VIEWING OURSELVES AND OTHERS: DIFFERENCES, DISCONNECTS AND DIVIDES AMONG LOCALS AND IMMIGRANTS IN SINGAPORE

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Report prepared for the CSC-IPS The Population Conundrum - Roundtable on Singapore's Demographic Challenges, 3 May 2012

Abstract

Migration into Singapore, particularly in the decade 2000–2010, has been phenomenal in terms of scale, speed, diversity and intensity. This has raised complex economic, social and cultural issues of perception, adjustment and interaction between locals and immigrants, which play out in particular and significant ways in social life at individual, group and society levels, and which impact upon senses of community, belonging and citizenship. This paper, based on an exploratory qualitative study, reveals and discusses some major economic, cultural and interactional issues arising between locals and Indian and Chinese immigrants. It critically examines some impacts and implications of immigration on cohesion, citizenship and belonging and their links with immigration policy. In the process, it also unpacks some common notions associated with immigrants, and locals' anxieties towards immigrants, particularly "anti-immigrant" and "xenophobic" sentiments, and points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of both local and immigrant responses and towards a more sensible immigration policy.

Introduction

Overview of immigration trends, policy and responses to immigration

Migration into Singapore in the past two decades (1990–2010) and particularly in the last decade (2000–2010) and in the years 2005–2010 has been phenomenal in scale, speed and diversity.

Table 1. Population Size and Growth of Singapore (1980–2010)

Year	Number, (as at June) ('000)					Average Annual Growth[1] (Per Cent)				
		Singapore Residents					Singapore Residents			
	Total Population[2]	Total	Singapore Citizens	Singapore Permanent Residents	Non-Residents	Total Population[2]	Total	Singapore Citizens	Singapore Permanent Residents	Non-Residents
1980	2,413.9	2,282.1	2,194.3	87.8	131.8	1.5	1.3	1.6	-4.5	8.0
1990	3,047.1	2,735.9	2,623.7	112.1	311.3	2.3[3]	1.7[3]	1.7[3]	2.3[3]	9.0
2000	4,027.9	3,273.4	2,985.9	287.5	754.5	2.8	1.8	1.3	9.9	9.3
2005	4,265.8	3,467.8	3,081.0	386.8	797.9	2.4	1.6	0.8	8.6	5.9
2006	4,401.4	3,525.9	3,107.9	418.0	875.5	3.2	1.7	0.9	8.1	9.7
2007	4,588.6	3,583.1	3,133.8	449.2	1,005.5	4.3	1.6	0.8	7.5	14.9
2008	4,839.4	3,642.7	3,164.4	478.2	1,196.7	5.5	1.7	1.0	6.5	19.0
2009	4,987.6	3,733.9	3,200.7	533.2	1,253.7	3.1	2.5	1.1	11.5	4.8
2010	5,076.7	3,771.7	3,230.7	541.0	1,305.0	1.8	1.0	0.9	1.5	4.1

1 For years prior to 2005, growth rate refers to average annual growth over the last ten years. For 2005-2010, growth rate refers to growth over the previous year.

2 Total population comprises Singapore residents and non-residents. Resident population comprises Singapore citizens and permanent residents. Non-resident population comprises foreigners who were working, studying or living in Singapore but not granted permanent residence, excluding tourists and short-term visitors.

3 Growth rate based on 1980 and 1990 using de facto concept.

Source: Wong W. K., "Census of Population 2010", Advance Census Release, Department of Statistics Singapore, August 2010: 3. Cited in Yap Mui Teng, "Migration and Singapore: A Historical Overview", presentation at CENS Workshop on Visiting the Immigration Issue in Singapore, Singapore, 24 February 2012.

In 1990, out of a total population of 3.047 million, citizens comprised 2.623 million (86%) and grew at a rate of 1.7%, while permanent residents comprised 0.112 million (3.9%) and grew at a rate of 2.3% and non-residents made up 0.311 million (10.1%) with a growth rate of 9.0%.

Ten years later, in 2000, the total population had increased by nearly a million to 4.028 million, in which citizens comprised 2.986 million (74.1%, at a growth rate of 1.3%), while the number of permanent residents had more than doubled to 0.2875 million (7.1%, at a growth rate of 9.9%) and that of non-residents shot up to 0.7545 million (18.7%, at a growth rate of 9.3%).

By 2010, Singapore's population had grown to 5.076 million, the increase due mainly to the growth of the permanent resident population to 0.541 million (10.7% of total population, a growth rate of 11.5%) and of non-residents to 1.3 million (25.7% of total population, a growth rate of 4.1%), with 3.23 million citizens (comprising 63.3% of the total population, a growth rate of 0.9%).

In addition, the population with newly granted citizenship and permanent resident statuses started to rise sharply from 2005 to 2010. The permanent resident population grew an average of 8.4% per year, dropping to 1.5% in 2010 (the year preceding the general election year 2011 by which time immigration had become a major election issue).

Numerically, the permanent resident population grew at an annual average of 58,000 between 2004–2006 and 28,500 between 2010–2011, while the population of new citizens grew at an annual average of 8,200 between 1987–2006 and 18,500 between 2007–2011 (Department of Statistics, National Population and Talent Division). In an article by *The Straits Times*, citing the latest report from the Department of Statistics, Singapore's population has risen from 5.08 million in 2010 to 5.18 million in 2011 to 5.31 million in 2012, with most of the increase coming from 100,000 more foreign workers, families and students over the past year between 2011–2012 (Heng 2012, A3).

During this period of rapid and massive immigration, immigrants came mostly to work, while other came to join their families, some through intermarriage with Singaporeans, and others for education. The foreign-born in Singapore's labour force reflects this major trend of work immigration: their proportion was 16.1% (248,200) of the labour force in 1990; 28.1% (615,700) in 2000; and 34.7% (1,088, 600) in 2010.

Among these "non-resident" immigrants, the vast majority were work permit holders (46%); dependants of citizens/permanent residents/work permit holders (15%); domestic workers (14%); employment pass holders (12%); S pass holders (8%) and students (6%).[1]

Immigration through marriage with locals also added to the numbers, as the proportion of marriages between citizens and non-citizens grew from 32.1% in 2000 to 39.4% in 2011.[2] Another growing category of immigrants comprises students who attend public and private educational institutions on scholarships or through private financing. Those sponsored by the Singapore government on scholarships are seen as an investment in a future workforce and citizenry, while other students are attracted to Singapore as a growing education hub and global schoolhouse. On the part of immigrants, their main reasons for coming to work and live in Singapore include good job prospects (in Singapore and Asia), Singapore's safe and secure environment, and established family links in Singapore.

1. Figures from Singapore Department of Statistics (2001a, 43; 2011, 48).
2. Ibid.

Immigrants to Singapore come from diverse nationalities and places and are mainly Asian. In 2010, of the foreign-born resident population of new citizens and permanent residents, 45% came from Malaysia (mainly of Chinese origin), 20% from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, 14% from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, 10% from other parts of Asia (such as the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar), and 6% from Indonesia, while various other nationalities made up the remainder 5% (Europeans 2%, Americans and Canadians 1%, Australians and New Zealanders 1%, and others 1%).[3]

Such phenomenal growth of the immigrant population is a direct consequence of the government's pro-immigration policy, aimed at meeting economic growth targets and maintaining global competitiveness on the one hand, and to address demographic trends of a declining fertility rate and an ageing local population on the other. The two main categories of immigrants found in Singapore are: low-waged, unskilled workers (mainly for domestic, cleaning and construction work) based on a work permit system, and semi- and skilled "foreign talent" (comprising broadly those in the professional, managerial, technical and services sectors and levels) based on a stratified employment pass and S pass system. Both categories are the outcomes of the government's bifurcated immigrant labour policy to address these economic and demographic needs and ideals. Unskilled workers are largely Asian, while those recruited or attracted to Singapore in the "global war for talent" are more diverse in nationality and place origin.

It would be fair to say that the government, in its open immigration policy in the initial years, had not anticipated the economic, social and cultural consequences of massive and rapid immigration inflows into the economy and society; its sole focus and driving force was the promotion of economic growth and competitiveness. When integration issues, especially in local and public spaces, first began to surface in the mid-2000s, their seriousness was underestimated. Even as the National Integration Council was set up (in 2009), it was broadly assumed that with some mutual understanding and effort between locals and immigrants, integration would take place over time and not pose serious social issues.

It took the national elections in May 2010, when immigration-linked issues — such as high costs of living, high property prices, low wages of unskilled workers, preferential hiring of "foreign talent" over locals and strains on public infrastructure and facilities — were raised and some Parliamentary seats were lost to opposition party candidates, that the government realised that issues had reached a tipping point and took a more serious view of them. It has subsequently tweaked some aspects of policies, such as reducing the numbers of immigrants and new citizenship and permanent residence statuses granted, tightening conditions for the hiring of foreigners and qualifications for employment and S passes, and tightening conditions of eligibility and qualification for public housing and in education that made clearer distinctions between locals and immigrants. At the same time, the government has continued to attempt to convince

3. Figures are computed from Wong W. K., "Census of Population 2010", Advance Census Release, Department of Statistics Singapore, August 2010: 3. Cited in Yap Mui Teng, "Migration and Singapore: A Historical Overview", presentation at CENS Workshop on Visiting the Immigration Issue in Singapore, Singapore, 24 February 2012.

locals of the economic need for immigration and to exhort them of the need to welcome and integrate with immigrants.

Local-born citizens (referred to as locals hereafter), in the initial years of massive and rapid immigration, were equally un-anticipative of its social consequences. Indeed, on the contrary, local agents and employers of unskilled immigrants were highly criticised by civil society groups for flouting employment laws, abusing or exploiting their employees, unscrupulousness and generally not respecting the employment and human rights of low-waged immigrant workers on work permits, while the Ministry of Manpower lagged behind in enforcing and improving labour legislation to protect this vulnerable category of immigrant workers. Locals' attitudes were also increasingly criticised as being intolerant of immigrants being accommodated within or near their residential areas,[4] and being prejudiced and racist, particularly towards darker-skinned immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, and xenophobic, particularly towards the numerically majority PRC Chinese. Of late, attention has been on some netizens' "anti-immigrant" and "xenophobic sentiments" that often connote intolerance, racism or at least political incorrectness.

On the other hand, from around 2007 onwards, locals began to raise economic and social issues such as depressed wages for unskilled local workers, soaring housing prices, high costs of living, discrimination by employers in favour of "foreign talent",[5] crowdedness and over-stretched public facilities such as public transport, and unfair competition in education such as places in schools and universities that are allocated to

4. For example, in the Serangoon Gardens case of "not in my backyard" syndrome (nimbysm) in 2008, residents of the private residential area organised themselves against the construction of a hostel for immigrant workers in their vicinity.

5. The top complaints related to discrimination by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment (TAFEP) are usually linked to language, race and age, but nationality topped the list for 2011 (TAFEP 2011, 38). The total number of complaints to TAFEP rose to 277 in 2011 (from 115 in 2010), with the following breakdown of complaints received about nationality: almost half were over job advertisements by companies preferring to hire foreigners, and almost one-sixth were of supervisors employing candidates from their own countries. According to a TAFEP staff member I interviewed on 10 April 2012, complaints about discrimination received by TAFEP come from all industries, especially services (financial, employment agencies and academia); they are mainly about companies hiring by own nationality (not by merit), having too many foreign workers in some sectors, job advertisements for hiring of foreigners, and exclusionary and condescending behaviour by expatriates. Complaints by locals are against all nationalities while there are also some complaints by foreigners about locals, such as about name-calling and calls to "go home" aimed especially against those from China. Based on the complaints, TAFEP has also approached more than 100 employers over allegations of discrimination based on nationality and advised errant ones. See also articles by in AsiaOne (Boh 2012) and *The Straits Times* (Heng 2012).

