CENS Workshop

Visiting the Immigration Issue in Singapore

A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

24 February 2012, Singapore

CENS WORKSHOP
VISITING THE IMMIGRATION
ISSUE IN SINGAPORE

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This report summarises the proceedings of the conference as interpreted by the assigned rapporteurs and editor of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.

The conference adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the points expressed in the prepared papers, no attributions have been included in this conference report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CENS Workshop titled Visiting the Immigration Issue in Singapore was held on 24 February 2012 at the Marina Mandarin Hotel. Dealing with the issue of immigration in Singapore, the intention of the Workshop was to provide a platform to facilitate an inter-disciplinary discussion of what has become a highly contentious subject matter among Singaporeans today. Overall, the Workshop aimed to:

• present an overview of the historical background and official government policies towards immigration since Singapore's independence in 1965;
• analyse the impact of immigration on the country's social, economic, cultural and political spheres;
• present perspectives from the ground – namely of the citizens, immigrants and temporary workers – on the immigration issue.

To that end, the panel of academics drawn together for the Workshop represented various fields of studies including political science, economic development, sociology, human geography, public policy, cultural studies, strategic security and demography.

The first panel set the backdrop for the ensuing presentations by providing a historical overview of the role of immigration in the formation and growth of Singapore's demographic structure. Also analysed were the competing anxieties over the immigration issue from the state and the population's point of view.

The second panel then turned to the perspectives on the ground, examining the social construct of integrating immigrants into the Singaporean society, the commitment of immigrants towards the country's multiracial structure and the economic and social costs that drives the country's migrant domestic work force.

The third panel examined the economic, cultural and social dimensions of the immigration issue. The panelists considered the economic benefits as well as the costs of maintaining an open-door economic policy and the necessity for the inculcation of cultural intelligence and equality in everyday engagements between Singaporeans and immigrants.

The last panel focused on the issue of immigration from the perspective of Singapore's security and political landscapes. This included ramifications of the immigration issue for the country's national security framework as well as the political discourse surrounding the issue between the ruling People's Action Party and opposition parties.

PANEL 1: CONTEXTUALISING SINGAPORE IMMIGRATION

Migration and Singapore: A Historical Overview

Yap Mui Teng's presentation examined the role of immigration in the growth and structure of Singapore's population from the colonial era to the present. The issue of immigration has become increasingly controversial in Singapore. The recent 2011 General Elections saw an unprecedented level of dissatisfaction expressed by the electorate, triggered in part by the influx of foreigners into the country in the second half of the decade of the 2000s. Demographically, there has been a high rate of growth among non-citizens and non-permanent residents in Singapore. By 2010, non-residents numbered 1.3 million in a total population of about 5 million, with approximately 500,000 permanent residents and 3.2 million citizens. This meant that 34.7% of the labour force in Singapore was made up of foreigners in 2010.

Immigration has historically played an important role in Singapore's population growth. Net in-migration was the main factor that contributed to Singapore's population growth for much of its history prior to independence in 1965. With the founding of Singapore in 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, there were reportedly only 150 fisher folk on the island. In 1824, the population reached 10,683, "entirely as the result of migrational surplus." By the first census in 1871, the population had reached 97,111 as a result of the inflow of immigrants from India and China. Until 1931, the rate of the natural increase of the island's population was in the negative due to a lower birth rate and higher death rates among the people. As such, the growth in the population then was due mainly to a net migrational surplus. The role of net migrational surplus only declined when the population became more settled and domestic growth began to increase due to rising fertility. Policies such as those easing the restrictions

on female migrants, and phenomenon such as the post-Second World War baby boom finally allowed the excess of birth over death. The proportion of the population that was local-born began increasing from 29% in 1921 to 78% in 1980, according to the Report on the Census of Population 1970 Singapore.

However, in recent years migration is once again playing an increasingly significant role in population growth due to the persistence of very low fertility rates. This is reflected in the decline in the proportion of the local-born in the population to 57% in 2010. In conclusion, Yap observed that the population density over time has increased tremendously. She noted that in 1901, there were less than 1000 persons per square kilometer but currently there are roughly over 7000 people per square kilometer in the country. The higher density today may be one of the main contributing factors to the negative reactions against the country's immigration policies.

Angst and Anxieties: Coping with the Immigration Imperative in Singapore

Eugene Tan's presentation contextualised the immigration controversy from the point of view of the state and its population. Persistently low fertility rates, an ageing population and economic imperatives were several of the main factors that prompted the state's drive for a more liberal immigration policy. Further fueling the drive is the intense competition for talent faced around the world, especially in advanced economies. In light of such considerations, immigration represented the solution to quantitatively correct ("right-size") the population by demographic top-ups, as well as qualitatively "revitalising" the local population.

