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'All news is fiction.' Comment.

"No news is good news." Once an adage that was cited in times of distress and fear in order to reassure, this saying has taken on an ironic twist in recent years, when criticism of the news media for shoddy or sensationalised reporting has flown fast and furious all around the world. Indeed, there is now a heightened sense of scepticism amongst the many people for whom the pervasiveness and influence of the news have become apparent. It is then unsurprising that some would consider news in its entirety to be fiction, out of pragmatism and perhaps with a hint of cynicism. In my view, however, although news contains elements of fiction and artificiality, it is unfair to dismiss all news as fiction because news is equally about the search for truth and authenticity.

Fundamentally speaking, news is a constructed, artificially moulded version of the truth. Because the news cannot aim to represent the real world to the fullest extent without merely replicating every detail of it, including the mundane and trivial aspects which are of little concern to most people, it must involve a process of screening and selection to decide what stories to run. This selective process already presents an element of exclusion and omission that is parallel to the way fiction also presents a chosen set of voices and perspectives through its characters and even narration. In much the same way, news must also put a certain spin on issues to achieve coherence and, perhaps more importantly, engage its audience with issues that matter to them. This principle of news reporting is very much a problematic one, and it is the theme that lies at the heart of American television drama, *The Newsroom*. In the course of the series, characters are challenged by the necessity of exercising selectiveness in the news pieces that they can broadcast on the basis of reaching out to their audience and at the same time reflecting what is actually going on in the society around them. In fact, just as the fictitious drama cannot claim to represent the news industry in the real world, news itself also cannot claim to represent reality because it is a human construct, no matter how ideal its principles.

Moreover, it is unfortunate that, far from even being ideal, news often seeks to sensationalise, dramatise, and glamourise. Media outlets like Fox News in the United States have become notorious for their style of running "human interest" stories that are exaggerated and blown out of proportion for the sake of promoting viewership through shock value. Tabloids and the paparazzi are also part of an industry that seeks profit and attention by churning out uninspired news about the sordid or glamourous lives and lifestyles of celebrities, stretching the meaning of "the news" to the extreme. What is even worse is perhaps the news presenting distorted, even untrue, views of events and ideas. During its recent broadcast of the demonstrations at Jawaharlal Nehru University, an institute of higher education, an Indian news channel staged a panel discussion about the issues that sparked the protest. However, the discussion quickly gave way to unbridled chaos and heated argument, as the network host began shutting out opposing views of the guest speakers and persistently denounced the actions of the protesters while provocative and accusatory video and image inserts flashed on screen to further drive home the point. Far from being a report of the truth, then, it is clear that news can be scripted and manipulated even beyond the point of fiction, to the extent that it even has its own malicious agenda.

Still, however fictionalised some aspects of the news may appear, news in general remains at essence a reflection of the world we live in. We watch the news or pick up the morning paper to get a glimpse of the world outside and find out what is happening around us. For our practical purposes, the news is successful in fulfilling this aim by making available and accessible to us stories on politics, the economy, culture, society, sports, and entertainment. Because news stories do not exist in a vacuum, but rather against a backdrop of a multitude of news sources including the limitless capacities of the Internet, the interconnectedness of both news and people allows us to easily corroborate the facts and reconcile what we read or hear about with what we experience in the world, regardless of the distraction or misleading instances of news that exist. This interconnectedness is also what has enabled citizen journalism to proliferate in the past decade, offering us a real-time view on events and crises that occur around the world, from the Arab Spring uprisings to recent terrorist attacks from Belgium to Jakarta. As a

result, we see that not all news media aim to sensationalise or entertain, and often what we are presented with is a fairly neutral, useful view on reality.

Taking journalism back to its roots, it is important to recognise that news involves the seeking of important truths, and encapsulates a lot more than just the fictive or factitious elements involved in the crafting of a news story. Journalistic integrity is a pillar of news reporting and it is an ideal that is not only long-held but also valued more than ever in today's world. Back in *The Newsroom*, junior reporter Neal struggles with the burden of revealing ground-breaking news in the form of controversial whistleblowing with serious political implications. This is matched in real life by cases such as Edward Snowden whose risks and struggles taken to reveal certain truths reminds that there are bigger issues in the wide world and news is much more than an artificially crafted story.

To conclude, not all news is fiction. No matter how sensational or artificial some aspects of news may seem, it is ultimately a bastion of truth and fact, serving always to broaden our worldview.

Marker's comments:

A generally good piece that is beautifully written! Points are clear and succinct, and the argument coherently presented, resulting in a fluent essay. An insightful response that features mature discussion of the nature of news, supported by apt examples.

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2016 | GP Y5 CT | Paper 1   **Ng Ying Sandra | 17S02A**

Do you agree that it is inevitable for the elderly to be a burden to society?

In 2013, Japan's finance minister, Taro Aso, caused a huge public uproar when he pronounced that the elderly should "hurry up and die" because of the strain they are placing on the country's expenses. Reserving judgement on his statement, it is clear that with developed societies around the world ageing rapidly, governments and families are feeling the burden of caring for their elderly, for it is an additional responsibility, and a heavy one at that, amidst a multitude of other issues. It is pragmatic to recognise that the elderly can be a burden, but I contest the view that it is inevitable for them to be a burden to society.

The area in which the elderly are most visibly a "burden" is the government coffers. As most are retired and hence have no income, in many countries they depend on government pension systems for sustenance. In countries with well-established pension systems, many would not have done much in their younger days to plan for retirement, assuming that they can depend on the welfare state. Consequently, with the baby boomers approaching senior citizen status, welfare spending can only increase, and it is politically and morally impossible to cut this spending significantly. Additionally, with age comes many chronic health problems that require long-term medical treatment, as well as higher incidences of major illnesses like cancer or injuries that require expensive surgery. This incurs high expenditure on healthcare, which is heavily subsidised in most of the developed world. We must keep in mind that in order to sustain the continually increasing welfare and healthcare expenditure on the elderly, resources are inevitably being diverted from other areas, such as education, infrastructure and more, so this is an extra load, a burden on the budget. In addition, taxes have to be raised in order to fund the spending, and the burden falls on working adults who are also struggling with rising costs of living and possibly the pressures of raising their own families. In Japan, one-quarter of all households receive welfare benefits, and goods and services taxes were doubled to ten

percent to support the increased spending on their ageing population, highlighting the extent of the financial burden the elderly place on society. Over in the EU, pension systems have recently been going bust because the astronomical funds needed are too much for the budget to bear, and the rest of the population suffers from the resulting austerity measures. Clearly, the elderly can be a burden to government spending.

Furthermore, the elderly can be a burden to their families emotionally and financially. Those who are invalid require round-the-clock care, so unless they are placed in nursing homes or hospices, their families are the ones who bear the burden of feeding, bathing and tending to them. Many of their caregivers stop work to care for them, thus losing much-needed income. It may also be challenging for caregivers to return to the labour market later on after the passing of the elderly family member. Additionally, many caregivers experience depression, underscoring the burden placed on them, in terms of the emotional distress and opportunity cost. Aside from physical care which applies only to a segment of the elderly population, the majority of elderly need financial support, and expect their families to provide for it. For instance, in Singapore, the chief source of retirement income for the elderly is their children, who are already dealing with sky-high costs of living and possibly the costs of raising their own children. Thus, the need to also support their elderly parents financially is an additional burden that not only strains their bank books but also can be a source of added stress. As much as families might wish to approach caring for the elderly as an honourable responsibility, the unfortunate reality is that it frequently ends up being a significant burden.

However, there is a need to stress that the elderly are not inevitably a burden because appropriate government policies can reduce the burden they place on society. These policies can come in the form of subsidies, retraining and other legislation. Subsidies can be provided to families to relieve some of the financial burden of caring for the elderly. For example, the levy on foreign domestic workers in Singapore is subsidised for families who hire them to care for an elderly family member, reducing the financial pressure slightly. Employers can also benefit from subsidies to reduce the cost of hiring and retraining elderly workers who tend to incur higher costs of health benefits and need skills

upgrading to remain relevant to their jobs. Singapore's SkillsFuture fund subsidises this retraining, reducing the burden on employers. Raising the retirement age helps by keeping elderly economically active longer, so they still contribute to the economy and earn an income, thus their families and the welfare system need not bear the burden of providing for them financially. Indeed, the responsibilities that we view as "burdens" can often be mitigated by suitable government policies. Hence, the elderly are not inevitably a burden.

In fact, the elderly can still contribute to their families and society, thus in these aspects they are a help rather than a burden. Many do help out with household chores and caring for their grandchildren, relieving the pressure on their adult children who can now go to work with more peace of mind. The elderly also offer a wealth of experience and wisdom, which can benefit their families and workplaces. Many adults have cited that they still turn to their elderly parents for advice. The life experience that the elderly have can serve as valuable lessons for their grandchildren in the form of stories. Given the breadth and depth of their exposure, they can serve as advisors to younger colleagues. Aside from this, many elderly contribute to society by volunteering. Precisely because they are elderly and no longer working, they have time that can be invested in giving back to the community. In the US, retirees form the most likely group of volunteers; in Singapore, RSVP, a non-profit organisation that engages seniors in volunteerism, has only seen its numbers grow. In light of the wide-ranging contributions that the elderly offer to society, I do not agree that they are necessarily a burden.

