CORRUPTION IN ASIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SINGAPORE: PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES

Jon S.T. Quah

Introduction

Corruption is a serious problem in many countries. Indeed, in many parts of the world, corruption has become a way of life with its own local version of the term and manifestations of various forms of corrupt practices. Corruption is like a cancer which afflicts all countries and is not the monopoly of the developing countries only. For example, in the United States, corruption was a problem even before Watergate. Scandals involving corruption have also been unearthed in other developed countries, including several European countries and Japan. The "epidemic" of corruption scandals in the developed countries has not only shattered the myth that only the developing countries are plagued by corruption, but has also encouraged more research on the dynamics of corrupt behaviour in the developed countries. Consequently, research on corruption is no longer restricted to the developing countries, but also includes all those countries (developed or developing) where the problem exists.

On the other hand, in some countries like Singapore, corruption is a fact of life rather than a way of life. Put differently, corruption exists in Singapore, but Singapore is not a corrupt society. This does not mean that Singapore is entirely free from corruption, as was contended by Lord Shawcross of Britain a decade ago. Now and then, there are incidents of corrupt behaviour in Singapore, but such cases are the exception rather than the rule and are examples of individual corruption rather than systemic corruption. Furthermore, those found guilty of corrupt behaviour are punished accordingly regardless of their position or status in society. For example, the Minister for National Development, Teh Cheang Wan, committed suicide on December 14, 1986, twelve days after he was

Jon S.T. Quah is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore and Deputy Director of the Institute of Policy Studies in Singapore. This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Political Science Association's Research Committee on Political Finance and Political Corruption Conference at Menaggio, Lake Como, Italy, May 19-24, 1987.
interrogated by two senior Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) officers regarding a complaint of corruption made against him by a building contractor. In short, corruption is incidental and not institutionalized in Singapore.

The most obvious question to ask is: what accounts for the varying levels of corruption in different countries? In other words, why is corruption a more serious problem in some countries and not in other countries? This article contends that the extent of corruption in Asian (and other) countries depends on two factors: (1) The nature of the causes of corruption in these countries; and (2) The degree of effectiveness of the various measures initiated by the political leaders to combat corruption in these countries. Thus, in order to control effectively the level of corruption in these countries, the causes of corruption must first be correctly diagnosed so that the political leaders can take appropriate action to minimize, if not to remove, such causes. Those countries in Asia (and elsewhere) which observe this logic of corruption control are more successful in combatting corruption that those which do not.

In 1968, Gunnar Myrdal referred to the taboo on research on corruption in Southeast Asia as one of the factors inhibiting such research in his monumental Asian Drama. However, in spite of this taboo, there has been an increasing amount of research on corruption in Asian countries. On the basis of this growing literature, this article will first identify the various patterns of corruption in the Asian countries. Secondly, it will demonstrate that the consequences of corruption in the Asian countries depend on the extent to which their incumbent governments have been able or unable to curb the problem. Finally, Singapore’s successful experience in combatting corruption will be described briefly in order to identify the lessons that can be learned by those countries which are concerned with solving the problem of corruption.

The term “corruption” covers a great variety of sins and is not an easy term to define as there are many alternative definitions, depending on the emphasis chosen. Arnold J. Heidenheimer has identified three types of definitions of corruption, namely, public-office-centred, market-centred and public-interest-centred definitions. The public-office-centred definition of corruption is the most useful for the purposes of this research.

A good example of a public-office-centred definition of corruption is provided by Joseph S. Nye, who defines corruption as:

"... behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gain; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence."
Corruption can thus be defined as deviant behaviour by an individual or individuals for the attainment of some socially and/or legally prohibited favours. Examples of such behaviour include bribery, nepotism, misappropriation of public funds or stores, irregularities in the granting of import-export licences, and under-assessment of income tax or estate duty for pecuniary gain.

