

SINGAPORE RESEARCH NEXUS VIRTUAL EVENT

New Humanities and Social Sciences Research on Singapore and the Region

PANEL THEMES

**Diaspora and
Cosmopolitanism**

**Religion
and Place**

**Language and
Multiculturalism**



**Mohamed Effendy Bin
Abdul Hamid**
NUS Southeast Asian
Studies



Seng Guo-Quan
NUS History



Daniel P.S. Goh
NUS Sociology



Indira Arumugam
NUS Sociology



Alvin Lim Eng Hui
NUS English Language
and Literature



Lee Cher Leng
NUS Chinese Studies



Nala H. Lee
NUS English
Language and
Literature



Rebecca Lurie Starr
NUS English
Language and
Literature

Friday, 7 January 2022

10am-4pm (SGT), Zoom

Registration:

shorturl.at/eptF6

Enquiries:

nexus@nus.edu.sg



Singapore Research Nexus
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

SINGAPORE RESEARCH NEXUS VIRTUAL EVENT

Recent Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences on Singapore and the Region

Featuring Panels on Language and Multiculturalism, Religion and Place,
Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism

Friday, 7th January, 2022 (Singapore Time)

**10:00 am to
10:10 am**

Opening Remarks

Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho | Associate Professor, NUS Geography, and Vice Dean of Research at FASS

Panel 1: Language and Multiculturalism

**10:10 am to
10:15 am**

Introduction of Researchers

Bao Zhiming | Professor, NUS English Language and Literature

**10:15 am to
10:35 am**

Singapore Hawker Centres: A Linguistic Landscape of Identity, Diversity, and Continuity

Lee Cher Leng | Associate Professor, NUS Chinese Studies

**10:35 am to
10:55 am**

On Extreme Outcomes of Multilingualism: The Case of Baba Malay

Nala H. Lee | Assistant Professor, NUS English Language and Literature

**10:55 am to
11:15 am**

Third Culture Kids on the Little Red Dot: Children's Sociolinguistic Development and Transnational Mobility in Singapore

Rebecca Lurie Starr | Associate Professor, NUS English Language and Literature

**11:15 am to
11:45 am**

Q & A

**11:45 am to
12:50 pm**

BREAK

<u>Panel 2: Religion and Place</u>	
12:50 pm to 12:55 pm	Introduction of Researchers
Irving Chan Johnson Associate Professor, NUS Southeast Asian Studies	
12:55 pm to 1:15 pm	Digits and Digital Embodiments of Spirits: Social Media Platforms, Live Streams, and Spirit Possessions
Alvin Eng Hui Lim Assistant Professor, NUS English Language and Literature	
1:15 pm to 1:35 pm	Malls, Centres, and Streets: The Dislocation of Christianity in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines
Daniel P.S. Goh Associate Professor, NUS Sociology	
1:35 pm to 1:55 pm	Reduced to a Goddess: Mythopoesis, Metamorphoses of and Mediations of the Past by a Tamil Deity
Indira Arumugam Assistant Professor, NUS Sociology	
1:55 pm to 2:25 pm	Q & A
2:25 pm to 2:40 pm	BREAK
<u>Panel 3: Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism</u>	
2:40 pm to 2:45 pm	Introduction of Researchers
Ivan Kwek Eng Tai Senior Lecturer, NUS Department of Sociology	
2:45 pm to 3:05 pm	Women-initiated divorce and the making of a Chinese patriarchy in colonial Java
Seng Guo-Quan Assistant Professor, NUS Department of History	
3:05 pm to 3:25 pm	Men of martial skills in Singapore: Insights to the social and cultural transformation of a diasporic community
Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid Lecturer, NUS Department of Southeast Asian Studies	
3:25 pm to 3:45 pm	Q & A

3:45 pm to 3:50 pm	Closing Remarks
Elmie Nekmat Associate Professor, NUS Communications and New Media and Assistant Dean of Research at FASS	

