Management Education within a Cultural Confluence: Twinning Programmes in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In its steady advance toward Vision 2020, Malaysia has been working hard to balance the skills and competencies of its people commensurate with its economic growth. To this end, educational twinning programmes abound in Malaysia. At present, these programmes are inevitably reliant to a considerable degree on Western thought and science. This paper, written from the perspective of two twinning programme directors, examines cross-cultural management issues underlying educational programme design and delivery. Its focus concentrates on the execution of commerce and business programmes.

Twinning programmes in commerce and business in Malaysia may be heralding a new era in management education—that of the global manager, capable of conducting business with sensitivity and efficiency across a number of cultures and ideologies. These programmes which operate at the confluence of global schools of thought, including Buddhist-Confucian-Taoist, Islamic, Judaeo-Christian and Vedic-Hindu, present significant pedagogical challenges. This paper discusses these challenges, including areas of cross-cultural difference requiring sensitivity and discretion, and resultant issues in course design and delivery. This paper concludes with a number of dilemmas for those involved in management education—dilemmas with potential long-term implications for both Malaysia and the Western nations that currently provide the curricula for twinning programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia continues to achieve prominence on the world stage, not only as one of the fastest expanding markets in the Pacific Rim, but also as a relatively successful multi-ethnic society and as a national role model and champion for developing nations. Malaysia's economic fundamentals are strong and forecasts are positive for continuing prosperity. Meeting the demand for management skills commensurate with Malaysia's economic growth and its strategic diversification from natural resources (tin, rubber and more recently oil) to high value-added manufactured goods, particularly electrical machinery and electronic components, represents a clear national challenge.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This paper will take an historical perspective on the underlying traditions of the main ethnic groups in Malaysia, viz. Malay, Chinese and Indian. Racial and religious correlations are noted. The purpose of the paper is to alert Western academics teaching on educational twinning programmes in Malaysia to the need for cross-cultural sensitivity in course design and delivery.

The scope of this paper is such that an important caveat is in order before proceeding with the cross-cultural analysis. The concept of culture as an expression of a group's shared understandings and values exists at a multitude of levels around our globe. Folks in small

villages can manifest distinctive cultural characteristics as can the people of entire nations. As cultural anthropologist, Clyde Kluckhohn, and social psychologist, Henry Murray, wrote many years ago (1953:53): "Every man is in certain respects—like all other men—like some other men—and, like no other men." This paper applies the concept of culture at a very high level of aggregation. Terms such as "Western world thought" are used. The threat of significant within-group variance is obvious. Nevertheless, it is suggested that these general categorizations serve for purposes of analysis in this particular situation.

Evidence is presented that the Chinese in Malaysia have an impact in Malaysian business organizations well beyond their proportion in the general population. Because of this, as well as the fact that Chinese students predominate in twinning programmes, there is a focus upon Chinese traditions and values and their impact in vital areas of business.

MALAYSIA IN PROFILE

Malaysia with a population of just under 20 million comprises the states of Peninsula or West Malaysia plus the two states of Sabah and Sarawak or East Malaysia, constituting 82%, 8% and 10%, respectively, of the total population. Indigenous peoples (59% of the total population) include Malays in Peninsula Malaysia, and several other racial groups in East Malaysia, where Malays are a small minority group (e.g., comprising less than 3% of the Sabah population in 1970). Since 1980, Malays have been grouped with Kadazans and Pribumi for Sabah (now 86%). Of the non-indigenous population of 41%, the largest racial groups are the Chinese 30% and the Indians 8% (Malaysia, 1992:44-49).

Malaysian society has been called "one of the most multicultural societies in the world" (Muzaffar, 1993). Malaysian political leaders recognise the pervasive impact of race:

> Racialism infuses much of the social psychology of Malaysians in just about every sphere—in the arena of politics, in business, in industry, on the shop-floor, and very sadly in our schools and universities. Many of Malaysia's urban ghettos remain cesspools of racial feeling and sentiment. (Musa Hitam, 1987:3)

The perceived inequities facing the Malays stirred the present Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad to write, a generation ago, his manifesto, *The Malay Dilemma*. This has provided a foundation for government affirmative action policies that have favoured the Malays since the 1970s.

Religious affiliation in Malaysia is as diverse as its racial composition, as indicated in Table 1 below. Unfortunately, figures based on the 1990 census have not yet been released.

It will be noted that Islam is by far the most common religion, reflecting the greater number of Malays and their religious cohesion.

TABLE 1. Religious Affiliation 1980—Percentage Distribution

Religion	Total 1970	Malaysia 1980	Peninsula	Sabah	Sarawak
Islam	50	53	56	51	26
Christianity	5	7	2	27	29
Hinduism	7	7	8	-	-
Buddhism	26	17	19	8	10
Confucianism	-	12	13	4	7
Tribal/ Folk Religion	-	2	1	2	15
Other	8	1	-	1	2
No Religion	4	2	1	6	12

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1983). *General Report of Population Census (1980)*, Kuala Lumpur, **Vol. 1**, January : 152.