In addition, a paper by Toh and Jiang (2012) shows displacement of local incumbents from their jobs and nepotistic practices by foreign companies, besides worsening wage share and productivity and suppression of local wages of unskilled workers. In random conversations with locals in several fields in the academic sector, I am often volunteered information about disparities in the hiring process in which foreigners are preferred over locals and where foreign staff also recommend and recruit those of their same nationality through their networks. There is also an observation made that some retired foreign professors are hired for senior positions on generous terms to lend their prestige to local institutions but whose actual workload is relatively light and who are generally ignorant of local contexts, cultures and knowledge.

foreign students and bond-free scholarships that are awarded to them.[6] Locals also began to complain about immigrants' anti-social behaviour in public places and their disregard for local established norms, as well as question the long-term loyalty and sense of belonging of internationally mobile immigrants who took up new citizenship and permanent residence for "strategic", economic and practical reasons.

By now, among some citizens, there is a sense of being overwhelmed, disillusioned or even displaced and disenfranchised by massive immigration, and the feeling that Singapore is no longer the familiar "home" where they belong. Some even feel that the government has neglected local citizens, belittles local talent or even treats them as "second-class" citizens in relation to foreign "talent", lacks understanding of their concerns, and is adding insult to injury in its lopsided calls on locals to welcome foreigners for better integration.

In general, these issues are raised by Singaporeans of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds, with some members of Singaporean ethnic minorities additionally expressing unhappiness over the large influx of Chinese from the People's Republic of China (PRC Chinese) in what they see as the re-Sinification of an already Chinese-dominant Singapore that is the outcome of earlier waves of Chinese immigration and settlement into the Southeast Asian/Malay Nusantara region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Since 2010, when immigration had peaked and immigrants (excluding new citizens) accounted for 37.7% of the total population, disconnects, tensions and divides between locals and immigrants/new citizens have become "hot button" issues that are open to much controversial discussion and debate. They are also often raised with anger and resentment by locals, particularly online, aimed at both immigrants, especially PRC Chinese and the Singapore government. Some incidents have further served as lighting rods that convey such feelings.[7] Today, far from being resolved, these disconnects,

6. See the National University of Singapore Students' Union Tri-University Dialogue Follow-up (NUSSU 2012) for a discussion on the overwhelming representation of foreign students in the faculties of science, engineering and computing (the average set by the university is 20%), which points out that current MOE foreign scholars under its SM2 and SM3 schemes can only apply to these fields. It also questions the criteria for Chinese and foreign students' admissions and points to barriers to local-foreign engagement and interaction and the existence of local resentment.

7. The most controversial incidents which also involved a high level of internet comments were the "curry" incident in 2011, "Sunxu, the PRC scholar" incident in 2012, the "Ferrari car crash" incident in 2012, and the "Amy Cheong" saga in 2012.. Briefly, the "curry" incident involved local outrage over a mediation decision in which a Singaporean Indian was asked to abstain from cooking curry, a distinctly Indian as well as local dish, except when his PRC Chinese neighbour was out. In the "Sunxu, the PRC scholar" incident, there was local anger over an online comment by Sunxu, a PRC student at a local university on a Singapore scholarship, where he wrote that "there are more dogs than humans in Singapore". The "Ferrari car crash" incident involved an accident in which three people died, including the PRC driver of a Ferrari car, that appears similar to high-speed accidents involving luxury cars driven by well-to-do individuals in China. In the "Amy Cheong" saga, netizens raised objections to the Facebook postings of Amy Cheong, a permanent resident from Australia, in which she had implied that Malays were low class and divorced easily when she commented on noisy Malay weddings held in public housing void-decks. The "curry" incident, which received 65,000 hits on the Facebook site "Cook and Share A Pot of Curry"

tensions and divides are problems that have come home to roost after two decades of open immigration and are now seriously recognised by the government as posing challenges to integration, cohesion and citizenship. Equally important, they serve to question not only the underlying logic and sensibility of the government's immigration and population policies, but also its vision of development in a context of growing income and economic inequalities amidst globalisation.

Background of this Paper

Local-immigrant disconnects, tensions and divides reflect complex and intertwining economic and social-cultural phenomena arising from the massive scale, speed and diversity of immigration. Played out and experienced at the individual, group and societal levels of everyday life in their particular and significant ways, these phenomena form the substance of perceptions, adjustments and interactions between locals and immigrants, which impact on the processes of integration and affect their senses of community, belonging and citizenship.

This paper, based on an exploratory qualitative study, reveals and discusses some major economic, cultural and interactional issues arising between locals and Indian and Chinese immigrants. In the process, it also unpacks some common notions associated with immigrants, locals, and locals' resentment towards immigrants, particularly "anti-foreign" and "xenophobic" sentiments, and points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of both local and immigrant responses. Finally, it critically examines some impacts and implications of immigration on cohesion, citizenship and belonging and their links with immigration policy.

Methodologically, qualitative data and evidence, such as anecdotes, experiences, narratives and stories, are well suited to understanding local-immigrant relations in their diversities, complexities and nuances. While they are not necessarily representative of phenomenon, they capture, illustrate and highlight how they are lived by as meaningful and significant moments in people's lives, and to some extent common and recurrent experiences also reflect on larger themes and issues. At the same time, responses among immigrants about locals and local-immigrant relations are more difficult to obtain publicly, compared with those of locals that abound in everyday discourses, including in mainstream and alternative internet media. (Chinese immigrants, for example, are known to make comments and postings about Singaporeans and Singapore on sites based in China rather than in Singapore, and some of which, according to one informant, can be derogatory. In general, it can be expected that critical comments by immigrants about locals are only made among known members of networks and circles.) A systematic gathering of data from both locals and immigrants is thus required. However, it is impossible to be exhaustive in covering all groups; in this paper, three distinct categories of populations are included: PRC Chinese and Indians who form the numerical bulk of immigrants (after Malaysians) and who are the chief targets

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also saw mobilisation through the internet where netizens were asked to cook and share a pot of curry on Sunday, 21 Aug 2011. Many netizens did and posted pictures of their dishes on the Facebook page.

of local resentment (although Filipinos are also increasingly mentioned), and local-born citizens.

Research material in this paper is drawn from a small exploratory and qualitative study on local-immigrant social cohesion based on three focus group discussions, organised distinctly by each group and conducted in July–October 2011.[8] Indian and Chinese participants (five and nine participants, respectively) are originally from India and China but have attained naturalised citizenship or permanent resident status. Local-born citizens (six participants) are all Muslims of mixed Indian, Malay and other ethnic minority backgrounds as it was felt that their views would reflect both those of local-born as well ethnic minorities. Ideally, there should have been at least two more focus discussion groups — one consisting of immigrants from Malaysia (who form the largest proportion of immigrants and are mainly ethnic Chinese) and the other of local-born Chinese Singaporeans as they are among those considered most resentful of PRC Chinese immigrants, but this was not possible due to time and resource constraints.

The focus group discussion topics centred around issues of ethnicity, culture and religion, particular Singapore's multiculturalism (state, popular); ethnic and cultural diversities and divides; other social divides; adjustments and adaptations to/of immigrants (with a focus on social and cultural behaviour, rights and obligations, discrimination and related experiences, religious adaptations and issues); and impact of immigration (on multiculturalism, ethnic relations, and ethnic and national identities).

Exploration and discussion of these themes covered individuals' knowledge, awareness, behaviour, experience, perception and expectations. Some themes were necessarily modified for each group to suit their contexts and frames of reference. While these themes and their guide questions served as the basis for discussion, each group was allowed to develop around those themes and issues that resonated with participants. Other unanticipated topics and issues, which were raised in the course of discussion, were also explored. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their names and their views no matter how controversial these might be. As it turned out, locals and Indians were all frank and forthright, while responses varied among the PRC Chinese, some of whom were highly articulate and frank while others were quiet on some issues but vocal on others.[9]

8. Lai Ah Eng, 2011, "Local-Immigrant Social Diversity and Cohesion in Singapore", unpublished report. I was commissioned to undertake the study and had free rein in conceptualising the project's main themes and writing up the report, while the commissioning body (which declined being named in this paper for confidentiality reasons) helped provide contacts for the discussion groups. I also served as sole moderator at all the discussions, with the assistance of an interpreter for the discussion with PRC Chinese, many of whom did not speak English.

9. In the author's experience, the study of local-immigration relations poses difficult challenges. The subject matter can be complex, sensitive, controversial, highly subjective and easily open to misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misjudgment, while responses can be defensive and self-righteous or self-justificatory by individuals and groups directly affected — these are, in themselves, a reflection of the realities and challenges of local-immigrant relations.

It should be borne in mind that the aim of the 2011 exploratory study was to identify and explore some issues of interaction affecting cohesion rather than to confirm or ascertain trends and opinions and the data should not be read as strongly representative of any community or group. Nonetheless, it provides some evidence and substantiation of issues, and some of these turned out to be consistent with those raised in popular discourses, while pointing to other aspects that need further research.

Brief Remarks on Literature

International literature on migration and immigrants is massive, with a dominant discourse based on Western intellectual frameworks, social contexts and concerns, especially of Europe and the US. Much of this literature focuses on particular categories of immigrants, such as undocumented immigrants, refugees and Muslim immigrants, and on major issues, which include human rights and minority rights, prejudices and stereotypes, tensions and controversies, racism, xenophobia and extreme nationalism, and diversity and multiculturalism. In European scholarship, for example, immigration from North Africa and Turkey and post-Sept 11 Islamophobia has led to much attention on Muslim immigrants and their impact on local, national and European identities within the framework (both implicit and explicit) of a historical Christian-Muslim religious divide or a national culture, and surfacing multilayered issues of interaction and symbolism such as the future of multiculturalism in Britain, the "headscarf" controversy in France, and the building of mosques in Austria. Controversial and violent incidents[10] and the formation of extremist nationalist and anti-immigrant "defence" leagues in various parts of Europe highlight the extremely difficult and complex relations between groups of immigrants and local populations.

On the other hand, these complex and difficult relations have led to state, non-government organisation (NGO) and citizen movements to pursue positive intercultural and inter-religious discourses and projects. These question, develop and promote principles and practices for the civil and ethical management of relations, intercultural and inter-faith dialogues and the shaping of historically unprecedented multiculturalism/ interculturalism within countries and the European region. In academia and research, discourses beyond those on state and policies and specific population groups[11] are centred on group and individual relations, such as meaningful everyday encounters, tolerance, civility and hospitality, and mutual and positive respect for difference; the ethics of hospitality and civility of being host and cultural intelligence of being immigrants and guests; and navigating cultural complexity, reducing injustice and affirming the value of difference through teaching and learning.[12]

10. Examples include the publication of derogatory illustrations by Danish and French cartoonists of the Prophet Mohammad in 2005 and 2012); the so-called "doner kebab" killings of Turkish vendors in Germany between 2000 and 2006; the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim in 2004; the murder of 77 people by Anders Behring Breivik who declared himself anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-multiculturalism, in Oslo, Norway in 2011.
11. See, for example, Ramadan (2004) and Modood (2007 and 2012).
12. See Valentine (2008) on everyday encounters, Derrida (2002) on hospitality, and Ang (2011) on navigating cultural complexity. Also see Council of Europe's "Intercultural Cities" joint action plan, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Default_en.asp.

On the whole, the literature on immigration points to the crucial importance of the need to understand historical and social conditions for contextualised and nuanced understanding of local-immigrant relations and differences, to hear a variety of voices among both local and immigrant groups, and to pursue the goals of peaceful dialogue and positive interaction in the interests of common good where tensions and conflicts arise. In this regard, the Singapore case is distinct and needs to be understood within its own context and social-historical conditions, the broad categories of “local” and “immigrant” with their conventional and popular associations unpacked and understood through the voices and concerns of both populations, and the issues of interaction, integration and cohesion examined with greater objectivity and clarity.