Patterns of Asian Corruption

Nearly fourteen years ago, the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)* featured a cover story on "Corruption: The Asian Lubricant." A team of correspondents surveyed the extent of corruption in ten Asian countries and concluded that:

“If you want to buy a Sherman tank, a Red Cross blanket, or simply speed up the installation of a telephone, there is probably no easier place in the world in which to do just that than in Asia - if you are willing to part with some cash, that is. With pathetically few exceptions [China and Singapore], the countries in this region are so riddled with corruption that the paying of ‘tea money’ has become almost a way of life.”

This general picture of pervasive corruption in Asia is supported by individual portraits of corruption in many of the Asian countries. For example, in Burma it has been reported that:

“The ‘Burmese way to socialism,’ like the Indian brand, has fostered a climate of corruption. Under-the-table payments are necessary to persuade poorly paid government clerks to process an application, issue a license, or act on any kind of official paper. Licenses reserved for the Burmese are sold to Chinese and Indian merchants, who use the Burmese as fronts to obtain them. Foreign businessmen face long delays in purchasing raw materials, unless they grease the palm of the right official in the government’s export corporation. One German teakwood buyer who refused to ‘grease’ saw his teak logs rot on a Rangoon pier for more than a year. When he demanded their release, he was told he would have to pay a new higher price for the logs, a year’s storage fee, and a new export fee based on the additional charges. He gave up in disgust.”

Corruption exists in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) too, but until recently, it had not yet attained the high levels exhibited in other Asian countries. According to Harry Harding:
"Like inefficiency, corruption has probably been one of the most persistent of the eight organizational pathologies we have considered in this study. There has been a chronic tendency for cadres to use their official positions to acquire special privileges for themselves, their families, and their friends. Nonetheless, graft, embezzlement, and bribery do not appear to have reached the same level in China as in many other Third World countries."\(^{20}\)

In more recent years, however, the reported incidence of corrupt behaviour has increased tremendously. For example, Alan Liu identified sixteen types of corrupt acts in the PRC on the basis of 275 media reports from 1977 to 1980. Nearly one-third of the 304 reported cases of corruption involved "housing irregularity" and "illegitimate feasting."\(^{21}\) According to another China watcher, the extent of bureaucratic graft in the PRC was concealed when Mao was in power. However, after Mao's death, "graft has taken firm hold of many sectors of Chinese society."\(^{22}\)

On the other hand, corruption is prevalent in such countries as India and Indonesia. Indeed, India provides a good example of a corruption-ridden society. In the words of an Indian writer:

"Corruption is the largest single element to be found most in India. All roads, from the maternity hospital to the crematorium, smell of corruption. No individual is free from it, no area can be found where corruption is not a ritual."\(^{23}\)

The verdict is the same in Indonesia, where corruption has reached epidemic proportions, as pointed out by Richard Robison:

"All the evidence points to corruption being as prevalent in Indonesia in the 1980s as it has been in previous decades. The head of the Financial Audit Board, Umar Wirahadikusuma, publicly admitted in 1981 that no departments are clear of corruption, while the vice-president, Adam Malik, spoke of corruption reaching epidemic proportions. A Tempo survey in the same year found that many respondents (43.8 per cent) considered corruption to be the greatest threat to the nation - many more, for example, than those who most feared the return of the PKI (21.6 per cent)."\(^{24}\)

Like the PRC, the socialist state of Laos is also afflicted with the "flourishing malaise" of corruption. In 1974, an unnamed FEER correspondent reported that:

"Corruption has long been endemic in Laos. At all levels of society, in all walks of life (save perhaps the Buddhist monkhood) kickbacks, payoffs, bribes and what are
euphemistically described as *ngerm kah sah* (tea money) payments have become part of the natural order of things. National Assembly deputies have bought their way into Parliament, army officers have padded out their meagre salaries by inventing phantom battalions, customs men have grown fat by levying their own private duties on incoming goods and regional bureaucrats and military warlords have, for a suitable rake-off, allowed Thai timber interests to illegally cut down almost every stick of valuable timber in their domain .... Things may change dramatically in the coming years, but right now, corruption is alive and flourishing in Laos.”25

