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Perceptions of Meritocracy in Singapore: Inconsistencies, Contestations and Biases

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ABSTRACT

This article questions how meritocracy, as a state-sponsored narrative in Singapore, is variously negotiated and interpreted by Singaporean youth. Conveyed as a tenet central to Singapore's national identity, meritocracy is often referred to as the "Singapore Dream" where socioeconomic mobility is made possible through hard work and ability regardless of ethnic difference. Critics of meritocracy in Singapore problematise how the narrative exists as a political instrument, conceals systemic discrimination and perpetuates ethnic inequality. Yet, how the population receives meritocracy remains unexplored within scholarship. While recognising its dominance within Singapore's socio-political landscape, this article takes a bottom-up approach to understanding how meritocracy is perceived on the ground. Interviews conducted with Singaporean polytechnic students reveal differential experiences and articulations of meritocracy, demonstrating a gap between the endorsement of meritocracy as a positive value and conviction that it exists in practice. Furthermore, where ethnic discrimination is recognised among Singaporean youth, it is oftentimes normalised as a function of a multiracial society. This belief is problematic as it vindicates state and society and reduces the impetus to seek redress and change.

KEYWORDS

Singapore; meritocracy; multiculturalism; discrimination; hegemony

Meritocracy is broadly theorised as a social system where individual merit is met with reward, such as economic returns or social status. In an ideal meritocracy, individuals have equal opportunities based on their own merit, understood as a combination of ability, talent, intelligence and effort (M. Young, 1958). Various interpretations and practices emerged as the idea of meritocracy became popularised as political ideology and a positive cultural trope.[1] In Singapore, meritocracy is promoted as a national value that ensures optimal economic performance and political leadership (K. P. Tan, 2008, p. 11). This commitment to meritocracy is a hallmark of Singapore's national identity, pervading national curricula and political rhetoric, and forming a cornerstone of a national ideology of multiracialism. The state's advocacy of reward, based on merit derived through hard work and ability, portrays Singapore as a fair, multicultural society that does not condone ethnic discrimination.

At face value, there may be a commonly shared belief among Singaporeans that socioeconomic mobility, referred to as the Singapore dream, is attainable through

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a meritocratic system where hard work and ability are rewarded regardless of ethnic particularities. Studies of socioeconomic mobility may support this view. For example, a general report about socioeconomic mobility released by Singapore's Ministry of Finance (2015) shows that there are indeed possibilities for upward mobility in Singapore, with 14.1 per cent of households in the lowest income quintile reaching the top quintile, higher than societies such as the US which stands at 7.5 per cent (see also Programme for International Student Assessment, 2013). Such statistics suggest that Singapore is already a society that is relatively socioeconomically mobile. However, these studies neither validate the state-sponsored ideology that meritocracy is responsible for socioeconomic mobility, nor negate the presence or perception of ethnic discrimination within Singapore's merit-based system.

Rather than identifying whether meritocracy quantitatively exists, this study delves into how it is perceived. This approach has yet to be qualitatively explored within scholarship in Singapore. Critiques of meritocracy are often top-down. They problematise how the narrative exists as a political mechanism, conceals systemic discrimination and perpetuates ethnic inequality (e.g. Barr, 2016), or measure its existence through quantitative and survey-based analyses of socioeconomic mobility in Singapore (Ng, 2007; E. S. Tan, 2004). One exception is a recent quantitative survey on race relations in Singapore, which finds strong support for the notion that success in Singapore is meritocratic, and that race has no impact on individual outcomes (Mathews, 2016). My qualitative examination of how meritocracy is perceived both supports and contests findings from the aforementioned study, shedding light on how an otherwise unilateral discourse is negotiated within and beyond state narratives.

Compared to scholarly critiques of meritocracy as a political tool, there is comparatively less research that investigates how Singaporeans receive and understand meritocracy as a narrative and policy framework. While recognising the central role of dominant narratives within Singapore's socio-political landscape, this article takes a bottom-up approach to meritocracy to understand how it is perceived on the ground. Interviews conducted with Singaporean youth from polytechnics reveal how subscribing to meritocracy as a value does not necessarily entail the belief that it mitigates ethnic discrimination in practice. Furthermore, where ethnic discrimination is recognised among Singaporean youth, it is often normalised as a function of a multiracial society. This belief is problematic as it vindicates state and society from seeking redress and change.

The concept of hegemony is a useful lens through which meritocracy in Singapore can be understood as a discourse of power. Since the original development of Gramsci's argument that coercion and consensus are key to the maintenance of power rather than force or repression alone, scholars have further developed ideas of how hegemony illuminates "the making and breaking of political projects and discourse coalitions" (Howarth, 2010, p. 310). This notion of power is twofold. First, hegemony identifies how practices, including policies and rhetoric, constitute a form of rule or governance. Second, Gramsci (1973) clarifies that power is not totalising. While the ideal manifestation of hegemony is the public's undisputed internalisation of ideas and values, practices and techniques of hegemony may fail or result in unintended effects. Drawing from these conceptions of hegemony, theorising meritocracy as such informs its traction in Singapore and how it falls short, as this article demonstrates.

The persuasive power of meritocracy as "natural" and "common sense" (Gramsci, 1973) is traced to political reiterations, such as education policy, electoral practices, and political rhetoric articulated by the ruling elite (Kong & Yeoh, 2003; K. P. Tan, 2008). Situated as central to Singapore's national identity and survival as a nation, meritocracy forms the bulwark for policies, which are "stabilized and maintained by the construction of fantasies, and ideologies that secure the consent of subjects, as well as complex political techniques and tactics" (Howarth, 2010, p. 310). Ideas of equal opportunity and upward socioeconomic mobility are conveyed through nation-building narratives as being realistic possibilities for citizens across all creeds and ethnicities. This institutionalisation and distribution of meritocracy as a "public good" is therefore regarded by various scholars of Singapore as an ideological hegemony, utilised by the one-party state to preserve its power through national consensus (Chua, 1995; K. P. Tan, 2008).

Contrary to the view that meritocracy exists as an unchallenged "national doxa" (Koh, 2014), I argue there is a gap between the belief in meritocracy as a value that enables the possibility of socioeconomic mobility for all, and the belief that it exists in practice. This treatment of meritocracy in Singapore reflects the duality of hegemonic power, recognising that dominant narratives do not always result in circumscribed outcomes. Overall, findings from this study suggest that Singaporean youths recognise meritocracy as a positive value, while being aware of how it functions differentially across groups to the disadvantage of ethnic minorities.

