

POLL FINDS SINGAPORE DIVIDED OVER PROSPECT OF THIRD-GENERATION MEMBER OF RULING LEE CLAN ENTERING POLITICS

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A rare political poll released in Singapore on Monday shone a light on a topic that thus far had been confined to pockets within the chattering classes: will a “third-generation” member of the city state’s powerful Lee family enter politics?

The family of the revered late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has dominated Singapore’s politics for the best part of six decades – his eldest son Lee Hsien Loong is the country’s third and current premier – and there have been increasing questions about whether this trend may continue.



Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Photo: AP

The public feud between Lee Hsien Loong and his younger siblings Lee Hsien Yang and Lee Wei Ling in 2017 added further grist to the rumour mill, with the younger two Lees at the height of the quarrel insinuating that the prime minister and his wife Ho Ching were priming their son Li Hongyi for political office.

Li, a data scientist at a government agency, immediately hit back by declaring on Facebook: “I really have no interest in politics”.

Still, speculation has continued to circulate – intensifying in recent months amid expectations that a snap poll may be called this year.

Raffles who? 200 years on, Singapore would rather he disappear

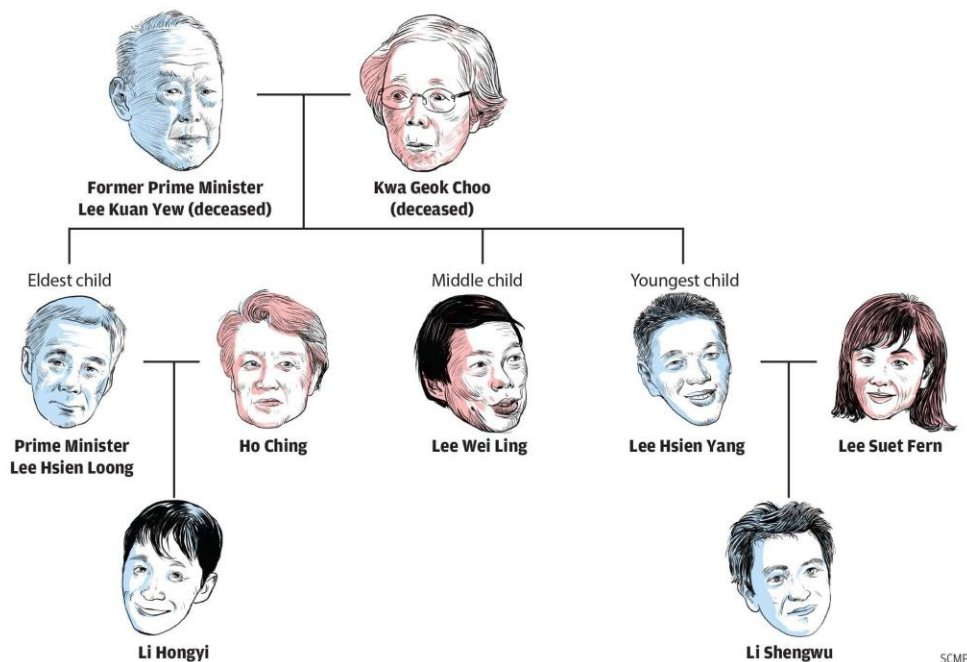
In a survey commissioned by Yahoo News Singapore, half of the 916 Singaporeans questioned said they were positive about the prospect of a third-generation Lee entering politics– 41 per cent said they were “quite positive” and 9 per cent were “very positive”. On the other hand, 30 per cent said they felt “quite negative” and 20 per cent viewed it as “very negative”.

The respondents were equal parts male and female with more than 40 per cent older than 50, according to Blackbox Research, the independent polling firm that conducted the survey.

Singaporean political observers said the findings showed a “pragmatic” streak among the populace.

According to Hong Kong-based political analyst Woo Jun Jie, an assistant professor at the Education University of Hong Kong, while online chatter gives the impression that Singaporeans overwhelmingly reject so-called dynastic politics, the actual survey findings suggest that sentiment on the ground might be different.

