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# SENTIMENTS ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION & THE ROLE OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

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**MATHEW MATHEWS  
ZHANG JIAYI**



This publication is supported by the National Integration Council. The opinions, views and information set out in this publication are those of the authors and contributors and do not reflect the position of the National Integration Council.

# National Integration Council



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## PREFACE

Immigration has proven to be a thorny issue in Singapore. While the economic benefits of immigration are undeniable, there are guttural reactions among many at the thought of having more immigrants in the city state. Concerns of competition for precious space, jobs and school opportunities inevitably breed anxiety and discontent among locals. That coupled with cultural differences that immigrants bring— whether in terms of mannerisms and mentalities are certain to fuel the us-and-them divide. If these divides persist, there will be permanent cleavages in society that will have negative repercussions to the overall cohesion and stability of Singapore.

But for such a good outcome, where xenophobic tendencies are exorcised and immigrants make a greater commitment to observe local norms and add value to Singapore, there must be a concerted effort by all players and not just the government. Employers, community leaders, new immigrants and local born citizens have to both contend with the issue and find feasible solutions to further integration in their spheres of influence.

This publication showcases the efforts of community leadership both in discussing the issue of immigrant integration in Singapore as well as their efforts to do so in the sites of immigrant associations. The publication consists of 2 distinct parts - Part 1 compiles the lived experiences of immigrant issues while Part 2 delves into how immigrant associations facilitate immigrant integration.

Chapter 1 informs readers on the nature of immigration in Singapore – the demographic breakdown of immigrants and the different tiers of economic migrants entering Singapore. It also outlines the issues fuelling local-foreigner tensions, and what state agencies have done to alleviate these ill feelings. Chapter 2 distils the sentiments of community leaders regarding immigrant integration which were raised during a series of closed door dialogues (CDDs) and the Community Leaders Integration Conference (CLIC) that IPS organised. While these meetings were conducted more than two years ago, the findings continue to be relevant.

Chapter 3 gathers information on how immigrant associations all over the world cater to the needs of immigrants in their society and help them settle down in an unfamiliar land. It also provides a discussion of how Chinese clan associations in Singapore helped early Chinese settlers manage life in Singapore. This provides a useful comparison of how immigrant



associations have evolved. Chapter 4 features 40 write-ups of immigrant associations in Singapore. It details the type of activities that they engage in and how these allow new immigrants to better settle down in Singapore.

We have included a perceptive piece by the prolific journalist, Asad Latif, at the end of this publication. Asad participated actively in the series of dialogues. His own experiences as a migrant coming to Singapore in 1984 and his reflections on the issue provide much food for thought.

Mathew Mathews  
Zhang Jiayi



## **Chapter 1**

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# Contextualising Immigrant Integration in Singapore



## **CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN SINGAPORE**

The social fabric of nations has become more complex with immigration taking place at an unprecedented rate and volume. The benefits of immigration in providing much needed labour to otherwise rapidly ageing populations are certainly quite persuasive among policymakers in some nations, such that the social costs associated with immigration are discounted. Yet the conflicts that result from the intermingling of new cultures — with their peculiar social norms, traditions and beliefs attempting to co-exist in a common space — have led to increased social tension and unhappiness of the citizens of host countries.

The profile of new immigrants is increasingly diverse. In some countries they include refugees from war-plagued countries and others fleeing different forms of persecution, while in others labour and marriage migrants are much more common. The flow of people across the world is an essential part of today's globalised world, which will ultimately create a class of global citizens.

Despite the inevitability of the continued movements of people across the world, recent waves of anti-immigrant sentiments aired in protests in parts of Europe signal that integration is an arduous task. Anti-immigration sentiments are partly fuelled by the threat of terrorism in Europe with citizens of European countries disconcerted by the fact that more than 3,000 people from European countries have joined the ISIS as jihadists ("Islamic State crisis", 2014).

Europeans have become more vocal about anti-immigration after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris, which killed 12 editors of the politically and religiously sensitive Charlie Hebdo magazine. Some 15,000 Germans took to the streets in Dresden, Germany, protesting against liberal immigration policies and the Islamisation of Europe (Kirschbaum, 2014). Protests have also sprung up in Rome, with residents unhappy about the liberal immigration policies and the lack of adequate public facilities and infrastructure ("Anti-immigration protests in Rome", 2014). Anti-immigrant sentiments are swelling in Sweden, which used to have an immigrant-friendly stance (Donahue & Rolander, 2014; Magnusson, 2010). Political parties that are premised on strong right-wing, nationalist, anti-immigrant agendas have gained traction all over Europe, signalling the public's disapproval towards immigration ("EU elections: Anti-immigrant wave sweeps Europe", 2014).

Singapore is not spared from the influx of immigrants to her shores, and the social issues that come with it. However, despite government efforts to manage the issues arising from integration, there is still tension and unhappiness between locals and new immigrants. This warrants greater understanding of public sentiments regarding immigration as well as mechanisms to better integrate immigrants into the Singaporean fabric.

The core of this publication features the diversity of immigrants in Singapore and their associations. It also documents their interaction with local-born Singaporeans in a conversation on how to deal with the teething integration issues that stem from the large immigrant presence in Singapore.

This chapter attempts to situate the issues surrounding immigrant integration by providing a background to Singapore's liberal immigration policy and the social concerns relating to the high rate of immigration. A segment of this chapter describes the diversity of immigrants; the demographic composition of immigrants in Singapore is one challenge to immigrant integration. Finally we detail the role of state agencies such as the National Integration Council as well as the People's Association in immigrant integration.

## **CONTEXT AND ISSUES OF SINGAPORE'S LIBERAL IMMIGRATION POLICY**

The Singapore government has adopted a relatively liberal immigration policy to bolster the foreseen decline of the workforce as a result of low fertility rates of Singapore. As a result of the overly successful "Stop at Two" family policy, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of Singapore has dropped below the replacement level of 2.1 since the 1970s (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2012). In 2013, the TFR is reported to be at a worryingly low level of 1.19 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2015). The sustained low fertility rate of Singapore results in a shrinking and ageing workforce, which threatens the economic competitiveness of Singapore. Immigration is hence seen as a solution to safeguard the economic competitiveness of Singapore by ensuring the size and dynamism of Singapore's workforce ("S'poreans have to understand need for immigrants: LKY", 2012). The table below depicts the volume of migration and the natural increase of Singapore's population.

**Table 1.1: Components of Total Population Growth, 2001–2014**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total population growth</b>	<b>Natural increase</b>	<b>Net migration</b>
2001	110,125	26,084	84,041
2002	37,938	24,940	12,998
2003	-61,124	21,449	-82,573
2004	51,838	21,314	30,524
2005	99,098	21,277	77,821
2006	135,603	21,924	113,679
2007	187,234	22,350	164,884
2008	250,797	22,604	228,193
2009	148,177	22,469	125,708
2010	89,159	20,357	68,802
2011	106,956	21,627	85,329
2012	128,749	24,182	104,567
2013	86,725	20,782	65,943
2014	70,562	22,839	47,723

Source: Generated from SingStat Table Builder, Singapore Department of Statistics

According to Table 1.1, the natural increase in Singapore's population has declined from 2000 to 2005, and has remained relatively stable at around 22,000 until year 2010. The net migration numbers in turn increased drastically in 2005 and peaked at 2008 in response to the persistently low rate of natural increase in population. Table 1.2 below depicts the growth of resident and non-resident populations in Singapore. Similarly, increase in the percentage of non-resident population grew from 2004, and peaked in 2008. This peak is at least partly attributable to policy measures aimed at attracting new migrants to Singapore from countries affected by the global financial crisis.

**Table 1.2: Percentage Growth of Resident and Non-Resident Population, 2000–2014**

Year	% total population increase	% resident population increase	% non-resident population increase
2001	2.7	1.6	7.6
2002	0.9	1.7	-2.4
2003	0.2	1.6	-5.7
2004	1.3	1.4	0.7
2005	2.4	1.6	5.9
2006	3.2	1.7	9.7
2007	4.3	1.6	14.9
2008	5.5	1.7	19.0
2009	3.1	2.5	4.8
2010	1.8	1.0	4.1
2011	2.1	0.5	6.9
2012	2.5	0.8	7.2
2013	1.6	0.7	4.0
2014	1.3	0.7	2.9

Source: Generated from SingStat Table Builder, Singapore Department of Statistics

The Singaporean government has asserted that foreigners ultimately aid in Singapore’s economic development and bring good jobs to Singaporeans. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated in an interview, “If we are too tight on the foreign PME [Professionals, Managers and Executives], I think many companies will be deterred from coming here and the jobs for Singaporean PMEs may not even exist in the first place.” (Yong, 2014)

However, since 2008 when immigration rates peaked at 19.0%, there has been rising public dissatisfaction regarding immigrants (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). Some commentators have described these sentiments as xenophobic. Much of these feelings stem from perceived unfairness, as many immigrants are seen as “stealing” white-collared jobs from Singaporeans (Lima, 2014). A portion of Singaporeans are also unhappy that expatriates are paid large amounts of money and live extravagant lifestyles while Singaporeans work a lot harder for less money. Singaporeans also find that promotions are hard to secure despite working longer hours than expatriates (Lima, 2014). While many of these assertions may not hold to empirical validity — for instance, (i) many expatriates in Singapore are not accorded expatriate packages and work on local terms, (ii) many foreigners occupy jobs that qualified Singaporeans are not interested in pursuing —



perceptions that are perpetuated through online media have become deeply ingrained in the minds of at least some Singaporeans.

The significant inflow of immigrants also saw strains in public infrastructure. Noticeably, trains and buses have become more crowded, there are more traffic jams, and Singaporeans are upset by the inconveniences caused by the overcrowding on public transport. Many also blame the overcrowding in hospitals, competitiveness in schools and soaring prices of property on the inflow of immigrants. Singaporeans are also worried about the dilution of national identity with the high rate of immigration (Lima, 2014).

These sentiments have been broadcast internationally, especially after the Population White Paper (PWP) was published and debated in Parliament in 2013. The PWP had provided a planning parameter of 6.9 million for infrastructure plans in 2030. This fuelled the unhappiness of many Singaporeans, who could not perceive how public infrastructure in Singapore would be able to accommodate the added strain posed by even more immigration. In response to the PWP, a series of protests against high rates of immigration was held in Hong Lim Park (“4,000 protest against white paper”, 2013; Adam, 2013). The government explained that the 6.9 million figure was never a target and that it was used for projection and planning purposes only. PM Lee expressed that the PWP could have been better explained to avoid the public outcry caused by misunderstandings (“Govt to examine its experience in population white paper”, 2013).

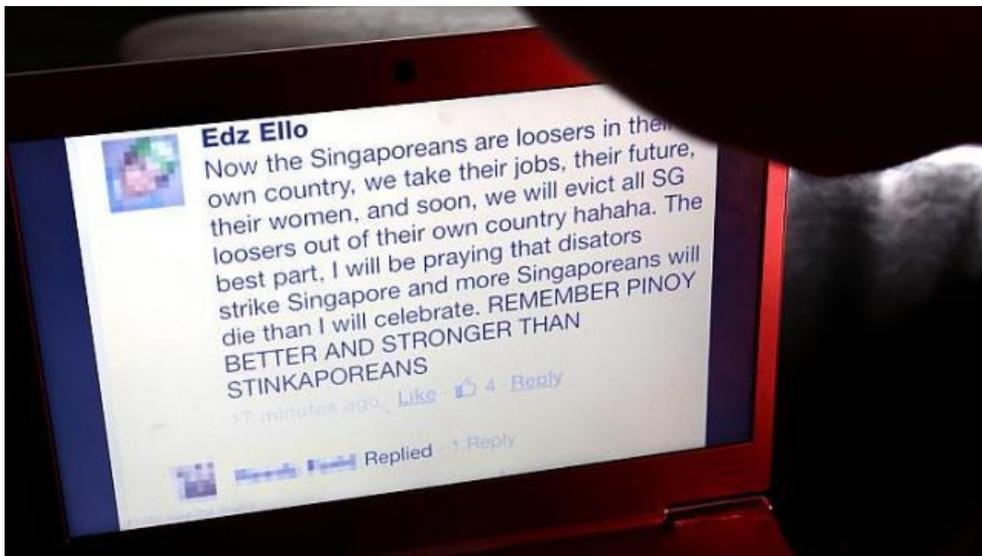
In addition to the government’s responses to manage the discontent of Singaporeans, policies such as reducing the number of foreign labour passes and stronger regulations regarding employer discrimination against Singaporeans were put in place (Cheam & Heng, 2013; Toh, 2013; Lee, 2014; Au-Yong, 2015). As a result of these policies, Singaporeans saw slower growth rate in the number of foreign workers. A tight labour market has also led to a rise in wages of Singaporeans in the short term.

Beyond government policy on immigration, Singaporeans also expressed outrage over the news of the Filipino Independence Day Council intending to hold an event in Ngee Ann City shopping mall to commemorate the Philippines Independence Day in 2014. Some Singaporeans thought it was unacceptable and disrespectful for the Filipinos to celebrate their independence day in a public venue (Wong, 2014). Some even threatened protest in the same venue against the event. In response to the heated reactions of Singaporeans, the council decided to cancel the event (Tan, 2014). The anti-immigrant sentiments were frowned upon by the government and a segment of society. PM Lee responded that

Singaporeans “must treat people in Singapore the way we ourselves expect to be treated overseas” (“Organisers cancel Philippine Independence Day event: Police”, 2014). Others commented that it was narrow-minded and petty of Singaporeans to take offence over the matter. This event, however, escalated the tension between Singaporeans and foreigner populations in Singapore.

Singaporeans also reacted furiously on social media in the last two years when they perceived that foreigners were showing contempt to local born Singaporeans. For instance, in early January 2015, offensive comments published by Ello Ed Mundsel Bello, a Filipino nurse working in Tan Tock Seng Hospital, angered many Singaporeans (Hoe, 2015). He posted his views that “Singaporeans are losers [sic] in their country” and how migrants would “take their jobs, their future, their women and soon ... evict all SG losers [sic] out of their own country.”

### Figure 1.1: The Anti-Singapore Post Made by Ello Ed Mundsel Bello



Source: “Tan Tock Seng Hospital fires Filipino nurse who made offensive comments on Facebook”, (2015, January 9), *The Straits Times*

Similarly Anton Casey, a fund manager from Britain, made remarks which were deemed as offensive when he referred to Singaporeans who take public transport as “poor people”, stating he had to “wash the stench of public transport off” himself (Ho, 2014). Singaporeans were enraged by his lack of respect for the citizens of his host country.



Incidents like these, although infrequent and certainly not representative of many foreigners on the island, have the tendency to produce stereotypes among Singaporeans that foreigners show contempt towards them and are plotting to remove their livelihoods. It also echoes the perceived unfairness where foreigners seem to have minimum obligation to Singapore but are able to enjoy many of the benefits that are present on the island. In instances like these, some Singaporeans blame the government for liberal immigration policies and their failure to adequately screen immigrants to ensure a good calibre of immigrants in Singapore.

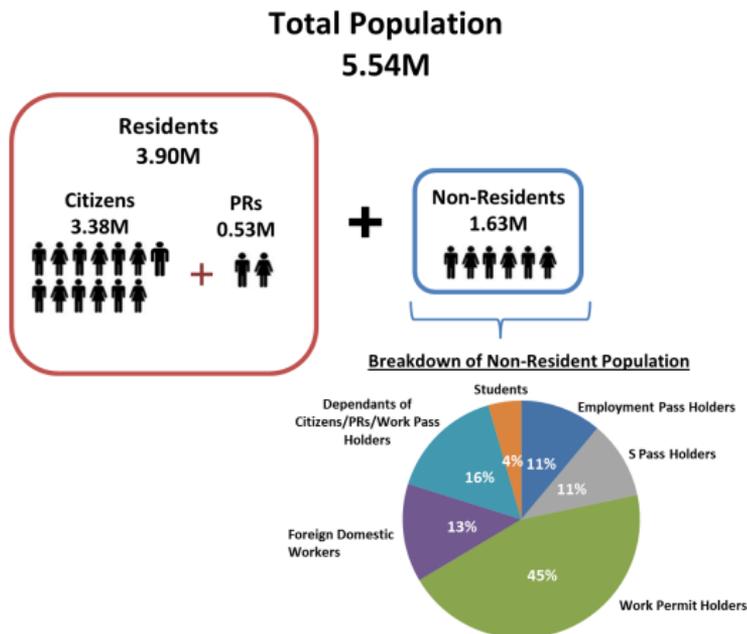
Despite all the issues that arise from immigration, Singaporeans know that being a small, open and vulnerable economy without any natural resources, coupled with a competitive economic landscape, Singapore needs to keep its doors open to immigrants of different skill levels (Yong, 2014). Moreover, with an ageing population and a likely increase in care needs that many Singaporeans may not be willing to take on, Singapore needs migrants to assist with these needs. With low TRF and immigration a necessary constant to ensure Singapore's economic growth and ability to meet its population's needs, the government has been conscious of the need to manage the inflow of immigrants and ensure their subsequent integration.

## **LANDSCAPE OF IMMIGRANTS IN SINGAPORE**

The complexity of immigration and foreigner integration in Singapore is at least partly attributable to the diversity of foreigners who come to Singapore to live, work and study.

The total population of Singapore consists of two categories: (1) the resident population and (2) the non-resident population. The resident population consists of Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents. As of June 2015, Singapore has a total population of 5.54 million, with 3.38 million Singapore Citizens, 0.53 million Permanent Residents and 1.63 million non-residents (National Population and Talent Division Singapore, 2015).

Non-residents include work permit holders, S pass holders, employment pass holders, international students, foreign domestic workers and dependents of citizens/PRs/work pass holders (see Figure 1.2) (National Population and Talent Division Singapore, 2015).

**Figure 1.2: Breakdown of Singapore's Population as of June 2015**

Source: Population in Brief 2015 (2015, p. 5), National Population and Talent Division

Foreigners usually move to Singapore for employment. There are several types of employment, with corresponding permits:

- Work Permit Holders often work in industries that face challenges hiring Singaporeans. These include the construction, marine and manufacturing sectors (Ministry of Manpower, 2014a).
- Foreign domestic workers are employed directly by households that require domestic help. These women usually come from Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka (Ministry of Manpower, 2014b).
- S Pass Holders are mid-level, skilled foreigners who usually work in industries such as retail, manufacturing and healthcare (e.g., allied healthcare workers), as well as in social and voluntary welfare sectors as care-givers for the elderly. They draw a monthly fixed salary of at least \$2,200 and have a degree, diploma or technical certificate which should comprise at least one year of full-time study after the completion of high school (Ministry of Manpower, 2014c).



- Employment Pass Holders are foreign professionals working in managerial, executive or specialised jobs. They earn at least \$3,300 per month, and possess acceptable qualifications such as degrees from recognised universities, professional qualifications and specialised skills (Ministry of Manpower, 2014d).

Students also constitute a substantial proportion of foreigners in Singapore. Since 1997, Singapore has been making efforts to develop the country into an international education hub for students from primary to university levels (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). In an effort to recruit global talent to boost economic competitiveness in Singapore, the Singaporean government also offers scholarships to foreign-born students from China, India and ASEAN countries (Ministry of Education, 2012). These scholars will then have to serve a bond of three years after graduation in Singapore.

### Ethnic Composition of Immigrants

Immigrants in Singapore are not only differentiated in terms of economic status, but also country of birth. People from all over the world come to Singapore in search of educational or economic opportunities. The table below reflects the diversity of immigrants in Singapore.

**Table 1.3: Distribution of Foreign-Born Resident Population by Country of Birth and Race, 2010**

Country of Birth	Chinese	Malay	Indians	Others
	Number			
Malaysia	338,501	25,036	20,483	1,959
China, Hong Kong, Taiwan	174,355	16	241	543
South Asia	140	52	122,703	583
Indonesia	42,571	10,810	553	470
Other Asian Countries	20,764	518	1251	67610
Europe	2,278	82	603	10,388
USA and Canada	3,605	65	581	2,961
Others	5,071	523	785	3,686
<b>Total</b>	<b>587,285</b>	<b>37,102</b>	<b>147,200</b>	<b>88,200</b>

	<b>Percentage</b>			
Malaysia	57.6	67.5	13.9	2.2
China, Hong Kong, Taiwan	29.7	0.0	0.2	0.6
South Asia	0.0	0.2	83.4	0.7
Indonesia	7.3	29.1	0.4	0.5
Other Asian Countries	3.5	1.4	0.8	76.6
Europe	0.4	0.2	0.4	11.8
USA and Canada	0.6	0.2	0.4	3.4
Others	0.9	1.4	0.5	4.2
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *The Population of Singapore* (Saw, 2012, p.70, Table 4.5)

From the table above, it is clear that Singapore receives a culturally and ethnically diverse group of immigrants<sup>1</sup>. Most of the ethnically Chinese immigrants come from Malaysia, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan; but Singapore also receives ethnically Chinese immigrants from other parts of the world, such as Europe and other parts of Asia. Similarly, a significant number of people classified under the ethnic group “Others” also reside in Singapore, and they come from all over the world. This means that cultural diversity can be found inter- and intra-ethnically and thus increases the complexity of community integration.

## **EXISTING STATE INSTITUTIONS IN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

Various state agencies are involved in the larger goal of immigrant integration, with the National Integration Council having an oversight role in ensuring that space, resources and opportunities are provided for people of different nationalities and ethnic groups to integrate.

### **National Integration Council**

The National Integration Council (NIC) was set up in April 2009 to promote and foster immigrant integration among Singaporeans, new immigrants

<sup>1</sup>Please note that Table 1.3 refers to the composition of resident population only.



and foreigners. It aims to drive integration efforts in a comprehensive, sustainable and ground-up manner (National Integration Council, 2010a). According to the organisation's website, it seeks to:

- Increase awareness of the importance of integration for our continued success as a society and nation.
- Help newcomers adapt to the Singaporean way of life, including helping them better understand local cultures and social norms.
- Grow common spaces and provide platforms for Singaporeans and new immigrants to interact.
- Facilitate the formation of friendships and shared experiences among Singaporeans and new immigrants, so as to foster mutual understanding and acceptance through their interactions.
- Foster and deepen emotional attachment and a sense of belonging to Singapore among new immigrants.

The NIC comprises leaders from government, the community and the private sector. Chaired by the Minister for Community, Culture and Youth, Ms Grace Fu, the Council meets regularly to deliberate on strategies and programmes to improve integration outcomes. Encouraging and facilitating collaborative immigrant integration efforts among the public, people and private (3P) sectors, the NIC is guided by three principles. First, the NIC believes that "integration is a two-way process". Both locals and new immigrants will have to reach out to one another to build relationships before successful integration can take place. Second, "everybody has a role to play" in facilitating immigrant integration. No matter a person's place in society, he or she can contribute to the efforts of immigrant integration, especially in his or her daily life. Contributions like these are more likely to be far-reaching and sustainable. No effort is too small or insignificant in this cause. Third, the NIC acknowledges that "integration takes time". Most new immigrants have spent a big part of their lives in another country with different values and belief system, culture, and history. It takes time for new immigrants to adapt to local norms and customs. The NIC encourages Singaporeans to be determined and patient as efforts committed to immigrant integration takes time to bear fruit (National Integration Council, 2010a).

Immigrant integration can take place in various common spaces in Singapore. The NIC recognises this, and hence provide the strategies for the four National Integration Working Groups (NIWGs). The four working

groups focus their attention on four channels which can facilitate immigrant integration, which are (1) the community, (2) media, (3) schools, and (4) workplaces (National Integration Council, 2010b).

The National Integration Working Group for Community (NIWG-Community):

*... seeks to bring together Singaporeans, new immigrants as well as foreigners in the community, through different platforms and shared interests such as sports, arts and volunteerism. It works closely with community stakeholders such as grassroots organisations, clans and associations, voluntary welfare organisations, as well as self-help groups to develop innovative ground-up integration initiatives. NIWG-C works closely with them in developing innovative and sustainable ground-up integration initiatives, while providing both networking and resource support. (National Integration Council, 2010c)*

The National Integration Working Group for Media (NIWG-M):

*... plays an important role in reaching out to people to foster greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity that we have in Singapore. It is also a platform to raise awareness about the importance of integration and ground up initiatives. As such, the NIWG-Media works closely with various partners to leverage various media platforms such as news publications and television/radio talk-shows to maximise outreach and highlight the importance of mutual understanding, co-operation and community spirit. It also helps to promote learning and appreciation of other races as well as nationalities. As the NIC's public communications co-ordinator, NIWG-M also assists with media matters relating to integration events. (National Integration Council, 2010d)*

The National Integration Working Group for Schools (NIWG-Schools) recognises:

*Schools are natural sites for immigrant integration to take place, as it is a common space for children of different ethnic groups and nationalities to learn and play. Opportunities for integration exist both in and out of the classroom, ranging from group work to various co-curricular*



*activities... (NIWG-Schools) capitalises on this, and partners schools and educational institutions to promote the interaction and integration of students, regardless of their nationalities. In addition to promoting opportunities for friendships between local and international students, the NIWG-Schools also nurtures a culture of mutual respect and understanding among the students. A diverse and well-integrated student body enriches our students' schooling experience, and enables them to develop their cross-cultural skills which will be essential for them to thrive in a diverse workforce and community. (National Integration Council, 2010e)*

The National Integration Working Group for Workplaces (NIWG-Workplaces):

*... engages partners in various industries to foster inclusive and harmonious workplaces. This involves raising awareness of the importance and benefits of being culturally sensitive, identifying workplace initiatives that support diversity management practices, and enhancing employers' capabilities to effectively manage their diverse workforce. To help organisations do this, the NIWG-Workplaces developed a Workplace Diversity Management toolkit. The kit includes a self-assessment tool to evaluate companies' state of diversity management and contains examples of initiatives that they could introduce to foster workplace harmony. The toolkit also contains a guide for managers to be more effective in understanding and managing diverse teams. (National Integration Council, 2010f)*

## **People's Association**

Besides the role of the NIC in providing oversight and funds to the goal of immigrant integration, the People's Association (PA) is another national organisation that is actively involved in helping new citizens integrate into Singapore. It was formed with the historical context of the racial riots and political strife in the 1950s–60s (People's Association, n.d.). The social tension made Singapore a poor and divided society with closely-knit communal groups pulling in different directions. The PA was formed to help foster racial harmony and social cohesion to form the basis for nation building. Twenty-eight Community Centres were set up as meeting grounds for various ethnic, language and religious groups. PA offers a wide range of programmes to cater to Singaporeans from all walks of life — connecting people, and people to government.

As the social fabric in Singapore becomes more diversified, the PA has subsequently not been only involved in promoting racial harmony but also immigrant integration between Singaporeans and new immigrants. Events and dinners are organised during festive and celebratory seasons. Everyone regardless of ethnicity and nationality are invited to these events. For instance, Lunar New Year Celebrations were held all over Singapore in February 2015. One such celebration that featured a mass reunion dinner for everyone in the community was held in an open field opposite Kim Seng Community Centre (Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng Citizens' Consultative Committee, n.d.). Such community events allow both locals and new immigrants to bask in the festive spirit. New immigrants also get to learn about these events that they may not celebrate in their home countries.

The PA has an arm that focuses specifically on community integration. Established in April 2012, the PA Integration Council aims to channel efforts by the PA to help new immigrants integrate into Singapore ("New integration council for locals, immigrants set up", 2012). Volunteers, also known as the Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs), help new citizens and Permanent PRs settle in the community, providing platforms for them to interact with and bond with the local residents. They actively reach out to new citizens/PRs by conducting house visits to welcome and invite them to grassroots activities, to expand their social network. INCs also organise various grassroots activities such as welcome tea parties and festive celebrations to engage new citizens/PRs ("Integrating New Citizens and Permanent Residents", 2010). Through their participation in various integration-centric programmes and social activities, the new immigrants can make friends and develop mutual understanding with their neighbours and other residents in the community.

For instance, on November 1, 2014, the PA organised an event, "One Community Fiesta 2014". The event was supported by 12 immigrant and clan associations, and drew over 4,000 Singaporeans and new immigrants. New citizens performed alongside locals during the event, and even sang local songs in Malay. The event brought together immigrant associations and grassroots organisations, which co-created 50 community service projects as part of the SG50 celebrations ("Locals and new citizens come together to celebrate friendship", 2014).

## **CONCLUSION**

The inevitability of immigration in a global city like Singapore calls for sustained efforts in immigrant integration. While there are challenges involved in this process due to the diversity of immigrants in Singapore, there is a governance framework in place to ensure that this aspiration is



realised. The state ensures fair policies, protecting the interests of citizens and migrants, and provides a conducive environment that acts against hate speech against migrants as well as locals, and the infrastructure to allow locals and foreigners on the island to peacefully co-exist.

The local and immigrant communities in Singapore are also crucial in the effort at immigrant integration. The rest of the chapters present how local and immigrant community leaders discuss the issues surrounding immigration. It also showcases immigrant associations in Singapore and how they attempt to integrate their community into Singapore.

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## **Chapter 2**

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# Voices on Immigrant Integration

## CHAPTER 2: VOICES ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

If public policy is to adequately address the concerns of immigrant integration, it is imperative that the sentiments of immigrants and locals towards these issues are discussed. It is also important to find out, from locals and immigrants alike, the types of social norms and values that anyone living in Singapore should adapt to in order to integrate. To facilitate such discussion, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) convened four Closed-Door Dialogues (CDDs) from April to May 2013 between leaders of immigrant and local associations to gather their views on various issues regarding immigration and immigrant integration in Singapore. Each CDD brought together participants of different ethnic groups and nationalities, namely the Chinese, Indians, Filipinos and people of other ethnicities. More than 40 organisations were represented at these sessions. Although the findings from these CDDs are not generalisable, they provide valuable insight on what immigrants and locals think about various thorny issues concerning immigration and immigrant integration in Singapore.

IPS also held a conference entitled “Community Leaders Integration Conference” (CLIC) in November 2013 to further discuss the findings of the CDDs. During this conference, leaders and representatives of ethnic self-help groups and immigrant associations shared more insights on integration as well as personal reflections and experiences. The conference consisted of three panels in total. The first panel brought together representatives of different immigrant associations, who gave a short introduction of their respective associations and how their work helped with integration efforts. The second panel consisted of a mixture of locals and new immigrants, and panellists identified the social norms and values essential for immigrant integration to take place. The last panel also comprised of locals and new immigrants, and panellists spoke extensively about their lived experiences of socially integrating into Singapore.

This chapter draws on the content discussed during the CDDs and the conference, in an effort to provide a nuanced and comprehensive coverage of the various views immigrants and locals have on integration issues.

### **FINDINGS OF CLOSED-DOOR DIALOGUES AND COMMUNITY LEADERS INTEGRATION CONFERENCE**

If we are to better appreciate immigrant integration processes, it is crucial that we examine the motivations for people to enter Singapore, their initial reactions and shocks and what they had to learn to accommodate living in



a society with differing norms and values to their countries of origin. This will be what the first section of this chapter will cover. Subsequently, we discuss views related to how immigrant integration can be better achieved.

### **Motivations to come to Singapore**

What motivates people to enter a new society has much bearing on their subsequent integration. Such motivations are a product of various push factors from the migrant's country of origin. These include a lack of economic opportunities, political instability or social exclusion of particular groups. There are also factors that attract people to various countries. These range from a vibrant economy, open immigration policies, the ease of recognition of qualifications and cultural similarity. Some societies, such as those in the Gulf, do not provide prospects for migrants to become full-fledged members of the community. In these cases, migrants build their own communities and feel little allegiance to their host societies. They orientate themselves to their countries of origin and make plans to return when they have fulfilled their mostly economic goals for migration. In other societies, such as Singapore, the prospect of permanent residence and naturalisation is very real for skilled migrants. Therefore, some migrants who value citizenship may be more open to integrate into Singaporean society.

### ***Economic opportunities***

According to the responses gathered from the CDDs, reasons for coming to live in Singapore are predominantly economic in nature. Foreigners coming into Singapore are either here on their own accord to seek a better life, or are sent here on a work assignment, and some compensated handsomely for having to relocate. Besides employment, some also come to seek professional advancement or to enrol in an educational course. The theme of economic and job opportunities features predominantly for many.