In the following sections, I first explain how meritocracy is articulated in relation to socioeconomic mobility in the context of Singapore. Second, I provide a methodological note about this research. Third, I show how Singaporean youths interviewed in this study articulate a general belief in meritocracy, yet normalise practices of unwarranted discrimination. Such perceptions conceal the inferiorising experiences of subordinated communities in Singapore, the impact of cultural stereotypes on equality of opportunity and the need for redress.

Meritocracy and Socioeconomic Mobility in Singapore

In Singapore, meritocracy is co-articulated with the national narrative of multiracialism, theoretically mitigating ethnic inequalities that may otherwise exist as a result of its multicultural demographic. Representing the state's endorsement of structural fairness, meritocracy forms a core value of Singapore's national identity. The dominance of meritocracy as a cultural value is made visible within eminent political speeches. For instance, at a National Day Rally, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong (2013) stated that "meritocracy has to remain the most fundamental organising principle in our society. We have to recognise people for their contributions and their effort, not for their backgrounds, not for their status or wealth or connections", emphasising instead reward based on "ability, your contributions, what you are giving back to the society".

That meritocracy is a cornerstone of national identity is not unique to Singapore. For instance, in the US, meritocracy constitutes a core value of the "American Dream" and contributes a key aspect to the national narrative of immigration, where any individual can improve their lot through hard work and their abilities (Hochschild, 1995). Similarly, meritocracy constitutes a key aspect of Singapore's national ideology of multiracialism where it "facilitates social mobility by dint of hard work" without privileging one "race"

over another (Hill & Lian, 1995, p. 31). Part IV: Fundamental Liberties of Singapore's Constitution endorses equal protection and equal opportunity through education. There should be no racial and religious discrimination within institutions. The nation-building ideology of multiracialism simultaneously draws from meritocracy in this way, and provides balance to the individualism that meritocracy intrinsically espouses through the valorisation of hard work, abilities and achievements.

Definitions of meritocracy are situational, influenced by and influencing national cultures, political systems and the power relations that shape them. Where "merit" is normatively defined as "the preferred view of the good society", the notion of the "good society" is also defined by "meritocracy's winners" (Sen, 2000; K. P. Tan, 2008, p. 9). In Singapore, the ruling party is identified as the key proponent of meritocracy and its main beneficiary, because attaining consensus contributes to its maintenance of power (K. P. Tan, 2008). This section examines how the legitimacy of meritocracy, as ideological hegemony, relies on its continuity across multiple facets of society.

Multiracialism

The Singapore state defines meritocracy as a national ideology and policy framework that enables all to advance in their passions and pursuits based solely on achievement, merit and hard work. This definition, while admirable as an ideal, is problematic. A merit-based system based on the principle of non-discrimination seeks to provide all individuals with equal opportunities to succeed, but this difference-blind approach assumes a level playing field to begin with, neglecting social disadvantages that are already at play. In other words, "those who are picked by meritocracy as having merit may already have enjoyed unfair advantages from the very beginning", establishing an inherent contradiction within the concept of meritocracy (K. P. Tan, 2008, p. 8).

The difficulty of attaining a "true meritocracy" is compounded by Singapore's system of multiracialism that promotes the recognition of group differences. Meritocracy's focus on individual ability and talent contrasts with multiracialism's emphasis on group-based communities. Despite this apparent inconsistency, coherence is sought by framing meritocracy as a system that protects members of ethnic minority groups from discrimination and even-handedly ensures that they receive equal employment and education opportunities.

The logic of multiracialism and meritocracy is reproduced within state narratives and public policies. The late Minister Mentor (MM) Lee Kuan Yew (2010) once stated to the Sikh community that "[we] are even-handed to all communities to practise their religions, their traditions and cultures. The government has not disadvantaged any minority group. We are a multi-racial and multi-religious society. We give everyone the opportunity to do well. Thus, we have a harmonious society", citing the Sikh Welfare Council and the inclusion of various South Asian languages as "Mother Tongues" within Singapore's education curricula. This valorisation of individual effort and success stories is rightly critiqued for concealing the uneven distribution of advantages and perpetuating societal inequalities (K. P. Tan, 2008, p. 8).

History further rationalises narratives of multiracialism and meritocracy. Singapore's difficult merger with the Federation of Malaya in 1963 provides justification for a religious settlement within the state structure. During the period of merger, the leaders

of the Federation, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), instituted Islam as the official religion of the country and provided indigenous Malays, *bumiputras*, with special rights (Hirschman, 1986, p. 355). Singapore's ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP), saw this effort by UMNO as the creation of a "Malay Malaysia"; that is, a Federation that would benefit Malays to the detriment of other racialised groups. Instead, the PAP called for a "Malaysian Malaysia", where all citizens of the Federation (Malaysians) would be treated equally based on merit, regardless of race or religion. This controversy contributed to a rift between Malaysia's and Singapore's leaders, triggering the 1964 racial riot between the Malays and Chinese during the *Maulud* (Prophet Muhammed's birthday) (Rahim, 2012). These events culminated in Singapore's secession from the Federation in 1965.

State officials rehash this journey towards a meritocratic society. During a speech commemorating Singapore's 50th anniversary, PM Lee (2015) stated,

> One of our most remarkable achievements over these last 50 years, has been our racial and religious harmony. It stems from a strong belief in the ideal of a multiracial society where everybody is equal, regardless of race, language or religion, and it was the most fundamental reason why we left Malaysia and went our own way on 9 August 1965. Since then, we have held firmly to the belief that before race, language and religion, first and foremost, we should all be Singaporeans together and so, we have built a fair and just society, based on meritocracy, where ability and not your background or the colour of your skin, determines how well you do, determines what contributions you make, and what rewards you get.

Mechanisms of socialisation maintain the authority of multiracialism and meritocracy (Barr, 2006). In particular, education has a central role in the production and reproduction of dominant ideologies (Lim, 2016). For example, primary and secondary school students are enrolled in compulsory subjects, including Civic and Moral Education, which extol the importance of respecting "different races in Singapore", "unity in diversity" and building "community spirit". Introduced in 1996, the National Education program aims to provide a Singapore-centric curriculum about the "Singapore Story", which narrates the nation's history, challenges, vulnerabilities, and the importance of developing a Singaporean national identity and core values of meritocracy and "racial harmony".

