

## **We publish differing opinion pieces, including on race, to exchange views: Zaobao editor**

He said that before publishing, the Chinese paper is always "careful to look at the language".

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Lianhe Zaobao publishes opinion pieces by people from many different schools of thought because it is a platform for people to exchange views, Zaobao editor Goh Sin Teck said on Friday (Jun. 25).

Goh was speaking on a panel for the Forum on Race and Racism in Singapore, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).

In addition to Goh, the panel comprised Elmie Nekmat, Associate Professor in the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore (NUS); Daniel Goh, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at NUS; and Laavanya Kathiravelu, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

It was moderated by Professor Paulin Straughan, Dean of Students and Professor of Sociology at Singapore Management University.

### **Why does Zaobao publish opinion pieces that "stoke racist sentiments"?**

Responding to a statement by Straughan about the importance of empowering people to host open sessions where difficult conversations can be had, Goh chimed in to share his view that traditional media "has a role and has a responsibility" to create such spaces for conversation.

Zaobao provides a platform for people with different opinions to exchange views, he said.

"Sometimes, I find it quite strange that people are saying, 'Why are you publishing this piece of opinion?'"

A member of the audience happened to pose a question along these lines, asking why Zaobao "continue[s] to publish opinions that stoke racist sentiments".

In April 2020, Zaobao came [under fire](#) after publishing a [forum letter](#) by one Li Shiwan that blamed the Covid-19 outbreak in migrant workers' dormitories on migrant workers' poor personal hygiene and bad habits.

More recently, on Jun. 9, 2021, Zaobao published [an editorial](#) about the spate of recent racist incidents in Singapore.

More than 200 local academics and scholars signed an [open letter](#) to Zaobao, taking issue with how the editorial characterised the problem of racism in Singapore because it blamed the racist incidents on the "uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the sensationalism of social media, and the import of 'foreign ideas' such as Critical Race Theory".

### **Zaobao provides platform for different opinions**

Goh responded to the audience's question, clarifying that when it comes to discussing race-related issues, there is the risk that talking openly about them may "get people excited", but added that there is also the converse risk that not discussing them may have a similarly negative result:

"There's also risk of not discussing it and then you try to be quiet. [...] And then something major happens, and it may just explode."

Thus, Goh said that the Chinese paper chooses to talk about these issues.

"And when we start talking about this, it is inevitable that then, you have people from different schools of thoughts, different opinions, that come out. And then we have to accept that there are people who don't actually share my views."

Goh spoke about the need for people to learn how to "open [their] heart and [their] ears to also listen to people who have different views from [them]", and how he felt that Zaobao could be a platform for that.

He added that when Zaobao publishes such pieces, they are always "careful to look at the language" — the tone, whether it is sincere in wanting to have a discussion, or if it is trying to "stoke emotion".

### **Seriously looking into doing own translations**

Straughan then asked Goh about the possibility of having Zaobao, a Chinese-language newspaper, do its own translations:

"The problem is that minority members, and many who cannot read Chinese, would have to rely on a translation. And then something gets lost.

How can Zaobao protect itself to prevent this from happening. Can you do your own translations?"

Goh admitted that doing so would require "a lot of resources", but added that they are seriously looking into the possibility, especially for important pieces.

"Rather than leave it to somebody to translate — or worse still, people not only translate, then they will put in their interpretation, and they say, 'Oh, this is what this article is trying to imply', and this becomes the interpretation of the article.

Then, you know, sometimes the discussion gets lost."