Delineate the overall scope (institutions and functions) of Public Administration in Singapore. Analyze how major contextual factors have shaped the nature of Public Administration in Singapore.
Public administration as a democratic institution must be built on structures and processes that are accountable, transparent, decentralized, and able to manage legitimate elections and the administration of justice, and operate under the oversight of the parliament.¹ There is no one definition of public administration as analysts and scholars have never agreed on a common definition. This is because when a phrase is used to describe, the meaning gets blurred.² Thus a simple definition of public administration would be implementing legislation according to public interest and doing things collectively that could not be done individually and they are in the political context. Singapore, follows the British style of public administration which is the West-Minster model³, aims for efficiency and accountability. There is a distinction to make between civil servants and public servants- though they mean the same thing. In Singapore, civil servants is the name for employees working in government ministries and related departments. Public servants would refer to those working in statutory boards. The department of public administration largely coves civil and legal service, police force and includes all 15 ministries employing over 64000 officers.⁴ By public administrators, it should be understood that they are not elected but chosen on merit-based system.⁵ The main engine for public administration in Singapore is the Public Service Division as they coordinate mass-recruitment exercise for graduates once a year through scholarships. Their main aim is “green-harvesting”.⁶ Singapore recruits its officers through rigorous examinations so as to be fair to all citizens. These officers are the bureaucrats of Singapore. When talking about public administration it is important to note that private enterprises, self-help groups and non-governmental organizations are not included. Temasek Holdings Private Limited Company (a government-linked company) is a unique case as it operates as an independent company separate from government but the government has 100% equity stake as an investor in the company.⁷ Thus, I would classify Ministries, Statutory boards, Para-political

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⁴ Ibid, pg 7
⁶ Ibid, pg.70
organizations (Community Development Councils (CDCs), Town Councils (TC) and Community Centres (CC)), Public Service Commission (PSC) and Anti-corruption agency as the structure nucleus of public administration in Singapore.

When considering personnel included in public administration, I am referring to civilian personnel and not military personnel even though military also fall under the scope of public administration. Civilian public administrators are based on government’s payroll which is decided through the divisions that are present in the public sector. Their payroll is normally determined by the country’s economic output. The public administration overarches the entire civil service. The number of officers working at different ministries differs as the highest numbers are found in Ministry of Education. The administrative service is stratified by rank designation which is further divided into specialised sub-units. The cycle doesn’t end here as they are further differentiated by different grades. This is done by the Public Service Division which is under the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) as shown by table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Generalist administrative and professional grades (requires a university degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division II</td>
<td>Includes the executive and supervisory grades and requires at least an Advanced General Level Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division III</td>
<td>Includes the clerical, technical and other support grades with an educational prerequisite of a General Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division IV</td>
<td>Workers engaged in manual or low-level routine work (e.g. office attendants) are placed in this category</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lecture on Spore PA- Background-Scope- Structure.

PS2244 20\textsuperscript{th} January 2013. Prof Shamsul Haque

Firstly, while describing the functions of the institutions, I would also have a general analysis on the scope that is covered by the Ministries as I have decided to only select a few but institutions to discuss. I feel that

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the institutions that I would be addressing are the ones that affect citizens most and it is linked with the State’s ideology of multi-culturalism, social cohesiveness, bilingualism and meritocracy. I would also be touching on the notion of personnel involved in public administration. Moving on, I would elaborate how contextual factors like history (linking to the British era and how the SCS has developed and the establishment of legislation against corruption which resulted in a corruption free nation), geographical, economic, political and socio-cultural play a role in the way that public administration is shaped. This is because these factors shaped Singapore’s ideologies of meritocracy, multi-culturalism, ad infinitum.

**Overall scope of Public Administration in Singapore**

Firstly, it is important to note that there are many ministries and a PMO (15+1) in Singapore which are broadly classified under economic, defence and health. They are headed by Ministers which shows that there is administrative decentralization in Singapore. Thus, it is clear that they serve as an important tool in the public administration of Singapore. The Ministries have to be neutral and not align themselves with politics\(^1\) even though they are headed by a political figure who is a Member of Parliament. Within ministries, there would be divisions and specialization done according to needs. So among the myriad of ministries present, I would like to highlight some of the important ones that concern the citizens of the republic. I would be talking about Ministry of Manpower (MOM). They are in-charge of ensuring that a competitive workforce is created so as to be globally competitive and at the same time ensuring that employees are people-centred.\(^2\) The divisions that are present in MOM range from a large array of functions ranging from income security policy to manpower planning,\(^3\) it is to ensure that there is decentralization in the MOM to make sure that policies would work for the people. Thus, this is one level of public administration in Singapore which is very rigid; quoting Max Weber, “there would not be much room

