

Conference on Identity

Tuesday, 23 November 2021
Online via Zoom

PROGRAMME

9.25 am – 9.30 am

Welcome and Introduction

9.30 am – 10.30 am

Opening Speech & Dialogue with Minister

Mr Lawrence Wong
Minister for Finance

Moderator

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong
Executive Deputy Chairman
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies &
Director
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

10.30 am – 10.35 am

Break

10.35 am – 12 noon

Panel 1: Identities and Diversity

Moderator

Dr Mathew Mathews
Principal Research Fellow &
Head of Social Lab
Institute of Policy Studies

Speakers

Professor Joseph Liow
Tan Kah Kee Chair in Comparative and International Politics &
Dean, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences
Nanyang Technological University

Professor Vineeta Sinha
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Professor David Chan
Professor of Psychology &
Director, Behavioural Sciences Initiative
Singapore Management University

Respondents

Ms Corinna Lim
Executive Director
Association of Women for Action and Research

Mr Sharvesh Leatchmanan
Co-Founder & Editor
Minority Voices

Mr Ng Yi-Sheng
Writer

Question-and-Answer Session

12 noon – 12.10 pm

Break

12.10 pm – 1.15 pm

Panel 2: Innovating Engagement

Moderator

Dr Carol Soon
Senior Research Fellow &
Head of Society and Culture
Institute of Policy Studies

Speakers

Mr Aaron Maniam
Deputy Secretary
Industry & Information
Ministry of Communications and Information

Associate Professor Zhang Weiyu
Department of Communications and New Media
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
National University of Singapore

Mr Joel Lim
Managing Director
ZYRUP Media

Ms Chan Chi Ling
Chief Operations Officer
better.sg

Question-and-Answer Session

1.15 pm

End

SYNOPSIS

Post-independence, identity politics and ethnonationalism were rampant in the region. Singapore's leaders managed diversity by establishing commonalities among the people, as we navigated our complex and diverse religious and ethnic landscape. Ideas such as a "Singaporean citizen" or building a nation "regardless of race, language or religion" had only just begun to emerge in our public consciousness.

Today, more than 50 years on, there is a growing appetite among citizens to engage with complex social issues, many of which are intertwined with the Singapore identity, or Singapore identities. Ongoing debates on class, race, religion, gender, sexuality and disability demonstrate the multiplexity and cross-cutting nature of identity. Social media has spurred conversations and contestations on issues relating to identity and diversity by providing the space for people from diverse backgrounds to initiate frank discussions and rally for change.

What are the implications of such developments for nation-building? How should notions of the Singaporean identity and established practices of social resilience evolve with the times? How should people engage with one another on these issues in ways that foster empathy and solidarity amidst diversity? What innovations or approaches are required for the accommodation and integration of multiple identities? The IPS-RSIS Conference on Identity aims to discuss these issues.

The keynote speaker at the event will be Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Finance. Invited panellists will include academics and practitioners who will discuss the implications of these issues, as well as the conditions for inclusive conversations.

Panel 1: Identities and Diversity

Set against the context of a growing pluralisation of voices in the Singapore society, this panel will examine how identity is constructed, how intersections matter, and how social capital matters in negotiations between identities. It will also discuss the implications for nation-building, social resilience and harmony, and how diversity can be managed. Civil society organisations and ground-up groups will reflect on the aspirations and challenges of their constituents, their place in the Singapore society, and how multiple identities should and can be accommodated.

Panel 2: Innovating Engagement

Academics and practitioners in civic engagement will discuss possible approaches to engaging with issues posed by new and cross-cutting identities. This panel will give the intangibles a form — what are the necessary conditions for inclusive and productive conversations? What do meaningful conversations look like? What innovations would help people meet and engage with those who are different from them? And as we seek out new platforms and avenues for public deliberation, how do we prevent the alienation of marginalised demographics?

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

CHAN Chi Ling co-founded Better.sg, a tech-for-good charity powered by more than a thousand volunteers from across disciplines who contribute time and skills to supercharge innovative digital tools for social good. She currently volunteers as the charity's Chief Operating Officer, where she leads a consultancy team to deliver pro-bono digital services to scale the impact of not-for-profit organisations in Singapore. Passionate about building technology for public good, Ms Chan is a civil servant and product manager by profession who works at the intersection of healthcare and technology. She enjoys discovering ways to see things in new light while navigating cross-cutting identities and finds Singapore's diversity to be one of the most underrated features of life on this little red dot.