Language policy reinforces meritocracy as a cornerstone of Singapore's multiracial national identity. The Constitution establishes English as one of Singapore's four official languages alongside the three "mother tongue" (MT) languages that represent *de jure* equality of treatment among the Chinese, Malay and Indian racialised groups (C. Tan, 2005, p. 42). The three MTs are meant to signify the state's equal treatment of "races" (Wee, 2003, p. 215). In 1972, then-PM Lee Kuan Yew stated that MTs enable Singaporeans to "understand ourselves, what we are, where we come from, what life is or should be about, and what we want to do" (Wee & Bokhorst-Heng, 2005, p. 165). This promotion of MTs through campaigns and education policies in the 1970s continues to underscore a valorised connection between language and culture.

The institutionalisation of English as an official language supports state narratives of multiracialism by advocating the meritocratic treatment of individuals across racialised groups. Because English is not associated with "culture" in Singapore, it is affirmed by the state as an official language that mitigates systemic ethnic discrimination within institutions and enhances multiracialism by providing a means of inter-group communication (Rubdy,

2001, p. 342). As a "functional" language, English does not favour a particular ethnic group while being used as the main linguistic medium of technology, instruction, administration, education and business. The premise of its institution is said to level the playing field, assuring that each community has equal opportunities to succeed, presumably buttressing meritocracy within Singapore's multiracial society.

Meritocracy and multiracialism are narratives that justify and are justified by policy and legislation. Education and language policies exemplify this duality. Another recent example is the revision of Singapore's presidential election, which was constitutionally modified so that it is now reserved for a particular ethnic group, should no member of that group have been President for five continuous terms. When it was introduced in Parliament, PM Lee (2016) stated that this "racial provision" aims to "strengthen our multi-racial society" while maintaining a meritocratic system through high qualifying criteria. Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Teo Chee Hean (2016a) added that "there is a need to ensure multi-racial representation in the Presidency, given its historical and principal role as the symbol of our multi-racial nation", reiterating the eligibility criteria in response to concerns about the negative effect a reserved election may have on Singapore's meritocratic system.

The elaboration of meritocracy and multiracialism throughout policy and the legislative landscape demonstrates state efforts to entrench them within Singapore's national identity, and as a way of life among Singaporean citizens and residents. From nascent years till adult employment, socioeconomic ascendance is said to be made possible by a meritocratic system that privileges reward through hard work and ability, mitigating hierarchies of ethnicity that would otherwise obstruct socioeconomic mobility.

There are two main critiques of the Singaporean state's propagation of meritocracy. First, meritocracy, as a narrative, operates as a hallmark of the nation-building ideology of multiracialism (Koh, 2005; Moore, 2000) that justifies the ruling party's continued political dominance (K. P. Tan, 2012), and relatedly, policies that pander to elitism and technocratic governance (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008, p. 10; Talib & Fitzgerald, 2015). Second, emphases on a meritocratic system overshadow systemic inequalities that marginalise particular groups, such as Singapore's Malay community (Lian, 2008; Rahim, 2001). Also overlooked are gender inequalities perpetuated by negative stereotypes and structural barriers, which manifest in the political underrepresentation of women in higher political office and leadership roles, and a prevailing gender income gap (N. Tan, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017).

These critiques are indeed valid and well substantiated, yet scholarly inattention to the matter of how the idea and implementation of meritocracy is received and understood among segments of the population risks reproducing the portrayal of a dominant state and passive electorate. One statement indicating consciousness of this inattention is Kenneth Paul Tan's (2008, p. 21) observation that "the disadvantaged and the disenchanted learn to articulate [online] their condition in ways the official discourse of meritocracy has excluded". There are exceptions, particularly in relation to the recognition that ethnic minorities, such as Malays in Singapore, experience disadvantages within Singapore's purported meritocratic education system (Barr & Low, 2005; Rahim, 2001). Other ethnographic studies also demonstrate how meritocracy in Singapore is disrupted through connections and networks that contribute to easier progression and reward for individuals who have access to elite groups (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008, p. 197, p. 259).

Beyond a handful of studies along these lines, however, there remains a lack of research that systematically documents and unpacks how the public understands and perceives meritocracy, compared to top-down critiques of meritocracy. With the objective of developing research in this area, I demonstrate through interviews with Singaporean youth how meritocracy is accepted as a positive value in Singaporean society in relation to socioeconomic mobility, with less conviction that it exists in practice.

Methods Note

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 polytechnic students between the ages of 20 and 25 from a spread of Singaporean polytechnics. They include men and women[2] from the three main ethnic groups in Singapore.[3] The sample was limited to students in their final year of study with the understanding that those close to graduating tend to be more mindful of career and work concerns, and may be exposed to or aware of social-structural factors as they seek out careers (Clemente, Daganzo, Bernardo, & Pangan, 2016).

I focused on polytechnic students, rather than other tertiary students, for several reasons. First, polytechnics have higher enrolment rates than other tertiary institutions. At the time of study, data gathered indicated that 49.2 per cent of all GCSE graduates in 2014 were enrolled in polytechnics (Singstat, 2015b), suggesting that the study would better attain a wider, more diverse spread of students as opposed to that of universities or technical institutions. Second, aligned with the objective of interviewing a diverse population, polytechnics reflect the largest range of courses across disciplines as compared to universities in Singapore (Chan, 2008). This diversity in interests, ambitions and opportunities is more likely to provide a random selection of interviewees compared to students from other tertiary institutions with fewer courses available.

Interviewees were recruited through publicity flyers posted on campus noticeboards and e-mailers sent through subject departments. While the initial ambition of this study was to attain an even distribution of interviewees across polytechnics, interviewees hail from three out of four of the main polytechnics in Singapore, as some institutions and departments better accommodated our requests for access. Interviewees include students of business management, engineering, health sciences and the humanities, among other programs.

Interviews took place from August to December 2016. They were conducted by the author, who was the principal investigator in the study, and two members of the research team. Questions ranged from introductory queries about interviewees' background and choice of education, to more focused questions about socioeconomic mobility. Interviews were approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length.