The Lee family tree



“Singaporeans might not see this (having a third generation Lee) as dynastic politics and they are still a pragmatic bunch who will choose candidates based on their ability to implement effective policies,” he said.

Li, Lee Hsien Loong’s 31-year-old son, is a deputy director of the data science and artificial intelligence division of Singapore’s Government Technology Agency.

Singapore’s next PM: safe pair of hands, ‘there’s just one pity’

The young member of the Lee clan – who spells his surname differently – was the recipient of a top government scholarship and studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

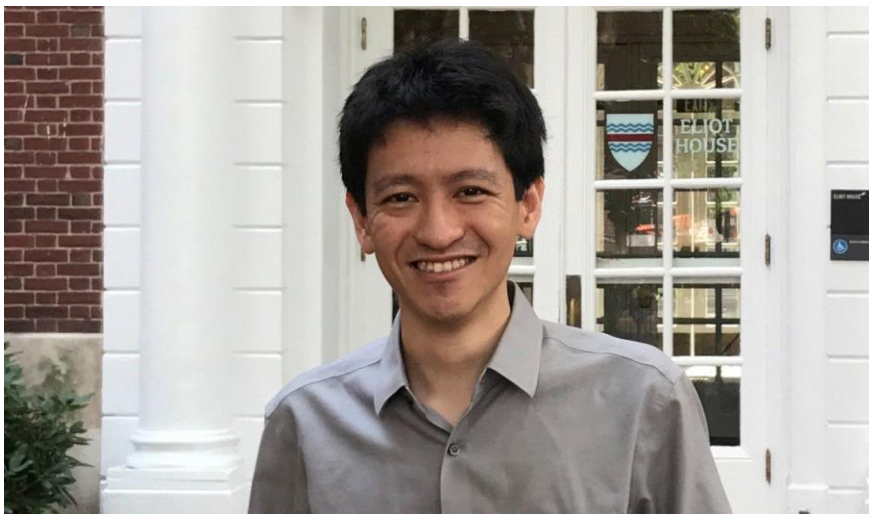
At the height of the 2017 public quarrel between Li’s father and his siblings, he was compared with his cousin Li Shengwu, the son of Lee Hsien Yang.

Commentators wondered aloud who, between the two of them, had the political chops of their grandfather, who founded the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) and steered the city state into developed status within one generation.

Following the family quarrel there have been suggestions that Lee Hsien Yang may enter politics to take on his brother.

Li Shengwu, however, has said he never intends to walk in the footsteps of his grandfather and uncle.

“I believe that it would be bad for Singapore if any third-generation Lee went into politics. The country must be bigger than our family,” the Harvard University economics professor said in 2017.



Li Shengwu. Photo: Reuters

Li Shengwu is facing contempt of court proceedings for comments he made in a private Facebook post at the time of the intra-family feud – which had to do with Lee Kuan Yew’s legacy and the future of the clan’s bungalow.

Woo, the Hong Kong-based Singapore watcher, and fellow analyst Felix Tan told *This Week in Asia* it was unlikely the PAP, currently helmed by Lee Hsien Loong, would field a younger Lee in upcoming polls.

Will Singapore’s politics change as its parties shift to Gen Next?

One reason is the party’s ongoing efforts to entrench its fourth generation of leaders – the politicians who will take over from Lee Hsien Loong’s current administration.

“If the elections were held later this year, it is too late to introduce any new face into the game as Singaporeans are still familiarising themselves with the fourth-generation leaders and they might not really want any more new faces,” said Tan, an associate lecturer at SIM Global Education.

The Yahoo News Singapore poll also found that in a toss-up between two fourth-generation PAP leaders, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat was the preferred choice of 75 per cent of Singaporeans to be prime minister, with Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing pulling in the remaining 25 per cent.

The party in November appointed Heng to a senior position that effectively makes him prime-minister-designate. Prime Minister Lee has said he hopes to retire before he turns 70, in 2022.

With Singapore’s mainstream local media being largely government-friendly, Yahoo News Singapore is viewed by many observers as among the few independent news sources in the city state.

Website: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2183999/poll-finds-singapore-divided-over-prospect-third-generation>