

CALS SEMINAR SERIES: ASIA & INTERNATIONAL LAW

24 June 2016, Friday ✦ 10.00am - 12.00pm ✦


Lee Sheridan Conference Room, Eu Tong Sen Building, NUS (BTC)

“Public Opinion on the Legal Status of Sexual Minorities in Singapore and Hong Kong”

The seminar will feature two presentations by Assistant Professor Lynette J. Chua (NUS, Law) and Assistant Professor Suen Yiu-tung (Chinese University of Hong Kong, Sociology) who led landmark studies on public attitudes toward the legal status of sexual minorities in Singapore and Hong Kong, respectively.

Assistant Professor Lynette J. Chua and Assistant Professor Suen Yiu-tung Suen**Moderated by: Assistant Professor Swati Jhaveri****Topic: Regulation of Same-Sex Sexual Conduct and Public Attitudes in Singapore”**


Chua's presentation is based on a recent random household survey that measures Singaporean attitudes on sexual regulation, particularly Section 377A of the Penal Code, the provision that criminalizes sexual conduct between men. It is the first that specifically studies public opinion on same-sex sexual conduct, its criminalization by Section 377A, the retention, enforcement, and repeal of Section 377A, as well as public knowledge about the law. The survey results and analysis are critical as the government places great importance on societal views in formulating its position on Section 377A. The presentation, drawn from a draft article, examines the survey results together with socio-legal scholarship to critically analyze the government's position, as well as the impact of the law itself on shaping public opinion.

About the Speaker

Lynette J. Chua is Assistant Professor of Law at the National University of Singapore. She is a law and society scholar with research interests in law and social change, and law and social movements. She is writing a book on how human rights are collectively mobilized and practiced on the ground, how they relate to larger social forces, and how relationships that people have with and through human rights perpetuate their practice and construct their meanings in Myanmar's sexual orientation and gender identity minority rights movement, before and during the country's political transition. Her 2015 Law & Society Review article, based on an earlier phase of the research, was awarded the 2016 Article Prize by the Socio-legal Studies Association in the United Kingdom. Her earlier book, *Mobilizing Gay Singapore: Rights and Resistance in an Authoritarian State* (Temple University Press, 2014), analyzes the emergence, development, and strategies and tactics of Singapore's gay rights movement, and explores the complex role of law and meanings of rights. The book received the 2015 Distinguished Book Award from the Sociology of Law Section of the American Sociological Association, and the 2015 Book Accolade for Ground-breaking Matter from the International Convention of Asian Scholars.

Topic: Public opinions in Hong Kong on legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status – debunking myths with empirical evidence

Within debates about sexual citizenship, a certain myth assumes that ‘Chinese values’ and ‘familial culture’ render jurisdictions influenced by Chinese culture particularly conservative in terms of public opinions towards non-heterosexuality issues. This paper analyzes empirical public opinion data collected through mixed methods – including a territory-wide telephone survey with 1,005 respondents; qualitative findings collected from three public forums, 14 LGBTI focus groups, 13 public focus groups including those with strong concerns, as well as online and postal submission of opinions – from the ‘Study on Legislation against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status’ conducted by the Gender Research Centre, commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission, an independent statutory body of the Hong Kong government. First, the findings suggest that ‘Chinese values’ and ‘familial culture’ are subject to wide and varied interpretations and may not necessarily be negative towards non-heterosexuality issues. Second, it argues that there is a dramatic difference among different age groups in terms of their opinions on the issues, signaling a social paradigm shift. This means that the ‘Chinese culture’ is always in flux. This paper as a whole argues that the argument that a certain culture itself is necessarily conservative on sexuality issues warrants scrutiny.

About the Speaker

Yiu Tung Suen, DPhil, is currently Assistant Professor at Department of Sociology, Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is also an incoming Associate Director of the Gender Research Centre of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at CUHK from August 2016. His research is inter-disciplinary in nature, and his current research interests include sexualities, ageing and generations, gender, and health. His academic writings can be found published or forthcoming in such journals as *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Sociological Research Online*, *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *Higher Education Research and Development*, *Social Theory and Health*, and others. His co-edited book (with Andrew King, Kathryn Almack and Sue Westwood) *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Ageing: Minding the Knowledge Gaps* is under contract with Routledge (London).

To register, please email cals@nus.edu.sg

Admission is free and closing date of registration is 20 June 2016