Pro-immigration posture has, however, contributed to much anxiety on the part of the country's citizens. Some of the concerns included: (a) the increase in competition for places in schools, housing and jobs; (b) causing runaway property prices; (c) the dilution of the Singaporean identity. Over-crowded public transportation and congestion in public spaces has heightened such concerns and sentiments. While the economic logic and rationale of pro-immigration policies may be clear, this is not easily translated into an effective acceptance of the immigration regime. Already present is a sense of imbalance between the way the government treated citizens and non-citizens. Common complaints ranged from citizens having to shoulder obligations such as National Service whereas first generation immigrants were excused from such a necessity and the inability of new immigrants to integrate into society. This sense of being overwhelmed by immigrants, both transient and long-term, stoked the fear that the immigration policy will ultimately do more harm than good to Singapore and Singaporeans alike.

In tracing the angst and anxieties over the existing immigration policy, Tan noted that the position taken by the government reflected concerns that if the population numbers are not topped up adequately, the country would face economic malaise and irrelevance. Hence, the policy imperative to keep the immigration doors open is strong and unlikely to waver even as such policies are calibrated to manage competing domestic concerns.

As a result, Tan observed that the government has to adroitly manage the social, economic, and political implications of the immigration policy if the immigration imperative is to be sustained. Even as the economic rationale for immigration is evident, it is difficult to connect the cognitive understanding of this fact with the reality faced on the ground. Unlike other global cities where citizens have the choice of moving to the hinterland, Singaporeans possess no such option. Thus, as a means to manage the angst, the government has to constantly maintain the position that citizens come first.

In conclusion Tan believed that immigration will remain a politically sensitive issue requiring a deeper engagement of its positive and negative aspects. He argued that immigration control and the integration of immigrants remained vital. There is an urgent need to ensure that existing citizens are appreciated, their interests are looked after and identities secured. He proposed abandoning the usage of the term 'foreign talent' due to its negative connotations, especially in the light of the fact that there is no observable difference between immigrants and the locals. He also reiterated the possibility of engaging and integrating newcomers before the granting of residency or citizenship status.

DISCUSSION

During the lively discussion that followed, many questions directed at the speakers concerned the differences in immigration policies between the past and present situations, which have generated so much unhappiness. A speaker responded that the density of the population which has impacted the public infrastructure and personal space of Singaporeans may be one possible factor that led to the discomfort with immigrants. Both speakers also noted that the greater diversity of people on the island may have contributed to the sentiment of alienation among citizens. It was observed that the ramping up of the numbers of immigrants in the recent years has resulted in a situation where the nation is unable to support the increase. Such sentiments of discomfort were expressed and reinforced through the use of social media, leading to an unprecedented articulation of discontentment.

The topic of Singaporean nationalism and identity was also raised during the discussion. The speakers were queried whether Singaporean nationalism is a direct reaction to the issue of immigration. A speaker observed that it was grounded on a larger sense of national identity that had been present all the while. Addressing a point about overseas Singaporeans, a speaker suggested that one not look at it as 'brain drain', but 'brain circulation' as there is still the possibility that such citizens may return one day to the benefit of the country. Furthermore, at the end of the day, the immigration issue is a two-way street. Rather than expecting foreigners to adapt to the country, Singaporeans should also take the initiative to reach out to them.

PANEL 2: PERSPECTIVES ON THE GROUND

Becoming Singaporean: What Matters? To Whom? And the Non-negotiable Changes?

Leong Chan-Hoong's presentation focused on the complex social construction of integration and the constitutive markers of the Singaporean identity. Beginning with a brief overview of the current demographics, he noted that the proportion of Singaporeans in the overall population is currently around 65% and this number has been falling consistently in the past years. In facing the challenges of declining birth rates and an ageing population the country has turned to immigration to ensure economic growth for the country. While there are imperatives for a pro-immigration stance, there are also economic and social challenges.

Among these are the suppression of wages especially for those at the lower end of the economic ladder, increased competition for jobs and educational opportunities, increased housing costs, as well as a dilution of the Singapore identity, unfamiliar cultural habits, poor command of English and the fact that immigrants who are eligible do not want to serve National Service. The government's response to these challenges was to sharpen the distinction with regards to subsidies between citizens, permanent residents, and non-residents. More housing was constructed and a residential quota for permanent residents was introduced. The infrastructure was also improved and the granting of immigration and employment visas were tightened. While such responses went some way towards tackling the issues, what remains to be dealt with are difficulties concerning whether Singaporeans are willing to accommodate the presence of immigrants and conversely, what immigrants must undertake to become fully participating citizens of Singapore.

To find the answers to this, Leong referred to an Institute of Policy Studies survey. The study essentially considered the social construction of integration, its implications, the main areas of contestations and whether Singaporeans are willing to adapt to accommodate immigrants. It tracked differences in responses between local-born Singaporeans and those that are foreign-born wherein 1001 Singapore nationals and 1000 foreign-born immigrants were interviewed. To the question of what the most important social markers were, Singaporeans responded that they expect immigrants to respect multiculturalism, to be gainfully employed, to be able to speak conversational English, and their male children serve National Service.

