


Singapore Sociology:
nation-building, professional demands, and student interests



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Sociology: the basics

- How is social order possible?
- What brings about social change?
- Consensus and conflict
- Social structures, processes, institutions
- Conservative or subversive?
- Critical, but objective

Department: history

- "Sociology of knowledge" perspective
- Sociological research began before the founding of the Department of Sociology. (Goh Keng Swee's "Urban Incomes and Housing")
- Department founded in 1965, same year as Singapore's independence.
- Mix of sociology and anthropology courses
- British social anthropologists and American sociologists
- Singaporeanization. US-trained PhD's.
- Influx of foreign academics (1/3 locals, 2/3 foreigners)
- Mainly undergraduate teaching. Program structure (British system)
- Graduate program and research-focus

Course offerings: 1965-1990

- Processes: urbanization, industrialization/ modernization, development, social change.
- Institutions: family, religion, education, organizations.
- Structures: race & ethnicity, stratification, professions.
- Policy: social policy & planning, housing, community development, population, crime & deviance.
- Theory & methods: ethnography, quantitative methods.
- Area studies: Singapore, Southeast Asia.

Course offerings: 1990 onwards

- "Sexy" Topics: gender & sexuality, body, popular culture, food, media & communications, emotions, everyday life, tourism, social memory.
- Macro-sociology and processes: economy, markets, power, science & technology, globalization, citizenship.
- Life-course: childhood, youth, ageing.
- Policy: healthcare, welfare.
- Methods: data analysis, visual ethnography.
- Area studies: Asia, China.

Research Focus: up to 2000

- Sociologists focused on Singapore society (nation-building & social transformation): housing & community, religion, ethnic relations, industrialization/ modernization, industrial relations, family and kinship, secret societies. (model after American sociology, low emphasis on theory development)
- Anthropologists continued their ethnographic research on pre-industrial societies in SE Asia. (model after British social and cultural anthropology)
- Government-commissioned research (unpublished).
- Working paper series.
- SE Asian Journal of Social Science.
- High research outputs in local/regional outlets.

Research Focus: post-2000

- Keeping up with American sociology
- More emphasis on theory development
- Adopt comparative framework, going beyond focus on Singapore society (attempts to be "center" for research on SE Asia and Asia.
- Publishing in international journals and presses.
- Obsession with top-tier, referee journals.

Research Interests

- Angshen Chan (Malaysia)
- Aihwa Ong, Social Demography, Research Methods
- Anne Barth (Brazil)
- National/Comparative Sociology, Youth, Education
- Cultural/Post Colonial (US)
- Science and Technology, Visual Culture
- Chua Beng Huat
- Home & Consumption, Cultural Studies
- David P. Gaub
- Postcolonial Studies, Myriam Webster, Ecology
- Eric Thompson (US)
- Urbanism, Cultural Geography, Southeast Asian Studies
- Globalization (Italy)
- Youth and Family, Anthropology of Religion, Identity, Gender, Political Violence, Anthropology of Music and Arts
- Gail W. James (UK)
- Demography, Development, Urban Sociology
- Ho Young-Ahn (Korea)
- Sociology of Aging, Sociology of Family, Demography, Labor participation, Gender
- Ho Young-Chang
- Urban Sociology, Youth and Society, Social Research Methods
- Ingrid Isakowitz (Australia) (Ethnic Studies, China)
- Mass Media, Consumption, Urban Sociology, Ethnographic Filmmaking
- Jasmin Sam (Spain)
- Social Capital, Volunteerism, Health and Aging
- Calvin S. Y. Lee
- Social Memory and Ideology: Sense and Sensibility, Migration and Transnationalism
- Nurul Hudaib (Malaysia)
- Sociology of Finance, Political Economy, Public Sociology, Economic Sociology, Comparative-Heritage Methods

1/3 local

Research Interests

- Laurence Liang Wei Fong
- Mass Communications, Comedy, Human Rights
- Mani Suresh Rao (Malaysia)
- Race and Ethnicity, Migration, State and Citizenship
- Maribeth A. Eick
- Sociology/Antropology of Tourism, Rural and Personhood, Socio-Political Change
- Julia Toppel (Japan)
- Transnational Migration, Gender
- Maria Perrele (Ghana)
- Theory, Migration, Global Cities, Economy and Society, Sports and Leisure
- Norberta Siqueira
- Crime and Democracy, Criminal Justice, Policing and Society
- Paula Bragança
- Family, Medical Sociology, Law, Family
- Rosalea Winkler (US)
- Southeast Asia, Social Memory and Life Stories, Visual Anthropology, Research with Children
- Anthropology of Architecture
- Sybil Ferdinandes (Malaysia)
- Political Economy, Sociological Theory
- Tak Lim Siu
- Structuralism and Mobility, Political Sociology, Agency
- Tung Chia Sheng
- Classical and Ethical Relations, Comparative Religion
- Victor Chua
- Social Capital, Labour Markets, Ethics, Stratification
- Yusufi Shih
- Sociology and Anthropology of Religion, Health and Medicine
- Yuhua Schmidt (Germany)
- Social Theory, East Asian Modernization, Social Policy
- Wendy Jean Young (US/ Taiwan)
- Family and Childhood, Demography, Stratification, China's Social Changes

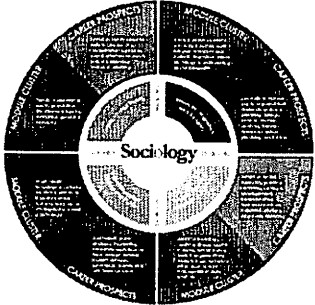
**Back to Teaching:
graduate program**

- Development of graduate program
- Influx of international students
- Local students in master's program; international students in PhD program.
- Change from British system (thesis only) to American system (coursework & dissertation)
- Concern about producing well-trained sociologists: theory, methods, substantive areas.
- Graduate students as teaching assistants and research collaborators
- Giving sufficient weightage to teaching; teaching excellence, the importance of research for teaching.

**Back to Teaching:
undergraduate program**

- Competition with other departments for students
- New curriculum structure (breadth & depth, cross-faculty modules): non-sociology students.
- Modular system and CAP
- Need to offer interesting and more modules to attract sociology majors (double majors, minors)
- Need to provide well-trained sociology graduates
- Need to ensure that sociology graduates are employable

Sociology graduates and job market



Reflections

- Building a department, discipline, and nation.
- Staff contributed to developing sociological literature on Singapore, making sociology an attractive discipline, to producing policy research, and as public intellectuals.
- Staff expected to contribute to producing world-class research, while doing well in teaching and service (to the nation, community, professional associations, university).
- The future: Staff will be prolific in producing for international "market", does reasonably well in teaching.
- BUT probably know very little about Singapore, and would not be able or want to conduct policy research for government agencies.

Balancing demands: What can be done?

- Let a diversity of talents bloom: Can we allow a diversity of talents to flourish in different staff, or must we insist that every staff possess all the required talents?
- Think comparative: While Singapore sociologists should not be studying Singapore society alone, they could use Singapore as a critical or anchoring case with which to compare other societies in SE Asia (culture, development), East Asia (values, social networks, ageing), Europe & North America (multiculturalism, welfare policy).
- Contribution to theory: Asia is the research site, but the goal remains theoretical development.