Local academic studies on immigrants and local-immigrant relations are limited and mostly survey-based, while popular activist information and literature are more tilted towards immigrants and conditions affecting their adjustments and lives. Civil society action NGOs such as HOME and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) focus, rightly so, on the rights and humanitarian issues of the unskilled and low skilled labour (mainly domestic workers and construction workers), such as abuse, employment and living conditions, and workplace safety. On the other hand, the responses of locals towards the impacts of rapid and massive immigration on their lives have been little critically understood and documented, and are focused on their “un-cosmopolitan”, “anti-immigrant” and generally unsympathetic sentiments which are often assumed to be racist or politically incorrect.

Selected local studies related to local-immigrant issues and their implications to community and social cohesion conducted between 2003 and 2012 show a build-up of complex responses by locals as immigration increased rapidly. An early survey by Yeoh and Huang (2003) studied integration in terms of functionality, daily routines, social interaction and attachment, and identification with host country as well as the impact of foreign talent on the sense of community. Specifically on talent, it found a large minority of Singaporeans (19%) felt little or no need for foreign talent, that Singaporeans were just as good or had enough talent, that foreign talent took away jobs from locals, and that local skills and expertise can be raised without importing foreign talent. In the integration of daily routines, the survey found mutual coexistence and sharing of routines rather than deeper social relationships at the workplace, and separate worlds and daily trajectories with little opportunities for crossing over into local society especially by non-Asian foreign talent who preferred private neighbourhood living to public housing living. In integration through social interaction, more foreign talent claimed variegated social interaction with Singaporeans, compatriots and other foreigners, but locals felt more insular with minimal or no interaction with foreign talent. In terms of attachment and identification with host country (willingness to continue to work in Singapore, desire to become permanent residents, and intention to adopt Singapore citizenship), foreigners had different degrees of rootedness depending on their mobility and multiple identification with different countries. With regard to the sense of community, Singaporeans were ambivalent about the influx of foreign talent and their contribution to community, commitment and cohesion, the main reasons being

competition for jobs, spaces and amenities; permanent residents' enjoyment of rights without responsibilities (national service is a major dimension and is perceived to disadvantage local men); and foreign talent's questionable commitment in times of crisis. For social integration, the study found existing immigrants' clubs to be exclusive, while the state's CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other) classificatory system is even more problematic because of immigrants' misfit of "race" (as inflected by differences in history, culture, nationality and ethnicity). Among foreign talent, the survey found that they felt they clearly contribute economy-wise.

The Social Attitudes Survey 2006 captured similarly complex responses of locals. It found a broad acceptance of immigrants and foreign talent as being beneficial to the economy, but minorities and the lower-educated being less likely to accept immigrants and more likely to feel their job security as being threatened. It also found that eight in 10 Singaporeans agreed that foreign talent is only in Singapore for the benefits they can get and will be among the first to leave in times of crisis; seven in 10 Singaporeans agreed that permanent residents enjoyed benefits that citizens get without bearing responsibilities and obligations; and five in 10 citizens agreed that the government should encourage more skilled foreign workers to become permanent residents and citizens.

The National Orientation Survey in 2009 noted an increase in ambivalence towards immigrants, and that two in three people would be concerned about the impact of foreigners, whether immigrants or transient workers, on national unity (Institute of Policy Studies 2009). A most recent study by Leong (2012a) — on symbolic and functional social markers and what locals and foreign-born must do to become fully participating citizens — found the greatest differences between local-born and foreign-born over these aspects, which the local-born clearly felt were more important compared with the foreign-born: male child completes national service; gets on well with workplace colleagues; is gainfully employed; works in a field where there is a shortage of talent in Singapore; gets on well with neighbours; able to speak conversational English; and has lived in Singapore for a period of time.

Against the background provided by the above overview of immigration trends, policy and responses to immigration and by the brief review of immigration literature and local research, we can now look at some findings from the Local-Immigrant Social Diversity and Cohesion Study (2011) to add to our understanding of the complex issues involved.

The Local-Immigrant Social Diversity and Cohesion Study (2011)

As this qualitative study was based on three separate focus group discussions — two consisting of naturalised citizens and permanent residents (NCPRs) from India (group A) and China (group B) and one consisting of local citizens who are all ethnic minority members (group C) — it is felt the data is best presented first by the same grouping (with focus group discussion participants named accordingly as A1, B1, C1, etc.) and organised along the main themes of study. This would allow the largely descriptive data to speak for itself and also capture some of the economic and social-cultural dimensions

distinct to each group. The data is also broadly discussed alongside their presentation. The paper concludes by way of some general comments and implications of the data on local-immigrant relations, immigration policy and Singapore society.

Indian Naturalised Citizens and Permanent Residents (Group A)

The following Table 2 summarises Group A participants' backgrounds:

Table 2. Focus Group Discussion — Group A Participants' Backgrounds

Ref	Gender & Age	Place of origin, citizenship status, years in Singapore	Family Background	Education and professions
A1	Male, 46	Kolkata, India (permanent resident for 13 years; came in 1998)	Married with two school-going daughters	University postgraduate; market analyst (previously an engineer and business consultant)
A2	Female, 46	Mumbai, Indian (Singapore citizen who first lived in Singapore 1995–7, then lived in Hong Kong for seven years, before coming back to Singapore in 2003)	Married with a son in national service	University postgraduate; worked in media industry (just resigned and now a freelancer)
A3	Male, 38	Tamil Nadu, Indian (Singapore citizen who came to Singapore in 1998 and lived in Singapore for 13 years as permanent resident till 2009)	Married with two young children	Polytechnic; maintenance engineer
A4	Female, 40s	India, Hong Kong (Permanent resident for 17 years; came in 1994)	Married with children attending international school	University graduate; freelancer in public relations & media
A5	Male, 26	Tamil Nadu, Indian (Singapore citizen; came at age nine)	Single	Just completed university and started working

All five participants have lived in Singapore for more than 10 years and do not consider themselves "new" citizens or permanent residents; they consider themselves as belonging to the "first generation" who are well settled into Singapore and their children as "second generation". Two (A2 and A4) "made the final decision" to settle in Singapore first as permanent residents and then as naturalised citizens after considering other countries of settlement. A3 was a permanent resident for about nine years before assuming citizenship, while A5 was brought to Singapore by his parents when he was nine years old and has been a naturalised citizen since young; he has grown up in Singapore and went through the major local institutions of school, national service and university. A1 is a permanent resident but he considers himself an "old PR" who is "well localised".

Singapore's Multiculturalism

Group A participants say they go about their daily lives in practical ways, but are at the same time used to being mindful of others, such as over religious differences, because their place of origin — India — is also diverse. Yet, they feel that ethnic identification in Singapore by both the government and local Singaporeans is very strong, and thus do not understand the strong emphasis on ethnicity, which they see as being unconducive to national identity. As A2 puts it: "What is the point of it if you want to foster national identity?", and adds that there is misunderstanding and stereotyping that goes with the emphasis on ethnicity.

Diversities and Divides

Focus Group Discussion Group A participants express awareness of the ethnically diverse local populations but do not know much about their histories and cultures. They are also aware of different communities among local Indians, mainly the Tamils and the Malayalees and also the Bengalis and Sikhs. They identify themselves variously as ethnic Indian, Singaporean citizen/permanent resident or expatriate, but feel that locals will inevitably identify them by their Indian ethnicity and sometimes their country of origin (India). They find that the distinction between "local" and "India" Indians, and between North and South Indians, seem to persist among locals about them despite their having lived in Singapore for some years. All feel that Singaporeans still view them in terms of their previous nationality. As A1 remarked, "You look at yourself, you think you're Singaporean. But others look at you as an Indian, although you carry a Singapore passport or are third-generation Singaporean".

Some participants feel that local and immigrant Indians are different culturally because local Indians are "frozen in time" (A1, A2, A4) and did not go through "social reforms and changes" such as those that have taken place in India whereas Indian NCPRs are bearers of "modernity". "That is why, for example, they still celebrate Thaipusam", which A2 insists is banned in India or merely confined to a very specific location in Tamil Nadu (a point disputed by A3 who talks about how Thaipusam is thriving in his place of origin, Tamil Nadu). Indeed, according to A2 and A4, the differences between local and Indian NCPRs can be great enough such that in the early years of the Indian Women's Association, formerly known as the Indian Expatriate Women's Association, some expatriate Indians were "not ready" to incorporate local Indians. It was only in recent years that new platforms and changes to participation have being created and undertaken to involve various cohorts and backgrounds — NCPRs, non-Indians married to NCPRs, and local Indians — to foster a common meeting ground and cohesion. On the other hand, it is recognised that Tamil NCPRs appear to integrate more easily with local Indians compared with NCPRs from North India because religion, language and culture of the former are the same or similar. Indian NCPRs additionally perceive a big economic divide between local Indians and themselves. They consider themselves as

"highly educated, take employment very seriously and work very hard" (A2). This is why A2 thinks it is local Indians who would resent them most, compared with other locals.[13]

Among Indian NCPRs themselves, differentiation appears to be based on cultural community and identity, in which there is a North-South divide that also overlaps with community lines of organisation. Indians from India make a distinction between North India (Mumbai and north of Mumbai) and South India, and that "basically, South Indians, they interact with South Indian people only, North Indians they interact with North Indian people only. Very seldom interact socially; only at work over work-related issues" (A1).

Social and Cultural Adjustments and Adaptations

Most Indian NCPRs acknowledge that Singapore is easy to adapt to on practical grounds, with English as a common language being a strong factor. "You can work and get on with life and raise family" but "integration is more than that and more difficult", according to A1 who has learnt to speak Singlish and uses chopsticks. A2 has picked up some Malay words and loves Chinese food, and has found it easy to adapt in Singapore and thinks the place is welcoming, gentler and more sociable compared to Hong Kong (which she sees as the closest cultural comparison). A3 from South India feels like he is on "home ground" in Singapore and has no adjustment problems because religion and language are the same, while A5 who immigrated to Singapore at a young age has long adapted to local accents and even learnt some Malay and Mandarin, speaks Singlish and eats Chinese food, and integrated "very naturally" through school, army and university.

Acquaintances and friendships among locals and Indian NCPRs are formed and maintained through the workplace and public social gatherings. However, Indian NCPRs' cultural expectation of local and immigrant families getting together and becoming friends appears unmet, due to different cultural notions and practices of "home". A2 and A4 find their interaction with locals very limited and observe that "locals do not invite you home or to their events such as plays", and that "cultural practices are exclusive", whereas for them, "friend" means "inviting them home" as "home is very important to the Indian" but invitations to their homes have not been reciprocated. "People [locals] don't entertain at home, the way we love to entertain at home," says A4 who waited in vain for two years for a reciprocal invitation. As such, Indian NCPRs have "professional" but not personal friends among locals; they have made friends only with other NCPR families. While A1 sees his local work colleagues as friends and goes with them for lunch or drinks, his only other friends are other Indian NCPR families. A4 has had no opportunity to meet locals as her children attend international school where she meets only international parents, and she interacts with locals only on major social occasions such as Chinese New Year. This is in contrast to the young A5 who came to Singapore at a young age — for him, acquaintances and friendships were developed with both Tamil Indians ("just two Tamils make one community in school") and those of

13. This consciousness of such a "divide" has probably surfaced in light of a recent report that some individual Indians (who are NCPRs) have surpassed individual Chinese as the richest people in Singapore.

other ethnicities through school (especially in core curricular activities), national service (such as common training and sharing bunks) and university.

1. Religious Adaptations and Issues

Participants have found much freedom to practise their Hindu faith and have not encountered problems finding and using religious sites. A3 relates how he went looking for a Hindu temple when he first arrived and within a week found one "just like back in Tamil Nadu". In relation to the religious lives and practices of locals, however, there is little or minimal encounters and interaction. Traditional religious organisation and activity among NCPRs tend to be run along community lines and there exist social and cultural divides between North and South Indian communities.[14] Additionally, there are many new religious movements (NRMs) of Indian origin in Singapore that are based on common purpose rather than traditional community ties and draw adherents both locals and immigrants and both older and newer immigrants. A4 also claims to have started the Holi Festival (a huge event in North India) in Singapore 16 years ago and that it has since grown tremendously and is celebrated by a good cross-section of Indians, including South Indians. She is proud that Holi has become a festival that "unifies family, friends and Indian communities". All participants also appreciate that Deepavali/Diwali is a public holiday in Singapore, and they like the local idea of a Diwali open house as, for them, the occasion is traditionally a private event for family only.