David CHAN is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Behavioural Sciences Initiative at the Singapore Management University. He is also Adjunct Principal Scientist and Scientific Advisor at A*STAR. Professor Chan has received numerous international prestigious awards for his scholarly achievements and scientist-practitioner contributions. Together with Nobel Laureate in Economics Professor Daniel Kahneman, he served on an international committee that submitted to the United Nations a report on measures of national well-being across countries, which was subsequently incorporated in a United Nations Development Report. Professor Chan is advisor, consultant and board member to various organisations in the public, private and people sectors both in Singapore and internationally. He is the first scientist in the world to receive Elected Fellow status of all six international psychological organisations. In 2020, a Stanford University global study on researcher impact named him in the top one per cent worldwide among all scientists across all disciplines. As of 2021, his published works in top psychology, management and methods journals have been cited over 13,000 times in various disciplines.

Corinna LIM is the Executive Director of the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), Singapore's leading gender equality group. She is a Fulbright Scholar and was appointed as the SR Nathan Fellow for 2021. Ms Lim has been a women's rights activist for close to 30 years and has advocated on issues such as gender-equal workplaces, gender violence, and greater support for single parents, lower income women and caregivers of the elderly.

Prior to joining the non-governmental organisation sector, Ms Lim practised law and founded a technology start-up which transformed into an IT company providing IT solutions for the legal industry.

Joel LIM is the Managing Director of creative house ZYRUP Media. He is also a content creator known for breaking down complex issues for the young adult audience. After gaining prominence with viral analyses during GE2020, he now focuses on making important topics such as education, politics, policies, current affairs, and social issues digestible and relevant to youths in Singapore.

Joseph LIOW is Dean of College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, where he is also Tan Kah Kee Chair in Comparative and International Politics, and Professor and former Dean at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. He held the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC.

Professor Liow's research interests encompass Muslim politics and social movements in Southeast Asia and the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Asia-Pacific region. He is the author or editor of 14 books. His forthcoming publications are *Movement, Party, Politics: The Role of Tarbiyah and Dakwah in the Evolution of Islamism in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, fifth edition (Routledge, 2022). A regular columnist for *The Straits Times*, his commentaries on international affairs have also appeared in *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *National Interest*, *Nikkei Asian Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *South China Morning Post*. Professor Liow is Singapore's representative on the advisory board of the ASEAN Institute of Peace and Reconciliation, and on the Experts and Eminent Persons Group of the ASEAN Regional Forum. He is also on the board of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, the Social Science Research Council (Singapore) and the National Arts Council.

Aaron MANIAM is Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Communications and Information. He previously served in various roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as Head of the Centre for Strategic Futures and Deputy Director of Strategic Policy in the Public Service Division, and as Director of the Industry Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He is also Council Member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Agile Governance. Mr Maniam is an award-winning poet, with his works featured in various collections and online journals. He received the First Prize for English poetry in the 2003 National Arts Council's Golden Point Award, and in 2009, he was one of 50 poets featured in *Fifty on 50*. Mr Maniam received a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from the University of Oxford, a Master of Arts in International and Development Economics from Yale University, and a Masters in Public Policy from the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. He is an Adjunct Faculty at the National University of Singapore's University Scholars Programme, and a trained facilitator of interfaith dialogue. He was a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum, an Asia 21 Young Leader of the Asia Society, and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

MATHEW Mathews is a Principal Research Fellow and the Head of the Social Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He has been involved in over 50 research projects examining social policy issues including race, religion, immigrant relations, family and poverty. Together with his colleagues, he recently released a report on national pride and identity in Singapore. Dr Mathew is on the boards of OnePeople.sg and the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre. He is also on the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund panel and Families for Life Council.

NG Yi-Sheng is a Singaporean writer, researcher and LGBT+ activist. He had co-organised the annual queer cultural festival, IndigNation, and was a committee member of the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus. His books include the best-selling non-fiction work, *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century*. He authored poetry collection *Last Boy* and short story collection *Lion City*, which were both awarded the Singapore Literature Prize. Additionally, he has co-edited *GASPP: A Gay Anthology of Singapore Poetry and Prose* and *EXHALE: An Anthology of Queer Singapore Voices*. He has recently begun crafting lecture performances such as *Ayer Hitam: A Black History of Singapore* and *Desert Blooms: The Dawn of Queer Singapore Theatre*. He tweets and Instagrams at @yishkabob.

