

**Abstracts and Biographical Statements – 16<sup>th</sup> MY-SG FORUM, Sept 20-21, 2018, UM, KL, Malaysia**

#	Presenter's Name & Email	Appointment/ Designation	NUS Department	Title of Abstract
1.	Dr Lavanya Balachandran arilb@nus.edu.sg	Postdoctoral Researcher	Asia Research Institute (ARI) and Centre for Family and Population Research (CFPR)	Heritage in Ritualistic Performance: Kavadi Bearing in Singapore
2.	A/P T. C. Chang geotc@nus.edu.sg	Associate Professor	Geography	Community Art as Everyday Heritage in Singapore
3.	Mr Syed Muhammad Hafiz sm.hafiz@nus.edu.sg	PhD Candidate	Malay Studies	<i>Jawi</i> : Beyond the NRIC
4.	A/P Ho Kong Chong sochokc@nus.edu.sg	Associate Professor	Sociology	In Search of Kampong Glam: Heritage Redevelopment and the Creation of Multiple Social Worlds
5.	Mr Jyh Wee Sew clssjw@nus.edu.sg	Lecturer	Centre for Language Studies	Hokkien as a Heritage Language for Citizenry Exploit in Singapore
6.	Dr Nidya Shanthini Manokara (Co-authored with Ms Nora Samosir) nsmanokara@nus.edu.sg; nidyamano@gmail.com  (Ms Samosir: ellsna@nus.edu.sg)	Part-Time Faculty Member  (Ms Samosir is an Instructor.)	English Language and Literature (Theatre Studies)	Wandering Women: Sanctity or Sacrilege
7.	Mr Mike HOU Minzheng (co-authored with Ms Seah Chia Shih, Paveena & A/P Tan Ern Ser) hminzheng@hotmail.com  (Ms Seah: paveena.seah@nus.edu.sg; Prof Tan: soctanes@nus.edu.sg)	Research Analyst and PhD Candidate (Ms Seah is a Senior Research Analyst and Prof Tan is an Associate Professor.)	Psychology  (Ms Seah is from NUS IPS Social Lab, Prof Tan is from Sociology)	Making Sense of the Tangible Past: Developing a Conceptual Framework From a Study of Public Opinion on Built Heritage in Singapore

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8.	Ms Roweena Yip Leileng roweena.yip@nus.edu.sg	PhD Candidate	English Language and Literature (Theatre Studies)	<i>Mak Yong</i> as Heritage: Intertextuality, Intermediality, and Interculturalism in the Contemporary <i>Mak Yong</i> of Norzizi Zulkifli
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**ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS**

**1. Heritage in Ritualistic Performance: *Kavadi* Bearing in Singapore**

Lavanya Balachandran

Postdoctoral Fellow

NUS Asia Research Institute and Centre for Family and Population Research

arilb@nus.edu.sg

Participation in ritualistic processions in urban spaces have provided the means by which ethnic communities inherit, reproduce and preserve cultural values and practices. Yet to assume that they safeguard a particular traditional past in contemporary society or remain pertinent only to specific groups of people decontextualizes notions of heritage from the social, political and economic milieus within which such practices have been and continue to be engendered. My ethnographic research amongst Singaporean Tamil Hindus – the largest sub-ethnic community amongst the formally recognized ‘Indian’ ethnic minority group- reveals that the ritualistic practice of *kavadi* bearing in public processions held during the annual religious festivals of *Taipucam* and *Panguni Utthiram* is a performative act. More specifically, it is a dynamic one that is constructed at the interstices of history, intergenerational ties and kinship networks while being equally contingent upon state policy and the vagaries of everyday life in a cosmopolitan city. Visibility in a public space also renders *kavadi* bearing a political act, one that encapsulates the tensions of race, class, caste, gender and citizenship in a non-liberal, postcolonial multicultural nation-state. The narratives amongst *kavadi* bearers, procession participants, spectators and organizers point out that the social reproduction of ritualistic performances such as *kavadi* bearing is not simply driven by the need to ‘preserve’ cultural heritage but continuously calls into question who can legitimately lay claims to the ethnic community, the urban landscape and the nation-state. This paper also conceptually offers to complicate the rhetoric of ‘darshan’ by arguing that the efficacy of an individual experience of religiosity – in this case *kavadi* bearing - rests on the recognition of its potency in the broader social rather than being embedded in an intimate relationship between the devotee and deity.