In 1984, several officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Finance were arrested and charged with corruption.26 According to Martin Stuart-Fox, the traditional clan patronage system in Laos has persisted even under communist rule because of economic necessity. Moreover, the economic reforms introduced by the Seventh Resolution of December 1979 also gave rise to new opportunities and temptations for corruption. The salaries of civil servants are so low that they are forced to supplement their official incomes from remittances recorded from family members abroad, renting their homes to foreigners, and family members trading on the open market or participating in corruption. “Indeed, petty corruption has become so widespread in Laos that it is all but institutionalized.”27

Although corruption in Malaysia has not attained epidemic proportions, it is nevertheless on the increase in recent years. This trend has been observed by Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, who wrote: “Apart from Singapore, of all the developing countries of Asia, corruption is least pandemic in Malaysia. The fear is that it is growing. Since 1957, the year of independence, corruption has definitely been growing in Malaysia. We see numerous political figures and others amassing wealth through being in office. It is public knowledge that there is a great deal of corruption going on in customs, the highway police, immigration, the courts, the land office, the supply acquisition units of the various ministries, the religious departments in the states of the federation, and the road transport offices. [But] corruption in Malaysia has not reached the Indonesian and Indian proportions to the degree of systemic malignancy.”28

Professor Alatas has also analyzed the problem of corruption in Pakistan. In his view,
"Corruption in Pakistan has now attained devastating magnitude. The misery and human suffering caused by corruption are beyond description. The state which was formed at great cost to human lives and suffering attending the partition tragedy, is now being abandoned by tens of thousands of its skilled and unskilled manpower. The brain as well as the brawn drain from Pakistan is truly impressive."\textsuperscript{28}

Thailand is the only ASEAN\textsuperscript{30} country which was not colonized. However, freedom from colonial domination does not immunize a country from the disease of corruption. Indeed, in Thailand's case corruption is an endemic disease and, as in the other countries mentioned above, various anti-corruption measures have been instituted as a response to this major problem. According to a Thai scholar:

"Corruption is a major problem of national development, especially in Thailand. The practice is prevalent at every level, whether it is political or administrative; upper or lower level officials. Moreover, corrupt practices in the Thai bureaucracy occur in many ministries, bureaus, and departments. And yet the problem of corruption in the country is more widespread with each passing day. Urgent solutions are required to ensure the survival of the existing administrative system."\textsuperscript{31}

Finally, the tremendous amount of "official corruption" that was practised by President Ferdinand Marcos, his family and friends during his two decades in power was only discovered after his downfall in February 1986.\textsuperscript{32} The plundering of the wealth of the Philippines by the former first family has been documented by Carmen Navarro Pedrosa in her biography of Imelda Marcos. She wrote:

"When investigators for the Aquino government rifled through the thousands of financial documents the Marcoses left behind, they discovered loot beyond any of their expectations. The documents outlined the Marcoses' formula for systematic plunder. They had amassed their wealth through bribe-taking and kickbacks from crony monopolies; through the diversion of government loans and contracts; through the profits from over-priced goods and construction; through unaudited government revenue, usually raised from taxes; and through the expedient of taking over businesses by decree and the diversion of yet more funds from government-controlled entities. Nothing was spared. Even payments for fresh flowers delivered daily to the homes of Imee, Irene, and Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.,
were disbursed from government funds. Imelda and Marcos and their cronies seemed to have devised every conceivable way of making money through the use of absolute power since the declaration of martial law in 1972. The commission which has been assigned to recover the Marcos fortune still does not know how much money they stole, but initial estimates hover between $5 billion and $10 billion, most of it already stashed abroad, in U.S. real estate and Swiss bank accounts. More Marcos accounts under false names have been found by Swiss authorities. The revised figure is a staggering $15 billion, more than half of the entire national debt of the Philippines."\(^{33}\)

Unlike the city-state of Singapore, the British colony of Hong Kong has experienced a comparatively higher level of corruption. However, unlike India or Indonesia, corruption in Hong Kong is not pandemic. In this connection, David Clark has correctly observed that:

