The Third Phase of Singapore’s Multiculturalism

Dr Daniel PS Goh, NUS Sociology
1. Melting pot, 1960s-70s
2. Mosaic, 1980s-90s
3. Multiculturalism, 2000s-
1. Melting pot, 1960s-70s

• “let us visualise Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures as self-contained circles. But these circles are not separate. They overlap. The areas where they overlap can be described as areas of Malayan culture because they consist of cultural beliefs and practices which are held in common. In my view this overlapping areas is far larger than we think and is steadily being enlarged” (S. Rajaratnam, 1960)
2. Mosaic, 1980s-90s

• “no group of people can jettison their past, embrace another culture, and survive intact. … We should therefore … retain our own heritages, but examine them for values which need to be modified, and scrutinise foreign traditions for ideas which can be incorporated, but do so cautiously. Our roots are important. We should not be root-bound, but neither should we abandon our roots. They anchor us, and will help us to grow.” (Lee Hsien Loong, 1989)
“no one can claim to belong to a separate and distinct group or race. One can appreciate and understand much of one’s own heritage. But within every individual there also exist elements and traits reflecting the larger society. … When I visit Komala Villas with my family and tuck into the vegetarian food, the crowd there is truly varied and Singaporean. While this food example may appear trivial it reflects what multiculturalism means in Singapore” (Yaacob Ibrahim, 2003)
Three phases of multiculturalism
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Colonial legacies, 1960s

“how the wheel goes round, who keeps it in motion, and the part played by Ahmad, Ah Seng and Ramasamy in its revolution”

Colonial racialism

“Lazy Malays”
“Greedy Chinese”
“Naïve Tamils”

Ethnic stereotypes

Emotive racism
Punggol North
Racial & Religious
Harmony Day
Street Parade & Carnival 2007
Date: 15th July (Sunday) 5pm

Guest of Honour: Mr. Kho Soo Kiow

Guest Speaker:

Free Sand Arts, Sugarloaf & Face Change Art (RBI) Performance
@ Carpark B

In front of Block 706B 17.30-17.50 (3pm to 3.50pm)

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@ Carpark B

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Cultural exchange

- Postcolonial multiracialism
- Positive stereotypes
- Emotive cultural exchange
Cultural changes, 1980s

- Excessive consumerism
- "Yellow Culture"
- Westernization
- Selfish individualism
Cultural conservation

Pluralist consumerism

Patronizing multiracialism?

Asianization

Hyper social sensitivity
Dialogue?

Fear of others

Self-censorship

Emotional, Patronizing Multiracialism

Erosion of trust

Lose capacity to talk
Most people can be trusted

- Taiwan Province of China
- Singapore
- Switzerland

Can
Can't
How often discusses political matters with friends

- Taiwan Province of China
- Singapore
- Switzerland
Dialogue?

- Fear of others
- Self-censorship
- Racial Jokes
- Emotional, Patronizing Multiracialism
- Erosion of trust
- Lose capacity to talk
Multicultural capacity

- Facilitate
- Understanding
- Sensitive
- Ethnicize
- Relational
- Actional
- Consensual
- Evaluative

- Frame
- Therapy
- Patronizing
- Racialize
- Communal
- Going with the flow
- Suppression
- Judgmental