**Biographical Statement**

**Lavanya Balachandran** is a joint Postdoctoral Fellow with the Asia Research Institute and Centre for Family and Population Research. Currently, her work explores the relationship dynamics within blended families in Singapore and specifically examine how parenting practices and values are reconfigured and how children in these families adapt and cope with the struggles of a changing family structure. Lavanya’s dissertation titled “Labouring to Learn: A Sociological Assessment of Educational Underachievement amongst Tamil Youths in Singapore” used a qualitative approach to examine how social capital mediates the interactive effects of ‘race and class’ on educational performance amongst Singaporean ethnic Tamil youths. Her wider research interests include race and ethnicity, multiculturalism, family, education, social inequality and qualitative methods.

**2. Community Art as Everyday Heritage in Singapore**

T.C. Chang  
Associate Professor  
NUS Department of Geography  
geotc@nus.edu.sg

In many prospective global cities, the rush to develop the arts has led to the construction of multi-million dollar infrastructure and amenities that include mega museums, iconic concert halls designed by 'starchitects' and blockbuster events catering to international tourists and local cultural elites. Criticisms of the arts as benefitting only a small segment of society are rife alongside concerns over monumental urban spaces that displace and alienate rather than engage the local community. How have cities tried to mitigate these problems and challenges as they undertake ostensibly globalizing agendas in arts and culture? What are some mitigation strategies and what have been their socio-spatial outcomes? This presentation offers some insights from Singapore. In its quest to be a 'Renaissance City of the Arts' (MITA, 2000), Singapore has focused on developing both its 'hardware' (infrastructure) and 'software' (human resource training, education and public outreach). While much has been written about policy statements, cultural plans and urban outcomes (e.g. Chang and Lee, 2003; Tan, 2012; Wee, 2012; Chang, 2014), this presentation will emphasize instead two public art programmes that address the country's software considerations. The two programmes include: (a) establishment of Void Deck Art Galleries in public housing environments (since 2011), and (b) incorporation of graffiti into legal street art programmes (since 2014). Both schemes have taken deliberate efforts to embrace non-mainstream artists in publicly visible projects, and to showcase their efforts through tourism promotion and large-scale national commemoration. While the street art programme has opened up spaces for graffitiists to write/draw in public areas without fear of criminalization, the void deck gallery encourages wide-scale community participation in self-help neighbourhood projects. Both programmes are intended not only to inject colour and beauty to public spaces, but also to showcase social community efforts as exemplars of 'everyday heritage'. NGOs like arts groups and collectives, rather than state agencies, have also been tasked as central players in the projects. However as we shall see, not all artists and participating members of the public are convinced of the inclusivity, diversity and integrative nature of these schemes. Concerns about government motives and stance, the instrumental agendas prescribed for art, and reluctance in community participation have emerged not only as public worries but also as very real limitations in the deployment of art/arts in branding cities and societies as united and cohesive.

Keywords: public art, artists, inclusive society, heritage, Singapore, community

**Biographical Statement**

T.C. Chang is an Associate Professor at the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore (NUS). His research interests include arts/culture, Asian tourism and urban development. He was Vice and Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (NUS) between 2008 and 2015. Presently, he is Deputy Director of the Global Relations Office at NUS. He has co-edited two books on Asian tourism: *Asia On Tour. Exploring the Rise of Asian Tourism* (Routledge, 2009; with Tim Winter and Peggy Teo) and *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia* (Elsevier Science, 2001; with Peggy Teo and K.C. Ho). His publications on public art and culture have appeared in such journals as *Area*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Geografiska Analler*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, and *Urban Studies*.

