

Seminar

Managing religious diversity in South East Asia: How insult laws backfire

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Date: **2 November 2015 (Monday)**
Time: **4 pm – 5:30 pm**
Venue: **B4-702, AC1, City University of Hong Kong**

Abstract

Incidents such as this year's *Charlie Hebdo* murders have forced many liberals to rethink the proper balance between freedom of expression and respect for religion. In the present climate, marked by anxiety over the extreme violence that accompanies religious offence, it may appear that diverse societies have no choice but to sacrifice free speech for the sake of peaceful relations among different communities. However, this presentation challenges the view that the law should step in when religious feelings are claimed to have been offended. Making specific reference to the experiences of Indonesia and Singapore, it argues that the criminalisation of religious offence, through anti-blasphemy and other laws, has been used by political actors against their opponents, often at the expense of religious minorities or other marginalised groups. Marrying legal analysis with insights from political sociology's theories of contentious politics, the presentation draws from a book project, *Hate Spin: The Manufacture of Religious Offence and its Threat for Democracy*, contracted to MIT Press.

Short bio

Dr. GEORGE is an associate professor in the Journalism Department of Hong Kong Baptist University, where his research centres on freedom of expression issues, including journalism and the state in Asia. A Singaporean by birth, he arrived in Hong Kong in 2014 after 10 years as a faculty member at Nanyang Technological University. He received his PhD in communication from Stanford University in 2003 and also studied at Columbia University's school of journalism and Cambridge University, where he read social and political sciences. He spent the first half of his career as a journalist at *The Straits Times*, Singapore. His previous scholarly books are *Contentious Journalism: Towards Democratic Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore* (2006) and *Freedom From The Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore* (2012).