Whether or not the elderly are "burdens" often boils down to our perceptions of them. Most societies, no matter how liberal, uphold to a certain degree the concept of filial piety and respect for the elderly. We can choose to view caring for them as a burden, or we can choose to regard it as a commitment and a way of showing appreciation for the contributions they made to society in their younger days. Although we acknowledge that the financial and emotional demands posed by the elderly are indeed very daunting and can feel burdensome, we should also find ways to mitigate these demands, and recognise the ways in which the elderly contribute to society. Japan will go from four to two working

adults supporting each elderly citizen in the next 50 years; Singapore will go from six to four working adults to each elderly by 2030. As societies become more developed, life expectancy increases, and ageing-related issues become more and more pressing, we should remain optimistic that the elderly are not inevitably a burden to society. It is up to us to determine whether the elderly are a burden to society.

Marker's comments:

Good command and error free. Effective introduction and paragraphing. Conclusion needs improvement. Rather functional writing.

2016 | GP Y5 CT | Paper 1   **Yeo Jiong Han | 17S06K**

'Females are no longer second class citizens.' Do you agree?

With the rise of female leaders like Hillary Clinton and Melissa Meyers in the highest echelons of political and corporate power, it would seem inconceivable that females are still treated as second class citizens today. Indeed, while great strides have been made in providing basic rights to women especially in developed countries, many cases of unequal treatment of females continue to exist in the workforce and society due to entrenched mindsets. As women have yet to attain full equality in rights and opportunities, it would be more accurate to say that they remain second class citizens today.

Critics would be inclined to cite the achievements of women in scaling the corporate ladder and attaining top leadership positions in politics as evidence that females are no longer second class citizens. The rise of female leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi as the State Counsellor of Myanmar and Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg does seem to suggest that the glass ceiling has been broken, and that females at last wield real influence and control as key decision makers. It is argued that females are no longer second class citizens because they have equal opportunities to become leaders. In fact, most women have gained many other entitlements through legislation, whether it is the right to an education, the right to vote or the right to choose their marriage partner. In these aspects, at least, the provision of equal rights to women and the vastly improved status of females in society could be construed to support the claim that females are no longer second class citizens.

Sadly, however, the absolute nature of the claim is not backed up by actual evidence. Rampant discrimination towards women continues to exist, even if their rights are enshrined in the constitution. One area in which women are still persistently treated as second class citizens would be the workforce. Women are still paid less compared to men for similar work, suggesting that women are not being respected as equals or being fairly assessed for their work. Even female celebrities, who are seen to have achieved a degree of success by conventional standards, are not spared. Recently, Jennifer Lawrence revealed that her paycheck for filming the movie *American Hustler* was substantially lower than that of her male co-stars, despite her more prolific status as a Hollywood A-lister and Oscar award winner. What happened to Lawrence shows that females, no matter how powerful and influential they seem to be, remain

subject to the tyranny of a male-dominated labour market that favours males over females. This bias against females certainly confirms that they are being regarded and treated as second class citizens. Women also tend to be judged more harshly for speaking up assertively at work, with co-workers describing them as "bossy" even though it is considered normal for a man to do the same thing. This shows how traditional gender stereotypes severely circumscribe how women can behave in the workplace, preventing them from pushing for their ideas to be heard. This creates an environment where it is harder for women employees to thrive, and where different standards apply for both genders, which proves that females remain second class citizens.

In society, women are also widely discriminated against in many ways, ranging from subtle jibes to crude sexist jokes. In fact, 60 percent of young women in Britain have experienced some form of sexist behaviour. The prevalence of this practice and its continued existence suggest that a significant proportion of males continue to view women in a very different way that justifies their mistreatment. A possible reason could be that the response to such behaviour has been far from adequate. A few years ago, when National Football League player Ray Rice was accused of domestic violence, the initial punishment meted out was to suspend him for two games. Various former coaches and athletes also weighed in, defending Rice and playing down the matter. The light punishment Rice received points to a clear disregard for the well-being of female victims, deemed less important compared to the need to protect the star players. It is difficult to argue that women are no longer second class citizens when their rights seem to matter less when compared to those of men, and can be trampled on with impunity. The unequal status of women in society is also manifested in how women are expected to juggle household chores with work, and to take care of their children in addition to having a successful career. While the fact that more females moving into the workforce can be seen as a sign of female empowerment, it is all but negated by the entrenched stereotypes about household responsibilities of women.

Furthermore, the ill-treatment of women remains extremely prevalent in many patriarchal societies. Atrocities are often committed against women, with little legal recourse available for the victims. The persecution of females is evinced in the rooted traditions of honour killings in Pakistan, where females are murdered in broad daylight for bringing shame to their families, for offences such as cohabiting with a male. Female genital mutilation in many countries remains common as well, despite being subjected to international condemnation. Such abusive and demeaning behaviour towards females is legitimised in the deeply patriarchal culture, which emphasises the rights of males over females. As women tend to be poorly educated, they are usually unaware of their rights and financially dependent on men, making them powerless to

resist or stop these practices. The situation is worse in countries like Saudi Arabia, where discrimination against women is firmly entrenched in the law – there, females are not allowed to drive by themselves and have to accompanied everywhere by a male guardian. In some Middle Eastern countries, the testimony of a woman in court only counts for half of that of a man. In such countries, widespread institutionalised discrimination against women has become an indubitable way of life, so it would be ludicrous to even suggest that females are no longer second class citizens.

In conclusion, progress has indeed been made in promoting the rights of females, but it would be mere fantasy to suggest that women are no longer second class citizens today. In many developing countries, the rights of women are actively suppressed as they are not even granted the same liberties as men by law. Women elsewhere, especially in developed, Western countries, may seem free to choose the live that they want to lead. Yet they continue to face many hurdles to leading a highly fulfilling work and social life, simply because of the gender they belong to. It is imperative that we do more for gender equality if we are to unleash the potential of half the human population, and usher in a more prosperous, equal and inclusive society.

Marker's comments:
Good control of complex sentences and clean script with few errors. Some hints of personal voice. Sound discussion of gender discrimination.

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2016 | GP Y5 CT | Paper 1　　　　　　　　　　　**Lucas Yeo (Yang Yuxu) | 17S03N**

'Military action is the most effective way to end terrorism.' Discuss.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, US President Barack Obama gave a valiant defence of his country's foreign policy in the Middle East. He argued that continued military intervention in the Middle East was necessary to keep the Islamic extremists and radicals in check. However, what he failed to mention was the fact that the ongoing political crisis in the Middle East was a result of disastrous US foreign policy missteps in the 1990s in adopting the approach of military action to combat terrorism in the first place. Although military action may appear to be a direct solution to the problem of terrorism, it is merely a myopic approach guaranteed to invite retaliation by the terrorists, thus diminishing its appeal as an effective counter-terrorism measure. Instead, I argue that a conciliatory approach emphasising peaceful negotiation is the way to go in ending terrorism in today's world.

In his 1992 seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington hypothesised that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. He argued that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War paved the way for Islam to become the new major ethno-cultural counter to Western liberal democracy. From the very beginning, conservative Islamic worldviews, such as the preference for and the adoption of a patriarchal society, were fundamentally incompatible with Western ideals. As rightly predicted by Huntington, this dichotomy of widely differing worldviews eventually led to major conflict. Terrorism, the use of force and aggression against innocent civilians with the aim to instil fear in the general populace, has increasingly become the preferred outlet for radical Islamists to vent their frustrations at what they perceive to be increasing dominance and oppression by the West. In retaliation, the West has adopted the approach of military action, dispatching troops after troops of soldiers to conflict regions in the Middle East, with the purported aim of providing assistance to local leaders in expelling these Islamic insurgents out of their countries. On paper, the multitude of Western victories against the local insurgents may have appeared to justify US intervention in the Middle East, but the

indiscriminate use of force to resolve conflict will inevitably have unintended consequences.

Proponents of military action have defended it as the most direct solution to terrorism. They claim that other means of resolving the tensions precipitating the rise of terrorism, such as reconciliation, have no immediate tangible benefit in the short-term, whereas military intervention has the immediate benefit of weakening the ability of the terrorists to launch terrorist attacks. They point to the killing of Osama bin Laden, the Emir (religious leader) of the Afghanistan terrorist group Al-Qaeda, as the key factor in the subsequent weakening of this terrorist organisation. This is evidenced by its failure to launch a terrorist attack for months after bin Laden's death. Many also cite the "success" of the 2003 invasion of Iraq (never mind the US' true intent of seizing Iraq's oil reserves). The toppling and subsequent execution of Iraq's military dictator Saddam Hussein was initially hailed as the perfect solution to put to an end the political turmoil plaguing the Middle East. Upon announcing the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan soil, the US purported that its military presence in the Middle East had been a boon to the security of those countries, with the US troops imparting knowledge, skills and expertise regarding counter-terrorism measures to their Middle Eastern counterparts. This reflects that military action remains the most direct solution to end terrorism.

In addition, military action can also be said to have a deterrent effect on terrorism. Increased frequency of air strikes against the terrorist organisation Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been cited as the key factor behind ISIS' losing battle against the local government forces of Syrian President al-Assad. Military action has undoubtedly increased the risk of capture or death of Islamic extremists by Western forces, and the fear of these counter-terrorism measures may yet discourage these radicals from launching terrorist attacks. Hence, the deterrent effect of military action may also justify its adoption as a feasible counter-terrorism measure.