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\(^1\) Ibid, pg 4


for innovation in such a rigid structure."\textsuperscript{13} Though this is true, Singapore has not failed in innovation of their policies as they have Statutory Boards under the Ministries which are less rigid.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the presence of 63 statutory boards in Singapore shows the scale of manpower present in public administration. The statutory boards range from innovation institutions like A*Star, so as to remain competitive in the globalized world, to education for the same reason.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, it is rather safe to conclude that the purpose of the statutory boards in Singapore is to enhance economic growth and to sustain them as they are directly under purview of the government having some form of authority but still following the framework of the government-centralized decentralization.\textsuperscript{15} The other functions of statutory boards are promoting economic development, developing infrastructure, public housing and urban redevelopment, education and promotion of tourism.\textsuperscript{16} The statutory board which I believe that affects the people the most is the Central Provident Fund (CPF). It has to be acknowledged that CPF affects everything in Singaporean’s lives from buying a house to pension plan. They guide their team to ensure that Singaporeans have safe retirement, healthcare and home financing through lifelong income. Thus they have geared their policies to ensure that at every stage of a Singaporean’s life they would be involved to ensure smooth process from one stage to another stage of adulthood.\textsuperscript{17} The CPF is under the Ministry of Finance which shows that CPF has to be hierarchically accountable to the ministry. This sense of hierarchy describes the overall nature of public administration in Singapore.

Moving on, I would be describing the para-political organizations which consist of Community Development Councils (CDC), Town Councils (TC) and Community Centres (CC). In Singapore there are 5 CDCs, 16 TCs and 106 CCs.\textsuperscript{18} Their function is to facilitate communication between members of the public and the public service. They ensure that the community is bonded which is Singapore’s ideology of multiculturalism and they would want to ensure that there are no racial tensions. The CDCs initiate, plan and

\textsuperscript{15} K. Mok, Decentralization and marketization of education in Singapore: A case study of the school excellence model, (MCB UP Ltd, 2003), 348-366.
\textsuperscript{16} John Quah, Public Administration Singapore-Style. (Emerald Group Publishing, 2010), 48-60.
manage community programmes to promote community bonding and social cohesion. These bodies come under the control of the PMO. It should be noted that the CCs came first in 1959. They became important when there was a political vacuum in the People’s Action Party (PAP) therefore, CCs were deployed as medium for disseminating information and consolidating influence at grassroots level. This led to the extension of para-political organizations in Singapore. Also, the 5 CDCs are hierarchically accountable to the government and they micromanage the TCs and CCs. Such creation and constant revision of government-sponsored grassroots organizations is a singular feature in Singapore and has been seen as one of the conditions for (PAP) long political dominance.

Thus, it could be seen that the overall scope of public administration in Singapore covers a wide range of things so as to ensure social cohesion in Singapore and also foster economic growth with development and innovation. The institutions that I have covered are what I perceive as important for the state and the people. The other important organs of the state are the PSC and Corrupt Practices Investigations Bureau (CPIB) - which would be covered in detail in the next part under the historical factor-, shaped the nature of public administration in Singapore. Overall, public administration in Singapore has a rich sense of accountability (political, legal, hierarchical and professional). There is decentralization except political decentralization as Singapore believes in a strong centre; explaining that it is an unitary state. The bureaucracy is very efficient as they follow the orders of the executives which imply that the bureaucracy lacks political influence in policy making and that the executives are the main engine for policy making in Singapore which resembles instrumental administration- strong executive leadership, weak political influence of politicians and low administrative entrenchment.

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20 Ibid
Contextual Factors affecting Nature of Public Administration

The island’s political history casts a long shadow on the present policy decisions as it had 140 years of colonial legacy. Singapore was an island made up of immigrants of various religion and race. Thus it became important for national education to be emphasized. The British ‘gave’ Singapore good structures like the formulation of the PSC (central personnel agency) to keep politics out of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS). Following the recommendations of the Trusted Commission in 1947, the 4 divisions were retained in the SCS. The purpose of the PSC as a major organ of the state is to uphold meritocracy in the recruitment of civil servants, maintain discipline as stated in Article 110(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore. Moreover, the PSC also devolved several of its functions to personnel boards in 1995 to increase efficiency and effectiveness which shows the State’s continued pursuit of economic excellence. As of today, the Singapore government has been following this method of the British and they have realised a surge in the number of applicants which led to the establishment of the Public Service Division (PSD) to ease the workload of PSC. There were the Education Service Commission (ESC) and Police and Civil Defence Service Commission (PCDSC) created as well. All these modifications were done to ensure that meritocracy is upheld and ensuring that the “best and the brightest” are recruited for the right job so that the heterogeneity society lives harmoniously. The PSC is unique as we are not able to separate bureaucrats and the Ministries as the Member of Parliament (MP) all came from the bureaucracy and climbed up the ladder. This following of the British rule has become a code of law that is practiced in Singapore. This inclination towards colonial master is crucial as the policies implemented though, would be different but follow the same rules and principles and follow and administrative culture of meritocracy. The state has been able to instil meritocracy to legitimise their rule. Thus, scholarships are given so as to