*I guess what I like most about Singapore is that there is a huge potential for growth and opportunities. There are many opportunities out here. But what I also dislike is that this is somehow hand in hand with competing in a rat race.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

*Here in Singapore I can get global exposure, especially in the tech industry. There are a lot of tech companies here and I think for a person in my profession it is a good place to be.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

### ***Prospect of enhancing quality of life***

Singapore offered the possibility for migrants to enjoy a high quality of life. Immigrants often noted the ease of access to material comforts and stable physical infrastructure including well-developed communication and transport networks.

### ***Stable political system***

For migrants who came from political systems that were marked by frequent chaotic episodes, Singapore provided a stable system where a high premium was placed on organising society based on the rule of law. As a participant from a CDD expressed,

*Coming from Indonesia, Singapore is very well organised and the rule of law is implemented efficiently here.*

— Indonesian participant

### ***Multiculturalism***

Many migrants in the course of the CDDs and conference expressed how much they appreciated the multicultural governance framework and practice in Singapore.

They noted the ability of people of different races and religions to live in harmony despite their differences. This feature was particularly attractive for immigrants who were looking for a country of tolerance and an absence of sectarian violence.

*I love the Tekka market here. Not for what it offers, but the harmonious way in which people [of all races] congregate there. I am really touched and impressed how well they work together, so this is something that really stays with me wherever I go in the world.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

*... in Singapore we are a largely tolerant society in terms of religion. Although Indonesian is 90% Muslim, many of those who are coming to Singapore are non-Muslim as well. It is not so much religion that plays a part that makes us [adapt] to the society but it is the society around us, which is very tolerant in whatever religion that we are practising. I have many friends of different religions: Muslim friends, Christian friends, even freethinkers. They really live here happily in Singapore.*

—Yoga Dirga Cahya, an Indonesian conference panellist at  
CLIC



The multicultural framework also reduced inequalities based on racial privileges. Some noted the role that the English language played in ensuring meritocracy in Singapore.

*I was in an English-medium school in India. In my ancestral village, there were children who were 10 times more intelligent than I was. If they had access to the English books I had... our roles would have been reversed. In Singapore, English as a medium of instruction... ensures we don't get the worst kind of class discrimination invented in the post-colonial world.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

### ***Marriage and family motivations***

Sometimes, coming and remaining in Singapore was based on the presence of a life partner who wanted to remain in Singapore. This motivation was particularly important for those from developed societies who did not have an intention to migrate for their economic betterment.

### ***Initial surprises about the Singaporean way of life***

Culture shocks are inevitable as people move into a new society. The process of understanding and adapting to these shocks reveal both the ease at which people can enter a society and the extent to which migrants are interested in integration. There are both structural and personal constraints that affect an individual's attitude towards seeking assimilation into local culture. First though, it is necessary to examine what new immigrants found foreign about Singaporean culture, with regard to both its people and the environment.

### ***Multiculturalism in practice***

To many, one of the distinctive characteristics of Singapore was the multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious way of living. For migrants who hailed from countries that were largely monocultural or at least stressed such uniformity, Singapore offered a unique environment where cultures blended.

*Some Singaporean Chinese don't speak Mandarin while there are many non-Chinese Singaporeans who can speak very good Mandarin.... Singapore is unique because of the multicultural/multi-lingual society. For example, my Indian neighbours tell me about Indian culture and I tell them about Chinese culture. We cannot get the same experience back in China.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

### ***Distant and reserved interactions***

Perhaps like any other urban city, there is little interaction between strangers going about their daily lives. New immigrants found the environment and the Singaporean psyche to be distant and reserved. For immigrants such as those from the Philippines, who were used to a more easy-going atmosphere where everyday interactions are less formal and people more open, the reserved nature of Singaporeans was something they had to get used to.

*Maybe because Filipinos are very warm, I thought the same of Singaporeans but it is hard to get a smile back, I think you all are just reserved.*

— Participant from the “Filipinos” session

*I believe Singaporeans don't necessarily interact with others because they are very busy... so many activities... except when you meet other parents at the playground and say “hello”.*

— Participant from the “Filipinos” session

However, upon further interactions with Singaporeans, some immigrants noted that there was a clear distinction between how they conducted themselves in public and private sphere — it was found that local Singaporeans were more welcoming where interaction with these new immigrants were of a personal basis. For example, one participant was warmly received by her landlords and their family.

*The uncle and aunty, they treat me as their child, even boiling water for me or cooking together during Christmas and New Year. I think I am very lucky, I have no problems with my neighbourhood.*

— Participant from the “Filipinos” session

### **Social norms and values that help with integration<sup>2</sup>**

During the CDDs, participants were asked to discuss in groups about the important social norms and values in Singapore. Each group was to come up with a list of social values and norms. At the end of the sessions, each participant was asked to write down the top three norms or values that they

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<sup>2</sup> This section is adapted from a report written by Dr Chiang Wai Fong. The full report can be found via this link: [http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/10/WF\\_Community-Leaders-Dialogue-Report\\_280116.pdf](http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/10/WF_Community-Leaders-Dialogue-Report_280116.pdf)



think were most important for living in Singapore. There were no set choices to pick from; participants were free to contribute their views.

Three values stood out as the most important in Singapore and for immigrants to learn to be able to integrate into Singapore society, namely: (1) respect for diversity, (2) orderliness, and (3) fairness and honesty in government and society.

### ***Respect for diversity***

Participants were concerned about respecting diversity in all forms, including linguistic, religious, cultural, social and nationality. To them, it is important to promote inclusiveness and harmony, keep an open mind to other cultures, and to accept and adapt to diversity. Both local Singaporeans and immigrant participants were appreciative of the diversity found in Singapore, in terms of cultures, food and language, etc., and agreed on the importance of enhancing inclusiveness and harmony in the various dimensions of social life.

There was consensus at the dialogue sessions that speaking a common language would facilitate communication and forge ties, and this has to start with mutual respect of one another's cultures and histories. Language is an important tool for interaction; participants acknowledged that it is important to accept and respect the cultures of the person whom we are interacting with, at the same time, respecting and adapting to the language environment that we are now in.

However, some participants thought that there should be some flexibility in language usage to help new immigrants settle down in Singapore. A Chinese national living in Singapore for the past five years pointed out that,

*..... when new immigrants come in, when they have difficulties, if you are able to help them with their mother tongues, if you are able to offer them a point with the native analogy to understand, you will greatly help them to integrate into the society rather than to highlight their differences.*

Whose culture and history take precedence seems to be a point of contest for the participants. Local-born Singaporeans seem to think that immigrants should pick up local customs and habits to help in integration. A local-born Singaporean shared his view,

*..... if our new immigrants, [who are] calling Singapore home, take the extra effort to pick up one of the most important attributes of integration — [learning to speak] English... not*

*as profound but basic words, simple basic English, and understand some of our localities, that will be excellent.*

From the dialogues, we found that first generation new immigrants tended to associate more with the cultural heritage and mother tongue of their country of origin, while their children and grandchildren born here acknowledged the generational shift in association to cultural and language identity.

### **Orderliness**

For this category, the discussion centred around behaviours that are thought to be condoned by the Singapore society and people at large to maintain an orderly, safe and clean society. These include respecting the rule of law, observing social orderliness and social etiquettes, like queuing, not speaking loudly in public, not littering and not jaywalking. As such, “Singapore is a fine country” appears to be a characteristic that many participants identified with, particularly in the legal sense.

Both immigrants and locals agreed that Singaporeans are generally law-abiding citizens. Both local Singaporeans and immigrant participants agreed that social and legal rules allow for a more efficient and orderly society to develop. They also acknowledged that maintaining orderliness and social etiquettes are important. It was highlighted that, as with any community of practice, new immigrants may require a transition period to acquire some of these social behaviours. For example, queuing is not found in some other Asian countries, and came as a shock to some new immigrants when they realised the extent to which it is practised here. However, once the new immigrants have gotten used to it, they appreciated this social norm for its efficiency, orderliness and fairness.

While there was much appreciation for the safe and efficient society upheld by law-abiding citizens, there were questions raised as to whether Singaporeans were too conditioned to following the rules, resulting in little human touch, and if Singapore society is too structured by rules and regulations, without which the society may not function as well. Another observation shared by participants was that, there could be several interpretations to a social rule or norm, and highlighted the need to have more education to enhance the awareness of the general public of these norms.

### **Fairness and honesty in government and society**

The third set of important social values and norms include fairness, honesty, meritocracy, transparency and integrity. Many immigrants were appreciative of the high level of fairness and transparency upheld in



government sectors, the workplace and the social sphere. Meritocracy, which opens up equal opportunities, was also well received by both the local Singaporeans and foreign immigrants.

In the earlier section, we discussed the motivations of immigrants to come to Singapore, their initial surprises living in the Singapore space and the social norms and values that are accepted as necessary for integration into Singaporean society. In the next section we examine what immigrant and local community leaders believe is necessary if we were to have better integration of locals and foreigners in our midst.

### **Targets of immigrant integration**

A fundamental point that needs to be resolved at the onset of any discussion on integration pertains to the question as to who should be targeted for integration. During the CLIC, speakers had differing opinions. Dr Ameen Talib, a third generation Singaporean Arab, urged Singaporeans to be more discerning when using the word “immigrants”, believing that the term should only refer to people who have received their citizenship or permanent residency. As such, integration efforts should only be directed at new citizens as well as permanent residents. He also suggested that by acknowledging that many of the foreigners that Singaporeans see on the street are transients, the discontent and anxiety of Singaporeans towards immigration could be managed.

*When we talk about integration and assimilation, I tend to be interested in the people who were getting citizenship and permanent residency, not the transients. I expect the transient workers to maintain their identity; I expect the transient workers to not really want to assimilate, because they are here for three to four years and they are packing up and going back home, so they want to maintain strong links with home, they want to maintain their identity and they are not really interested in making any kind of long-term plans in the country — so let it be, that's fair.*

*... some people are probably afraid of or think that there are too many foreigners are coming in. The only problem is the speed the influx. Actually if we look at the numbers, the speed is not really that great when we look at the number of people getting PRs and citizenship. It is only the high influx on the street — when we walk on the street we see a lot of foreign people. So a lot of Singaporeans have that fear. Which is why I said we need to get the Singaporeans [to] understand that what you see on the street are not people*



*coming to settle here forever, that a lot of them are transients. The Dubai people are not panicky when they walk on the streets and they see foreigners, because they know they are not going to settle there forever. So we are actually getting a decent number of people to keep us going, there are a lot of people coming here because we need foreigners to keep the country going, I think people should be more relaxed about it.*

The opinion that Singaporeans will be more accepting if they are cognisant, just like citizens of the Emirates, that the many people on their streets are there only for a short phase, was challenged. Danish Sultan, vice-president of the Singapore Pakistani Association and conference panellist, notes during the CLIC,

*... the experience on the street that we face. It doesn't say whether this person is a PR or a citizen, it is just an experience with that particular person, with that particular community. This is particularly the case in Singapore since new citizens and migrants are often racially similar, unlike in other societies where it is easy, simply based on phenotypes to distinguish between citizens and transients.*

Therefore, in the Singaporean case, some attempts to also integrate immigrants who may not be eligible to naturalise in the long term are necessary if social cohesion is to be maintained.

### **Motivation to integrate**

Earlier we discussed the different motivations foreigners to reside in Singapore. Those who came with the intention of fulfilling an educational course or work placement were less likely to show initiative in integrating into the local community or social networks.

*For students with the intention of being a PR, they are driven towards... "I need to score good grades, get a stable income and settle down in Singapore." So there are really extremes in perspective; some really come with the determination of being Singaporean in the long run, but it's not true for everyone.*

— Participant from the "Others" session

During the conference, panelist Pradeep Paul drew on his family's experience and sought to explain why the transient economic migrants are less willing to integrate into Singapore society. He rationalised this based



on how global talent moves internationally and accepted that they are not likely to settle deeply in any particular locality.

*What's happening here now is people come here and people come from global economies and the jobs take people around. So some people come here with the feeling. My brother is a case in point: He is a banker and he was here for some time, now he is in Dubai. And I meet a lot of these people again — a lot from the Indian community — but they come here and they don't want to integrate as much because they don't know how long they are going to be here, so they don't want to do the hard work which some people have done... there are some who just see Singapore as a transit stop because they don't know where [they] will be three years from now, and they will go to Dubai and London and Japan and New York. That's the nature of the world today. So we have to be accepting of the fact that there are some people who will see us as a transit stop. And if we can welcome them and make them part of our fabric for those three years or five years, fantastic; if we can't, [at least] we've tried.*

Nevertheless, not all temporary sojourners to Singapore make the economic decision to tap exclusively expatriate networks and avoid trying to blend into a society from which they might be uprooted quickly. There are immigrants who possess self-initiative and personality to immerse themselves in the culture they are in.

*Locals grow up here and they already have friends. When you go to a different country, there will be a lot of movement of expatriates coming and going. This is not your home base. Maybe you have to go search out for other people, you need to [take initiative] and seek out platforms to get to know locals.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

*As someone who has worked in many countries, learn to go with the flow, learn to stop insisting on your local way of doing things, word of advice — find out how to blend.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

*For example, when you meet your neighbours, if you take the initiative — other people will reciprocate. So I think it is*



*important to keep doing it even if the person doesn't smile back.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

*How much effort do you want to make in integrating into your new home. I know some PRC friends who can speak Singlish in a few short years, and do Singaporean things. Some still cannot integrate after 20 years.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

## Challenges of immigrants to integrate

### **Language use in Singapore**

As language is a tool to communicate with other people and instrumental to immigrant integration, the unique linguistic landscape Singapore posed challenges to new immigrants, and they had to put in some effort when it came to the language styles used in Singapore. While many immigrant participants at the dialogue appreciated the diversity of official languages in Singapore, they had a particularly hard time trying to understand Singlish. Many also responded that it took some time for them to pick it up.

*I think [Singlish] is definitely a barrier for some international students, who are not able to mix with locals because of the slang that is used here.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

*When I first moved into a hostel, I was greeted by this Indian uncle who was a security guard. He spoke fantastic Singlish that I got lost in, it took me a few years just to get used to it. This was one of the very strong impressions I got when I first came to Singapore.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

Conversely, Singlish was also seen as a marker of localisation and, while challenging to some, was seen as a true marker of successfully “going native”.

*What shocked me a lot was that Singaporeans I met didn't seem to like Singlish. But I thought it was really cool, and really, you only can fit in if you can talk like a local right? It is uniquely Singaporean, and if you are moving here, you should try to acquire it.*

— Participant from the “Others” session



During the conference, panellist Dr Ji Yun, Assistant Professor of the Department of Buddhist Research in the Buddhist College of Singapore, explained some misunderstandings Chinese immigrants have about the language medium in Singapore, and reiterated the importance of learning English as it is the medium of communication between the different races in Singapore. Below is an excerpt of his speech.

*Another difference is the language, the so-called mother language policy. It is kind of confusing; it confused me. Mother language is supposed to be the first language but here the mother language is the second or even the third language here. Actually the first language here in Singapore is English. According to the survey two or three years ago, more than half of Singaporean families use English. So the first language is English, but to the Mainland Chinese, because we have been told that here the mother tongue of the Singaporean Chinese is Mandarin, so actually there is no need for us to learn English at all, no need for me to use English. That kind of mother language policy may be a hindrance for the new immigrants to integrate to the society. Because you know Singaporeans are not all Chinese... [there are] the others, for example, my new friend from Pakistan. If the new immigrants really want to integrate into this new society, the first thing and the most important thing is to learn English.*

A further point about language was brought up by Director of IPS Janadas Devan, during the CLIC. He pointed out that learning the same language is not enough – knowing how the same language is used and what do locals really mean when certain expressions are used is important for immigrants to integrate into Singapore. He elaborated,

*I got an email from a friend of mine this morning about the problems of integration in Britain. This was [regarding] integration amongst the Commonwealth countries — a little feature that appeared in the British press about what the English mean when they say certain standard phrases like “It is interesting”. The foreigners think that [the British think] it is really interesting or they [the British] find it interesting, [but] what it means is actually “I am not interested”. There is a whole list of things and I was very amused to read this. When the British say, “I hear what you say”, what they really mean is “I disagree and do not want to hear anything more”. The foreigners think it means he accepts my point of view.*



*When they begin a sentence or response by saying “with the greatest respect”, what they really mean is “you are an idiot” but the foreigner thinks the British is saying “he is listening to me”. When he says, “I am sure it is my fault”, he really means “it is your fault”. But the foreigner thinks that he really does mean what he says. Or when he says, “you must come for dinner”, what the Englishman means is that “this is not an invitation I am just being polite” and the foreigner thinks “I will get an invitation soon”. When I was reading this list, what I was amused by is that actually I use all these phrases, and I mean what the English mean. But we need a similar kind of translation for our own immigrants in Singapore. Because it is at this level of ordinary discourse that you find a lot of misunderstandings. It is in the idiom, it is in the language; it is in the unspoken that a lot of misunderstandings occur in an everyday level.*

### ***Comfort in forging ties with people of the same background***

For those who were already here on a more permanent status, as PR or new citizen, some found it difficult to break into local social networks as more initiative was needed on their part. As a result, some found it easier and less stressful to join existing expatriate networks through their workplace, schools or communities based on nationalities, e.g., the British Club or the American Club.

*I felt, as an expat, there was nobody who reached out to us. I made my own way. I am extroverted, that is my personality, and I reached out and I made friends, but it wasn't easy.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

*[In international schools] the students of the same region will flock together because I think they've got more in common with their culture, lifestyle and food, etc. We are not integrating because we're too comfortable with the friends we already have.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

Some participants expressed that the “birds of same feather flocking together” phenomenon was to be expected. Immigrants are naturally bound to seek primordial ties for building up social capital in a new environment. Such “gravitation towards commonalities” should be seen as a norm. During the CLIC, panellist Koh Buck Song, a writer and editor keen on social issues, shared that it was human nature to seek company with



those who are of similar ethnic background, and that this reality poses a limitation to our expectations of integration.

*[I would] just like to make a point about limits on our expectations of integration. To illustrate my point: In the ongoing Singapore Biennale Art Festival, there is an exhibition at the National Museum called “A Changed World: Singapore Art of the 1950s and 70s”. There is a painting by Liu Kang, who is one of our pioneer artists. It is titled “National Day”. It was painted in 1967. It depicts a scene from the Padang looking towards City Hall. You can see huge flags and bunting celebrating National Day and there are a number of human figures depicted — Indians, Malay and Chinese. I was reading a book that accompanies the exhibition and the writer observed that, while it depicts [a] multiracial gathering, the people are all within their own ethnic groupings. So you have a group of maybe three people of Indian origin and another four people of Chinese origin and two others there, and so on. The writer also made the comparison with another much earlier painting called “The Esplanade from Scandal Point” which was painted by artist J.T. Thomson in 1851. Similar scene of people, this time including Europeans in the picture. But the same characteristic is that while it is a multiracial grouping, the people who were there were within their own ethnic groupings, and I think no matter what we may say or put on our wish list, this is the reality of human nature which goes back to 1851. I think [this] is still with us, which is that our lives are compartmentalised. So there is a part of us that can be very willing to give our time and our energy and space to integrating with people of different ethnic origins, but most of the rest of the time we actually live in our own separate worlds. That is our nature and I don’t think it will change very much... I think there is a limit to what we wish for in integration. There is a level of integration that we can aspire towards but we cannot go beyond that.*

Communities with larger numbers in Singapore tend to be comfortable with one another as they have a space in the Singapore community, and this therefore reduces the willingness to integrate. Mr Yoga’s insights into the Indonesian community in Singapore bear this out.

*There are about 200,000 Indonesians here in Singapore from the various levels of livelihood like domestic workers:*



*We have about 120,000 which is the bulk of it, then we do have professionals around 20,000, then students and then all the businessmen, etc. Our community is actually very strong within; just now I spoke to some of the panellists and they mentioned that we have a sizeable number of Indonesians but we don't really hear much about the Indonesian community activities here. So maybe it is because we are too contented amongst ourselves and we have this strong internal community. We realise that we need to expose [ourselves] more to the other communities... [It] is very important for us to have the interaction between the other community leaders... so that in the near future we can have more interaction with the rest of the communities, not only [with] Singaporeans but also [with other] immigrants as well.*

Singapore's success in attracting a large number of foreign talent and the ease through which social media allows people to connect and reconnect increase this likelihood of those from similar countries of origin to congregate. As Mr Pradeep points out,

*If you ask me, we are victims of our own success. Twenty years ago when I came to Singapore, I had no friends. Being a person who likes a drink, I used to invite my friends and my colleagues — the first friends you make are the people at work — so I invited people at The New Paper to my home and those parties were full of Singaporeans; Chinese, Malay, Indians — but Singaporeans. Some from Malaysia — again Chinese, Malay — and we had a great time. It was like a potluck; they brought some food, we cooked up some food and we had a great time.*

*Today, because of our success, because [of] how big and successful Singapore has become, when I have a party, there are many, many times that I look around, standing at my bar, looking around the crowd and I say, I am actually doing myself and this country a disservice. The room was full of people who went to school with me in Calcutta. And while it was a great evening for me, I was actually doing the wrong thing. But I don't know about you all, I have a very average-sized home and there is a limit to how many people I can host. And much less the certain number of people with their spouses, that's all I can have. With Singapore becoming such a beautiful economic destination, lots of*



*companies have grown and people who went to school with me have found jobs here. And with social media playing its part, suddenly you get an email or a call from someone who says "Hey I am in town, I am here with the Tata Group and I have joined HP and I am here!" And before I know it, I have woven them into my social circle, and that's it, suddenly I have friends who went to school with me, who went to college with me, who worked with me in India and I am regressing instead of progressing, where I should be calling people who are not my race to my home. I am actually going backwards. And I am guilty. I am absolutely guilty and I am aware of it. I do try to make amends, but this is something we have to be aware of.*

### **Existing class divide between locals and immigrants**

The class divide between the locals and the expats has led to problems in immigrant integration, such as reducing chances for interaction. For instance, the children of expats go to international schools while the local children go to public schools. Expats tend not to be in the heartlands where the local community tend to live. This hinders immigrant integration. Mr Pradeep's reflection of his own experience reveals this.

*I don't know if I am touching a raw nerve but I wonder whether the divide is actually more financial. I found that the Indian expat community consisted of people who were coming in and living in a certain part of town, going to a certain school, and entertaining themselves in a certain part of town. They were not mingling with the people who are living in the heartlands, which tended to be the local Singaporean Indian community. So was it because of lack of integration because of a connection between them or was it just that the financial division kept them at different ends of the island?*

*I live in Lorong Chuan and some of these friends of mine, when I invite them and I tell them where I live, they don't know where I live. A lot of these people don't know anything north of Newton Circus. I don't say this with pride, but these are my friends: they live in River Valley Road, work in the CBD, their kids go to some international school and they entertain at Clarke Quay and they are members of Tanglin Club and that's it. Their lives revolve around that part of the island.*



Relatedly, the migrant status of foreign expatriates has always alluded to a higher socio-economic class and therefore one which has caused much tension in recent times, as can be seen in the increasing xenophobia tendencies among locals who are worried about their position in the nation and consequently, their declining sense of a national identity.

Immigrants were aware of such discontent and as some of the participants had experienced such a backlash in their everyday lives.

*I am holding a managerial position and when I need to delegate work to the locals, sometimes they don't follow because of my foreigner status. I understand that Singapore is a small country and you should always prioritise the locals but I feel that we are not here to steal your jobs, we are here to help your economy as well.*

— Participant from the “Filipinos” session

## **Facilitators of immigrant integration**

### ***Positive attitude and personal willingness***

However, there are new immigrants who are willing to go the extra mile to build ties with the local community. Alain Vandendorpe, a panellist in the CLIC who is formerly from Belgium and now a naturalised citizen, exemplified proactivity in stepping out of his comfort zone to connect with the local community. He reflected on his personal experience trying to integrate into the Singapore society. He spoke extensively about the obstacles he faced in various aspects of attaining citizenship and integrating into Singapore: Getting the Singapore passport, enrolling his children into public schools and being more involved in the Singapore society through community service. He reinforced the notion that some immigrants are serious about settling in Singapore and calling Singapore home, and are more than willing to go through inconveniences to be part of the local social fabric. In his own words,

*I have been here for 18 years and moved my family 16 years ago. I made the conscious decision that this is the place where I wanted to settle my camp. Family and children were here so it became a very natural decision for me that I wanted to become a citizen. When I went through the application process, I didn't speak to anyone about it. I kept it very quiet. I could have shared with some of the people I know but I kept it very quiet. My journey is interesting because every time I was trying to integrate myself in the system, there was a bit of [a] hurdle here and*



*there. The first one was to get the passport. Because the customs officer found out that in my passport, that particular year, which was 2000, you ought to be here 180 days that particular year, but she was counting my stamps and I travel quite a bit and I was short of three days that year. So she said, "I am not quite sure, I have to keep your passport and we will do a careful check." I went back home. I had the feeling that after all if they don't want me as a citizen because I am short of three days that year then so be it. It went fine and I got my passport.*

*With all the respect for my Singaporean fellows, I do not consider myself as a Singaporean; I consider myself as a citizen of Singapore because I am not born and bred here so I make that little distinction to my friends. But when you move to [a] country, I think you have to be gracious and understand that you are being hosted by the country. We always feel that we have to make some extra effort to integrate ourselves into the society here. The first thing was the children, and we decided to put the children into local schools. It was a natural decision for us to say we are going to settle here and we need to make sure that our children are mixing with the local community. It became a bit difficult for the school because we wanted to enrol them into Nanyang Primary School and there was such a long queue. We never made it, so we shifted to United World College (an independent school). My two youngest sons are about to finish (their education).*

*And then in year 2000, I wanted to integrate my boys into a community of children of their age. So I decided to bring them into Scouts. I went to see the commissioner and told him, and he said it is difficult because my boys are not in Singapore schools. The enrolment for Scouts is through the local system and my children are not with the local schools so it is not possible. But he said, maybe one way is if I decide to become a Scout Master myself and create a troop. The more he talked, the more I was concerned and afraid because I am busy travelling like everyone else. I went back home and I told my wife that the last joke that I heard [that day] was that I wanted my boys to be Scouts and they want me to become a Scout Master. I was never a Scout when I was young. My wife challenged me and said, "You always*



*told me you want more bonding with your boys, now you go for it.*

*So at the age of 40, as everything is taken seriously in Singapore, I went on a fast-track course to become a Scout Master which was a nightmare for me but I did it, got my certificate and we made a unit which is called the Tanglin Falcon — we live in Tanglin area. However, the troop consisted of the classmates of my children who are mostly Japanese and Indian friends. There were no Singaporeans in the group until one day, a Singaporean friend called me, and he said, “Can you bring my son into your troop?” The irony was that we had to integrate a Singaporean boy into a little Scout and I was so happy. These are some anecdotes of our journey to integrate ourselves as a family.*

*I think we do a lot of community service in the family. First my boys do community service with the children and I find it very good. When I was Scout Master I have to fulfil the job week; I was cleaning up HDBs and every time I knocked on the door, the people were afraid. The old lady will slam the door because my face [looked different]. Climbing up the stairs — at that time some HDBs had no lifts — at the age of 40 and you know in this climate, it is not easy for me. My wife for 12 years is working at Changi prison every week. She is a psychologist and therapist so she [is] taking care of that. She is working with organisations like Mendaki and MINDS. I don't think we are a singularity. I can tell you of many PRs in Singapore who are involving themselves and sometimes alone.*

### ***Life stage as both a challenge and facilitator of immigrant integration***

Relatedly, the ease of integration was also dependent on one's life stage. Many new immigrants who started a family here with young children were surprised at the flexibility and ease with which their children seemed to fit in with the local environment as “third-culture kids”. They were able to pick up local culture such as familiarity with customs, foods and language at a faster pace. They were able to act as cultural brokers for their parents or older family members who might have found Singaporean life more challenging. This was, however, only apparent in children who were going to local educational institutions and mixing with Singaporean counterparts. Children who were sent to international schools retained their affiliations



with their home country or possessed a more global Western outlook, as seen in the quote above.

*My daughter (who attends a local primary school) already assimilated within one year here, as compared to me, and I have been here for seven years. Her best friend is Malay. She also identifies herself as Singaporean, not PRC.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

One’s life stage also meant the retention of a social identity that would have been firmly affiliated to one’s home country. Since most new immigrants would have spent their formative years in their home countries, it was naturally harder for them to see themselves as possessing dual identities straddling different nationalities.

*I find that because adults have a stronger sense of a Chinese identity, they cannot assimilate themselves entirely into Singaporean society. Many new immigrants still see China as their “focal point”.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

*His [referring to his son] roots are in Singapore because the seed is planted in Singapore. When you take a Chinese seed and plant it in Singapore, a Chinese plant is not going to grow... The seed was planted in Singapore so it will grow up to be a Singapore tree. You can say that it looks like a Chinese tree, but it is not, and it bears Singapore fruits.*

— Participant from the “Chinese” session

### **Transition to citizenship**

Many mentioned various criteria by which an individual would swing between staying in Singapore as a citizen or moving back home or elsewhere for better opportunities. Besides local policies regarding citizenship or education or even economic opportunities, there were emotional reasons that are hard to pin down.

*It’s where an individual thinks about where he should be, “where can my life be better?” I saw a bartender from California who’s here, and she said she just wants to be here. What makes people stay — it’s not going to be because a bomb doesn’t drop here.*

— Participant from the “Others” session



During the conference, some speakers shared their emotional journey in their transition to citizenship. Both Mr Pradeep and Mr Vandendorre termed the process as “painful”. Mr Pradeep described his experience choosing Singapore citizenship over his former Indian citizenship in the excerpt of his speech below.

*For those who have given up [their] citizenship, you will know the feeling. It hurts when you have to walk away from your previous life. The Singapore government insists on you going and getting your previous passport cancelled. You have to go and get it snipped off at the edges and that you literally have to go to the Indian Embassy and get the edges snipped off and then go back to the Immigration Checkpoint Authority, show it to them and that walk to the Indian Embassy and back — after 40 years of citizenship [this] was very painful. It [was] not easy. So my message is we can't expect a perfect world but there are people who will make the extra effort and now it is up to us Singaporeans to be more welcoming of them because they are making sacrifices to be here with us.*

Mr Vandendorre candidly spoke about the instances when he faced social sanctions since he gave up Belgium citizenship and chose to be a citizen of Singapore. He echoed Mr Pradeep's calls for the general public to be more conscious about the hard choices and sacrifices immigrants made to be a part of Singapore. Below is a transcript of his speech.

*When I got my [Singapore] passport, you cannot imagine the hardship I went through. Even my brothers-in-law called my wife and asked her, “What's wrong with your husband; he has lost his mind. How can he give up his EU passport for a Singapore one?”*

*My eldest son is a young politician in Belgium. He didn't want to talk to me for three months. He told me, “That's it, we never speak. How can you renounce loyalty to your original country?”*

*I am telling you this because it is not an easy decision for someone to cross the bridge and make a decision to be part of this community. It has consequences. You have to manage that. The way I see it is more [that] we are hosted. So I think we have to do a bit more, give more or share to*



*integrate ourselves in the society. There will always be some suspicion.*

*I was travelling a week ago and I happened to go through Brussels for a lunch meeting. When I went to the customs, the police officers all went, “Oh you gave up your Belgium passport.” He [a police officer] has an information screen and he asked me, “Why are you coming to Belgium?” This is painful, you know. Even 12 years after [I became a Singapore citizen] and I told him, “Because I am coming here to see my family”. And then the next question was, “How long are you going to stay?” because I have a limitation which is 90 days. So don’t underestimate decisions made by other people to come. They carry a burden throughout their lives.*

## **Suggestions for improving local-immigrant relations**

### ***Recalibrating class and migrant status***

The participants also raised various points on anti-immigrant sentiments. First, the equation of expatriate to someone in a higher socio-economic bracket is not always necessarily accurate. There is diversity even among the migrant community here in terms of income and choice of lifestyle. Second, when immigrants eventually stay on and naturalise into Singaporean citizens, they too have to contend with the influx of foreigners and the competition for opportunities.