However, I argue that indiscriminate military action against insurgents is a myopic approach to solving the complex problem of terrorism. Indeed, military action seems to serve only as a short-term solution to terrorism, with no significant long-term impact. Despite the initial apparent weakening of Al-Qaeda after the death of bin Laden, its leadership hierarchy has since been restructured. Its resurgence has been evidenced by a new wave of terrorist attacks, such as the mass shooting in a luxury hotel in Burkina Faso in Africa, which it has claimed responsibility for. It can also be argued that repeated air

strikes by the Global Coalition led by US President Barack Obama have not significantly weakened ISIS. This may be attributed to the fluid nature of terrorist organisations' leadership hierarchy in which new leaders rise readily to replace those killed in action. For example, ISIS Emir Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi had been deployed in a wide and diverse range of positions at various terrorist organisations. As Al-Qaeda suffered numerous losses of its key leaders during the War on Terror, Al-Baghdadi rose steadily in the ranks to become the caliph of ISIS after pledging his allegiance to Al-Qaeda from 2006 to 2013. Thus, the emirs of terrorist organisations are mere figureheads who are definitely dispensable and readily replaceable, rendering military action against these figureheads of terrorism ineffective.

It is perhaps ironic that the West's preferred strategy of countering terrorism is by unleashing more violence of its own, such as the use of air strikes in Syria, killing thousands of civilians in the process. This "eye-for-an-eye" approach and the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians as "collateral damage" have led to a backlash against the West by the citizens of the Middle East. In widely-circulated international news footage, Syrian citizens called for American troops to leave their country, asserting that US presence in an already politically unstable situation had merely added fuel to fire. Moreover, far from being a deterrent effect, military action has, on the contrary, been a source of inspiration and motivation for many more to join terrorism. Hugely successful ISIS recruitment videos capitalise on the fact that the US has been using violence against Muslims to justify their acts of terrorism. Many Islamic clerics cite military action by the West as a "call to action" for "Muslim brothers the world over to rise up against the decadent West". Numerous terrorist attacks have been launched by ISIS in retaliation against Western air strikes. Furthermore, the bombing of Brussels Airport by ISIS was cited as an act of revenge after the ISIS-affiliated Salah Abdeslam was captured in Brussels. Salah's own act of terrorism, where he masterminded the shooting of the editorial staff of French satirical comic magazine Charlie Hebdo, also had ramifications the world over. These acts of terrorism by Islamic extremists, counter-terrorism measures by the West and more acts of terrorism in retaliation by the extremists form an unending cycle of violence. As brilliantly outlined by the renowned journalist, author and speaker Malcolm Gladwell in his best-selling book *What the Dog Saw*, these cycles of violence are propagated by irrational thought processes of both opposing parties involved and will never cease unless there are genuine efforts of reconciliation by both sides. Therefore, the West's approach in employing military action to counter terrorism only invites retaliation and more acts of terrorism, rendering it an ineffective solution to counter terrorism.

In order to solve the problem of terrorism at its roots, a conciliatory approach is necessary. Since terrorism has been proven to be precipitated by the ossification of incompatible worldviews – namely, Islamic beliefs and Western liberal democracy – genuine efforts must be made at reconciliation in order to bridge these ethno-cultural differences. This will go some way towards dispelling the sense of oppression and marginalisation which radicalises many otherwise peaceful, moderate Muslims to seek violence in order to make their frustrations known. The world has since witnessed successful examples of conciliatory diplomacy. After the initial acts of violence committed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against the ruling government, including the brutal execution of Lord Louis Mountbatten in 1979, the subsequent willingness of the government to seek peace talks with the rebel leaders has led to a lasting, albeit fractious, peace in Northern Ireland. In addition, the push for the independence of Catalonia from Spain has been largely peaceful. This has raised hopes for meaningful dialogue and negotiation between the Catalans and Spain's central government.

In conclusion, the essentially violent nature of military action renders it a myopic approach against terrorism, with its only guaranteed impact being to invite retaliation and beget more violence. In this light, a far more effective solution would be the adoption of a conciliatory approach and genuine openness and willingness for peaceful negotiation. The West may perhaps draw inspiration from the successes in Ireland and Spain in adopting a similar approach towards the East. This will certainly go some way in bridging the ethno-cultural divide between the West and the East, providing a glimmer of hope for the eventual resolution of the multi-faceted problem of terrorism.

Marker's comments:

Generally, relatively well-written piece that sufficiently discussed the effectiveness of military action. Apt examples used to support points with clear explanations. Quite a pity, though, that you did not manage to discuss the other underlying issues with terrorism: poverty, unemployment, etc. Consider other perspectives of effectiveness as well. Good linguistic ability. Few errors. Complex sentence structure present, used successfully.

'Military action is the most effective way to end terrorism.' Discuss.

What would you do if you had two-and-a-half million dollars? For the leaders of many NATO countries, the answer now could be: execute yet another air strike in Syria, against the Islamic State. To be sure, the ideology of terrorism, be it for political, social or religious reasons, has to be eliminated for good. The use of force has been employed in the past to "end terrorism", most notably against Islamist terrorism in the Middle East, but has thus far failed to prevent the rise of ISIS and the continued existence of Al-Qaeda. Thus, although military force can seem like the most direct way to accomplish some objectives in the war against terrorism, its huge costs, short-termism, and potential to backfire renders it less than effective.

It is, first, necessary to recognise the merits of military action, which has been favoured by hawkish politicians and lauded by some portions of the populace for its directness, swiftness and effectiveness in executing the most important strategic objectives of the war. These objectives include the execution of the leaders or ideological figureheads of terrorist groups, or the destruction of the groups' sources of income. For example, the Taliban group in Afghanistan has had to undergo a search for a new leader for the second time in 2016 because both its long-time figurehead, Mullah Omar, and his short-lived successor, have been taken out in military actions. Similarly, Osama bin Laden, head of the Al-Qaeda network, was killed by US forces. These high-profile victories against terrorist groups harm their prestige, and dissipate their shroud of invincibility, causing less and less young, radicalised individuals to join their ranks. The death of a leader also damages the morale of existing terrorists in the group, weakens its stature, and eventually sparks enough internal strife and weaknesses to undermine their ability to carry out terrorist operations. Another example would be the bombing of ISIS oil fields, which severely undercut their source of income, in the hope of eventually wearing them out. Hence, the effects of military action can be top-down, by eliminating its leaders, or bottom-up, by eliminating its resources.

These military measures, however, are no long term solutions, and have difficulty putting a halt to terrorism for good. Killing the leaders of terrorist groups may sound like a good idea, but, in truth, the practical effects of this are very small. This is because terrorist groups are usually motivated by a higher purpose, such as "jihad" or freedom from subjugation, and are not simply built around a single figurehead. In other words, it is ideology and not personal loyalty that fuels most terrorist activities. A prime example of the ineffectiveness of executing leaders is the curious case of the aforementioned Mullah Omar, former head of the Taliban. Although he was on the US's most wanted list for a long time even after the war in Afghanistan, the outside world was unaware that that he had in fact been dead for more than seven years. The Taliban simply did not disclose news of his death, keeping to business as usual. Similarly, after the death of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri stepped right into his shoes without a fuss. Thus, it is clear that terrorist groups often have the capacity to continue operations even after military action has achieved its prime objectives. The key here is that military action does little to the hearts and minds of the terrorists, who would be just as bent on their original goals. Basque and Irish nationalism, for example, resulted in bloody wars in the latter half of the last century, but long-term peace did not come through these wars, but rather through diplomatic settlements. Thus, long-term, permanent victories over terrorism can only be accomplished through the undermining of their ideology, not simply the destruction of physical targets.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that many terrorist operations are covert in preparation and take place away from obvious battlegrounds. This is especially true for two types of terrorism: first, lone-wolf operations in developed countries, and second, decentralised, disorganised terrorist operations. In these cases, military action is simply not a viable option. A terrorist operation of the first type happened in Sydney, when a lone-wolf gunman laid siege on a downtown coffeehouse, taking dozens of hostages. Two deaths eventually resulted, and the gunman was shot by military police, but the point here is that there is simply no way for the military to pre-empt or even foresee such operations. Better intelligence or surveillance might help, but military measures can only contain the damage to the best of their abilities. The violence perpetrated by monk Wirathu in Burma falls into the second category. He openly urged Burmese Buddhists to attack the Muslim minority in his country, whilst perpetrating a smear campaign against Muslims. This resulted in random violence against Muslims on some Burmese streets, with some Muslim

homes being burnt. In this case, the military has no place in the solution of this issue, which is caused by deep-rooted socio-cultural and religious tensions. Summing up the lessons from these cases, it can be said that the covert and decentralised strains of terrorism render military action powerless, necessitating social and political resolutions.

The huge economic costs of military intervention also need to be considered. In the face of recent economic downturns in many developed countries, some, including UK opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, have been clamouring for scaled-back military expenditure as they channel money away from social spending that benefits the people. Various cuts to public school funding, especially in Britain and America, have called into question whether two-million dollar air strikes are really the most cost-effective way to spend government budget. Due to the high costs of military action, domestic opposition can easily cause efforts to scale back. Hence, it is not the most sustainable measure to fight the long war against terrorism.

The most poignant opposition to military action is that is easy fodder for backlash from terrorist groups. One can look at history to see that it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that brought into existence many jihadist groups like the Taliban, and it was the US interventions in Iraq that fuelled opprobrium from the Arab world, providing material for Al-Qaeda's rhetoric against American imperialism as justification to its violence. Similarly, the Waco Siege had the direct consequence of the Oklahoma Bombing, which killed dozens. Its perpetrator Timothy McVeigh claimed that news of the Waco Siege, which involved US forces alongside state law enforcement, infuriated him, and prompted his bombing raid. These examples all show the potential for military actions to backfire, through the anger and opprobrium it unleashed.