"Corruption in Hong Kong, while serious, had not by 1973-74 reached epidemic proportions. Hong Kong was not so corrupt that the entire society was permeated by it. This was a vital point since it meant that the government could rely on significant public support especially from an idealistic younger generation. This sustained the government during the crisis in 1977 and was partly responsible for providing the impetus which changed the government's mind about the seriousness of the problem in 1973. It also enabled the ICAC [Independent Commission Against Corruption] to receive so many reports and thus provided the information base for investigation."\(^{34}\)

Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next section, the experiences of these two city-states in combatting corruption demonstrate that it is possible to minimize or reduce the level of corruption in a country through the implementation of effective anti-corruption measures which are supported by the political leadership.

A two-year comparative study of bureaucratic corruption in seven Asian countries identified five emerging patterns on the basis of data collected in twenty-two case studies to answer the following questions:

1. How similar or different are the forms and purposes of bureaucratic corruption in the functions of revenue raising, revenue spending and regulation?

2. Who are the public employees or officials who tend to be more prone to corruption in each of these functions?

3. Who usually makes the first move to set the corrupt process in motion?
(4) How much money is in the process? Are there other forms of material reward which change hands in the course of the corrupt act?

(5) How much risk do actors take when they decide to engage in corruption? How much [is the] reward? Does the risk cum reward balance change as one shifts from one function to another?35

The first pattern was that bribery was the most prevalent type of bureaucratic corruption in the seven countries studied. Furthermore, the reasons for the bribery differed according to the functions of the agency. According to Ma. Concepcion P. Alfiler:

"Among revenue raising agencies, the prevailing reasons for bribery are for reduction of taxes and the undeclaration of goods passing through customs. In revenue spending agencies, particularly in construction projects, a bribe is offered either to ensure that contractors are awarded a construction project or when construction is in progress, to keep field engineers of government from enforcing strict standards of supervision. A bribe for police officers is usually given to seek protection for engaging in an illegal activity or to request him to fix a traffic violation or similar offenses."36

The second pattern was that corrupt civil servants were those who had regular contact with clients and who had the discretion to resolve issues regarding the delivery of goods or services. However, this does not mean that senior officials who did not have regular contact with clients were not involved in corrupt behaviour. Indeed, it was found that "top officials also share in the corruption money collected, and that where top leaders are involved, a culture of corruption is likely to develop in the agency."37 Moreover, the level of officials involved in corruption depends on the concessions required by the clients. For example, private contractors bidding for large construction projects would approach senior rather than junior officials. In the case of police agencies, those officers who were in constant contact with the public were more likely to be corrupt.38

Thirdly, there was no clear pattern regarding who initiated the corrupt act. Since both the civil servant and the client benefit from the transaction, either one of them can take the initiative depending on whose interest is more directly affected. For instance, a contractor with a major contract at stake would approach a senior official in a revenue spending agency.39

The fourth pattern was that the amount of corruption money depended on the extent to which the corrupt act was prohibited and whether the activity was a major part of the client’s business. For example, the amount of corrupt money involved in the protection of illegal activities by police officers was high because such officers took relatively greater risk. In
addition, more corrupt money would be needed to bribe these officers to ensure continuing protection of illegal activities.\textsuperscript{40}

The final pattern identified was that the risk involved in a corrupt act was related to the extent to which corrupt individuals were apprehended, prosecuted and penalized.\textsuperscript{41} In Singapore, corruption regardless of the type of agency is regarded as a high-risk and low-reward affair. Corruption in Hong Kong is a low-risk activity in revenue spending agencies, but it is a high risk activity for police officers, especially after the formation of the ICAC. Finally, bureaucratic corruption in revenue raising, revenue spending and regulatory agencies in the Philippines and Thailand is viewed as a low-risk but highly rewarding activity.\textsuperscript{42} Consequently, it is not surprising that corruption in these two countries tends to be recurring and systemic.\textsuperscript{43}

\section*{Consequences of Asian Corruption}

More than two decades ago, David H. Bayley contended that corruption in India had not only harmful, but also beneficial effects.\textsuperscript{44} Since then a great deal of research has been done on the consequences of corruption in different countries.\textsuperscript{45} The purpose of this section is not, however, to review this literature. Suffice it to say that the evidence shows that corruption has more harmful than beneficial effects. The results of two recent attempts to evaluate the consequences of corruption will be cited here to illustrate this point.