2. Discrimination

While practical adjustments have been easy, the women NCPRs claim employment disadvantages and discrimination in some fields even though there is great demand, such as media presentation and teaching. They see highly qualified Indian NCPR women as forming a talent pool that is unfortunately untapped because they are viewed as dependants while their strong accents, the non-recognition of some Indian degrees and a "white is better mentality" in hiring practices hinder their employability. For them, the requirement of "native English speaker" (meaning white) especially in the teaching of English is outmoded.

In the realm of specific experiences and incidents with locals, all participants have both positive and negative responses. All have personally experienced acts of social discrimination or bad treatment by locals on the basis of what they believe is their ethnicity and nationality. Seeking rental accommodation appears to be a major problem area where they face discrimination. A1 feels he has been badly treated because of his Indian background in his attempts to rent accommodation: "She [the condominium owner] said, 'You sound Indian, are you Indian?' And I said, 'Yes I am'. I could immediately tell she was not interested." In another incident, he was asked if he could afford to rent a condominium, being Indian (he felt this was the reason). Others concur with him that in accommodation "they [landlords] favour the Caucasians" (A2) and "they

14. In a separate earlier interview I conducted with a local Indian leader in 2009, he claimed that there was some tension over leadership and styles of organisation between locals and NCPR Indians in some Hindu temples.

discriminate a lot, even housing agents have forewarned us of this" (A4). In school, A5 recalls his primary school experiences in which Indian boys like him were "suspected and singled out and assumed to be noisy or mischievous". On the other hand, all have experienced acts of kindness in little emergencies, such as being helped when lacking small cash for payment.

Social and Cultural Rights and Obligations of Immigrants

Participants express an expectation of tolerance and a "give and take" attitude. There is no expectation that locals are obliged to help immigrants adapt and adjust, but help and mutual open-mindedness would be "welcome[d] as conducive" (A4). For example, everyday living in close proximity can generate misunderstandings, such as over the outspills of cultural activities, and needs mutual understanding and careful negotiation. A1 gives the examples of how his neighbours in the condominium unit directly below his complained when his daughter practised her traditional Indian dance for a few days before her examinations (despite her using a mattress to absorb any vibrations from her feet thumping on the floor) and also when he held home gatherings. A2 thinks Singaporeans and NCPRs have cultural differences over noise in which NCPRs do not pay much notice to it, while for A5 who lives in an HDB setting, "noise" from some activities by all groups — Malays, Chinese, Indians — can be frustrating.

Cultural capital is what NCPRs say they have and which they can contribute to Singapore but they lack recognition by government and platforms to develop and project their talent. That said, several participants recognise that NCPRs are a new community and their cultural development is fairly recent, with much room for further development by Indian NCPRs themselves. For the young A5, however, many young people are not strongly ethnic-based in culture but are more "mainstream", and he is of the opinion that "in Singapore, everyone needs to sacrifice a bit of ethnic culture for mainstream culture in order to get along". For him, playing soccer with locals of different ethnic backgrounds has been a great binding force.

Indian Immigration: Contribution and Settlement

Group A participants are highly confident that Indian immigration and they themselves have impacted Singapore society positively through their skills, talents and cultural contributions. They are also clear and confident about what it takes for Indian immigrants to build a sense of Singaporean identity: through their respective associations (such as work associations and women's associations), cultural programmes and community services that can involve both local and immigrant Indians, and non-ethnic based common interests such as music and sports. For example, A1 stresses the contribution of culture and cultural programmes and his own role and plans to "give back to society" through his work association, such as through a mentorship programme for young people. A2 thinks that the "new Indians have brought a whole new dimension of Indians in terms of perception... [they have] changed the whole perception of what Indians are — what they look like, what they can be capable of, how he speaks, how he thinks", implying their modernity, cosmopolitanism, capabilities and

progressiveness. This is consistent with A5's view that there has been an image change of Indians with recent immigration, "from mischievous Tamil boys who do not do too well in school, to the Indian technologist and banker".

1. The Processes of Settlement Over Time

Participants point to the need to understand the complex process of settlement. Overall, it takes some years to make the "final decision" to settle down in Singapore (most took about 10 or more years). A2 and A4 note that it is only a recent trend in the last four to five years that they have seen friends take up citizenship, buy homes, allow their sons to do national service, and make the "final decision"; prior to this, sons and entire families were more likely to give up their permanent residence status and leave for other countries and "take their chances in Australia and America" when sons had completed high school. They identify the reasons for this change as: 1) employment opportunities with the rise of Asia and 2) the children's sense of belonging. The second generation's sense of belonging is particularly significant. Says A2: **"**The children don't know any other home. The parents have always said, 'oh fine, we go back to India'. For the children, that is not home; they just look Indian." A4 thinks the children do not want to go back to India because they cannot adapt easily there, and cites a case of a "split" family in which one son gave up his permanent residence to go abroad but another opted to do national service because he wanted to stay in Singapore.

Participants are also well aware of the inter-generational dimensions of identity building, in which the second generation are likely to be more integrated into Singapore society. A1 thinks that the first generation needs to know more about local cultures, while the second generation have fewer problems of intercultural knowledge and acculturation because they attend the same schools as locals and form friendships with them. At the same time, it is recognised that there is still need for more exposure and mixing, such as for children in international schools who lack opportunities to meet locals. It is also acknowledged that those from South India may integrate better with local Indians due to commonalities of language and religion, but this may be less significant over time as North Indians settle in and their children are more integrated.

Chinese Naturalised Citizens and Permanent Residents (Group B)

The following Table 3 summarises focus group discussion B participants' backgrounds:

Table 3, Focus Group Discussion B Participants' Backgrounds

Ref	Gender & Age	Place of origin, Citizenship status	Family Background	Education and Occupation
B1	Male, 40	Hong Kong; permanent resident	Married to Singaporean	University graduate; engineer
B2	Male, 56	Shanghai, China; citizen	Married, with a daughter in Australia	Junior college/Pre-U; cook
B3	Male, 33	China; citizen	unknown	University postgraduate;

				engineer
B4	Male, 51	China; permanent resident	Married, with a son	University graduate; engineer
B5	Female, 38	Fujian, China; citizen	unknown	University postgraduate; teacher
B6	Male, 47	China; permanent resident	unknown	Polytechnic; engineer
B7	Female, 45	China; permanent resident	Married, with a son	Polytechnic; accountant
B8	Male, 61	Szechuan, China; citizen	unknown	University postgraduate; lecturer
B9	Female, 33	Beijing, China; citizen	Married, with a daughter	University postgraduate; insurance agent

All nine Chinese NCPRs have lived in Singapore for at least 10 years, with the longest periods of stay being 18 and 20 years (B8, B2). Other than B1 who is from Hong Kong, the rest are from South China (Shanghai, Fujian, Szechuan) and North China (Beijing).

Singapore's multiculturalism

Group B participants are mostly concerned about work and survival in their daily lives, and are not particularly concerned about issues of multiculturalism nor seem to understand the concept well. They are also variable in their awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity. B2 who says he has encountered many Malays and Indians at work many times notes that "the things they eat are not the same as the things we Chinese people eat" and "Malays have their Malay ways of doing things, Indians have their Indian ways of doing things", but thinks there is harmony among the different races in Singapore. B3 does not view people and relationships in terms of ethnicity but goes by personal similarities (and differences) and compatibility: "... race doesn't make much difference, so I don't try to differentiate whether this is Malay or Indian... But it's whether it's the same kind of person as me, or different. I try to approach those similarities, more [of] things in common." B4 who has worked in many places is impressed with how well run Singapore is, especially with respect to racial harmony and integration, and attributes this to a common language, English. B8 thinks that the integration of different ethnic groups is very difficult because "all ethnics think they are the best in the world" but believes Singapore deals with the issues well in that they are taken seriously.

With regard to local and national programmes that aim to promote racial and religious harmony, participants are limited in their awareness and participation. B8 hardly participates in them as he thinks that for "many Chinese people here, work is first, for survival. For most of us, we're not boss, we're employee, we are busy working". However, he and another friend are members of the Tian Fu Club for new Chinese immigrants and both joined the National Integration Committee upon invitation (they would not have volunteered, otherwise). For the few who do participate, their participation has aided them tremendously in understanding local life and in integrating them into society. B9 has also joined a Citizens' Consultative Committee (CCC) after she realised how her engagement with local society has sensitised her and helped her ease her daughter into adjusting to local life. Similarly, B7 joined the Residents'

Committee (RC) from which she has learnt much about locals and local life. Besides personal engagement with community activities, it is through their children that some have more grounded and sensitised experiences and views about multiculturalism and which have helped them settle in socially, as we shall see.

Adaptations and Adjustment

A core discussion topic about the major adaptations and adjustments that Chinese NCPRs have had to make since they came to Singapore revolved around their social and cultural behaviours. Much of the discussion focused around three Chinese identity markers: language (particularly the learning and use of English), food and culture (to a lesser extent). That ethnic culture is not of major concern is probably because most of the participants are practical and work-oriented and operate mostly within immigrant Chinese family, personal and social networks and thus do not encounter major ethnic cultural adjustments. Adjustments to local foods, such as curry, are important to some Chinese NCPRs, given the strong culture of eating out in public places during meal times. But increasingly, foods from China are available for home cooking and eating out, and food has become less of a major concern. They are also generally alert to the food and cultural practices of local ethnic others, and have observed some aspects such as Muslims' *halal* diet (and need to attend mosques for prayers on Fridays) and vegetarianism among many Indians.

English language adjustments form a core concern and issue for Chinese NCPRs. All of them recognise the importance of knowing English as the common social and working language, and all show different levels of speaking ability and adjustments to the language. B6, B8 and B9 think that it is possible for Chinese immigrants in Singapore, the UK, the US and Canada to live only among Chinese people without having to speak English at all and speak only Mandarin, but emphasise that they have all learnt some English in Singapore, given the work environment and for the sake of their children's adjustment. B3 notes that his colleagues are Malays and Indians with whom he must communicate in English, while B7 says she does the same with her Japanese and American colleagues. At the same time, they point out that some [Chinese] locals also speak Mandarin, with whom they can also communicate in Mandarin. B9 is an exception — his university work environment has many scholars from China who "have a very, very pure Chinese environment. I think there is no need for them to change [language]". However, he thinks that language choice also depends on one's lifestyle, with English being very important if one wants to enlarge one's social circle.

While participants acknowledge the importance of English, they also manifest the challenges and tensions of using and moving between both the English and Chinese languages, with each adapting to suit his/her particular circumstances. B6 navigates himself through this language complexity by speaking Mandarin at home and English in public, while B1 speaks Cantonese and English and is appreciative of some locals' ability to speak different languages and dialects. However, for B5 who is a Chinese language teacher, Mandarin remains a particularly significant marker of Chinese ethnic identity as well as social class, and she sees an English-Mandarin language divide in

which local Chinese who know Mandarin prefer to speak English as a mark of higher education and class superiority over those from China who speak Mandarin.

Social Relationships and Perceptions of Ethnic Others

Most Chinese NCPRs appear to have only close Chinese friends and social circles while they may have work acquaintances, colleagues and neighbours of other ethnicities and nationalities. B9 feels that Chinese immigrants' social circles are very small, comprising only mainland Chinese, and needs to expand and to participate in social activities which will help integrate them with local society.