To conclude, the negatives of military action outweigh its potential benefits, and a more balanced, civil approach, such as policymaking, should be sought first before using force.

Marker's comments:

On the whole, very well-informed. Written with a sense of conviction and engagement. Confident evaluative comments which could have been a little better supported at times.

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2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 1   **Qian Tingchen | 16S06N**

'We care for the developed world at the expense of the developing world.' Discuss.

Developed countries have usually had an advantage over developing countries in terms of financial might, competent governments, stronger institutions, and a louder voice on international platforms. It is no wonder that people living in developed countries can continue to enjoy a much higher standard of living and quality of life than those in developing countries. While Donald Trump, the presumed Republican nominee in the Presidential elections in the United States, has a rather extreme and America-centred foreign policy called "America First", most developed countries are more moderate and contribute to the progress of the developing world too. However, as self-interest is still the number one priority of any nation, such contributions may be flawed or ineffective. As a result, the developing world is still struggling with exploitation and poor management while the developed countries benefit from these struggles.

This is not to say that absolutely no help has been given to developing countries. In fact, international organisations such as the United Nations have contributed billions of dollars of aid to improving the lives in these countries. In terms of the provision of basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, electricity and healthcare, the developing countries have improved by leaps and bounds. Millions now have access to clean, safe and reliable drinking water, while infant mortality rate has fallen in almost every country. Help and funding from non-profit organisations and governments of developed countries have improved education, leading to better family planning and increased opportunities for the impoverished. Developed countries have the financial means to do so without impacting their own citizens. There are also organisations that provide micro loans to women for them to start their own small businesses to make a living. Other than helping via such social programmes, developed countries also pour in billions in the form of foreign direct investment in order to help developing countries build up industries and establish a growing economy. In this way, the developing world has still managed to benefit even as developed countries increase their wealth.

However, most developed countries have their own interests at heart and are funding developing countries not for altruistic reasons. Nevertheless, some of their goals, such as opening up new markets to export their goods and services, can benefit developing countries as well. Multinational companies such as Coca-Cola are eager to enter developing countries because rising wealth in those countries has led to enormous demand for their goods. Coca-Cola is ubiquitous and present in even the most remote regions of the world. Everyone wants to buy a bottle of the black fizzy liquid, thanks to Coca-Cola's aggressive advertising campaigns. People living in developing countries get to enjoy a wider variety of goods and a taste of Western life, while multinational companies make more profits and governments collect more taxes. This is good news to developing and developed countries alike.

Unfortunately, this symbiotic relationship does not hold in other areas, such as the developed countries' reliance on labour and resources from less developed countries. Exploitation is rampant today despite increased frequency of inspections by developed countries. Today, slavery appears to be non-existent due to more stringent checks and a worldwide acknowledgement of the relevant human rights. But that is not the case. Slavery is hidden from the public eye, notably in the seafood industry and in the sex industry, where human trafficking is still a major issue. Some of the seafood from Thailand is processed by slaves, who do not get paid for their work, and are abused and unable to escape. Recent revelations about this dark side of the seafood industry have managed to free many slaves from a lifetime of hard labour, but other forms of human exploitation have continued. Low wages, poor and dangerous working conditions are still prevalent in the developing world. The governments either do not care or cannot afford to improve the lives of their people in fear that MNCs move their productions elsewhere. Meanwhile, in developed countries, consumerism is still on the rise even as people demand cheaper goods, leading to companies moving out of a developing country once its labour costs rise and inspections become more stringent. Equally little has been done to improve the worsening environmental conditions and pollutions as natural resources are stripped from the earth and factories and coal plants continue spewing out filthy air. Countries with an abundance of natural resources such as oil, precious minerals and timber enjoy rapid economic growth initially. However, without sustainability measures and proper planning, the growth is unlikely to continue. An example is Nauru, a small South Pacific island-

nation that relied on earnings from phosphate deposits found in bird droppings. However, it never diversified its economy and its people have suffered as a result. Hence, the developing world has paid a big price for helping developed countries grow further.

In terms of research and development, most of the benefits do not impact developing countries at all. This is because only developed countries can afford to fund R&D, such as treatments and cures for lifestyle diseases such as diabetes. Much of the innovation in the world today, such as that from Silicon Valley, does not reach developing nations. Millions still die from preventable diseases and neglected tropical diseases such as malaria and polio, which have been eliminated from most developed countries by widely available cures and vaccines, and proper sanitation and hygiene. Clearly, funding from R&D goes into improving the lives in developed countries more so than developing ones.

However, developing countries, with their increasing affluence, are partly to blame for the phenomenon of exploitation. The rising middle class in these countries demand electricity, better quality goods and food, which contribute to the environmental problems faced by their poorer countrymen.

In conclusion, we do, for the most part, care for the developed world at the expense of the developing world. While some developing nations are on a path to future development, many remain trapped in the backwaters. We should realise that there can be potential long term benefits to both sides if we care for both worlds, such as increased trade without exploitation. Unfortunately, nations are for the most part self-centred and short sighted, hence caring for everyone is a near impossible task.

Marker's comments:

This is a balanced discussion with appropriate illustrations. The penultimate paragraph, though well intentioned, is far too brief. Very clear introduction, with few errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 1   **Nicole Neo Wei Di | 16A01C**

How far do you agree that government efforts in combatting terrorism are doing more harm than good?

In the wake of the November 13 bomb attacks in Paris orchestrated by Syrian militants under the banner of the Islamic State (IS), countries all over the world rushed to implement measures to step up their fight against terrorism to eliminate this security threat and protect their citizens from further attacks. France passed a bill that would give its security branch extensive power over surveillance mechanisms to detect potential attacks and terrorists, while the United Kingdom, and later Russia, announced their countries' decision to step up attacks against IS targets. Despite these efforts, the terrorism threat continues to loom large while the situation in the Middle East has only become more chaotic, raising the view that government efforts to combat terrorism have done more harm than good. While greater international cooperation has increased the ability of governments to prevent further terrorist attacks, most forms of government action have instead exacerbated the root causes of terrorism, prolonged the suffering of those displaced by terrorist groups, and endangered the security of the very people these governments wish to protect.

Optimists would argue that increased interstate cooperation in the field of information and intelligence sharing has increased the international community's ability to identify terrorists and prevent potential attacks that are mostly conducted across borders. As most terrorist attacks, especially those on the developed world, are currently conducted by foreign militants, states are increasingly seeking cooperation with other states to share information on the location, travelling patterns and identities of these terrorists to allow for preventive measures to be taken, such as banning the suspected individual from entering the state. Greater cooperation between intelligence agencies of respective states has also increased the effectiveness of cross-border military operations to arrest terror suspects. Indonesia, a hotbed for terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), has

cooperated with Singapore, Australia and Malaysia to help reduce the possibility of terrorist attacks carried out in these neighbouring countries by Indonesia-based terrorists. A key example would be the arrest of Mas Selamat, a prominent JI terrorist cell leader who had escaped from a prison in Singapore but was eventually successfully nabbed by Malaysian authorities. In fact, the reduced incidence of terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia compared to other regions with equally potent threats, such as in Africa and the Middle East, clearly reflects how increased information sharing between states in combatting terrorism has led to more good by increasing regional stability.

However, information sharing is but one aspect of state efforts to combat terrorism; most efforts targeted at eliminating the threat of terrorism have not only failed to do so by not addressing the root causes of terrorism, they have caused more harm to their own citizens and others directly affected by terrorism by worsening the problem and prolonging the chaos it brings. States' direct military action against terror groups, which more often than not eliminates the perpetrators of terrorism rather than the factors that facilitate their rise, has only intensified conflict in regions where terrorists are located, creating more suffering for the people in those regions. Since the late 1990s, individual states such as the United States, and international organisations such as the United Nations, have mounted military operations to eliminate individual terror groups and to decimate their power by seizing their bases. However, such military interventions are often concluded without the restoring of peace and law and order to the country and without the building of effective political systems that would prevent such countries from descending into chaos and into the hands of terrorists. For instance, even when terrorists such as Al Qaeda were chased out of the Middle East by states' armies, the ensuing power vacuum only fuelled the emergence of larger, more threatening terrorist groups like IS, which has seized swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria and has led to the displacement of more than 500,000 Syrians who have fled the country in search of refuge from the violence in the region. With existing military action failing to address the root cause of terrorism, which is the failure of secular governments to provide good governance, further military intervention only prolongs the four-decade long violence plaguing such regions, doing more harm to the security of the region and its citizens in the long run.

Additionally, the use of force by governments as a form of retaliation against terrorism has only fuelled terrorists' antagonism towards such governments, making them more likely targets of attacks, hence further endangering the lives of the citizens of such governments. Today, most terrorism stems from religious fundamentalism, which seeks to define and shape a society according to religious values and practices. Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, influences its followers to view the Western world as a religious enemy because of its promotion of secularism and its Christian majority, factors which make the West's existence intolerable to these fundamentalists. Terrorists acting in accordance with such thinking target the West in their attacks, and when the Western world retaliates violently against these terrorists, the perception of the West as a hostile enemy and an aggressor against the Islamic world is further entrenched. For example, after the US government increased its efforts to clamp down on terrorist group Hamas in Palestine, related groups, further incited to attack Americans, bombed American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. Similarly, the Paris bombings in November 2015 were carried out after President Hollande announced his country's participation in further air strikes against IS. Hence, even when governments crack down on terrorists, their actions inevitably lead to the hardening of attitudes of terrorists, ultimately making their societies more vulnerable to attacks and inviting more harm to be wrought onto their own citizens.