The research team also included two other members who did not interview any interviewees and were responsible for coding the data. To ensure inter-coder reliability, team members first coded data from pilot interviews. The author then checked for coding reliability by resolving differences in naming codes and constructing a codebook to ensure inter-coder agreement before coding raw data from the study commenced.

Data analysis employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative text analysis was used to analyse themes, differences and similarities between interviewees. Interview data was coded in several cycles and accounted for first-level codes (descriptive), second-level codes (analytic) and in vivo codes (vernacular used by interviewees) that determined patterns, themes and possible disparities

across the data. Quantitative data provided a complementary understanding of the salience and resonance of certain responses, the percentages of which are recorded within the findings. In particular, matrix comparisons were helpful in highlighting instances of contradictions when interviewees responded positively, negatively and ambivalently to questions about whether meritocracy, racism or upward socioeconomic mobility exists in Singapore. The matrix comparison also picked up on contradictory responses within independent discussions of race that occurred without prompting.[4]

Dislocation: Meritocracy as a Value and Practice

With the understanding that policies and rhetoric are mechanisms intrinsic to political and social life that "set the terms of intelligibility of thought, speech, and action" (Crawford, 2004, p. 22), this analysis shows the inextricability of state practices and social norms. Where this lens may suggest that state narratives are imbibed by the population and practised through lived experiences, I find that they manifest in surprising yet problematic ways. Gramsci cautions that hegemony does not denote a group's neat incorporation within another's ideology because "there co-exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought" (cited in Hall, 1986, p. 22). Analysing ideology as a "differentiated terrain" more accurately captures how "these ideological currents are diffused and why in the process of diffusion they fracture along certain lines and in certain directions" (Hall, 1986, p. 22). This approach unpacks varied perceptions of meritocracy because of, and despite, dominant state-sponsored narratives.

This section first outlines four main categories that emerged upon coding initial responses about meritocracy, as well as inconsistencies that emerged and how they imply a gap between the valorisation of meritocracy and the belief it exists in practice. Second, perceptions of cultural stereotypes demonstrate cracks in the logics of multiracialism and meritocracy, their damaging effects on ethnic minorities, and how the onus placed on individual responsibility suggests a lack of societal consciousness. The third section argues that where ethnicity, in terms of race, language and religion, is seen as a constraint, the favouring of Singaporean–Chinese is also problematically regarded at times as a natural bias in Singapore.

Inconsistencies

Responses to the interviews were first coded according to meritocracy, followed by socioeconomic mobility. This approach ensured that meritocracy was understood consistently across interviews – that is, as a principle that ensures the possibility of upward socioeconomic mobility solely based on reward reaped through hard work and merit. The analysis of results nevertheless reveals inconsistencies where those initially expressing a belief that meritocracy and socioeconomic mobility exist in Singapore contradicted themselves later when discussing race relations. These discrepancies suggest that while meritocracy is often accepted as a guiding principle, it is less observed in practice.

Broadly categorised, attitudes towards meritocracy in Singapore arrived in four forms: meritocracy exists; meritocracy does not exist; meritocracy is subjective; and barriers can be overcome through hard work. The majority of interviewees stated that meritocracy exists in Singapore (76 per cent). More than half (56 per cent) of the

interviewees described the subjective nature of meritocracy across contexts, stating that the practice of meritocracy manifests differently across contexts (e.g. in schools as opposed to job opportunities or vice versa). A similar number of interviewees gave ambivalent answers (53 per cent), and a minority do not recognise the existence of meritocracy in Singapore (16 per cent).

Among interviewees asserting that meritocracy exists in Singapore, a positive association is struck between meritocracy in the education system, opportunities and upward mobility in Singapore. As one said, the "system is quite fair *lah*,[5] you want to do well, you can do well and you can succeed". Similar responses express views that societal norms can be overcome through Singapore's meritocratic education system, partly due to state policies such as SkillsFuture and Edusave. For instance, an interviewee said,

> Those low-income can rise up to middle income all thanks to education *lah*. Even though the parents are low salary worker, but if their children, they somehow become very smart and can enter JC [junior college],[6] then come up to study in university and secure better jobs, then they can raise this family out of poverty. This is how you rise up the mobility ladder.

Interviewees who recognise the existence of meritocracy in Singapore also relate success to hard work, which is understood through values including self-motivation, perseverance, adaptability, resilience and interest. The association between success and hard work is variously applied in relation to educational accolades, job attainments and promotions, and financial reward.

As expected, those who rejected the existence of meritocracy were those who viewed its practice as mitigated by factors including ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. Having said this, the overall analysis of interviews revealed that those who fully committed to recognising the practice of meritocracy in Singapore later said that factors such as ethnic discrimination mitigate equal treatment in schools and the workplace.

Inconsistencies appeared when interviewees were asked about the relationship between ethnicity and meritocracy. The majority of interviewees stated at the outset of the interview that ethnicity does not affect job and education opportunities (86 per cent). For instance, one interviewee said, "they don't even look at our race or what, it's just you sell it, you get it". Yet responses were inconsistent across and within interviews. Only a minority of interviewees maintained unequivocally that ethnicity, or perceptions of ethnicity, affect job and education opportunities (10 per cent). Most interviewees stated at different stages of their interviews that race has a subjective effect on opportunities, depending on the context and persons involved (69 per cent).

Further inconsistencies surfaced when interviews were coded for socioeconomic mobility. There is a dominant perception (83 per cent) that upward socioeconomic mobility exists in Singapore. Routes to upward mobility include hard work, Singapore's meritocratic education system, self-motivation and individual resourcefulness in relation to seeking out job opportunities. While most interviewees convey a positive attitude towards the possibility of upward socioeconomic mobility as a result of Singapore's meritocratic system, nearly half of them articulated contradictory or ambivalent views in other parts of the interviews (44 per cent).

Findings thus far reflect a tenuous belief that individuals, regardless of ethnic background, are provided fair opportunity for upward socioeconomic mobility. Where

interviewees clearly subscribe to meritocracy as an idealised value, many do not perceive it as applied equally across contexts and ethnic groups in Singapore.

Cultural stereotypes and meritocracy

The value and significance of meritocracy to Singaporeans is apparent through a strong subscription to individual effort, but an otherwise unconditional belief in meritocracy is disrupted by perceptions that cultural stereotypes affect how merit is rewarded in schools and workplaces. These findings affirm a symptom of meritocracy, where structural barriers to equality of opportunity are overlooked due to the valorisation of individual responsibility.