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26 Jon S.T. Quah, *Public Administration: Singapore Style*, (Singapore: Emerald Group Publishing, 2010), chap.5-6, pg 71
28 Ibid
bond the students. Hence, this is how the British era has shaped the nature of public administration in Singapore so that there would be a strong sense of hierarchical accountability with the constant portrayal of meritocracy as their fundamental ideology. Moving on, I will be explaining how the British rule established anti-corruption measures in Singapore which was further modified by the elites of PAP which resulted in corruption-free nation.

The British established the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) which was fundamentally weak as the responsibility of combating corruption was given to the police who were corrupted and the ACB were under-staffed as combating corruption was given low importance.\footnote{Saxena, N. C. (2011). *Virtuous Cycles: The Singapore Public Service and National Development*. New York: United Nations Development Programme. Pp.43-51} The elites of PAP were worried that Singapore’s competitive nature would be affected by corruption which was a result of underpaying the civil service and weak policing thus they enhanced the CPIB that was established by British in 1952. Reforms to the CPIB were done to eradicate corruption on the surface but it was to legitimise the rule of the PAP in Singapore.\footnote{Ibid} The elites implemented Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) and increased its scope to 32 sections then to 37 so as to increase effectiveness.\footnote{Quah Jon S.T. *Public Administration: Singapore Style*, (Singapore: Emerald Group Publishing, 2010), chap. 9.} The CPIB is not a “rubber-stamp” as they investigated 4 PAP leaders for corruption.\footnote{Ibid} The CPIB has a myriad functions in terms of receiving and investigating complaints and examining practices so as to minimize corruption. Thus, now Singapore is ranked at the top with a score of 9.3 as of 2010.\footnote{Transparency Internationl, "CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2010." Last modified 2010. Accessed March 22, 2013. http://www.transparency.org/cpi2010/results.} This was a remarkable achievement as they were able to curb the endemic problem during British era by understanding the flaws of the system. They increased manpower in the CPIB. Singapore increased the remuneration of civil servants so that they won’t be tempted to get into corruption. Salary packages were introduced and had variable component of 40% compensation and huge bonuses. This meant that more people wanted to be in the public sector was due to the economic factor.\footnote{Jon S.T. Quah, *Public Administration: Singapore Style*, (Singapore: Emerald Group Publishing, 2010). chap.5-6} The public service salary was benchmarked to the private sector.\footnote{Jones, David Seth (2002). “Recent Reforms in Singapore's Administrative Elite: Responding to the Challenges of a Rapidly Changing Economy and Society.” *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.10, No.2, pg 80} This increase in salary was across all the levels of
public administration. Performance bonuses were also given depending on the performance rating in the appraisal. Such measures would then deter any public servants from being corrupt.\textsuperscript{36} This was done through the political willingness of then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who said that, “we are sickened by the greed, corruption and decadence of many Asian leaders….we had a deep sense of mission to establish a clean and effective government.”\textsuperscript{37} Thus, it could be seen that the historical fact that British led to increased corruption in Singapore, which made the leaders prioritise anti-corruption in national agenda. This let to measures being undertaken to curb corruption in Singapore leading to increased competition in public administration so that one would be able to get more bonus if he/she performs well in the appraisal system. Thus, the above mentioned institutions are outcomes of the state’s nature of public administration basing on historical context.

Moving on, when considering the geographical context, Singapore is an unique case as the geographical location affects many policies that Singapore has to undertake and its impact this could be seen in the geo-commercial trade accumulation of the state. Singapore is a small city state with a geographical size of only 692.7 sq km and with a small population.\textsuperscript{38} In spite of such geographic limitation, heterogeneous population, lack of natural resources (humans as the only resource), Singapore has become one of the most developed states, showing its dependence on raw materials and imports and making high-end goods to export. This has helped them economically. Within a short span, its per capita GDP reached US$49,900 (8th in the world) and these economic achievements have been based on the efforts pursued by the state. Thus, having been fortunate to be located at such a strategic location proved to be conducive for regional and global trade, investment and tourism and it is highly urbanized city-state as there is hardly rural sector. Therefore, to make the best out of its location, the executives have developed export-oriented policies and welcomed the flow of foreign direct investments to steer the republic to what we now know as an economic power house. This happened because the country was stable and had no corruption (as mentioned earlier) which would have deterred growth. Furthermore, considering the economic factor this has shaped the nature

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid pg 84  
of public administration in Singapore. This is because Singapore is rich in foreign reserves—amounting to S$289 Billion in 2010 which was 10 times more than what they had in 1965- and has no foreign debt.\(^{39}\) This has enabled it to increase the pay (as mentioned earlier). This was possible because of the increase in the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about 8%.\(^{40}\) This would also mean that the state could take up any form of policies as they have the capability. Therefore, the elites were able to create numerous research institutions like A*STAR, so that innovation would be kept up to date and that country would be competitive in the global market and moving to e-governance. This explains how geographical and economic factor shaped the nature of public administration.

