

SINGAPORE HERITAGE SOCIETY
together with The National Library Board
is proud to present:

THE MULTICULTURAL KOPITIAM IN SINGAPORE

a talk by Dr Lai Ah Eng

venue	Imagination Room, Level 5 National Library, 100 Victoria Street
date time	Saturday, 5 Sep 2009 3.00 pm
admission	Free and open to the public
enquiries	shs.secretary@gmail.com (Wendy)

This is the story of Singapore's multicultural diversity seen through a unique feature – the kopitiam (coffeeshop) – found mostly in the HDB estates in which 85% of Singapore's population live. Often viewed as a quintessential feature of Singapore everyday life and public culture, the kopitiam is one among several institutions and spaces in Singapore within which are embedded dynamic aspects and processes of migration and social-cultural diversity, set within the larger context of Singapore as a rapidly changing and globalizing city.

Originally a small-scale set-up serving drinks, nibbles and sometimes meal foods, the kopitiam has undergone a major transformation over the years. This talk examines the following aspects of the kopitiam's cultural and social diversity: 1) foods and stalls, 2) owners, stallholders and workers, 3) customers, 4) social activities and cultural politics, and 5) local and international connections. In doing so, it explicates the historical, social and cultural evolution of the kopitiam as a site of Singaporean multi-culturalism.



LAI AH ENG is senior research fellow at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She has worked in various research capacities at the Consumer's' association of Penang, Housing Development Board (Singapore), the National Archives of Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore) and Institute of Policy Studies (Singapore), and lectured at the Departments of Sociology and Social Work, National University of Singapore. Her research areas include multiculturalism, migration, family and heritage.

Her recent major publications include *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case Study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore* (1995), *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore* (ed.) (2004), *Secularism and Spirituality: Striving for Integrated Knowledge and Success in Madrasah Education in Singapore* (co-ed.) (2005), and *Religious Diversity in Singapore* (ed.) (2008). She has also written articles on ethnicity, religion, gender and family issues.