It is likely that the figures from the 1990 Population Census, when released, will show further growth in the proportion of Muslims since 1980, due to the Government's advocacy of Islam and restrictions upon activities by other religions. It is also noted that Christianity maintains a significant presence in the states of East Malaysia.

There is a high correlation between race and religious affiliation for Malays, with almost all subscribing to Islam. Hinduism is the most common religious affiliation among the Indian community in Malaysia, followed by Christianity and Islam, with Buddhism as a small minority. There is even less predictability with the Malaysian Chinese, with religious affiliation spread across Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity and often comprising a complex mixture of these.

TERTIARY EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

The demand for university places among Malaysians greatly exceeds the capacity of the local universities. In 1991 over 36,000 Malaysians were attending overseas universities while roughly 60,000 were enrolled in Malaysian universities (Lewis and Shea, 1994). Undergraduate studies in the field of Economics, Business and Management are the most common in Malaysian universities (9,770 students in 1990) and for private students studying with foreign universities. Because of a combination of affirmative action for Malays in the allocation of university places at Malaysian universities, and the impact of national language policy, the Chinese constitute the vast majority of Malaysian students studying privately overseas (Lewis, 1994). Increasing numbers of Malay students are also sponsored by Government bodies (e.g., MARA) to study at foreign universities.

Malaysia is now in the process of expanding its university system, having recently approved the establishment of a ninth university to be located in Sabah. Nevertheless, the nation remains heavily reliant upon external providers. Malaysia has become a world leader in encouraging the growth of twinning programmes (Mukhi and Pratt, 1994) whereby Malaysian students enrol at local private colleges for the first phase (1, 1.5, or 2 years) of a degree offered by a foreign university and then proceed overseas to complete the final phase. Since the late 1980s, these twinning programmes with Western world universities (particularly from Australia, United Kingdom, United States, and more recently New Zealand) have mushroomed, especially in business/commerce related fields. The result is that Malaysia now offers an "educational supermarket" of tertiary education, featuring a wide range of inter-national courses, particularly in business. These fee-paying places are mainly taken up by Chinese Malaysians because of difficulties they experience in enrolling in local universities.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

There are many pedagogical issues and challenges facing existing twinning programmes in Malaysia. The need for these issues to be addressed is becoming acute as twinning programmes have become vital, not only as a major contributor to educational development in Malaysia, but also as a likely vehicle to help Malaysia achieve its aspiration to become a regional centre for higher education. Yet criticisms are being made that twinning programme curricula have not been adapted to meet the socio-cultural, economic and national needs of Malaysia (Dean, 1994).

Course design and delivery tend to reflect successful practices as applied at the home university. Schein's definition of culture as: "a pattern of basic assumptions- invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration..." (Schein, 1985:9) comes to mind at this point. Nevertheless, some twinning programmes are adapting curricula to reflect local situations.

While visiting expatriate academics are prepared with respect to course content, one wonders if they are equally prepared in terms of course *context*, in particular, the conceptual sense-making frameworks of the various students involved and their learning traditions. A number of twinning programmes employ local academic staff to bridge these external curricula to the local environment on a week-to-week basis.

Despite laudable efforts at local adaptation of curricula and teaching in twinning

programmes, it remains the case that most curricula for business-related courses are based upon Western paradigms of management thought and business practice. The remainder of this paper will explore the relevance of this and the dilemmas posed when considering different paradigms.

CULTURAL TRADITIONS—AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This section presents a review of the various ideological traditions existing within Malaysia's cultural confluence. It starts with Western tradition and uses this as the backdrop against which to contrast the mainstream cultural foundations of Malaysian society which, presented in alphabetical order, are: Chinese, Indian and Islamic traditions.

Western Traditions
Western thought and tradition in an historical sense have advanced along many avenues over the past 3000 years, the concept of work being a prominent theme to which this discussion will devote most of its attention. Prior to focusing on the concept of work, however, a more introductory discussion of Western and Eastern thought is deemed warranted.

Philosophers Titus, Smith and Nolan (1986) suggest several broad differences in outlook between Eastern and Western thought. They suggest that the West has tended in recent times to emphasize the empirical world. Under Greek influence Western knowledge has become descriptive and highly specialized. In contrast, they suggest that:

> the Asian thinker, especially as influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, is more likely to emphasise the inner nature of self and a reality beyond the world of the senses, which is regarded as fleeting and illusory. (Titus et al., 1986:502)

Titus, Smith and Nolan also note a Western tendency to emphasize desires and their satisfactions, whereas in the East there is greater emphasis on discipline, self-control, moderation, detachment, and even renunciation. Creative evolution and progress are often held up as the hallmarks of Western society. However, for the Hindu or the Buddhist:

> ... the good is not in this present world of things, and it is not to be gained by manipulating nature, altering society, or seeking pleasure for ourselves. The good is found through the quest for the One within or beyond, or in attaining *nirvana.* (Titus et al., 1986:503)

A final contrast noted by Titus, Smith and Nolan is the centrality of Eastern peoples' spiritual life. They state:

> For hundreds of millions of Asians, their religion—no matter what form it takes—is the most vital concern in their daily lives, not a mere one-day-a-week observance. The peoples of non-Western cultures see religion as integrally related and inseparable from all the other areas of life and experience. (Titus et al., 1986: 482)

This claim is confirmed by frequent calls by political leaders in Malaysia for business leaders to emphasize morality and values in their dealings. Let us now turn our attention to the concept of work. The concept of work is central to curricula for commerce and business educational twinning programmes. It has also been a dominant theme in Western thought and tradition.