In 1983, David J. Gould and Jose A. Amaro-Reyes concluded that corruption had a harmful effect on administrative performance and political and economic development in the developing countries. They wrote:

"The available data suggest that corruption has a deleterious effect on administrative efficiency and political economic development. Even under circumstances of benign corruption, the costs incurred in administrative and political performance far exceed the benefits derived from relative gains in economic efficiency. Moreover, if general welfare is the standard for evaluating the benefits and costs of corruption, the social, political, and administrative tradeoffs involved in attaining increased economic efficiency represent a loss to society in the long run. This is particularly so in developing countries, where its effects are deemed cumulative and circular. That is, government monopoly of economic activities - when combined with conditions of political 'softness,' poverty and widened socioeconomic inequalities, ambivalence toward governmental organizations, and systematic mal-
administration - contributes to high levels of corruption throughout society, undermining the legitimacy of the state, social equity considerations, and the effectiveness of development policies and strategies. There seems to be little doubt that under conditions of systematic or widespread corruption economic efficiency, together with political and administrative performance, declines below optimal levels and thus lowers general welfare."

Three years later, Ledivina V. Carino analyzed the effects of graft and corruption on the individual, the organization and society in seven Asian countries and came to the following conclusions:

"... is corruption tonic in its consequences? On the whole, the answer is negative. Corruption has largely toxic consequences to the organization and the society. We must moderate that statement at the level of the individual who enjoys the extra income of corruption that also gives him an avenue for social mobility as well as more power over the clients and the general public. Such effects are however positive only in the completely amoral view when greed is allowed to reign supreme ... Corruption clearly entails increased administrative costs through overpayment of supplies and materials and losses in government revenue ... Corruption makes administration difficult as it creates a second line of authority parallel to the formal one, in the process undermining and weakening it. It also results in goal displacement, replacing it with the personal economic interests of the individual employees or the syndicate ... In the society, the first set of harmful effects concerns the losses in the government treasury on both the revenue and expenditure side. ... A second set of harmful effects sets in when corruption renders inutile the intent of policy and regulations. Corrupt civil servants may change target beneficiaries, impose unauthorized controls or fees, or otherwise alter the allocation of values set by law ... The possibility that corruption may improve the economy also seems unlikely since it does not really allow only efficient producers to enter the market ... Our conclusion then is: corruption is toxic, with very few exceptions. We wish we had more positive findings since we are faced with the problem of its strength and pervasiveness in most of the countries we studied ... Perhaps other more sensitive and finer minds can rationalize the existence of corruption. We cannot."
The consequences of corruption in a country can, however, be minimized or reduced if its government has an effective anti-corruption strategy and implements it. More specifically, the more effective anti-corruption measures are, the greater their impact on the society in terms of reducing the harmful effects and level of corruption will be. The effectiveness of anti-corruption measures depends on two factors: (1) The adequacy of the measures themselves in terms of the comprehensiveness of their scope and powers; and (2) The level of commitment of the political leaders to the goal of eradicating corruption in the country concerned. In short, for anti-corruption measures to be effective they must not only be properly designed (to attack the causes of corruption in the society), but must also be sponsored and upheld sincerely by the political leaders. Needless to say, the most elaborate and well-designed anti-corruption measures will be useless if they are not enforced by the political leadership.\footnote{49}

By juxtaposing these two variables of the adequacy of the anti-corruption measures and the commitment of the political leadership, a matrix of anti-corruption strategies is obtained, as can be seen in Table 1. There are theoretically four possible strategies for combating corruption depending on whether the anti-corruption measures employed are adequate or inadequate, and whether the political leaders' commitment is strong or weak.\footnote{49}