Panel 1: Language and Multiculturalism

Singapore Hawker Centres: A Linguistic Landscape of Identity, Diversity, and Continuity

Lee Cher Leng

NUS Department of Chinese Studies

chsleecl@nus.edu.sg

10:15 am to 10:35 am

Abstract

This paper is a sociolinguistic study of the linguistic landscape of signboards in Singapore hawker centres. It examines the language(s) displayed on the signboards of 2,145 stalls in the 20 largest hawker centres in Singapore. Hawker centres in Singapore are open-air eating places patronised by thousands of people each day. With less government intervention in the language that can be displayed on hawker centre signboards, the signs reflect the languages used and identities adopted by the masses in a multilingual setting. This language ecology enables us to observe how languages interact at individual and societal scales in hawker centres and how linguistic diversity is maintained despite the apparent widespread use of English in Singapore. We examine how besides the monolingual, bilingual and multilingual and hybrid signboards, hawker centres are unique habitats in this language ecology where non-Mandarin dialects are preserved and traditional Chinese characters are commonly seen, in globalised Singapore. The hawker centres showcase a linguistic landscape of identity, diversity, and continuity.

About the Speaker



LEE Cher Leng is an Associate Professor of Chinese Linguistics, Department of Chinese Studies, NUS. Her research interests include Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics and Chinese language education. She has published in international journals such as Pragmatics, Journal of Politeness Research, 《当代语言学》, Global Chinese, Current Issues in Language Planning, Journal of Chinese Linguistics, and contributed to Politeness in East Asia (Cambridge University Press), Chinese Discourse and Interaction (London: Equinox), and Multilingualism in the Chinese Diaspora Worldwide (Routledge) among many others. Her interview with CNA on the signage of hawker centres was broadcasted in the program Belly of the Nations in 2019.

Panel 1: Language and Multiculturalism

On extreme outcomes of multilingualism: the case of Baba Malay

Nala H. Lee

NUS Department of English Language and Literature

nala.lee@nus.edu.sg

10:35 am to 10:55 am

Abstract

Language ontogenesis and language death can occur at polar ends of multilingualism. Baba Malay offers a curious case study, having emerged under highly multilingual circumstances, and in its current state, being critically endangered. Formed by intermarriages of Chinese traders and local indigenous women, the Peranakan community, culture and language thus came to be. Analysis of data from the turn of the 19th century demonstrate the range in variation as a response to multilingualism and prevailing linguistic ideologies. The language has since become critically endangered in the face of other dominant languages.

About the Speaker



Nala H. Lee is an assistant professor of Linguistics at the Department of English Language and Literature, NUS. She is interested in the spectrum of language change brought about by multilingualism. Specifically, her research interests include language endangerment, language death, and creolistics. She is a co-developer of the Language Endangerment Index, which is used by the Catalogue of Endangered Languages (www.endangeredlanguages.com). Locally, she focuses largely on Baba Malay. Her grammar of the language is slated for publication in February 2022.

Panel 1: Language and Multiculturalism

Third Culture Kids on the Little Red Dot: Children's Sociolinguistic Development and Transnational Mobility in Singapore

Rebecca Lurie Starr

NUS Department of English Language and Literature

rstarr@nus.edu.sg

10:55 am to 11:15 am

Abstract

The rise of transnational migration in Singapore has transformed the country's sociolinguistic landscape; children growing up in the community are increasingly exposed to a wide range of local and non-local language varieties, and develop their understanding of how language functions in society in relation to this complex ecology. This talk presents work exploring the linguistic production and perception of children from various national backgrounds growing up in Singapore, and considers how transnational mobility is shaping the trajectories of local languages.

About the Speaker



Rebecca Lurie Starr is an Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. She received her PhD in Linguistics with a Designation in Cognitive Science from Stanford University in 2012. Her research focuses on children's sociolinguistic development and language variation and change in multilingual settings.

