

USE2318 Managing Cultural Difference: Theorizing the Singaporean model
Monday & Thursday, 2:00pm-4:00pm
Dr Mabel Wong
uspwcm@nus.edu.sg

Introduction

The question of managing ethnocultural diversity—i.e. of how to reconcile particular ethnic and cultural claims with the broader demands of national cohesion and citizenship—is a challenging and pressing issue faced by all multiethnic states and met with a variety of responses that draw from different intellectual traditions. For Singapore, this question has been a key feature of its nation-building process since 1965 and its response has been the cultivation of an officially ascribed multiculturalism underpinned by the state-espoused ideological commitments to pragmatism and an ostensibly “Asian” communitarianism.

Yet such a model has, of late, been placed under much stress. Recent incidents such as last year’s social backlash against Anton Casey, the riots that erupted in Little India in 2013, the firing of Amy Cheong in 2012 for her Facebook comments towards Singaporean-Malays, and 2011’s ‘Cook a Pot of Curry’ movement, all illustrate the various tensions that inhere within the Singaporean model of multiculturalism. Tensions, moreover, that with a changing economic, demographic, and urban landscape, are increasingly becoming more noticeable and pressing. In light of all this, can the Singaporean model survive?

This module examines the conceptual framework of the Singaporean model of multiculturalism in order to evaluate its viability for the future. It does so by positioning it in relation to other existing theories of ethno-cultural identity and rights. In so doing, it asks:

1. What are the ideological, historical, and practical underpinnings of the Singaporean model?
2. What might be problematic, contradictory, and insufficient about its accounts of identity, equality, political and civic responsibility?
3. How else might a multicultural society negotiate its multiple and oftentimes competing ethno-cultural demands?

Assessment

1. Analysis Paper on the 2013 Population White Paper (25%)
What does the 2013 White paper say about the CMIO model and, more generally, the state of multiculturalism in Singapore today? Some useful questions to get you going might be: What ideological commitments underpin the argument made in the White Paper? What political work are they intended to do? Are they similar to those of the 1991 White Paper on Shared Values? What might account for these commitments?

This paper should be **no more the 5 pages in length**. It is **due in Week 6, Friday 19 Feb**. Please submit your paper by uploading in onto IVLE in a **WordDoc format**.

2. Evaluative Paper (35%)

Identify and evaluate **one** problem with the current state of multiculturalism and the future sustainability of the Singaporean model of multiculturalism more broadly through the lens of any **one** of the theories explored in Part II,

This paper should be no **more than 8 pages in length**. It is **due on Monday 18 April**. Please submit your paper by uploading in onto IVLE in a **WordDoc format**.

3. Blog (30%)

See “Instructions for Blog” for more details

4. ePortfolio (10%)

TBA

Class Etiquette

1. Please try to be **on time** for class. I understand that some of you are rushing to class from the main campus. It is NUS’ policy that all class end 25mins prior to their stated end time. So a 12-2pm class should end at 1:35pm. The policy is set in place to ensure that students do not arrive late at their next class. I realize that not all instructors adhere to this policy and that as students you have no say over what time class ought to end. Nonetheless, I do hope that you do not make a habit of being late for class.
2. Laptops are **not allowed** in class. I realize that there are some good reasons to use a laptop in class. The best reason in my view is that they are an environmentally friendly way for students to access class readings in class. But there are many bad reasons for using a laptop in class and unfortunately, these outweigh the good. Here are my main motivations for not allowing laptops:
 - First, if you have your laptop open, it is almost impossible to not be tempted to check your email or social media sites. While quickly checking or responding to an email or social media post might seem perfectly harmless to you, studies have shown that **multitasking impairs learning**. Multitasking interrupts your concentration and train of thought. As such, you leave the class with a collection of disconnected statements (for an example of such a study, refer to: http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html)
 - Second, although you might think no one, especially the instructor, knows what you are doing behind your laptop screen. You are wrong. Studies have shown that not only does multitasking on a laptop distract you, **it also distracts your peers who can see the computer** (see for example this

article “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers” published in *Computers & Education*, Vol. 62, March 2013).

Aside from distracting, albeit unintentionally, your classmates, you are distracting the instructor as well. Instructors always know when you are paying attention or not. We can tell from your affect and bodily gestures when you taking notes on the computer or looking through the reading and when you are looking at your email for FB page. Not only is this disheartening, it causes us to lose our train of thought as well.

- Lastly, studies have shown that **note-taking on your laptop actually causes you to learn less than note-taking by hand**. The purpose of note-taking is to support the learning and retention of material discussed in class; note-taking is not learning. While students taking notes on their laptop write down more material, they often simply type what the instructors are saying verbatim without processing the material. This is not learning neither is it helping you learn. In fact, it is doing the opposite, preventing you from the actual process of learning. Note-taking by hand forces you to synthesize and condense what you are hearing because you can’t write everything down. (See the most recent study, “The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” published in *Psychological Science*, April 2014)

Of course, if you have good reasons for needing to take notes with a laptop, please do come and speak with me.