**Table 1**

**A Matrix of Anti-corruption Strategies**

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<tr>
<th>Commitment of Political Leadership</th>
<th>Anti-corruption Measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effective Strategy</td>
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<td>Weak</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ineffective Strategy I</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Hopeless” Strategy</td>
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The first anti-corruption strategy is the *effective* strategy which occurs when there are adequate anti-corruption measures and the political leaders are strongly committed to wiping out corruption in their country. In my comparative analysis of the anti-corruption strategies in the five ASEAN countries six years ago, I placed Singapore and Malaysia in this first category. However, today as a result of the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal and the recent co-operatives scandal, Malaysia’s anti-corruption strategy does not seem to be as effective as before. Moreover, the commitment of the political leadership towards the eradication of corruption appears to have slackened, judging from the delay in investigating and prosecuting those responsible for the BMF scandal on the part of the Malaysian government. The success of the ICAC in combatting corruption in Hong Kong and the strong commitment of the British colonial government place Hong Kong in this category. Indeed, Leslie Palmier contends that “the probity of government in Hong Kong at least does not detract from, and probably considerably assists, the effort to curb corruption in the administration.” Moreover, according to H.J. Lethbridge, the ICAC has managed to reduce the level of corruption in Hong Kong.

The second and third cells of the matrix represent two different types of *ineffective* anti-corruption strategies I and II. Ineffective strategy I occurs when the anti-corruption measures are adequate but the commitment of the political leadership is weak, thus resulting in the non-enforcement of the anti-corruption measures. This strategy fits the case of the Philippines very well because what was lacking in the country’s anti-corruption effort during the Marcos era was not adequate measures but rather the political will to implement such measures and apprehend those found guilty of corruption regardless of their status or position in society. While the level of corruption in Malaysia is lower than that in the Philippines, the former’s anti-corruption strategy can be placed in this category if there is a further weakening of the political leaders’ commitment to wiping out corruption.

The ineffective strategy II is theoretically possible, but quite unlikely in reality as political leaders with a strong commitment are likely to improve the anti-corruption measures if these are inadequate, instead of being satisfied with inadequate anti-corruption measures as suggested by the third cell of the matrix.

The final cell of the matrix depicts the “*hopeless*” strategy because the anti-corruption measures are inadequate and the political leaders are not really concerned with alleviating the problem of corruption in their countries. This type of strategy is used in countries where corruption has been institutionalized. The political leaders in India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand cannot afford not to have an anti-corruption strategy in view
of the public protests against corruption. On the other hand, they are not really committed to the goal of eradicating corruption because they or their families are not free from direct or indirect involvement in corruption. Indeed, corruption is so pervasive in these four countries that there is no incentive for political leaders to ensure that anti-corruption measures are adequate. Consequently, they rely on inadequate measures because they do not appear to be concerned about curbing corruption in the first place.

Learning from Singapore's Experience in Curbing Corruption

The fact that corruption is not a way of life in Singapore is an indication of the effectiveness of the anti-corruption strategy adopted by the People's Action Party (PAP) government after it assumed power in June 1959. However, it should be noted that corruption was a way of life during the colonial period in Singapore, especially after the Second World War. The rampant inflation during the Japanese occupation gave rise to widespread corruption because the civil servants found it difficult to live on their fixed salaries. Conditions deteriorated after the war and contributed to a further increase in corruption. The low salaries and rapidly rising cost of living during the post-war period accounted for the bureaucrats' need to be corrupt; and the inadequate supervision of civil servants created many opportunities for corruption on their part with little probability of being caught. In his 1950 Report, the Commissioner of Police pointed out that graft was rife in government departments.

The newly-elected PAP government was determined to eradicate corruption in Singapore in general and in the civil service in particular. Its strategy of dealing with the problem of corruption emphasizes the necessity of reducing both the opportunities and need for corruption. It relies on the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) to spearhead its anti-corruption strategy. The aim of the POCA and CPIB is to curb corruption by reducing the opportunities for corruption and by increasing the price to be paid for corrupt behaviour if one is caught.