In their everyday life with people of other ethnicities, NCPRs appear to come into contact mostly with Malays as neighbours and work colleagues. A dominant perception of Malays is that they are warm, friendly and helpful. Some even compare Malays with Chinese and consider Malays friendlier. Says B7, "I feel the local Malays are friendlier than our own people. When I run into them, they will say hello. On the other hand, among Chinese people, we rarely greet one another. It almost feels like it's easier to communicate with the Malays, although of course, there will be some problems with language. But the simple things are no problem. When we need to borrow something, we'd go downstairs to borrow it from a Malay neighbour. They are willing to lend it to us". Says B5, "My mother is not the type who talks a lot, she keeps to herself. But the Malays would still ask her things like where she's going and greet her. I feel that the Chinese don't do this". She also relates an experience when she was on the way home with her shopping and a stranger who was Malay offered to help her carry her things. "They are all very warm. But among us Chinese, even if they see you carrying a lot of things, they are not going to offer to help, maybe because we tend to be afraid that there would misunderstanding." B2 concurs that Malays are more forthcoming with offering help, without any suspicion, whereas the local Chinese fear misunderstanding, so they tend not to offer help. B1 goes further to say that this is a cultural issue and difference, "Whether it's Singaporean Chinese, Malaysian Chinese or foreign Chinese, we Chinese have this type of mentality '自扫门前雪' [literally, "you only clear the snow in front of your door"], everyone just cleans the steps in front of their door, and does not bother about others [meaning each person is just looking out for himself]." That said, he thinks it is more a matter of how one approaches someone for help rather than an issue of ethnic background, and if it is a Chinese person "you have to approach them and ask them directly".

At the same time, some see Malay Muslims' *halal* food requirements as inhibiting closer friendship, as sharing or invitation to partake of food or a special meal is a common Chinese practice and expression of friendship. Said B2, "if we have a Chinese friend, normally we can prepare some good food and we share with them. But for Malay families, you have to consider they cannot take non-*halal* food, so cannot share food with them". However, B1 sees ways to negotiate this. He offers suggestions such as the exchange of recipes and substitution of some ingredients such as chicken for pork. "You like to eat *char siew*, right? You can't eat pork, okay, never mind, what about chicken? Things you can do are chicken dishes, congee… So never mind, I share with you how

you can do it. We can still make friends, we can be good friends, ya... I think you need to learn to learn to respect other people's practices".

1. Experiences and Incidents, Local Resentment

In the realm of experiences and incidents with locals in the course of adjustments and adaptations to living in Singapore, all participants cite both positive and negative responses in their everyday lives. Among the positive, general friendliness and help received from colleagues, especially Malay colleagues, and strangers are the most commonly cited and of which examples were given earlier.

Negative perceptions (rather than actual experiences of discrimination) focus around their feeling that it is local Chinese who are uncomfortable and resent their presence, due to their sheer numbers, work competitiveness, the insensitivity of some PRC Chinese in everyday behaviour, and the sense of superiority of some local Chinese. B7 says she does not feel she has been slighted by Singaporeans and especially not by the local Malays and Indians, but by "the local Chinese who look down on us mainland Chinese people. They seem to feel our cultures are too different. It's almost as if they feel we've taken something that belongs to them. I sense some hostility towards us". B8 sees "three levels of discomfort" in ethnic terms about foreigners in Singapore — "the strong, the so-so, and not so strong" — in which the strongest is among the local Chinese with the "new Chinese", the second is among local Indians with "new Indians", and the third and slightest is among local Malays who do not see much difference between themselves and Malays in neighbouring Malaysia. According to him, the strongest discomfort is among Chinese people, both locals and Chinese NCPRs, is because they are "over-clever" (suggesting intense competition). Furthermore, he thinks all locals, including Malays and Indians, feel discomfort with the "new Chinese" because of numbers: "too many Chinese, about one million". Citing a seminar he attended where he found the atmosphere "very… not so friendly", he attributes this discomfort also possibly to class, as "maybe they think the new Chinese is new rich". Others offer "work competition" and "insensitivity" as reasons for this "discomfort". B6 thinks locals perceive new Chinese immigrants to be taking away jobs, while B1 thinks some new Chinese immigrants are insensitive, and cites his several observations on the MRT trains in which they rush for seats instead of giving them to those in need or the elderly. This resentment by local Chinese towards Chinese NCPRs resurfaced as an intensely discussed topic on differences between local and NCPR Chinese (see below).

Social and Cultural Rights and Obligations of Immigrants

Participants have strong identification with Chinese ethnic identity and culture, and see no major issues in terms of maintaining certain cultural aspects of lifestyle in Singapore. They clearly see that it is their obligation and responsibility to integrate into Singapore society in order to survive and to be comfortable, such as "by working hard, letting others understand them, opening themselves to others, and changing their mindsets" (B9). Their approaches are mainly practical and social, focusing on personal adaptations. For B5, there are no issues in terms of maintaining certain cultural aspects

of lifestyle in Singapore, including speaking Teochew, and cites her mother's smooth experiences with "practising her ways here... even the language that she uses in the market, she is able to speak in her dialect with no issue". Indeed, she thinks that some of the Southern Chinese customs are maintained to an even greater extent in Singapore than in China, such as the observation of the 15th day of each lunar month as well as the Seventh Month Festival. Consistent with strong Chinese cultural identification, B1 clearly states that he would prefer keep to his Chinese culture, which he considers "unique and important", rather than follow "the local, *rojak* culture".

In terms of social and cultural obligations, B7 is clearly of the opinion that "we should integrate", which is why she joined the RC among whose members she notes are more locals as well as Indians and Malaysians but few from China. She says: "I feel like since I have come to Singapore, I should become part of the Singapore society. I have to adapt to this society from the most basic level. A lot of the culture is not the same". Her view that Chinese NCPRs have a responsibility and need to help themselves integrate is echoed by B9 who thinks deeper integration "makes our life more comfortable" — which is why she became a Citizens Consultative Committee member. She was also led into taking more integrative steps to help her young daughter adjust to life in Singapore.

Do Chinese NCPRs see locals as having obligations to help immigrants adjust and adapt to Singapore? It appears they clearly do not think so but that the responsibility rests on themselves. B1 thinks immigrants have to "work hard to let people understand you, and you have to open yourself so that the people can know who you are". He also adopts a highly practical approach: "You come here, you want to survive or not? You want to survive, you make it work. Otherwise, you can go any other place. It is not that there's a list to invite you to come over to Singapore, stay, and live here… You like, you come, you work, you do business, you live your life here. You appreciate the education here, it's good. Then, you adapt to the culture here. Every place has good and bad… So for me, it is okay if you leave for somewhere else. Important is how well are you staying here." B8 agrees: "If you can stay here successfully, you stay. If you cannot, you can just go back". At the same time, he notes that many have left because they do not "feel comfortable" and because of work opportunities elsewhere. He concludes that locals have no responsibility or obligation towards immigrants and thinks immigrants' mindset should change. "It's none of their business, really. You work here, you live here, good or not, is none of their business. It's your own business. You think you are a guest. Forget you are a guest. You are ordinary people. You're workers here".

1. Religious Adaptations

Religious adaptations are varied among Chinese NCPRs. For some, joining local Christian churches has helped with adjustments, particularly their children's adjustment as it provides multiple benefits — religious belief, religious values for moral anchoring, friendships, activities and learning English. Several NCPRs' experiences are illustrative of adaptation through religion. Says B6: "For me, I send my son to the church every week... Because of the many activities they organise... I think it benefits the child. So then, [he] can merge in the society [meaning interact and integrate], can learn English

very well… this church is not bad, very traditional, cannot smoke, cannot gamble, no dancing. So I like that, because the child learns a lot of good things". The church also provides "everything almost free", including transportation, refreshments and English lessons. Additionally, sending his son to church near his home on weekends is a form of childcare and substitute-parenting as he needs to work on weekends. Although he himself is unable to attend church because of work, he believes he is doing a good thing for his son. To him, his son having a religion and participating in religious activities will also give him a sense of belonging and meaning in Singapore, which would be "better than in Shanghai, [during] Mao Zedong's time, no religion, this affected our first generation. Our second generation, not so… they can accept this culture". He also encourages his son to maximise the benefits of the Singapore education system and to take up national service and citizenship later. B7 agrees with him about children's religious participation and shares that her child used to attend church where he sometimes helped out with activities and where he had a group of friends who got together weekly and also helped each other out. She further believes people should have some sort of religious belief and thinks that the church's teachings guide children on how to be "good persons", so she does not mind her child's involvement in church. B6 who feels that Chinese immigrants' circles are small and comprising of only PRC Chinese believes that "if you want to integrate into this society, you have to take part in a lot of activities", and thinks that besides residents' committee activities, the church also provide activities "so we have common topics, otherwise nothing to talk about".

Adjustments for the Chinese NCPRs without a religious faith have not been difficult as there is religious diversity in Singapore, including secularism and humanism, and they are able to find spaces to fit into in this landscape. The range of religions present does not seem to pose a challenge even if they notice religious piousness among some. For B6, respect and non-criticism of religion is very important simply because there are "so many people with so many religions". As B2 puts it, "Each religion has its own characteristics, so I think… you have to adjust to and understand the background rather than to challenge [them]". He is accustomed to religious and cultural differences, citing his Indian and Malay neighbours. In general, respect and tolerance is the approach taken by those Chinese NCPRs without religions towards others, both locals and other Chinese NCPRs, with religions.

Immigration: Contribution and Settlement

Chinese NCPRs see their positive contributions to Singapore in terms broadly of food (*la mian*, or hand-pulled noodles, dumplings, Shandong, Shanghai and Szechuan specialties), work skills and standard of Mandarin (higher than locals'), and in that they have led to better understanding of the "true" China. In work and skills, B6 points to all levels — high, middle and low — that those from China work at in various sectors and industries, such as in engineering and at construction sites and shipyards, and how they are indispensable and contribute to the GDP and economic growth. Several immigration-related topics, also related to their adjustments, integration and belonging in Singapore, were discussed with much excitement, varied opinion and some anxiety — such as being officially and socially identified ethnically as Chinese; what it takes for

Chinese NCPRs to build a sense of Singaporean identity; and language and class divides between them and local Chinese and the latter's resentment towards them.

1. Official and Social Ethnic Identification of NCPRs as Chinese

Chinese NCPRs have no major issue over the official and social ethnic identification of them as Chinese, as ethnic identity is clearly strong among them. Being first-generation immigrants who came to Singapore when they were young adults, they also readily acknowledge to having dual place and social identification, with China as place of origin and Singapore as place of adoption and of citizenship. This is in contrast to their children who identify themselves clearly to others that they are Singaporean, not "from China". However, what appears to bother and confuse them is persistent and primary referencing of them as "from China" by locals, as a means of differentiating themselves from Chinese NCPRs. Said B7: "People always ask me, 'Are you from China?' and I don't know how to answer that question. Because when you've gotten Singapore citizenship, how can you still say that you are from China? So do we say Singapore or China? Sometimes I say I'm Singaporean, sometimes I say I'm from China". B5 has had the experience of people asking her the same and when she replies that she is from China and she is a citizen, they would categorise her as "Oh, a citizen from China". B9 considers herself as having "two kinds of citizenship" as "I was born in China but I stay here for a long time already". However, B5 and B7 said that their children would clearly identify themselves to others that they are Singaporean, not "from China". "My child was also born in China. But having come here, he doesn't admit that he's from China. He says no, he's a Singaporean".

2. Diversities, Differences and Resentment Between Local Chinese and Chinese NCPRs

Participants are conscious and clear about similarities between local Chinese and Chinese NCPRs. Similarities identified include a strong work ethic in which Chinese NCPRs see that local Chinese Singaporeans also work very hard, have strong family cultures in which "Singaporeans take care of the next generation", and share common dialects (Cantonese, Fujian) between local Chinese and Chinese from South China, which is identified as enabling the latter to better integrate locally than Chinese from North China. It is the diversities and differences between local Chinese and Chinese NCPRs and some arising tensions, divisions and resentment that participants seem most concerned about.