Panel 2: Religion and Place

Digits and Digital Embodiments of Spirits: Social Media Platforms, Live Streams, and Spirit Possessions

Alvin Eng Hui Lim

NUS Department of English Language and Literature

ellleha@nus.edu.sg

12:55 pm to 1:15 pm

Abstract

On 7 April 2020, Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple (新加坡韭菜芭城隍庙) introduced the “Praying Online” initiative in response to safe distancing measures and the implementation of ‘Circuit Breaker’ in Singapore. For two hours a day, devotees can go on their Facebook page to view the main altar of the temple and pray to the tutelary deity, Cheng Huang Gong (城隍公). Devotees leave online messages and emoticons (🙏), and a monitor screen has been placed in front of the effigy for the deity to view these messages. In a similar way, live-streamed videos of Chinese underworld gods, Dua Ya Pek and Di Ya Pek appeared on the Facebook pages of several private temples in Malaysia. Possessing different human vessels each time, the gods ate, drank, smoked, and communicated with their devotees online by improvising, responding to their online comments, and providing numerical digits for lottery draws. The gods and their vessels re-emerged to provide some semblance of normalcy, or rather, a new normal where they relied on social media to connect with their devotees during times of necessary physical isolation.

My contribution will reflect on the ontological status of this simple act of placing a camera before an object or a person believed to a material vessel of a god. This act acknowledges that the god can ‘see’ through the monitor screen via live streaming. In a different context, during Christian services streamed online, pastors look at the cameras and ask viewers to close their eyes to pray and to feel the presence of God. These acts of facing the camera or looking away, I sense, replaces the embodied attachments to places of worship but in so doing, tap on the respective practices’ existing emphasis on being in a personal relationship with one’s god and that gods have eyes to see acts of devotion, even in digital forms.

See an example of the live streaming of Sheng Hong Temple’s main altar at: <https://www.facebook.com/LKCSHENGHONGTEMPLE/videos/1220727588260805/>

About the Speaker



Alvin Eng Hui Lim is a performance, religion and theatre researcher. He is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. His research focusses on the intersections of theatre and religion, popular religious practices, spirit mediums and rituals, with emphasis on digital media. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies jointly awarded by the National University of Singapore and King's College London. He is also Deputy Director and Technology and Online Editor (Mandarin) of the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A, <http://a-s-i-a-web.org/>). His first monograph, *Digital Spirits in Religion and Media: Possession and Performance*, is published by Routledge in 2018. He has also published on Singapore theatre, translation, digital archiving, and religious performance in Singapore.

Panel 2: Religion and Place

Malls, Centres, and Streets: The Dislocation of Christianity in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines

Daniel P.S. Goh
NUS Department of Sociology

socgohd@nus.edu.sg

1:15 pm to 1:35 pm

Abstract

Fast-growing independent Protestant churches in the primary cities of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines are found in three types of locations: shopping malls, convention centres, and unconventional buildings on city streets. This is linked to the need for social camouflage, as well as the acumen of reaching the new middle classes for church growth and the desire for plugging into the emerging circuits of regional evangelical flows. Consequently, Christian placemaking has been dislocated and the distinctions between sacred and profane, community and individual have been displaced into a liminal sociality that does not yet have a name.

About the Speaker



Daniel PS Goh is Associate Professor of Sociology and Associate Provost (Undergraduate Education) at the National University of Singapore. His primary research interests are in state formation, cultural politics, Asian urbanisms, and Christianity in Asia. He has published over 60 articles, book chapters and edited books, including *Regulating Religion in Asia: Norms, Modes, and Challenges* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). In the recent few years, he has been studying the growth of independent Christian churches in Southeast Asian cities in a SSRC-funded research project with Terence Chong from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. This talk is based on findings from the study.