The origins of Western thought can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. During this period a rather pessimistic view of work prevailed. Work, and manual work in particular, was seen as the domain of slaves and those unfortunates who could not afford the leisure of the good life. The famous Roman statesman and orator, Cicero, is credited with saying "selling one's labour was selling one's freedom."

With the advent of Judaeo-Christian thought, work became more respectable. Mosaic law manifested concern for the man who worked for wages, an advance on ancient Greek and Roman thinking. Jesus Christ was the son of a carpenter who selected apostles from amongst fishermen, whose occupation, incidentally, Cicero despised.

Early Christian thought was greatly influenced by Saint Paul. Saint Paul viewed work as the means for independence and self-respect. One of his favourite expressions was reported to be: "my fellow worker." Following on, Saint Augustine (345-430 AD) exalted the

benefits of labour as moral perfection. Similarly, monasticism raised the prestige and esteem of work. Positive esteem for the conduct of labour and work was maintained right through to the Middle Ages (1500s) in Europe.

The modern Western concept of work emerged during the middle ages, influenced by the ideas of Luther and Calvin. Applebaum (1992:321) suggests that: "Protestantism and its perspectives on work were also the ideological precursors for capitalism and its work ethic." German religious reformer Martin Luther advocated that one best serves God by doing perfectly the work of one's trade or profession. Swiss reformist John Calvin preached that all men must work as it is the will of God.

More modern proponents of what is now known as the "Protestant Work Ethics" include Benjamin Franklin of American folklore fame during the eighteenth century, and more recently at the turn of this century, German sociologist Max Weber. Franklin, the son of a Calvinist father, espoused the Puritan work ethic of John Calvin, as well as Martin Luther's ideas. Franklin, who had a great deal of influence over the mind-set of American colonialists, described America as the "Land of Labour" and was recognised by Max Weber and Karl Marx as embodying the spirit of thrift and hard work as the path to success in business enterprise.

Weber concluded from his comprehensive study covering Europe, the Middle East, India and China, that there were religious factors in the modern West that favoured the rise of capitalism. Such factors were absent in other civilizations, one factor in particular being "accommodation to the world" found in Confucianism versus "reorganising the world in a rational manner" found in Puritanism and Protestantism (Morishima, 1987).

In the Western world today, work is defined in an egocentric manner as a source of self-respect and meaning. The workplace is viewed as a political environment in which people are demanding individual rights and freedoms. People expect challenge, growth and personal fulfilment through interesting and meaningful work (Kanter, 1978).

In summary, the concept of work within Western thought has a rational, utilitarian essence. It is not conducted out of a normative sense of one's duty nor for purposes of social conformity, rather actions deemed to be goal-oriented and purposeful, often in terms of individualist achievement, are carried out.

Chinese Traditions

"Chinese culture is one of the three great ancient world cultures, with the Greek and Indian cultures, and Confucianism stands alongside Christianity, Islam and Buddhism as one of the four great spiritual traditions" (Laszlo, 1993: 116). Power traditionally has been passed from father to son under the Chinese culture. The first recorded dynasty was the Xia Dynasty (21st to 16th century BC). People living in the Xia Dynasty believed in the mandate of heaven which could bring good or ill luck to those on earth. The emperor, seen as heaven's son, had divine and absolute rights.

The Shang Dynasty (16th to 11th century BC) reoriented the spiritual focus from the mandates of heaven to a belief in ghosts and gods, including adopting witchcraft and practising divination. The Shang Dynasty was replaced by the Zhou tribe who invaded from the peripheral north-west corner of China. They established the Zhou Dynasty (11th to 8th century BC) and ruled with a system of feoffment which included investing a few hundred people with hereditary titles in a hierarchical order. The Zhou Dynasty disintegrated into a chaotic phase (770-221 BC) known as the "Spring and Autumn Period" during which ten feudal princes remained engaged in ongoing conflict. Laszlo states that:

> At that time a new group called 'Shih' (learned people) emerged. These were the first free intellectuals of China. They moved unimpeded among the warring states, giving lectures to crowds, founding academic schools, writing books to expound doctrines, and manoeuvring between various political groups. (Laszlo, 1993:117)

He further notes that out of the various schools of thought three emerged with strong and lasting influence—the Taoist school, the Confucian school, and the Legalist school.

The Taoist school advocated the natural law ('Tao') under which Chinese rulers would govern as little as possible. The Confucian

school stood for a return to hierarchical order similar to that which existed under the Zhou Dynasty including ancestor worship. And, the Legalist school advocated a return to the old system of royal order under an emperor. In sharp contrast to the Confucian school, the Legalist school was opposed to the worship of ancestors.