As far as Singaporeans' willingness to accommodate immigrants is concerned, it was found through the survey that ethnic Chinese are less likely to view English proficiency as a requirement, while Singaporeans who live in smaller houses named fewer social markers and are more willing to accept lower wages. Those with strong family ties are more likely to endorse the National Service requirement. Those with higher levels of national pride tend to endorse all markers and are less willing to compromise on attitudes, while Singaporeans who are economically optimistic are overall more accommodating on attitudes.

Leong concluded that perceived contributions by immigrants could help promote inclusiveness of native Singaporeans. It was suggested that integration policies and programmes needed to consider the experience of both recipient nationals and the immigrant community. Those concerned should not lose sight of the bigger picture and need to consider the immigration conundrum in a holistic manner. Societal resilience should not be contained to only 65% of the population; there is a need to consider the other significant 35% of the population as the country is only as strong as its weakest link.

From Outsider to Insider: Social Integration of Immigrants into Multiracial Singapore

Mathew Mathews began his presentation with the observation that to some extent all nations are multicultural as different cultural communities (whether based on language, religious or racial differences) exist within a state. However, the level of interaction and exposure of those who are culturally different is sometimes limited due to geographical boundaries and segregation. As immigration is closely linked to globalisation, economically developed countries have seen more immigrants.

To deal with immigration, certain countries have adopted mild multiculturalism, i.e. cultural differences are acknowledged but survival of any given culture is not guaranteed. Hard multiculturalism on the other hand sees governments affirming cultural differences and protecting the rights of the different groups. Singapore has in place a system of multiracialism, a form of multiculturalism under which the cultures of four official racial categories (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) are recognised and preserved.

From the experiences of certain immigrants surveyed in Singapore, Mathews highlighted several findings about their commitment to the system of multiracialism found in the country. Accordingly, immigrants notice early from their arrival that there are cultural differences between themselves and those with whom they work, study, or live with. As long as different cultural habits are not forced upon immigrants such habits are not resented. Moreover, immigrants tend to accept Singaporean norms more quickly when their own children adopt these norms.

Prevalent among certain immigrants is the perception of being looked down upon. The effect this has on them is the abandoning of integration efforts and a re-focus on their own communities. When asked whether it was more important for immigrants to preserve their own native culture than to adopt the Singaporean culture, 5.3 per cent of those surveyed strongly disagreed, 29.5 per cent disagreed, 33 per cent were neutral, 28 per cent agreed, and 4.2 per cent strongly agreed. It was found that those who agreed had been in Singapore for a shorter period of time, and were therefore more oriented towards their own home countries. It was also more likely that they were from countries such as India as compared to China or Malaysia.

Mathews concluded that multiracialism guaranteed that there would be continued awareness of differences as these are made salient. Based on the multiracial framework, new immigrants understand the need to preserve harmony. However, tolerance is emphasised in interactions while cultural differences are rarely praised, appreciated or admired. Furthermore, absorbing new immigrants into the existing CMIO structure (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) meant that such immigrants are held against the existing markers of the identity of these groups even though new immigrants may not fit into this structure. New immigrants although racially similar to local born Singaporeans are often culturally different. The question is whether the government should help new immigrants in preserving their unique cultural heritage or continue their commitment to maintaining the existing racial framework.

Silent Voices: The Social Realities of Singapore's Temporary Women Migrant Workers

Theresa W Devasahayam spoke on the hardship of low-skilled women migrant workers in Singapore. In her research, Devasahayam found that female migrant workers in Singapore come from very diverse backgrounds. They are drawn to Singapore by the higher salaries that they can earn compared to their home countries. There are two types of costs associated with the migration of such migrant workers: (a) financial costs and (b) social costs.

In terms of financial costs, Devasahayam pointed to the fact that many of them accrue debt to work in Singapore. This consisted of payments needed for their passage, documentation and training which they undergo in their own home countries. In order to repay the debt, many domestic workers are forced to work for several months without pay from the employers; this has led, in the past, to some cases of exploitation. However, due to the unequal power relationship vis-à-vis their employers, most domestic workers tend to remain quiet even when financially exploited. A transfer to another employer also costs money, at least a month's salary, so many female domestic workers prefer to stay with one employer despite being abused.

With regards to the social costs borne by women migrant workers, Devasahayam pointed to a study which showed that half the number of such workers had one Sunday off and merely 12 per cent had every Sunday off. She emphasised that allowing migrant workers a day off per week is important as it allows them to meet with their compatriots, socialise in their own languages and enjoy food from their homeland. These gatherings also allow them to learn about their rights and where to seek help in cases of abuse from their employer. Allowing a day off is, however, opposed by some Singaporeans on the basis that this provides migrant workers with the opportunity to moonlight or become involved in relationships that may result in pregnancy. Another issue is the lack of privacy, as some migrant women reported that their letters were read by their employers.

Despite these circumstances, female migrant workers are active and engage in informal organisations to care for and educate themselves. Some of them also participate in courses in mosques and churches to learn new skills and widen their horizons. In conclusion, Devasahayam noted that while the economic dimensions of migration were important to many such workers, the needs to fulfil the social aspirations in their adopted country were also important.

