

## Conflict & Harmony in Multi-ethnic Societies

**What is the purpose of the chapter?**

**How does Chapter 4 connect to other chapters?**

1. Factors that make/break multi-ethnic societies via comparisons of two foreign case studies.

- Understanding the concept of ethnicity as a composite identity shaped by different elements.

- Difference between race and ethnicity

- Ethnicity: sense of shared cultural identity can be built upon different combinations of several elements ranging from shared religion, language and sense of history.

- Opportunities to connect with national identity formation. Some nation states are closely linked to certain ethnic groups - the ethnic identity is closely tied to the national identity (but in cases, this close linkage is disputed e.g. the association of Jews with the state of Israel; a less disputable case may be Japan or Korea). Most nation states do have many different ethnic groups living within them.

- Appreciating the potency of ethnicity in shaping relationships between peoples and societies, thus the sometimes explosive and intractable nature of conflicts which are linked to ethnic-based issues.

- Understanding how ethnic-based factors play a role in contributing towards and aggravating conflicts. The ethnic factor may be a key but it is usually one contributory factor and it is the combination with other factors that shape conflicts. These other factors could include historical (past conflicts), governance (livelihoods affected, sense of belonging to country), leadership (specific leaders' actions).

- Strategies for managing conflict will depend on the multi-faceted causes. Assessments of

other societies' approaches to managing conflicts should also take into account these contextual factors.

- Tackling just the ethnic factor will not resolve tensions effectively if there are other factors involved. Our assessment of other societies' abilities to resolve conflict should also be based on an assessment of the management of all contributory factors. Depending on complexities of the factors, conflicts can take a long time to resolve.

- Multi-ethnic relations in Singapore to demonstrate governance in action. How does it demonstrate?

- Appreciation of role of ethnicity in Singapore's national history and identity.
- Recent history of ethnic-based tensions and Singapore's geographical position in the region mean that ethnicity will feature prominently in the way Singapore perceives itself (and shape national policies) and how others (especially our neighbors) perceive us.

- Awareness of the visibility of ethnicity in many aspects of governance.
- Measures to ensure protection of interests of ethnic groups are deeply rooted in many aspects of national policies, ranging from the housing to electoral representation to the Internal Security Act and Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.
- Opportunities to bring in structure of government when appropriate. E.g. Elected President's role and Presidential Council for Religious Harmony. E.g. Roles of Ministry of Home Affairs, National Development and how GRCs are organized.

- Appreciation of multi-pronged approach to maintaining harmony (education, political, community level)
- Can refer to efforts related to heritage development and preservation. The ways through which Singapore define and preserve our heritage also shows the influence of ethnicity; and shows another dimension of how harmony is maintained.

**What do I already know about the workings and how would I assess the state of ethnic relations in Singapore?**

**What do my students already know/what are my students' existing perceptions?**

1. What are my personal experiences and opinions? How will I assess the state of relations?

2. How can I find out/shape my students perceptions?

- Balanced perspectives of issues related to ethnic relations in Singapore can be consciously built up. There are the academic perspectives because of Singapore's reputation as a case study for understanding state-ethnic policies, relations as well as ethnic identity development. There are perspectives from the state, showing how national policies, institutions and agencies shape ethnic relations in Singapore. The blogsphere also have a myriad of perspectives from common Singaporeans on how they feel about the state of ethnic relations and how they negotiate their own identities.

- An awareness of and sensitivities towards the variety of identities you have in your classrooms, including your own, is an important first step towards constructive engagement of your students in discussions on issues related to ethnicity. Each student will bring to the classroom influences that shape his/her own identities as well as his/her pre-conceived notions about other ethnicities.

**What are the different ways through which to develop an appreciation of the topic?**

1. Why are ethnicity, ethnic relations and policies and will remain central in Singapore society?

- Appreciation of role of ethnicity in Singapore's national history and identity
- The prominence of ethnicity in so many aspects of governance
- The success of ethnic harmony and its impact on perceptions of effective governance
  
- Awareness of the increasing complexity of ethnic landscapes in Singapore with growth of foreign population
  
- How are ethnic relations connected to other social issues?
- What are the controversial issues that could arise from this topic?
  
- Political distribution of power, Economic distribution of wealth
  
- Personal and emotional nature of issues
  
- What other foreign case studies may be used to provide more insights into different approaches to managing ethnic relations?
  
- Switzerland, Indonesia, China, US.

## Resources

The links cover resources that look at various aspects influencing ethnic and national identity in Singapore and Southeast Asia including states policies aimed at strengthening national cohesion, the effectiveness of these policies and impact on ethnic relations/identities. It may be interesting to study the evolution of ethnic identities of different groups in Singapore/Southeast Asia to discover how fluid and complex the evolution can be. An aspect which adds to the complex nature of ethnic issues is the connections between ethnicity and economics. Lastly, one can also look at various heritage construction projects aimed at developing aspects of the Singapore national identity.