The Legalist school was initially dominant and China was reunited under the Qin Dynasty (221-209 BC). As punishment for extolling the past to negate the present, the First Emperor of Qin Dynasty ordered 460 Confucian scholars buried alive. This new social system collapsed after only eleven years giving away to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) which maintained Qin's social institutions but adopted Taoist Lao-Tsu's philosophy of ruling the country with as little intervention as possible. Fifty years into the Han Dynasty, the country now prosperous and strong, Emperor Wu Di elevated Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu into a position of power and adopted Confucianism as the official philosophy. From that point on only Confucian scholars had the opportunity to enter the Civil Service and Confucianism established itself as the dominant philosophy.

Confucianism has remained at the core of Chinese tradition until the present day. K'ung Fu-Tzu (551-479 BC), whom the modern Western world calls Confucius, was a defender of tradition. He taught the importance of obedience to heaven, king, and clan. He emphasized the denial of self and a return to propriety. According to Confucius, people should maintain a moderate position, behave according to rules, and refrain from extreme speech and action.

Orthodox Confucianism was tempered (220-581 AD) by Indian Buddhism introduced by invading nomadic tribes who settled in the north of China. Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC), founder of the Buddhist religion, preached the "Four Noble Truths:" First truth is the fact of the existence of suffering—suffering is the universal problem of life in a world that is finite and changing. Second, suffering is caused by selfish desires, or 'tanha,' which literally means 'thirst.' Third, release from suffering is possible—striving and desire must be blotted out—the main obstacle being our ignorance of the true nature of the self and of the "chain of causation". And fourth, there is a way out, to *nirvana*, through the "Noble Eightfold Path" which involves acquiring the right knowledge about the nature of one's self as a means of removing evil and suffering.

With regard to contemporary Chinese culture, Laszlo reports:

> The typical 'mind-set' of contemporary Chinese culture is a long-standing distillation of origins and development of the Chinese tradition. It is remarkably stable, almost impervious to change, and is likely to be around for a long time to come. (Laszlo, 1993:129)

He suggests the dominant values are: the value of unity (sense of identity and cultural integrity); the value of tradition (a belief that tradition is valued more than innovation, ideal standards are more important than reality, and the past is greater than the future); the value of bureaucratic power (the traditional process of reading books, passing the imperial examination, becoming an officer and being in power are the only correct ways to self-fulfilment); the value of clan and family (clan and family are more valuable than the interests of the individual); the value of morality (with benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity, one restrains his or her own behaviour and regulates relationships with others pursuing moral perfection). Laszlo suggests that adherence to these values leads to personal behaviour in which people will conduct themselves carefully and evasively, hoping not to distinguish themselves but merely to avoid mistakes.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by John Kao (1993) of the Harvard Business School who found empirical evidence to suggest that the Confucian tradition remains dominant within contemporary Chinese business practices. In fact, he goes on to suggest that the traditional Confucian "life raft" mentality may be hobbling the future of Chinese business. The concept of a "life raft" is in reference to the Chinese survivor mentality which Kao suggests is based on many generations of disruption and hardship due to natural (flood, fire, famine) and man-made

(war, conflict, revolution) disasters. Kao (1993:30) describes the current values underlying Chinese business as follows:

* thrift ensures survival;

* a high, even irrational, level of savings is desirable, regardless of immediate need;

* hard work to the point of exhaustion is necessary to ward off the hazards present in an unpredictable world;

* the only people you can trust are family—and a business enterprise is created as a familial life raft;

* the judgement of an incompetent relative in the family business is more reliable than that of a competent stranger;

* obedience to patriarchal authority is essential to maintaining coherence and direction for the enterprise;

* investment must be based on kinship or clan affiliations, not abstract principles;

* tangible goods like real estate, natural resources, and gold bars are preferable to intangibles like illiquid securities or intellectual property; and

* keep your bags packed at all times, day and night.

In summary, Chinese values as they relate to work promote harmonious, obedient, conservative behaviour primarily cued by tradition and social consensus. Self-interest is repressed. Trust and openness are reserved for a very select few.

Indian Traditions
Whereas Chinese culture developed in a relatively isolated manner, the evolution of Indian traditions manifests a process of interaction with various civilizations throughout the ages. In this discussion of Indian traditions, it is not possible to match the coherent chronology of the Chinese

culture. The origins and development of Indian culture are more vague and fragmentary. In fact as a culture, the Indian culture is less homogeneous relative to that of the Chinese. It is also important to recognize at the outset that Indian traditions and its peoples' spirituality overlay three of the great world religions: Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. The discussion in this section will focus on Hinduism while acknowledging the other two and providing discussion as to their influence in other sections.

Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of an early culture on the Indian subcontinent located on the plains of the lower Indus. Hypotheses suggest that this culture was linked with those of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. A second cultural influence was that of the darker-skinned Dravidian people who also settle along the Indus and on the Indian Peninsula as well as in present-day Sri Lanka. From these early civilizations an Aryan culture emerged with the *"Rig-Veda"* as its cultural guide. In reference to the *Rig-Veda*, Laszlo (1993: 110) states: "This ancient text set the stage for the evolution and development of Indian culture, gave it an identity, and laid the foundation of the Hindu way of life, covering a broad sweep of beliefs and attitudes."

Hinduism is one of the oldest religious traditions in the world. It is also one of the most diversified. In many ways this discussion is an over-simplification in that there are many divisions and sub-divisions of Hinduism. The early Hindu texts (*Vedas*—meaning sacred knowledge) pre-date the Christian era by fifteen hundred years. These texts, often in the form of hymns, contain tributes to the gods, including *Indra*, the god of war and storm, and *Varuna*, the guardian of the law (*Dharma*). They also contain the *Brahmanas* which detail the administration of sacrificial rituals by the Brahmin class. Later writings (8th to 5th century BC) known as the *Upanishads* attempt to explain the inner meaning of the Hindu faith.

One of the most famous Hindu Scriptures is the *Bhagavadgita* (Song of the Lord) believed to have been composed in the second century BC. Titus, Smith and Nolan (1986:484) state: "To read the Gita is to be introduced to some of the main themes of Hindu thought as well

as to some of the main practices of Hindu life. It also introduces one to splendid Hindu poetry and to the god Krishna."

Four main values comprise Hindu tradition (Titus, Smith & Nolan, 1986). These values are presented in ascending order. The first two values are worldly and are legitimate provided that they do not obstruct the attainment of higher order values. These values are: (1) *Artha* (wealth), (2) *Kama* (pleasure), (3) *Dharma* (duty or righteousness, including sincerity, honesty, non-injury, cleanliness, control of the senses, love, forbearance, and the like), and (4) *Moksha* (enlightenment or release from finitude and imperfection).

The concept of release relates to the Hindu law of *karma* and concept of the wheel of existence. Under Hindu tradition, unless a person achieves release through illumination and overcoming selfishness, he or she is destined to repeat the round of more existences. The law of *karma* articulates the cause and effect of human behaviour—sowing and reaping.

A life of evil may result in a lower level rebirth, perhaps even subhuman, whereas a life of goodness may result in a more favoured human existence, and ultimately, liberation from the wheel of existence. The law of *karma* and concept of rebirth form the foundation for India's traditional caste system which has four main levels. This system has been renounced in modern India including statements by Hindu leaders calling attention to the abuses of the caste system. It is against the law to discriminate on the basis of caste in modern India.

Guthrie and Woehr (1993) summarize contemporary Hindu beliefs as follows:

* There is one all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

* The universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution.

* All souls are evolving toward union with God and will ultimately find spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

* Under *karma*, the law of cause and effect, each individual creates his or her own destiny through personal thoughts, words and deeds.

* The soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all *karmas* have been resolved.

* Divine beings exist in unseen inner worlds, and temple worship, rituals, and sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with the *devas* and Gods.

* A spiritually awakened Master is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, self-inquiry, and meditation.

* All life is sacred and to be loved and revered, through the practice of non-violence.

* No particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, and are deserving of tolerance and under-standing.

Smith (1993) in a historical look at family businesses in India notes the impact of Hindu values on business practices, including: loyalty and obedience to the family, business networks centred around familial relations, business succession from father to son, and status in the community based on the proprietor's ability to provide for his family. Gujer (1994) suggests that traditional Hindu values including the Indian trait of deliberateness are under threat as some young Indian entrepreneurs gravitate toward the American values of openness, efficiency, customer-orientation, and go-for-it pragmatism.

In summary, Indian (Hindu) traditions, similar to Chinese traditions previously presented, manifest considerable contrast

relative to Western beliefs and practices. Relative to Chinese traditions, however, Indian traditions appear to be more liberal in terms of tolerance in scope of interpretation and adherence, perhaps as a function of the more multifarious origins of its culture. In reference to the current nature of Indian tradition, Laszlo states that:

> The mind-set of India shows a penchant for an integrated approach, seeking a balance between the intangible and the material, the active and the passive, the past and the present. It also seeks a balance between the traditional and the modern. (Laszlo 1993:114)

Islamic Traditions

The word Islam is derived from an Arabic root the meaning of which includes the concepts of peace, purity, submission and obedience. In religious terms Islam means submission to the Will of God. In contrast to Eastern thoughts—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism—Islam is viewed (Titus, Smith & Nolan, 1986) as one of the three universal religions of the West along with Judaism and Christianity. The adjective "universal" signifies a religion in which its beliefs are offered across all humankind. In fact according to Islamic belief, every person is born a Muslim (a follower of Islam); however, some are influenced by their environments to stray from this path. In similarity with Eastern thought, Islam is a comprehensive, all-encompassing, day-to-day way of life as well as a spiritual denomination. Islamic doctrine includes detailed codes for human conduct, penal codes *(Hudud)* and rules for business transactions *(Mua'malat)*.