Moreover, as governments seek to identify and prevent the occurrence of terrorist attacks within their borders by increasing the surveillance of their citizens, they inevitably intrude on their privacy, violating their fundamental human rights and putting them in more insecurity. Following the September 11 attacks in 2001, the US government passed the Patriot Act that was meant to help the state identify potential suspects through extensive surveillance of its citizens' actions. However, as whistle-blower Edward Snowden later revealed, the National Security Agency instead made use of these powers to indiscriminately monitor all its citizens through their private correspondence via email and social media for the past decade, rather than targeting terror suspects alone. Similarly, in France, the government passed the "Law on Information" in early 2016 which gave the government extensive rights to monitor its citizens' actions to identify those at risk of organising terrorist attacks. However, many French people view this move as a violation

of their right to privacy as guaranteed under the Declaration of the Rights of Man which forms the basis of France's constitution. This consternation was aptly expressed by the French publication *Libération,* which reported, "If this law was only meant to protect French citizens from potential terrorist threats to their security, is it thus necessary to consider all French citizens as suspects?" From the actions of both governments, it is evident that while the State may have had noble intentions of bringing more good to their citizens by using surveillance to protect them from terror attacks, their means of indiscriminate monitoring to do so has only harmed their citizens further.

In conclusion, while government efforts do intend to bring more good to their people and the international community by seeking to eliminate terrorism, the implementation of such efforts has instead created more instability in the world, inevitably bringing more harm to the people the governments had intended to protect. As these governments learn from past failures, they have shown increasing awareness of the potential destructiveness of their efforts, gradually turning to more effective and long-term approaches of strengthening efforts to establish democratic institutions and a peace process in vulnerable regions, and promoting moderate ideas to stem radicalisation in their home countries to address the root causes of terrorism.

Marker's comments:

Excellent response, showing good knowledge and sustained focus on answering the question (though paragraph 2 and the second half of paragraph 4 could be tightened in the latter aspect). Language is also excellent, with just minor slips.

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2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 1   **Kalvinder Kaur D/O Ranjit S | 16S07B**

**'In the world today, a nation's economic success is nothing more than a case of luck.'
Is this a fair assessment?**

Despite the rapid globalisation of today's world, which ideally should have brought about even growth worldwide, many are not surprised that the gap between the richer and poorer countries is, in fact, widening. Comparing nations like Saudi Arabia, Brunei and China to other nations like Syria or Greece, one may believe that a nation's economic success, characterised by high growth rates which translate into greater prosperity, can be nothing more than a case of luck. While luck is undeniably a contributor to economic success, it is not the sole reason for economic success, as factors like good governance, a suitable international climate and national work culture play even greater roles in bringing about this success.

Some may argue that the economic success of nations is purely due to their luck in terms of resource endowment, which allows these nations an advantage over others who have fewer resources. The resource endowment of a nation is in no way controllable or intentional, and must be attributed to luck. These resources can then be exploited to generate growth, either through exports of these primary resources, or by using them to spur growth in other sectors, like manufacturing. These resources thus give the nation a competitive edge over its rivals, contributing to its economic success. For example, countries like Brunei and Saudi Arabia have been abundantly endowed with oil resources through no action of their own or anyone else. They have been able to generate spectacular growth through the export of oil, with oil revenue comprising a significant proportion of their Gross Domestic Product. Justifiably, the luck of these nations in terms of their resource endowment is considered by some as the main reason for their economic success.

Yet, it must be noted that many other nations with similar resource endowments have not been able to exploit these resources to generate growth. Countries like Syria and Iraq are

also rich in oil resources, but have been unable to tap on these resources to bring about economic success. So while luck provides the opportunity for a nation to be successful, other factors that are intentional and calculated by countries are essential in taking advantage of the opportunities that luck provides.

In circumstances where a nation's luck has allowed it to have a vast spread of opportunity for success, good governance is crucial in ensuring that these opportunities are made use of. Just as one can put food on a man's plate but cannot force him to eat it, luck can provide resources to a nation, but whether these resources are used productively to generate economic growth is entirely in the hands of the government. Clearly, a stable, effective, and knowledgeable government is required in order to manage these resources appropriately. The presence of a stable and knowledgeable government in Saudi Arabia and Brunei explains why the oil resources have been able to bring about growth that has been sustained, while the lack of stable government in Iraq and Syria explains why such growth has not been achieved. Hence, good governance is essential in taking advantage of the opportunities provided by luck.

In addition, even when luck has instead deprived the nation of resources, good governance is still crucial in that economic success can be brought about if the government is able to manage the economy well. When countries lack natural resources, one door to economic success is closed on them. It is then the duty of an effective government to find, or even create, other paths to success, through developing human resources or encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), for example. Singapore is a commonly illustrated example of this, where the lack of natural resources and limited domestic market hindered growth in the beginning. The government was, however, effective enough to overcome the odds through prudent and careful planning and policies, and brought about economic success in a mere 30 years. Thus, even when luck does not side a nation, a good government can still bring about economic success.

Furthermore, luck is hardly a determinant of economic success given the highly globalised world today, because a country's individual luck is largely insignificant in comparison to the role of the international political and economic climate. Whether or not a country is

economically successful no longer depends on the opportunities that luck has given it, but on the opportunities provided by the international community. Regardless of whether a nation is heavily endowed with resources or not, it can attain economic success if it is able to tap on resources from elsewhere in the world, be it natural resources from other countries, economic support, or world markets to export to. Hence, given the increased mobility of resources and opportunity, a nation's luck does not determine its success. For example, a well-endowed country like China, with vast agricultural resources, suffered a famine in the 1960s, but has become an economic giant upon its inclusion, post-1976, into the global trading community which allowed it to capitalise on export-driven growth. Singapore, with its lack of economic luck, was able to tap on FDI to spur growth. It is evident that the international climate is much more significant than luck in allowing a nation's economic success.

Finally, luck does not determine a nation's local working culture, which in turn determines whether the country's luck in resource endowment is maximised, or if its lack of good luck is mitigated. A nation's working culture is the result of a number of internal factors, both historical and current. Complacent or driven, relaxed or industrious – these work attitudes present in national communities are not a result of luck but of calculated human action. These attitudes, in combination with governance and the international climate, directly determine whether a country is economically successful by impacting the way and pace that growth in the economy occurs. The stereotypical Greek, often described as complacent and laid-back, would have impacted the lack of economic growth in Greece and contributed to sending it to the economic gallows, while the stereotypical Asian, hardworking and often highly pressured, would have contributed to the rise of numerous Asian economies. Therefore, luck is a much more limited determinant of economic success than local work culture.

Overall, it is undeniably unfair to argue that a nation's economic success is nothing more than a case of luck, because many calculated and intentional factors have been a main driver of growth, while luck, particularly in resource endowment, has merely been a bonus. Good governance, together with a cooperative international climate and efficient work

culture allow nations to be economically successful, with or without luck. The confluence of these factors has meant that some nations have rapidly developed economically while many others have been left behind, widening global income gaps and, in particular, the divide between more economically developed countries (MEDCs) and less economically developed countries (LEDCs). Considering this huge divide, while the individual factors that brought about economic success were clearly not due to luck alone, the fact that all these factors were able to confluence in some countries and not others may be sheer luck.

Marker's comments:

Very much on target, with sustained and meaningful focus on the question, plus excellent concessions/counter-arguments/balance.

To what extent do we need religion when science can answer most of our questions?

The turn of the 19th century saw an unprecedented paradigm shift, which was corollary to the rejection of the ecclesiastical certitudes and religious practices of the church, in favour of the Newtonian scientific approach. Set in motion by Nicholas Copernicus' assertion of the heliocentric model of the universe, which was completely anathema to the conservative teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the medieval worldview was completely shaken and the fallibility of religion became glaringly apparent. Since the Scientific Revolution, mankind has made leaps and bounds in scientific progress, with each new generation of scientists striving to emulate the successes of their predecessors; religion, on the other hand, has more often than not, taken a backseat. Given that science is often given the imprimatur of being factual, objective and a reliable means of understanding the natural phenomena of the world around us, whereas religion seems to be a manmade construct of arbitrary rituals and observances which cannot answer most of our questions of the observable universe the way that science does, it would follow that religion is redundant and we can dispose of it. However, religion cannot be done away with as it still plays a function in our lives distinct from what science can offer. So while science may be able to answer most of our questions, there are many issues that fall beyond the scientific realm which religion can better answer.