DISCUSSION

A participant asked whether the current state of relationships between Singaporeans and foreigners were good, and what the ideal state looked like. A speaker responded firstly that the list of social markers that was presented was not an index but measured the state of relationship present. It was opined that it is neither good nor very bad and that it is everybody's task, both locals and foreigners, to improve the relationship. It was pointed out that according to findings, Singaporeans do not expect foreigners to assimilate to become Singaporean. Rather, what was expected was respect for multiculturalism, being gainfully employed, having a conversational command of English and that those who are eligible serve National Service.

Another participant asked how to increase the social resilience of people living in Singapore, considering that 35 per cent of Singapore's citizens are foreigners and have stronger ties to their home countries. A speaker noted that foreigners do not have to be rooted in Singapore as long as they do not oppose or work against the country and that there was room to have a more inclusive view of migration.

PANEL 3: IMMIGRATION: CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Brain Strain and other Economic Issues from an Aggressive Open Door Policy

Toh Mun Heng and Jiang Bo's joint presentation focused on the economic impact of Singapore's aggressive open door immigration policy. It was observed that Singapore owed much of its economic successes in the past and present to the implementation of open door policies, from policies on free trade to the importation of capital and labour in the present.

The economic benefits of an open door immigration policy are connected to the element of diversity. Here, two types of diversity can be observed: firstly, diversity found in the creative sector which not only contributes directly to the economy but also has an indirect impact in terms of providing aesthetics, freshness and style to products and in the arts, culture and entertainment sector. Secondly, diversity found in the workforce has been found to play an important part in empowering innovation and growth. This can be seen from the example of the United States, with its competitiveness linked to the degree of openness to outsiders compared relatively to the situation in Japan and Germany, with their homogeneous workforce. The effects of diversity on a country's economic performance can be identified through two externalities: the Marshallian and Jacobian. The former emphasises the fact that human capital externalities takes place through face to face interactions of skilled workers in a central location as well as technological spillovers from one firm to another within the same industry in a city. Jacobian externalities on the other hand see the role of diversity in geographically proximate industries for promoting innovation and growth. Singapore's Economic Development Board is well aware of such advantages;

a prominent example of its attempts to leverage on the Marshallian and Jacobian externalities is the setting up of Biopolis, a targeted site where top biomedical companies are located.

Moving on to the economic costs of an open door immigration policy, Jiang identified six which are: (i) labour share; (ii) productivity; (iii) local wages; (iv) use of foreigners as a 'buffer' in business cycles; (v) the erosion of social capital and (vi) income inequality. With regards to labour share, Singapore has one of the lowest wage shares in the world, mainly through the presence of cheap foreign labour. This leads to a vicious cycle of lowering productivity and encouraging an increasing dependence on cheap labour. The presence of better qualified foreign labour willing to work for lower remuneration on the other hand suppresses local wages. The higher degree of ethno-linguistic fragmentation created situations for the possibility of nepotism to arise where foreigners in managerial positions may tend to favour hiring workers from their own ethnic background.

With regards to the use of foreigners as a 'buffer' in harnessing business cycles, Jiang noted that this is premised on the assumption that the foreign work force would be used to fill demand during a business boom and allow such businesses to absorb a downturn in the business cycle by retrenching such workers first. The reality on the ground, however, is that many older and more highly paid Singaporean workers are more likely to be retrenched first during a downturn compared to younger and better educated foreign workers. Jiang observed that there is evidence that people from different ethnic groups are more likely to trust each other less than those of the same ethnicity. The increasing number of foreigners in the country is thus likely to have an effect on the country's social capital which is the level of trustworthiness between strangers in a community. Lastly, concerning income inequality, Jiang pointed to an upward trajectory between the number of foreigners coming into the country and the worsening income inequality of locals.

Jiang concluded by stating that while there are definite benefits and costs in adopting an open door immigration

policy stance, to promote wholesome development Singapore needs all kinds of people from both ends of the spectrum. Hence, efforts to promote assimilation and bonding become even more of an imperative for nation building.

Pedagogies of in/difference: On the ethics of (national) hospitality in immigration gateway Singapore

Aaron Koh's presentation focused on viewing the complexities of the immigration issue through the lens of cultural intelligence. While familiar narratives such as stories of successful migrant communities are usually brought forth to persuade the Singaporean public of the need to remain open, tensions over issues of immigration still remain and are becoming more overt. While school children are taught how to accept differences in schools, the same cannot be said of the general public at large. Hence, there is a need to bridge negative values in an affirmative way and to work towards providing a basis for the articulation of differences. For Koh, this involved the concept of public pedagogies in reawakening public consciousness and teaching the population ways to accept and cope with the differences of immigrants living within their midst.