Panel 2: Religion and Place

Reduced to a Goddess: Mythopoesis, Metamorphoses of and Mediations of the Past by a Tamil Deity

Indira Arumugam

NUS Department of Sociology

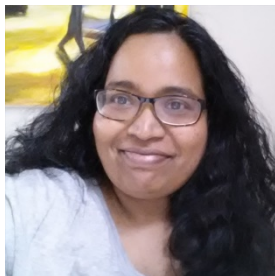
socia@nus.edu.sg

1:35 pm to 1:55 pm

Abstract

Premised upon three narratives – of Veeramakaliamman's origins from the violent death of a young girl in Tamil Nadu in 750 CE, growth with a spectacular icon, temple and ritual cult and finally travel to Singapore in 1855 and settlement within a temple in Serangoon Road in 1881 – this paper grapples with how this popular Tamil goddess is birthed, bodied, placed, and propelled through stories and storytelling. The goddess mediates between two dispositions towards the past – the mythic and the historic. Manifested and mapped in and through shifts in narrative genres is the gentrification of the goddess from a specific, local, and idiosyncratic being into a universal, abstract, and generic power. Sifting through the differences between the narratives about Veeramakaliamman from her native Tamil Nadu and from her sojourn in Singapore, I explore how ongoing interactions between shifting politico-economic conditions and religious sensibilities in specific places shape how the goddess is re(presented). Intensifying deification, I suggest, has transformed an originally sovereign, incendiary, agentic force into a comparatively more contingent, serene, and human-mediated entity. In shifting from the mythic to the historic genre, her narratives chronicle how, while inspiring human actions, Veeramakaliamman herself becomes more inert and abstract. Stories about Veerakaliamman do proliferate. However, the goddess herself no longer drives the narrative as she had before.

About the Speaker



Indira Arumugam is an Assistant Professor in the National University of Singapore. She is an anthropologist working primarily in Tamil Nadu and amidst the Tamil diaspora in Southeast Asia. Her primary research interests are rituals, lived kinship, popular politics, everyday ethics and grassroots Hinduism. Her articles on pleasurable kinship, resurgent animal sacrifice, coercive gift and electoral politics and festival ethics have been published in *Social Anthropology*, *Modern Asian Studies*, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* and *Material Religion*. Her monograph entitled, *Visceral Politics: Intimate Imaginaries of Power in South India* is forthcoming. She is currently working

on two projects: the contemporary resonance of animal sacrifice and the ritual cult of an autochthonous village goddess in urban Singapore.

Panel 3: Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism

Women-initiated divorce and the making of a Chinese patriarchy in colonial Java

Seng Guo-Quan

NUS Department of History

hissqq@nus.edu.sg

2:45 pm to 3:05 pm

Abstract

Scholars have long observed that Peranakan Chinese women enjoyed more autonomy than their counterparts in China but less those in Southeast Asia. My study of more than 700 nineteenth century divorce trials show that their relative autonomy was grounded in a Confucian marriage system creolized by local Islamic divorce norms. In this talk, I explain how “civil divorce” was a well-established customary legal right for Chinese women in colonial urban Java. Specified neither in contemporary Chinese imperial law, nor in Dutch colonial Chinese adat law, I argue that the predominantly women-initiated divorce proceedings, adjudicated by the community’s Kapitan patriarchs, gave shape to moral notions of “Chinese” woman- and manhood in the middle of the century.

About the Speaker



Seng Guo-Quan is Assistant Professor in the Department of History. This talk is based on a chapter in his book manuscript, *Intimate Strangers: Gender and Chinese Moral Borders in Colonial Indonesia* (under review). The book traces the formation of an ethnic minority identity under Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia (1816-1942) through intersecting discourses of race, gender and civilizing legal reforms. He is more broadly interested in researching patterns of Chinese trade and migration, and Overseas Chinese social-political formations in Southeast Asia, in the context of the history of capitalism. His next project, *A Diaspora of Shopkeepers*, examines the expansion of transregional Chinese retail networks and the rise of racial discourses in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia between the 1870s and 1970s.