ONG Keng Yong is Executive Deputy Chairman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore since November 2014. Concurrently, he is Ambassador-at-Large in the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Singapore's non-resident High Commissioner to Pakistan and non-resident Ambassador to Iran. He was High Commissioner of Singapore to Malaysia from July 2011 to October 2014. Mr Ong was Secretary-General of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), based in Jakarta, Indonesia from January 2003 to January 2008.

SHARVESH Leatchmanan is a MA student in Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University and the Co-Founder & Editor of Minority Voices Singapore, a social media platform that raises awareness about the ongoing racism and intersectional issues ethnic minority communities face in Singapore. His research interests lie in the intersections of sexual racism, inter-ethnic solidarity and emotional well-being. With a bachelor's degree in guidance and counselling, and a foundational background in the performing arts, Mr Sharvesh is motivated by the power of storytelling and how unearthing personal narratives of the lives and experiences of marginalised folk can be used to educate, motivate and inspire people to adopt anti-racist and anti-discriminatory attitudes to build a respectful community that acknowledges its differences, recognises the power in diversity and celebrates its uniqueness without pushing for assimilation or integration in to a dominant way of being.

Carol SOON is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies where she heads the Society and Culture Department. Her research interests are in digital literacy and inclusion, digital media and activism, public engagement and deliberation, and media regulation. She has published her research in books and peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Asian Journal of Communication, and Public Integrity. She worked with the Singapore government on Singapore's first citizens' jury and is currently working with various government agencies on engaging citizens in co-creating and co-implementing policy solutions.

Dr Soon is also Associate Director of the Asia Journalism Fellowship that is supported by Temasek Foundation. She is the Vice Chair of Singapore's Media Literacy Council and sits on the Civil Service College, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth Partnerships and Engagement Experts Panel. She has taught courses on media, public opinion and public at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the University Scholars Programme at National University of Singapore.

Dr Soon was a recipient of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Research Excellence Award and the Australian Endeavour Award. Prior to joining academia, she worked in the corporate sector where she developed communication campaigns for profit and non-profit organisations. She also serves as a volunteer with Advisory SG and Voices of Asia as a mentor for Singapore youth.

VINEETA Sinha is Professor at the Department of Sociology as well as at the South Asian Studies Programme at National University of Singapore (NUS). She obtained her Master of Social Sciences from NUS and her Master and PhD in Anthropology from Johns Hopkins University. Her research and teaching interests include the following areas: Hindu religiosity in the diaspora; religion-state encounters; religion, commodification and consumption practices; history and practice of sociology; critique of concepts and categories in the social sciences; rethinking the teaching of classical sociological theory. She has published articles in a range of peer-reviewed

journals and the following monographs: *A New God in the Diaspora? Muneeswaran Worship in Contemporary Singapore* (Singapore University Press & Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2005); *Religion and Commodification: Merchandising Diasporic Hinduism* (Routledge, 2010); and *Religion-State Encounters in Hindu Domains: From the Straits Settlements to Singapore* (Springer, 2011). She was Vice-President (Publications) of the International Sociological Association (2014–2018) and co-editor of the *Asian Journal of Social Science* (Brill), the *Monograph Series, Social Sciences in Asia* (Brill), and the *Routledge International Library of Sociology*.

Lawrence WONG was elected as a Member of Parliament in May 2011 and re-elected in September 2015 and July 2020. He has held positions in the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Communications and Information, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, the Ministry of National Development, and the Ministry of Education.

Mr Wong co-chairs the Multi-Ministry Taskforce on COVID-19, and is the Deputy Chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore. He is also a member of the GIC Board; the Future Economy Council; the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council; and the National Research Foundation Board; and co-chairs the Singapore-Shanghai Comprehensive Cooperation Council.

He chairs the PAP Community Foundation and contributes to the labour movement as Chairman of the Singapore Labour Foundation, and Advisor to the Union of Power and Gas Employees.

Beginning his career as a civil servant, Mr Wong had worked as the Chief Executive of the Energy Market Authority and the Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. At the community level, he was involved in youth work in the church and voluntary organisations.

Mr Wong was educated at Tanjong Katong Secondary School and Victoria Junior College. He obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. He also holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.

ZHANG Weiyu is Associate Professor at the Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on civic engagement and information and communication technologies, with an emphasis on Asia. She is Director of the Civic Tech Lab (www.civictechlab.org) and has led multi-nation projects on youth engagement, online deliberation, and civic tech in Asia. Her current interest is to develop and examine civic tech applications to facilitate citizen deliberation on science topics such as climate change, gene-editing and artificial intelligence.

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