# GES1041/GESS1029
# Multiculturalism in Singapore

LECTURE 6
DARYL OOI

# Week 6: How many others in C-M-I-O?

Required reading:

- *Selvaraj Velayutham. 2017. 'Races without racism? Everyday race relations in Singapore'. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 24(4): 455-473
  https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2016.1200050

Supplementary resources:

- ChannelNewsAsia. 2016. 'Regardless of Race' (documentary).
  https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/video-on-demand/regardlessofrace

- Daniel Goh. 2010. 'Multiculturalism and the problem of solidarity'. In *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
  http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3282838
- Lai Ah Eng and Mathew Mathews. 2016. 'Navigating disconnects and divides in Singapore's cultural diversity'. In *Managing Diversity in Singapore: Policies and Prospects*. London: Imperial College Press.
  http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3583640
- Laavanya Kathiravelu. 2017. 'Rethinking race: beyond the CMIO categorisations'. In *Living with Myths in Singapore*. Singapore: Ethos Books.
  https://newnaratif.com/research/rethinking-race-beyond-the-cmio-categorisations/

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# Luminus Forum

## GESS1029/GES1041

## Everyday Ethics in Singapore

[2120] 2021/2022 Semester 2

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### Re: Topics 1 and 2 - Inequality and Meritocracy (AY2021/2022 Sem 2)

Posted by **Nicholas Noel Loo** on 15 Feb 2022 11:10 am.

★★★★★ (0)

1. Statistical findings on income changes during the pandemic

- A 2021 report on the fall of income in 2020, with the onset of the pandemic, contrasted with the growth from the previous five years. It records and compares cumulative changes across the different income groups as well (check out the graphs).
- A 2022 report on changes to median household income across the two year pandemic period, as well as GINI coefficient changes.

2. An interesting perspective on the norm of working long hours, in the context of the experiences faced by young lawyers.

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### Topic 3 - Multiculturalism (AY2021/2022 Sem 2)

Posted by **Daryl Ooi** on 18 Feb 2022 8:18 am.

★★★★★

Here is a link to last year's PM's National Day rally speech, which included a segment on multiculturalism and multiracialism:
https://youtu.be/4XVuKgAMs9k?t=2410

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# Overview

1. **Review: meritocracy and elitism**

2. Intersection: inequality and meritocracy

3. Analysis: multiracialism and everyday racism

4. Assignment: Journal Entry 3

# The structure of meritocracy

| Principles of system | Criteria of merit | Mechanisms in use |
|---|---|---|
| 1.        **Equal opportunity** for talents | Not race, gender, sexuality, age, or class | Penalties for workplace discrimination Social provision of basic goods |
| 2.   **Efficient allocation** of talents | Ability | Qualities and qualifications for jobs |
| 3.        Optimal development of talents | Effort | **Competition** for rewards |
| 4.        **Just reward** for merit | Ability and effort | "Market rates" |