**3. Jawi: Beyond the NRIC**

Syed Muhammad Hafiz  
PhD Candidate  
NUS Department of Malay Studies  
sm.hafiz@nus.edu.sg

For most Malay-Muslims living in contemporary Singapore, the only presence of the Jawi script in their daily lives would be their names spelt out in their National Registration Identity Cards (NRIC) - that too is a choice not made mandatory by the authorities. From a time in history when Jawi was the standard script for the Malay language, Jawi has been consigned to only a few parts of the Malay world for example, being the official script for Brunei, and functioning as a religious administrative language for some Malaysian states and to a lesser extent, some parts of southern Thailand.

This paper will be tracing the recent revival of the Jawi language in more public platforms, mainly via exhibitions held in national institutions, and through grassroots-level initiatives in Singapore. Some of these initiatives have also spawned cross-disciplinary collaborations between cultural activists, located both in Singapore and Malaysia.

While notions of 'revival' have been associated with nostalgic or ethnocentric tendencies, this paper will argue that the heritage of the Jawi script may provide new inroads into the study of both the Singapore and Malaysian cultural landscapes, for example, the visual art history of both countries. The main reason for this being the numerous cultural magazines and periodicals that were published in Jawi script from the post- World War II period.

Hence the ongoing efforts of 'Jawi activists' within our cultural landscape demonstrates how the heritage of a particular script can be redeployed in contemporary society, to possibly mine new insights into our shared past.

**Biographical Statement**

**Syed Muhammad Hafiz** (born in 1985) was previously a researcher with the Singapore Art Museum and a curator with National Gallery Singapore. He has curated exhibitions involving artists from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia which include *PRIMITIVE: Ahmad Fuad Osman* (2018), *Between Worlds: Raden Saleh and Juan Luna* (2017), *Iskandar Jalil: Kembara Tanah Liat* (2016) and *S.Sudjojono: Lives of Pictures* (2014). His research interests lie in the cross-cultural developments within the Nusantara. He is currently a PhD candidate with the Malay Studies Department (FASS), National University of Singapore.

**4. In Search of Kampong Glam: Heritage Redevelopment and the Creation of Multiple Social Worlds**

Ho Kong Chong  
Associate Professor  
NUS Department of Sociology  
sochokc@nus.edu.sg

Cultural policies, when these are tied to urban regeneration, create a sense of anticipation and hope, promising new social and economic activities and a new facet to the city image. At the same time, because these interventions also threaten to disrupt existing ways of life, the challenge is in understanding how the new and the old can continue to coexist, allowing the needed boost to the economic vitality of the city while allowing local ways to breathe. My paper illustrates, with the case of Kampong Glam, an inner city precinct, how government cultural policies worked to create a type of urban regeneration that stems from heritage redevelopment. This is a case involving strong state intervention in three phases with minimal grassroots participation. The result is a dramatic transformation of the area, concentrating the cultural life of the area to a smaller area surrounding the mosque, and expanding the social life of the area as new activities related to lifestyle and tourism took root, relying local heritage to create an appealing place character. In the process, heritage has undergone a commodification process. The rhythm of activities has also changed, creating a sharper day and night distinction. A new segment of youths has also been attracted to a new set of trendy shops in the adjoining area, the result of a commercial (not residential) gentrification of Haji Lane. Thus the result is the creation of multiple worlds, the faithful drawn to the Mosque, office lunchtime crowd to the renowned eateries, the tourist (from Europe and Canada, not Southeast and East Asia) in search of an authentic local experience, youths to a trendy street, and night revelers in hopes of having a fun time amidst a vibrant place ambience.

**Biographical Statement**

Trained as an urban sociologist at the University of Chicago, **Ho Kong Chong** is the incoming cluster leader for the Asia Research Institute's Asian Urbanisms Cluster and an editorial board member of Pacific Affairs and the International Journal of Comparative Sociology. Recent publications include *Neighbourhoods for the City* (University of Amsterdam Press, 2018); "Public Housing in Singapore", UNHabitat Housing Practices Series (with Tan, Ng and Glass, 2018), and "The Neighbourhood Roots of Social Cohesion: Notes on an exceptional case of Singapore" *Environment and Planning C* (with Chua, 2018).