Panel 3: Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism

Men of martial skills in Singapore: Insights to the social and cultural transformation of a diasporic community

Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid
NUS Department of Southeast Asian Studies

seameah@nus.edu.sg

3:05 pm to 3:25 pm

Abstract

In this talk I will discuss the role of men with martial skills from the Malay-Indonesian world in Singapore's history which is a greatly neglected area of study. It argues that men with martial skills from Sulawesi, Bawean island and the Malay archipelago were once important to the traditional court and society in Singapore but British colonialism and the advent of the modern state, changed the role and function of men with martial skills and insights to this process can be gleaned from family histories of Silat groups in Singapore and archival sources.

About the Speaker



Dr. Effendy is a lecturer at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. Trained as a historian, he has wide interests that include Pre-colonial Southeast Asian history, Colonial Southeast Asian history, Post-colonial and Modern Southeast Asian history.

Opening and Closing Remarks

About the Speaker



Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho

NUS Department of Geography

elaine.ho@nus.edu.sg

Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho is Associate Professor at the Department of Geography and Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore (NUS). She is currently Vice-Dean of the FASS Research Division. Her research addresses how citizenship is changing as a result of multi-directional migration flows in the Asia-Pacific. She is author of *Citizens in Motion: Emigration, Immigration and Re-migration Across China's Borders* (2019, Stanford University Press). Elaine is now extending her research to two new domains: (1) transnational ageing and care in the Asia-Pacific, and (2) internal displacement at the China-Myanmar border, focusing on border im/mobilities, diaspora action and transnational aid. She is Editor of the journal *Social and Cultural Geography*.

About the Speaker



Elmie Nekmat

NUS Department of Communications and New Media

elmie@nus.edu.sg

Dr. Elmie Nekmat is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Communications and New Media and Assistant Dean of Research at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He is concurrently a Principal Investigator for the Center for Trusted Internet and Community (CTIC) and Research Associate at the Center for Family and Population Research (CFPR) in NUS. He was a recipient of the NUS Overseas Graduate Scholarship (NUS-OGS) for his Ph.D. studies in communication and information sciences (2013) and the NUS Overseas Postdoctoral Fellowship (NUS-OPF) for his postdoctoral research on digital communication and evaluation at the University of California, Santa Barbara (2014).

Dr. Nekmat specializes in media effects research, focused on the social psychological processes and effects of source and information evaluation on civic engagement and expression, and strategic communication in social networked computer-mediated environments.

Panel Chairs

About the Speaker



Bao Zhiming

NUS Department of English Language and Literature

bao@nus.edu.sg

Bao Zhiming is a theoretical linguist working in the Department of English Language and Literature. He joined NUS in 1993. Currently he has two active research areas: contact linguistics and theoretical phonology.

About the Speaker



Ivan Kwek Eng Tai

NUS Department of Sociology

ivankwek@nus.edu.sg

Ivan Kwek is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, NUS. Trained as a media anthropologist at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and prior background as a TV current affairs and documentary producer, Ivan has worked on the ethnography of media production at Suria, the minority Malay-language television channel in Singapore. His research is focused on the so-called Malay worlds as they relate to, not just media and ethnicity, but also spaces, memories, and future-making. As an educator, he teaches visual methodologies, race and ethnicity, and the sociology of cultural production.

About the Speaker



Irving Chan Johnson

NUS Department of Southeast Asian Studies

seajic@nus.edu.sg

Irving Johnson has had a longstanding interest in Southeast Asia, particularly in the areas of art, traditional performance and borderland identities. Growing up listening to stories of corpse chin oil, violent deaths and magic from his Kelantanese Thai mother and grandfather, Irving decided to explore the role of dance and magic in a small Thai village in Kelantan as part of his undergraduate (Honours) research at the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, NUS. Returning to Kelantan annually to visit family and friends, Irving's interest in the small Buddhist community soon developed from one of that revolved around things that go bump in the night, to issues of cultural identity. Irving received his PhD in Social Anthropology from Harvard University in 2004 where he worked on issues of marginality, borders, movements and history in Kelantan's northern frontier.