Distilling Immigration through Identity Politics and National Narratives

Panel Discussion
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Singapore Demography – similar to other developed economies

Singapore Citizens | Singapore Permanent Residents | Non-Residents | Total Fertility Rate

Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000) | Year | Population (000)

1970 | 1874.8 | 1980 | 2194.3 | 1990 | 2623.7 | 2000 | 2985.9 | 2010 | 3230.7 | 2015 | 3500.9 | 2020 | 3523.2

Total Fertility Rate:
- 1970: 3.07
- 1980: 1.82
- 1990: 1.83
- 2000: 1.6
- 2010: 1.15
- 2015: 1.24
- 2018: 1.14
- 2019: 1.14
- 2020: 1.14
## Singapore Resident Ethnic Composition (1970 – 2020)

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<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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Racial composite remains stable over last 50 years

BUT EXCLUDES NON-RESIDENTS
Can Singapore cultivate resilience in face of change?

By LEONG CHAI-HOONG
Published January 9, 2016
Updated January 10, 2016

2013 Population White Paper
and immigration influx

Immigration – a raw and emotive subject for many then
Immigration – Still a raw and emotive subject for many

https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/tiktok-ceo-singaporean-chew-shou-zi-who-is-he-bytedance-1347001
Distilling Immigration through National Narratives

Diverse, fractured populace, hostile neighbour, and overcoming the odds to rise from 3rd world to 1st

- National narrative – a country’s “blue print” for our beliefs and experience
- Story board that guide people’s thinking and how to relate to others
- Central to the construction of national identity and engender sense of cohesion and belongingness
- Defined by history and collective memories, stories of a nation’s origins and achievements.
### China’s Narrative

1. **The century of humiliation**
   - Historical humiliation at the hands of foreign imperialism; oppression to China’s ascension

2. **Unchanging culture**
   - China an inherently peaceful actor

3. **History as destiny**
   - Powerful, respected, and peaceful global actor in the past, to restore its rightful role in the future

4. **Filial piety and familial obligation**
   - Obedience to authority. Collective interest

### America’s Narrative

1. **The libertarian narrative**
   - Dynamism of the free market. Importance of individual autonomy, rights, and agency responsible for their own fate (“American Dream”).

2. **Multicultural America**
   - Immigrant society – see diversity as pillar of nation building. Key elements of identity rooted in English as common language, Christianity, religious commitment, rule of law

3. **Globalised America**
   - Open and connected world is always a better one. Power in the hands of few which corrupts if unchecked

4. **American-first rhetoric**
   - Sense of purpose in eliminating foreign threats and to establish an environment amenable to American interests

### New Zealand’s Narrative

1. **National narratives hinges on values of fairness and equality**

2. **Historical injustice to indigenous people**
   - Treaty of Waitangi as its first constitution

3. **Biculturalism – tensions and reconciliation between Maori (native) and Pakeha (Europeans settlers)**

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What is the Singapore Narrative?

**Nation Building**
- First instituted in 1967 to build Singapore’s armed forces after gaining independence in 1965, National Service is a Singapore national policy that mandates all male Singaporean citizens and second-generation PRs to serve a period of compulsory service in the uniformed services.
- Singapore’s highly developed free-market economy is anchored in political stability, low corruption rates and transparent public institutions, making the country a trusted partner for businesses. To add, prudent monetary and fiscal policies and a transparent legal framework underpin our low risk economy.
- The Ethnic Integration Policy was also implemented to foster greater social cohesion by maintaining a diverse ethnic mix across HCB blocks and neighbourhoods.

**National Resilience**
- Health threats: SARS & COVID-19
  - Across both health crises, rapid containment of the outbreak was effected with strong political leadership, effective command, coordination at all levels, prompt and coordinated interagency responses, high levels of professionalism and dedication of Health care workers, and strong community support.
- National security: Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorism threats & counter-terrorism
  - Singapore continues to identify counterterrorism as the nation’s top security policy priority and has comprehensive strategies based on global and regional trends.
  - These include: vigilant security measures, regional and international law enforcement cooperation, efforts to counter radicalization to violence, and a campaign to prepare the populace for possible attacks.
  - Singapore’s Internal Security Department (ISD) prevented a series of bomb attacks by Singapore’s JI branch, effectively crippling the network.

**Conflict**
- As a multiracial and religious society, issues related to race and religion are often at the forefront of Singapore’s conflicting issues (i.e., racial riots).
- Singapore also continuously faces the challenge of inequality, resulted from a weakened global economy due to the pandemic, soaring inflation, growing rich-poor divide and declining social mobility.
What is the Singapore Narrative?

Nation Building

Creating institutions, making sacrifices for common good

National Resilience

Shared experiences in overcoming the odds

Conflict

Tensions, compromises, tradeoff


National narratives – at individual level

Shared Challenges

I had acute anxiety: DBS’ Piyush Gupta on past mental health struggles

Will Covid-19 be the catalyst that normalises acceptance of mental health issues in the workplace? Perhaps when more bosses admit their own struggles.

Shared Spaces

Shared Aspirations
The End

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