In conceptualising the meaning of Islam, Islamic scholars note the propensity of non-Muslims to focus solely on the prophet Muhammad including categorization using terms such as "Mohammedanism" and "Mohammedans." It is incorrect to conceptualise the role of Muhammad (570-632 AD) within Islam as similar to that of Christ within Christianity. Muslims worship God (Allah) alone. Muhammad's role was that of a prophet who was spoken to by the angel Gabriel, the records of which comprise the verses of the Qur'an which literally means "recitation." Muhammad was a mortal and the last of a line of Islamic prophets which includes Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, David, Moses and Jesus.

While contemporary Islamic tradition is quite distinct from that of Judaic or Christian ideology, historically, all three traditions share common origins. They geographically emerge from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. They all date back to the time of Adam and recognize Abraham as the patriarch of their faiths. Islamic tradition positions Islam as the middle way (The "Straight Path") between Judaism and Christianity suggesting a restoration of unity for the children of Abraham and avoidance of the exclusiveness of Judaism and Christianity.

The basic beliefs of Islam can be classified under five headings which are collectively called iman (meaning "faith"). First, there is the belief in one absolute and transcendent God who is supreme, eternal, infinite, mighty, merciful, compassionate, creator, and provider. Second, there is the belief in messengers of God (angels) chosen to teach mankind and deliver God's divine message. Third, there is the belief in revealed Scriptures and prophetic messengers of which Muhammad was the last in a long noble line. All Scriptures are God's work, but some may have been corrupted by peoples' early interpretation. The Qur'an is viewed as the purest extant Scripture, inspired and verbally infallible. Fourth, there is the belief in the last day of judgement when there will be compensation and reward for good deeds and punishment for evil ones. And fifth, there is the belief in the timeless knowledge of God and His power to plan and execute His plans. The Qur'anic view of divine decree and predestination also allows for free will. Muslims are exhorted to think, to plan and to make careful choices, but if things turn out differently, they must not lose faith.

In contrasting capitalist and Islamic traditions, Rodinson (1966) describes capitalism from two perspectives. First, capitalism is described as a set of institutions that manifest characteristics such as private ownership of the means of production, free enterprise, striving-for-profit as the chief motive force in economic activity, production for the market,

money economy, the mechanism of competition, and rationality in the conduct of an enterprise. Second, capitalism is described as a characteristic of societies in which a capitalist mentality is predominant, in particular Western Europe and America.

In reference to the Qur'an, Rodinson states that:

> There are religions whose sacred texts discourage economic activity in general, counselling their followers to rely on God to provide them with their daily bread, or, more particularly, looking askance at any striving for profit. This is certainly not the case with the Qur'an which looks with favour upon commercial activity confining itself to condemning fraudulent practices and requiring abstention from trade during certain religious festivals. (Rodinson, 1966:14)

Similarly, Islamic scholar Muhammad Asad (1969: 31) states that:

> "Thus, the full appreciation of this world and its goods is in no way a handicap for our spiritual endeavours. Material prosperity is desirable, though not a goal in itself."

Islamic scholar, Muhammad Umar Chapra, writing on the objectives of the Islamic economic order, suggests (1976:175) that Islam: "urges Muslims to gain mastery over nature because, according to the Qur'an, all resources in the heavens and the earth have been created for the service of mankind...". He concludes that a suitably high rate of economic growth should be among the economic goals of Muslim societies. Another Islamic scholar, Muhammad Qutb suggests that:

> Islam strikes a balance between the two extremes of capitalism and socialism. Being appreciative of their role Islam harmonises the individual and the state in such a way that individuals have the freedom necessary to develop their potentialities and not to encroach upon the rights of their fellowmen. It also gives the community and the state adequate powers to regulate and control the socio-economic relationships so as to guard and maintain harmony in human life. (Muhammad Qutb, 1976:256)

A distinctive aspect of Islamic economic doctrine is the prohibition of lending money at interest (*riba* which literally means "increase"). One Qur'anic passage (2:75) dealing with earning interest states: "Those who devour usury shall not rise again...". Another passage (3:130) states "O believers, devour not usury, doubled and redoubled...". This prohibition naturally complicates business relationships in the modern world of industry and commerce. Islamic business practitioners recognize this constraint and are experimenting with novel financial arrangements including substantial equity investments in the global markets.

In summary, Islamic tradition shares some commonality in origin with respect to Western tradition. Both ideologies support working hard and the creation of wealth, although some would argue that the goals of Muslim society are socially oriented while the economic goals of Western society are more individually oriented. Perhaps the most salient distinction in tradition from an economic perspective is that of the role of government in the economy. Islamic tradition strongly supports an active role by government to ensure adherence to a philosophy of social and economic justice which conforms with the ideals of Islam.

Against the backdrop of Western thought this section has looked across the cultural traditions comprising the Malaysian cultural confluence. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper precludes an in-depth review fitting of the rich nature of these traditions. Even at this level of analysis, however, pedagogical issues for Western-trained lecturers operating in this environment are clear.