Posing the question whether it is enough to inculcate attitudes of tolerance, Koh saw the need to go further in addressing issues of deep seated prejudices and cultural stereotypes. Drawing from the work of Derrida, he posited the need to incorporate principles of hospitality which goes beyond the ordinary meaning of friendly and generous reception of guests and strangers but is extended to relationships of hospitality and ethics. This called for a rethinking of the position of host and guest and the necessary ethics to be fulfilled in such a relationship. Koh echoed Derrida's claim that tolerance is the opposite of hospitality; tolerance is practiced by

limiting the welcome of immigrants through controlling one's territory and merely acts to silence indifferences, but does not promote hospitability.

Koh reiterated the need to pedagogise ethics in order to position the country as a hospitable nation if the country wanted to remain attractive to mobile talent. He noted the fact that the Singapore government has done much at the policy level in its efforts to promote openness and integration. However, fundamental questions regarding the state's responsibility to its own people needed to be examined as well. For immigrants, there are obligations which should be observed. This included the need to contribute to the host country, to integrate and mingle rather than to choose to live apart. Koh concluded by observing the need to simplify the cultural complexity of being an immigrant nation through inculcating cultural intelligence. He observed the need to put ethical issues at the forefront for the country to move forward and call itself a hospitable nation.

Reconstructing Singapore as a Cosmopolitan Landscape: The Geographies of Migration and its Social Divisions that Extend into the Heartlands

Elaine Ho's presentation focused on the effects that a growing number of migrants have had on Singapore's cultural landscapes. Noting that landscapes are a way of seeing and interpreting social and spatial arrangements, Ho began with the contextualisation of the cosmopolitan landscapes in Singapore, which sees a marked divide between 'cosmopolitans' and 'heartlanders'. While cosmopolitanism in Singapore is usually linked to the lifestyle practices of the mobile elites and cultural diversity, the term 'heartland' typically depicts the core of Singaporean life and identity.

In terms of immigrants, there are also existing divisions. While cosmopolitan landscapes are inhabited by immigrants classified as the global elite, at the other end of the spectrum are migrants who work as low-grade labourers. Increasingly however, there are immigrants in the middle who do not belong to either the global elite class or low grade labourers. These can be termed as the 'middling transnationals' and are normally migrants who are well educated and comfortably well off in their home country. When they come to Singapore however, they are hired under local terms of employment and earn local salaries; some may take up jobs that are characterised by precarity, for example, Japanese women working in Singapore who were not transferred by their companies and women termed as *pei-du mama* or study mothers, who are unable to take up most jobs due to visa restrictions. These 'middling transnationals' tend to stay in Housing Development Board (HDB) estates, meaning that they live within spaces that are designated as the 'heartlands'. With the greater propensity of this class of immigrants moving into such spaces, Singaporeans have been feeling increasingly threatened. This has resulted in cultural clashes, such as the 'Curry day' incident triggered by a media report of complaints by an immigrant family over the strong smell of curry being cooked by a Singaporean family. There are also perceptions that foreigners are ungrateful, exemplified by the controversy of a mainland Chinese student posting inappropriate remarks about Singaporeans over the internet. Lastly, foreigners, even those who have taken up citizenship, are not seen as adequately suited to take over positions of leadership.

These perceptions and stereotypes call into question the willingness of Singaporeans to be self-reflective over their own social prejudices. Recent decisions by the government to restrict the number of permanent residencies and to impose additional Stamp Duty taxes over private property, which has the greatest impact on foreigners buying property in the country, appear to send signals of a lackluster welcome to immigrants. This appears to have caused some foreigners to consider alternative places to move to.

Ho noted that integration is a dialogical process and as such, for there to be meaningful encounters of differences, there is a need to firstly move beyond just notions of hospitality towards thinking about issues of equality; secondly, perceptions of zero sum scarce resources need to be tackled; Singaporeans feel threatened when they perceive that resources are limited when that is not necessarily the case; thirdly, systemic processes that privileges any one social group over others should be addressed. In conclusion, a paradigm shift which calls for positive responses to differences as well as facilitate equality in a systematic way is needed.

DISCUSSION

A participant raised a query on the perceptions of zero sum scarce resources held by Singaporeans. A speaker replied that the perception that the resources are limited stems from a sense of threat felt by Singaporeans. A speaker advocated moving away from thinking of foreigners as a threat and instead accepting that they have the equal right to earn a living in the country. Also encouraged were ways of highlighting the contributions that immigrants make towards growing the country's economy.

A participant commented that while there is a strong emphasis on whether Singaporeans are prepared to reflect on the way they treat foreigners there is lesser focus on the existing obligations of immigrants in the country. A speaker replied that immigrants have to learn to negotiate their every day spaces no matter where they are from. While there is a definite need to highlight the obligations of immigrants to Singaporeans a speaker noted that there are many who would be willing to adapt to the Singaporean way of life. Increasing spaces for both Singaporeans and foreigners to intermingle should be encouraged. It is through the process of engagement on an everyday level that both sides would come to understand each other better.