Participant noted that a closed-minded attitude towards immigration would be counterproductive to economic well-being of the country because of the forces of globalisation in a competitive world. As local community leaders articulated during the CDDs,

*The fact is that the world continues to change and evolve. Kids need to pull up their socks and smell the coffee. Perhaps it is a generational thing. They need to know what’s happening in the world and how the realities of life will cause an impact on them. There are a lot of Mainland Chinese students who are smarter, more hardworking and older, and they will swarm the locals out.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session



*How do you educate the young and educated that it is not their right to have these entitlements; right or wrong, foreigners come in and may take the cushy jobs.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

### ***Deconstructing “xenophobia” and discontent***

Participants and panellists at the CLIC shed light on some reasons why there are anti-foreigner sentiments among Singaporeans. During the conference, panellist Wang Xin Bin, a representative from the Hua Yuan General Association of New Immigrants, suggested that stereotypes and prejudice towards people of other nationalities are unfortunately inevitable as long as there are perceived differences. This, however, must be managed.

*First, we have got to be realistic about having prejudices. It is “mission impossible” for us as human beings to eliminate all prejudices or stereotypes. It is just because we are human beings.*

*The prejudice exists not simply between local Singaporeans and foreigners. To be honest, based on my 26 years [of] experience in China before I came to Singapore to study on the government’s scholarship, I also feel tremendous/significant prejudice among the Chinese in China. There is the same issue with people from different provinces or from different cities in China! A typical example is in Shanghai or Beijing — two prominent global cities in China. If the foreigners from other provinces cannot speak Shanghai hua [dialect spoken by the local Shanghai people] or Beijing hua [dialect spoken by the local Beijing people], the local people will seriously discriminate [against] you.*

*Then what can we do about this? The issue is how we can minimise or how we can adjust ourselves. I mean two-way adjustments. We can try not to let this prejudice seriously damage or affect our friendship or even our family. As in the case of your son marrying a foreigner from another province, but not from Shanghai. So that’s the best thing we can do to minimise [the adverse impacts], but this is quite a subjective issue. I don’t know for individual persons what is their tolerance level on this.*

Several participants questioned whether Singaporean’s reactions should to begin with being seen as “xenophobic”. Rather, their reactions may stem



from unhappiness with facets of immigration. As Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser, a moderator at the sessions, highlighted,

*My findings suggest that Singaporeans are quite nice people. In fact, by and large, race relations in Singapore have been quite good. Even when you talk about immigration in Singapore, our attitudes towards immigration and immigrants in Singapore, I found that Singaporeans are quite ambivalent. On one hand, we believe that we need immigrants and foreigners in Singapore; we need all the foreign talent we can get. But at the same time, we also do not really like the competition — it is a threat to our livelihood, and we don't like the crowdedness in public spaces and amenities and infrastructure. But having said that, I think it is not that we are really opposed to competition. I think we are opposed to unfair competition, or what we perceive to be unfair competition. After all, we are brought up to believe in meritocracy and self-reliance, so what is the problem with competition? It is really about the perception that it is unfair that bothers some of us.*

Dr Lai Ah Eng, moderator of one of the panels and a sociologist from the National University of Singapore (NUS), echoed this point calling for caution in the use of the term “xenophobia” as anti-immigration is not part of the social and political climate of Singapore.

*I would even say that let's be careful about that word [xenophobia] because it is a very politically historically loaded. It is imported from the West. They have their own histories of multiculturalism, inter-culturalism and xenophobia. We have our own histories and I dare say that while there might be individuals who are xenophobic or border on the xenophobic, two things that we need to do is to unpack that individual xenophobia or seeming xenophobia and see whether there is really anything xenophobic and not something else. Let's not just throw labels around and be very careful about that. Second, we don't have a history of organised anti-immigration; the one that took place in Hong Lim Park fizzled out by the third demonstration because, interestingly, Singaporeans and perhaps others tell the organisers not to go down that road and to focus on what the problems are.*

### ***Rethinking sites of integration: Education***

Besides discussing the obstacles in creating some form of natural integration, a great part of the dialogue was also about understanding what current forms of integration was taking place in the various immigrant groups — and how these were being adapted or have changed in recent times.

One important point was raised, which is that the diversity in educational options for immigrants in the form of international schools was a big hindrance to natural integration. Since integration at a younger age was deemed more successful, this was called out as another form of unnecessary social divide.

*Unfortunately, in the Indian community we have the most number of international schools. There is a waiting list to go to GIS [Global Indian School]. Unlike the international school kids, those going to mainstream schools make more local friends, and then this is how they integrate their parents too.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

During the conference, Mr Sultan, having lived in both Hong Kong and Singapore for a period of time, reflected on the education system in both societies. He called for a rethinking of the system of restricting locals from international schools and ensuring that foreigners could easily obtain places in local schools so that better interaction could happen between the foreign and local communities.

*We lived in Hong Kong six years before coming to Singapore... they [Hong Kong] had a different education system. Looking at the local system, we were a bit concerned that the kids may not be able to compete because there is a lot of competition in the local system, so we put them into international schools. Now, looking back, I find that we deprived them of an experience.*

*Fortunately, my elder daughter goes to LASALLE College of the Arts and her two best friends are Singaporeans and Chinese. And my son is going to NS this year. So they will get that local connection. What happens is that there are so many international schools in Singapore although in Singapore the language of teaching is English. In Hong Kong it was terrible, because the foreign community don't know Cantonese, so they had to go to English schools. But*



*in Singapore, I can understand if medium of instruction were German, so Germans would need a German school for example. But if we had a system where the expats could join local schools and a certain percentage of Singaporeans can join international schools, it would provide them the exposure with the international community. They'll have friends, there will be more integration and understanding of other cultures, and local Singaporeans will get a lot of exposure. Similarly the international students will get a lot of exposure to the locals.*

In his presentation, Mr Vandendorre also shared his regrets about the lack of interaction with the local community among students in international schools.

*I think the point I want to make is — and this is very much an expression of regret — tonight, one of my sons celebrates his 18th birthday. There will be 100 of his classmates and we have been politely requested to leave home tonight with my wife. They will be — I know his friends, they are from all over the world — Japanese, Indian, Taiwanese, Americans and Australians. I think not a single one will be a true Singaporean. And this is a regret for me because he went to an international school [with] no Singaporeans, at least in his graduating batch. Maybe [think] of building, at the early stage, bridges within the schooling and education system so that we allow more Singaporeans to have free choice. If they want to place their children in an international school, they should be able to do so without asking permission, and that can start at kindergarten.*

Even in mainstream schools, integration can also be compromised by the “customisable” options in terms of language classes and co-curricular activities. One participant noted,

*My son's school has a cricket team. I asked him who else was in it and he said, “Oh, all the expats”. And I asked him about mother tongue lessons. He said, “My Bengali friends go to the association to take Bengali, my Hindi friends go to the Hindi school”, and so on.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

**Rethinking sites of integration: Housing**

Speakers in the conference also spoke about housing arrangements as counter-productive to immigrant integration. Mr Sultan spoke passionately about the local-immigrant divide that arises from the housing policies in Singapore.

*Most of the expats who come here — of course they are not entitled to rent HDB flats — so they put up in condominiums. And that again forms communities and they stay there; even after they get citizenship they continue to be there. So that's not really helping in the integration part as well.*

**Rethinking sites of integration: Personal initiatives**

That aside, the dialogue participants had all in their personal or communal capacity organised or participated in integration efforts. What was fruitful in the discussion was how the immigrant individual could immerse himself or herself in local culture through personal efforts without necessarily going through established immigrant communities or local organisations like the People's Association (PA).

*I think normally, Singaporeans wouldn't go to International Night. They would probably go play futsal, club, [and to] social places where people hang out. I'm pretty sure you can make friends with Singaporeans if you share common interests. That would be a much better way to integrate into society here.*

— Participant from the “Others” session

What worked for many was joining common interest clubs or casual meet-ups that brought together both locals and foreigners. These included sports activities, music or social events.

*I am part of a Singaporean Dragon boating team. I was a founding member actually, and we have four Singaporeans on our team. When we compete, we actually put two flags on the boat, one for Singapore and one for the Philippines.*

— Participant from the “Filipinos” session

**Rethinking sites of integration: Literature and media**

During the conference, several other spaces were also highlighted as potential sites for integration that can be utilised. Mr Koh pointed out that literature and media are effective agents for integration. He suggested that Singaporeans could get to appreciate the diversity of cultures that can be



found here and truly celebrate multiculturalism in the process of reading the literature of different cultures.

*The recently concluded Singapore Writers' Fest is a great example of celebrating multiculturalism. It is the only multilingual festival of its kind. I had the chance to moderate a panel which included a writer from India who read her poetry in Tamil. But we need more of such cross-cultural interfaces. Cross-cultural dinner and dance events are great, but we may need multicultural platforms that have a longer shelf life such as multilingual anthologies, to put together anthologies of literature from all the four languages, in which every poem or short story is translated three times into the other three languages. Given the diversity that we have now, we will have a much bigger task. And we have to do this for the other powerful media, films, television, music and videos.*

Besides translating literary works so that it is more assessable to all cultures in Singapore, Mr Vandendorre suggested that the local newspapers could expose the Singapore population to the existence of different communities in Singapore. This can be done through having special coverage on various communities when they celebrate events specific to their nationality or culture. He said,

*... what I will like to see in The Straits Times — since we have so many international communities — is when an international community celebrate its national day, we have a page on the Belgium community... [same for] the Americans and the Chinese and the Indians... But I don't see that in The Straits Times, and I think that is something we can do to get to learn from each other. My last boy has a girlfriend who is from Bhutan. I have always been dreaming to learn more about the Bhutan families in Singapore — I had no idea about them. I would like to have a full page in the ST about the Bhutan community when they celebrate and it would help me to learn about them. I think little steps and little implementation can help us pull together.*

Relatedly, Clement Mesenas, a panellist representing the Filipino Association of Singapore, pointed out that social media could be used as a medium to facilitate integration. However, he also acknowledged that responsible speech is something to be managed when running a social media platform.



*Social media is god's great gift to mankind. The thing about social media is that it is 24/7; you have the Internet, radio, Facebook and Twitter. It is a wonderful thing. Because of the diaspora of so many races, social media enables all these various people from various parts of the world to keep connected 24/7. Even with the varying time zones they can also stay connected.*

*How do we maintain social responsibility (in terms of responsible freedom of speech) where the social media is concerned? Social media is a new and wonderful thing; what it requires is 24/7 moderation. It is a tough job actually. You have got to come in like a good moderator like we have here to come in at the right time to say a few things to moderate the discussion so that it goes along the lines you feel will be good, sensible discussion of any topic. Moderators of social media platforms have the right to delete offensive statements. Of course, moderators should go into this kind of moderation with a light hand. If you try to suppress all kinds of remarks [that] you just don't like, discussion will die out. You have to moderate with a very light hand, and you find that you can engage so many people around the world 24/7.*

### **Collaborations of community leaders**

On the part of the community leaders themselves, there was a plethora of ideas and initiatives taking place, some as tie-ups with grassroots community clubs. These included partnering up for local festivals such as the *Chingay* parade or for film screenings.

*I have been working closely with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to bring events for Indonesians and Singaporeans to come together. For example we have had several Indonesian movie screenings.*

— Participant from the "Others" session

*There is a festival called the Durga Puja that we hold every year. Twenty thousand people have attended it, and we've been doing it since 1956, organised by the Bengali Association. We have lion dances, we have Indian cultural performances — when Vivian Balakrishnan visited in 2011, he was surprised because he didn't know such a thing was possible. Now we are working with the Singapore Chinese*



*Girls' School's choir to showcase Tagore's songs. These little things also contribute.*

— Participant from the “Indians” session

In relation to these large-scale integration events that community leaders hold, speakers during the conference exposed the need to rethink if these events are always effective in its purpose to facilitate integration. Conference panellist Soh Yi Da, vice-president of the Students' Union in NUS, discussed some of the limitations of university-held integration events and suggested that organic and ground-up initiatives might be better alternatives to large-scale integration events.

*Over the years we have been doing these [integration events] and we have noticed that there is always very strong participation by our international students [but] our local students are not very forthcoming. I think that this is a perception problem because every time we try to say that this is an event where you get to interact with international students, they do not buy that value proposition and they don't really see the point in doing that. So participation of local students has not very been very forthcoming in such integration events. I think it is important for us to rethink the type of initiatives that we are rolling out. It cannot be too contrived and too in-the-face; I think we have to be more subtle in our approaches. For undergraduates like myself I think in the university, we are at the age where we are sceptical and rebellious and we don't like things being forced down our throats, so you need a different approach to engage younger Singaporeans like myself. We believe in things that are organic, things that are genuine, things from the ground up, and I think that promoting integration and reinforcing the types of social norms and values need to be something very organic and done on a day-to-day basis.... To me it is about creating shared experiences through genuine ground-up platforms, things that happens on a day-to-day basis, and I think it is really about building trust amongst individuals and all these will help to really build... and have the type of social cohesion that we want to have in Singapore. I think it is time for us to take this opportunity to rethink what... integration really means.*

*I think that Singaporeans are very obsessed with KPIs and I believe as community leaders you like to organise large-scale events, have lots of people attending with a VIP —*

*looks grand and glam... — but we should think about how much real value [there is] in organising that sort of events. I believe the real approach will be as individuals; you reach out to the people around you, start small, organically grow and build a community. At your own time you host dinners, invite a couple of your friends, help to mix and match different groups of people together and then you slowly build and invite other people to join in so slowly you reduce the social distance between different people — and you build the trust amongst this group itself. I am not a fan of those large-scale events and all, I believe in close intimate interaction where you truly build friendships and camaraderie.*

While these were overt forms of community involvement, there were other small tie-ups that helped these groups provide some form of community service and help. For example, the Bayanihan Society, a Filipino association, partnered with the National Kidney Foundation in blood donations. The Bayanihan Society also provides help for Filipino domestic workers in Singapore through providing skills training and educational courses.

It was also brought up during the conference that times of crises can act as opportunities for integration, as community leaders mobilise assets and resources to help the affected parties. Community leaders can also play the role of rallying people of different nationalities towards a common social cause or goal, and this can greatly facilitate in integration. Mr Yoga pointed out how the Indonesian community, along with locals and members of other communities, were mobilised and worked together during periods of haze.

*I would like to share a bit about what we have done in the past to foster the integration during the haze period early this year. We experienced a very bad haze situation in Singapore which [was] coming from Sumatra and Kalimantan. We do feel bad, the Indonesian community here feels bad and at one meeting we had a discussion about what can we do to show our care to the Singapore society. Although that this is not our fault as the community in Singapore but we share the burden, we share the pain that Singaporeans in Singapore are experiencing. So we set up an indoor care in Singapore. We gave away masks, because it was a time in need so we — not only Indonesians but we also got help from our Singaporean*



*friends and also Filipinos — so that it [fostered] the bonding between the two countries and the reception from the ground and from the society [have] been quite good.*

During the conference, Panellist Dr V. P. Nair, president of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (Singapore), also pointed out that identifying the right community leaders would help in integration efforts. He shared some of the traits of such community leaders.

*...identify community leaders who are accepted and respected by both Singaporeans and new immigrants. [They should be] leaders who can boldly brush aside differences and build on commonalities.*

### **More thoughts on immigrant integration in Singapore**

However, were formalised institutions and activities necessary to facilitate integration? As a conference participant suggested,

*Can't we have integration in Singapore without trying to formalise it? There are all these challenge from the ground because all of us recognise what is a good type of integration — people talking together, people eating, is not the real thing. The real thing is whether integration does not take place. Can we get to the point where one day we will not have to talk about integration but just practise it?"*

The responses to this question were nuanced. While some participants were more pessimistic about the state of national cohesion and immigrant integration if there were to be no conscious and formalised efforts, others thought the disappearance of such formal structures might give rise to opportunities for more ground-up and genuine interaction between members of different communities. Below are some excerpts of speakers' responses to the question.

*Before all this debate on integration, I thought Singapore [was] a wonderful integrated society because you have all kind of religions cultural social and everything. Probably nothing would happen if we didn't discuss it for one year. Maybe it is an opportunity when we disbanded all these associations. It will be an opportunity for all of us to connect with the larger masses. But the unintended consequences may be that there may be resentment amongst people [when] you can't or you are forced not to meet your own people and cannot do what you want to do.*



—Danish Sultan

*Actually there is no need for us to imagine. Just stop one year talking about integration and problems. Why [are] so many of us talking about that? It is because there are real problems of integration. So there's no need for us to imagine [the end of all these efforts]. We need to face it and solve the problems.*

— Dr Ji Yun

*I think it is impossible if we decide to stop all the various associations that deal with racial and religious harmony and the integration process. It will fail completely — we will be setting ourselves back 20 or 30 years. We are a young nation, we are only 48 years old. We are growing and we are still a work-in-progress and we still need to have the sort of integration we have right now.*

— Vincent Schoon, board member of OnePeople.sg

*I have a more optimistic view of human nature and I believe [in] natural socialisation — although there would be cliques and groups forming, that's part of human nature — but over time there of course will be people trying to build bridges across the different groups. But naturally if there are no integration events and... there are bound to be certain conflicts and misunderstandings. These are unavoidable but I think it is important to have such conflicts because it helps to build resilience and helps to improve the overall robustness of this society. If we are always trying to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings, then we are just trying to avoid the unavoidable. So I think we really need to rethink some of these concepts and what we are doing right now.*

— Soh Yi Da

## CONCLUSION

The discussions during the dialogue sessions and conference highlight that education is key for immigrant integration to be successful in Singapore. There could be better linkages between international schools and local schools, so that local students get to interact with international students, who are mostly children of the expat community or new immigrants. At the same time, the international students could expose themselves to the local culture through mingling with the local students. Collaborative bridging events such as sports days and school carnivals could be co-organised by



local and international schools to increase contact between local and international students.

Moreover, awareness about the history and culture of various ethnic groups could be enhanced for new immigrants and locals alike. With understanding of the history of different religions, races and cultures found in Singapore, people could gain mutual respect and appreciation of one another's heritage.

As integration is a two-way process, there are some mindsets that Singaporeans have to unlearn to be more open to immigration, which will in turn facilitate immigrant integration. As Singapore gets more and more cosmopolitan, Singaporeans will have to unlearn the "small city" mindset, and instead mentally prepare ourselves for the "London Effect". The "London Effect" refers to the phenomenon that culturally diverse countries inevitably have; that when any event happens, there will be a community who would like to make their voices heard about it or be invested in it. Singapore has already seen traces of the "London Effect"; Malaysians in Singapore demonstrated against the Malaysian elections which was accused to be rigged in 2013, and other communities celebrate their National Day or Independence Day here in Singapore. By being more conscious about the fact that Singapore is getting more cosmopolitan and on its way to being a global city, locals can grow to be more tolerant of the diversity amidst Singapore.

The state also has a part to play. It was pointed out by several speakers that when Singaporeans feel more secure, Singaporeans become more generous and welcoming towards people coming to our shores. By assuring that opportunities are aplenty and that there is no unfairness in terms of economic opportunities of Singaporeans, the government can help Singaporeans become more secure about life in Singapore and therefore become more accepting of new immigrants.

To ensure that citizenship and permanent residency are only offered to individuals who are genuine about calling Singapore their second home, some speakers suggested it should be mandated that potential citizens and permanent residents go through a minimum amount of community service. Through community service, these individuals could get to know more about the society which they are soon going to be a part of, and they could build local connections with the beneficiaries of these service programmes. It is also suggested that only members who are willing to apply for citizenship for their entire nuclear families should be able to become citizens and permanent residents of Singapore. This is because there are cases whereby families avoid applying for citizenship for their

child to avoid programmes like the National Service, and this is a sore spot for many Singaporeans.

Furthermore, more sites for integration such as the media and literature could be utilised to expose locals and new immigrants alike to the cultural diversity in Singapore. Community leaders could also strive to bring more meaningful and effective programmes to the people when it comes to immigrant integration. Everyone could play a part in their daily lives to build connections with one another.

In the end, the willingness of both local Singaporeans and new immigrants to learn more about each other, interact, and accept one another as fellow citizens of Singapore, is critical. It means the local Singaporeans has to be more open-minded and welcoming to new immigrants, while new immigrants need to step out of their comfort zones and mingle with the local community. As integration is a long process, Singapore might only see the fruits of the extensive efforts put into integration in the next generation.



## **Chapter 3**

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# **Immigrant Associations and their Role in Immigrant Integration**

## **CHAPTER 3: IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

Immigration is sustainable only when the negative impact of immigration is mitigated, with effort from both the government and society. Immigrant integration is hence an ongoing project for all the stakeholders involved. Helping immigrants to settle down in a foreign land and ensuring that they are well adjusted, by familiarising themselves with a set of new norms and values that govern life in a foreign country, lessens the social tensions that can arise from immigration.

This chapter examines the literature on immigrant associations and discusses how they cater to the needs of their respective migrant populations internationally. The relationship between the state and immigrant associations is also briefly explored, before shifting the focus to the landscape of immigrant associations in early Singapore. To understand current immigration associations in Singapore and their role in immigrant integration, some understanding of how these organisations have helped previous generations of newcomers to Singapore is apt.

### **CONCEPTUALISING INTEGRATION**

Before discussing the role of various stakeholders in integration, it is imperative to conceptualise integration. This segment will provide the paper with a framework to talk discuss integration and therefore evaluate the effectiveness of the role of various stakeholders in facilitating immigrant integration, which will be used extensively in Chapters 3 and 4.

Immigrant integration is a multi-faceted concept. In fact, Vaughan Robinson has suggested that integration is a chaotic concept, one that is interpreted differently by different people (Robinson, 1998). There is little prospect for a unifying definition, theory, or model of immigrant integration (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2001).

However, as immigrant integration is a policy goal for many countries, there is a need to come up with an operative definition and measures of immigrant integration. Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008) developed a comprehensive conceptual framework that outlines 10 core domains reflecting normative understandings of immigrant integration, which aptly frames this paper's discussion on integration. The domains of integration include both quantitative indicators, such as education and employment rates, as well as qualitative factors, such as social bonds and language



and cultural knowledge. Each of these 10 domains of integration is briefly elaborated upon in the following section.

### **Domains 1–4**

The first four domains highlight public outcomes that can be quantitatively measured as indicators of immigrant integration. However, it should be noted that achievements in these four areas, namely, employment, housing, education and health, should not be seen as mere markers of integration. They should also be considered as potential means to enhance immigrant integration in societies (Ager & Strang, 2008). Programmes helping to boost employment and educational rates as well as access to healthcare and housing can be effective ways to improve immigrant integration. It is also noted that some of these aspects can be mutually enhancing. For instance, access to education enhances opportunities of employment, assuming the absence of discriminatory hiring practices.

### ***Employment***

Being employed increases opportunities for immigrants to be socially integrated in their host country. First, immigrants get to interact with other members of the society in the workplace (Africa Educational Trust, 1998; Bloch, 1999; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). The workplace acts as an avenue for immigrants to learn about the work ethic, culture, social norms and habits of their host society. Relationships forged in the workplace can act as a valuable source of social support for these immigrants who enter an unfamiliar society. This is especially boosted with integration-friendly human resource policies.

Furthermore, employment is a factor that influences many relevant issues to immigrant integration, such as economic independence, providing opportunities to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance (Africa Educational Trust, 1998; Bloch, 1999; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002).

### ***Housing***

It is well established that favourable housing and living conditions help immigrants feel “at home” and increases their overall physical and emotional well-being (Dutch Refugee Council/ECRE, 2001; Glover, et al., 2001). While indicators of good housing or living conditions include the physical characteristics of housing (e.g., size, quality and facilities available, ownerships if applicable, etc.), the socio-cultural aspects of housing cannot be overlooked. Immigrants attach value to the relationships around their living area. Neighbours provide opportunities for learning from established members of the community (Ager & Strang, 2008).

### ***Education***

Education provides skills and competences in support of subsequent employment, enabling immigrants to become more constructive and active members of the society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Schools are an excellent avenue to socialise and integrate new members of the society. The young tend to be less conscious of differences, and are less averse to interacting with people who are of a different ethnicity, background or nationality. Students can easily bond through sports and working on the same project groups, and share a collective identity while going through the same education system. This is particularly reinforced through National Education, which is part of most public school systems internationally.

### ***Health***

This domain includes two components — the health of the migrant and the access to health services by the migrant. A healthy migrant is able to actively engage himself or herself in the society, which helps in immigrant integration.

### **Domain 5: Citizenship and rights**

To develop an effective policy on integration, the government needs to clearly articulate what citizenship entails and the rights that come with it. Theoretically, equal rights — in terms of access to public services, education and employment — should be accorded to migrants who gain citizenship. In some parts of the world, residents of various statuses are also eligible to various benefits.

### **Domains 6–8**

The following three domains address components of social connections, which are important in removing barriers to integration. Theorists have distinguished between three different forms of social connections, namely, social bonds, social bridges and social links.

### ***Social bonds***

Social bonds refer to social relationships and connections with family members or members of the same community. This includes co-ethnic, co-national and co-religious associations. Proximity to members of the same community helps immigrants feel “settled” as they are able to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships. The establishments of these social bonds are beneficial to effective integration (Duke, Sales, & Gregory, 1999; Hale, 2000).



### ***Social bridges***

Social bridges refer to social relationships and connections with other communities. In particular, friendliness of the host community towards the new immigrant community is an important factor of making the new immigrants feel settled. Participating in various activities and increased contact with people from other ethnic or religious groups are also important means to immigrant integration. Such social bridges enhance a sense of safety and security, which is closely associated with perceived higher quality of life. Furthermore, social bridges also bring long-term social and economic benefits to the new immigrants, such as facilitating employment opportunities (Woolcock, 1998). This component is especially important in the present context, since globalisation gives rise to communities that are culturally diverse. Fault lines along ethnic identities as well as inter-ethnic tension can be reduced with effective building of social bridges.

### ***Social links***

Social links refer to the connection between individuals and the structures of the state, such as government services. New immigrants tend to have different needs as compared to members of the host society, and they feel a greater sense of belonging when their needs are met by government institutions.

### **Domain 9: Language and cultural knowledge**

Having language and cultural knowledge is the key for immigrants to be able to integrate with the wider community. Speaking a common language opens doors for dialogue and increases opportunity and ease of interaction with members of the host society. It also allows immigrants to access public services and better engage in the local experience. Language and cultural knowledge is often vital to gain employment and integrate with the local education system (Pankaj, 2004). This in turn helps with immigrant integration in the host society. Having broader cultural knowledge also helps new immigrants to understand the dos and don'ts of their host community and to meet the expectations that the host society have of new citizens, facilitating immigrant integration (Ager & Strang, 2008).

### **Domain 10: Safety and stability**

New immigrants tend to feel more at home when their host society is safe and peaceful, and the local community tends to be more accepting of new immigrants when the influx of new immigrants does not lead to unrest and lower perceived levels of safety and stability (Ager & Strang, 2008). Conversely, occasions of violence and unrest increases mistrust between the local and new immigrant population, thereby hindering immigrant integration. Social connections and the availability of shared space could

help in maintaining safety and stability and thereby facilitating immigrant integration.

As the framework by Ager and Strang is formulated in the European context, which sees a huge influx of refugees and labour migrants, the focus is put on citizenship rights and basic needs such as housing, employment and safety, making it not entirely applicable to evaluating immigrant integration in Singapore. Nevertheless, looking at what immigrant associations of other countries do to cater to immigrant populations can help to refine this framework.

## **IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS**

Forming immigrant associations has been one way in which immigrants in many societies band together to give and receive support in the new society they enter. These institutions are either formed by immigrants or for immigrants and usually done voluntarily (Sardinha, 2009). Immigrant associations can be identified based on their mission and history of providing services to a particular immigrant group (Cordero-Guzman, 2005). Looking into the composition of the board of directors, backgrounds of the Chief Executive Officer or senior executives, composition of the staff, geographical area of work as well as the “ethnicity” or “national origin” of the clients served and engaged by the organisation are good ways to determine if an organisation is an immigrant association. It is sometimes hard to differentiate immigrant associations from ethnic associations, especially since they are synonymous in some countries.

In this publication, an immigrant association is loosely defined as a voluntary association that caters to the needs of immigrants. They can exist in multiple forms and can have a variety of functions. Business associations, welfare provision associations, charity associations comprised primarily of immigrants, associations whose membership is based on a common country of origin, ancestral decent or language are all considered as immigrant associations in this publication.

### **Why is it important to study them?**

Understanding the landscape of immigrant associations in a society is important as it sheds light on immigration and integration processes. Since organisations are usually formed in immigrant groups that are relatively large and growing, the character, number and size of organisations indicate the profile of the immigrant population in a society (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Cohen, 1985). Studying the mission of immigrant associations also give some clue on the extent to which immigrants want to identify themselves as being different, or how they want to be seen by the



local population (Cohen, 1985). The services provided by immigrant associations articulate the social service needs that the immigrant population requires, which reveals the socio-economic circumstances of the immigrant population in question. For instance, selective social clubs and ladies' charitable foundations confer status through exclusive membership through their high membership fees, while hometown associations tend to be more inclusive (Moya, 2005). Alternatively, it reveals the distinct cultural needs that can only be provided by people of similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds in a way that is sensitive to the social and cultural need of the group (Vacc, DeVaney, & Wittmer, 1995).

### **The role of immigrant associations in immigrant integration all over the world**

Immigrant associations play a crucial role in helping immigrants accustom themselves to unfamiliar surroundings, through a series of both formal and informal programmes and initiatives. Immigrant associations fulfil a variety of economic, social, cultural and political needs common to persons of its defined group (Jenkins, 1988). The needs of immigrants vary from country to country; hence the nature of immigrant associations and the extent they are involved in various functions also vary.

Immigrant associations can act as a link between the sending country and the host country, and are in good position to provide advisory services for future migrants (Odmalm, 2004). Immigrant associations are hence likely to be the first site immigrants approach for assistance in the immigration process. They often render administrative assistance to new immigrants who are unfamiliar with the overwhelming amount of paperwork required in the host country. For instance, associations in New York provide advice and legal help for individuals who want to change their immigration status in the United States (Cordero-Guzman, 2005). They provide: (1) citizenship classes which help with the naturalisation examination; (2) legal services which include preparation of legal documents and visas; (3) interpretation and translation services as immigrants may not be well versed in English; and (4) other forms of initial support such as shelter and providing access to community networks and information.

Immigrant associations not only help in the administrative and legal process of immigration; they also help in the naturalisation process of immigrants through providing for the specific needs of immigrants. As the leadership and staff of immigrant associations are likely to be immigrants themselves and have gone through the process of naturalisation, immigrant associations are better acquainted with the specific needs — be it economic, social or cultural — of the immigrants they cater to (Jenkins,

1981, 1988; Padilla, 1997; Vacc, DeVaney, & Wittmer, 1995). This shapes the mission and objectives of immigrant associations.

As migrants can be motivated by economic prospects and opportunities to move to another country, some immigrant associations facilitate integration through enhancing employment opportunities of their target community. Services include business counselling, which is provided by over a quarter of immigrant associations in New York City (Cordero-Guzman, 2005). Business counselling provides small business owners with support and assistance in technical aspects of running a business, from formulating business plans and raising business capital. In some societies such as Soweto (in Johannesburg, South Africa), immigrants are excluded from credit markets (Besley, Coate, & Loury, 1993; Kramer, 1975). Rotating credit associations hence played an important role to help prospective immigrant entrepreneurs accumulate start-up capital (Chotigeat, Balsmeier, & Stanley, 1991; Light & Gold, 2000).

For labour migrants and refugees, looking for a job in a foreign country can be daunting. This is because the qualifications that they possess may not be recognised in their host society or they are not familiar with the transport system, the language spoken in the host society as well as job-seeking portals. Immigrant associations step in to provide immigrants with knowledge and help in seeking a job. For instance, the Asian Association in Utah in the United States helps members with resume writing, application and interview coaching, job search support, and transportation assistance. They also work on creating short and long-term career planning for their members, and go a step further to offer employment and life skills workshops (Refugee and Immigrant Center — Asian Association of Utah, n.d.).

Besides catering to economic needs, other social welfare needs such as housing and health are taken care of by immigrant associations. Mutual aid societies in Europe functioned like an insurance organisation, with services like birth deliveries, medical and hospital care, medicines and disability insurance. The breadth of service depends on the size of the mutual aid societies, as well as the amount of funds these associations had (Moya, 2005). Some immigrant associations in New York City have varied services including mental health services, which involve treatment and prevention programmes, and housing services, such as schemes that increase access to home ownership and help with tenant management (Cordero-Guzman, 2005).