Those who are of the opinion that religion is no longer needed since science can answer most of our questions view the two fields of human cognizance as entirely dichotomous. Science is known for its extensive research, precise observations, tireless documentation and meticulous experimentation, which confer on science its hallmarks of accuracy and precision in explaining the physical world around us and, by extension, provide us with answers on the questions we have of how to solve certain problems. Religion would be the polar opposite, subsisting on faith in some unobservable God (or Gods, in certain religions), seemingly unable to offer any concrete evidence or proof to answer our

questions in the way science does. In extreme cases, it would seem that religion only serves to hinder scientific advancement as religious considerations tend to complicate affairs and pose an obstacle to the inquiry and research of scientists. This was the case in early English civilisation, where society, then largely religious in its practices, saw the body as a temple of God and opposed strongly to the study of the human anatomy, leaving scientists to go to drastic measures of illegally digging up human cadavers from graves so as to have specimens to examine. Owing to the works of those scientists, we are now able to answer many questions we have regarding the workings of the human body, whereas previously these scientists were consigned to the labels of insanity and irrationality for challenging religious teachings. In present day, it would seem that religion may still pose an impediment to scientific inquiry, specifically in controversial topics like stem cell research, where scientists can use these models to better understand disease development and cell growth, offering much promise to not only answer our questions on the origin of life but also questions about how to treat genetic and neurodegenerative diseases. Staunch religious groups, however, have been actively objecting developments in this area as they believe that humans should not be "playing God" or destroying embryos to extract stem cells, which, in accordance with their religion teachings, is a profound disrespect for life and equates to murder. In these circumstances, it would seem the case that religion is not only unnecessary, but it is also a hindrance to science.

However, this attitude is blind to the value that religion can bring to scientific developments. As Albert Einstein had said, science is nothing but an ever expanding collection of facts and statistics and is, in itself, entirely amoral; anything outside its jurisdiction still "requires all forms of moral judgment". While religion may seem to oppose science, it in fact helps to guide the scientific inquiry, which treads on the thin line of ethical and moral grounds given the potency of science. Upon acquiring the answers which science brings, the ethical implications and teachings of religion help to steer it in the correct direction to fulfil the ultimate goal of benefitting mankind. Popularly termed as the "dual-use dilemma", science presents the problem that any findings it brings can be used for both constructive and destructive forces. Such duality can be observed with the developments of many chemical agents. Science has allowed humans to understand the

chemistry behind many reactions and harness that knowledge to develop their own chemical mixtures to serve several purposes and address questions, like how to increase crop yield for instance, which led to the invention of sarin gas – originally intended as a pesticide. Without religions ramifications of non-malevolence and beneficence, the same scientific "answer" can be manipulated to serve selfish agendas, as evidenced by the use of sarin gas as a chemical weapon by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in the Tokyo subway bombings and most recently by the al-Assad regime against innocent Syrian civilians. Clearly, while science by itself can conjure many answers and provide many facts and deliverables, the ethical applications of these answers still require the values of compassion, altruism and goodness that religion imparts to its followers, such that these answers can truly be translated into advantages for mankind.

Separately, while science can arguably answer many questions that plague humans regarding the natural, observable world, it is limited in its ability to explain deeper questioning and philosophical debates that revolve around the reason for existence and the purpose of life. For these questions, religion would be in a better position to offer some answers. By its very definition, religion is a set of beliefs and practices that its followers ascribe to and is concerned with the realm of the unknown. Faith is something that science can neither prove nor disprove; it cannot be understood by the five senses but is something innate and felt by the heart. Religion offers clarity and an opportunity for self-reflection in an atmosphere of genuine humility and subservience to a larger entity, allowing believers to answer questions regarding their sense of self and identity. The perennial question "Who am I?" is one that science cannot answer, and while religion may not directly give a concrete and absolute resolution to such questions, the spiritual enlightenment and contentment that it lends to those who are pious believers better helps to ground them, offering a sense of certainty in a rapidly changing world. Where a single scientific discovery can give a revolutionary new answer that entirely overturns previous hypotheses, religion anchors people in beliefs they value and adhere to. In addition, religion can also answer the questions on how we should conduct ourselves in daily affairs, since the values of brotherhood, love, peace and compassion are universal across all religions, which exhort their followers to share with others and treat everyone

with dignity and respect. This is echoed in the Jewish concept of "repair the world", the Christian commandment "love they neighbour as thyself" and similarly in the Muslim injunction "look upon charity as something you must do every day the sun rises". In this instance, it can be seen that science answers the questions of what is, while religion answers the questions of what should be.

Ultimately, while science in itself serves its function well and answers the questions regarding the laws that govern the universe, it cannot address the questions of which rules should govern human affairs – for this, religion is still very much necessary. Beyond answering a separate set of questions that science cannot answer, religion also provides guidance on the ethical applications of science and helps to make science relevant in the pursuit of benefitting humanity. As Pope John Paul II eloquently put it, "Science purifies religion of superstition, but religion purifies science of evil and false absolutes". Rather than choosing one discipline over the other, there are areas of confluence between science and religion, and only by striking such a balance can man truly answer all his questions – both of the external world and of his inner being.

Marker's comments:

A lucid and sensitive response, supported with apt illustrations.

2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 1   **Darryl Shya Shao Feng | 16S07B**

To what extent do we need religion when science can answer most of our questions?

Religion has often been said to offer answers to life's greatest questions, but these answers are coming under increasing attack by those who claim that the answers science provides far outweigh anything religion can offer mankind in value and in grounded fact. These critics would argue that we do not, in fact, need religion when science provides sufficient and viable explanations for the mysteries which define human life; in other words, we do not need religion since science can answer most of our questions. However, to view the answers religion and science provide as mutually exclusive would be foolishness, and it is worth noting that the questions science does not answer are often the questions that are most relevant to mankind, and seen as a valuable pursuit in and of themselves; religion is still needed by mankind even in the presence of scientific explanation.

Certainly, there is bountiful and ever-increasing width and depth to the answers provided by science, and this is coming into conflict with the orthodoxy provided by religious narratives. The scientific revolution that began with the Enlightenment period and has continued on to the present time has produced answers to nearly every question imaginable. Indeed, it is now possible to isolate specific building blocks of the fabric of reality itself, with the discovery of the Higgs boson particle being a cause for celebration in this regard. Science has also brought answers that intrude on and displace religious narratives. Most creation narratives of world faiths provide an explanation of the intervention of divine force in the physical realm to explain the creation and history of the people to whom said creation narrative belongs. In contrast, science can provide a viable and tested narrative of the creation of the universe without any intervention, and utilise key aspects of the universe like the red-shifting of observable galaxies and the increasing distance between stars. There is undeniable proof that the scientific explanation seems more grounded in reality, as well as more tangible, than the highly subjective divine force

that drives most religions, and the inherent un-provability of the divine explanation can drive people towards the more tangible and explainable scientific answer. For these reasons, it is possible to argue that science's answers to our questions do indeed seem to delegitimise the worth of, and therefore our need for, religion.

More importantly, however, it is crucial to note that the key value of science when juxtaposed against religion is not the answers it provides but the way it attempts to reach said answers. Science is a philosophy, and scientific scepticism which rejects that which cannot be proven clearly seems more attractive to most than other ways of thinking, including religious dogmas. The scientific method, as it is known, has accounted for all the vast knowledge which science has made accessible, and through its requirement of proof that is reproducible and can be substantiated, there is an answer available to many questions known to us, even the most contentious and difficult of conundrums. This burden of proof makes the infinite majesty of any God and the intimate knowledge many claim of such a being irreconcilable in most eyes. The sheer impossibility of "proving God", so to speak, in this scientific method is exemplified in "Russell's Teapot", where the burden of proof is shown to be on the claimant of an otherwise incredulous assertion to prove the claim's worth, not on others to prove the claim's impossibility. Thus, it seems that this way of thought and the liberalisation of belief that has led many away from religion are inextricably connected – studies in America show that nearly 70 percent of all those who claimed to have "no religion" also demonstrated sceptical responses to questions posed on varying topics. Thus, the answers that science helps man think about can certainly delegitimise the answers religion provides in the eyes of many.

Yet, it is important to note that science cannot answer everything within the physical realm – without sufficient proof, there is little the scientific rationalisation of evidence can provide for some. There are significant gaps in the way we understand how our universe works: the scientific paradigm of the universe first requires dark energy, then dark matter, to regulate the expansion and stability of the early universe, and there remains no proof as to the existence, whereabouts or detection of these entities. The seeming impossibility of humanity being the only advanced race in a universe large enough for any possibility,

summed in Fermi's Paradox, is also something science struggles to account for. It is worth noting that these confusions extend even to the building blocks of reality itself – string theory and the continual chaos of quantum mechanics reduce the fundamental laws of reality to utter confusion, changed on the turn of the die of human observation. These observations are clearly not things the average person can understand and make clear through the scientific method. It becomes clear that the "God of the Gaps" will remain clear to some people for as long as there are gaps in scientific understanding, calling for a religious response to this lack of human capability.

However, the "God of the Gaps" is limited to these gaps, as many observers have pointed out. Much more pertinent are the failures of science to answer key questions that are relevant to mankind, and these must account for much of human behaviour and the inherent characteristics of humanity. These are questions that religious philosophies and traditions have drawn on for millennia, and their answers are still relevant today. The question of human evil is so well known, its answers so myriad, and many religions give answers more inherently grounded in human experience than science can offer. Where science points out that the behaviours many recognise as "evil" are essentially biochemical reactions to behaviours deemed unfavourable to the self, religion offers a rich theological background for human suffering, from the book of Job to the four ages of Hinduism. Religion then uses these inherently human responses to evil and good, weaving them into a divine template, the handiwork of a higher power and symbolic of a greater purity of being. Although the ways in which this happens vary across different faiths, from the dhammic nature of Buddhism to the total depravity and all-loving God of Calvinism, there seems to be a grace which proves more sufficient, more all-encompassing, more comforting answers than those which the scientific method can bring to bear. Thus, the need for religion seems obvious, not just where science is inadequate but also where scientific answers cannot satisfy us.