**5. Hokkien as a Heritage Language for Citizenry Exploit in Singapore**

Jyh Wee Sew  
Lecturer  
Centre for Language Studies  
clssjw@nus.edu.sg

Recently, the Senior Minister of State for Education informed the hosts of *Channel NewsAsia* that a space for respectful conversations on citizenship experiences is in place for *National Education* (Chia, 2018). Could a heritage language such as Hokkien enrich the meaning of citizenship in an ever-evolving Singapore story? Statistics from the Singapore Census of Population (2010) indicates that 11% of the local Chinese households speak Hokkien. Movies and television serials produced in Singapore and using Hokkien as the medium of interaction are well-received, hinting at Hokkien as a former lingua franca commonplace amongst the locals. The decent numbers at the box office and in viewership ratings indicate that the verbal traction of Hokkien in Singapore is quite encouraging. Considering Hokkien may pull common cultural memories together for many Chinese Singaporeans, this discussion contemplates if learning Hokkien could cultivate collective resilience in balancing work with personal challenges. To this end, a contemporary Taiwan variety programme available in *YouTube*, *冰冰Show* (2017) is used for evaluating the introspection power in Hokkien as there may be potential for nurturing good citizenry. Select Hokkien wise sayings shared by the host *Bai Bing Bing* (白冰冰) are presented as heritage capital containing cultural-communicative efficacy. The virtues in the spoken idioms seems to inculcate a unique linguistic intelligence rich with communal values (e.g., *em pat ji qia lan quo*; *em pat lan liao ji puo* [illiterate hires reader; solitary loses half a battle]). In consideration of the sensibilities design in the idiomatic expressions, we might recalibrate if and how the aspect of common good in Hokkien could be exploited for engendering a positive ripple effect to nation-building.

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*冰冰Show*. (2017). <https://www.facebook.com/bingbingshow>

**Biographical Statement**

**Jyh Wee Sew** teaches Malay as foreign language at National University of Singapore. Jyh has presented aspects of onomatopoeia in language pedagogy at INALCO Paris, NUS, NTU and RELC in Singapore, and University of Malaya. Jyh's articles appeared in *Akademika*, *Archipel*, *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, *Issues in Language Studies*, *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, *Kajian Malaysia*, *Kemanusiaan - The Asian Journal of Humanities*, *Language Sciences*, *Word*, among others. The latest book of Jyh is *From Face to Screen: Interactive Multimodal Semiotics at Work* (UNIMAS Press, Sarawak, 2017).

**6. Wandering Women: Sanctity or Sacrilege**

Nidya Shanthini Manokara  
Part-time Lecturer  
Theatre Studies Programme, NUS Department of  
English Language and Literature  
nidyamano@gmail.com

Nora Samosir  
Instructor  
Theatre Studies Programme, NUS Department of  
English Language and Literature  
ellsna@nus.edu.sg

In multi-cultural Singapore, bharata natyam (an ostensibly traditional dance form from South India) is often preserved, practiced and performed as an ethnic indicator of the minority Indian community. Seen as an embodied proxy of Indian culture, this revered dance serves as a potent symbol of racially and religiously enclaved identity. Particularly, the content relies heavily on established Hindu religious narratives and heightens devotion as the primary mode of dance expression. Given this context, to what extent can the form be inclusive of non-mainstream Hindu religious figures? Can the portrayal of non-Hindu religious figures embrace devotion? As a practitioner-researcher, I propose testing these premises through a bharata natyam-theatre collaborative performance *Wandering Women* that draws on two historical-religious figures. Despite an entire fire-walking ceremony dedicated to her, the demi-God Draupadi is not integrated as an independent figure in bharata natyam. In a similar vein, the mangled reputation of Mary Magdalene due to popular culture forces one to confront the agency of the apostle to the apostles. Maligned in their respective cultural contexts as such, I therefore argue for the inclusion of Draupadi and Mary Magdalene within *Wandering Women* to question the efficacy of the dance form.