Immigrant associations help enhance the social connections immigrants have through providing them opportunities and means to build ethnic, cross



ethnic and bridging social capital (Jacobs & Tillie, 2004). They provide a space for people from the same region to gather in the host country (Moya, 2005). Hometown associations all over the world organise dances, picnics, celebrations and a variety of other social activities (Moya, 2005; Pavlovic, 2002). Through working with other organisations, immigrant associations help members build social bridges and social capital in their host countries. Many immigrant associations in Norway work with other voluntary organisations and the local government and are members of local immigrant councils (Predelli, 2008). The Federazione Colonie Libere in Svizzera (FCLI), which represents Italian labour migrants in Switzerland, actively seeks contact and support from Swiss trade unions and political parties (Schmitter, 1980). Members of immigrant associations hence get the opportunity to build their social capital through meeting people of other organisations, which then, working with government organisations, help members of immigrant associations to obtain valuable information on government services. Social links are also enhanced through immigrant associations' efforts to inform the immigrants of government services. Most immigrant associations in New York City provide benefits counselling, where immigrants are advised on the types of benefits and schemes they are entitled to in the host society (Cordero-Guzman, 2005).

As immigrants are new to their host country and may not be well-versed in the native language and culture of the host country, immigrant associations bridge that gap through providing opportunities to attain language and cultural knowledge. Immigrant associations in New York City provide cultural heritage programmes for immigrants through art exhibitions, theatrical productions and musical concerts. These and other arts and culture related activities familiarise them with the arts and culture of the city. In addition, 89% of associations provide English classes for immigrants (Cordero-Guzman, 2005).

One of the primary objectives of immigrant associations is the conservation of cultural wealth and ethnic identity (Cohen, 1985; Predelli, 2008; Kwon, Kim, & Warner, 2001; Moya, 2005; Pavlovic, 2002). The associations provide a space where individuals can communally be in touch with their ethno-cultural roots (Albuquerque et al., 2000). This includes providing members with the space and opportunity to celebrate symbolic cultural festivals and perform traditional rituals together (Pavlovic, 2002). As such, some immigrant associations are formed along religious lines, especially during the earlier phases of migration for communities whose religion forms part of their ethno-cultural identities (Predelli, 2008). In the predominantly Catholic Brazil, Catholic immigrant churches, set up by German immigrants, became one of the most important immigrant institutions (Luebke, 1987). While pan-German associations existed, German



Protestants, Jews and Catholics tended to form separate associations (Hofmeister, 1976; Lowenstein, 1989; White, 1980).

Some immigrant associations do not merely conserve cultural identity; they aim to promote it and increase appreciation and awareness of it within their host societies. For instance, Serbian immigrant associations appear as representatives of the Serbian community and its cultural traditions by being present in fairs celebrating American festivals. Some Serbian groups also make it a point to go on radio and television to showcase their performing arts, while others participate in important American events such as the inauguration ceremonies of the president of the United States (Pavlovic, 2002).

Another way that immigrant associations preserve ethnic culture of immigrants is through promoting and supporting the transmission of the cultural heritage to the next generation. Through routine contact with migrants, migrant associations develop certain activities that permit cultural conservation and transmission. The Serbs in Chicago for instance founded a Serbian school, where the children could learn their mother tongue and receive basic education on the history and culture of their forebears. Numerous cultural groups, sports clubs, folklore groups, tambour orchestras and other clubs were also founded, mainly to serve the young to engage them culturally (Pavlovic, 2002).

Most immigrant associations also seek to maintain bonds and links to home countries. One way is through supporting civic projects at home, from financing infrastructural projects to financing charitable causes back at home (Moya, 2005). Magazines containing the information of the happenings back in home countries also tend to be circulated amongst members, so that immigrants are kept abreast of what is happening at home. Only in exceptional cases do immigrant societies not keep in touch with their host societies, such as Cuban refugees in the United States, when there was a lack of diplomatic relations between both countries.

Immigrant associations interact with the larger society in terms of representing its community politically (Minkoff, 1994; Walker Jr, 1991; Predelli, 2008). It consolidates the voices and concerns of the immigrant population, and acts as an amplifier of these views (Cordero-Guzman, 2005). They are a legitimate platform to negotiate with government agencies and to politically mobilise the immigrant community and as such, have the capacity to influence public policy (McAdam, 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). The larger immigrant associations organised by the Serbs in Chicago for instance, set up their newspaper, and use that as a platform to inform the public of and assert their opinions and ideas



(Pavlovic, 2002). Similarly, immigrant associations in 1970s West Germany demanded reforms on behalf of the labour migrants. These demands included better educational opportunities for the children of migrants and voting and election rights in communal elections after five years of residence (Schmitter, 1980). Similarly, the Federazione Colonie Libere in Svizzera (FCLI) made official demands for greater participation and involvement of foreigners in Swiss life, such as establishing foreigners' parliaments in Swiss municipalities. Another example would be the Turkish Youth Association in Norway, which managed to mobilise its members to successfully influence the basis of association funding in the Norwegian system (Rogstad, 2009).

Competency building and social learning are facilitated by immigrant associations as well. Participation in immigrant associations allows members to learn about the political culture in their host countries (Odmalm, 2004; Predelli, 2008; Rogstad, 2009). In the case of the Turkish Youth Association, members attended training and competency building courses to learn about how organisations work in Norway. The organisation served as a "school for democracy", to equip them with the skills and values to participate socially and politically in Norway (Rogstad, 2009). The face-to-face contact as well as the close co-operation between members of a group to work towards a common goal also built trust and networks amongst members. This enabled the youth to participate actively in the political sphere, providing them a sense of ownership in Norway, and thus facilitating immigrant integration.

Given that immigrant integration is a multi-faceted concept, immigrant associations seldom limit their activities to one specific goal, function or activity. They often attempt to provide their members with a number of services and opportunities, and the scope of their activities reflects most often the combination of emotional and material interests that draw and hold the members (Owusu 2000). In general, individuals who join ethnic organisations demonstrate a sense of ethnic identity, and through membership and participation, they reinforce this identity (Moghaddam & Perreault, 1992). The literature informs us of a few more domains of immigrant integration that Ager and Strang left out in their framework. These domains include preservation of one's culture, contribution to the country of origin and contribution to the host country.

Some of these functions are more pertinent in some associations than others. Usually, the associations catering to the global class or expatriates are less focused on providing basic social services or assistance with employment. This is because these immigrants usually already have employment since they are settled there by their companies. Basic social

needs such as housing and education for their children are often also already provided for by their companies in their employment package.

The services provided by immigrant associations also depend on the life cycle of the immigrants. Immigrant associations catering to the first generation of immigrants generally have more services directed towards young adults, such as employment services. However, after some time, when first-generation immigrants start their own families and have children, immigrant associations tend to extend their bank of services to include some activities directed towards transmission of culture and education. For instance, first-generation Serbs in Chicago were mostly labour migrants, and they formed work groups, along with religious and political societies. It was with the increase in numbers of children and young people among them that led to the founding of the Serbian School, to provide the young with an education (Pavlovic, 2002).

Immigrant associations can function as a double-edged sword. On one hand, the formation of immigrant associations provides a platform for social connections to be built, be it between the new immigrants and the local community, or within new immigrants of different nationalities and ethnic groups. Cross-cultural activities organised by immigrant associations can lead to increased contact and understanding amongst various groups in society, thereby facilitating immigrant integration. On the other hand, immigrant associations may be more concerned about retaining and celebrating their cultural identities. In this case, immigrants associations act as a means to fence off individual national and ethnic identity from others. It can create an area of comfort and familiarity, which can evolve to become an exclusive space for new immigrants. This can result in fewer incentives for new immigrants to interact with the host society, hindering immigrant integration. This might also be a reaction against social exclusion or discrimination on the part of the host society. Hence, while immigrant associations have to balance their role of building social connections and preserving individual cultural identity, the host society also has the responsibility to mitigate social exclusion and discrimination to bring out the best in immigrant associations in facilitating immigrant integration.

### **Immigrant associations and the state**

There is little consensus about the role of the state in the formation of immigrant associations. Some scholars argue that the state can encourage and incentivise migrant associations through certain policies (Ireland, 1994; Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Soysal, 1994). Italy had two such opportunities that possibly led to the proliferation of immigrant associations: (1) representative institutions and (2) financial resources. The country



established a law allowing for delegates from the six most representative immigrant associations to participate in a consultative committee attached to the Ministry of Labour (Caponio, 2005). Allowing immigrant associations political representation legitimises these associations and incentivises the formation of immigrant associations.

On a related note, immigrant associations can serve as a counterweight to government institutions, playing an active role as civil society actors. These associations keep the democratic culture going by bringing in new values and issues to the public sphere (Odmalm, 2004). Immigrant associations usually play such a role when there are low barriers to their entry into the political landscape, and when there is a legal framework for conflict resolution to enable groups with divergent values to co-exist peacefully (Gray, 1993).

Where the state grants financial resources to associations, it can influence the nature and function of immigrant associations. The Norwegian state for instance emphasises the role of immigrant associations as sites for immigrants to learn about the values of democracy. Hence, state funding is only made available to associations that elect their leaders based on democratic values and processes (Predelli, 2008).

Provision of state funding can also diminish the autonomy of immigrant associations, restricting their contribution to civil society and preventing them to play the role of a counterweight to state institutions. The state can control the scope of services and activities of immigrant associations through restricting the sources of funding for immigrant associations, and then stipulating the conditions for public funding. In Sweden, the state highly regulates immigrant associations. There is emphasis that immigrant associations are “voluntary” organisations, and hence should be non-profit in nature. As a result, Swedish immigrant associations are heavily dependent on the state for grants and subsidies. The state has also created a comprehensive funding scheme that only issues funds for activities and programmes that comply with goals set out by government directives, mainly aimed at strengthening migrant self-organisation and increasing contact and co-operation between migrants and Swedish authorities (Odmalm, 2004).

In such cases, the immigrant associations can be co-opted by the state as partners in the process of immigration and naturalisation. With close co-operation with local governments, the immigrant associations can facilitate integration procedures by providing information to new arrivals of the host country in their respective native languages. Instead of navigating the complex bureaucracy in the host society, the associations can potentially

function as an alternative, giving immigrants first-hand experience of the migration process (Odmalm, 2004).

More often than not, the relationship of immigrant associations and the state lies on a spectrum, with some having more influence on public policy than others. In the same society, it is possible to have some associations that are co-opted by the government, and others that are in better position to actively contribute to civil society. In the case of Norway, some associations are called to be part of government-appointed advisory bodies (Allern, Helgesen, & Predelli, 2001) and regional immigrant councils (Melve, 2002). These associations report that they have more public influence, and fee; that they are in good position to influence public policy. At the same time however, associations representing ethnic minority women report few formal opportunities to influence public policy. These associations hence turn to informal channels, such as lobbying and arranging meetings with public officials, to advance their agenda (Predelli, 2003).

The state's stance on integration policy can also affect the formation of immigrant associations. In Canada, where there is a strong policy of multiculturalism, the state's encouragement and provision of financial support for ethnic-related activities provides a strong incentive for the formation of associations among Ghanaian immigrants, as it has apparently done for many other ethnic groups (Louis-Jaques, 1991; Giberovitch, 1994).

Nevertheless, some point out the non-causal link between government policies and formation of immigrant associations in some cases. Owusu (2000) argued in his study on the role of Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto, that the leaders of the associations indicated that the policy itself was of relatively minimal consequence in terms of their decisions to form associations. Ghanaian associations have been formed in countries that have policies quite different from Canadian multicultural policy, such as the United States, Britain, Germany and France. Rather than a response to government incentives, the formation of these associations was dictated by the need to organise in order to strengthen intra-group ties and address, in a collective manner, the needs related to their settlement in a different environment.

Policies that deal with immigrant associations are often deemed as ineffective and/or inadequate. The development of state welfare systems crowded out immigrant associations, leading to a decline in the number of active immigrant associations (Moya, 2005). Tiziana Caponio (2005) lamented that, in his examination of migrant associations in Italy, public



institutions preferred Catholic institutions, as they were more experienced as social service providers. As a consequence, the inexperienced and structurally weaker immigrant associations distrusted public institutions, and in turn this distrust kept immigrant associations inexperienced and structurally weak. Some scholars also pointed out that the outcomes of the actions of the state might not adhere with its policy directives on multiculturalism. In Sweden, for instance, although the multicultural model articulated the importance of cultural preservation and co-existence, the funding model for immigrant associations encouraged activities that were conducted in a “Swedish” way. Rather different from the intended, the outcome of Sweden’s policies was more characteristic of assimilationist policies (Odmalm, 2004).

Nevertheless, government intervention can have a positive effect on immigrant associations. Government contracting helps develop organisational capacity where it is lacking. The involvement of the state can mean that important resources are transferred to the immigrant associations to help them better direct these resources to the immigrants who need it. For example, Irene Bloemraad (2005) finds that in a comparison study between immigrant communities in Boston and Toronto, migrants can benefit from government involvement. She argues that settlement and multiculturalism policies provide material and symbolic resources that facilitate the formation of immigrant associations. For instance, financial resources were deployed by the Office for Refugee Settlement (ORR) in the United States to Vietnamese refugees to help them establish their own organisations, called Mutual Assistance Associations. Less concretely, government policies influence the symbolic standing of immigrant and refugee communities. These symbolic effects can increase the immigrants’ interest in organising themselves and setting up new associations. This goes a long way in legitimising the presence of immigrant communities in host countries, especially when governments emphasise the public importance of these groups.

## **IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS IN EARLY SINGAPORE**

After looking at what immigrant associations do all over the world and how they operate differently depending on their respective social contexts, it is evident that the role of immigrant associations is dependent on the socio-economic environment of the host country. Before we scrutinise the role of immigrant associations in facilitating immigrant integration in present-day Singapore, it is useful to understand more about the immigrant associations of early Singapore and the role they had played in enabling integration.

Short introductions of the Japanese Association, the Eurasian Association as well as a few Malay and Indian immigrant associations are included in this segment. Chinese immigrant associations will be discussed more extensively as they dominated the landscape of immigrant associations in early Singapore, and have been more widely documented by scholars.

A large number of Chinese clan associations were formed due to the huge influx of Chinese immigrants from the Hokkein and Kwangtung provinces in South China. They were vastly different from the ethnic group associations or business associations as we know them now. This segment illustrates how the Chinese immigrant community looked like in the past. It then explores the formation and landscape of the Chinese immigrant associations in early Singapore. We then summarise how the Chinese immigrant associations facilitated immigrant integration of the early Chinese immigrant in Singapore.

### **Early immigrants in Singapore**

In 1819, when Raffles first arrived in Singapore, there were only about 1,000 inhabitants. Most of them were the Malays and Orang Laut (sea nomads). Singapore, under British rule, upheld a free trade policy and Singapore became a destination for employment opportunities for people in the region. The earliest to arrive were the Malays, Straits Chinese and Peranakans from Melaka. Thereafter, there was a huge influx of Chinese immigrants. By 1840, they had formed the majority of the population (Freedman, 1960). Other communities who immigrated to Singapore during this time included the Indians, Arabs, Jews, Eurasians and Europeans. The overwhelming proportion of Chinese immigrants arriving onto the shores of Singapore explains the huge number of Chinese clan associations that were formed to cater to their needs. The table below shows the annual population growth rate of the three major races in Singapore during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Table 3.1: Annual Rate of Population Growth for Three Main Races, 1824–1947**

Period	Chinese	Malays	Indians
1824–1830	12.0	2.9	16.7
1830–1840	10.4	5.6	5.8
1840–1849	5.0	2.9	7.2
1849–1860	5.4	5.2	6.8
1860–1871	0.1	4.4	-1.5
1871–1881	4.8	2.4	0.2
1881–1891	3.5	0.1	2.9
1891–1901	3.0	0.0	0.6
1901–1911	3.0	1.5	5.0
1911–1921	3.7	2.5	1.5
1921–1931	2.9	2.0	4.6
1931–1947	3.5	3.6	1.9

Source: *The Population of Singapore* (Saw, 2012, p.12, Table 2.3).

Although the population growth rates for the Indians were higher than that of the Chinese at times, the nominal population growth and migration for the Indians were not as high. This is because there has been a small population of Indians in Singapore as compared to the Chinese. The table below shows the nominal net migration for the three main races residing in early Singapore.

**Table 3.2: Nominal Net Migration for Three Main Races, 1901–1947**

Period	Net Migration		
	Chinese	Malays	Indians
1901–1911	108800	7600	15200
1911–1921	132200	11200	8400
1921–1931	93900	5700	19800
1931–1947	134300	40700	17300

Source: *The Population of Singapore* (Saw, 2012, p.13, Table 2.4).

The Chinese who had immigrated to Singapore were mostly coolies who were attracted by the economic opportunities Singapore had to offer as the main Malayan port of entry. They were mostly from South China (Ng, 1992). Singapore saw a heterogeneous population of Chinese; within the population were speaker of different dialects from the Hokkein and Kwangtung provinces (Freedman, 1960). Most of the Chinese immigrants

were single young men who had left their families to seek their fortunes in Singapore.

### **Early non-Chinese immigrant associations**

Due to the comparatively smaller population of non-Chinese immigrants, there were only a handful of non-Chinese immigrant associations in the 19th and 20th centuries. There is also very little scholarly documentation of these groups although they were significant in the welfare of immigrants from the regions they represented.

Established in 1915, the Japanese Association was a gathering place for Japanese who lived in Singapore. It also took care of its members' welfare, their children's education as well as cemetery maintenance. The association closed during World War II and was re-established in 1956. Post-war Japanese Association dabbled less in the basic needs of members, as the state provided for basic social services such as education and burial spaces. It focused on social activities and building social connections instead; the increased size of the clubhouse of the association was to provide a space for members to gather and interact (Japanese Association, Singapore, 2015).

There were a number of Sikh associations registered in the 1900s. The Siri Guru Singh Sabha was a Punjabi (Sikh) quasi-religious association registered in 1918. It catered to people of Punjabi origin with a Sikh religion. The association sought to improve the conditions of the Sikh in Singapore and to oversee that its members followed the teachings of the religion (Singh, 1993). The Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan, which was registered in 1926, sought to create friendship amongst its members and act as a welfare organisation for needy Sikhs. They provided financial aid towards the cremation ceremony at the death of a poor member and arranged for the repatriation of members to India when they were unable to pay their fare (Singh, 1993).

The early Indian population was sizeable enough in early Singapore to be represented by a handful of Indian immigrant associations. These associations were often based on the region or language spoken by the immigrants it represented. An exception was, the Singapore Indian Association (SIA), was formed in 1923 and presented itself as a pan-Indian organization, rather than only deriving its membership from immigrants from particular regions or language. It largely catered to Indian labourers and helped them with the employment, repatriation, accommodation and education of young children in the early days, when unskilled labourers formed the largest proportion of the early immigrant population. Subsequently, as the Indian population became more affluent, the SIA



started to also cater to the middle class. It tackled Indian middle-class problems such as toddy drinking, and provided sports and recreational activities such as cricket, which the middle class was interested in (Kumar, 1994).

Singai Maruthurar Sangam, a Tamil craft association, also existed in the 1900s. It catered to Tamil barbers of the Maruthurar community in Singapore. It also functioned much like a welfare organisation, providing education as well as a library for young children. It also helped members to return to India when they needed to and paid for burial services for poor members who could not afford to send their deceased relatives' bodies back to India (Kumar, 1994). Similarly, the Thopputhurai Muslim Association played a major role in raising the standard of literacy of their members. It also helped members to maintain their relationship with their home villages by maintaining mosques and schools back in India.

### **Formation of Chinese clan associations**

The formation of Chinese clan associations can be attributed to many reasons. The societal culture of the immigrants, the state of economic growth and governance in Singapore, and personal motivations of the immigrants drove the formation of Chinese associations.

The early Chinese immigrants of Singapore came from the village communities of the Kwangtung and Hokkien provinces. In these communities, family and kinship ties were very strong. The communal social organisation of people in these village communities meant that such kinship ties acted as an individual's second line of defence (Yen, 1981). Whenever a person was in danger or in trouble, when he needed help performing an economic task or a ceremonial obligation, when he required assistance that his immediate family members could provide, he could turn to the members of his larger kin group for help. The need for such a social support system was felt by the early Chinese migrants of Singapore, especially when they lived under a foreign government and amongst other communities who spoke in different languages (Yen, 1981; Ng, 1992). The immigrants hence had a common desire to establish clan associations as a means to transplant kinship ties into Singapore.

The Chinese formed associations out of practical needs. Although most of these immigrants did not intend to permanently settle in Singapore, many were forced to stay for long periods of time. These immigrants wished to observe traditional Chinese customs such as ancestral worship and festive celebrations. Chinese immigrants were not likely to form a family in Singapore. Hence, an organisation providing social support such as employment, residence and communications with the state was required

(Yen, 1981). Also, an organisation was needed to deal with death and the rituals that accompany it. While the rich could afford to send their coffins back to China for burial, they needed an organisation to arrange it for them. The poor required some form of social support to raise money for a decent burial in Singapore (Yen, 1981). Due to all these practical needs that called for an organisation, the Chinese were motivated to form clan associations.

The wealthy Chinese saw the founding of a clan association to be a display of prestige. The colonial society offered the Chinese little chance to be part of the official leadership, partially because they did not speak English, the language of administration in colonial Singapore (Freedman, 1960). Therefore, community leadership, such as clan leadership, was sought after as an alternative source for social status. The drive for such social status and prestige prompted some wealthy Chinese immigrants to found clan associations (Yen, 1981).

Not all clan associations were based on localised kinship ties. Some associations were based on non-localised dialect groups. This was a result of the power alignment of the early Chinese community in Singapore (Yen, 1981). As most of the Chinese immigrants were southern Hokkienese and Teochews, the minority Cantonese felt threatened. The Cantonese thus banded together to form non-localised dialect associations to express group solidarity and to protect the interests of the group.

As some specific needs such as ancestral worship could not be fulfilled by non-localised dialect groups, the Cantonese expanded their associations to include people both based on kinship and dialect ties. These associations thus could not only provide special facilities and services to people who wanted to engage in ancestral worship, but also additional protection and assistance in times of need (Yen, 1981).

### **Functions of associations**

Chinese associations in early Singapore were not homogeneous. Some of them were based on kinship ties, others based on dialect groups. Different associations had different functions that cater to the needs of their members and various aspects of immigrant life in Singapore. The associations often addressed an institutional or legal gap that was present in colonial Singapore.

Since Raffles founded Singapore in 1819 to 1826, Chinese settlers had to police themselves under the supervision of the authorities. This necessitated them forming associations. Clan associations, also known as *huay guan* in Chinese, provided settlers with a secure anchorage in a more familiar social and cultural setting. These clan associations were exclusive;



they only admitted those of the same surname/family name, kinship group or dialect group (Freedman, 1960). This led to the inevitable outcome of early immigrants interacting only with members of the same dialect group and kinship group (Yen, 1981). They functioned as strong pillars of social support, replacing the care-taking role of the family for these single Chinese men. Clan associations were established primarily for self-help and protection. The aims of these clan associations were primarily to perpetuate lines of descent, promote clan solidarity, and foster traditional values such as filial piety, loyalty, virtue, harmony reverence for the old, and exaltation of educational achievements (Yen, 1981). The major functions of these clan associations were (1) ancestral worship and worship of protector gods; (2) observance of traditional festivities; (3) helping destitute members; (4) arbitration of disputes; (5) legalisation of marriage and promotion of education; as well as (6) provision of healthcare and other social services.

Some clan associations had clan temples that housed statues or portraits of progenitors and ancestral tablets. Clan members went to these clan temples to worship their ancestors. This helped unite clansmen to their origins, while providing an avenue for them to conduct a traditional ritual that was often practised at home — thereby building a sense of familiarity and reduces feelings of alienation. While common protector deities could be housed in common temples that were accessible to all, clan-specific protector deities were housed in clan temples. The large ceremonies and rituals held in these clan temples for clan-specific deities also gave clansmen a sense of solidarity (Yen, 1981).

Clan associations provided an avenue for fellow clansmen to observe seasonal festivals. The Spring Festival, Moon festival and the seventh month were closely linked to Chinese history and tradition. Despite changes in environment and climate, the Chinese immigrants tended to observe these festivals. As labourers lacked regular holidays then, celebrating festivals did not only portray the Chinese immigrants' loyalty to Chinese customs and traditions, it also gave them the much-needed respite from work. Some clans found these occasions useful opportunities to display their wealth. Bigger clans could afford elaborate ceremonies and lavish celebrations, and mobilise more members for their events (Yen, 1981).

Without social safety nets, destitute clansmen relied on clan associations for help. In early colonial Singapore there were hardly any social welfare programmes. With no modern pension system, people had to fend for themselves in old age. There were also no unemployment and health benefits. Clan associations addressed the welfare gap and developed

welfare functions, especially since most Chinese immigrants were singles who had left their families in China (Freedman, 1960; Yen, 1981). They needed material support from the clan associations in times of sickness, unemployment and death. Clan associations provided financial assistance to the poor, needy and sick within the clan. In the event of clansmen dying without a kin around, clan associations would arrange a simple funeral and a burial in the clan cemetery. Clan associations also provided new immigrants of the same clan with a place to stay, food and clothes. Clan associations also helped new members to find employment. By filling the gaps of the welfare system in early Singapore, clan associations rescued members from the fear of being unemployed, poor, sick and helpless. In return, members supported the clans as far as they could, and identified with the clan.

As the legal system of Singapore then was not well established, clan associations also became the centre of the informal justice system governing the Chinese immigrant society (Yen, 1981). Arbitration of disputes by clan associations maintained stability within the Chinese immigrant society.

There were usually two types of disputes: (1) internal disputes within clansmen, and (2) disputes between different clans. Internal disputes were usually over money or personal matters, and if not resolved could undermine clan solidarity. Parties affected by internal disputes escalated matters to a sub-committee of the clan associations, and investigations were held. Clan heads tried to mediate and settle the matter meting out punishment and rewards accordingly (Yen, 1981; Ng, 1992).

External disputes were usually a result of clan fights that occurred in South China. As Chinese immigrants usually maintained close ties with their families back in South China, they were aware of clan rivalry and conflicts back in the hometown. These incidents could lead to disputes between clans in Singapore. Trivial disputes could escalate into large-scale clan fights. Such fights threatened the clans directly as well as the stability of the Chinese immigrant community. They could also provoke hostile interventions by local authorities. As such, clan leaders were careful to settle external disputes. When such disputes arose, members usually left matters into the hands of the clans, and mediation took place within an inter-clan committee formed for such purposes (Yen, 1981).

Co-operative methods of resolving conflicts promoted cordial relationships between clans, and in turn improved inter-clan relations in China. As some of the Chinese clan associations in Singapore were wealthy and powerful, they provided financial help to force their parental clans in China to work



together to avoid large-scale clan wars. These financial efforts promoted the spirit of inter-clan co-operation in the home village as the money was used for building common facilities for everyone in the villages (Yen, 1981).

Later into the century, when single immigrant men from China wanted to start a family, clan associations helped to legalise these marriages. As male Chinese immigrants outnumbered female Chinese immigrants, young men who wanted a Chinese wife had difficulty finding a partner. Clans associations, because of their strong links to China, were able to make arrangements for brides as well as ensure that the marriage would be recognised when the male returns to his home village in future (Yen, 1981).

Clan associations upheld the strong emphasis on education within Chinese society. Education was perceived to be the most important stepping-stone to upward social mobility. Since prestige was associated with scholars, clans that were able to produce more scholars received greater respect within the society. Clan associations honoured imperial degree holders from their clans by engraving their names on a eulogy board in clan temples. Clan associations also contributed to the educational chances of their clan members in early Singapore by setting up schools (Ng, 1992). These clan schools, run by a separate board under the control of the clan committee, admitted only children of members irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. The curricula were similar to that in Chinese schools in South China. The educational content was geared towards traditional notions of filial piety and loyalty and perpetuates traditional Chinese values in the society (Yen, 1981).

Powerful clan associations banded together to provide the Chinese community with healthcare. Powerful individuals with various positions in different clan associations and guilds rallied resources to build hospitals to provide healthcare for the immigrant community. One example of such a hospital is the Thong Chai Hospital, which was founded in 1867 (Ng, 1992).

It is remarkable how wealthy and powerful some of these clan associations were and how involved they were in the lives of early Chinese immigrants. They owned property and land in Singapore. They ran schools, hospitals and cemeteries. They took care of the early immigrants as well as their offspring, from cradle to grave.

### **Development of associations later in modern Singapore**

By May 1959, associations and societies had to be registered with the government. This process allowed greater scrutiny of such groups and indirectly provided a better understanding of the landscape of immigrant

associations in Singapore. At that time, approximately a quarter of all societies in Singapore included Chinese-friendly and benefit associations — associations formed voluntarily and based where there were no kinship or dialect group ties but meant for the welfare of the Chinese immigrant society in Singapore. Another quarter were Chinese surname and clan associations.

The number of immigrant associations ballooned in the first three decades of the 20th century. This phenomenon can be explained in a number of ways. First, there was increasing segmentation at different levels of the sub-ethnic communities. As there were an increasing number of Chinese immigrants, more sub-ethnic communities had a critical mass to form new immigrant associations to better represent their identity. For instance, among the Hokkiens, natives of Zhangzhou set up their own prefectural association instead of joining the existing Hokkien associations (Ng, 1992).

Many Chinese *huay guan* also underwent secularisation. Unlike in the 19th century when clan associations would set up temples and places of worship, no prominent temples were built by any dialect or regional association in the 20th century. In fact, some associations tried to dissociate themselves from their previous religious image. This could be due to Western influences in the Singaporean community and the social notion that embracing a folk religion was not respectable of a “modern” social organisation (Ng, 1992).

There was continuity in the provision of welfare services in the 20th century. Chinese clan associations continued to provide basic Chinese education to young children, and many were benefactors of this programme. The number of Chinese clan schools continued to increase, providing more children with educational opportunities. Clan associations also set up schools for higher levels of learning. For instance, the Chinese High School was a community-based enterprise aimed at offering Chinese secondary education in the region. Subsequently, associations played an important part in setting up the first Chinese tertiary institution in this region. Nanyang University (“*Nantah*”) gave Chinese-educated students the opportunity to pursue higher education (Ng, 1992).

Chinese clan associations continued to be engaged with happenings in China. This was especially prominent between the 1920s to the 1940s. The Chinese *huay guan* were involved in many community-wide patriotic campaigns to raise funds for the Sino-Japanese War. Members of clan associations were mobilised and the Chinese tapped their extensive networks to contribute as much as they could for the cause (Ng, 1992).



## Summary of immigrant associations' role in immigrant integration

Immigrant associations in early Singapore were an important part of the immigrant's life. The table below summarises how early immigrant associations, particularly Chinese ones, facilitated immigrant integration with reference to the 10 core domains of integration based on Ager and Strang's framework which was discussed earlier in this chapter (Ager & Strang, 2008).

**Table 3.3: Facilitation of Immigrant integration by Chinese Immigrant Associations**

<b>Domain of Immigrant integration</b>	<b>Actions undertaken by Chinese Immigrant Associations</b>
Employment	The clan associations helped new members look for employment.
Housing	The clan associations helped new members with lodging.
Education	In the early phase of Chinese immigration, there was less investment in education as most of the immigrants were single men who had left their families in China. It was only when the need arose for education — when there was a second generation of immigrants — that clans started building clan schools to provide these young children with basic Chinese education. Initially, these clan schools only admitted members of their own clan. As time passed, clans worked together to build secondary schools and even a university for further the education of the Chinese community. Admission to these schools also became more inclusive as clans collaborated in building these schools.
Health	Associations pooled financial resources to build hospitals to provide free healthcare to Chinese immigrants. Associations also provided members with financial assistance in times of sickness.
Social Bonds	Surname, kinship group and dialect group associations built group solidarity between its members. These groups were a substitute to having a family in Singapore, which to the immigrant was a foreign and unfamiliar land. Engaging in ancestral worship and celebration



	of traditional festivals together helped in building social bonds between fellow clansmen.
Social Bridges	<p>Less was done to facilitate interaction between clans. Initially, there were huge divides between clans due to the clan wars and hostility between their parental clans in South China. Clan associations helped to mediate conflicts between clans. They at times engaged in collective effort to help with the situation back in South China, which improved clan relationships. However, the building of social bridges was limited to group consciousness; individual relationships between clans and with people not originating from China were rarely mentioned.</p> <p>Although clan associations physically existed overseas, they strove to mould a type of society similar to their home communities in China. This has been viewed by some as counterproductive to immigrant integration, as resistance to change and preoccupation with Chinese tradition slowed down the process of acculturation of new Chinese immigrants into Singapore</p>
Social Links	Associations helped bridge the gap caused by the lack of administrative and legal institution in early Singapore, by politically representing their members. Clan leaders represented their fellow clansmen in negotiating with the officials. However, access to social services was still lacking, and the associations played a large role in providing mutual aid and helping destitute members.
Language and Cultural Knowledge	The associations' role in this aspect is not documented. Perhaps it was not relevant to the immigrants in early Singapore since a collective identity was not important to a colonial administration. Immigrants did not have intentions to permanently settle in Singapore as such associations continued to perpetuate the language and culture of the country of origin.
Safety and Stability	Associations acted as a form of social insurance in early Singapore when social services such as unemployment benefits and welfare was



	lacking. It provided financial assistance for the needy. The associations also helped in the arbitration of disputes and acted as an informal justice system. This provided some informal laws and rules and contributed to the safety of members.
Rights and Citizenship	The associations were limited in this aspect as a result of the absence of a discourse of citizenship rights in early Singapore.
Preservation of own Culture	The associations brought together members of the same home village/dialect group and celebrated seasonal festivals according to the customs of their home village/dialect groups.
Contribution to the Region/Country of Origin	Financial resources were contributed to home villages to build common facilities. In times of national crises, e.g., during the Sino-Japanese war, associations mobilised members to contribute resources back to their home countries.