3. Unless you have a good reason and have asked me for permission for an extension, the datelines for all the assignments are non-negotiable. Not planning ahead and having “too many assignments to do for other classes” is not a good reason for an extension. If you do find yourself in a situation in which you have too much work to do and therefore cannot submit the assignment on time, you will just have to pay the price of a late submission. **The penalty for late submission is a third of a letter grade a day** (e.g. B+ down to B down to B-, etc.). **If, however, you are late by more than a week, I will no longer accept your assignment.** Again, I stress that if you have a good reason for not being able to submit your work on time, you can always come to me to explain your situation and ask for permission.

Schedule and Readings

Introduction: Setting the stage

Week 1: Mon, 11 Jan & Thurs, 14 Jan

- Parekh, Bhikhu (1999) “What is multiculturalism?”. Accessible: <http://www.india-seminar.com/1999/484/484%20parekh.htm>
- Taylor, Charles (1994) “The Politics of Recognition (excerpt)” in *Multiculturalism*, Amy Gutmann (ed.), New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 25-44.

I. The Singaporean Model

Week 2: Mon, 18 Jan & Thurs, 21 Jan

- 1991 Shared Values White Paper
- Chua, Beng Huat (1995) "Ideological trajectory: from authoritarianism to communitarianism" in *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, London: Routledge, pp. 9-39
- Lai, Ah Eng (1995) "Multiculturalism and Nation-Building" in *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-Study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, pp. 178-188

Week 3: Mon, 25 Jan & Thurs, 28 Jan

- Goh, Daniel P. S. (2008) "From Colonial Pluralism to Postcolonial Multiculturalism: Race, State Formation and the Question of Cultural Diversity in Malaysia and Singapore" in *Sociology Compass* 2(1): 232-252
- Hill, Michael and Lian, Kwen Fee (1995) "The ethnic origins of Singapore" in *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore*, London: Routledge, pp. 39-66

Week 4: Mon, 1 Feb & Thurs, 4 Feb

- "Key Indicators of the Resident Population," Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 2: Household and Housing, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/publications-and-papers/cop2010/census10_stat_release2
- Chua, Beng Huat (2005) "The cost of membership in ascribed community" in *Multiculturalism in Asia*, W. Kymlicka and B. He (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 170-195
- Rahim, Lily Zubaidah (1998) *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of Malay Community*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, (pages TBA)

Week 5: Mon, 8 Feb & Thurs, 11 Feb (*Mon, 8 Feb CNY holiday; no class*)

- 2013 Population White Paper
- Yeoh, Brenda S.A. and Huang, Shirlena (2004) "Foreign Talent" in Our Midst: New Challenges to Sense of Community and Ethnic Relations in Singapore" in *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*, Lai Ah Eng (ed.) Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies and Eastern Universities Press, pp. 316-338

II. Challenges & Alternatives

Week 6: Mon, 15 Feb & Thurs, 18 Feb

- Kukathas, Chandran (1995) "Are There Any Cultural Rights?" in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 228-255
- Kukathas, Chandran (1998) "Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference" in *Political Theory* 26(5): 686-699

Recess Break: 20 Feb – 28 Feb

Week 7: Mon, 29 Feb & Thurs, 3 March

- Kymlicka, Will (1995) Chapters 3, 5 & 6 of *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 34-48, 75-130 (skip pp. 116-125, Section 2-4)

Week 8: Mon, 7 March & Thurs, 10 March

- Barry, Brian (2000), *Culture and Equality*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp.19-39, 63-71, 252-263, 279-291, 317-328

Week 9: Mon, 14 March & Thurs, 16 March

- Parekh, Bhikhu (2006) Chapters 3 (last section), 4, 8, & 9 (first section) of *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 109-113, 114-143, 239-273

Week 10: Mon, 21 March & Thurs 24 March

- Brown, Wendy (2006) Chapters 1, 2, & 4 of *Regulating Aversion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-47, 78-106

Week 11: Mon, 28 March & Thurs, 31 March

- Connolly, William (1991) *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of a Political Paradox, Expanded Edition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xiii-xxxi, 158-181

Wrap-Up: Reassessing the Singaporean model

Week 12: Mon, 4 April

- Low, Donald (2014) “Liberal Ideas in the New Normal” in *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*, Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh (eds.), Singapore: NUS Press, pp. 209-225
- Vadaketh, Sudhir Thomas (2014) “The End of Identity?” in *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*, Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh (eds.), Singapore: NUS Press, pp. 59-78

Week 12 & 13:

- Consultations