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Singapore's National Day Rally speech: A site of ideological negotiation


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Abstract

This article analyses the inaugural National Day Rally speeches of three Singapore

prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong. It argues that the People's Action Party (PAP) has been able to maintain its political hegemony and forge a national consensus and identity through its political and ideological discourse. It examines how the PAP has managed to mediate between the competing interests of different social groups and to create a sense of national unity. It also discusses the role of the National Day Rally speech in this process.

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Notes

¹ Chong cited my paper (Tan, [2001](#)) as an example of the “patriarchal state” approach. While this is not the place to engage in extended debate, I contend that he misunderstood the central thesis of the paper. Rather than arguing, as Chong claimed, that the state has become feminised, that is to say, “softer” in its approach to governance, my paper actually suggested that the “patriarchal state” has shifted from the more brutal and coercive emasculation of civil society in the 1960s to 1980s, towards a partnership with civic society actors, where the state continues to assume the “masculine” or “husbandly” voice of reason and control, while the latter are restricted to “feminine” preoccupations like welfare (care), the arts (expressiveness) and dialogue (communication). True to “patriarchal” form, any hysterical outbursts in civil society or attempts by its actors to meddle in politics will be met by condescension, ridicule, reprimand or even punishment.

² This and the next two paragraphs are based on parts of a public lecture that I delivered on 16 August 2004 for the Political Science Association (Singapore) at the National University of Singapore.

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