Source: Adapted from Ager and Strang (2008)

### **Subsequent decline of immigration associations**

After Singapore obtained independence, immigrant associations had much less significance even among the Chinese population. Chinese immigrant associations primarily existed due to the lack of legal and administrative institutions to provide for their welfare. Upon independence, Singapore's government pursued aggressive plans to ensure the social welfare of the population through mass education, housing and industrial programmes. The government also provided for social bonding through establishing community centres to promote communal activities for people in Singapore.

Moreover, Singapore residents no longer saw themselves as immigrants. The later generations of the Chinese immigrants born after Singapore gained independence were accorded the status of Singapore citizens. They no longer identified with the clan associations, which saw Mainland China as their motherland and hometown. Besides not sharing the same political and emotional affiliation to China, new generations of Singaporeans developed their own family and friends in Singapore. They hence did not need to rely on clan associations for social activities and celebration of festivals.

The recent waves of immigration since year 2000 has probably provided a resurgence of interest in Chinese clan associations as well as other



immigrant associations in Singapore. Recent immigrants appreciate the existence of these associations since they create a familiar environment in a foreign land, just as how they did for the early immigrants. With these immigrants being interested in the activities of the clan associations, the recent waves of immigration brought about an increase in clan membership. Many new immigrants have also taken up leadership positions in existing Chinese clan associations (Leong, 2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

Looking at the functions of immigrant associations all over the world exposed several aspects of immigrant integration that can be added to the framework of Ager and Strang (2008). These aspects include political participation and representation, preservation of cultural and identity as well as links to home country. This means that the roles and functions of immigrant associations are constantly changing, and differs from place to place as the demand of immigrants are different in different societies.

Immigrant associations are demand-driven. This can be seen from the fact that the early immigrant associations thrived as they were relevant to the lives of the immigrants. They acted as a form of social insurance, addressing the lack of legal institutions and welfare provision for the early immigrants. The Chinese associations filled the gaps of knowledge and acted as a substitute for social support for single young men who arrived on the shores of Singapore alone. These associations acted as a bridge between the authorities and the immigrants; officials could disseminate information through association leaders and association leaders could represent the needs of the immigrants. They created an environment that was familiar and similar to home for the Chinese immigrants, allowing them to feel safe in a new and hostile environment. Immigrant integration then meant that people were provided for, felt safe and had companionship in their new environment. However, as Singapore progressed and these immigrants started their own families here, associations lost their relevance and their importance in the lives of second-generation immigrants started declining.

It is noted that the clan associations in the past were more inward-looking and isolated in their existence. There was little effort for bridge-building between different communities, although there was presence of ethnic diversity in Singapore then. Such a model of immigrant integration probably does not apply now. Post-independence Singapore has articulated inter-ethnic harmony as a national goal, hence there would probably be low tolerance towards inward-looking immigrant associations. As a modern multi-cultural nation-state, Singapore houses many different ethnic



communities who have different cultures and traditions, but co-exist in the small land space. Moreover, present-day Singapore is more involved in providing for the basic needs of people who chose to live and work in Singapore. There is a modern social security system, and many channels people can access social services should they require help. Hence, the services provided by present-day immigrant associations will differ rather largely from the immigrant associations of the past, which focused more on provision of basic needs. The demographics of present immigrants are also vastly different from that of early Singapore. There is also an expectation for immigrant to respect the existing social values and norms that govern the Singaporean way of life. It is no longer enough for immigrant associations now to just cater to the new immigrants; for successful integration to occur, present immigrant associations must also be sensitive to the socio-cultural context of Singapore as well as the expectations of the locals. Based on all the reasons above, it can be expected that the activities, nature and function of immigrant associations that emerge to cater to new immigrants of today will be very different from that of the early immigrant associations.

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## Chapter 4

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# Immigrant Associations in Singapore



## **CHAPTER 4: IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS IN SINGAPORE**

Unlike in the past when Chinese associations formed the bulk of immigrant associations in Singapore, today there are about 53 immigrant associations representing immigrants from all over the world. A few of these associations have been in Singapore before independence — for instance, the Japanese Association and the Philippines Association of Singapore, but the bulk of immigrant associations have been set up in the past two decades. The sizes of these associations differ; there are small associations with around 200 members, while some large associations have more than 10,000 members. These immigrant associations engage immigrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States.

This chapter sheds light on the factors encouraging the formation of immigrant associations in modern Singapore. Integration policy and state institutions create a conducive environment for immigrant associations to grow and engage new immigrants, facilitating immigrant integration in Singapore. The state strategically provides the space for immigrant associations to be involved in this project of immigrant integration. By providing easy access to basic social services, and having in place basic infrastructure for housing and education, the state enables immigrant associations to direct their resources and efforts at building social connections — at which they are likely more effective since these associations work most closely with the new immigrants. The synergy between the state and immigrant associations is discussed in depth in this chapter.

A list of profiles of presently active immigrant associations is included at the end of the chapter. These profiles, contributed by the respective immigrant associations, narrate the history, vision and mission, as well as the series of initiatives organised to facilitate immigrant integration in Singapore.

### **FACTORS ENCOURAGING THE FORMATION OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS IN SINGAPORE TODAY**

#### **Huge and diverse immigrant population residing in Singapore**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Singapore sees a significant inflow of immigrants. This inflow and diversity of new immigrants give rise to a



demand for immigrant associations, as different groups of immigrants have different needs, concerns and demands.

Different associations represent and engage immigrants who come from different places. For instance, the Japanese Association caters to the Japanese immigrants residing in Singapore, while the German Association attends to the needs of the German immigrants living in Singapore. There are also associations representing immigrants who come from the same country, but belong to different ethnic groups or different regions from the country. An example would be BIJHAR, which engages the Bihar and Jharkhand community in Singapore, and the Punjabi Society, which aims to bring together the Punjabis living in Singapore. While the Biharis, Telegus and Punjabis are all from India, there are different existing immigrant associations catering to them.

Specific immigration associations also cater to immigrants of different occupational and social backgrounds. Some immigrant associations such as the Tianjin Association cater to professional immigrants. Most of their activities revolve around providing members with business contacts and social activities that enhance business opportunities and widen professional networks. Other immigrant associations have activities catering to the less educated foreign workers in Singapore. For instance, the Singapore Loving and Giving Society organises English classes for Chinese foreign workers to help them pick up English and better integrate into the English-speaking society in Singapore.

It can therefore be said that the formation of immigrant associations is brought about by the demand for such associations by the huge and diverse immigrant population residing in Singapore.

### **Low barrier of entry for immigrant associations**

There exists a low barrier of entry for the setting up of immigrant associations. Formal associations require only the particulars of 10 members who must be Singapore citizens or Permanent Residents, a written constitution and a registration fee of \$300 or \$400 to register with the Registrar of Societies as a formal organisation. They are then governed by the Societies Act (Registry of Societies, 2010).

Moreover, universities are also open to international students getting together to form organisations. The VNCNUS at National University of Singapore<sup>3</sup> and ChaoVietnam of Singapore Management University<sup>4</sup> are

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<sup>3</sup> The NCNUS website is: <http://home.vncnus.net/>



examples of student-formed bodies catering to international students. They are governed under the club constitutions in the respective schools. Like formal immigrant associations, they organise activities to celebrate their identity and culture, and aim to increase awareness about their own culture within the Singaporean universities.

Social media has made it easy for informal immigrant association to form. It has created a platform for people of similar background and cultures to plan outings and gatherings. They may not be a formal association (not registered under the Societies Act), but they function exactly like how an immigrant association does. An example will be the Singapore Taiwanese meet-up group<sup>5</sup>. They use the online portal Meet Up to gather like-minded individuals and Singaporeans who are interested in the Taiwanese culture. This informal group engages Taiwanese and Singaporeans interested in Taiwanese culture through organising meet-ups, Taiwanese classes, as well as going for Taiwanese-related events together.



A screenshot of The Singapore Taiwanese Meetup Group. Interested individuals can easily reach groups of interest through websites like these.

<sup>4</sup> The ChaoVietnam's Facebook page is: <https://www.facebook.com/SMU.VietnameseCommunity>

<sup>5</sup> Their meet-up link is: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Singapore-Taiwanese-Meetup-Group/>



Another screenshot of the meetup group. This page documents the past social gatherings that this group was able to conduct through such an online platform. Social bonds and bridges can be formed by approaching such informal groups instead of joining a formal immigrant association.

Facebook is another portal where immigrants can gather and share information. Two such examples are the Association of Cambodians in Singapore<sup>6</sup> as well as Thai Association Singapore<sup>7</sup>. Setting up a Facebook page creates a common space where interested individuals can engage one another in conversations. It also acts as a convenient portal to notify each other of events and gatherings. This eliminates the need for associations to have an actual physical address to gather and conduct their meetings and activities. The virtual space overcomes physical distances and boundaries, and thus facilitates the formation of both formal and informal immigrant associations.

### State support in formation of immigrant associations

Immigrants associations form because there is an encouraging socio-political context for them to thrive. Multicultural and integration policies of Singapore recognise that there is a role for immigrant associations to play in society, and there are institutions put in place to support the activities and initiatives of these associations.

<sup>6</sup> Their Facebook Page is: <https://www.facebook.com/associationofcambodiansinsingapore>

<sup>7</sup> Their Facebook page is: <https://www.facebook.com/ThaiAssociationSingapore?fref=ts>



## ***Multiculturalism policy***

*Singapore's approach to integration does not demand that new immigrants abandon their own beliefs and culture. Rather, we expect them to share commonalities, values and experiences with fellow Singaporeans so that we can all work together to achieve our aspirations and build the best home for ourselves and our children.*

— National Integration Council home page  
(National Integration Council, 2010a)

Some countries like France have a one-way approach to integration where immigrants are expected to leave behind their origins, culture and heritage and assimilate in the French culture (Langellier, 2005). The “melting pot” is often used as a metaphor for this approach of immigrant integration. It depicts a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous, with different elements “melting into” a harmonious whole with a common culture (Gleason, 1979). However, this theory of immigrant integration has been criticised by scholars to be Anglo-centric and restrictive towards ethnic diversity (Gordon, 1964; Adamic, 1985; Laubeová, 2000; Kallen, 1915).

Singapore takes on a different view in immigrant integration. As the quote above suggest, Singapore believes in a *rojak* analogy, a localised version of the “salad bowl” analogy used in the literature, which recognises and respects the diversity of the immigrants coming together and forming a part of Singapore. Singapore's stance towards immigration and integration is later also described using the metaphor of a “potluck”; immigrants are welcome to bring in their carried cultures and heritage to add on to the already diverse social fabric of Singapore, although they are nonetheless expected to respect and understand local culture.

As such, immigrant associations, which are seen as a cultural symbol and ballast of the immigrant communities, have a space to thrive and prosper in Singapore. The accepting climate of different cultures co-existing allows immigrants to get together in associations and use these associations as a platform for promoting their culture and heritage. This is most commonly done through organising cultural events and celebrating cultural festivals together.

## ***State institutions that support immigrant associations***

Institutions like the National Integration Council (NIC) and the People's Association provide resources to immigrant associations to support them in



their cause to facilitate immigrant integration in Singapore.<sup>8</sup> Singapore strikes a good balance in its involvement in immigrant integration; on one hand, the state provides basic social services to all the immigrants, e.g., healthcare and education, so that the immigrant associations can concentrate their efforts in building social connections which are most productive towards immigrant integration, unlike what the Chinese clan associations did in the past. On the other hand, the state does not crowd out the services of the immigrant associations by nationalising efforts for immigrant integration. It allows space for immigrant associations, which are closer to the immigrants, to organically form and do what they do best. It is strategic for the state to focus on providing the infrastructure to ensure all efforts are concentrated in building social connections when immigrant associations facilitate immigrant integration.

Besides having the National Integration Working Group (NIWG)-Community that partners immigrant associations and provides them with support, the National Integration Council (NIC) has also launched the Community Integration Fund (CIF) in 2009 to provide financial resources to organisations, including formal immigrant associations, which are interested in implementing ground-up integration initiatives (National Integration Council, 2010b). The CIF provides co-funding of up to 80% of the total qualifying expenditure of approved projects. The maximum funding for a project is capped at \$200,000. The NIC also suggests organisers of these projects to consider the innovativeness and sustainability of the project, as well as to ensure that the project reaches out to an inclusive mix of participants. Table 4.1 below details the criteria of projects that will be considered for funding.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the role of the NIC and PA in facilitating immigrant integration, please refer to Chapter 1.



**Table 4.1: Criteria for Eligibility for CIF Co-Funding**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Examples (but not limited to)</b>
Provide information and resources to new immigrants and foreigners on Singapore society, norms, and values	Learning journeys, field trips, seminars, publications, and productions that provide information on local history, cultures as well as social norms.
Enhance interactions between new immigrants, foreigners and Singaporeans	Interest-based activities that provide common platforms for people to interact and build relationships with one another, e.g., sports or arts.
Promote positive mindsets and attitudes among Singaporeans, new immigrants and foreigners	Projects that promote mutual understanding such as diversity workshops and cultural exchange programmes.
Encourage emotional attachment to and involvement in Singapore	Projects that introduce volunteerism opportunities to new immigrants, encourage the use of English for communication and interaction, and encourage new immigrants to connect their community with the wider Singaporean society.

Source: Community Integration Fund, National Integration Council (n.d.)



## PROFILES OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS BY REGION

This section features a series of write-ups on the work that immigrant associations do to facilitate immigrant integration. The content for most of these writeups were provided by the leadership of immigrant associations while others were synthesised and/or translated from websites and Facebook pages of these associations with their permission. We have attempted as much as possible to preserve how these associations wish to be portrayed. For instance, the tenor of each submitted piece is unchanged – some associations prefer to be presented in a more formal tone, while others preferred a less formal tone. Since writing styles in English differ based on the region one originates from, we have also chosen to retain some of these unique styles. We have however categorised the information given to us by the associations into the domains of immigrant integration (refer to Chapter 3) and judicially edited each piece for readability. We have also included a summary, which outlines the role of the immigrant association in each domain of immigrant integration, based on the organised information. The profiles are arranged in alphabetical order, by geographical region.

### Africa

#### ***South Africans in Singapore (SAiSG)***

##### Introduction to SAiSG

South Africans in Singapore (SAiSG), a Singapore registered society since 1994, was formed as a supportive, welcoming community for South Africans and their families in Singapore.

Today SAiSG has almost 200 signed members and a Facebook group of more than 800. Membership is not restricted to South Africans; anyone is welcome to join — as long as they have a passion and genuine interest in South Africa.

##### Role of SAiSG in immigrant integration

SAiSG is a place to make new friends, connect with old friends and celebrate what it means to be a “Saffa” in Singapore. SAiSG helps to form a home-away-from-home. It provides information on how to settle down in Singapore and provides networking opportunities and recreational activities. Members include families with young children, couples and singles.

The group has an affiliate programme where businesses can market their South African related products and services to SAiSG members from scuba diving courses, to Ina Paarman grocery products and footwear.



In 2014, SAiSG organised 25 events and gatherings that had over 520 attendees. For 2015, SAiSG held the following main events:

- Three Braai's (SA BBQ) a year
- Kids' Christmas party
- Annual social event
- End-of-year bash



SAiSG Kids' Christmas party



SAiSG gathering at East Coast Park

The group organises numerous ad hoc events yearly, such as monthly Ladies Coffee Mornings, Ladies/Couples Cocktail Nights, sporting events and Easter Egg hunts.



SAiSG group photographs taken during gatherings. These gatherings are held frequently every month (e.g., Ladies Lunch) and during special occasions (e.g., Christmas).



Every year, SAiSG supports two charities — one Singaporean and one South African. All proceeds are divided according to Singapore regulations.

The charities for 2015 were:

Willing Hearts, a volunteer-based non-profit organisation that provides daily meals and other support services to the underprivileged, the needy, and other marginalised members of Singapore's society, and assists them towards rehabilitating and reinstating themselves as useful citizens.

QHUBEKA, a South African charity that helps fund bicycles for children who have to travel long distances to get to school with greater ease.

Summary of SAiSG's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	SAiSG organises various social activities like picnics and outings that get members together.
Giving back to Singapore society	SAiSG partners a different local charity each year. Proceeds from various ticketed events will be donated to the local charity.
Giving back to country/area of origin	SAiSG partners South African charity QHUBEKA, which funds bicycles for children who have to walk long distances to school each day.



## America

### ***American Association of Singapore (AAS)***

#### Introduction to AAS

The American Association of Singapore is the oldest American organisation in Singapore. Established in 1917 by a small group of Americans, its primary mission was to provide community support for American residents far from home. AAS is the founder and initial sponsor for most of the American community organisations in Singapore, including:

- American Women's Association (AWA) – 1935
- The American Club — 1948
- Singapore American School (SAS) — 1956
- American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) — 1969
- Singapore American Community Action Council (SACAC) — 1973
- Boy Scout Troop 07 — chartered by AAS since 1986
- American Dragons (Dragon Boat Team) —2005

Today, AAS is a not-for-profit association dedicated to enhancing the well-being and experience of all expats residing in Singapore. Its office is often the first point of contact for new residents and for those visiting Singapore before accepting employment. About 40% of AAS members are non-American. AAS is open to members of all nationalities and its office staff and activities reflect this growing diversity.

#### AAS' role in immigrant integration

The publications of AAS help its members know more about Singapore. Printed since 1958, the *Singapore American* is a monthly community newspaper reporting on travel, food and dining, events, and happenings in Singapore. *Living in Singapore* is Singapore's leading reference guide for expats, written by expats. The comprehensive 12th edition contains information to help newcomers learn about local culture, customs and food; locate schools, resources, goods and services; and find things to do, places to go and how to get there. These publications are useful resources for new immigrants to familiarise themselves with Singapore, and help facilitate immigrant integration.



To help members with employment issues, AAS has a Career Resource Center for Expats (CRCE). This centre offers invaluable services to expats seeking job opportunities in Singapore through an exclusive job board and career workshops, as well as to employers seeking talented staff. Some of the events and services the CRCE offers include regular workshops, the “Power Lunch Series” and “Join in the Conversations” talks on a range of career-related topics. The CREC has offerings for individuals who would like (1) to start their own businesses, (2) advice on resume writing, (3) tips for job searches and interviews, (4) insights into using social media for career development.



AAS members attending a conference entitled “Redefining Success in the Workplace”

AAS organises various social events for members to socialise. Locals are also welcome to join these events. One such flagship social event is the George Washington Ball, which has been celebrated since the 1930s. The event attracts over 350 people to an evening of entertainment which includes a four-course meal, a silent auction and a lucky draw. Proceeds from the silent auction and lucky draw during this black-tie charity event supports the Singapore Children’s Society.



People of different ethnicities have a chance to interact in the AAS' George Washington Ball

In the annual Ambassador's Cup Golf Tournament, members form teams of four to pit their golfing skills against one another. Players are treated to a resort-style golf course, food, cocktails, prizes and an entertaining dinner. Non-golfing partners are also welcome for dinner. Participants get to spend a relaxing weekend away from the hustle and bustle of daily life as well as meet fellow golfers.



AAS members pit their golfing skills against one another in a game of golf in the annual Ambassador's Cup Golf Tournament



AAS members unwind during dinner after the tournament. Members from other communities also join in the fun.

The AAS displays support for American military men and women through the Home Hospitality Initiative. An open invitation is extended to families of Americans, Singaporeans and other nationalities to host visiting American service personnel, often en route to dangerous assignments. Hosts, through this initiative, can get in touch with the military happenings in the United States while the military men and women hosted can get to know the Singaporean community better and experience the food and hospitality culture in Singapore. This programme has been in place for many years, and is seen as meaningful and worthwhile by participants.

Other events that the AAS organises include:

- Annual Independence Day Celebrations: A full day of fun, music, food, drinks and patriotism, capped off by formal ceremonies and a spectacular fireworks display. This event is completely not-for-profit, and as such, depends 100% on the support of the community. AAS has never charged an admission fee for the Independence Day Celebration, as it sees this as a duty to celebrate in true American style with the whole community in Singapore.
- Toys for Tots: Toys are collected during this event and given to less privileged children.
- Welcome Back Celebration: Members get to mingle with newcomers and reconnect with old friends in this event that welcomes members back after the summer break. With an afternoon filled with food, fun and entertainment, there is something for all ages.



- Turkey Trot: A Thanksgiving run and a way to get fit before indulging during Thanksgiving. AAS, along with its sister organisations, hosts this event which includes a two-kilometre fun run for children and parents, as well as the five-kilometre and ten-kilometre races. After the run, members get to indulge in a buffet breakfast, lucky draw and awards ceremony.
- Other smaller social events include wine-tasting, dinners and food trails in cultural places.



A photo of AAS members participating in Turkey Trot 2013.



AAS' members gathering to observe the celebrations of Independence Day.



AAS members trying out Indian food during a food trail in Little India.



AAS member with the chef of a Sichuan restaurant.

Summary of AAS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Employment	The Career Resource Center for Expats (CRCE) caters to members of the Association by helping them with a range of employment-related issues, such as resume writing and career development.
Social bonds	Social activities like wine-tasting, dinners and sports events bring together members within the Association and friendships are forged.
Social bridges	Members of other communities are welcome to join the social activities organised by the Association. Members of the AAS get to meet and interact with people of different nationalities and ethnic groups during these occasions.
Social links	Magazines published by the Association provide information on government services like education.
Language and cultural knowledge	Since members of the Association speak English and English is a language widely used in Singapore, the Association has little role to play in language knowledge. Magazines that the Association publishes provide information on local culture and customs. Food trails also provide members with some knowledge on the diversity of cuisines that can be found in Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	The Association celebrates Independence Day in true American fashion.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members engage in charity events and initiatives such as the George Washington Ball and Toys for Tot.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Association runs the Home Hospitality initiative to show support for the American military.



## **Asia – Central and West Asia**

### ***Russian Club in Singapore***

#### Introduction to Russian Club in Singapore

Russian Club is a public, not-for-profit organisation established in the middle of 2007. It was officially registered with the Registry of Societies, Singapore on 24 September 2008.

The club's mission is to:

- Foster relationships within the Russian-speaking community in Singapore
- Provide help and social support to Russians relocating to or visiting Singapore/Asia, and vice versa
- Promote Russian culture and language amongst Singaporeans through organising and supporting events and projects
- Create information channels and emotional ties between Singapore and Russia

#### Role of Russian Club in immigrant integration

The Russian Club helps its members foster relationships through organising social events such as concerts and outings. Members also celebrate traditional Russian festivals and events such as Maslenitsa (possibly the oldest-surviving Russian holiday where people feast on pancakes and cheese, wear masks and dress up before observing Lent), and Pushkin Day (death anniversary of a famous Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin). Less formal social gatherings such as BBQ outings are also organised for members to get together and forge friendships.



Members of the Russian Club posing with the Russian Doll during Pushkin Day, also known as Russian Language Day.



Members of the Russian Club attended the concert of Diana Arbenina, who was part of Russian rock group *Night Snipers*. The Russian Club organised this event.



A group photo taken during a BBQ outing at East Coast Park.



Besides cultural activities, members take part in sporting events and competitions. To help members with employment, the Russian Club has business networking events as well as workshops, seminars and educational programmes to enhance the skills and knowledge of the Russian community in Singapore.



Members of the Russian Club take part in sporting events together. This picture was taken during the Standard Chartered Marathon.

The Russian Club does not only cater to the Russian community in Singapore. Membership is open to anyone who is interested in Russian culture or language. The Russian Club also holds joint social events with other communities in Singapore, allowing its members to get to know people of different nationalities and ethnic groups.



A gathering at a bar held by the Russia Club in conjunction with the Italian community in Singapore.



Members get to mingle with people of other communities during joint social events like these.

Besides small-scale and less formal social events, the Russian Club organises larger and more formal events to facilitate understanding between the Russian and the Singaporean community. The Club cooperates with public and governmental organisations in putting together events like the Russia-Singapore Business Forum, which aims to foster investment, trade and thought leadership between Russia and Singapore. Other collaborators with the Russian Club include the Russian Embassy in Singapore as well as the Russian Language Centre in Singapore.

The Russian Club also partakes in charity work and events. One example is the “History of Dreams” art exhibition that the Russian Club supported in 2012. The exhibition featured paintings by Lana Fill from Ukraine and sculptures by Vitaly Didenko from Russia. A fifth of total proceeds was donated to the Singapore General Hospital’s Needy Patients Fund.

The Club has multiple media channels to engage members, including Facebook, the Club’s website and an online portal. These avenues provide



members with valuable information about Singapore such as places of interest, Singapore's culture and important days of commemoration, good places to learn English in Singapore as well as contact details of the Russian Embassy in Singapore.

#### Summary of Russian Club in Singapore's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Employment	Russian Club organises business networking events as well as talks, seminars and workshops to help address concerns of members regarding employment in Singapore.
Social bonds	Social activities like networking events, celebrations and outings allow members to get together and forge ties are organised.
Social bridges	Members of other communities are welcome to join the social activities organised by the Association. Collaborations between different organisations also allow members to get to know people of other communities.
Language and cultural knowledge	The Club's website gives information about life in Singapore as well as places to learn English.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate Russian festivals and events. The Club also runs events that promote the Russian language.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members take part in charity events and initiatives raise funds for the needy in Singapore. The Club also bridges ties between Singapore and Russia that can give rise to more economic opportunities and better diplomatic relations for Singapore.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Club bridges ties between Singapore and Russia that can give rise to more economic opportunities and better diplomatic relations for Russia.



## ***Turkish Cultural Centre (TCC)***

### Introduction to TCC

Turkish Cultural Centre was established in April 1999 as a not-for-profit organisation by a group of Turkish and Singaporean businessmen, to promote bilateral relations by means of arts, culture, education and tourism.

### TCC's role in immigrant integration

The TCC organises a host of activities, including language classes, seminars, talks, cooking and art workshops, various gatherings, humanitarian aid campaigns, celebration of local festivals like Chinese New Year and Hari Raya, music nights; food promotion programmes and inter-cultural trips. These are done to:

- Establish cross-cultural bridges between Turkey and Singapore
- Build long-term friendships
- Build mutual trust
- Integrate the Turkish community into Singapore society
- Help the Turkish community learn more about local culture and customs
- Contribute to racial and religious harmony
- Bring various communities together
- Promote intercultural dialogue efforts

Some of the events organised by the TCC to facilitate immigrant integration include the Dialogue and Friendship Dinner. This flagship event is organised annually. It gathers people of various religions, faiths and cultures around a table and provides a platform for them to share their culture. Turkish food is served to the selected invitees in the holy month of Ramadan. Outstanding individuals and organisations are awarded the "Dialogue and Friendship Award" for their tireless efforts and contributions in intercultural and interfaith dialogue activities on this auspicious occasion.



People of different faiths and nationalities gather during TCC's Dialogue and Friendship Dinner.



Different cultures are showcased as performance items during the Dialogue and Friendship Dinner.

Above: A man playing the *gu zhen*, a Chinese musical instrument.

Below: Dancers performing the *Sufi* whirling, which is a customary dance performed during worship ceremonies.



The Turks in Singapore are invited to socialise and enjoy homemade Turkish food monthly during Cultural Nights. This regular setting allows for friendships to deepen, while getting a taste of home.



Men getting their hands dirty while preparing a traditional Turkish dish.



Members getting together during TCC's monthly Cultural Nights.

TCC participates in public events such as neighbourhood community events and festivals island-wide. Among them are “80 Tastes Around the Park” and “IRCC @ Heartlands-Nanyang Sports Fiesta” to create public awareness about Turkey and its culture.

Beyond interacting with the community, the TCC also makes it a point to go to schools to promote Turkish culture and food during International Friendship Day. International Friendship Day is celebrated every year in April throughout Singapore schools. The TCC conducts talks, sets up booths and exposes local students to various aspects of Turkish culture.



A representative from TCC giving a presentation on Turkish history and culture.



Another representative from TCC guiding a student from Ngee Ann Secondary School while he tries *Ebru*, a Turkish water painting technique.



A representative from TCC holds up a completed piece of *Ebru* after demonstrating the art in front of students.



Students pose with Turkish flags and artefacts in front of TCC's booth.

The TCC is not only involved in promoting its own culture. It also seeks to help members understand and appreciate the different cultures and beliefs in Singapore. This is especially significant as Singapore is a multicultural society. Hari Raya, Hari Raya Haji and Chinese New Year are some of the festivals celebrated by the association which brings Singaporeans and Turks together.



Singaporeans and Turks coming together to celebrate Chinese New Year.



People, regardless of nationality and ethnicity, coming together to *lou hei*, a Singaporean ritual during Chinese New Year.

The TCC conducts multiple classes for the public. Cooking classes are conducted at TCC's premises. TCC also organises cooking classes with community centres and some of the mosques in Singapore. Besides cooking classes, TCC regularly conducts public and private Turkish classes throughout the year. Currently more than 50 students are learning Turkish in these classes.

TCC invites academics, journalists and community leaders to deliver talks on the history of Turkey, contemporary Turkey and other social subjects. Among them were a panel discussion on "Religious and Cultural Crossroads: Istanbul and Turkey" and "Media and Values: A Global Perspective", both held at the Singapore Management University in 2011, and a seminar by Kerim Balci on "Increasing Role of Turkey in the Middle East" in conjunction with the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore in 2010.

TCC organises intercultural trips to Turkey as yet another means of building bridges and strengthening friendships between the people of Singapore and Turkey. Participants not only enjoy tourist sites and food in Turkey but also meet families and learn to appreciate their culture.

Right after its establishment, on 17 August 1999, a major earthquake occurred in Turkey. More than 40,000 people lost their lives in the quake. The TCC, Turkish Embassy and Red Cross Singapore collaborated in organising an aid campaign for the quake victims in Turkey. Many Singaporeans, along with their Turkish friends, camped at the TCC to work on coordinating the aid effort. Cash donations of S\$2.4 million, blankets, medicine and clothes were collected and delivered to Turkey. This was the



first major collaboration where Turks and Singaporeans acted together for a humanitarian cause. This also enabled the TCC to be known among Singaporeans.

In the following years, TCC has organised various activities in collaboration with the National Arts Council, secondary schools, polytechnics, junior colleges, universities, the National Library, MUIS, People's Association, community centres, the Asian Civilisations Museum, Malay Heritage Centre, various mosques and other institutions.

#### Thoughts on immigrant integration

According to a Turkish saying, every individual is responsible for cleaning the front of their house. If everyone does his or her part, the whole village or town will be clean. That is why the TCC does its part to contribute to Singapore society.