Moving on, I would discuss the political factor shaping the nature of public administration. It is important to note that Singapore is an electoral authoritarian country not a democratic country as there are elections but one-party dominance since 1959 shows that the political system is electoral authoritarianism. Though the bureaucracy has been the backbone for Singapore’s development, they should not be granted all credit as the executives are the final deciders in policy making and performing checks on bureaucracy which shows the control on the bureaucracy. Singapore is a parliamentary democracy thus resulting in a multi-party unicameral legislature of which 82 of the 84 seats belongs to PAP.\(^{41}\) This is to legitimise the PAP rule and not regard as entirely authoritarian but they show fairness and represent the opposition. It is widely believed that there would be dichotomy between the executives and the bureaucracy so that the latter is non-partisan. However, in the case of Singapore, due to the duration of PAP’s rule, the question of partisanship of the bureaucracy comes into question as there are 50% of “bureaucrat politicians” in the Singapore Cabinet.\(^{42}\) However, they have ensured that Singapore has been stable and in the question of “freedom” and “stable”, it is important to have the latter in a developing state. Thus, this led to the centralized decision making of the PAP. Therefore, it could be seen that the centralized control on the bureaucracy, helped the state to implement polices without much veto channels. This could be also viewed as instrumental administration as the executive power is strong and the political influence of the bureaucrats is limited as


\(^{40}\) Carling, Robert G. *Singapore: a Case Study in Rapid Development*. International Monetary Fund, 1995 pg4

\(^{41}\) Chong, T. *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*. Institute of Southeast Asian, 2010. Pg 280

stated by Christoph Knill. The PAP was able to rule for such long period because the alternatives were weak. Using this type of control by the PAP, they were able to transform Singapore from a third world nation to an economic powerhouse. Political context is important because many policies (which are capitalist in nature) were shaped considering the survivalist aspirations after the separation from Malaysia in 1965.

Finally, if we consider the socio-cultural factor it could be seen that in a general view that a heterogeneous society results in more conflicts between groups that are vastly different. Singapore has been able to remain politically stable and live harmoniously despite its multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual composition, including Chinese (76.8%), Malays (13.9%), and Indians (7.9%) in terms of varying races. Elites of Singapore were able to understand the need of social cohesiveness and bonding of the different ethnicities so that social fabric, which is fragile, is kept intact. Thus, the elites of Singapore had multi-culturalism and bilingualism as part of their ideologies. They implemented the Ethnic Integration Policy in HDB so as setting quotas of different ethnicities in apartments. This was done to ensure that there was bonding of different ethnicities so that a repeat of the 1963 riots does not occur as racial riots have troubled the countries in many instances like the cases of East and West Pakistan prior to 1971 before West Pakistan became a separate state named Bangladesh in 1971 due to prevailing differences. PAP has also instilled bilingualism as compulsory so that English is the common binding tool for people so that various ethnicities could talk and mingle. Thus it could be seen that the socio-cultural factor has helped the elites in understanding the diversification that is present in the Singapore society thus ensuring the policies implemented do not break the social fabric of Singapore. The elites constantly reminded the people to study, eat, live and work together. Singapore government has ensured its continued use of multi-culturalism and practicing of meritocracy to show fairness so that there would be stability in the country which would show

43 Christoph Knill, Explaining cross-national variance in administrative reform: autonomous versus instrumental bureaucracies, (Journal of Public Policy, 1999), 113-139.
the rest of the world that Singapore is a safe country and this would result in increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that would boost economic growth and also employment.

In conclusion, it could be seen that the PAP has the final say in all the policies and even has an overview of all the institutions that are functioning in Singapore. This is because the functions of executives are to make policies, to show patronage towards the party, to use media as a form of political socialization and finally to have an oversight of the bureaucracy which have been done with the understanding of various factors as mentioned above. However, in the name of meritocracy, whereby selection of bureaucracy has to be done fairly is a serious question due to the co-optation of public servants into politics which would affect the neutrality of public administration. This is the case as 50% of government leaders have admin service background due to the compulsory National Service that males have to go through. I feel that it was the geographical factor that benefitted Singapore a lot and that made it prosperous and to a level that it is today. This should not be only credited to the executives but it has to be regarded as a gift of nature and executives only made use of what was presented to them. If not for the geographical factor understanding of the other factors would not have been of use as Singapore had no natural resources to have dependency on that.

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