Cultural stereotypes are perceived as having a negative effect on meritocracy in Singapore. They include that of Malays being lazy and Indians being verbose:

> Better education opportunities … no I think but job opportunities probably, 'cause I think some boss prefer Chinese… Chinese seems more trustworthy kind of thing, some prefer Malay, oh Malay is more … sincere, more hardworking kind of thing. Then Indians are, oh they can talk better kind of thing. It affects the jobs that they get I guess.

Ethnic discrimination and cultural stereotypes were often described through examples from the media, and experiences or observations in the classroom and the workplace. For example, the interviewee below perceives preferences in the workplace as affected by negative media representations of Indians and Malays.

> I don't know, there's this stigma against darker skin people, it's represented in the media also. In the media, all they choose is just light-Chinese or light-skinned Indians, light-skinned Malays. You hardly see any dark skin people on TV or anywhere. So that's just the media side *lah*, so I don't really know for other jobs, like how they want to hire people, but maybe for those … like on screen, theatre, like more media-based *ah*, then race will definitely impact you, because yeah on TV also, you … like those Channel 5, it's all Chinese. Yeah … you know, the bad guys are Indians or Malays, and they'll … on TV, they just portray other races as the bad. So this can, you know, give a stigma to Singapore *ah*, like you know, "oh shit, you're Malay. Careful".

> …sometimes people still discriminate against people of different race, especially, I don't know maybe it's just in my class, people just discriminate against Indian they talk about their colour, all this, then they would say Indians talk better, thinking they bullshit better, in a way, but they don't really do their work, that's what they say….

With few exceptions, observations of cultural stereotypes and ethnic discrimination were made by members of racial minority groups with personal anecdotes. Interviewees who self-identified as Indian and Malay were keenly aware of their position as members of a minority and minoritised group.

> First and foremost when they look at you, they'll see your race – Indian, they'll start to ask questions like "Do you drink? Do you smoke?" because that increases the probability of you being late to work? Having breaks or disappearing during jobs.

> When I went for an interview for personal training […] they'll ask me this kind of questions, like I said really don't drink and smoke and all that. So they saw my portfolio, they say fine. Then for this Chinese guy, they asked him different question, like what's their personal training background? They didn't really ask something like drinking and

> smoking and all that, because it's actually in the particular paper, their particular paper. But for me they asked again. So I found something different in that.

Generally, interviewees deny harbouring cultural stereotypes themselves. Many also perceive hard work as an antidote to ethnic discrimination, demonstrating some belief in meritocracy. Where meritocracy may not operate perfectly to the extent that ethnic discrimination does not affect education and job opportunities at all, interviewees argue that such barriers can and should be overcome by individual effort. Some place the responsibility for self-improvement on individuals subjected to discrimination, such as learning a new language. Subjects of cultural stereotypes similarly internalised an individualisation of responsibility.

> …there's this general stereotype that … you know that "Malays like to *lepak*". But then, I know people, like Malays who are hardworking. Yeah, they also face this kind of stereotype what. They still work hard and they still put in the work *ah*. Yeah, you have to prove that it's not true *ah* … you have to prove your worth *lor* […] you have to overcome *ah*. It's our job to overcome.

> Yeah, it's mostly based on yourself *lah*. But you still have to consider all the factors that affects your opportunities *lah*, like what we have discussed already *lah*, like, race, gender, orientation, whether you are a foreigner or not. It would definitely affect you, but I think if you work hard, you will get it.

> 'Kay, for my internship … it's kind of difficult *lah*, because my supervisor is not really a very friendly person. And … because I'm a Malay, and I wear *tudung*, right, so she would want me to take it off *lah*. So I say, no *lah*, I can't, because it's part of my religion, you have to understand. And then they're like, oh, but you're- you're someone working in the kitchen, what can you do? Then I just say, but you know those ninja things that you wear, maybe I can wear that to protect my head *lah* […] Yeah, so I say, maybe I can just wear that *lah*. Then- 'cause their concern is they scared that my *tudung* will just get caught in something *lah*, which I understand, but then I just tell them, maybe I'll just wear the ninja thing *lah*, then they agree, there's a mutual agreement *lah*.

> Even though I hear people say outside like, Malay got lesser chance outside *ah*. I want to prove them wrong *ah*.

The last two responses above also illustrate how cultural inferiorisation is damaging, even as subjects individually seek to overcome the odds. Referring to W. E. B. Du Bois' "double consciousness", Iris Marion Young (1990, pp. 59–60) argues that cultural stereotypes are often internalised "at least to the extent that they are forced to react to behaviour of others influenced by those images". Where subjects seek to "prove them wrong" and achieve success despite the odds, they are receiving and reacting to messages of inferiority conveyed by dominant culture. As Natalie Stoljar (2014, p. 107, original emphasis) contends,

> [even] if agents do not endorse the script, they *adapt* their decision making and behavior to it … they are called upon to take an *evaluative stance* to the norms embedded in the script … [and] they must *respond to and disavow* the script to see themselves and be seen as equal participants in their daily transactions with others.

The humour through which the Muslim female interviewee addressed the treatment of her religion at her workplace belies unwarranted discrimination based on religious practice. She describes the issue as requirements that come with the challenge her

religion poses to her job, rather than her employer's lack of religious accommodation. Her supervisor's reasoning that the headscarf might "get caught in something" can similarly be applied to aprons and chef hats; a logic that would hardly be accepted as readily. Yet, the interviewee's response elucidates how the subordinated cannot simply reject dominant social scripts that are imposed upon them, but instead find themselves negotiating them and seeking compromise.

Cultural stereotypes have lasting negative impacts on one's sense of self. Charles Taylor (1994, p. 25, original emphasis) argues that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves". Such effects are evident among some of the interviewees, even those who maintain a belief in Singapore's meritocratic system:

> When it comes to opportunities, I don't think race really plays a part, but one thing I noticed when I was in primary school was … why as the class, as the classes go down,[7] there are more and more Malays grew and grew [sic]. So when I was in primary and secondary school, I was a bit ashamed *lah*, to be Malay. Yeah. I just didn't understand why more Malays were down there.