Another Turkish saying goes like this: "A home is not where you are born but where you are fed!" In this sense, the TCC considers Singapore its home. As a spokesperson from TCC described:

*We earn a living here, our families are here and we have lots of friends here. We are not exclusive to Turkish people. In fact, the more we would like to have interaction with our fellow Singaporean friends.*

*Even if there may be different feelings and thoughts, we are all people of this society. Even though we may not have common grounds on some matters, we all live in this world and we are passengers on the same ship. In this respect, there are many common points that can be discussed and shared with people from every segment of society. Turkish Cultural Centre endeavours to highlight these common points by setting up platforms where people express themselves.*



### Summary of role of TCC in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Cultural nights and other social activities bring members together.
Social bridges	Events like Friendship Night welcome people of other communities, and members get to know different people through these events. The TCC also collaborates with schools and local organisations, and members can get to know people of other communities through such collaborations.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members celebrate festivals of other ethnic groups such as Chinese New Year. Through such initiatives, members learn about the culture of other ethnic groups in Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	The TCC showcases Turkish food, music, language, art and culture through a number of initiatives like school outreach programmes, Turkish language classes, cooking classes and community events.
Giving back to country/area of origin	Members engage in fundraising and providing aid when natural disasters strike.



## Asia – East Asia

### ***The Japanese Association Singapore (JA)***

#### Introduction to the Japanese Association Singapore

The Japanese Association (JA), Singapore, was established in 1915 and re-established in 1957, with a history of over 80 years. Pre-war Japanese Association was a gathering place for Japanese who lived in Singapore, and took care of members' welfare, their children's education as well as cemetery maintenance.

Besides serving its original role, post-war Japanese Association has been active in promoting exchange and interactions with the Singaporean community. One of the objectives of the Japanese Association is to become an international cultural exchange ground for people to meet, chat and relax. Its current clubhouse is also designed to be culturally oriented to suit this purpose.

The clubhouse was officially opened by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 23 May 1998. It is a building designed and constructed with a modern exterior yet incorporating rich Japanese traditional styles for the interior. On a freehold land of approximately 5,600 square metres, the clubhouse has been built to provide members with improved services in a cosier setting and a much more pleasant environment. To the JA, it is a clubhouse that can instil a sense of belonging and pride for its members. The venue acts as a meeting place for members to organise local charitable activities. The space enables the creation of opportunities for cultural exchange and social interaction on a larger scale between members and the different communities.

#### Role of JA in immigrant integration

The JA is highly interested in getting more Singaporeans to know about Japanese culture. It does so through being involved in the Chingay Parade where it showcases Japanese dance and costumes. Members participating in the Chingay Parade also get to work with locals and thus learn about the diverse cultures in Singapore.



Colourful costumes and floats that the JA put up for the Chingay Parade.

The JA actively offers volunteer services to local schools and community clubs to introduce Japanese culture. Some aspects of Japanese culture that are featured in these programmes are the Japanese tea ceremony, drum music, flower arrangement and *koto* music. To provide a platform for local students to interact with Association members, JA invites local students to various events, including annual summer festivals, sports day, open house and Japanese speech contests.

The 27th Summer Festival was held on 23 August 2014 at the Japanese School (Changi). Participants got to try out Japanese food, games and traditional Japanese costumes during the event. There was a large turnout of over 8,000 people, including 4,000 local Japanese language learners from secondary schools, junior colleges and polytechnics. Volunteers and participants had the chance to mingle and find out more about the Japanese culture. Friendships were also formed.



Thousands of Japanese and locals joining in the traditional *Bon* dance in the 27th Summer Festival.

The JA Sports Festival, the biggest event of 2014 for the JA Sports Committee, was held in the Ayer Rajah-JAS Sports Centre. Under clear skies, over 2,000 participants competed in various team and family events. Among the participants were the Japanese Ambassador Yoichi Suzuki, JA President Mr Shojiro Nishio and many of the JAS General Committee members, as well as polytechnic students and people from the Ayer Rajah-West Coast Constituency. Locals and new immigrants participated in various sports events together. Around 160 volunteers consisting of Sports Committee members, teachers from the Japanese School, interest group members and the Waseda Shibuya School (Singapore Campus) helped out in the Sports Festival. The team events encouraged cooperation between the locals and the new immigrants. Team members also got to know each other well during the event.



A female team participating in a seven-legged race.



The JA introduces Japanese culture to the Singapore community. It looks forward to collaborating with more non-profit organisations such as schools, community centres and charity organisations. The JA recognises that interaction with Singapore community is one of the most important roles for it to play, and it is open to collaborations to better foster interaction and understanding between members and the general public.

#### Summary of JA's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members attend social gatherings and association-wide events, and forge relationships with one another.
Social bridges	Members participate in local community events held by the People's Association and National Integration Council and they get to know people from different nationalities and ethnic groups during these events. The JA also reaches out to other communities and invites everyone to take part in its events. These are opportunities for members to meet people of other communities too.
Language and cultural knowledge	Participating in national events helps members learn more about the different cultures in Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	Celebration of Japanese culture during Association events such as wearing traditional costumes and eating Japanese food. There is also substantial effort in promoting Japanese culture to locals and people of other communities.



## ***Korean Association in Singapore (KAS)***

### Introduction of KAS

Korean Association in Singapore was established in 1963. The Association also established the Korean School, which is now known as Singapore Korean International School. As the number of Koreans residing in Singapore has increased, the Association has also developed more functions to cater to the increased population. The number of Korean residents in Singapore is estimated to be around 25 000, consisting of students, businessmen, specialists and their family members. The main objective of the Association is to help these Korean residents build networks in Singapore. The Association is privileged to have the support of 113 corporate members, including Samsung, Hyundai, LG Electronics, SK Group, GS Caltex, Motorway SsangYong, Korean Air, and Asiana Airline.

### Role of KAS in immigrant integration

KAS is highly involved in organising social and recreational activities for Korean residents in Singapore. A few of the annual events include:

- Full Moon Festival for the Elderly held in February
- Korean Golf Competition held in May
- Korean Sports Day held in October
- Annual Dinner held in December

Besides these annual events, members also get to attend regular networking sessions. These initiatives gather members and give them the opportunity to mingle and interact. Through these events, members forge friendships with one another, and subsequently become a source of social support. This is especially important as members are new to Singapore and have few friends and relatives who they can turn to for help. Members also get to celebrate traditional festivals and customs with fellow Koreans, and this creates a sense of familiarity, a home away from home, for the members.



The elderly are treated to a visit to the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore during Full Moon Festival. KAS organises different visits for the elderly during Full Moon Festival every year.



KAS members pit their golfing skills against one another every year in the Korean Golf Championship.

Besides organising annual events and regular networking sessions, the KAS also conducts lessons for members. Members get to learn aspects of Korean culture, pick up new skills, and make friends during these lessons. Some of these lessons include Korean history lessons and K-pop dance lessons.



Members learning the dance steps to K-pop.



Members taking part in the *MomSaIRim* exercise routine.



Younger members attending a Korean history lesson.

To facilitate further communication between members, the KAS has set up an email network. The network currently has more than 2,000 members. A weekly bulletin delivering news and words of wisdom is sent out every Monday via the email network.



A screenshot of a typical news bulletin sent every Monday to members who are part of the email network set up by the Association.

The KAS also circulates publications within the Korean community in Singapore. The Association has published a book that documents the 50-year history of Koreans in Singapore. Members have access to the magazine *Hannuri*, which is published every month. *Hannuri* contains information about current affairs in Singapore as well as updates on the Korean community in Singapore. It has been in print since 2002.



Summary of KAS' role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members participate in association-wide annual events, networking sessions and lessons, and this allows them to mingle and get to know one another.
Language and cultural knowledge	Publications and emails inform members of what is happening in Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	Celebration of traditional festivals and having lessons on aspects of own culture such as history helps preserve Korean culture.



## ***Kowloon Club***

### Introduction to Kowloon Club

Kowloon Club was established in April 1990. The Club represents a group of people who have relocated from Hong Kong. The club currently has 1,500 family members.

As an organisation, the Club aims to nurture leaders for its community and society. With the generous support from members and members of the public, and under the leadership of its executive committee, the Club has grown to be one of the biggest immigrant associations in Singapore.

### Role of Kowloon Club in immigrant integration

The Club maintains a close relationship with local communities as well as immigrant associations from mainland China in Singapore. The Club also provides a platform for volunteers to share their experiences with community leaders from grassroots organisations and other new immigrants.



Group photo taken during a retreat to Danga Bay, Johor Bahru in Malaysia.

Apart from organising activities for its members throughout the years, the Club also acts as a mutual aid association for its members. It provides advice and shares information about Singapore with new arrivals from Hong Kong. The Club provides a forum and meeting point for members to meet and share their experiences. It has come to the aid of members who suffer sudden bereavement or misfortune. It also provides free legal consultation to members. The Club has set up bursaries for the children of members and help them finance their education.

The Club's helping hand has gone beyond its members. It has extended help to the less fortunate in the society whenever it is within the Club's means to do so. The Club's Volunteer Group provides volunteers who cook for and take care of the patients in hospitals such as the National University Hospital and

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (Dover Park Hospice Care). Volunteers have provided lessons for “study mamas” in Singapore. Through these activities, it provides a platform for members to get into close contact with community and integrate into society.

After more than 20 years of taking root in Singapore, the Club set up the Charity and Community Service Sub-group in 2012. Under the leadership of current President, Mr Philip Chan, members of committee, club staff and volunteers have organised several charity activities. To date, it has managed several events and contributed proceeds to charity organisations including the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism, Children’s Aid Society and Society for the Physically Disabled. The Club organised Longevity Vegetarian Charity Dinners for several old folks’ homes. The Club also joined the One Community Fiesta organised by the People’s Association, and has donated to Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital and the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore.



A representative from Kowloon Club handing over a cheque of \$10,000 to the Society for the Physically Disabled.



Minister of State Sim Ann joining Kowloon Club members for a charity vegetarian dinner.

#### Recognition of Kowloon Club for its contributions

In recognition of the Club contributions, its past president Mr Kenny Hui was conferred the PBM in 1997 from then Singapore President Mr Ong Teng Cheong. In year 2000, then President Mr S. R. Nathan also conferred the PBM to Mr Chung Ting Fai, the Association's past president.

In 2013, the Club was also awarded "Clan of the Year Award" by the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations to commend their outstanding performance in club activities and their active contribution in promoting Chinese culture, social and national harmony.

#### Summary of Kowloon Club's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social events are organised within the Club so that members can get to know one another during these events. There is also a culture of mutual help within the Club, e.g., counselling for troubled members and bursaries for children of members.
Social bridges	Members get to interact with the local community when they participate in volunteering.
Giving back to Singapore society	Various charity initiatives that include fundraising for the needy in Singapore and charity dinners.



## ***Singapore China Friendship Association (SCFA)***

### Introduction to SCFA

The Singapore China Friendship Association was officially established in July 1993 by 10 founding members. The association has since grown; it now has 250 official members. All directors of the association serve on a voluntary basis. Funding of the association comes from a voluntary yearly contribution of its members. The Singapore China Friendship Association is honoured to have many notable Singaporeans such as Dr Aline Wong, Dr Ker Sin Tze, Mr Lee Khoo Choy, Professor Shih Choon Fong, Professor Edwin Thumboo, Professor Wang Gungwu, Mr Ong Keng Yong, Professor Su Guaning, Mr George Yeo, Professor Yang Chen Ning and Mr Chan Soo Sen as its honorary advisors. Professor Phua Kok Khoo is the current president of the association.

### Role of SCFA in immigrant integration

SCFA aims to work closely with public and civic organisations in both Singapore and China to strengthen the understanding between citizens of both countries, as well as create opportunities for collaboration. It also provides Singaporeans and Chinese with an alternative platform of communication, through economic cooperation and cultural exchange programmes. It strives to become a bridge between China and Southeast Asia through organising different activities and programmes, to encourage interaction between people of different nationalities.

The SCFA does the above through organising talks, dialogues, seminars and exhibitions to expose Singaporeans and Chinese alike to each other's cultures. One example is the Chinese Movie Festival, co-organised with the Embassy of China in Singapore as well as the National University of Singapore's Alumni Club. SCFA also co-organised an art exhibition featuring Chinese art by Wang Dachuan, a well-known Chinese artist and art commentator. The exhibition was jointly organised by the Culture Division of the Embassy of China as well as Federation of the Art Societies Singapore. Events like these expose participants, who are Singaporeans from all walks of life and of different ethnic groups, to Chinese art and culture.



Master of ceremony introducing the programme for the China Film Festival held in 2013



Members of the SCFA attending the China International Confucius Cultural Festival.

The variety of events organised by the SCFA ensures that there is something for everyone. For those less interested in visual arts, some seminars focus on social issues. For instance, the SCFA organised a series of talks in 2014 and 2015, inviting speakers from both Singapore and China to talk about bilateral issues and to explore opportunities for more collaboration between the two countries. This series also helped to facilitate understanding and communication between Singaporeans and Chinese.



Participants listening attentively to a forum about what China could learn more from Singapore. More than 120 participants turned up for this event.

SCFA aims not only to strengthen relationships between China and Singapore, but also among all people in the region. It convened a conference that included representatives from China, Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. This forum acted as a platform for people of different nationalities to interact and vocalise their aspirations for social relations among the participating countries. It also promoted mutual trust and provided an avenue for collaborations to take place.



Representatives from different countries engage in dialogue and discussion during People to People conference organised by SCFA.

Besides these formal events, the SCFA also organises social events to celebrate cultural festivals. Members get together to celebrate Chinese New Year. SCFA also organised a celebratory dinner during Singapore's National Day and invited the Chinese in Singapore and locals alike to celebrate National Day together.



Members celebrating Chinese New Year together.



Members giving a toast when celebrating Singapore's National Day.

#### Summary of SCFA's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members who attend social events and gatherings have the opportunity to get to know one another.
Social bridges	The SCFA is active in bringing people from various countries together in events. Singaporeans and Chinese nationals also interact in events featuring both Chinese and Singaporean culture.
Language and cultural knowledge	Talks, seminars and conferences organised by SCFA help members to understand Singapore's culture, social norms and way of life.
Preservation of own culture	SCFA organises events that feature Chinese art, literature and culture.



## ***Singapore Hua Yuan General Association***

### Introduction to Singapore Hua Yuan General Association

Hua Yuan General Association is a non-profit organisation founded in 2001 by a group of new immigrants from mainland China. Most of the members are professionals who came to Singapore after the 1980s. The Association has almost 6,000 members and is the biggest association for new Chinese immigrants. Its membership and influence on society are growing rapidly. In the past 13 years, it has received support from the Singapore government, grassroots and other associations such as the Chinese Embassy and many Chinese enterprises. The Association plays a role in enhancing the communication among new immigrants, to help new immigrants integrate into local society and to build a connection between Singapore and China.

The mission of the Hua Yuan General Association is to:

- Help new immigrants integrate into multiracial Singapore
- Encourage interaction among members
- Provide support for the new immigrants
- Enhance and foster friendship with other Associations
- Enrich the lifestyle of members through a series of events
- Enhance the communication between China and Singapore in the aspects of culture and economics

### Role of Singapore Hua Yuan General Association in immigrant integration

Since the founding of the Association, Hua Yuan General Association has organised over 400 different kinds of events to bring together Hua Yuan Association members and members of the public. These events include:

- Hua Yuan troupe performance for Tong Ji Hospital charity which raised S\$120,000 in research funding
- The 4th National Speech Competition organised in conjunction with Singapore newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao*
- Table Tennis & Happy Mandarin Camp organised by Hua Yuan General Association



- Participation in the “Universal Chinese Business Talk” with a local organiser
- Welcoming delegates from Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Chongqing, Xiamen, Nanchang, Quanzhou, Tieling
- Organising business trips to Ningbo, Kunming, Shantou, Jiangsu

To facilitate immigrant integration and to make new immigrants feel at home, Hua Yuan General Association organised a series of events with the tagline of “One Singapore, One Family”. It has celebrated Mid-Autumn Festival with Chua Chu Kang Community Club and New Year’s at Labrador Park with Radin Mas community club. In 2010 and 2011, Hua Yuan General Association also celebrated the Dragon Boat Festival with Chinatown residents and new immigrants. These events inculcated a sense of home in the new immigrants, and also enhanced the racial harmony and understanding through interaction. More people also got to know about the Chinese culture through these events.



Members of Hua Yuan General Association showcasing Chinese tea culture in a public event held during the Mid-Autumn Festival.



Hua Yuan General Association is also concerned about the well-being of members of the society, especially the elderly. In year 2010, the Association and the Hainan Association co-organised events to celebrate Chinese New Year with the elderly. This event encouraged new immigrants to visit the elderly and give care to them. In 2011, Hua Yuan General Association celebrated Chinese New Year with Queenstown Community Club and organised the event “Love6000” to promote traditional Chinese philosophy and culture. One of the philosophies highlighted in the event was filial piety so as to promote care for the elderly. In September 2012, at the invitation of Member of Parliament Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, Hua Yuan General Association collaborated with Jiangsu Overseas Chinese Association and NTUC to organise a charity event at Telok Blangah Community Club. A total of \$60,000 was raised that day.

Hua Yuan General Association appreciates the diversity in Singapore and does its fair share to engage with different cultures. In April 2013, Hua Yuan General Association, with the People’s Association, Tanjong Pagar GRC and Radin Mas SMC, collectively organised an event termed “International Arts Night” to introduce cultural elements from around the world.



The Hua Yuan General Association is also actively involved in the Chingay Parade.

#### Recognition of Hua Yuan General Association’s contribution to immigrant integration in Singapore

The success of the Hua Yuan General Association has been recognised and acknowledged by Singapore politicians and the Singaporean community. Singaporean politicians and Chinese ambassadors have graced anniversaries as well as inauguration sessions of Hua Yuan General Association. In September 2010, the then Minister of Community

Development, Youth and Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, was the Guest of Honour for the tenth anniversary of Hua Yuan General Association and the first New Immigrant Outstanding Contribution Awards Ceremony at Resorts World Sentosa. The purpose of the event was to motivate more new immigrants to contribute to the society. A spokesperson of the Association writes, “Hua Yuan General Association is grateful for the recognition it is given and endeavours to build platforms to enhance the communication and harmony of the country and to help more new immigrants to integrate into Singapore.”

Summary of Singapore Hua Yuan General Association’s role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social events such as sports camps and community activities allow members to come together.
Social bridges	Most events are co-organised with local and other organisations, and this allows members to get to know people from other communities. Members also take part in community-wide events, where they get to meet local Singaporeans during these events.
Language and cultural knowledge	Taking part in cultural events co-organised by local organisations help members familiarise themselves with the various cultures in Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	The Association give members a chance to showcase Chinese culture in public events, e.g., tea culture and Chinese philosophy. Members also get to take part in local Chinese activities to promote usage of Chinese language and knowledge of Chinese culture.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Association organises charity events such as visiting welfare institutions and fundraising for the needy. It also acts as a bridge between Singapore and China.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Association hosts delegates from China, organises business trips back to China and acts as a bridge between Singapore and China.



## ***Singapore Loving & Giving Society (L&G)***

### Introduction to L&G

Among the various local non-profit organisations in Singapore, Singapore Loving & Giving Society (hereafter L&G) focuses on immigrant integration via public benefit activities. The slogan of L&G is “to cultivate an earnest heart, to perform acts of thanks-giving”. Through various benevolent social activities, it creates a platform for local residents and new immigrants to communicate and help one another, promoting mutual understanding. Furthermore, L&G is always ready to help new immigrants adapt to the local lifestyle and understand local core values, and create opportunities for them to contribute to local community.

### Role of L&G in immigrant integration

L&G facilitates immigrant integration through multiple projects and events, a few of which are described below.

The Cultural Seminar Series is a long-term project. It acts as a forum to discuss any culture-related topics of Singapore. The target audience of the series is mainly immigrants from China. Aiming to familiarise immigrants with the local social norms, culture, values and beliefs, this project helps to promote mutual understanding and tolerance between locals and immigrants. It also encourages immigrants to actively participate in social and community programmes and activities. Eventually, this project will help immigrants take the initiative to integrate into local society, gain local recognition and contribute to the community on their own accord. This project is highly supported by National Integration Council (NIC).

Themed seminars that L&G have organised to date are as follows:

- “New era, new immigrants”
- “Population, immigrants and identity – the challenges of Singapore”
- “Immigration celebrities – inspiring integration stories”
- “Talk across labour and capital – law and reality in Singapore”
- “Light up your heart – happiness within your reach”



A group photo taken after the seminar, “Population, immigrants and identity – the challenges of Singapore”

# 法律 LAW

狮城工作 法与情  
SINGAPORE

在新加坡工作的您：  
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是否清楚怎样合法维护自己的权益？  
拥有中国员工的您：  
是否理解他们的不同法律背景？  
是否知道如何更好的与其沟通协商？

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**范国瀚** 硕士生  
新加坡之家法律顾问  
**林理明** 硕士生  
石林会计师事务所合伙人

主持人：  
**周兆呈** 博士  
联合早报向玉编委导师（新加坡）主编

时间：  
2013年5月12日 13:30 –16:00

地点：  
Room 701, No. 1 Marina Boulevard,  
#11-01, One Marina Boulevard,  
Singapore 018989

联系人：  
于海洋 +65 9466 0164  
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A poster of the seminar “Talk across labour and capital – law and reality in Singapore”. The seminar seeks to equip participants with legal knowledge on the labour laws in Singapore as well as highlight the differences between the legal systems in Singapore and in China.

The Chinese Enrichment Programme is a long-term collaboration with Children’s Aid Society since 2011. The children in the residential home come from troubled families facing violence, abuse and poverty. L&G sends volunteers three times a week to help the children with their Mandarin. More importantly, the volunteers befriend them and aspire to be



good role models for the children. L&G is happy for this opportunity where new Chinese immigrants can serve the local society more effectively using their expertise.



Picture taken outside the Children's Aid Society

Starting in August 2011, the Elementary English Programme for Chinese Labourers aims to teach elementary English communication skills to PRC workers who have no background in English. These workers are mainly from the construction and service sectors, such as bus drivers holding at least two-year working contract. This group is sometimes blamed by society for not being able to integrate well into the local scene. L&G believes that the problem lies in their lack of English proficiency and understanding of local culture. Hence, in this programme, L&G teaches them English as well as local etiquette.



Chinese labourers attending a lecture that aims to brush up their English communication skills and awareness of local etiquette.



L&G has conducted four consecutive semesters of English communication skills, at both elementary and intermediate levels. More than 240 students successfully completed the course. The number of students doubled by the second half of 2014.

The English Enrichment Programme for student nurses from China was launched in July 2013. These student nurses are undergoing additional training and internship in Singapore hospitals, and are expected to work here in the near future. While they have taken English classes, they are not apt at English communication due to lack of an English-speaking environment in China. To help them improve their English communication skills and adapt to the new environment quickly, L&G arranges a weekly workshop to provide them with English training and presentation skills. The volunteer teachers, as well as the students, give English presentations across various topics in the workshop, and they share comments and suggestions in English. After the presentations, the volunteer teachers also introduce some presentation skills, e.g., how to communicate to different audiences and ways to communicate at work. The students showed significant interest in this interactive workshop. L&G is preparing to extend the workshop to attract more new immigrants so that they can both benefit from and contribute to the programme.

L&G also had its first collaborative project “Caring and Reaching out the Elderly” (C.A.R.E.) with the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) on 14 April 2013. CDAC is a well-recognised organisation whose mission is to nurture and develop the potential of the Chinese community in contributing to the continued success of multiracial Singapore. The main objectives were to:

- Help the needy senior citizens from the lower income group
- Create a platform for the Chinese community to contribute to the society
- Encourage youths to volunteer their service in caring for and supporting the senior citizens

This project is just the beginning of CDAC-L&G collaboration. CDAC has a total of 11 branches in different regions and provides various community programs. L&G intends to work closely with CDAC by sending volunteers to participate in their existing programmes as well as designing new joint projects.



An informal social gathering held in the comfort of the home of one of L&G's members

Singapore Loving & Giving Society has received tremendous support from various reputable organisations over the last four years. This support enables it to play an influential role in helping immigrants settle down more quickly in the local community. Moving forward, it hopes to commit more resources over the next three to five years, to establish L&G as one of the established non-profit organisations in Singapore and to continue to work with both Singaporeans and new immigrants to contribute actively to the local society.

#### Summary of L&G's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members interact and bond during informal social gatherings.
Language and cultural knowledge	L&G organises English lessons for Chinese nationals, which will help them integrate into Singapore society. L&G also organises a cultural seminar series which informs participants of the culture and social norms in Singapore.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members volunteer to help both needy children and the elderly.



## ***Taipei Business Association in Singapore (TBAS)***

### Introduction to TBAS

Despite the fact that Taiwanese businessmen have been in Singapore since the 1970s and that Taiwan is one of the first investors in the region, Taiwanese businesses have not been able to keep in pace with the rapid growth of the region. This can be attributed to the lack in organisation within the Taiwanese business community in the region. Hence, Taiwanese investing in Singapore worked towards establishing a formal business association in Singapore. With the support of the Taiwanese Economic Representative in Singapore as well as many generous members, the Taipei Business Association in Singapore (TBAS) was formed in 1991.

### Role of TBAS in immigrant integration

TBAS is primarily a business association. It aims to promote the goods and services of its members (usually businessmen) and enhance business opportunities. It also aims to strengthen trade relations between Singapore and Taiwan. However, it is also involved in providing welfare and benefits to its members, as well as organising social events to engage its members. These social activities act as a platform for members to come together and exchange information about their lives in Singapore. They also act as social support groups so that members who stay in touch with one another have someone to turn to in times of need.

The major events that TBAS celebrates include Chinese New Year, where members bring their families along and offer their Chinese New Year greetings to other members. The chairman of the association makes it a point to give the children present a *hongbao* (red packet) each.



TBAS members having *lou hei* during Chinese New Year dinner



TBAS members enjoy a lion dance during Chinese New Year celebrations

Members also get together to celebrate *Shuangshijie* (National Day of the Republic of China) through organising a series of sporting events. Locals are also invited to join in these events, as members would like the general public to share their joy for this big day, which is of significance to the Taiwanese. The Association engages in public diplomacy during these events, allowing non-Taiwanese and Taiwanese to bond through sports and interact in an informal manner.



A group photo after a tennis outing



TBAS' celebratory National Day dinner

Besides these big annual events, the Association also organises small ad hoc events such as financial management talks, family day trips, welcome events for new members, as well as collaborations with Taiwanese artistes in producing concerts and performances.



TBAS members attending a premier of a Taiwanese movie



The TBAS hosts dignitaries from Taiwan when they pay Singapore a visit. This picture shows TBAS members hosting previous Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-pin.

The Association is not only concerned with the welfare and growth of its members, it also believes in giving back to the Singapore society. In recent years, generous members of the TBAS visit patients of mental institutions during traditional Chinese festivals such as the *Duanwu* Festival and Mooncake Festival. They donate clothes and daily necessities to the patients, and put up performances to cheer them up during these festive seasons.

#### Summary of TBAS' role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social gatherings that include sports outings, talks and movie screenings act as platforms for members to mingle.
Social bridges	Non-members are welcome to join the Associations during large social events like the celebration of <i>Shuangshijie</i> .
Preservation of own culture	TBAS promotes Taiwanese films and Taiwanese art through movie screenings and collaborating with Taiwanese artistes.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members volunteer with mental institutions and donate items to the patients of these institutions.
Giving back to country/area of origin	TBAS hosts dignitaries from Taiwan and helps to improve trade relations between Singapore and Taiwan.



## ***Tianfu Association Singapore***

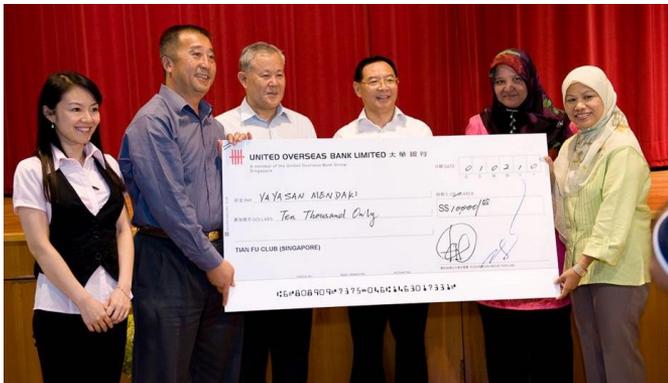
### Introduction of Tianfu Association Singapore

Tianfu Association Singapore originated in Sichuan, China, and is the first Chinese immigrant association formed in Singapore after diplomatic relations between Singapore and the People's Republic of China was established. The Association has been active since 1996, and was formally registered with the Registrar of Societies in 2000.

To date, Tianfu Association has approximately 80 directors and 2,300 members who largely consist of Information Technology professionals, business leaders and scholars. Its members come from all parts of China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Xi'an.

### Role of Tianfu Association in facilitating immigrant integration in Singapore

Tianfu Association seeks to integrate its members into multicultural Singapore through a myriad of activities. Most of these activities are charitable in nature. Tianfu members generously contribute to the less privileged segments of Singapore society. For instance, the Association donated \$10,000 to Mendaki, to support less privileged Malay students in Singapore. As Tianfu Association believes in the value of education, a sum of \$5,000 was contributed to the local students residing in East Coast Kampong Chai Chee as bursary awards cum textbook and uniform subsidies. In 2014, Tianfu Association set up an integration fund. Members and non-members alike, regardless of race, language or religion, can also tap this fund to conduct social activities beneficial for immigrant integration. In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA), Tianfu Association donated \$60,000 to the SFCCA to support its work.



Representatives from Tianfu Association handing over a cheque of \$10,000 to Mendaki. This sum goes towards providing less privileged Malay students with financial assistance.



Tianfu Association contributed a sum of \$5,000 as bursary cum textbooks and uniform subsidies to the students in East Coast Kampong Chai Chee.

Besides monetary contributions, members of Tianfu Association also contribute their time and skills to make Singapore a better place to live in for everyone. The directors of Tianfu Associations are often invited to join governmental task groups and organisations such as the town councils and National Integration Council. Many members are also actively involved in grassroots activities, some even as grassroots leaders. They volunteer at Meet-the-People Sessions, and believe in serving the Singaporean community.

Tianfu Association aims to provide a platform for its members to network, connect and socialise. Through organising social events such as during the durian season and the Mooncake Festival Celebrations, Tianfu Association encourages its members to interact and get to know one another. The Association spearheads efforts to help its members familiarise themselves with local culture as well as to pick up English and various dialects. Strong bonds are forged in the Association; when members encounter obstacles working and living in a new environment, they get together to share thoughts and advice, encouraging one another to stay positive. This ultimately facilitates integration into Singapore. Over the years, Tianfu Association has earned a reputation for being a closely-knit and harmonious community.

Tianfu Association also builds relationships with other associations. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Chinese student associations, Teochew *huay guan*, Kowloon Club are among many other clubs the Tianfu Association reaches out to and engages in social activities and partnerships. Tianfu Associations makes it a point to participate in local social events, such as the leaders' inauguration ceremonies of other



associations, talks and conferences, as well as cultural performances and events such as the annual River Hongbao event and community-organised Rangoli Design Competitions. These avenues act as excellent platforms for members to get to know and work with people of other communities, widening their social circle and getting in touch with local culture.



Durian season event organised by Tianfu Association. This event was graced by Law Minister Mr K. Shanmugam.



Members of the Tianfu Association are interested in learning about the culture of other ethnic groups.

Above, left: Secretary of Tianfu Association, Ms Joana Jiao, learning how to put on a sari.

Above, right: Tianfu Association participated in the Kampong Chai Chee Rangoli Design Competition. The Rangoli featured in the photo holds the record of the largest Rangoli design in the *Singapore Book of Records*.

To help new immigrants better integrate into Singapore, Tianfu Association collaborated with the Tianjin Association and a few other organisations to



organise a closed-door dialogue in July, 2014 to offer participants some insights and information on how to navigate life in Singapore. Participants also got the chance to interact with Mr Chan Chun Sing, the then Minister of Social and Family Development, and hear his thoughts on immigrant integration. Through this dialogue, members better understood the national policies of Singapore.

Tianfu Association is also sensitive to the needs of its members and the happenings back in China. Other than providing scholarships and financial aid to deserving children of members, funding some 128 students, Tianfu Association is also quick to raise funds for Chinese affected by natural disasters. Tianfu Association initiated fundraising efforts for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake in 2013 and managed to raise a total of \$240,000. In addition, Tianfu Association built an elementary school in Sichuan for children whose schools were damaged in the earthquake so that they could continue their education.