CONFLUENCE OF TRADITIONS

The above analysis highlights the distinctive nature of the traditions underlying the Malaysian cultural confluence. Whereas the above analysis was divergent in its approach; the analytical approach in this section attempts to be convergent. It will explore areas of consensus, convergence and similarity within the Malaysian cultural confluence.

It seems reasonable to suggest that within any particular Asian nation, such as Malaysia, there is also a blending of values and

beliefs. Significant numbers of the Chinese in Malaysia, for example, are practising Christians who nevertheless still observe traditional Chinese beliefs that have their roots in Taoist and Confucian tradition.

There has not been a significant level of integration in Malaysia, however, between the three major ethnic groups, through intermarriage. Islam has been noted to be a severe barrier in both Malaysia and Indonesia to intermarriage and full assimilation.

Islam is deemed to be relatively intolerant and exclusivistic. Buddhism requires of its followers only a sincere desire to seek the truth; Islam requires more formal conversion, and the renunciation of false, or other, gods ... conversion to Islam demanded physical sacrifices from the Chinese immigrant which Buddhism did not, namely circumcision and abstention from eating pork (The, 1993:61).

The predominant observance of Islam in Malaysia is based on the relatively moderate Sunni branch. The Islamic leadership in Malaysia is however, in touch with international developments in Islam, with Malaysia hosting the 1993 International Islamic Conference. In recent years there has been growth in more fundamentalist Islamic factions. This has forced the Malaysian authorities to ban the radical group *Al-Arqam.*

There were 70,000 Muslims among non-Malays in 1970. These included an estimated 30,000 converts, of whom about 21,000 were Chinese (The, 1993: 84-85).

With the above impediments, there are specific areas in Malaysia where intermarriage between Chinese and Malays have been concentrated. The Babas of the Straits Settlements, particularly in Melaka, have adopted Malay speech, food and dress habits, although they did not adopt the Islamic religion (The, 1993:94).

The total number of Christians in Peninsula Malaysia grew from 71,000 in 1931 to 610,000 in 1980. Most of the present Christian churches in Malaysia were established before 1960, being affiliates of denominations, missions and autonomous national churches based overseas, both from Western countries and Asian, such as India and China (Chan, 1992:355). If the Chinese converted to a new religion, they usually turned to Christianity, especially after World War Two.

The Malaysian Way?

At a higher level of aggregation, we could question whether there are traditions, or values, that influence the management of business organizations, that are distinctly Malaysian. Certainly the nation's leaders have been relatively successful since the race riots of 1969 in promoting harmony and national development, using *Vision 2020,* more recently, as the unifying focus for national development. As one leader observes:

> Of course, just as peace is not merely the absence of war, harmony is not merely the absence of violence. But by any yardstick you care to choose, there can be no doubt that great strides have been made 'by Malaysia in its long journey towards one nation. (Musa Hitam, 1987:3)

Recent research examining the values and practices of Malay and Chinese executives in Malaysia found significant differences between the Malays and Chinese in managerial practices—planning, evaluating, innovating, interpersonal relations and decision-making. There was also a significant difference in workplace values, with Malays preferring a *Theory Y* (McGregor, 1960) approach to leadership while the Chinese believing in *Theory X* (Zabid and Chong, 1994: 574-582). Despite the claim by Zabid and Chong (1994:574) that their findings suggest "the existence of a truly Malaysian value system", their observed significant differences across central areas of management suggest that Malay and Chinese values, below a level of superficiality, are not alike.

The Asian Way?

Business leaders in the West, raised on a diet consisting for-the-most-part of American business and management texts have in recent years read with great interest about the values, strategies and practices used by their counterparts of successful business corporations in Japan. The Japanese way has been incorporated into the pattern for businesses in the so-called *Tiger* economies of Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The search for a common Asian approach to management has lead to the following observations by a former president of the Asian Institute of Management and a graduate-management educator in the region for more than 30 years:

> Like the Japanese, we are children of an ancient civilization which is infused with Confucian patterns of thought, a mind-set that gives primacy to family, that esteems and extols paternal benevolence and filial piety ... (Mendoza, 1991: iii)

Mendoza argues that the secret of the success of Asian managers is that they "lead their men as does a father his family" (*ibid*). (This analogy of course may be interpreted quite differently between Eastern and Western observers.) The central idea of kinship and family-centredness has been integrated into the culture of the work organizations. The leaders make an effort to meet all the needs of their employees, demanding loyalty, obedience, respect, trust and diligence, and giving loyalty in return.

The Chinese Way?

Possibly the major factor in the common features of business management in Asian countries is the dominant role of the overseas Chinese—a phenomenon Kao (1993:28) refers to as the *Chinese Commonwealth*. The ethnic Chinese play the dominant role in the private business sectors of ASEAN countries (Fynmore and Hill, 1992:239).

In Malaysia, the Chinese have been prepared to accept political dominance by the Malays while themselves maintaining economic strength by dominating business activity in commerce and manufacturing. Despite the government-supported affirmative action for Malays in business—including low interest loans, preferential access to business education and requirements of non-Malay owners to achieve minimum proportions of Malay shareholders, directorships and staff appointments—the Chinese still continue to dominate Malaysian business (see Table 2).

