

# Singapore's Neoliberal Decadence: Meritocracy Revisited

Professor Kenneth Paul Tan

Hong Kong Baptist University

**Abstract:** Singapore has often been described as a successful meritocracy. However, over the last couple of decades, as inequality and poverty have become much more visibly felt in many people's lived experience, views about meritocracy in Singapore have become rather less uncritical. Kenneth Paul Tan discusses five types of criticism, focusing on the view that meritocracy is part of a larger narrative of decay. He elaborates on this decadent form of meritocracy through a theoretical framework that points to the rise of authoritarian populism as a debased response to the kind of rigid technocratic elitism that Singapore's meritocracy has degenerated into, largely a result of an ever-tightening embrace of the orthodoxies of neoliberal globalization without adequate policies to deal with its disruptions and dislocations. As more and more Singaporeans feel left behind and ignored, while the voices of those who attempt to speak up for them are quietened through an expanding range of legal and policy instruments of censorship, the meritocratic compact that once supplied political legitimacy is poised to become the source of its erosion.

**Kenneth Paul TAN** is a tenured Professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, which hired him under its Talent100 initiative in February 2021. Previously, he was a tenured Associate Professor and Vice Dean at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKY School). His books include *新加坡模式: 城邦國家建構簡史* (季風帶文化, 2020), *Singapore: Identity, Brand, Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), *Governing Global-City Singapore: Legacies and Futures After Lee Kuan Yew* (Routledge, 2017), *Cinema and Television in Singapore: Resistance in One Dimension* (Brill, 2008), and *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics* (NUS Press, 2007).



8 November 2021 (Monday)

4:00-5:30pm

Room G5-214

5/F Yeung Kin Man Academic Building

City University of Hong Kong

Register in advance for this Seminar:

Attend via zoom

<https://bit.ly/3pYg7lg>



or in-person

<https://forms.gle/VP9GkFjnNLBkm163A>



After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the seminar.