### [Race, ethnicity, and the state in Malaysia and Singapore \(book\)](#)

Lian, K.F. (2006). Race, ethnicity and the state in Malaysia and Singapore. Leiden: Brill. 2006.

Comparative study of two states for which race and ethnicity feature very prominently in national policies, providing insights into relations between the two.

### [Constructing Singapore: elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project \(book\)](#)

Barr, M. (2008). Constructing Singapore: elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. 2008.

Alternative viewpoints and critical evaluation of ethnic-based policies in Singapore.

**[Beyond rituals and riots: ethnic pluralism and social cohesion in Singapore \(book\)](#)**

Lai, A.E. (2004). Beyond rituals and riots: ethnic pluralism and social cohesion in Singapore. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic. 2004.

Overview (looks at various social spheres) and critique of the progress made thus far in social cohesion in Singapore.

**[Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the Ethnic Chinese \(Book\)](#)**

Suryadinata, L. (2005). Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the Ethnic Chinese. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2005.

Comparative study of how Chinese ethnic identities have been negotiated, constructed and managed differently, resulting in different state of relations in Southeast Asia. Special focus on Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

**[Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries \(book\)](#)**

Barnard, T. (2006). *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2006.

Examination of how sense of Malayness have been evolved and developed across time and space.

### **Archives, Heritage and the Devpt of 'Reflections at Bukit Chandu'**

Brunero, D. (2006). Archives and Heritage in Singapore: The Development of 'Reflections at Bukit Chandu' a World War II Interpretative Centre. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Vol. 12, No. 5, pp. 427-439,

On 15 February 2002 a new World War II interpretive centre was opened in Singapore. A

colonial bungalow was redeveloped by the National Archives of Singapore to commemorate the Malay Regiment and particularly the officers and soldiers who made a heroic stand against Japanese forces in one of the last battles before the fall of Singapore. This centre, Reflections at Bukit Chandu, has significance in terms of local heritage development, public memory of war, national education initiatives, and also in relation to the changing role of archives in Singapore. This paper serves as an exploration of this heritage site and uses this as a starting point for considering public history in Singapore and importantly a new direction for the National Archives of Singapore, as it played the key role in developing this site.

## **Ethnic Heritage and Tourism The Peranakans**

Henderson, J. (2003). Ethnic Heritage as a Tourist Attraction. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Vol.9, No.1, pp.27-44.

## **Invention of Heritage and Popular Music**

Kong, L. (1999). The Invention of Heritage: Popular Music in Singapore. *Asian Studies Review*. Vol. 23 No.1. pp. 1-25

## **Role of State and InterEthnic Relations**

Ooi, G.L. (2005). The Role of the Developmental State and Interethnic Relations in Singapore. *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume 6, Number 2, pp.109-120

Singapore is a city-state in Southeast Asia which, like much of the rest of the region, has a population that is ethnically and culturally diverse because of migration before and during colonial rule. Migration has continued with the rise of modern nation-statehood, particularly as



the countries in the region sought to integrate more closely with the global economy. So for some centuries now, Singapore's polyglot population has lived often cheek by jowl in relatively high-density urban conditions generally without major problems. There have, however, been incidents of racial rioting that have been stimulated as much by political opportunists as well as the political tensions arising from transitional periods in the government particularly during the changeover from colonial regime to selfrule in the 1950s to the 1960s. Singapore's multi-ethnic population comprises a majority of Chinese, 77 per cent and two smaller ethnic groups, the Malays, 15 per cent and Indians 8 per cent together with other small groups like the Eurasians and Arabs. The state has played a major and dominant role in the management of interethnic relations in Singapore. This paper discusses the role that the state has played and the status of relations between the Chinese and Malays.

### **Managing Urban Ethnic Heritage and Little India**

Henderson, J. Managing Urban Ethnic Heritage: Little India in Singapore. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 332–346

Historic urban ethnic enclaves are complex entities that serve multiple purposes and are used in various ways by different groups. This paper deals with the case of Little India in Singapore and examines the relationships, processes and underlying dynamics that are at work and their consequences for the management of the heritage site. The enclave is shown to be a historic, commercial, leisure and residential space in which citizens, migrant workers, tourists, government agencies and private business all have a stake. Existing and planned developments, however, generate conflicts and expose fundamental tensions between pressures for change and for preservation and continuity. Particular attention is devoted to the role of tourism, which is seen to act as an instrument of both development and conservation. Conclusions have a wider applicability beyond Singapore, but the distinctive qualities of the city-state are also highlighted.