The emphasis placed on individual agency overshadows how the relationship between cultural and structural inequalities calls for societal and institutional redress. Symptomatic of meritocratic creeds, repeated emphasis on individual effort indicates a failure to recognise societal change as a plausible solution. Instead, the onus to improve is laid upon the agent. The attribution of responsibility to individuals is troubling as it demonstrates a lack of awareness of social scripting, or cultural stereotypes, as forms of oppression that multiple agents contribute to.

Acknowledging ethnic discrimination as a shared responsibility simultaneously recognises it as an issue that wider society should be responsible for, despite the difficulty of tracing and disaggregating blame (I. M. Young, 2004, p. 368). The correction of cultural stereotypes must be a societal and political effort. To ensure greater equality and distribution of economic and political power, there should be calls for equal rights among individuals and groups to "express, maintain and transmit their cultural identity" (Parekh, 2006, p. 211). Redress should occur through a gamut of group-specific public policies,[8] anti-discrimination laws, representation in public institutions and inclusion within national identity (Parekh, 2008, p. 42). Such demands are primarily directed at the state, with the objective of achieving a far-reaching impact on societal attitudes towards cultural differences (Parekh, 2008, p. 42).

A natural bias

The normalisation of ethnic discrimination perpetuates vindications of societal and political responsibility. Perceptions of meritocracy in Singapore illuminate how privileged subjects are absolved of the responsibility for redress as they see preferential treatment on the basis of ethnicity as a natural outcome in Singaporean society. The presence of a Singaporean–Chinese bias is also perceived as logical based on Singapore's demography, shared ethnolinguistic culture and geopolitical location. These perceptions

consequently lead to an acceptance of the existence of inequalities as a matter of cultural differences, and a failure to recognise the need for policy redress.

Ethnicity-based preferential treatment was often normalised through essentialist notions of culture, suggesting that cultural differences, perceived as immutable, inevitably lead to cultural divides. For instance, one interviewee sees racially-skewed voting behaviour as "natural" given Singapore's makeup, neglecting the troubling implications for political representation and meritocracy:

> Most people don't want the minority race to be the PM … I think it's pretty normal. I don't subscribe to this kind of thoughts but I must say that Singapore Chinese population is the majority, so it's only natural that the Chinese want a Chinese to be the next PM.

This view simultaneously contradicts and reproduces state narratives. The perception that Singaporean–Chinese vote along racial lines shows an essentialist understanding of culture which, whether true or not, is contrary to the meritocratic system promoted by the state, where the eligibility of candidates should be founded on merit rather than ethnicity. Meanwhile, the perception that racialised voting is "natural" mirrors state justifications for interventionist multiracial policies. The notion that Singaporeans are susceptible to racialised voting reproduces state rationale for policies that concurrently seek to ensure fair ethnic representation and cement the power of the ruling party. Mechanisms such as the Group Representative Constituencies (GRC) and revisions to the presidential elections are founded on the basis that racialised voting has to be mitigated. Scholars and political pundits question the premise of the GRC system, which assumes that voting behaviour is along racial lines despite little evidence (Mutalib, 2012b; N. Tan, 2013). Instead, policies and legislation are suspected to be political instruments instituted by the PAP to control voting behaviour and perceptions of race. Similar doubt was cast on recent changes to the aforementioned presidential elections, critiqued as yet another political manoeuvre cloaked in multiracial justifications (Vadaketh, 2017; Zannia, 2016).

Preferential hiring processes favouring Mandarin language-speakers are qualified in a similar, matter-of-fact manner. Preferential treatment was described as a given result of Singapore's demographic and business relations with China, therefore attributing inequality of opportunity solely to external forces rather than ethnic discrimination. More than half of the interviewees who recognise the existence of ethnic inequality in Singapore cite reasons including job requirements that call for Mandarin-speakers, familiar bonds between members of the Chinese community, and increasing business relationships with new Chinese migrants.

> Perhaps, because, I would like to think that organisations will have a fair distribution of races in their employees. So, being Chinese, the predominant majority right, would definitely have more allocations for roles.

> I think nowadays, China is doing well, so if you are a Chinese, you have more advantage, unless you are a Malay and you learn Chinese, that's also a good thing […] and China people will tend to trust Chinese people more than Malays. So they will see your race as well […] I think I was watching some video or something, the China people, not China people, the Chinese companies preferred to talk those people from Chinese background rather than those *ang mohs*,[9] cos they feel like more of a connection, cultural connection, language connection.

The systemic and social exclusion of non-Mandarin speakers is similarly rationalised by the sense of belonging that a shared language is assumed to confer. This assumption reinforces the essentialist perception that cultural divides are "natural", neglecting to recognise how they constitute exclusionary practices negatively affecting ethnic minorities:

> …when you're out in the working world, because the majority is Chinese, you're more able to get along? And sometimes like, even my teachers, even though they don't realise it, but sometimes they're speaking Chinese to us. Because they're so used to it. And other races, students of other races, they won't be able to understand. And in this time you just get along better because you're of the same race, and you speak the same language, even though we all speak English *lah*. And also, working-wise, I do see that it's … the people of the same race are more- more able to just get along well. Much easier.

> Because there are Chinese, then feel a sense of belonging. Like when you have a committee of Chinese working together, then you can talk in Mandarin, and make jokes. But for other races, they want to join us, they cannot understand the jokes, so there is not much connection.

> …some jobs would want people to … have … the ability to converse in Mandarin, you know, it will be easier for them *lah*, if they cannot then … that's too bad, I guess. And then … 'cause I think … they're more comfortable with Chinese, rather than the Malay? You can see that there is a gap *lah*, between races.

Attaining a certain comfort level appears to be a common justification for preferential treatment, even among those who maintain that meritocracy exists through equal opportunities:

> … sometimes, if, let's say, whether you get promoted is also how well you… You get along with your boss, and how well he sees of you. But let's say he's of a different race, sometimes, they don't get along together, or perhaps someone who is, if my … someone who is of the same race with your boss would get along easier, and thus, get promoted, even if you and that person are … have the same capabilities.

> Those Muslims, they don't go to lunch as often as the rest of the Chinese workers, with the boss. Because when the rest of us go out and eat, we don't really… We don't have to look for a halal restaurant or anything, and usually, the Muslims will go to another food area, which has a lot of halal choices. So, well, during lunch, there is a lot of conversation going, and that's when you get to talk to your boss sometimes […] Yeah, network. And … communicate, so, I guess, for me, that point, they will- might lose out a little.

