

Racialization and the Politics of Malay Identity in Singapore

By Professor Lian Kwen Fee

Institute of Asian Studies

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Speaker's Profile



Lian Kwen Fee was formerly at the Department of Sociology in the National University of Singapore before taking up an appointment in the Institute of Asian Studies as Professor of Sociology. His academic background is in political and historical sociology. His research interests are in race, migration, and the nation-state focusing on New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. His recent publications are on migrant remittances in Asia, migrant entrepreneurship in Korea and Japan, race and politics in Peninsular Malaysia. He is currently editing a book on 'Multiculturalism, Migration and the Politics of Identity in Singapore'.

Abstract

This paper addresses how racialization can be applied to examine the state construction of Malay identity in Singapore. The conventional understanding of racialization is that it is a process that attributes differences to biological constitution, usually phenotypical characteristics. I take the broader interpretation that people racialize or naturalize differences and relations between races/ethnic groups even by referring to culture, religion, language, nation or other issues. By examining the public and political discourses particular to some of these issues, I demonstrate how the state has racialized and influenced the development of Malay identity in various stages in the political history of Singapore: colonial, national, and global.