Collaborating with established Singapore theatre practitioner Nora Samosir, I draw on texts from the Mahabharata and New Testament as a parallel to the sung poetry in conventional bharata natyam. We then embark on site-visits to India and Israel in June 2018, to uncover the origins of these women to better understand how they resonate with our contemporary times. Rehearsing in the two distinct sites will then shape the text investigations and movement explorations. How can one portray these women – who are increasingly part of our shared cultural consciousness – through the embodied heritage of bharata natyam? Does a splinter from the established form become enabling or does it risk being sacrilegious?

**Biographical Statement**

**Nidya Shanthini Manokara** has obtained her Ph.D in Theatre Studies from National University of Singapore. Her primary research interests include evolving Asian practices and affective registers in performance. Dispelling the notion that everyday life and codified art are distinct entities, in her writings Shanthini questions how far an urbanite can resonate with contemporary issues with ideas inspired by her practice in bharata natyam. Shanthini has taught a range of performance courses at NUS, NTU and Lasalle College of the Arts. She is currently the Resident Dramaturg with RAW Moves and is an External Assessor with National Arts Council.

**Nora Samosir** has more than 30 years of professional theatre experience - including *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* (2015), *LIFT: Love is Flower The* (2013), *Casting Back* (2012), *Tongues* (2012), *\_\_\_ can change* (2010), *These Children Are Dead* (2009), *Temple* (2008), *Asian Boys Vol. 2: Landmarks* (2004), *Proof* (2002), *Asian Boys Vol.1* (2000), *Beauty World* (1998, 1992), *Lao Jiu* (1997, 1994), and *Trojan Women* (1991). Nora has a Postgraduate Diploma in Voice Studies and an MA in Theatre Studies.



**7. Making Sense of the Tangible Past: Developing a Conceptual Framework from a Study of Public Opinion on Built Heritage in Singapore**

Mike HOU Minzheng

PhD Candidate

NUS Department of Psychology

hminzheng@hotmail.com

Paveena Seah

Senior Research Analyst

NUS IPS Social Lab

paveena.seah@nus.edu.sg

Tan Ern Ser

Associate Professor

NUS Department of Sociology

soctanes@nus.edu.sg

As more buildings and landmarks are being conserved in recent years, questions surrounding the meaning and purposes of built heritage conservation have grown more salient. To understand what the public considers built heritage and why, an examination of public opinions of heritage sites is imperative.

Research has hitherto examined popular attitudes towards built heritage in relation to national identity, urban conservation and conservation policymaking in Singapore. Conservation of historical buildings is generally considered as an important symbol of nationhood and a tangible element of national identity (Ooi, 1994). Nonetheless, it cannot be assumed that there is a consensus among Singaporeans in regard to which building and neighborhood should be conserved, and how (Yuen, 2006; Kong and Yeoh, 1994). A conceptual framework is therefore required to “capture” the range of public opinion and to make sense of lay theories of heritage.

To address this gap, we propose a framework based on empirical research that illustrates lay theories and the appraisal logic involved in evaluating the importance of a heritage site. We conducted seven focus group discussions with 51 Singaporeans aged 21 to 68, from various backgrounds. Questions focused on the awareness and perceived importance of 90 historic sites and the reasons for their importance. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes that subsequently informed the construction of our framework.

Three distinct dimensions were evident: Knowledge, Memory and Physical Attributes. Knowledge refers to one’s explicit or tacit understanding of a site and its significance. Memory refers to both collective and personal memories of the site. Physical attributes refer to the site’s architectural appeal, functionality and accessibility. These dimensions are in constant tension as they are being weighed through one’s evaluation. Each dimension represents a sufficient (but not necessary) condition for evaluation of importance to occur.