Differences between local Chinese and those from China are strongly identified in the English-Chinese language and social class divides, and viewed in terms of resentment of Chinese NCPRs by the locals due to intense competition over resources. In their perception of this language and class divide, local Chinese are perceived as preferring to speak English rather than Mandarin as a mark of higher education and class superiority over those from China who speak Mandarin. (Interestingly, it is a common perception among local Chinese that those from China look down upon locals who cannot speak Mandarin and on the local standards of the language). B5, who is a

Chinese language teacher, thinks that some local Chinese prefer to speak in English rather than Mandarin even if they know the latter well enough “just to show they are better educated and upper class” and that “if you can only speak in Mandarin but not in English, people will say that you are uneducated”. Two others claim that a Chinese person who does not speak English is treated as “second class [by local Chinese]”. There is, however, difference in opinion on this matter. B7 pointed out that there are many Singaporeans who are poor in their command of the Mandarin, such as in her workplace where most people speak better English than Mandarin, and added that she actually envies Singaporeans for their language abilities. “They speak in all sorts of languages, like Malay, and others. They can speak in the language of the person they meet. When they run into a Malay, they can greet them in Malay. I envy this, that they can speak just about anything. This we cannot do.” However, B5 the teacher repeatedly insists that it is not that local Chinese are poor in Mandarin but that speaking in English allows them to feel “superior” (a heated argument ensued during this part of the discussion between B5 and B7 over their views of the language ability and use of Mandarin and English by local Chinese).

The perceived unfriendliness and resentment of local Chinese towards those from China is attributed mainly to competition over resources (even though articulate participants B5 and B9 tend to take a pro-Chinese NCPR view and claim that locals simply do not understand or refuse to understand Chinese NCPRs). B9 cites a local Chinese friend who told her that most local people around him are “not so friendly to Chinese from China” because they see the latter as very competitive, taking away jobs, raising property prices, taking away “many things from local people” and making them “more and more stressful” and “ suffer”. She adds that locals hate the government’s policy “to allow so many foreigners come to Singapore”, and so do not like Chinese from China. “We are just like intruders”, B7 exclaims. B5 shares that such resentment is reflected in the internet and the newspapers, and argues that locals do not understand why the government is spending so much money in bringing in students from China when in reality they are not proportionately large in number considering that there are more than a hundred secondary schools in Singapore and locals already have many advantages over foreigners, such as cheaper college fees. B7 is of the view that Singaporeans do not mind unskilled immigrants doing work that they themselves do not want to do but are unhappy with “top positions that are being taken up by foreigners, such as Indians and Americans”. To her, the government is “trying to think for the locals” with its immigration policy and “the locals should also think for [understand] the government”.

3. What it Takes to Be Singaporean

Participants are clear about the language and inter-generational conditions and dimensions in what it takes to build a Singaporean identity. They understand the integrative processes and decisions involved with settlement and over time and generations: first-generation NCPRs encounter settlement issues of employment, language and acceptance and are focused on survival; the next generation have fewer problems with language and acceptance as they are growing up in Singapore. Three

cases — B6, B7 and B9 — are particularly poignant and illustrative of the integrative processes and decisions involved with settlement and over time, and are best captured in their own narratives.

Case B6: **"**For me, I think for first generation to Singapore, it's very difficult to merge in Singapore. I think next generation, okay, no problem at all. One reason is first generation work very hard, have to settle everything in Singapore. And also, we are used to China culture, so first generation is not so easy to merge] in Singapore. But we can survive, no problem at all. Next generation is okay, everything. My son now studying in Singapore, Primary 4. Can speak English very fluently, go British Council to study English [he was speaking Singlish]. Singaporeans cannot recognise the boy is from China…. Only if he speak in Mandarin, the person can recognise, maybe the boy is from China."

Case B7: **"**Nowadays, they study together, they go to school together. Our children are stronger than us in English. Sometimes, people cannot tell that they are not locals. I remember that when my child first got here, he kept asking to go back. But one year later, he didn't want to go back anymore. He's forgotten all about his friends in China. He asks, 'What is there to do if I go back?' He simply doesn't want to. He says he wouldn't be accustomed to everything in China. I think, to him, he is a Singaporean. That's the way it is". She further traces how the decision on taking up Singapore citizenship evolved within her family. **"**We each decided that we wanted to be citizens at different points in time. We were all PRs, and my husband was the first who wanted to become a citizen. At that time, my child did not want that. But two years later, he himself decided that he wanted to become a citizen. Now, it's my turn to want to be a citizen. We each went through our own journey, and had our own opinions about whether Singapore was good or bad. My son told me one day: 'Ma, I think it's better for me to become a citizen'. He said he's making the right decision. Nowadays, he eats everything, from curry to laksa. We don't cook that at home, so he goes out to eat them. He's already very used to being around the Malay students. He'll ask me why I don't cook these things. The fact of the matter is that Chinese households don't cook these things. He tells me that I can buy pre-made ones, that I can just add it into the noodles. He knows these things. And from watching TV shows, we know how these things are made. But we don't have the habit of cooking these things, and we're not that familiar with the taste. These kids are so used to Singapore. They would find it hard to adapt in China. Whenever we go back to China, he behaves as if that is not his home. At the start, he would cry about wanting to go back to China. My son was about 10 years old then. Nowadays, he doesn't even keep in touch with his friends, not even online." She concludes thus: "He's 18, getting ready for national service. There's no way he's going back. He might marry a local, or a Malaysian next time, I can't really say. In Singapore, you can't be fully Chinese. With each new generation, I think we will change further. You can't guarantee that you will keep on marrying Chinese people. Because in Singapore, you have people from Malaysia, Thailand…."

Case B9: B9 was led into taking more integrative steps to help her young non-English speaking daughter adjust to life in Singapore. "… she was so unhappy with the school,

with everything here. She was so emotional. So I think it's so important for me to take the action first, to know deeper about the society and to know more about the local people". Prior to this and first working in a Chinese company when she came to Singapore, she did not think it was necessary for her to "know so many things about local things, local people". "I get very good pay, so I don't think it's necessary". However, her outlook changed when she became a mother. "I have daughter here. It's my responsibility to help her to get used to life here, so I need to take the action first. Yes, so that's why I attend so many activities". Her major decision and integrative step was to take up citizenship. She assesses that these efforts and activities in the past two years has led her to learn much from local people and to study and understand more about local life, and have helped her adjust. "I think it's very helpful. It makes me feel very happy and more comfortable to live in Singapore." As to how all this has helped her daughter, "I can explain to her, I can understand what she's talking about, what the teacher's talking about". She concludes that language is the first important thing for first generation Chinese from China, and so advises her friends and young immigrants from China to learn English. "The first thing I told them is to learn English". Equally important, she sees how knowing the language will open up their world. "It is very important if you want your lifestyle to be broad, not so narrow, just Chinese from China. So you need to learn English. You need to understand others."

Local Minorities' Responses to Immigration and Immigrants (Group C)

The following Table 4 summarises Group C participants' backgrounds:

Table 4. Focus Group Discussion C Participants' Backgrounds

Ref	Gender and Age	Ethnicity	Family Background	Education and Occupation
C1	Male, 68	Malay (Chinese-Malay parentage)	Living alone (grown children in Canada)	Secondary school; musician (part-time; previously a clerk)
C2	Female, age unknown	Indian-Muslim	Married (husband is Australian who is a PR), with two children	Secondary school; kindergarten administrator
C3	Female, 61	Indian-Muslim	Married, with two grown sons and two grandchildren	Secondary school; supervisor (housing)
C4	Male, 34	Malay (mixed Chinese-Indian-Malay parentage)	Divorced, with two children	Secondary school; engineer (land transport)
C5	Female, 51	Indian-Muslim (mixed Eurasian-Indian parentage)	Single parent, with one child (aged 15)	Secondary school; receptionist (fitness centre)
C6	Male, 41	Malay (mixed Javanese-Chinese-Ceylonese parentage)	Married, with one son	Degree; managing director (management consultancy)

All six participants are local-born, ethnic minority members of mixed Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Chinese ethnicities and are Muslims. Even though officially classified as ethnic Malay or Indian, they spoke voluntarily of their mixed ethnic backgrounds. Some have family ties abroad (for instance, C1, through children who have migrated) or through marriage (for example, C2) while C6 travels extensively for work.

Immigration and ethnic and cultural diversities, social divides

Most locals are exposed to immigrants in the course of work and public encounters, especially to Chinese, Indians and Filipinos. In the services sector, participants have encountered mostly language problems in communication with those from China. Says C5, "I was attended by a China salesperson. She doesn't know English, so the communication is really a problem for us". C3 complains, "Even bus drivers. You can't even ask where this bus is turning. They can't even explain to us."

In their awareness and perceptions of Indian immigrants, impressions of several participants appear to be fall within a broadly class and cultural divide, in which those with professional backgrounds tend to be perceived as arrogant and as viewing themselves to be better than local Indians, while blue-collar Indian workers are "down to earth and humble". C2 recalls an "uppity" North Indian colleague in her previous workplace where most of the IT specialists hired are Indian, "… he said, 'I don't find any of your people in my position'. That means he's saying that from India, they're higher in position than local Indians, which is true because local Indians do not get themselves qualified enough. But I was very hurt with his point. And, also, another thing he said, 'Without us you won't be progressing so much'". C4 is forthright in his opinion about class differences and consciousness and skilled Indian immigrants acting superior, "Comparing management levels and those blue-collared workers, I think those blue-collars are very down to earth, unlike those engineers, those in management level. They are very, you know, they are loud speakers. They are not only loud speakers, they talk as if they are big-headed... Ya, talk big and loud, loud and big-headed. And another thing, they think they are much, much better than everyone as compared with them". When C2 further adds that "Indian immigrants, if they are PRs or citizens, they already feel that the country owes them something", C4 reaffirms her with "Ya, I agree. I very very agree with you".

In their awareness and perceptions of Chinese immigrants (of which there was much more discussion compared with Indian immigrants), locals see them as distinctively different from local Chinese Singaporeans in many ways, including dress, speech, mannerism, thought processes and class. Noticing rich Chinese, C3 says, "I have some Chinese neighbours who come from China. They bring a lot of money and [they buy a house, $500,000, they can pay cash, they buy in cash. And my son is struggling to pay $484,000 in instalments". C2 agrees, saying "… some of them are very rich. Because I've seen their houses. They're the ones who live in very posh houses and they drive very posh cars and one happy thing for them is they're not controlled by the one-child policy".

The social behaviour of Chinese immigrants tends to be singled out for attention and is mainly perceived in negative terms, such as dirty hygiene habits, the materialistic and opportunistic outlooks of "gold-digger" Chinese women as shown through their strategies of marriages and divorce with locals, and their class consciousness and "intolerant attitude" towards others. This arises from some participants' own experiences or cases they have heard of. C5 relates how "they don't flush the toilets" in her fitness centre and have to be told to do so. C3 explains that her son once dated "a China girl, the only child of a contractor and from a quite well-to-do family" only to be rejected. "The girl came [to her home] with her family and said they are not keen to accept. No private house, HDB flat like a pigeonhole. She left him... My son was heartbroken but, in the end, he married another Chinese girl. But she's not from China; she's Singapore Chinese." Others concurred with similar stories they have heard. On Chinese immigrants' "demanding and intolerant attitude", kindergarten administrator C2 offers some examples: "Parents from China are very demanding parents. They want everything to be perfect... I have this parent who came, wanted my teacher to be sacked because she doesn't smile. 'I don't want her next year', she said… And complaining that my teacher is pregnant, she said, 'How can you employ a pregnant woman?'". C2 offers another example of intolerance as well as inability to accept social and interethnic mixing. "Immigrant Chinese parents, sometimes, they don't want their child to sit with another race. I've had that happen. 'I don't want my child to mix with that one'. You see, they are colour-fast [meaning preferring only Chinese people]". However, she added that there are some Singaporean parents who are also "like that".