Apart from reducing the opportunities for corruption, the PAP government's anti-corruption strategy also relies on reducing the need to be corrupt among civil servants by constantly improving their salaries and working conditions. The assumption here is that corruption becomes a serious problem in those countries where the civil servants are generally paid very low salaries and where there is an unequal distribution of wealth. The salaries of Singaporean civil servants are quite high by Asian standards to dissuade them from leaving for private sector jobs and from engaging in corrupt activities. As a result of the latest salary increase in April 1982, the top three grades in the Administrative Service command
salaries of US$9,864 (or US$11,415 including allowances) for Staff Grade III, US$8,545 (or US$9,889 including allowances) for Staff Grade II, and US$7,227 (or US$8,364 including allowances) for Staff Grade I.\textsuperscript{56}

Perhaps the most eloquent justification of the PAP government’s approach to combatting corruption by reducing the need for corruption by raising the salaries of its political leaders (and civil servants) was provided by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Parliament on March 22, 1985 when he explained why the salaries of the cabinet ministers had to be increased. He contended that political leaders should be paid the top salaries that they deserved in order to ensure a clean and honest government. If they were underpaid, they would succumb readily to temptation and indulge in corrupt acts. He said:

“How do you ensure that a fortuitous, purely accidental group of men who came in in 1959 and after twenty-six years of office ... have remained stainless? ... Every member knows that there is no easy money on the take. That’s the way we are. Nobody believes that we spent money to get into this House. ... I’m one of the best paid and probably one of the poorest of the Third World Prime Ministers. ... There are ways and ways of doing things. And I’m suggesting our way, moving with the market, is an honest, open, defensible and workable system. You abandon this for hypocrisy, you’ll end up with duplicity and corruption. Take your choice.”\textsuperscript{57}

More recently, he explained how Singapore was able to curb corruption in the following way:

“The effectiveness of our system to check or punish corruption rests: first, on the law against corruption contained in the Prevention of Corruption Act; second, on a vigilant public to give information on all suspected corruption; and third, on a CPIB which is scrupulous, thorough, and fearless in its investigations.

For this to be so, the CPIB has to have the full backing of the Prime Minister under whose portfolio it comes. The strongest deterrent is in a public opinion which censures and condemns corrupt persons, in other words, in attitudes which make corruption so unacceptable that the stigma of corruption cannot be washed away by serving a prison sentence.”\textsuperscript{58}

What lessons can be learnt from Singapore’s experience in curbing corruption? To eliminate corruption is not an easy task, especially in countries where it is a way of life. However, the Singapore case shows that it is possible to minimize if not eliminate the problem of corruption.
Countries which are interested in making corruption a fact of life rather than a way of life should take note of the following five lessons to be learnt from Singapore's anti-corruption strategy. The most important lesson to bear in mind is the need for the political leadership to be committed to the eradication of corruption. In other words, they must be sincere and want to eliminate corruption themselves. This implies that they must show good example and should not indulge in corruption themselves. Furthermore, anyone found guilty of corruption must be punished, regardless of his status or position in society. If the rich and powerful are protected from prosecution for corrupt behaviour, the anti-corruption strategy is defective because it discriminates against those who are poor and weak. There should thus be no double standards in the enforcement of the anti-corruption laws. Whether one is a "big fish" or "small fish" should not be the crucial factor in determining a person's guilt and punishment for corruption. Finally, political leaders and their families should not live ostentatiously if they are serious about wiping out corruption in their country. The best example to illustrate this is the case of former President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, Imelda Marcos, of the Philippines. Their ostentatious lifestyle (Imelda's three thousand pairs of shoes and two thousand ball gowns) and the full extent of their involvement in corrupt activities have been publicized by the new government of President Corazon Aquino.