> I don't think it's opportunities, I think it's being more of, more comfortable because we're the majority so, you are more comfortable, people around you are mostly Chinese also, so you have this similarity and stuff, more comfortable versus a minority whose practices, religious practices or racial practices are not as recognised. So they have more difficulties with that.

Like electoral policies, observations of preferential treatment contravene Singapore's meritocratic creed while reproducing state discourses. Again relayed as a natural outcome of cultural differences, anecdotes conceal a politicised and contentious history of language policies.

Justified through state rationalities of constructing a Chinese community and economic reason, language policies are critiqued for privileging Mandarin and Mandarin-

speakers at the expense of ethnolinguistic minorities. First, the Speak Mandarin campaign, a language campaign initiated in the 1970s, sought to unite Singaporean–Chinese in the creation of a community. Ex-PM Goh Chok Tong promoted the campaign as encouraging "a single people, speaking the same language, that is Mandarin, possessing a distinct culture and a shared past", which will then enable Singapore to "grow to become a nation" (Bokhorst-Heng, 1999, p. 254). The emphasis on the nation within promotions of a Singaporean–Chinese identity blurs the line between the nation and community, suggesting that Singapore's nationhood hinges upon the cohesion of the Chinese community as opposed to one that includes Singapore's various ethnic groups (Bokhorst-Heng, 1999).

Second, the valorisation of Mandarin as a language of high economic value and "cultural potential" occurs at the detriment of other ethnolinguistic groups who cannot benefit in the same way (Gopinathan, Ho, & Saravanan, 2004; C. Tan, 2005b). The bilingualism campaign illustrates how the differential treatment of languages favours English–Mandarin bilingualism. Bilingualism among Singaporean–Chinese is vigorously encouraged through the learning of Mandarin with the objective of benefiting from the developing Chinese economy while maintaining cultural heritage (Wee & Bokhorst-Heng, 2005). This stance was recently reaffirmed by DPM Teo (2016b) during a speech at a local secondary school, stating that "[s]peaking both English and Mandarin well and being able to bring together the best of the East and the West will help us to capitalise on opportunities in the region and beyond". This differential treatment of MTs contradicts state propositions that bilingualism, the ability to speak one's MT language and English, is a function of socioeconomic mobility in Singapore (Wee, 2003). Rather, it is specifically English–Mandarin bilingualism that is perceived to lend a comparative advantage to speakers.

Perceptions of Malay–Muslim discrimination as a natural bias similarly illustrate how cultural stereotypes and policy operate within a feedback loop. Among interviewees who identified religion as having a direct impact on socioeconomic mobility in Singapore, Muslims and Malays were the only communities mentioned, usually as conflated categories. Reasons cited include the perceived security threat posed in relation to terrorism and national security, and religious needs that set Muslims apart from wider society.

> Currently you see example is in the Air Force [sic], you don't see any Muslim pilots […]. The … in a sense that they are easily influenced by their religion, cos … a Muslim guy may be very religious, he thinks he knows what is right *lah* but someone may easily influence him. So if he were to be a pilot right, imagine he was fine for the first few years then suddenly he start to become very radicalised then he just, parliament building blow … there blow […] cos in Singapore the thing is that race affects religion, mainly for Malays *lah*. Cos you see you don't see any Buddhist Malay, is all Muslim. Whereas for Chinese you see Buddhist Chinese, Christian Chinese, free-thinker Chinese. So yeah that's the thing that affects *lah*… Basically anything high risk one *lah*, where it can affect a huge number of people.

Malays and Muslims comprise a significant proportion of the nation's domestic population, and a large demographic of the nation's regional neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia. State officials explicitly reason that in the event of a conflict with its Muslim neighbours, religious loyalties may supersede civic loyalties to Singapore. While National Service was introduced in 1967, universal conscription excluded Malays until 1985 despite the declaration that Singapore's defence force should be

"racially balance[d]" (E. K. B. Tan, 2015, p. 438). Another example of Singapore's "racialised security apparatus" is the Singapore Armed Forces' (SAF) historical tendency to limit the allocation of strategic and high-ranking positions to Singaporean Malay soldiers, relegating them to the Civil Defence unit and Police Force (Huxley, 2000, pp. 114–115; Rahim, 2009, pp. 91–93). Since the 1980s, several Malays have become officers in the SAF, but each Malay applicant is assessed on a case-by-case basis with particular attention paid to their religious beliefs (Barr, 2013, p. 70).

Exclusionary policies are testament to how a presumed religious affiliation with Islam rationalises discrimination against Malays as threats from within, a logic applied exclusively to the Malay racialised group and not to Chinese or Indians, some of whom are also Muslim. In 1987, then-PM Lee Kuan Yew acknowledged that "[a] Malay Singaporean brought up in a multi-racial English medium school will feel Singaporean... But there can be situations where religious emotions are stronger than civic or national feelings or military discipline" (Aljunied, 2010, p. 318). That same year, PM Lee (then Minister of Trade and Industry) reiterated that "if the SAF is called to defend the homeland, we do not want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may be in conflict with his religion" (Mutalib, 2012a, p. 140).

Perceptions that ethnic discrimination is normal protect privilege "from being fully recognized, acknowledged, lessened, or ended", perpetuating disservice done to marginalised groups (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1). Compounding the normalisation of ethnic discrimination are perceptions that it is invisible to those who do not experience it. The invisibility of advantages accorded to Singaporean–Chinese resonates with descriptions of white privilege as "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (McIntosh, 1989).

Articulations of "Chinese privilege" emerged among interviewees, with reference to unequal job opportunities due to race, as well as the lack of awareness Singapore's ethnic majority has in relation to discrimination. Rationalisations of inequality echo Young's (1990, p. 59) conception of cultural imperialism as the way in which a particular group's privileged access to social norms skews interpretations and communication in practice. Consequently, experiences, ideas and values of dominant groups are often disseminated across society as universal standards, at times subconsciously by members of the group. Those of non-dominant groups are simultaneously "othered" and rendered invisible.

In Singapore, cultural imperialism is evident where discrimination becomes part of the social fabric, rendered ubiquitous and rational through scientific understandings of demographic composition and economics.

