

Name : Koh Lin-Net

Date of Birth

School : St. Nicholas Girls' School.

Address : 1, Pearl Bank Ave. 2, Street 13,
~~#37-04~~ Ang Mo Kio,
Singapore 0316 Spore 2056.

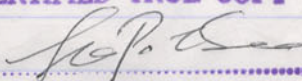
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PRINCIPAL
ST. NICHOLAS' GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL
SINGAPORE

Xu Linme

Tradition has it that 'a woman's place is in the home'. This, however, is not a sound policy for the welfare and progress of ~~this~~ my country Singapore. Singapore is a relatively small country with little natural resources nor large ~~big~~ hinterlands for agriculture. Thus, we have no choice but to resort to our human resources in order to survive in this competitive world.

Since my country is striving for recognition as the brain center in South-East Asia, we need ^{every precious} ~~the maximum~~ amount of talent and brainpower that we have. This would certainly include Singaporeans of the fairer sex, which make up nearly half of our population of a mere two and a half million. So if the policy that 'a woman's place is in the home' is implemented, then we would not be making full use of our limited human resources.

While many other nations around the world are facing problems of widespread unemployment, Singapore on the contrary has not enough workers for her many varied industries. This could be a result of the successful family planning programme implemented about twenty years ago. The rapid economic growth we have had the privilege of enjoying for the past fifteen years has also added to the pressing demand for more skilled workers in our Republic. In an attempt to correct this problem, Singapore has had no choice but to resort to importing workers from ~~our~~ foreign countries, mainly Korea, Japan and the Philippines. However, it must be realised that these people, however skilled, will never be able to permanently replace workers of our own society and culture. We in Singapore have our own unique set of cultural values which someone from afar would need years to adapt to. This set of problems which the social and

cultural differences have brought forth has made our government all the more convinced that women should join the workforce, and not just stay at home.

Why not? Today's women, unlike yesterdays, are highly educated. They are no longer content in just taking a backseat and watching the world go by; a world controlled by men.

Increasing awareness in our society has spurred our women to look for more in life. The equal opportunities for education has also no doubt deepened their quest for knowledge. These opportunities have not gone to waste.

Many have done surprisingly well academically and have been further trained in tertiary institutions both at home and abroad with the help of the government. Surely all these costly efforts spent will not be justified if these women ultimately spend their lives over the cooking pot!

One must also think not only in terms of money and time wasted, but also of all the rare talent which has not been put to good use!

Fortunately, women in my country have been actively contributing towards Singapore's development and welfare. It cannot be denied that they are very good at certain things; things which they are more adept at, and at times even better at than men. It is in these areas which our women have ventured into, and have shown themselves to be very competent at. Singapore thrives in her tourist industry, and women play a vital role in sustaining it. Our stewardesses, the famed 'Singapore girl', have made a name for both the Singapore Airlines, and also for Singapore herself. The gentleness and charm exuded by these beautiful Singapore girls in serving their passengers can certainly not be replaced by men.

Women have also proven to be better teachers. It is well known that patience and love are two factors that can not be missing in a good teacher. Women certainly top the list in these areas! Therefore our educational system in Singapore will face a major setback if all women were to follow the policy that "a woman's place is in the home". The hotel industry would also suffer, because it is in public relations and service that a woman's touch, sensitivity to feelings, charm and intuitive knack of taking care of the smallest detail is so necessary. Design, administration and social counselling, among others, are but some of the many other jobs that women have proven to good if not better at than their male counterparts. All these are undeniably vital to a country's success. Therefore if women in Singapore were to believe that they should stay at home, who would fill these jobs? Men? Or even more foreign workers? In the long run, would this work out?

No doubt a happy family needs the presence of a mother and wife. But this certainly does not mean that she has to be around all the time. After all, the presence of the father is also important for a complete happy family. But does he stay at home all day? Women of today are becoming increasingly capable, and mixing family and career together should not bring about too many problems. This is because the government has also realised that working mothers might face many problems, especially if their children are not capable of looking themselves. As a result, creches and day-care centers have sprung up made their appearances in many places, ranging from posh offices to tucked-away factories. For an affordable fee, babies and toddlers are looked after by professional babysitters. These facilities are more often than not located

conveniently in the same building as the mother's working place, so that they can pop in during breaks to see how their children are faring. In this way, an ambitious woman can find satisfaction through an outside job, and at the same time soothe her guilty conscience with the knowledge that her children are in good hands. This is of course better than just staying at home and mourning over the fact that life is boring and meaningless. In addition, a mother who has had to spend part of the day away from the family would no doubt come to cherish her family more. In a way, this set-up can be likened to "killing two birds with one stone", where both the country and family can benefit from women joining the workforce. Singapore's continual growth can be assured. At the same time, everyone would learn the importance of having a family and not just take it for granted. Fathers, ~~would also have to~~ ^{would also} in sharing in the household chores, ~~and~~ come to realise that ~~that~~ maintaining harmony in a family — something that is not usually remembered — is, after all, not that simple!

Women are part of Singapore, of any country. They should be given the equal right to participate in the development of their country, to be part of the workforce. Once any individual knows that she is doing something to contribute to her country's growth and prosperity, no doubt this will instil in her a greater sense of belonging, of loyalty. Especially in a small country like Singapore, who has no natural resources, every single bit counts.

Women make good lawyers, doctors, accountants, and many other professions. Many women are successful in hotel, banking and travel industries. The majority of our teachers are women. They make a major contribution to our society and our community

by actively participating in social work, and in our many associations for the poor, the needy, the spastics, the deaf and the dumb, in drug rehabilitation, and with the aged.

We now have three women Members of Parliament in Singapore. The world has women Prime Ministers such as the late Indira Gandhi of India and Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom. Women's place should not just be in the home.

(1254 words)