The second lesson to be drawn from the Singapore experience is the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach rather than a piecemeal or incremental approach. Corruption is a serious problem requiring major surgery and not a minor operation. Anti-corruption measures must be comprehensive to prevent loopholes and must be constantly reviewed for the purpose of introducing further amendments whenever necessary.

The third lesson to be learnt is the precondition that the anti-corruption agency must itself be incorrupt. It must be controlled or supervised by a political leader who is himself incorrupt. Care must certainly be taken to recruit and select competent and honest men and women as staff of the anti-corruption agency. To keep the size of the anti-corruption agency's staff manageable, all government departments and ministries should be directed by the incumbent government to provide assistance and cooperation for the anti-corruption agency's efforts in combatting corruption. Obviously, any member of the anti-corruption agency's staff who is guilty of corruption must be punished and removed from the civil service.

The fourth lesson to be gleaned is the necessity of reducing the opportunities for corruption. Those government departments which are vulnerable to corrupt activities (such as the Customs Department, Immigration Department, Internal Revenue Department, and Traffic
Police) should review their procedures periodically in order to reduce opportunities for corruption. Those found guilty of corrupt behaviour should be punished in order to deter others bent on such behaviour.

The final lesson to be observed is the importance of reducing the need for corruption by raising the salaries of civil servants and political leaders. If a civil servant's salary is low, he is more vulnerable to corruption. Therefore, to reduce or minimize his need for corruption, his salary must be improved. Of course, salary revision is a costly measure to take and will depend on whether the government concerned can afford to do so. In the long run, however, if the salaries remain low, capable civil servants will leave the civil service to join the private sector for higher salaries; while the less capable will remain in the civil service out of necessity and consequently indulge in corrupt activities to supplement their meagre salaries.

In sum, Singapore has succeeded in minimizing the problem of corruption because its anti-corruption strategy is characterized by the following features:

(1) **Commitment by the political leaders**, especially Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, towards the elimination of corruption both within and outside the public bureaucracy;

(2) **Adoption of comprehensive anti-corruption measures** designed to reduce both the opportunities and need for corruption; and

(3) **Creation and maintenance of an incorrupt anti-corruption agency** which has honest and competent personnel to investigate corruption cases and to enforce the anti-corruption laws.

Singapore's experience in tackling corruption demonstrates the importance of having incorrupt political leaders who are committed to wiping out corruption by enacting comprehensive anti-corruption legislation and by establishing an incorrupt anti-corruption agency to enforce such legislation. The combined weight of these three factors is required to erode the problem of corruption. Otherwise, corruption will remain a way of life instead of a fact of life. Thus, Singapore has shown other countries that it is possible to solve the problem of corruption by taking appropriate anti-corruption measures to ensure that corruption need not be a way of life.
NOTES


5. This distinction was introduced by Gerald E. Caiden in his article "Public Maladministration and Bureaucratic Corruption," Hong Kong Journal of Public Administration 3 (1, June 1981): 58-62.


12. The Central Vigilance Commission of India reported a total of thirty-four types of corrupt practices during 1964-1965. For a description of some of these practices, see L. Michael Hager, "Bureaucratic Corruption in India: Legal Control of Maladministration," Comparative Political Studies 6 (2, July 1973): 200-201.


15. This is a slightly modified version of Dwivedi's definition. See O.P. Dwivedi,


This source will referred to as *FEER*.

18. Ibid., p. 3.


27. Ibid., pp. 1-2, 6-7.


29. Ibid., p. 88.

30. ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and has six members: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.


36. Ibid., p. 63.

37. Ibid., p. 64.

38. Ibid., p. 64.

39. Ibid., p. 64.

40. Ibid., p. 64.

41. Ibid., p. 64.

42. Ibid., p. 63.

43. Ibid., p. 68.


45. Examples of such research include: Gabriel Ben-Dor, *Corruption,


48 Quah, "Bureaucratic Corruption in the ASEAN Countries," pp. 174-175.


52 Lethbridge, *Hard Graft in Hong Kong*, p. 221.


54 Ibid., pp. 161-162.


58 *Straits Times*, January 27, 1987, p. 11.
