, it is essential to agree on the crucial terms which will be used in this working paper. What do we mean when we speak of a "society?" The International Encyclopedia of Social Science tells us that:

a society is a group of human beings sharing a self-sufficient system of action which is capable of existing longer than the life-span of an individual, the group being recruited at least in part by the sexual reproduction of the members (Sills, vol. XIV, 1968, page 578).

How does this definition apply to Singapore? Does the population living within the borderlines of this nation-state form one society?

Peter Chen wrote about Singapore that it is:

the smallest and youngest nation in Southeast Asia. It attained internal self-governing status in 1959 and became an independent republic in 1965... Singapore is a plural society with a heterogeneous population which is differentiated socio-culturally (1978: 1).

According to the 1970 census, the three major ethnic groups are the Chinese (76.2 per cent), the Malays (15.0 per cent), the Indians (7.0 per cent), with other minority groups (1.8 per cent). The heterogeneity is further complicated by dialect groups. Among the Chinese, 42.2 per cent are Hokkien, 22.4 per cent Teochew, 17 per cent Cantonese, 7 per cent Hainanese, and 7 per cent Hakka. Among the Malays, 85.8 per cent are Malay, 7.9 per cent Javanese, and 5.5 per cent Boyanese. Among the Indians, 66.3 per cent are Tamil, 12.0 per cent Malayali, 8.4 per cent Punjabi.

Furthermore, how many "Singaporeans" are locally born and how many are immigrants from Malaysia, Indonesia, China, India and other countries?
Locally-Born Singaporeans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of Total Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>74</td>
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</tbody>
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Not only has the percentage of locally born citizens risen considerably during the last fifty years, the age structure has also drastically changed. More than sixty per cent of all Singaporeans (1979: 2.5 millions) are under the age of twenty-five.

While before the mid-1950's all ethnic groups maintained their ethnic boundaries and sent their children to separate schools, by 1959, already about half of the total school enrolment was in English schools, 44 per cent in Chinese and only 6 per cent in Malay and Tamil schools. English has become the first language with Chinese (Mandarin), Malay, and Tamil as the other three official languages.

The general trend toward a Singaporean identity has to be considered when we look at the attitudes of individual groups, but we have also to distinguish between complex systems of action in which units of the population participate. Each of these "social systems" is:

an organized set of interdependent social persons, activities or forces. It is called a system because its organization includes mechanisms for maintaining an equilibrium or some other constancy in the relations between the units. From another perspective such mechanisms can be seen as boundary-maintaining mechanisms for systems can be isolated as separate entities only if they maintain some constancies in the face of environmental change, that is, if they maintain some boundaries vis-à-vis the environment. If every event within a system were a direct consequence of some event outside the system, it would be impossible to draw a boundary for the system, it would be, in effect, a mere unit in a larger complex. The concept of a social system seems ideally suited for use in defining a society analytically, for it contains within it the crucial concepts of "unit" and "boundary" (Sills, 1968: 583).

Before we look at the social systems developing around mediums, we have also to decide what research techniques are the most appropriate.

Academic studies of mediumship have, in the past, been predominantly carried out by psychiatrists or theologians. Both introduced their professional biases to the topic.

A psychiatrist would draw up character profiles of mediums based mainly on his experience with mental patients and prisoners. He would treat each occurrence of mediumship as an "abnormal," i.e. a clinical case. A lunatic and a mystic can, indeed, have the same mystical experience. There are, however, differences. A lunatic is unable to grasp what he is experiencing and the mystic comes "to know God" (Prabhavananda, 1953). Furthermore, when a psychiatrist judges from the outward appearance of meditators that they must be regressing (Ludwig in Prince, 1966), this