Redding (1993:31) estimates that, allowing for the portion of Chinese influence hidden away in the Malay business sector, the Chinese portion of the locally owned economy in Malaysia is between 60% and 70%. Note that the Chinese comprise only around 30% of the total population.

TABLE 2. Ownership of Malaysian Companies

	Foreign	Malay	Chinese & Indian
1971	62%	4%	34%
1985	25%	18%	57%

Source: S.G. Redding (1993), *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 30-31.

From his qualitative study involving interviews with 72 Chinese businessmen in four countries, Redding suggests a distinctive "spirit of Chinese capitalism" which manifests the values of : paternalism, filial piety, personalism, and a network based on family and clan ties. The similarity to the characteristics of the *Asian way* advanced by Mendoza are worthy of note.

In summary to this analysis and from the perspective of finding a convergent common ground, the development of curricula and teaching techniques appropriate for business and commerce twinning programmes in Malaysia clearly requires particular awareness of and sensitivity to Chinese business traditions, workplace values and management practices.

CONCLUDING DILEMMAS

On the surface, it appears that Western universities have defaulted in terms of radically redesigning their curricula and teaching methodologies to offer twinning programmes in Malaysia. Some even go as far as to suggest gross cross-cultural insensitivity. One senior academic from an Australian university was recently quoted in the public press as follows:

> To the extent that alternative beliefs are ignored in courses which are promoted overseas, Western educational institutions are guilty of a form of intellectual imperialism. That kind of arrogance leads to thoughtless imposition of Western beliefs on people from other cultural and religious

backgrounds. (Professor Murray Wells, quoted in the *New Straits Times*, 31/8/94: 13)

Yet the world is becoming smaller with rapid development in communications and transport technology eroding the tyranny of distance. Markets are becoming increasingly global. The head office and senior staff components within many of the world's large business corporations currently comprise people from a variety of nations.

In developing countries, the business leaders of tomorrow have completed much of their tertiary education beyond the borders of their own countries. Malaysia is no exception. These trends toward globalism are having an impact on the way corporations conduct their business within individual nations, as observed below:

> A relatively high proportion of ethnic Chinese in South East Asia has undertaken studies abroad in the past 30 years, especially in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. The effect of their foreign study on business organizations in South East Asia has been marked by increasing use of professional managers and expert advisers. Chinese family conglomerates are becoming more similar to their Western counterparts. (Fynmore and Hill, 1992:239)

We conclude that university courses need to be directed at educating tomorrow's professionals and leaders, and therefore we should be including in curricula not only extant knowledge, but also academic fundamentals in support of future scenarios. A basic issue therefore is whether the long-standing traditions outlined in this paper are appropriate to guide and frame the values for Asian managers in the future.

It is suggested that descriptive models presented by Kao, Mendoza, Redding, and others may not be replicated by the next generation of Eastern CEOs. Evidence is accumulating that the new generation will display leadership and management styles which integrate many aspects of Western management thought. Therefore the resultant mind-set will manifest a hybrid of Western and Eastern thought existing within one executive who is capable of operating effectively in the global arena.

Paradoxically, the cross-cultural analysis in this paper makes a strong case for more Western sensitivity and awareness. Clearly, aspiring leaders of business in Western nations will need to take into account the values and practices of their Asian counterparts. This is particularly the case in which countries such as Australia and New Zealand perceive that their economic futures will depend to a much greater degree on trading and business relationships with South East Asia.

In conclusion, those involved in curriculum design and delivery in Malaysian twinning programmes may do a disservice in the long run if they either: (1) excessively adapt Western curricula to reflect traditional Asian values and practices, or (2) fail to repatriate their experiential learning with respect to Asian values and practices back to their Western home universities. In essence, we conclude that the future will not belong to those who blindly espouse Western ethnocentrism, nor will it belong to those who tenaciously hold fast to Eastern traditions. The future will belong to those who have an awareness of and sensitivity to the global international age towards which we are all inevitably progressing. It is incumbent on educational institutions to anticipate this eventuality by developing and promulgating East-West hybrid models of management thought and practice.

Building from the work of Barnham and Oates (1991) who suggest key characteristics for the international managers of the future, we close with a short list of goals for the consideration of those involved in business and commerce educational twinning programmes in Malaysia:

* Seek to achieve an awareness of your own cultural assumptions and a positive sensitivity to different cultures both for yourself and within the minds of your students. In other words, don't ignore or be embarrassed by cultural difference, rather celebrate it and explore it in the classroom.

* Promote a global work context that recognises both Western and Eastern roots and highlight the belief that the

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future will belong to those who can integrate across this divide, not those who want to take sides.

* Realize that hard work and ethics are fundamental and form a common thread across all of the traditions reviewed in this paper. Elevate the importance of these values regardless of traditional heritage for those who aspire to lead in business and commerce.

* Achieve a balance between Western empiricism and Eastern social consensus in discussing the validity of theories, knowledge and ideas.

* And finally, emphasize diversity as a positive feature and integrate it into classroom discussions and in forming study groups and class project teams.

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