# The structure of meritocracy

**Principles of system**

1. **Equal opportunity** for talents

2. **Efficient allocation** of talents

3. Optimal development of talents

4. **Just reward** for merit

social good
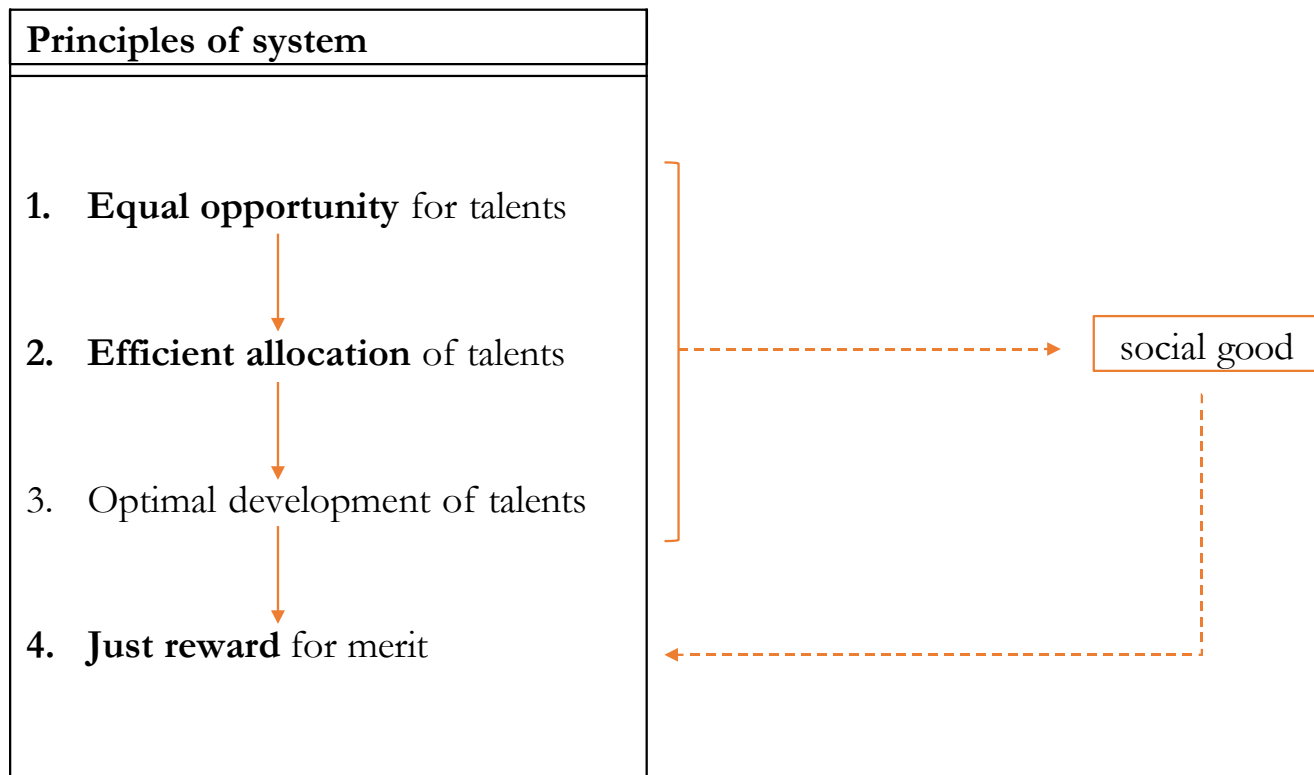
# Merit in an incentive system

incentives for action

Rewards to merit　　　　　　　　　　　　　Social good

basis for evaluation
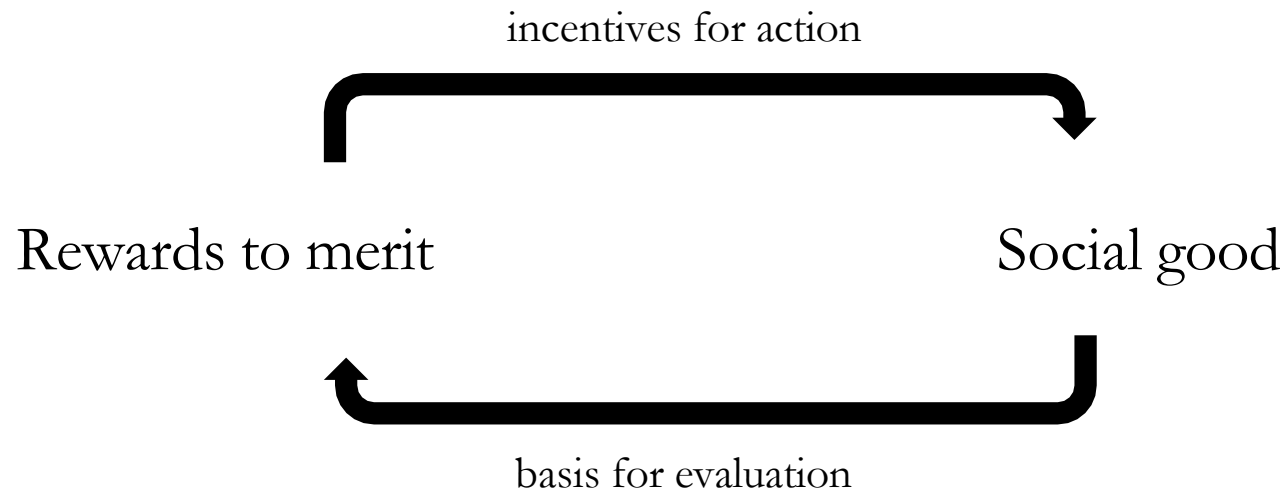
# Three 'ad hoc' features of meritocracy

1. Personification of merit

2. Entitlement to reward

3. Neglect of distribution

# Another model of ethical analysis

1. **The elite Singaporean**

   - Insider dominance
   - Outsider scepticism

   - Manipulation of mechanism
2. Political analysis
   - Entitlement to reward
   - Bias in distribution

3. Ethical analysis
   - Unequal starting points
   - Unacceptable domination
   - Unequal shares of socially produced benefits

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# Video: 'A picture of poverty'



https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/video-on-demand/regardless-of-class

# Video: 'Race and privilege'



https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/video-on-demand/regardlessofrace
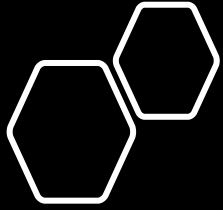
# Exercise: The Privilege Walk

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# Veluyutham's approach to multiculturalism