Tianfu Association also celebrates milestones in Singapore's history. In January 2015, Minister Chan Chun Sing and Minister of State, Minister of Education and Ministry of Communications and Information Ms Sim Ann graced a celebratory dinner organised to celebrate Singapore's 50 years of independence. During the dinner, a sum of \$6,000 was donated to self-help organisations CDAC, MENDAKI and SINDA to support them in their good work done for the local community.

A spokesperson from Tianfu Association expresses the Association's will to play a larger role in immigrant integration.

*The acceptance shown by the Singaporean society towards Tianfu Association further fuels the Association's will to continue to be generous and serious towards contributing to the society. While striving to be an excellent and outstanding immigrant association, Tianfu Association will continue to be humble and prioritise its loyalty in serving and giving back to the society.*



### Summary of Tianfu Association's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social activities that the Association organises bring members together.
Social bridges	Tianfu Association works closely with and actively engages both local organisations and other immigrant associations, and members get to meet people of different nationalities and ethnic groups during these events. Members also take part in community events, and they get to interact with local Singaporeans through these events.
Social links	Dialogue sessions are organised for members to learn more about national policies.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members learn about Singapore's culture and the cultures of different ethnic groups through participating in community events, e.g., during the durian season and at the Rangoli Design Competition. They also learn about Singapore's law and culture through dialogue sessions. Tianfu Association strongly encourages members to pick up English too.
Giving back to Singapore society	Tianfu Association is very generous in donating to the poor and needy in Singapore. Funds have been raised by members for self-help organisations in Singapore. Tianfu Association has also set up a fund that everyone can tap when initiating an event facilitating immigrant integration.
Giving back to country/area of origin	Tianfu Association contributes in form of donations when natural disasters strike China. The Association also raises money to build schools in China.



## ***Tianjin Association***

### Introduction to Tianjin Association

The Tianjin Association was founded on the 30 March 2008. It is a Chinese immigrant association established after Kowloon Club, Hua Yuan General Association and Tianfu Association. The founder of Tianjin Association, Ms Chen Liping, was born and bred in Tianjin. She came to Singapore 20 years ago and decided to call Singapore her second home. Hoping to help new Chinese immigrants better integrate into Singapore, she led 12 professional new immigrants in founding the Tianjin Association. Today, the Tianjin Association has close to 300 formal members. The large membership allows the Association to make a significant impact to the society.

### Tianjin Association's role in immigrant integration

The Singapore Tianjin Association seeks to be both a business association and a clan association. It bears the mission of encouraging trade and investment between Singapore and Tianjin. It also provides an effective platform for the entrepreneurs and investors in both countries to communicate and interact. As an important bridge between Singapore and China, the Tianjin Association has facilitated and encouraged contact and communication between the Chinese residing in Singapore and members of their homeland since its founding. The Tianjin Association has developed to become an up-and-coming association for the Chinese community in Singapore to turn to, as it acts as an effective bridge between Singaporean Chinese and the Chinese in China.

The Tianjin Association sees itself playing an important role in diplomatic relations between Tianjin and Singapore. When Tianjin officials come to Singapore for visits, the Tianjin Association makes it a point to host them and make them feel comfortable in Singapore. This bridges the political distance between Singapore and Tianjin, allowing Tianjin Association members to interact with the officials, while making the Tianjin Association a relevant and politically important association.



Tianjin Association is a point of contact when officials of Tianjin visit Singapore

Anyone who is interested in Tianjin can join the Tianjin Association. Membership is not exclusive to only people from Tianjin. Hence, the Tianjin Association consists of people from various nationalities, and is a good avenue for members to interact with people from other communities. The Tianjin Association is also frequently represented in local social events. In these events, members of the Tianjin Association get a chance to mingle with local Singaporeans and connect with government officials and Members of Parliament. The Association also supports events organised by other associations, by attending and putting up cultural performances. Through these events, more get to know about the work that the Tianjin Association does, and members get to learn more about others too.



A picture of Tianjin Association's president, Ms Chen Liping, and Taiwanese representatives in Singapore. The Tianjin Association was invited to attend the celebrations of the national day of the Republic of China.



A picture taken with Ms Sim Ann during the National Day Celebratory Dinner organised by the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce.



Members of the Tianjin Association putting up an event for a Mid-Autumn Festival dinner party organised by the Singapore Amoy Association.

In the past seven years, the Tianjin Association has managed to expand, both in membership and in importance. With the hard work of both old and new members, the Association believes that it will become a crucial link between Tianjin and Singapore. The Association looks forward to enabling more economic opportunities and strengthening social relations between the two places.



### Summary of Tianjin Association's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Both formal and informal gatherings amongst members act as an avenue for members to forge bonds.
Social bridges	Membership is not exclusive to people from Tianjin; Tianjin Association consists of members from various nationalities and they get to interact during Association events. Members also participate in national events that gather people from different communities.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members learn about Singapore's culture when they participate in national events.
Preservation of own culture	Tianjin Association showcases aspects of Chinese culture when they are invited to perform during events. Members of the Association also celebrate traditional Chinese festivals.
Giving back to Singapore society	Tianjin Association helps in enabling more economic opportunities and enhances social relations between Singapore and Tianjin.
Giving back to country/area of origin	Tianjin Association hosts delegates from Tianjin when they visit Singapore. The Association also enables more economic opportunities and enhances social relations between Singapore and Tianjin.



## Asia – South Asia

### ***Bengali Association Singapore (BAS)***

#### Introduction of BAS

The first attempt to form a Bengali association was made as early as 1920 and a second attempt in 1936 — both were unsuccessful due to the lack of intent and leadership. It was only in 1956 that another attempt at forming a formal association was discussed. A proposal to form an association with the name Singapore Bengali Association was unanimously accepted and an ad hoc committee was elected and empowered to frame a constitution. The draft constitution stated that the objectives of the Association were to promote social, cultural, educational and recreational activities amongst its members as well as to hold annual celebrations in which Bengalis are particularly interested in. The objectives still remain. The Registrar of Societies approved the constitution and the Singapore Bengali Association came into being with a membership of 50 families on 10 September 1956.

With the passing of the older generation, a new breed of members has not only kept it alive but has made it a home away from home for a sizeable expatriate Bengali community made up of IT specialists, financial experts, medical specialists and regional directors of multinational corporation. They and their families have brought with them the wealth of Bengali culture of songs, dances and dramas.

The Association is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the celebration of culture and preservation of traditional values among the immigrant Bengali population of Singapore. Members come from all walks of life, include families and singles as well as those of different ages.

#### BAS' role in immigrant integration:

BAS provides a platform for members to network with the broader Bengali community in Singapore and participate in cultural programmes. Through *MILON*, an annual BAS publication, members also get to build their social networks in Singapore. This is because *MILON* contains contact details of all the members, making it easy for members to get together to organise social activities.

BAS provides members with a home away from home by celebrating traditional Indian festivals and bringing together members of the Bengali community in Singapore. Some of these events and traditional festivals celebrated include:

- Noboborsho (Bengali New Year)



- Saraswati Pujo (A Hindu festival to honour Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, arts, wisdom, and learning)
- Durga Puja (A six-day Hindu festival that honours Durga, the Hindu goddess that triumphed against evil)



BAS members gather to perform traditional rituals during Saraswati Pujo together



BAS members coming together to work together and put up decorations for Durga Puja. BAS holds one of the biggest Durga Puja celebrations outside of India.

BAS also participates actively in events organised by the local community. It takes these opportunities to showcase the Bengali culture, music and dance during national events. An example would be Racial Harmony Night held on 7 July 2012. It was organised by local agencies such as the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), the Eurasian Association (EA) as well as the Chinese Development Activity



Council (CDAC). People of different ethnic groups got to know more about BAS and the Bengali culture through the dance performance put up by the dancers.



BAS members showcase traditional dances and costumes during Racial Harmony Night held on 7 July 2012

### Summary of BAS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	<i>MILON</i> , the annual publication of BAS provides members with each other's contacts. Members also get together during celebrations.
Social bridges	BAS participates in events organised by local organisations and during these events, members get to know people of different communities.
Preservation of own culture	Celebration of traditional cultural festivals and promoting own culture to the general population through performances.



## ***Bengali Community Singapore (BCS)***

### Introduction to BCS

BCS is a non-profit organisation in Singapore that prides itself in its high level of appreciation of Bengali cultural heritage, which is particularly valuable in multi-ethnic Singapore. BCS represents a community of Bangladeshi born Singaporean and Bangladeshi expatriate who are involved in various professional fields in Singapore. It plays a role in the promotion of peace, love and harmony, in a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious country; and is committed towards service to the community as well as nation building.

BCS was formed on 5 May 2007 on an ad hoc basis and formally established later on 8 December 2007. It began with 12 members. Today, it has nearly 200 ordinary members, more than 1,000 Grassroots Committee (GRC) members and a pan-Bangladeshi community that reflects the cultural diversity of a vast country with an ancient heritage.

### Role of BCS in immigrant integration

The objectives of BCS are aligned to enhancing immigrant integration and harmony in Singapore, while organising social and cultural gatherings to maintain the Bengali identity. The BCS provides a platform for its members to celebrate important cultural festivals such as the Durga Puja and Saraswati Puja together. Community activities like picnics in parks are also held to enhance relationships within the members of BCS.



Members gather to celebrate and perform traditional rituals during Saraswati Puja.



Traditional music is played during celebrations.



Beauty pageants and games like tug-of-war are featured in outdoor picnic events. Members bond and interact while having fun.



BCS is also actively involved in giving back to Singapore society, through looking after the welfare of the needy and helping them by providing counselling services and social support. BCS' involvement with community service can be seen from the large number of members working with grassroots committees. BCS also provides a platform for interaction between Singaporeans and expatriates by organising social events, which enhance immigrant integration.

#### Summary of BCS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members forge friendships during social activities like picnics and celebrating cultural festivals together.
Social bridges	People of different ethnic groups and nationalities are welcome to participate in social events. Members also work closely with the local grassroots leaders and volunteering activities.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate traditional cultural festivals together.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members are actively involved in community service, such as providing counselling services.



## **BIJHAR**

### Introduction to BIJHAR

BIJHAR was formally registered in Singapore in 2006, although the foundation can be traced back to 2004. The founding members of BIJHAR have roots in the eastern Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, hence the portmanteau BIJHAR. It believes in integrating all the people living in Singapore as one big family. Over the past 11 years there have been numerous efforts made by members of BIJHAR to facilitate social cohesion in Singapore. Its programmes are touted to be holistic, to promote camaraderie, spirit of selfless work and to give a platform to the members and their families to showcase their talents in various programmes. It started with about 20 members and has now grown to around 300.

### BIJHAR's role in immigrant integration in Singapore

BIJHAR is highly interested in facilitating immigrant integration in Singapore. Its primary aims are directed to help its members feel more at home in Singapore, and to help the locals understand more about the culture and history of Bihar and Jharkhand.

BIJHAR's primary aims are to:

- Help new immigrants to settle down in Singapore

BIJHAR is active in helping new immigrants and members of BIJHAR to settle down in Singapore. It informs them about the laws of the land, its economy and the privileges available to make it easy for the new migrant to comfortably settle down. Each year, it welcomes new immigrants from all over the world (not necessarily only from Bihar and Jharkhand), and members of BIJHAR help these families to better understand Singapore.

BIJHAR also organises retreats for its members to unwind and bond at popular nearby tourist destinations such as Halong Bay, Angkor Wat or nearby resorts in places such as Bintan, Desaru, St. John's Island and Kusu Island.

- Promote social, cultural, educational, recreational and welfare activities as well as celebrate the native festivals of Bihar and Jharkhand

The group has been celebrating Indian festivals such as Deepavali (Festival of Lights), Holi (Festival of Colour) and Makar Sankranti (a harvest festival) which are attended by existing members and new immigrants. It also invites members' friends and colleagues from other



nationalities so that others can get to know about these cultural celebrations. The growth of this community in the recent past has led to a signature event Deep Utsav becoming one of the biggest Indian cultural events in Singapore. It works closely with National Integration Council to get valuable support in organising these events.



BIJHAR members pour dye on each other as a form of blessing during the Holi celebrations.

BIJHAR also gather members who would like to play the national sport of India — cricket — in Singapore. Families bond through fun and sports, while keeping themselves healthy.



A picture taken after a game of cricket in the Ceylon Sports Club. Cricket is a popular sport within the Indian community.

The involvement of a Japanese group in our celebration of Deepavali for the past five years marks the success of BIJHAR in integrating different nationalities within its community. The particular Japanese group makes an effort every year to travel from Japan to Singapore just to give a



performance on Deepavali. BIJHAR members share a mutual love, respect and understanding with the group of five talented Japanese ladies. As a spokesperson mentioned, “With their stupendous performance they make us feel that they are more Indian than us”.

- Promote intercultural understanding between the Bihar and Jharkhand community and Singaporeans

Over the years BIJHAR has been inviting Singaporeans on different occasions like knowledge-sharing sessions and cultural activities. In 2014, BIJHAR invited dignitaries from SINDA, *Tabla!* and Onepeople.sg to join its events. In 2014, “Deep Ustav” featured Singaporean students from a group called “Rang Manch Musical Bollywood”, who gave an unsurpassed performance on a difficult dance art form called Dandiya. The Singaporean students have been participating in BIJHAR events for the past three years and never miss a chance to join the group in all their other events. Moreover, the Festival of Colors, or Holi, involved Singaporeans from all walks of life. It has also invited academicians to participate in their Holi Milan (a eight-day celebration of the Holi). According to BIJHAR, their cultural integration mission has played a crucial role in building a bond between the locals and the Indian immigrants.



Locals join in the fun during the Deep Utsav 2013 celebrations

BIJHAR is also open to collaboration with local grassroots organisations. It successfully organised a Dandiya (a traditional Indian folk dance form) event with support from West Coast Park neighbourhood committee. This event was attended by the West Coast CCC chairman, various grassroots leaders and local citizens. BIJHAR has also been invited to national events such as the Chingay Parade and River Hongbao, to engage in local cultural festivities. It also organises sports events and invites the local



community so that new immigrants can get to know locals better and bond through engaging in sports.

- Engage in developmental activities for the underprivileged sections of the society

Since 2012, a group of BIJHAR members and their friends have been engaged in charity work both in India and Singapore. As a part of this initiative, participants contribute a minimum sum of S\$20 every month. As there is no upper limit, some members in the past have contributed up to S\$50 and S\$100 each month. The sum is collected and disbursed to a number of NGOs and other institutions that accept donations from the public. The beneficiaries of this programme include the Society for the Physically Disabled (Singapore), Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad (Patna, India) and Children of Mother Earth (Uttar Pradesh, India).

BIJHAR initiates visits to local welfare institutions like MINDS under its community welfare drive. BIJHAR members have also visited the Cheshire Home to help people with disabilities. They donated money along with food and items for daily use to the home. BIJHAR has been making modest but sustained attempts to engage in humanitarian and philanthropic activities in Singapore.

BIJHAR is also involved in other charity activities such as taking part in the blood donation drive at Singapore General Hospital, and fundraising for the victims of natural disasters.



Blood donation is one of many ways members of BIJHAR contribute to the society.



➤ Create opportunities for social entrepreneurship

Many members of BIJHAR have come forward with the initiative to contribute both socially and economically to Singapore. BIJHAR founder Mr Prakash Hetamsaria started a new venture, Fresh Healthy Café that provides employment to the elderly in society. Co-founding member, Mr Rajesh Anand opened yoga classes for all Singaporeans and foreigners. The proceeds of these yoga classes go to charity.

Future Plans

BIJHAR's vision for the next five years is for a more integrated Singapore. As it sees more and more foreigners coming to Singapore, its main objective is to integrate them into society. Since children are the future of the society, it will be putting in more efforts towards children's integration. Moreover, as a community, it believes that its efforts to integrate Singaporeans with the foreigners will help take the mission of building a cohesive Singapore to a greater reality.

BIJHAR's focus in the years to come will be community development, culture and sports development and charity work across Singapore. It will be organising classes to help members get used to their office environments and extend a hand of friendship towards their neighbours. It believes that if each member of BIJHAR could start their day with a feeling of brotherhood towards his colleagues or neighbours or even strangers, the group will be able to contribute immensely towards an integrated Singapore.

Summary of BIJHAR's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Celebrations, sports and other social activities bring members together.
Social bridges	Locals and people of other different communities are invited to social events, and members get a chance to interact with these people. Membership is also open to people of other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate cultural festivals together.
Giving back to Singapore society	Efforts include fundraising, visits to social services institutions and blood donation drives. BIJHAR also creates opportunities for social entrepreneurship.



## ***Indian Institutes of Technology Alumni Association, Singapore (IITAAS)***

### Introduction to IITAAS

The IIT Alumni Association Singapore (IITAAS), started in 1993, is a non-profit organisation, dedicated towards building a network of IIT alumni in Singapore to foster and promote a sense of togetherness within members of the IIT community. There are over 1,000 IITians in Singapore in various walks of life contributing significantly in professional and social arenas. The energy and zeal of its members have allowed the IITAAS to achieve several commendable targets in a short time.

### IIT's role in immigrant integration

IITAAS has been actively involved in the integration of its members with the Singaporean community particularly since 2013. Having a strong commitment towards social causes, IITAAS believes in being responsible members of the society and contributing to raffle draws for the underprivileged and the needy. It regularly participates in closed-door focus group discussions especially on integration and harmony where its executive committee members Ms Ritu Jain and Ms Priya Sengupta are frequent contributors. In 2014, they have together attended three such conferences. IITAAS also puts up dance and music performances that marry the cultures of Singapore and India, and highlights the cultural variety of the various different ethnic groups that have made Singapore their home. It is also active in collaborating with the People's Association, the Narpani, and the Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs) for various events. Some of these activities include Family Days, Community Sports Days and cultural events such as the Chingay Parade.

IITAAS represented the immigrant Indian community in Singapore during the Integration Carnival held in April 2013. This marked the beginning of its collaboration and participation with the People's Association. As part of this carnival the IITAAS set up booths drawing visitors to henna art and other interactive community activities that showcase some of its customs and traditions. Participants who come to the booths got a first-hand experience in the customs and traditions of the Indians, and gained an understanding on why they do things the way they do.



Above, left: Woman gets her henna painting experience from a member of IITAAS. Above, right: Representative of the IITAAS on stage with the Guest of Honour, Ms Grace Fu, during the Integration Carnival 2013.

IITAAS organised the Tanjong Pagar GRC-IAEC Deepavali dinner in December 2013, where more than 50 IITAAS members and their families participated. Members' children were invited to usher the various heads of the 13 Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs) who were the Guests of Honour for this event. The children also put up energetic dance items that were featured that night. A big draw at the event was a giant Rangoli exhibit made by the ladies' wing of the IITAAS, which was given final touches by Ms Indranee Rajah, then Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of Law and Ministry of Education.

IITAAS also sponsored 10 raffle prizes to be distributed as part of the lucky draw. It gave a 40-minute performance on stage to showcase members' cultural talents to the audience.



Picture taken with Ms Indranee Rajah, then Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of Law and Ministry of Education during Deepavali dinner celebrations .



Members of the IITAAS attended the Chingay Parade in February 2014. Participants understood the values of integration, racial harmony and nation building through the parade. It was a colourful festival with song and dance from various ethnic groups in Singapore, and the IITAAS looks forward to be able to participate as performers in future.

As a premier educational institute, IITAAS recognises the power of knowledge and wants to use it as a way to reach out. Therefore, when the People's Association invited IITAAS to set up a booth at the One Community Fiesta held at Gardens by the Bay in November 2014, the Association put up a quiz that highlighted Singapore's connection with India entitled "The Singapore-India Friendship Quiz". The booth was dedicated to the work being done by The Cha Project, a Singapore-led urban revival initiative for India's only surviving Chinatown in the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata). The reason the project resonates with IITAAS is that it uses Singaporean talent and expertise in urban planning and design to resuscitate the city. Colourful info-graphics highlighted the strong connection that Singapore has with Calcutta, which not many are aware of. More than 2,000 people answered the quiz over *masala chai*, an Indian beverage, and many were surprised to learn that there is a Chinatown in India. Many locals and new immigrants were delighted to know about the strong connections the two cities shared and felt a sense of commonality and association through participating in the quiz.



Above, left: IITAAS members engaging Minister Khaw Boon Wan in conversation



Above, right: Picture of the info-graphics regarding the Singapore-Calcutta connection put up by the IITAAS

#### Further plans to further facilitate immigrant integration in Singapore

IITAAS recognises that it can do more to further enhance understanding and interaction between members and the general local population. It plans to continue its community interaction by:



- Being part of the thought leadership in addressing immigrant issues and increasing citizen-immigrant interaction platforms
- Being part of the integration carnival again in the future and coming up with innovative ideas each time on how the interaction can be an enriching and meaningful one
- Participating in the Chingay Parade in the coming years to allow more people to know about Indian culture while embracing other cultures in Singapore
- Celebrating Indian cultural festivals such as Deepavali, Eid and Holi with the community centres so that locals can join in such events
- Working closely with SINDA and raising awareness and funds for its various social causes
- Organising special film screenings/events for migrant workers
- Setting up a scholarship fund for needy students

#### Summary of IITAAS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members take part in social activities and gatherings and forge friendships during these events.
Social bridges	IITAAS partners local organisations in events, and members get to know locals during these community events. IITAAS also has plans to celebrate traditional festivals in community spaces so that people from other communities can join in.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members learn about the values and culture of Singapore through attending events like the Chingay Parade.
Preservation of own culture	IITAAS showcases India's culture through song and dance during events.
Giving back to Singapore society	IITAAS engage in social causes such as sponsoring tables so that the less privileged can join them in celebrating Deepavali. There are also plans to do more; for instance, fundraising for needy students, activities for migrant workers and partnering SINDA to better address social issues.



## ***Maharashtra Mandal (Singapore) (MMS)***

### Introduction to MMS

Maharashtra Mandal (Singapore) or MMS is a non-profit social organisation registered with the Registrar of Societies in Singapore since August 1994. Its principal objectives are to cultivate artistic talent and to preserve, promote and share its culture and heritage among members or other interested individuals.

MMS has about 750 full and current members and more than 2,200 members registered in its database, mostly residing in Singapore and some in overseas locations. MMS members are typically between 30–40 years of age and a large majority of them are information technology, engineering, finance and management professionals.

### MMS' role in immigrant integration

MMS organises events and programmes aligned with its objectives. It runs forums, performances and fine arts (e.g., music, dance, drama, poetry, literature). This approach provides a stage for showcasing, sharing and enhancing talent and helps in passing its rich cultural heritage, social values and appreciation for the arts to succeeding younger generations. MMS runs a library consisting of over 3,000 books made available to its members. Members contribute poems, essays and other forms of literature to an e-magazine that MMS publishes, which reaches an estimated 2,200 email inboxes in Singapore and overseas. Last but not the least, MMS works closely with other social/cultural organisations in Singapore and participates in a variety of collaborative events. Festivals such as Ganeshotsav (a Hindu festival honouring the elephant-headed god, Ganesh), Deepavali, Gudhi Padwa (Hindu New Year) and annual performing events such as a musical orchestra, a multi-act play, dance programmes (all presented by members and their children) and an annual sports meet are MMS' main events. It also organises programmes presented by visiting professional artists. On average, about 250 members attend each of these programmes.

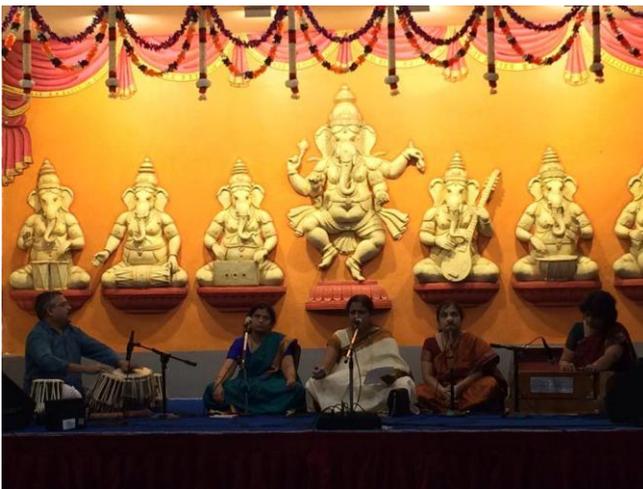
MMS celebrates Ganeshotsav annually with its members, members of other Indian communities and special guests. Every year they have hundreds of visitors and particularly a large number of devotees and patrons attending the celebrations. A special annual publication is also published on this occasion, which carries high quality literary pieces contributed by members and advertisements, complimentary messages from members, patrons, donors and well-wishers.



A picture of the altar for worship during Ganeshotsav

In 2011, MMS hosted an International Marathi Literature conference — a significant global event for Marathi speakers. MMS also hosted the 2011/12 (annual) Singapore Gita Jayanti celebrations. This event was co-hosted by 35 other participating Indian community organisations in Singapore. It regularly participates in this annual event. Through the event, MMS members get to know people from other Indian communities and build social connections with them.

MMS is a prominent participant in the New Year Celebration organised by LISHA (Little India Shopkeepers' Association), the SIFAS music festival, and music and dance performances at the Sri Vadapathira Kaliyamman Temple in Little India.



Song performances put up by MMS during the New Year Celebrations held in Sri Vadapathira Kaliyamman Temple



In 2014, MMS participated in the Indian New Year Celebration organised by the Tampines CC IAEC. It was a part of the team that created the Longest *Rangoli* made of sand and found a place in the *Singapore Book of Records*.



Above, left: A poster with the details of an Indian New Year Integration event that MMS took part in

Above, right: A group photo taken after the event

In 2014, MMS jointly organised the Holi celebration with other Indian community organisations such as the Singapore Gujarathi Society, Mitra Marwari Mandal and the Sindhi Association.



Above, left: A poster of the Holi event that MMS co-organised with other Indian organisations

Above, right: Performers on stage during the Holi event

MMS made the first move in this direction. Moving forward, MMS intends to conduct initiatives such as a blood donation or a donation drive through which it can give back to Singapore in some form. It would also like to



make its presence felt by participating in events organised by the local community on a regular basis. It would also like to invite people from the local community to attend its flagship Ganesh Festival.

Summary of MMS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members get to know each other through celebrating traditional festivals together and attending social events.
Social bridges	MMS collaborates with other organisations when organising events. It also provides a platform for members to attend large-scale events that bring together people of different nationalities and background. Non-members are also welcome to join the MMS in events.
Preservation of own culture	Publications and events to preserve Marathi language, literature and culture. Celebration of traditional festivals also preserves culture.
Giving back to Singapore society	MMS plans to take part in blood donation and donation drives in Singapore.



## ***Marwari Mitra Mandal (Singapore) (MMM)***

### Introduction to MMM

Marwaris originating from Rajasthan migrated to other regions in India as well as to various other countries including Singapore. MMM's members includes (1) Marwaris who have roots in Singapore since three generations ago (from the 1930s), (2) newer immigrants from various regions in India and (3) Marwaris from all over the world.

Before the formation of MMM, members used to organise various social programmes. The members then decided to formally register themselves as a society. Marwari Mitra Mandal (Singapore) was registered with the Registry of Societies in 2005 with the objective of promoting social, cultural, educational, recreational and welfare activities as well as hold celebrations for Marwaris in Singapore. Since then the society is gradually widening the scope the activities, a ladies' wing has also been formed to help the Mandal to organise various activities.

Currently, the society has 322 members. Our membership roster includes prominent businessmen engaged in commodities, metal, petroleum products and machineries as well as bankers and professionals.

### Role of MMM in immigrant integration

The Society endeavours to bring the Marwari Community in Singapore closer by providing all members with more opportunities to know one another better. It intends to further strengthen the integration with other societies and communities on social and cultural levels through the sharing of traditions, beliefs, rituals and values. It aims to foster stronger relationships with different sections of the society and contribute to the overall social cohesion of Singapore. MMM organises various social, cultural, religious functions as well as sports and networking events. These events act as platforms for different people to interact and get to know one another, facilitating immigrant integration. Some of these activities are listed below.

MMM deepens social connections not only amongst its members but also with members of other societies when celebrating cultural festivities. These celebrations bring people of different backgrounds and societies together, and act as a platform for people to interact. For instance, Mandal organises Diwali Ball, a signature annual event. Various cultural programmes are featured during the Diwali Ball. The Ball is attended by members of MMM and also by people from other societies. During the Diwali Ball, it also honour members and their families by presenting them with excellence and encouragement awards for their outstanding achievements in various fields

such as education, culture, sports or business. The recognition encourages members to do better in contributing to the society.



Members interacting during Diwali Ball, one of the largest events that Marwari Mitra Mandal (Singapore) organises

Besides interacting with members from other societies during the celebrations, members of the Mandal also deepen relationships with members from other societies through organising a cultural event together. Such cultural events include Holika Dahan, which is arranged every year together with Singapore Gujarati Society, and Dulhetty, which is co-organised with the Singapore Gujarati Society and the Singapore Sindhi Association.



Marwari Mitra Mandal (Singapore) is honoured to be invited to a Deepavali Light Up with Guest of Honour, Member of Parliament, Lim Biow Chuan



Engaging members of all ages, MMM organises a series of events to facilitate immigrant integration. An example of an event catering to young children would be the Fun Fiesta. Fancy dress, drawing and painting competitions were held for young children from 2 to 12 years old. It received an overwhelming response from about 400 participants. Members from other communities also attended the programme. The event was well received by participants as a platform to showcase their children's talents and to get to know new friends.



Both children and parents participated in the Fun Fiesta, a family-friendly event full of games and competitions.

Various events are held periodically for members to network and interact. For instance, a talk was organised in 2015 to educate the members on importance of legacy planning. MMM also held a movie premiere at GV for its members along with members of other societies. A networking session preceded the movie premier. Members of MMM also attended an interaction night held by the Singapore Press Holdings.



Movie premiere at GV cinema. Members got to interact and mingle before the premiere.

MMM believes in giving back to the society. Its members actively engage in charity and volunteering events. Members of the MMM participated in a blood donation camp organised at Mountbatten Community Centre in cooperation with other societies, as well as SINDA Volunteers' Tea Programme.



A picture taken with Deputy Prime Minister and then Minister for Finance, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, during SINDA Volunteers' Tea. This event was held in appreciation of the contribution of volunteers and various organisations to the community.



### Summary of MMM's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social events like cultural festivals and movie screenings allows members to meet and get to know one another.
Social bridges	People from other communities are welcome to join MMM in festive celebrations and other events. This provides members with the chance to interact with people of different nationalities and backgrounds. Collaborating with other organisations and attending networking events organised by other agencies also provide members with a chance to get to know people outside of MMM.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate traditional festivals together.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members are involved in blood donation drives and they also volunteer actively with SINDA



## ***The Nepalese Society Singapore***

### Introduction to the Nepalese Society Singapore

The Nepalese Society is the first and the only Nepalese immigrant organisation in Singapore. It was registered with the Registrar of Societies in 2008. To date, the Society has approximately 150 active members and the executive committee is elected every two years. The Society also serves as the Singapore chapter of the Non-Resident Nepalese (NRN) Organisation, a global Nepalese diaspora organisation.

The Nepalese diaspora in Singapore has a population of approximately 1,000, with approximately 200–300 families. Most of them are Permanent Residents while a few are Singapore Citizens.

### History of the Nepalese community in Singapore

One of the lesser-known yet significant communities in Singapore, the Nepalese community has a history dating back to the British Occupation, where, as the Gurkha Brigade it formed an indispensable part of the Army.

The Gurkhas fought alongside the allied forces during WWI and WWII. Gurkhas were involved in quelling the communist uprising in Malayan jungles. Post-independent Singapore chose to retain the Gurkhas as an integral part of its Police Force. As former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew put it in one of his memoirs, *From Third World to First*: “When I returned to Oxley Road [Lee’s residence], Gurkha policemen (recruited by the British from Nepal) were posted as sentries. To have either Chinese policemen shooting Malays or Malay policemen shooting Chinese would have caused widespread repercussions. The Gurkhas, on the other hand, were neutral, besides having a reputation for total discipline and loyalty.” Their deployment was noted in maintaining peace during the racial riots in 1965 and Little India riots in 2013.

Although most Gurkhas returned to Nepal upon retirement, a small minority chose to stay behind in the Malay Peninsula including Singapore after WWII. In Singapore, it is mandatory for the Gurkha contingent to return to Nepal upon retirement. Therefore the Nepalese community in Singapore has very few Gurkhas retired from the police force or their families.

The influx of Nepalese into Singapore was observed mostly during the economic boom of mid-1990s to early 2000.