In general, locals tend to be critical of Chinese and Indian immigrants' social and public behaviour. Beyond the individual friendships with immigrants of two participants, none spoke of positive experiences and incidents with immigrants. They also tend to think that newcomers should make some attempt to adjust to Singaporean norms of behaviour, such as queuing. C5 cites an experience where she was asked by a Bangladeshi or Indian to hurry up, to which she replied, "'You want fast, you go take taxi because we are queuing. Because there are certain things we Singaporeans still practise like queuing. For them it's rushing… we need to educate them a little bit to our culture. They are here, yes, to earn money. We appreciate you help our economy also, but at the same time, do respect the cultures, the value system here, the rules and regulations here… I think this is noticeable especially on weekends when you go through Serangoon, even Chinatown. You can see they cross not just in one, two, but in groups, so this is like they're making it like their own country". C2 is of the opinion that immigrants who become citizens will still "take a while to really adjust to our system".

1. Social and Cultural Rights and Obligations of Immigrants

Locals' views on the social and cultural rights of immigrants are limited; on the contrary, they are more concerned about economic challenges posed by immigrants. C5 clearly feels threatened by "too many immigrants" and that immigrants cannot receive full rights immediately: "They should not be given full rights because, all the years Singapore has been built up by our people, our parents, so suddenly when newcomers come and want to have their rights, I think it's not fair". All agree that immigration has been too

excessive, while some also feel that too many immigrants from China have been given citizenship and this has to be controlled. Additionally, some participants feel that immigrants are only transient without any commitments to the country. “They are here for the money. They make money then they pack up and go”, and “then they won’t be seen ever again” (C6).

2. Immigration Policy’s Rationale and Impacts

Immigration policy and impact are clearly of chief concern to all participants, particularly the issues of policy rationale, foreign talent, wages, employment, living costs and expectations of living standards, with the sense of anxiety, threat and resentment generated palpable at the focus group discussion and particularly well illustrated through individual narratives. Questioning the “real intent and rationale” of the government’s immigration policy and the quality of ‘foreign talent’, they argue that cheap labour and low wages more than talent are the real reasons for the hiring of immigrants, and that low wages are unattractive to Singaporeans due to Singapore’s high costs of living, and do not make for fair competition between locals and immigrants. The group argued for basic and fair wage.

2.1 Immigration Policy’s Rationale and Talent, Wages and Costs of Living

C6 questions the “real intent and rationale” of the government’s immigration policy pointedly. “Are we just filling up the numbers, or filling up the gaps at the industries at different levels? Or is it just to maintain the racial quota of every different major race in Singapore, or just to make up the numbers because of the shortage in our birth rate?” He similarly questions the quality of foreign talent being imported, “... the word ‘talent’ itself is a very big word, so people will ask, ‘What sort of talent these people have?’ Even young Singaporeans say, ‘What talent? I can even speak better English, am more educated. But when I go outside, eh, I don’t get a job. So, where does that leave me?’” C4, and engineer, drawing from his experience and observations at his workplace, does not think it is talent but cheap labour that drives the hiring of immigrants. “It’s all about cheap labour in my company… in construction… My boss hires a lot from China and the Philippines and a lot of Indian technicians. I can count the number of Singaporeans but majority mostly are foreigners just because they’re cheap.” He further explains why he thinks this is not good or fair for Singaporeans: “Even if they want to hire Singaporeans, they’ll pay them the same level as the foreigners and it’s not fair enough. It’s not good enough because, for me, these foreigners when they go back to their countries, they are rich. They have a lot of money when they convert [their salaries]. But, in Singapore, we get that salary, where can we go? Everything is going up so high. You cannot even survive.” C2 similarly believes it is mainly economic competition over wages that works against locals. “My competitors are Indian workers, when they go back to India they own a big house, they have lots of properties, whereas if we are paid the same wage as them, we can’t even eat. We can’t even survive”. C2 thinks that foreign workers are cheaper to hire than locals because “foreigners can stay 16 to a room”, and identifies the problem of hiring locals as primarily due to the lack of a basic [minimum] wage.

The sense of insecurity and threat felt by immigrants in access to jobs and opportunities for economic mobility is accentuated by locals' claim that they already have to work very hard to keep up with the costs of living. At the same time, they point to what they expect: security and a certain level of comfort. Says the engineer, C4, "I mean not to get a luxurious life, but at least we can lead a life that's secure. I don't want to be rich, but I just want to have a comfortable life". C5 points out that "our way is such, if the job is lost, it affects the house, everything is affected. Everything is affected because our job is our pillar. So if one collapses it means that's it, everything's gone".

The sense of threat from immigrants over wage competition is accentuated by the claim of difficulty in obtaining jobs, based on the experiences of other locals that the participants know. C3 relates the job search experiences of her son, a graduate from Australia. He was unsuccessful in his applications for media-related jobs even though his productions had won prizes, and finally had to settle for a job as an assistant teacher in a secondary school — "a job he is not set on but he has to earn something". He is also paid less than what she pays her degree-holder pre-school teachers "even though he does a lot more than them. And he's a local and I'm paying a foreigner. So, I don't see the fairness in it, in a sense, when the market is saturated and people are applying for jobs and they can take $1,500 and convert to rupiah and can be a very rich person... My son is very hardworking. You throw him anything, he'll do it. But the disappointment comes right after every interview. He just can't cut through to the market. So I feel there's an unfair advantage with the cheap labour. If it's a fair wage, if it's a basic wage, and you're fighting for the same salary, then I think there's a fair fight for locals and you will be finding a lot of locals coming out".

The sense of feeling threatened specifically among ethnic minorities is raised by C6. "You'll hear people say, especially the minority groups, 'How come there are so many Chinese? Why, can't even speak English, but you employ them? And we have our own locals, why can't we employ them?' I think it's natural for the minorities to feel this in any population when you're being threatened by an outsider. Probably could be perceived threat then [in the early years of immigration], but now, I think it's a real threat because eventually, if we don't curtail the movement, our jobs will be taken away. This is what the fear is. And the irony is that… the government is trying to promote meritocracy. Yes, we have got the same qualifications, but when it comes to salaries, there is no meritocracy. It's the lowest quote gets it". Locals also point out that there is also Malay foreign talent but which is, however, "not coming" from Indonesia or Malaysia; on the contrary, they mention a reverse outflow in which Malay Singaporeans are migrating to Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia to work or live, or at least moving to nearby Johor where the cost of living is lower and commuting to work in Singapore.

While immigrants are perceived as a threat in job competition, it is recognised that some locals' "negative" work expectations and attitudes also play a part in the preferred hiring of immigrants over locals. Says C4, "For myself, I started as a technician, so I'm not fussy with work. I know if I work really hard… I don't have 'O' levels, I don't have 'N' levels, I only have diploma because I go through ITE [Institute of Technical Education], go through hard labour. Nine years I started as a worker… I started from scratch. I

compare with my friends, they are choosy with work. They are very, very choosy. They want easy way to get good job, straightaway good money. For me, I believe in working hard… Partly to be blamed, the youngsters". C6 agrees that some young Singaporeans cannot take pressure at work. "For people like us, when we are already committed, we have families, so we are thinking we cannot leave this job. For me, I'm stuck to one job, but I'm happy because I have a family. But for the youngsters, we train them up, after one week, they cannot take it. They cannot take the stress... Foreigners, they are hardworking because, first of all, they don't have anything to do here. Their time is just to work".

2.2 Competition and Children's Future

Current immigration policy and trends are also seen as threatening to the future of the young. For C5, "[immigrants], from first working now they are already staying and bringing their families here…. So I think that should be stopped. The immigration [authorities] should see this. Otherwise… we will be left behind. We will be nowhere. In Singapore, we are holding a Singapore red IC, but it won't be valid [meaningful] — I think so, in the future… I'm worried for my son. I think if I have a chance to send him somewhere, I will send him". C6 similarly feels immigration is threatening for "the young ones". "Because I have a boy, so I wonder not only for me, I think for the rest also, because like our jobs is all being taken up by these people, be it whether they can talk or they cannot talk [speak English].... Our concern is now our children. Will they face the same kind of discrimination, biases, prejudices, when it comes to applying for jobs? I think that's the fear and if they see among them in the midst, also in schools like NUS, NTU, even polytechnics, there are quite a number of foreigners. Then they ask, 'Will I graduate at the same time?', 'Can I get the job?', 'Will I or will he get the job?' So there's always this fear now. I don't think it's perceived. I think it is real for them, so we need to look ahead, what's next. For our generation, I think we are okay… but there's always this concern, not for us, but our children".

2.3 Proposed Immigration and Wage Policy Changes

Participants are constructive in proposing immigration policy changes even as they feel threatened and are critical of immigration policy. They stress that they are not anti-immigration but are against "too much" immigration, which they see needs to be more stringent, "better controlled", and call for a "better balance", "basic wage", "fair fight" and a more discerning understanding and application of talent. As pointed earlier, C2 feels there is an unfair advantage for immigrants with the cheap labour. "If it's a fair wage, if it's a basic [minimum] wage, and you're fighting for the same salary, then I think there's a fair fight for locals". Business consultant C6 proposes immigration policy refinements from a business viewpoint as well as in the interests of Singapore and Singaporeans with real needs, and advocates a balance of costs, quality and "Singaporeans first", which will give Singaporeans confidence and a stake in Singapore. He argues, "… From a business perspective, I do understand we have to manage our costs… on the one hand, we need the workers. We cannot get Singaporeans, we are left with no choice but to get foreigners. But, there must be a certain kind of balance for Singaporeans and for

foreigners, in terms of the salary itself… we cannot say, 'but others are able to supply because costs is lower". It should be more than just costs. It should be about quality. And also there is this element that Singaporeans in a way [should be] first… I am not saying this should be a rule but hiring must meet specifications and expectations. We've been doing nation-building for 46 years, and I think we are very cohesive…. But, now, the question is, having these new foreigners coming in…. It's not just anyone who applies straightaway can get it because he is cheap. There must be a stringent kind of immigration policy — stricter from now onwards and to ensure the future generation that they at least have confidence in the system. Then, at least when they graduate, they have a job, rather than they have to compete with others. Compete with Singaporeans that's fine, but compete with foreigners and you don't get it, that's really sore".

Impact of Immigration on Identities and Cohesion

In general, participants do not speak of feeling threatened in their ethnic identities by the massive immigration of Chinese from China nor are they particularly concerned about ethnic identity itself. Rather, they stress their national Singaporean identity over ethnic identity and the need for immigrants to adjust to Singaporean culture. They are also future-oriented in terms of the impact of massive immigration and unfair competition on the larger society and its cohesiveness. The huge influx of new immigrants makes some participants think it might bring back and reinforce ethnic divides, some of which Singaporeans have already overcome over time and generations. They think that massive immigration and unfair competition might create new faultlines in Singapore society that has been increasingly cohesive over time and generations. Says C2: "if you talk about the China-Chinese coming here, then it's a bit of a headache", as she thinks that immigrant Chinese are less open to mixing and can be "colour-fast" [meaning preferring to mix only with Chinese]. C6 thinks Singaporeans on the whole have no problem "mingling with foreigners" as "we've been taught how to accept and appreciate diversity", and "even if there are some little tensions that is part and parcel of life". However, he thinks that the concern now is about cohesion. "We were building up very nicely, but with the influx of the foreign talent, it may fragment the whole country... As a country, I think we're intact. But, now, the question is, having these new foreigners coming in, should they adapt to us or we adapt to them? This is our homeland. We built this country. So I think those who would like to become members have to abide by the culture, the rules of this country." To him, having a "stake" in Singapore is important: "'Stake' is what Singaporeans face. I'm born here. This is my country, this is where I live, so I want a stake in this country. It's in line with our principle of governance: opportunities for all, a stake for everyone. So Singaporeans are questioning this principle now. Where is our stake for everyone?"

Discussion

This exploratory study shows immigration in Singapore to be a complex and controversial phenomenon. In a cacophony of individual and group voices, locals and immigrants relate stories, experiences and perspectives and stake their contributions, claims and expectations. Their narratives reveal significant economic, social and

cultural diversities, differences, disconnects and divides, both between locals and immigrants and within each group in some respects. Many of the local-immigrant disconnects and divisions raised are not new; they are openly and constantly articulated and contested in public social and political discourses, especially by local-born citizens among themselves and vis-à-vis the government to which they attribute these as a direct consequence of its open immigration policy. Among them, several stand out which point to the need for crucial understanding and action by locals, immigrants and policy-makers: immigrant settlement over time and generations; the ethnic identification of immigrants; economic competition and foreign talent; immigration policy itself; and belonging and citizenship claims by locals. They also point to the need to unpack the broad categories of "immigrant" and "local" and some common notions associated with each.