Our proposed framework is useful in illuminating the cognitive process behind one’s evaluation of a heritage site. This understanding can help policymakers prioritize their conservation and outreach efforts. Specifically, our findings suggest that engendering knowledge, creating memories, and balancing physical characteristics are key enablers towards meaning making.

*(Note: If the findings from the forthcoming, follow-up survey are ready by August 2018, they will be included in the presentation. The findings may also lead to an elaboration or modification of the conceptual framework currently based on the FGDs.)*

**Biographical Statement**

**Mike HOU Minzheng** is a Research Analyst at the NUS IPS Social Lab. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Highest Honors) in Psychology and Economics from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. In addition to his research on heritage, he is working on other key Social Lab’s projects concerning online antisocial behaviors and driving the establishment of the inaugural Social Lab Panel. His research interests include political psychology, national identity and immigration issues.

**Tan Ern Ser** is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology; Academic Convener, Singapore Studies, FASS; Academic Adviser, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab; and Deputy Chair, General Education Committee,

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NUS. He received his PhD in Sociology from Cornell University, USA. He is author of “Does Class Matter?” (2004) and “Class and Social Orientations” (2015). He is also co-investigator of Asian Barometer-Singapore and World Values Survey-Singapore. He has served as research consultant to government ministries, and is Chairman, Research Advisory Panel, Housing Development Board.

**Paveena Seah** is a Senior Research Analyst at the NUS IPS Social Lab. She graduated with honours in Sociology from NUS, and has an MSc in Ageing and Society from the Institute of Gerontology, King’s College London. She has been working on the Social Lab’s flagship Singapore Panel Study on Social Dynamics since it was launched in 2014. Her research interests are in population ageing and heritage conservation, with a special focus on how the built environment and social relations shape the subjective well-being of older people.

**8. *Mak Yong* as Heritage: Intertextuality, Intermediality, and Interculturalism in the Contemporary *Mak Yong* of Norzizi Zulkifli**

Roweena Yip Leileng

PhD Candidate

Theatre Studies Programme, NUS Department of English Language and Literature

roweena.yip@nus.edu.sg

In this presentation, I examine the current status of *mak yong* as both local and global heritage, and consider the ways in which the tension between traditional and contemporary practices in *mak yong* performance is both problematised and productively reconstituted. I shall do by analysing *Mak Yong Titis Sakti* (2009, restaged 2018) and *Throne of Thorns* (2017) by Malaysian theatre director and academic Norzizi Zulkifli, through the intersections of various practical and theoretical frameworks, organised into three sections: intertextuality and ritual, intermediality and the politics of space, and finally, intercultural collaboration as mediating between *mak yong's* status as both global and local heritage. Tracing the historical reception of the form, both locally and abroad, will inevitably foreground the historical, political, and cultural tensions surrounding traditional and contemporary practices of *mak yong* in Malaysia, as well as that which surround contemporary scholarship on *mak yong*. These tensions primarily concern the function of *mak yong* as entertainment or ritual, the performance of *mak yong* in the urban metropole of Kuala Lumpur, and finally, *mak yong's* status as global and/or local heritage, in light of UNESCO's recognition of the form as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (2005). Both productions respond to the form, function, and content of traditional *mak yong*, in order to facilitate different ways of thinking and theorising about contemporary *mak yong* and its status as heritage. Both productions intervene in these tensions, making the case both for the evolution of *mak yong* into a contemporary form, and drawing attention to the heterogeneity involved in this process. At stake in this paper is therefore what it means for *mak yong* to be considered not only heritage, but also a *contemporary* performance form, and to assert its continuing significance and influence in contemporary Malay(sian) culture.

**Biographical Statement**

**Roweena Yip** is a PhD Candidate in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore, whose research interests lie in the intersections of gender studies and feminist theory, and intercultural performances of Shakespeare in Asia. Other interests include early modern British drama, disability studies, and trauma studies. She completed both her undergraduate degree in English Literature (First Class Honours, 2015) and Master's Degree in Renaissance Literature (Distinction, 2016) at the University of Edinburgh, UK. Her work has been published in *Gender Forum*.