There is also clear and present appeal to religion and the ethical-normative framework it provides to societies seeking answers to the problems scientific answers bring up; religious answers and scientific answers are not binaries, as the continuing use of religion

in ethics reminds us. The clear respect for human life, sanctity and dignity religious attitudes and perspectives can bring to complicated scientific discussions is what defines how society deals with massively powerful and morally ambiguous tools. For example, the cloning debate over the utility of stem-cell research continues to rage in many quarters, given the various perspectives religion has over the conception of the soul. These perspectives were shaped by and continue to be shaped by a rich cultural and religious framework respecting human life and dignity – it is easy to see a link between the sacrosanct nature of life and the "Thou shalt not kill" of religious scripture. It is no coincidence that the use of nuclear weapons was heralded by a quote from the Bhagavad Gita: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds"; conversely, the religious perspective on mass destruction and the use of weapons channelling said destruction proved instrumental in the creation of the disarmament movement of the Cold War, with President Reagan's personal belief in Jesus Christ motivating him to "turn swords into ploughshares" and sign treaties to radically reduce ballistic and nuclear weapons from 1985 onwards, a process that continues on to the present day. In both these cases, science required religious perspectives to regulate and safely constrain its impact on societies and the world, and the answers science provides seem more relevant as complementary to the answers faith provides than as antagonistic to the latter. Thus, religious and scientific explanations and answers are equally relevant, and to say that the scientific answers delegitimise the answers faith provides is folly – religion is still necessary to us.

It is worth recognising, finally, that the scientific method has allowed religious questions to be answered with more scrutiny than ever before. The question "Is there a God?" has been around since the inception of mankind, and to some extent the philosophies which have shaped science were born in the minds of religious thinkers, from St Augustine to Tertullian to Pope Pius XII, Second Vatican Council. The Greco-Roman traditions of reasoning and logic were preserved not by the secular, but by faithful wishing to discern God. It is from this scrutiny of nature that we derive the wondrous contemplation of Augustine and the delight of Rumi, and through their scrutiny faith has come to a better enrichment of itself and its understanding of God in the world than it could otherwise have come to. This remains relevant even in the modern world: from the apologetics of

the American evangelical movement to the continued ethics debates between the various *fiqh*, or schools of jurisprudence, of Islam, the scientific method is used to determine scriptural truths and deeper truths of the human condition, allowing for greater understanding of the world and God in the process. If, as the Summa Theologica states, God's greatest gift to man was intelligence, the faithful have not refrained from using it, contributing greatly to the sum of human knowledge as a whole and making religion relevant to society as science progresses.

Thus, we can see that the role of religion is not just to provide answers, nor is it the role of science to provide answers contesting with religion; rather, the two intersect in the most interesting of ways, each at turns enriching the other through debate and mutual conflict, at turns cooperating to find answers to thorny societal quandaries. This, then, proves that the need for religion remains as strong as ever, along with the answers science provides. Dag Hammarskjold, ex-Secretary General of the UN, once sheepishly admitted that his process of conversion had "no clearly defined question… just the clear answer of Yes". So it is with faith, the clear answer of Yes in a growing and profound ocean of human discovery, perhaps the best demonstration for the divine in a secularised world.

Marker's comments:

Intelligent response, showing depth and breadth of understanding. There is also focus on the question and strong balance is achieved. One key issue, though, was the density of your phrasing and approach, which at times really detracted from clarity and precision of analysis, especially in paragraphs 3, 4 and 6 – something to work on. Language is quite excellent throughout, with elegance and complexity of phrasing, plus a strong personal voice. However, lapses into convoluted phrasing affected clarity of communication.

2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 2 | Passage

Patricia Marx examines South Korea's fixation on plastic surgery.

If you want to feel bad about your looks, spend some time in Seoul. An eerily high number of women there – and men, too – look like anime[1] princesses. Subway riders primp in front of full-length mirrors installed throughout the stations for that purpose. Remarks from relatives, such as "You would be a lot prettier if you just had your jaw tapered," are considered no more insulting than "You would get a lot more for your apartment if you redid the kitchen."

South Koreans do not merely brood about their physiognomy[2]. They put their money where their mouths – and eyes and noses – used to be. By some estimates, the country has the highest rate of plastic surgery per capita in the world. It has been estimated that between one-fifth and one-third of women in Seoul have gone under the knife (the figure for women in their twenties is reportedly fifty per cent or higher). Men, by one account, make up fifteen per cent of the market, including a former President of the country, who underwent double-eyelid surgery while in office.

The epicentre of this phenomenon is Seoul's so-called Improvement Quarter in the high-end Gangnam district. The walls of the stations are plastered with giant advertisements for plastic surgery clinics, many picturing twinkly cheerleader types often standing next to former versions of themselves. "This is the reason celebrities are confident even without their makeup," one caption read. "Everyone but you has done it," another said.

You know you are in the right neighbourhood by the preponderance of slightly bruised and swollen-faced men and women in their twenties and thirties going about their business, despite the bandages. Another clue: there are between four and five hundred clinics and hospitals within a square mile. They are packed into boxy concrete buildings that look as if they were all built on the same day. Some clinics occupy as many as sixteen floors, and the largest encompass several high-rises. There is even a maternity clinic that specialises in beauty enhancement for brand-new mothers and mothers-to-be.

A surgeon observed that in the eighties, the ideal look was Western – sculpted, well-defined faces with big eyes – but this has changed as a result of the plastic surgery culture as when everyone started looking alike, 'quirky' and 'different' came to be prized. In fact, many dispute the notion that Korean plastic surgery today emulates a Western aesthetic, pointing out, for example, that big eyes are universally considered appealing and that pale skin connotes affluence.

Still, just about everyone who was interviewed in Seoul confirmed the trend toward a baby-faced appearance. Almost every doctor has had patients who brought in photographs of celebrities, asking to be remade in their likenesses. Also, an increasing number of women are arranging for matching operations at the same time as their daughters, so that the daughters' looks are attributed to nature rather than to suture.

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[1] Japanese-style animated film or television entertainment known for depicting characters with exaggerated features.

[2] The assessment of a person's character or personality from his or her outer appearance, especially the face.

The national fixation on plastic surgery began in the aftermath of the Korean War, triggered by the offer made by the American occupational forces to provide free reconstructive surgery to maimed war victims. The procedures caught on fast, especially with Korean women who wanted to attract American soldiers. More recently, throughout Asia, the "Korean wave" of pop culture (called *hallyu*) shapes not only what music you should listen to but what you should look like while listening to it. "Surgery tourists" from abroad make up about a third of the business in South Korea, and, of those, most come from China. Cosmetic transformations can be so radical that some of the hospitals offer certificates of identity to foreign patients, who may need help convincing immigration officers that they are not in the Witness Protection Program.

A clearer understanding of why South Koreans are such lookists is offered by Eunkook Suh, a psychology professor at Yonsei University, in Seoul. "One factor is that, in contrast to Western cultures, the external aspects of self (your social status, clothes, gestures, and appearance) versus the inner aspects (thoughts and feelings) matter more here," he explained. Suh, like others, partially attributes the Korean mind-set to Confucianism. He elaborated, "In Korea, we do not care what you think about yourself. Other people's evaluations of you matter more."

Indeed, this is a very competitive society. In the old days, if your neighbour bought a new television or new car you would need to buy a new television or car. Now Koreans all have these basic things, so the competition has moved up to comparing one's looks, health and even spirituality. Added to this is the relentless pressure to belong, to be part of a coalition or clique. The feeling is that if one can look better, one should, for to neglect doing so is mere complacency and laziness, which in turn reflects badly on the group. This is the antithesis of individualism.

Compared to American society, Korean society does have different ideas about personal change. In Korea, a lot of people hold an incremental theory versus an entity theory about a person's potential. In the latter theory supposedly subscribed to by Americans, the belief is that a person's essence is fixed and that there is only a limited potential for change. Children who are deemed to innately lack particular talents, such as in sports, are unlikely to be forced to develop these talents. However in Korea, the mind-set is that sufficient effort leads to improvement, so children would be forced to develop talents regardless of their natural inclination. In the same way, looks can likewise be improved, even if it requires countless surgeries. All it takes is effort.

This attitude is exemplified by a well-known story: when the mother of South Korea's former President Chun Doo Hwan was trying to conceive a child in the 1920s, she met a wandering monk who told her that she had the face of someone who would be the mother of a great man – unless her buckteeth got in the way of destiny. With swift dispatch, she knocked out her front teeth using a log. (Some accounts say that she used a rock.) Her son ruled Korea from 1980 to 1988 as a brutal and repressive dictator. So who is to say that one's face does not matter? If it worked for the President's mother, it could work for you.

Patricia Marx raises several reasons why South Koreans are fixated on plastic surgery. How applicable are these issues to you and your society?

Marx states that a key reason "South Koreans are such lookists" is the "relentless pressure to belong", as "other people's evaluation of you matter more" than your own. Though it can be argued that Singapore is a rather materialistic society as well, this is not due to the feeling of needing to belong to a larger community; rather, it is more often born out of a desire to improve one's social standing for personal reasons. The proliferation of knock-off designer bags and clothing, for example, could point to the similar desire to "look better". Yet, this is mostly an attempt to broadcast one's social position in a rather self-serving and ostentatious way. Singaporeans do care about "the external aspects of self", as is evident from the 5Cs – Cash, Credit Card, Condo, Country Club and Car – but the reasons behind doing so differ. Rather, in a society that is obsessed with merit and practicality, it is yet another indicator of one's success, and it does not serve to reflect on the community at all.