PANEL 4: IMMIGRATION: POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

Immigration and the Changing Milieu of Singapore's National Security: Reshaping the Who, What and Why of Total Defence

Bernard Loo spoke on the ramifications immigration could have on Singapore's national security. At the outset he noted that the national security policy-making process, particularly in the realm of defence, necessarily reflected social and/or cultural biases, and the conceptualisation of national security for Singapore had been shaped to a large extent by the ethnic component of the society and the existence of the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) racial categories. Running on a key assumption that the four officially recognised communities were fairly monolithic and coherent, Loo then looked at how the rapid influx of new migrants could affect their supposed continued coherence, which in turn, could impinge upon how national security was understood and conceptualised in the years to come.

Loo posited that high levels of immigration could further complicate the CMIO edifice in the long run. Locally born Chinese and new migrants from China, for instance, tended to see each other as very different entities. Those locally born, having gone through national education in Singapore schools and having begun seeing the world as how the country's key policy makers tended to see it, would naturally possess a worldview that was very different from the new Chinese migrants. This would already have an impact on both the internal and external dimensions of national security, thus requiring a rethink regarding how the question of national security would

have to be framed and formulated, considering the contesting worldviews of those within the same ethnic communities about their security concerns.

Reiterating the importance of grasping the cultural dimension when it came to the question of challenges and threats facing Singapore from beyond its borders, Loo pointed out that being a small Chinese-dominated state in a larger Malay archipelago had helped shape what Singapore perceived its challenges and threats to be. Singapore's geopolitical reality therefore had implications for its continued viability should there be rapid changes to the country's ethnic components due to immigration. Concerns over, among others, communalism and ethnic chauvinism were warranted because they could have spill-over effects on how the country's various ethnic communities might see themselves. Additionally, Singapore's history with its neighbours, particularly Malaysia, had also shaped how Singapore assessed its security challenges; this too would have to be factored in when examining how immigration could impact the country. While Loo agreed that perceptions regarding the external environment would likely continue to drive Singapore's national security calculus today, he questioned whether it would remain the dominant security narrative decades down the road with the incorporation of the new migrants and their worldviews.

Rapid immigration would also affect Singapore's preparation for military defence as the new migrants could contest the country's national security narrative. There would be a need to relearn new rules of the game based on new cultural norms as the new Singapore context would change the military institution and the laws that govern behaviour within.

In conclusion, Loo said that the impact of rapid immigration on Singapore's national security would only become apparent many years down the road after the new migrants were already absorbed into the country and, more importantly, when they had already begun to play an increasing role in the national security policy-making process.

The Politics of Immigration: Perspectives of the Ruling PAP and Opposition Parties

Bilveer Singh talked about the politicisation of the immigration issue in Singapore by both the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and the opposition parties. He acknowledged that while bringing in migrants with fresh outlooks was good for the country, it was not without problems.

Over the years, the government had provided many reasons for bringing in more migrants – from buttressing economic growth and rectifying declining birth rates to pushing Singaporeans to become more competitive – but Singh said the often changing rationale made people question the real reason(s) behind the move. Until the last few years, the government had pursued its immigration-friendly policies almost unchallenged; Singh believed that its endeavours could be justified because it did bring in individuals who were good for the economy. Besides, Singaporeans had an absorptive capacity about them too. Also, as a small state, Singapore could not afford to be xenophobic.

Immigration, however, started to become increasingly politicised in recent years because the common man had begun feeling its impact in one way or another. Singh argued that everyday discomfort could get politicised very easily, especially in times of economic downturn and particularly in light of a ruling party that appeared to face political troubles. Regardless whether fears were founded on facts, the growing perception that the influx of new migrants could detrimentally affect the citizenry resulted in negative consequences; managing perceptions was therefore a crucial aspect of the politics of immigration. The opposition had tapped into the growing unhappiness. As was made evident in the last general elections, immigration became a central political issue that was compounded by concerns over the lack of public housing and overcrowded public transportation.

Immigration had become an issue now because the rapidly rising numbers of the new migrant community as well as their unprecedented variedness meant they were more visible in the public sphere. In the previous decades, 'foreign talents' mostly occupied high-level economic positions and lived in private enclaves largely apart from the majority of the populace while the lowly skilled workers also had their own economic and living spaces. But the deluge of new migrants today would work and live side-by-side with the average Singaporean, lending the sense that they were 'crowding' out the heartlanders.

Singh argued that it would be irresponsible of the government to continue to open the doors to migrants in light of public disapproval; it would also be irresponsible of the political opposition to refuse migrants altogether. Finding the middle ground as well as integrating the ones already here were challenges for the future.

Singh concluded that the presence of migrants had arguably been helpful in shaping Singapore's national identity among the citizenry as there appeared to be a rising sense of what it meant to be core residents of Singapore. The immigration issue had inadvertently made Singaporeans ask what kind of nation they would like Singapore to be.