The considerations and processes that immigrants go through in arriving at their "big decision" to work and settle in Singapore and their adjustments over time, as shown by Indian and Chinese NCPRs, need better and sensitive understanding by locals. For immigrants who have chosen to come to Singapore of their own accord, including the highly mobile and skilled workers and those who treat Singapore as a strategic stepping stone to greener pastures or merely as a place to earn a living, make money or tap its facilities, such as for their children's education, it is true that they do have a choice to leave and indeed some have come and gone. However, this does not diminish the contributions and often unappreciated travails amidst the adjustments of those who have decided to stay and to settle down. The sense of attachment to more than one place for the first generation is to be expected (unless one expects amnesia from them) as is their congregation in immigrant associations and social networks for support and networking. However, whether they will leave en masse and their loyalty questionable at a time of crisis is yet to be seen.

What is crucial for locals' understanding and expectation of settlement, citizenship, belonging and commitment by immigrants is the difference between the first and subsequent generations. The data shows that those who migrated to Singapore when young and the children of immigrants are Singaporeans as they have lived their formative years in Singapore and undergone experiences in its key institutions of school and national service (for males) as well as in ordinary everyday social and community life. They do not relate to India or China like their parents do; they identify themselves as Singaporeans and their choice to be in Singapore is an important factor in their parents' decision to sink roots, become citizens themselves and to make adjustments, including mindset changes, expectations and participation in local life. Through this inter-generational change over time, some of the perceptions, prejudices and stereotypes of Singapore and Singaporeans or cultural rigidities held by their parents may also gradually wither away or fade into insignificance over time.

Immigrants, on the other hand, need to understand why locals are anxious or resentful, and to see their presence in Singapore beyond their own contributions and their economic participation beyond their own personal qualifications, experiences, interests and rights. They need to constantly bear in mind that Singapore is not merely a

globalising city but also a small nation-state with citizens who also have rights. Seen from this perspective, locals' concern over economic conditions on home grounds ought to be understandable, as many immigrants too have similar concerns in their home countries and indeed have migrated to Singapore/Asia because of unemployment and job uncertainties back home. While there is a "global war" for talent, the definition, application and hiring of "talent" in reality can be subjective and controversial, open to cultural and social forces such as exclusive networking, preference for own kind, nepotism, discriminatory practices, and conscious or unconscious cultural biases.[15] For locals, the rights and stakes of citizenship reasonably extend to expectations of fair employment opportunities and fair wages, all the more in the context of intense competition and growing inequality amidst globalisation and open immigration. The call for a balance between costs (wages), quality and "Singaporean first" is a reasonable one.

The extensive and quick pace of change brought about by immigration affects both locals and immigrants. However, locals can feel overwhelmed in their sense of familiarity, place and social order that they have established over time and generations prior to the arrival of the recent wave of immigrants. Mutual adjustments and interactions in gradual, aware and sensitive ways are needed and the rules of civility-hospitality and open-mindedness without quick judgement apply equally to all. While immigrants need their immigrant support networks and activities, their going beyond these to familiarise themselves with locals and to participate in some shared activities will enable them to understand and better adjust to local conditions.

Immigrants also need to understand Singapore society in larger terms, including its location in the Southeast Asian region, and to learn more about local and regional histories, cultures and norms as Singapore and the region have a diverse range of peoples, cultures and histories preceding their arrival. The idea that Singapore is an immigrant society is contentious. Indigenous Malays do not see themselves as immigrants, while local Indians and Chinese with migration backgrounds of earlier generations have settled and developed their distinct local histories, cultures and orientations and should be viewed as such. Cultural similarities should not be assumed, imagined or exaggerated under a broader ethnic identity, such as by some PRC Chinese under "Chinese-ness" or "Chinese diaspora" and who also see Singapore as a "province" of China. That some Chinese NCPRs in the study also do not seem to understand the concept of multiculturalism well is probably because they come from

15. See, for example, *Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development Report 2012* which identified 'gaps' and issues in leadership, culture and assessment in business corporations operating in Asia (Diversity and Inclusion in Asia Network 2012). It pointed out a high reliance on import of foreign talent in Asia and a disproportionate representation of expatriates at senior levels, and an institutionalised Western-model bias which overlooks and disadvantages local talent in recruitment and assessment and which fails to appreciate the strengths and competences of local talent. In my research, I was taken aback when one foreign financial analyst told me his American recruiter found local women "modern and cosmopolitan" but local men "not meeting the mark" which he clarified meant "Yale standards". To me, this suggests not only cultural bias but also gendered and sexual politics between locals and immigrants at work – a growing observation in the financial sector.

relatively homogeneous contexts in China and most are Han Chinese carrying with them some baggage of Chinese civilisation and Chinese society. The expectation that a local Chinese should switch from English to Mandarin and the preference of Chinese over local *rojak* (mixed) culture by two Chinese NCPRs illustrates the strength and rigidity of language and culture as ethnic markers among some, as well as their lack of understanding about language and cultural acquisition, change and diversity among the Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. For Indian and Chinese immigrants in particular, their official classification under the same ethnic identities as local ethnic Indians and Chinese is a misfit that is based on false assumptions of ethnic cultural similarity and identity. This in turn can lead to misplaced judgements, comparisons and expectations of ethnic identity and behaviour, such as over language (for example, local Chinese' poor command of Mandarin and preference for speaking in English as a sign of superiority) and cultural practices (for example, local Indians' continued traditional practice of Thaipusam). The expectation of relatively problem-free integration arising from supposed similarities falls flat in the face of the poignant differences and divides between local Chinese and PRC Chinese. Indeed, the official ethnic classification system of Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others — already heavily criticised for its assumptions of homogeneity and fixity of group identity (as well as for generating divisiveness among citizens along ethnic lines) — shows up to be even weaker in its assumptions when Chinese and Indian immigrants are included under its categories.

Locals' anxieties over immigration and their deep questioning of policy and its consequences, as shown by the study, can easily be confused as being "anti-immigrant" if read superficially and with preconceived notions of "anti-immigrant" drawn from especially Western contexts and events.[16] This is all the more so when there are indeed individuals who are prejudiced or racist, when netizens post anti-immigrant and xenophobic comments on websites and when immigration surfaced as a major issue during the general elections in 2011. However, a closer and more objective reading of the data and the unpacking of locals' sentiments, considered together with the other issues pointed out earlier — claims of discriminatory hiring practices against locals, soaring property prices including public housing, allocation of places and bond-free scholarships to foreign students in the highly competitive higher education sector and growing pressures on social facilities and public transport — show that there are reasonable grounds for the strong feelings against rapid and massive immigration. Broadly, these sentiments can be grouped around three areas: immigration policy pertaining to its rationale, numbers in immigration flows and sources of immigrants; economic issues around definitions of talent, recruitment practices and wage levels; and

16. For example, the "curry" incident (see footnote 8) was portrayed as an anti-immigration protest (Suhartono 2011). In the author's Facebook homepage on 5 May 2011, this comment posted by an Italian "foreign talent" acquaintance (an academic) who had attended a national election 2011 campaign in which immigration was a hot button issue: "Time to go, time to leave this little insignificant dot in the sea. Please, what are two million people? I hope that migrants understand that here they serve whom do not deserve to be served. Let Singapore go to its destiny. Today I have binned its flag my wife and I used for National Day (and we are not even PRs). Racism and xenophobia can be tolerated in a country of 70 million [Italy] because often you find a majority of neurons who will rise and scream against the fascists. Here, no, Fascism has a future. I hope you get your Mussolini. Ciao Belli ☺"; to which a local (an artistic director) replied "Time to go!"

economic and social impacts of immigration on personal lives, citizens' rights and social cohesion. One other contentious issue (raised tangentially by an Indian participant in the study) is national service (and reservist training). As this is compulsory for local male citizens and involves a long period of time (at least two years) away from higher education or work as well as also safety issues, the strategic avoidance of national service by sons of permanent residents upon completion of school negatively affects locals' perceptions of permanent residents and immigrants as enjoying privileges without bearing responsibilities. Compulsory annual reservist training that takes them away from work further reinforces some locals' sense of being disadvantaged in relation to immigrants, such as in hiring and treatment by employers (Leong 2012b). The government, however, has remained relatively quiet on this key issue.

Taken together, these are anxieties about being disadvantaged or set back by economic competition and about social citizenship and should not be confused as inherently "anti-immigrant".[17] While there is some cultural stereotyping of immigrants arising from encounters, there is thus far no coherent political or nationalistic ideology against immigrants or organised efforts calling for an end to immigration and the exclusion or expulsion of immigrants. Indeed, the clarification made by locals in this study is that they are not against immigration altogether but for controlled immigration and a review of its policy's excessive openness and consideration of its consequences. "Locals", like "immigrants", are diverse in their responses to immigration, and the "anti-immigrant" and "xenophobic" labels should not be carelessly used across the board but applied only to known categories such as the category of netizens indulging in hate speech. It should also be pointed out that, unlike what has happened even in some of the most tolerant of Western societies, Singapore has no history of mobilised anti-immigration, extreme nationalism and xenophobia. Nor has it witnessed any major acts of provocation and violence arising from the divides and tensions between locals and immigrants despite their intensity. On the contrary, there are strong ground practices of multiculturalism and prevailing codes of civility, including hospitality, tolerance and conflict avoidance, based on local cultures and honed through several generations of intergroup relations, for convivial social interaction and the maintenance of order and stability.[18]

Conclusion

This study shows rapid and massive immigration to be fraught with controversy and vulnerable to stereotyping, misunderstanding and divisiveness in local-immigrant relations, particularly in an environment of intense economic competition and uncertainty. The economics of such immigration within Singapore's globalisation experiences has brought about dimensions of inequality and unfairness to unprecedented new levels, while the cultural politics of "race", space and place play out in unexpected ways that frustrate, anger or divide. Local-immigrant divides would not have been as serious had the economic and social implications of such immigration been considered alongside the pursuit of economic growth and population goals. Now,

17. For other views on locals' anxieties, see Terence Chong (2012) and Eugene Tan (2012).
18. See Lai (1995) for the micropolitics of ethnic relations and multiculturalism in local encounters.

problems are coming home to roost. Before the next new population target of between six and eight million (cited figures vary among ministers and population experts)[19] is rationalised and realised mainly through immigration, the economic and social lessons from immigration in the last decade ought to be clearly learnt. For example, it has been suggested that increased population size can be accommodated through land reclamation and construction of taller residential buildings. Such projects are, however, limited in scope, costly to undertake and physical or technological in approach, and are likely to encounter social and human responses to dense crowding and intensive competition some of which are already being played out. The physical limits of sea and sky in Singapore may seem endless but its citizenry's human limits are not and when reached may then be expressed in ways expected ways and otherwise. As it is, in the internet, vitriolic voices that curse immigrants and call for them to "go home", cynical criticisms of government and open threats to vote for the political opposition in the next general election in 2016, appear with regularity.

Immigration and population policies themselves, citizens' interests and concerns, economic growth and distribution issues, city planning for liveability — how these and other major issues are addressed in the next few years are crucial and will affect the conduciveness or adversity of conditions for local-immigrant relations and integration. For multiculturalism to continue to prevail and develop and to ensure extreme nationalism does not take root, immigration in particular needs to be carefully and sensitively managed. Two principles ought to be always remembered and balanced.[20] One is that immigrants, once they are allowed to enter Singapore to work and live, are entitled to decent and dignified treatment. The other is that Singapore is not merely a convenient place for people to flow in and out but a country where citizenship and belonging is what is meaningful, rightful and at the heart of it all.

19. See Puah et al. (2012).
20. See Kuah (2012) who discusses the tension and the need for reconciliation between the "national narrative" and "global city ethos".

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