1.  **Two perspectives on multiracialism:** 'It is how the <u>Singapore state</u> defines the nation's ethnic composition and governs race relations. The use of race…filters down in <u>everyday life</u>, where racial difference continues to be produced and manifests itself in a multitude of ways through <u>official, bureaucratic and quotidian encounters</u>.' (455)

2.  **Three challenges of racism:** 'The challenge for Singapore as a culturally diverse immigrant society lies, first and foremost, in naming <u>racism</u>, and second, in acknowledging that racisms are "<u>structured systems of power and domination</u>"…and third, in addressing <u>personal and social costs of racial discrimination</u>.' (457)

# State multiracialism

1. **Colonial inheritance:** 'Colonial Singapore was a <u>highly segregated society</u> divided along race, ethnicity, class, language, religion and so forth…<u>Racial discomforts, tensions and stereotyping</u> were prevalent as these immigrants co-mingled under the watchful eyes of the <u>colonial</u> <u>authorities</u>.' (457)

2. **Political sensitivity:** 'Ethnic relations have come to be viewed as needing <u>careful management</u> by the <u>state and political elites</u>…The official demarcation of issues relating to race and religion as "<u>sensitive</u>" and falling within the "<u>out of bounds</u>" markers makes their engagement by the public…all the more difficult.' (456)

3. **Structural discrimination:** 'While the idea of meritocracy is frequently invoked in Singapore as an ideological principle that accords <u>equal status to all races</u>, it does not take into account <u>systemic or structural</u> <u>impediments</u> which may prevent underprivileged or minority races from accessing particular <u>opportunities or pathways to social mobility</u>.' (459)

4. **State intervention:** 'The state's <u>swift intervention</u> into highly publicized racist incidents has the unfortunate effect of shifting the public focus from acknowledging racism to <u>singling out perpetrators</u> as aberrant or rogue individuals who are a <u>threat to public order</u>…This action reinforces the perception that racist practices are <u>isolated incidents</u>.' (469)

# Everyday racism

1. **Racial stereotypes:** 'First, a person's <u>phenotypic characteristics and other biological features</u> are singled out for discriminatory practices…Second, racist practices rely on <u>cultural stereotypes</u> for the perpetuation of <u>racial inequities</u>.' (461-2)

2. **Discriminatory practices:** 'Taken-for-granted <u>assumptions of racial traits and prejudices</u> spill over into <u>mundane practices</u>, normalizing stereotypical racial attributes and behaviours, and perpetuating racial inequalities.' (456)

3. **Invisible injustices:** "Everyday racism involves <u>cumulative practices</u>, often covert and hard to pinpoint, but is felt and experienced persistently…These <u>micro-injustices</u> become <u>normal</u>, fused into familiar practices. There is also a sense of <u>resignation and powerlessness</u> about their social position in Singapore.' (466)

4. **Social media:** 'The <u>circulation of racially offensive comments</u> on the Internet and social media are becoming common…<u>Privately held</u> <u>negative views and prejudices</u> about ethnic minorities now circulate in the public domain.' (462)

# Dynamics of multiracialism

| State multiracialism | Everyday racism |
|---|---|
| 1. Colonial inheritance | 1. Racial stereotypes |
| 2. Political sensitivity | 2. Discriminatory practices |
| 3. Structural discrimination | 3. Invisible injustices |
| 4. State intervention | 4. Social media |

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# Prompts on multiculturalism

- Which passage in our readings on multiculturalism moved or frustrated you most? Write about its ethical significance.

- Is race still a "sensitive" issue in Singapore? Should it be one?

- How would you make sense of a specific multicultural encounter or conflict? Examples: "Can you not eat curry?", "Yes it's because you're Chinese."

- Which aspects of multiculturalism tend to be hidden, invisible or obscured – write about its ethical significance.

# Video: 'One actor can play four races'

# Upcoming assignments

- Reading Quiz 2 (Meritocracy)          18 Feb 2022, Fri 2359

- Journal Entry 3 (Multiculturalism)     04 Mar 2022, Fri 2359

- Group Project

# Week 6 Online activities

1. Word cloud
   https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/v6GzDYvHGotC6YDTyvIe0/respond

2. Step forward/backward
   https://PollEv.com/discourses/kdygDvGVpQylAyBglXviM/respond

3. Q&A
   https://PollEv.com/discourses/KJE1yb8U3wCEaUy7KnjdF/respond

# Thank you.

| | |
|---|---|
| Instructor | Daryl Ooi [darylooi@nus.edu.sg](mailto:darylooi@nus.edu.sg) |
| Tutor | Nicholas Loo [nick.loo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:nick.loo@nus.edu.sg) |
| Zoom hours | Friday 1200-1400 (via LumiNUS Conferencing) |