However, it can be said that this trend is increasingly changing in Singapore, as displays of wealth are often seen as arrogant and unsavoury. In the 2011 General Elections, a new People's Action Party candidate, Tin Pei Ling, came under fire when she posted a photo of herself with a Kate Spade bag, and netizens lambasted her for her insensitivity and immaturity. This can be attributed to the rising socioeconomic inequality in Singapore, and increasing public discontent at those who flaunt their wealth, as many in society do not have access to similar luxuries.

Marx also claims that a "competitive society" that "[has] these basic things" will start to compete in looks. This is clearly false in Singapore – most Singaporeans enjoy a reasonable standard of living, but we do not share the same obsession with plastic surgery. Firstly, this could be due to differences in culture and context – Marx mentions that plastic surgery was introduced in the aftermath of the Korean War, as American forces offered to provide free reconstructive surgery to maimed war victims. Singapore has never had

these same opportunities and, similarly, plastic surgery never had the opportunity to enter the market here in such a broad way before. Secondly, the distinct lack of infrastructure to support plastic surgery hinders and reduces the avenues for Singaporeans to engage in such activity. Whereas in Korea, "the walls of the stations are plastered with giant advertisements for plastic surgery clinics" and "there are between four and five hundred clinics and hospitals within a square mile" in some places, plastic surgery firms simply do not have enough traction or the domestic market to cater to. With the lack of availability of these services, consumers will also have less access to them.

Something can also be said about Singapore's national focus on pragmatism – looks are deemed as less important than the "inner aspects" of character and virtue, and therefore fewer feel the need to alter their looks. Singapore's relatively more conservative demographic, too, could be averse to the idea of artificially enhancing or changing one's looks, as it is deemed unnatural, and the idea may be uncomfortable for many.

Markers' comments:
Relevant points raised, with many good examples, although some sections would benefit from having more depth.

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2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 2 | AQ　　　　　　　**Lye De Jun Victor Samuel | 16S07C**

> **Patricia Marx raises several reasons why South Koreans are fixated on plastic surgery. How applicable are these issues to you and your society?**

I believe that Patricia Marx's view that South Koreans are fixated on plastic surgery as "the external aspects of self (your social status, clothes, gestures and appearances) versus the inner aspects (thoughts and feelings) matter more here" is not applicable to Singapore. She suggests that South Koreans place greater importance on the material and tangible aspects of themselves, which may seem superficial compared to their own personal nature. This implies that South Koreans value attractive physical appearances and materialism such that they turn to plastic surgery to fulfil their desires. However, this is not applicable to my society, as I believe that there is not so much widespread emphasis on physical appearance in Singapore; instead, society still values the individual's opinions and innate characteristics. For example, Singapore celebrates individuals based on meritocracy, which is based on one's performance and individual merit. Individuals like Teresa Tsui Chih, Tony Tay, and Muhammad Hanafie Ali Mahmood are celebrated not because of their external aspects. To give a case in point: Tay, the founder of Willing Hearts, a charity organisation which provides food for the poor, would not be considered very physically attractive in South Korea nor do the clothes he wears portray a picture of affluence. Instead, he is recognised for his beliefs and personal actions, such as serving and helping others. Likewise, the 'MRT Abang' was not lauded for his good looks nor his flashy attire but for his willingness to stand up for a fellow Singaporean when he was being harassed. Therefore, it is clear that the issue of Singaporeans valuing external aspects of people is not apparent in Singapore. There is still strong evidence to show that the values, morals and opinions of people are much more respected. Therefore, this issue is not largely applicable as Singaporeans are able to look beyond the superficial instead.

I believe that Marx's statement that "Koreans all have these basic things, so the competition has moved up to comparing one's looks, health and even spirituality" is applicable to Singapore only to a certain extent. She implies that due to the extremely competitive nature of Korea, people have a desire to compare vis-à-vis other criteria, particularly physical appearance. Hence, they tend to succumb to the pressure to undergo plastic surgery to compare who is more attractive, especially since many of their friends

and relatives may be doing it as well. Just like South Korea, Singapore is extremely competitive, but the competition for looks is not yet applicable to the majority of Singaporeans. Still, it is true that Singapore is competitive academically and economically due to its need to maintain power over the economy and stay attractive to investors. Singapore is famous for being a "tuition nation", and the tuition industry is worth billions due to the competition over grades. Moreover, it is also true that a small group of Singaporeans, especially the more affluent ones, are able to travel overseas to undergo plastic surgery, signalling a certain degree of increasing competition over looks. However, one should not overlook the fact that Singapore has not moved completely in the direction of focusing on looks. Looks are arguably more important in South Korea due to its K-pop and K-drama industries, where celebrities are fawned over due to their good looks. Yet, Singapore remains largely focused on the competition of human capital and skills, rather than appearances. For instance, schools in Singapore largely focus on the transfer of knowledge and jobs in Singapore are subject to intense competition depending on relevant skills instead of physical appearance. Therefore, I find that Marx's reason is only applicable to a certain extent in Singapore.

In sum, Singapore is similar to South Korea in certain ways, in terms of our relatively small population, Asian mindset and competitive society. However, South Korea specialises in K-pop and plastic surgery, which are areas still quite culturally distinct from Singapore. However, it is increasingly true that Singaporeans are being influenced by South Korean culture, especially with globalisation and media. Yet, these issues are not completely applicable to Singapore in the present.

Markers' comments:

Valid examples and evaluation. Substantiation is relevant, but you must do full justice to all examples given – do not merely list.

2016 | GP Y6 CT2 | Paper 2 | AQ   **Vanessa Chia Qi En | 16A13A**

Patricia Marx raises several reasons why South Koreans are fixated on plastic surgery. How applicable are these issues to you and your society?

Patricia Marx's reasons for South Koreans being fixated on plastic surgery have some resonance with Singapore's society today, especially in terms of competition and "incremental theory", but we have not developed to the extent of comparing physical appearances as of yet. However, with the rise of new media and "pop culture" images, things may change for future generations.

Firstly, Marx mentions the way in which Korea's "competitive society" has led to "comparing", and this is also leveraged upon when a society believes in the "incremental theory", where people are pressured to "develop talents regardless of their natural inclination" due to the rise in competition. This multifaceted reason for the proliferation of plastic surgery in South Korea is highly relevant in Singapore today, yet not entirely applicable, as this competitive spirit is manifested in different ways. Singapore's popular mindset of being "kiasu", or fearing to lose and being competitive in the Hokkien dialect, is a clear manifestation of the similar "competitive society" and a pressure to "develop" and grow despite the possibility of "limited potential". However, perhaps due to the nature of Singapore's socio-economic outlook, Singaporeans do not quite place the same kind of emphasis on physique just yet. As a meritocratic nation, knowledge and ability is power, and here is where the "kiasu" mindset is most strongly felt. While Korea has transcended comparisons of affluence such as "new television[s] or car[s]", Singapore can be said to still be highly competitive in the material aspect, such as the 5Cs: credit card, cash, car, country club and condominium, which is predicated on the fact that these material, "external aspects of self" will bring one social status and joy. In order to have the ability to pursue these, parents are highly competitive in ensuring their children attain the best possible education, with many students having tuition for a multitude of subjects, starting as early as kindergarten got a head start on primary school education. These are the ways in which similar perceptions between Korea and Singapore are largely manifested in our society and hence, though the reasons for the proliferation of plastic surgery are relevant, they are not entirely applicable.

However, Marx's comment on "pop culture ... shap[ing] not only what music you should listen to but what you should look like while listening to it" is highly relevant to

Singapore's youths today. Marx suggests that the proliferation of the media and the images pop culture promote do have an immense influence on consumers' perceptions of appearances. With the rise of new media and its associated cultures, along with the high mobile penetration rate in Singapore which exceeds the 100% mark, this issue is highly applicable to Singapore as our youths and their culture take on a shift in tone, to one with a more liberal, more Westernised undertone. A clear example is local blogger Xiaxue, who is known for her extensive plastic surgeries and physical enhancement. What stands out, much as with the Koreans, is that she is proud of how plastic surgery has made her feel more confident. With her bubble-gum pink hair and enlarged eyes, Xiaxue is one of the most popular blogger influences here. Many of her followers are also seeking ways to actively enhance their appearances based on media-fed expectations of beauty, with the "Korean wave" of pop culture being one of them. This media proliferation and obsession with what is trendy, and the notion that "'Everyone but you has done it'", leads to the possibility of and potential for the aforementioned competitive spirit spilling over into the rivalry in outward appearances. Increasingly, more and more Singaporean girls are taking to posting workout selfies or heavily edited images on Instagram, the popular social media platform. These applications to enhance your features on images in one of the newest fads in our society, and can arguably be one step away from obsession with physical enhancement surgery.

Marx, however, presents a somewhat one-sided argument. Coupled with this competitive spirit and the possible comparison based on "looks, health and even spirituality" can perhaps be a positive change. Increasingly, girls in Singapore are also getting involved with trends that promote organic, healthy eating, part of the undertones of subtle competition in physical appearances. With the rise of healthy, organic food franchises such as Cedele and Project Acai, which many young girls are fans of today, it is possible that Marx's view of the emphasis on looks may be overly one-sided.

Ultimately, the confluence of both competitiveness and new media images may very well lead to the new generation's over-fixation on physical appearances. Though not exactly fully applicable to Singapore yet, undertones of it are present in today's young Singaporean generation's social life, online and offline.

Markers' comments:

Good development of ideas. Clear evaluation, fair points raised. Decent evaluation of article with adequate local analysis.

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