DISCUSSION

A participant noted that a recurring theme of discussion through the day revolved around the issue of perceptions regarding migrants and he wondered what would be the best way to deal with perceptions, particularly the negative ones. A speaker replied that concerns over immigration only recently came to the centre stage of the political discourse in Singapore and the various anecdotal controversies that came along with the influx of new migrants – that they were taking away "our jobs, our husbands and our wives" – that had been repeatedly heard built up in the minds of Singaporeans that the new migrants were a 'threat' to their economic, social and personal lives. Managing perceptions required a multifaceted approach and a speaker suggested that it was important for the government to recognise 'local talent' as much as 'foreign talent' or risk further discontentment over the seemingly higher importance accorded to foreigners; the core citizens of Singapore were most important and should not be taken for granted. Singapore had a highly tolerant society but managing perceptions remained important which was why open forums like this one needed to continue. Another participant added that the many 'misperceptions' could

likely be a consequence of the lack of transparency in the collection and sharing of official migration data.

Another participant, sharing her own research on immigration, noted that while the government intended to maintain the competitiveness of Singaporeans by adding 'foreign talent' to the mix, it however left the recruitment of foreign professionals to the gatekeepers of the various vocations; in the process, "second stringers" were drawn in partly because Singapore could not stand up to the likes of the US, the UK and Australia in drawing the best. In response, a speaker replied that it was important to ask at which point of the economic ladder did such individuals come to occupy in Singapore and whether their status here reflected the fact that they were indeed "second stringers". In terms of security, if second-rate foreigners were indeed here and decided to stay, Singapore would likely not be improving the human capacity aspect of security considering the military now, with its greater emphasis on technological sophistication, demanded people who were technologically savvy and could negotiate the new realm of high technology.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

Friday, 24ᵗʰ February 2012

0800 – 0825hrs	**Registration** Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer (Level 5)	1015 – 1030hrs	**Coffee and Tea break** Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer (Level 5)

0800 – 0825hrs **Registration**
Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer
(Level 5)

0825 – 0830hrs **RSIS corporate video**
Venue: Vanda Ballroom (Level 5)
Attire: Smart Casual
(Long-sleeve shirt without tie)

0830 – 0845hrs **Welcome Remarks**

Speaker:
Norman Vasu,
Deputy Head, Centre of Excellence
for National Security (CENS),
RSIS, NTU

0845 – 1015hrs **Panel 1: Contextualising
Singapore Immigration**

Chairperson:
Norman Vasu,
Deputy Head, Centre of Excellence
for National Security (CENS),
RSIS, NTU

Speakers:
"**Migration and Singapore:
A Historical Overview**"
by *Yap Mui Teng*,
Senior Research Fellow,
Institute of Policy Studies,
National University of Singapore

"**Angst and Anxieties: Coping
with the Immigration Imperative
in Singapore**" by *Eugene K. B. Tan*,
Assistant Professor,
School of Law,
Singapore Management University

Q & A Session

1015 – 1030hrs **Coffee and Tea break**
Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer
(Level 5)

1030 – 1230hrs Chairperson:
Bilveer Singh,
Associate Professor, Department of
Political Science, National University
of Singapore

Speakers:
"**Becoming Singaporeans: What
Matters? To Whom? And the Non-
negotiable Changes**" by *Leong
Chan-Hoong*, Research Fellow,
Institute of Policy Studies, National
University of Singapore

"**From Outsider to Insider:
Social Integration of Immigrants
into Multiracial Singapore**" by
Mathew Mathews, Research Fellow,
Institute of Policy Studies, National
University of Singapore

"**Silent Voices: The Social Realities
of Singapore's Temporary Women
Migrant Workers**" by *Theresa W.
Devasahayam*, Fellow, Institute of
Southeast Asian Studies

Q & A Session

1230 – 1330hrs **Lunch**
Venue: Taurus Ballroom (Level 1)

| 1330 – 1530hrs | **Panel 3: Immigration: Cultural, Economic and Social Issues** | 1530 – 1545hrs | **Coffee and Tea break** Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer (Level 5) |

Panel 3: Immigration: Cultural, Economic and Social Issues

1330 – 1530hrs

Chairperson:
Yolanda Chin,
Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU

Speakers:
"**Brain Strain and Other Economic Issues from an Aggressive Open Door Policy**" by *Toh Mun Heng*, Associate Professor, Department of Strategy & Policy, NUS Business School, National University of Singapore and *Jiang Bo*, Instructor and Research Associate, Department of Strategy & Policy, NUS Business School, National University of Singapore

"**Pedagogies of in/difference: On the Ethics of (National) Hospitality in Immigration Gateway Singapore**"
by *Aaron Koh Soon Lee*,
Associate Professor,
Department of English, The Hong Kong Institute of Education

"**Reconstructing Singapore as a Cosmopolitan Landscape: The Geographies of Migration and its Social Divisions that Extend into the Heartlands**"
by *Elaine Ho Lynn-Ee*,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Geography,
National University of Singapore

Q & A Session

1530 – 1545hrs

Coffee and Tea break
Venue: Vanda Ballroom Foyer
(Level 5)

1545 – 1715hrs

Panel 4: Immigration: Political and Security Issues

Chairperson:
Damien D. Cheong,
Post Doctoral Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU

Speakers :
"**Immigration and the Changing Milieu of Singapore's National Security: Re-shaping the Who, What and Why of Total Defence**"
by *Bernard Loo Fook Weng*,
Associate Professor, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University

"**The Politics of Immigration: Perspectives of the Ruling PAP and Opposition Parties**"
by *Bilveer Singh*,
Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science,
National University of Singapore

Q & A Session

ABOUT CENS

WHAT IS CENS?

The Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) is a research unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Established on 1 April 2006, CENS is devoted to rigorous policy-relevant analysis of a range of national security issues. The CENS team is multinational in composition, comprising both Singaporean and foreign analysts who are specialists in various aspects of national and homeland security affairs.

WHY CENS?

In August 2004 the Strategic Framework for National Security outlined the key structures, security measures and capability development programmes that would help Singapore deal with transnational terrorism in the near and long term.

However, strategizing national security policies requires greater research and understanding of the evolving security landscape. This is why CENS was established to increase the intellectual capital invested in strategizing national security. To this end, CENS works closely with not just other RSIS research programmes, but also national security agencies such as the National Security Coordination Secretariat within the Prime Minister's Office.

WHAT RESEARCH DOES CENS DO?

CENS aspires to be an international research leader in the multi-disciplinary study of the concept of resilience in all its aspects, and in the policy-relevant application of such research in order to promote security within and beyond Singapore.

To this end, CENS conducts research in three main domains:

Radicalisation Studies
- The multi-disciplinary study of the indicators and causes of violent radicalization, the promotion of community immunity to extremist ideas and best practices in individual rehabilitation.

Social Resilience
- The inter-disciplinary study of the various constitutive elements of social resilience such as multiculturalism, citizenship, immigration and class. The core focus of

this programme is understanding how globalized, multicultural societies can withstand and overcome security crises such as diseases and terrorist strikes.

Homeland Defence
- A broad domain researching key nodes of the national security ecosystem. Areas of particular interest include the study of strategic and crisis communication, cyber security and public attitudes to national security issues.

HOW DOES CENS HELP INFLUENCE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY?

Through policy-oriented analytical commentaries and other research output directed at the national security policy community in Singapore and beyond, CENS staff members promote greater awareness of emerging threats as well as global best practices in responding to those threats. In addition, CENS organizes courses, seminars and workshops for local and foreign national security officials to facilitate networking and exposure to leading-edge thinking on the prevention of, and response to, national and homeland security threats.

HOW DOES CENS HELP RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES?

To educate the wider public, CENS staff members regularly author articles in a number of security and intelligence-related publications, as well as write op-ed analyses in leading newspapers. Radio and television interviews have allowed CENS staff to participate in and shape the public debate on critical issues such as radicalization and counter-terrorism, multiculturalism and social resilience, as well as crisis and strategic communication.

HOW DOES CENS KEEP ABREAST OF CUTTING EDGE NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH?

The lean organizational structure of CENS permits a constant and regular influx of Visiting Fellows of international calibre through the Distinguished CENS Visitors Programme. This enables CENS to keep abreast of cutting edge global trends in national security research.

FOR MORE ON CENS

Log on to **http://www.rsis.edu.sg** and follow the link to "Centre of Excellence for National Security".

ABOUT NSCS

NSCS was set up in the Prime Minister's Office in July 2004 to facilitate national security policy coordination from a Whole-Of-Government perspective. NSCS reports to the Prime Minister through the Coordinating Minister for National Security (CMNS). The current CMNS is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affair Mr Teo Chee Hean.

NSCS is headed by Permanent Secretary (National Security and Intelligence Coordination). The current PS (NSIC) is Mr Benny Lim, who is concurrently Permanent Secretary (National Development) and Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister's Office).

NSCS is made up of two centres: the National Security Coordination Centre (NSCC) and the Joint Counter Terrorism Centre (JCTC).

The agency performs three vital roles in Singapore's national security: national security planning, policy coordination, and anticipation of strategic threats to Singapore. As a coordinating body, NSCS ensures that government agencies complement each other, and do not duplicate or perform competing tasks. It also organises and manages national security programmes, one example being the Asia-Pacific Programme for Senior National Security Officers, and funds experimental, research and start-up projects that contribute to our national security.

For more information about NSCS, visit
http://www.nscs.gov.sg

ABOUT RSIS

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** was officially inaugurated on 1 January 2007. Before that, it was known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), which was established ten years earlier on 30 July 1996. Like its predecessor, RSIS was established as an autonomous entity within the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The School exists to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of Asia Pacific security studies and international affairs. Its three core functions are research, graduate teaching and networking activities in the Asia Pacific region. It produces cutting-edge security related research in Asia Pacific Security, Conflict and Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Area Studies.

The School's activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific and their implications for Singapore.

For more information about RSIS, please visit
http://www.rsis.edu.sg

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