> The Chinese are much more … privileged compared to us, as in, the Indians and the Malays, I would actually think so […]. You get jobs easier […]. Even like, when you walk, when you speak, they say Chinese, or, something like that. You know, you get the job.

> I think that when you belong to a majority race in a country right, you can never be the person to preach racial discrimination, cos you will never be a victim of it, I feel.

The perception that discrimination is less visible to Singaporean–Chinese reinforces recent discussions of "Chinese privilege", a term first popularised by activist Sangeetha Thanapal, that indicate an analogous relationship with white privilege among

Singaporean–Chinese through the normalisation and invisibility of advantages experienced by those who have it (Dierkes-Thrun, 2015). Since then, "Chinese privilege" is employed to criticise racial insensitivities in Singapore, particularly those directed toward South Asian and Malay communities (Ang, 2017; Lay & Lee, 2017).

While recognising that subjects of privilege do not usually see themselves as such, and even less as oppressors of marginalised groups, it is only acknowledging an "unearned skin privilege" that makes systemic change possible (McIntosh, 1989). This awareness and reflexivity bridges the gulf between punishment and excusing discrimination on the basis of ignorance or lack of intent. Young (1990, p. 151) argues that while blaming agents for unintentional acts and subjecting them to punishment is inappropriate, calling for responsibility is not. By recognising that particular attitudes and actions contribute to the oppression of others, they are responsible for "submit[ting] such unconscious behaviour to reflection, to work to change habits and attitudes" (I. M. Young, 1990, p. 151).

Conclusion

The stories that unfold elicit a more nuanced understanding of how meritocracy and multiracialism are perceived in Singapore. Differential experiences of meritocracy among interviewees show how its existence is not unconditionally accepted among the population, despite assumptions that it is accepted as a "national doxa". Simultaneously, justifications for ethnic discrimination as "normal" reproduce and subvert dominant state narratives. The various ways in which state rationalities are negotiated, interpreted and rejected provide an examination of meritocracy beyond top-down critiques, while revealing how ethnic discrimination in Singapore is not commonly perceived as a problem that exists and needs redress.

Interviews with Singaporean polytechnic youth suggest that while meritocracy is generally perceived as a positive value, it is seen as functioning unevenly across groups and in less ideal ways for ethnic minorities, particularly within employment practices in the private sector. While meritocracy is generally endorsed as a positive value and one associated with Singapore's national identity, this value subscription is not always coupled with an unquestionable belief that meritocracy exists in practice to ensure structural fairness. Constraints articulated by interviewees express a sharp awareness of ethnic discrimination, particularly among ethnic minorities. As such, where this analysis supports findings that establish support for meritocracy in Singapore, it supplants those that demonstrate how race is perceived as an unimportant factor in success and all individuals regardless of race have equal opportunities for economic wealth (Mathews, 2016).

These perceptions closely relate to state narratives beyond meritocracy. Paul Frosh (2012, p. 171) comments that "narratives which we habitually treat inattentively as a kind of unremarkable wallpaper are nevertheless the products of highly concentrated institutionalized forms of attention, routinely practiced by … cultural professionals". Affirming this claim, cultural stereotypes and rationalisations of ethnic discrimination present within interviews reproduce rhetoric and policy founded on essentialist notions of cultural difference, the privileging of Mandarin, and the securitisation of Islam.

There are dire consequences should meritocracy continue to disguise the prevalence of ethnic discrimination. First, the resonance of cultural stereotypes is detrimental to individuals who may internalise inferiorising practices and social exclusion (Hirsch,

2015, p. 169). Second, the belief that unequal treatment is "natural" or "normal" is troubling as it suggests an abstraction from the harms of unwarranted discrimination, and the need for social change. "While everyone in the system of structural and institutional relations stands in circumstances of justice that give them obligations with respect to all the others, those institutionally and materially situated to be able to do more to affect the conditions of vulnerability have greater obligations" (I. M. Young, 2004, p. 371). In the context of ethnic discrimination, such obligations should include state actors as well as those privileged within racial hierarchies of power.

To address ethnic discrimination in Singapore, the attribution of responsibility has to first be acknowledged as one based on what individuals themselves do, as well as what they fail to prevent as a community (I. M. Young, 2004, p. 373). The intrinsic relationship between perceptions of meritocracy, social norms, public policy and political rhetoric shows how ethnic discrimination exceeds individual effort. Only through such recognition can social change begin to break the cycle of cultural habits, social exclusion and structural disadvantage.

Notes

1 There are exceptions to this view. For instance, see Bloodworth (2016) and Littler (2018).
2 The initial objective was to attain an even distribution of interviewees across gender and tertiary institutions. A larger number of women responded to calls for participation, with 18 women in comparison to 12 men. Noting this difference, this study does not make conclusive statements about how gender affects perceptions of meritocracy.
3 As the study sought a random sample, there was not an explicit attempt to seek demographic representation of race. That said, the ratio of members of different ethnic groups reflects the racial demographic in Singapore. Singapore's population of 5.5 million consists of 3.9 million citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs). Among citizens and PRs, there are 74.2 per cent Chinese, with Malays forming the largest minority racial group at 13.3 per cent, followed by Indians at 9.2 per cent and "Other races" at 3 per cent (Singstat, 2015a). Among the 30 interviewees, there were a majority of Chinese (67 per cent), followed by Malays (20 per cent) and Indians (13 per cent), and none of the interviewees fell into the "Other" category.
4 The results of the matrix comparisons are explored in the section below on "Inconsistencies".
5 A discourse particle often used within colloquial Singapore English (see Lim, 2007).
6 JCs are Junior Colleges, actually the equivalent to just sixth form at a college in the UK, which students aged 16 to 19 attend in preparation for advanced school-level qualifications, which include the GCSE A-levels and International Baccalaureate in Singapore. JCs are generally perceived to be held in higher regard by employers and society than vocational colleges and tertiary institutions such as polytechnics and ITEs.
7 In Singapore, students are streamed according to ability, with those who achieve poorer academic grades placed in classes ranked downwards – e.g. the top scoring students are placed in class 1A, with those scoring lower in class 1H.
8 One such example would be Sikhs' exemption from wearing hardhats on construction sites (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 97; Parekh, 2000, p. 244).
9 An epithet used to describe Caucasians, derived from the Hokkien expression for "red hair".

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