The Nepalese community in Singapore today is ethnically and professionally diverse, resembling the diverse cultures of Nepal, a country of over 40 different ethnic groups, each having different languages and



dialects, and different rituals and cultures. Most Nepalese here belong to Brahmin, Chetri, Newar, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Marwari, Sherpa, Tamang, Tharus, Thakuri, Thakali, Teli and Yadav ethnicities. Most practise Hinduism or Buddhism while some have converted to Christianity or Islam.

Nepali remains the lingua franca of the community, as it is the common thread that binds the heterogeneous community. Ethnic languages or dialects are mostly spoken at home or among relatives. However, for the second- or third-generation Nepalese here, English remains the means of communication as many are unable to converse, read or write in Nepali. As Nepali is not offered as “second language” in school, they are limited to learning Chinese, Malay or Hindi.

As an open society, mixed marriages among the Nepalese in Singapore are common. Although many are married within their own race, some Nepalese are married to Chinese, Malays, Tamils, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Sinhalese and Caucasians.

Most Nepalese here are employed as skilled or semi-skilled professionals in several industries such as: medical, IT, engineering, bio-technology, media, design, education, research, social work, banking, finance, insurance, logistics, management, marketing, human resources, food and beverage, hospitality, sports and entertainment.

Nepalese businessmen and entrepreneurs in Singapore are involved in telecommunications, IT, manufacturing, chemicals, food and beverage, restaurants, travel and tourism, education, and other industries.

#### Role of the Nepalese Society in immigrant integration

The primary objective of the Society is to strengthen mutual cooperation among the Nepalese living in Singapore by promoting, sharing and preserving Nepalese culture, values and heritage by organising social, recreational, sport, welfare, cultural and community-based activities. The Society organises cultural activities associated with key Nepalese festivals (e.g., Dashain, Deepavali, Teez and Vesak Day). Additionally, it conducts sports, community-bonding activities as well as personal and professional development programmes that would benefit community members.



Members of the Nepalese Society celebrating the Dashain Festival together. Above left: Junior members of the society receiving the *tikka* (a vermillion paste applied on the forehead, in between the eyebrows) from more senior members of the society.

Above right: Members celebrate the festival with traditional song and dance  
Below left: Members gather in their colourful and festive new clothing and have a traditional meal together during the celebrations



Nepalese Society members celebrating Nepali New Year 2069 (year 2012 on the Gregorian calendar) with a BBQ at East Coast Park. The Nepalese follow a different calendar, and New Year usually falls in mid-April.



The Society strives to integrate the Nepalese community into the greater Singapore society by participating in cultural exchanges with other communities living in Singapore. It works closely with local organisations such as SINDA, community clubs and other ethnic communities to jointly conduct community activities.

One of the key objectives of the Society is to encourage the Nepalese to give back to the community by subscribing to charitable activities, and to raise funds for victims of natural disasters, needy and the less fortunate. In 2009, the society organised a medical camp to Nepal with participation from Singaporean and Nepali doctors. The Society also supports SINDA's "Project Give" initiative.



The Nepalese Society celebrated SG50 by taking part in a Blood Donation Drive.

In April and May 2015, two powerful earthquakes hit central Nepal killing more than 8,000 people and making millions homeless. The Society's immediate relief effort included dispatching medical team, medicines, food, blankets, tents, tarpaulins and clothes. The Society also assisted other organisations and volunteer groups to coordinate their relief work in Nepal. Currently the Society is in the process of building 500 temporary houses, and plans to fund the reconstruction of five schools damaged by the earthquake. The Society believes that the rebuilding of Nepal needs a sustained effort and the Nepalese community here will be engaged in the reconstruction for a long time.



The Nepalese Society ran several events to raise funds for the earthquake relief efforts and the events are well attended by Singaporeans and Nepalese alike. Left: A poster of a movie screening at Singapore Management University (SMU). A collaboration between Project Namaste (an SMU group consisting of students of all nationalities interested in helping the less privileged in Nepal), Gazaab Nepal (an SMU Overseas Community Involvement Project group) and the Nepalese Society.

Right: A poster for a fundraising lunch, in which the proceeds will go directly towards reconstructing schools and homes in affected areas.

### Summary of the role of Nepalese Society in immigrant integration

Domain of integration	Initiatives
Social bonds	The Society organises social, recreational, sport, welfare, cultural and community-based activities which are platforms for members to interact and forge bonds.
Social bridges	The Society works with other organisations such as SINDA, community clubs, and other ethnic communities to jointly conduct community activities.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Society takes part in local charity projects, such as “Project Give” initiated by SINDA.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Society has been engaging in relief and reconstruction work when natural disaster struck in 2015, and in other times of need.



## ***Punjabi Society***

### Introduction to Punjabi Society

The word Panjab (or Punjab), when split, conveys the meaning of the words — *Panj* (five) and *Aab* (water or river). It refers to the “Land of Five Rivers”, and naturally a person whose roots lie from that land can be called a Panjabi.

Whilst the land has seen five rivers flow through from north, it has also seen waves of humanity descend from the north as well. Some in search for a conducive climate and fertile land, like the Aryans, and some with less friendly intentions such as conquerors like Alexandra and the Mughals. The constant influx from north along with the threat, made Punjabis tough, hardy and industrious which became their hallmark, rather than an affiliation to a particular race and religion. Panjabi as a language evolved as an Indo-Aryan one. However, the script is not specific and can be written in Persian or Gurmukhi.

The Punjabi Society was formed in early 2014 to represent Singaporean residents of Punjabi heritage along with their friends and relatives. True to its roots, the Society is not linked to any religion or language and welcomes one and all who are ready to embrace the spirit, and imbibe the tradition and values.

Hard work, honesty and humility are the Society's guides when serving members and others in need.

### Role of Punjabi Society in immigrant integration

The Society aims to be different and has adopted the following basic concepts as its guiding principles. These principles also help the Punjabi Society play a role in facilitating immigrant integration in Singapore.

- Bridging the economic divide: People from all socio-economic statuses are welcome to join the Punjabi Society. To make it easier for less privileged members to do so, the Society waives charges for one-room HDB flat residents. It currently has three such members and has approached SINDA to recommend more of such families. Members from all strata of the society will be able benefit from the activities of the Punjabi Society.
- National integration: The Punjabi Society encourages and accepts non-Punjabis as equal members in its events and managing committee. Thus far, it has members originating from other states



like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. Furthermore, not all members are new immigrants. Some members are very old citizens, new citizens, PRs and employment pass holders. While a majority of its members are Hindu, its members also include Sikhs and Christians and it has already approached Muslims of both Indian and Pakistani origins to become members. This Society acts as a good platform for old and new immigrants from various faiths to interact and build long-lasting social bonds.

- Global outlook: For wider recognition, the Punjabi Society plans to be an associate member of other global and international Punjabi societies. Such cooperation may lead to joint visits to places of historical interest and for larger social networks to be formed between members and people all over the world.
- Serving the larger society: The Punjabi Society plans to serve the children and elderly of its members as well as use this platform to serve society in general.

Although the Punjabi Society is a new kid on the block, it already has in mind a series of events to facilitate immigrant integration in Singapore. The Punjabi Society has plans to cater to the needs of the members it represents and promote Punjabi culture. This will be done through festivities and encouraging members and non-members during these events. Members can look forward to celebrating festive events like Lohri, Holi, Vaisakhi, Teej Milan, Diwali and Basant Ritu with other members of the Society. Members of the society will be free to suggest ways for children and elderly to be assisted. This will be actively considered by the management committee. The Punjabi Society also intends to invite famous Punjabi artists and performers so as to expose members to prevalent Punjabi culture and arts. The Society is also looking to organising games, picnics and other cultural events for the benefit of members.



Picture taken at the first welcome gathering of the Punjabi Society

### Summary of the role of Punjabi Society in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	The Society has plans to organise social events such as games and picnics for members to interact and mingle.
Social bridges	Non-Punjabis are welcome to join the Society. Members of the Society consist of people of different nationalities, ethnic groups and religion.
Preservation of own culture	The Society celebrates festive events and invites famous Punjabi artists and performers.



## ***Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA)***

### Introduction to Singapore Malayalee Association

Singapore Malayalee Association, established in 1917, is the oldest association outside India for Malayalees, and it remains as the interactive hub for the Malayalee community in Singapore today.

The vision of the SMA is to preserve Malayalee heritage and culture through collaborative engagement, with a mission to promote the interests and development of the Malayalee community in Singapore by engaging them in intellectual, cultural, educational, professional, social, sporting, welfare and recreational activities.

The SMA has prioritised the following activities as its key goals:

- Integrate all Malayalees
- Extended outreach to have a cohesive community
- Engage in welfare activities
- Promote its heritage and culture
- To be an approachable, trusted and reliable association

### Role of SMA in immigrant integration

The SMA made efforts to better reach the community, promote membership benefits and to attract more Malayalees residing in Singapore. SMA has opened up its facilities to other organisations to hold their gatherings. It has made efforts to interact and understand the needs and expectations of the second-generation Malayalees in Singapore and to join hands in its activities.

SMA sub-committees target different segments of the Malayalees in Singapore. Some may be interested in cultural items while others in sports and yet others in artistic expressions. SMA provides platforms to exhibit all such talents within the community and ensures that the Malayalee community has time for interaction. SMA flagship programmes Onam Nite, Onam Village and Varnam always keep the community vibrant and provide interaction among the community throughout the year.

Onam is the biggest festival for Malayalees, celebrated irrespective of their religion. Onam Festival falls during the Malayali month of Chingam (August–September) and brings out the best of Malayalee culture and



tradition. Intricately decorated *pookalam* (floral decoration), sumptuous *onasadya* (vegetarian feast), breath-taking Snake Boat Race and exotic Kaikottikali dance are some of the most remarkable features of Onam.



*Pookalam* (floral decorations) is a feature of Onam, a festival that the Singapore Malayalee Association celebrates.

Listed below are some of the social activities the SMA organises to bring people together:

- SMA Onam Nite – Mega show where celebrities from the hometown (i.e., Kerala, where Malayalees migrated from) perform various cultural events. Such shows normally attract a crowd of over 2,000 guests. Such shows always promote Malayalee heritage and culture.
- SMA Onam Village – Yet another mega event by SMA which serves as the platform for the interaction of all generations of Malayalees as well a great opportunity to integrate newcomers to Singapore into our community. It is been celebrated with traditional



cultural programmes as well as special Onam sports and a traditional *onasadya*.

- Varnam – A platform for the local talented artists within the community to come together and share their experience and inspire others.
- Annual sports events by SMA (e.g., football, badminton) are yet another venue for the sports enthusiasts within the community to come together and celebrate.



Above: Children participating in a sports event waiting for the obstacle course to start

Below: Winners posing for a photo for annual badminton match held by the SMA

SMA believes strongly in giving back to the society and maintaining strong relationships with local and other Indian communities. SMA provided volunteers during the outbreak of the Hand, Foot and Mouth disease in Singapore, and actively partners the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC). Working closely with SINDA and PA, SMA often supports



local activities by putting up various cultural performances. In the first-ever Kerala Food Fair jointly organised by Silk Air and Carlton hotel, SMA played an active role by providing exhibits and cultural items. The publication of the first *Directory of Singapore Malayalees* in 2004 was another milestone in the history of SMA. National Arts Council (NAC) has recognised SMA's efforts in promoting Malayalee arts and culture in Singapore. The Council has awarded project grants for many events organised by SMA.



Exhibits and cultural items provided by the SMA

SMA welcomes additional roles that can support the integration of fresh migrants to the country and is open to having mid-yearly orientations for new citizens to provide a platform for them to interact with the older generations from their own community.



Summary of the role of SMA in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members come together during various social events such as cultural festivals and sporting events, and friendships are forged during these events.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate cultural festivals in traditional fashion and showcases Malayalee dance, song and exhibits during events.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members are active volunteers and a keen partner of NVPC, PA and SINDA.



## ***Singapore Pakistani Association (SPA)***

### Introduction of SPA

Singapore Pakistani Association (SPA) started out as the Overseas Pakistani League in 1948, carrying out activities in tune with the events in Pakistan. Over time, the organisation aligned its activities around Singapore as well as Pakistan. As the population of Pakistanis in Singapore grew, so did SPA membership. Today, SPA has around 1000 members, comprising of Singaporeans, Permanent Residents, expatriates and students.

### Role of SPA in immigrant integration

Over the past 65 years, SPA has provided a platform for Pakistanis in Singapore to interact among themselves and to connect to the communities that have called Singapore home. SPA's efforts include cultural, sporting and family events, to cater to the wide range of members. Concerts and performances featuring Pakistani artistes, Eid gatherings, Ramadan activities, cricket and sports carnivals, talks and information sessions are some of the ways that SPA brings its members together.

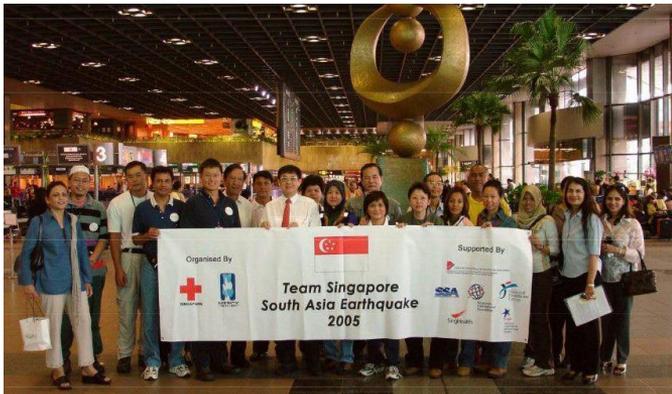


Ladies gathering for *Milaad*, a Muslim religious holiday commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad

SPA works actively towards engagement with other community organisations such as the Singapore Khalsa Association, SINDA and the Arab Network. SPA recognises a duty to connect members to philanthropic



activities. Over the years, SPA has worked in partnerships with different charities and welfare organisations, both in Singapore and Pakistan. In this respect, SPA has collaborated with Mercy Relief, Pertapis, and regularly works with children's homes.



SPA being part of a team helping with relief work in disaster-struck areas

SPA has held the following events to integrate communities:

- Annual inter-community *Iftar* event during Ramadan where religious scholars and leaders from various communities participate in the breaking of the fast
- Literary events with local organisations and the Asian Civilisations Museum to allow more to know about Pakistani culture, while allowing members to learn about the culture and heritage of other communities
- Musical events with participation of other communities, which is also in line with the objective of cultural exchange
- Ladies night of giving with the Arab Network
- Colours of Indus, a charity fashion show, where SPA raised S\$70,000 for the Singapore Muslim Women's Association
- "Building Bridges – Creating Harmonious Communities", a talk by Daisy Khan, Executive Director and Co-Founder of American Society for Muslim Advancement
- Jewellery exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum



- SPA Bazaar and Festival, which includes cultural shows and a picnic
- Art exhibitions



The Association donated \$72968 to Persatuan Pemuda Islam Singapura (PPIS) in support of their work. PPIS is a non-profit organisation which aims to empower Muslim women and in the process support their dependents.

Every week, an energetic bunch of people gets together to explore the nooks and crannies of Singapore. They go to scenic parks, cultural spots, tourist locations, numerous islands around Singapore, museums, exhibitions, and interact with the local communities.



Members touring the Gardens by the Bay as part of the initiative to visit scenic and cultural sites in Singapore



Members of the SPA were involved in organising the Pakistani Film Festival

SPA believes that Singapore is a great place to live, work and play — and that it is the personal and social responsibility of each one of their members to contribute, to maintain its unique character of accommodating everyone who calls Singapore home. Participation in community and national events at the community centre or grassroots level prior to obtaining citizenship would help individuals to better integrate, which will also help existing new Singaporeans.

#### Summary of role of SPA in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Various social events (e.g., sports, talks, outings and celebrations) bring members together.
Social bridges	SPA collaborates closely with other organisations and welcomes people of other communities to join cultural events. These are opportunities for members to meet people of other communities.
Language and cultural knowledge	Celebration of Chinese New Year, where members learn about the Chinese culture in Singapore. Members also get to know Singapore better through tours to all parts of Singapore.
Preservation of own culture	SPA showcases cultural exhibits in the Asian Civilisation Museum. Members also celebrate traditional festivals and events. Pakistani culture is also promoted through events like film festivals.
Giving back to Singapore society	SPA engages in fundraising and volunteers with local charity partners.
Giving back to country/area of origin	SPA takes part in relief work in disaster-hit areas.



## ***Singapore Telugu Samajam (STS)***

### Introduction to STS

Singapore Telugu Samajam, also known as Singapore Telugu Cultural Society, is a non-profit organisation in Singapore for the Telugu community. It was registered in Singapore in on 11 November 1975. Its vision is a “happy Singapore Telugu community”.

The objectives of STS are to:

- Preserve and propagate the Telugu cultural heritage and maintain the identity of people of Telugu origin.
- Provide a common platform for Telugu literary, cultural, educational, social, recreational and charitable interactions among all Telugu people in Singapore.
- Position the Telugu community on par with the other communities in heterogeneous Singapore society.
- Provide a forum for elder and younger generations to share their views and ideas.

### STS's role in immigrant integration

The STS facilitates immigrant integration in a few ways. It promotes Telugu literature and cultural heritage of the Telugu-speaking people. The STS conducts Telugu learning sessions in partnership with Siliconandhra USA for Telugu learning enthusiasts at SINDA premises. As Telugu is widely spoken language across the globe with rich linguistic heritage, the STS is also seeking the opportunity to make it a recognised mother tongue by Ministry of Education, so that it can be offered as a mother tongue choice for Telugu-speaking children.



Children taking part in Telegu classes organised by STS



Besides promoting the Telegu language, the STS is also involved in organising cultural events and various festive celebrations every year. It organises annual events for Ugadi (Telugu New Year), Dasara (a 10-day festival dedicated to the worship of Hindu deity Durga, celebrated in South India), Karthikamasa community picnic, Sankranthi - also known as Pongal (a major harvest festival celebrated in India), Bathukamma (a 9-day floral festival celebrated by Hindu women), and the Ganesh Festival (a Hindu festival celebrated in honour of the elephant-headed god, Ganesha) in Singapore. STS helps facilitate distribution of neem flower and regi pandlu (a special fruit) needed for celebrating these festivals.



STS members gathering during Ugandi



Ladies dressed up in traditional saris doing a traditional dance when celebrating Bathukamma, a festival for feminine felicitation

The STS also seeks to give back to Singapore society while working towards the betterment of the Telegu community in Singapore. It conducts



a blood donation drive every year, where Telugu people come voluntarily to donate blood during the drive. It also supports annual fundraising for the Project GIVE initiative of SINDA. Besides blood donation and fundraising, members of the STS also put aside time and energy to participate as traffic marshals in partnership with Hindu Endowments Board (HEB) for the annual Thaipusam event. Members also actively contribute in annual Indian New Year celebrations conducted by LiSHA (Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association).



A member of the STS taking part in a blood donation drive

Besides cultural events and charity events, STS runs social and recreational events like sports. We conduct annual sports tournament to bring up sport talents for games such as badminton, bowling and cricket.



Members posing for a photo after a badminton match

The above listed activities help to provide much needed engagement in terms of bonding with not only Telugu people living across Singapore, but



also with wider Singapore community. Participation of Telugu-speaking people, especially for events like Project Give, blood donations and Thaipusam will bring awareness, appreciation and further strengthen the bond and integration with wider community of Singapore.

Summary of role of STS in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social events such as sports events and cultural festivals provide a platform for members to mingle.
Social bridges	Singaporeans and people of other communities are welcome to join these social events. Members also take part in events organised by local organisations, and thus get to interact with locals and people from other communities who also attend these events.
Preservation of own culture	Celebrating cultural festivals in a traditional fashion and teaching the Telegu language are two things the STS do to preserve Telugu culture.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members take part in blood donation drives and fundraising efforts. Members also volunteer as road marshals for Thaipusam.



## Asia – Southeast Asia

### ***Association of Cambodians in Singapore (ACS)***

#### Introduction of ACS

Association of Cambodians in Singapore (ACS) is a not-profit organisation which was founded in 2013 by a group of young and passionate Cambodian students and was supported by the Royal Embassy of Cambodia in Singapore.

ACS was created from a very small volunteering student group who assisted the Royal Embassy of Cambodia in Singapore to organise the 60th Anniversary of Cambodian Independence Day in Singapore back in 2013. ACS has been growing to become a well-known and strongly supported association thanks to the enthusiastic, hardworking and resilient Cambodian students who share the same values, goals and visions — to raise Cambodian profile among the international community, especially in Singapore, bring the Cambodian community together in Singapore, and contribute back to Cambodia.



Group photo of the ACS committee members

#### Role of ACS in immigrant integration

ACS has played a very important role as a facilitator and has provided a good platform to bring Cambodians together by organising different social events such as barbecues at East Coast beach, Chinese New Year celebrations, dragon boating and Khmer New Year celebrations. Cambodians from all walks of life come together, interact with one another and more importantly share different experiences as well as perspectives.



## Sentiments on Immigrant Integration & the Role of Immigrant Associations



Group photo taken during the 60th Anniversary of Cambodian Independence Day in Singapore



A gathering during the Khmer New Year 2013



Members bonding and having fun through sports such as dragon boating



A BBQ retreat and gathering at East Coast Park

To allow more people to learn about Cambodia, ACS members also attend cultural events such as ASEAN Gala Night and International Friendship Day in order to showcase Cambodian culture, traditional dance and the best tourism places in Cambodia. During such events, members also get to know about other cultures.



A group photo taken after the team participated in International Friendship Day

ACS has collaborated with different organisations including the Royal Embassy of Cambodia in Singapore, Salvation Army, Kent Ridge Education and Women of Vision to organise humanitarian events to give back to Cambodia. These events sought to promote Cambodian investment and tourism, donate clothes and textbooks to libraries, build public libraries, and raise funds for the needy in Cambodia. In engaging Singaporeans, ACS members have helped Singaporean students and local Singaporeans prepare and plan their volunteering trips to Cambodia by teaching simple Khmer lessons and sharing both Cambodian culture and tourism tips with them.



ACS runs a textbook collection programme biannually for low-income Cambodian students

In the future, ACS intends to focus more on business and investment-related discussions and collaboration with the Embassy to attract Singaporean investors to Cambodia. In addition, it will continuously help Cambodians integrate in Singapore society while staying, studying and working in Singapore.

Summary of ACS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social events and activities ranging from sports to celebrations and gatherings for members to get together.
Social bridges	Members work with other organisations to contribute back to Cambodia, attending bridging events like International Friendship Day where members get to interact with people of other cultures, engaging Singaporeans when helping them to plan trips and community service efforts in Cambodia.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members share cultural and language tips about Cambodia with Singaporeans heading to the country for volunteer and philanthropy work, including school trips by Singapore students.
Preservation of own culture	Members celebrate Cambodian cultural festivals (such as Khmer New Year) and promote Cambodian culture during events.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Society conducts various activities to promote investment, tourism and charity to Cambodia.



## ***Malaysian Association in Singapore (MASIS)***

### Introduction to MASIS

The Malaysian Association in Singapore (MASIS) is a platform for all people of Malaysian origin who are residents in Singapore to connect with and support each other. Founded in 2014, it welcomes individuals, students, families and the corporate sector to share, network and celebrate “Malaysian-ness”.

The formation of MASIS comes at a high-water mark in bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore. MASIS hopes to foster goodwill and understanding between Malaysia and Singapore and deepen the bonds of friendship and interdependence between these two nations.



Group photo of the committee of MASIS

### Role of MASIS in immigrant integration

Although MASIS is newly formed in 2014, it has a vision of how it wants to play a part in immigrant integration. MASIS proposes to organise and promote Malaysian food festivals, Malaysian-themed arts and culture events, sporting and recreational activities, travel and tourism in Malaysia, business and networking opportunities, and special initiatives for Malaysian students in Singapore.

MASIS affords a wonderful opportunity for members to meet other like-minded and not so like-minded Malaysians. MASIS has given people opportunities to meet and interact with a wonderfully colourful crowd of Malaysians from different walks of life, who are both interesting and successful. MASIS can provide the “supper table” for such Malaysians to come together to exchange views and ideas, and to work together in a



“Malaysia Boleh” spirit, to unlock and unleash potential synergies, and promote growth and development on both sides of the Causeway.



A man making *teh tarik* during Mari Makan

The inaugural Mari Makan was the first of various Malaysia-centric events and activities that MASIS organised for members. These series of social activities include business networking sessions, regular sporting meets, family recreation activities and specialised tours in Malaysia, talks and seminars. These events bring together members and act as a platform for friendships to be forged. Malaysian food was also featured, allowing members to get a taste of home during such events. Non-members are welcome to join these events, but at a higher fee. The Mari Makan event raised a total of RM20,000, which will go towards a flood relief fund.



Dancing to music during the Mari Makan event

The MASIS also plays host to important members visiting Singapore from Malaysia. Datin Norshiha, wife of the Malaysian High Commissioner in Singapore, along with interested female members, were invited to lunch. It was an opportunity for members to personally get to know her. Datin Norshiha also gave members a cooking and a baking demonstration.



Datin Norshiha demonstrating a baking recipe



A group photo with Datin Norshiha after the baking and cooking demonstration.

### Summary of MASIS' role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social activities within the Association give members a chance to mingle and get to know one another.
Social bridges	Non-members are welcome to join in for some events organised by the Association, but at a higher fee.
Preservation of own culture	Malaysian food, traditions and customs are featured during social events.
Giving back to country/area of origin	Proceeds of some ticketed social events are contributed to a flood relief fund that seeks to help those affected by floods back in Malaysia.



## ***Myanmar Club (Singapore)***

### Introduction to Myanmar Club

The Myanmar Club (Singapore) was registered with the Registry of Societies in Singapore in 2002. It was established by a group of Myanmar professionals working and living in Singapore, led by prominent lawyer Dr Myint Soe.

The Club was established with two main purposes:

- Providing help to the Myanmar community
- Promoting Myanmar culture to Singapore and ASEAN neighbours

### Role of Myanmar Club in immigrant integration

The Myanmar Club (Singapore) gives members an opportunity to maintain strong ties with the motherland. The Club has worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Singapore), Singapore Embassy in Myanmar and Singapore Red Cross Society in building hospitals, cyclone shelters and providing and distributing various aid-related items to Myanmar in times of need. The club also supports various Myanmar delegations on study tours in Singapore to achieve a democratic society in Myanmar.

To help workers understand work life in Singapore better, the Club collaborates with the Workplace Safety and Health Council (WSH Council) to educate Myanmar workers about working in Singapore. Some of the content covered include: (1) safety in the workplace, (2) the “Do and Don'ts” and (3) labour laws in Singapore. The Club also provides necessary legal assistance and advice to the Myanmar Community in Singapore.

The Club also provides members with a platform to contribute to civil discussions about public policy in Singapore. For instance, the Club participated actively at the Community Leaders Integration Conference held by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). The Myanmar Club has also sent representatives to participate in focus group discussions held by IPS.

Showcasing Burmese culture is also what the Club does. The Club provided Myanmar food and performed Myanmar dances during the ASEAN Gala Dinner celebrations in Singapore. Such initiatives allow people of other communities who were present for these large-scale events to know more about Burmese culture, while members also get to learn more about the culture of other communities.



The Club provides ample opportunities for members to interact with people of different ethnic groups and nationalities as members are invited to participate in events organised by other associations. One example would be the Water Festival, which was organised by the Thai Association. The Laos, Cambodia and Sri Lanka embassies also took part in the event. The Myanmar Club (Singapore) has also been working together with Singapore government agencies, private organisations and individuals to facilitate better understanding and friendships between ASEAN residents.

The Myanmar Club makes it a point to give back to the Singapore society. It does so through raising funds for the Singapore Red Cross Society which runs community services for the less privileged in Singapore.

#### Summary of Myanmar Club's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social activities organised by the Association give members a chance to mingle and get to know one another.
Social bridges	Taking part in events organised by other associations provide members opportunities to both learn about the cultural traditions of others and make friends with people from other communities.
Preservation of own culture	Traditional food and dances are showcased during celebrations.
Language and cultural knowledge	The Club equip workers with legal knowledge on working in Singapore.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Club conducts fundraising for the Red Cross Society and participates in conferences and dialogues in Singapore.
Giving back to country/area of origin	The Club supports the building of infrastructure in Myanmar and provides aid in times of crisis.



## ***Pinoy Star Magazine***

### Introduction to *Pinoy Star*

*Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Pinoy Star* magazine started as a print publication in 2001. *Pinoy Star* is the brainchild of the Singaporean husband-and-wife team, Clement and Luz Mesenas. They have been involved in helping migrant communities through their editorial efforts in the Middle East for 20 years before returning to Singapore in 2001.



Clement and Luz Mesenas received an award for Best Global OFW Magazine 2014 presented by the Office of the Philippine President

### Role of *Pinoy Star* in immigrant integration

*Pinoy Star* helps in the integration of OFWs by introducing various aspects of their host society and providing services to help them familiarise themselves with social norms and values. The *Pinoy Star* magazine's primary objective was to provide news on events from the homeland for Filipino migrant workers in Singapore. *Pinoy Star* also helps explain Singapore laws and regulations relevant to migrant workers. It also provides counselling for workers trying to cope with life in a new land away from the comfort of home and family.

The initial objective of *Pinoy Star* was to provide a lifeline for domestic helpers who were working long hours in their employers' houses. These women were working in an environment where their language was not spoken, eating food that they were not familiar with, with no TV to watch



and no friends to speak to. The magazine was mailed to these workers with the help of the Catholic Church and it helped provide a crucial link to the outside world and some comfort for these women.

*Pinoy Star* is able to reach out to more migrants not only in Singapore but also worldwide with its online version ([www.pinoystaronline](http://www.pinoystaronline)) and a Facebook page which was launched six years ago in 2009.

*Pinoy Star* also collaborates with an online radio station (Radyo Kabayan), which is heard by OFWs around the world. The Facebook page has had wonderful response, with over 50,000 “Likes” to date — 50% from Singapore and the rest from the Philippines and around the world. *Pinoy Star* magazine was recently awarded the accolade of World’s Best OFW Magazine. The Office of the Philippine President accorded this recognition.

*Pinoy Star* works with various organisations including the Filipino Association of Singapore (founded in 1937), HOME, an NGO that helps migrant workers in distress, the Bayanihan Society of Singapore (which provides skills improvement classes for migrant women workers), and Kultura Performing Arts to teach and stage cultural dance events.



Participants who completed a public speaking workshop held in conjunction with the Bayanihan Centre

*Pinoy Star* stages an annual Pinoy Talent Festival in which members of the community show off their talent through beauty pageants and talent contests in singing and dancing. Singaporeans as well as members of the other communities also take part in the festival. They not only enjoy the fun that such a festival generates but they also get to know the aspirations of people from other countries.



Winners of Pinoy Talent Festival 2014. Contestants showcased their talents through song and dance, and the audience were entertained by the vibrant programme.

*Pinoy Star* is also involved in Singapore's national activities like the Mid-Autumn Festival parade in Chinatown, by sending Filipino cultural dance contingents. The Filipino contingents have over the years added to the colour and spectacle of the Chinatown parade.

To sum up, the events in which *Pinoy Star* regularly participates and which attract audiences in the thousands are:

- The Philippine Independence Day celebrations
- *Pinoy Star's* own annual Pinoy Talent Festival
- The Autumn Festival in Chinatown

*Pinoy Star* is also involved in relief work — raising awareness, collecting and dispatching relief goods to victims of natural calamities in the Philippines. These efforts are supported not only by Filipinos but also Singaporeans and expatriates.



Filipinos and non-Filipinos working side by side when packing donated items during a donation drive for the victims of Typhoon Yolanda in 2013.

### Further plans

*Pinoy Star* aims to devote more resources towards the drive for immigrant integration and foster social harmony between the migrant community and Singaporeans through annual sports events involving football, basketball, volleyball and cricket.

Another major integration project would be the holding of food fairs in which participants can get together and sample the dishes prepared by members of the various migrant communities, while watching a programme of cultural dances and songs.



This drive for social harmony will take the soft-sell approach to allow migrant communities and Singaporeans to get to know one another better through social activities. This way, the virtues of tolerance, understanding and acceptance of another's culture and social mores can be promoted and become the norm over time.

*Pinoy Star* will strive to achieve this primarily through stories, which tell how Singaporeans and migrants help one another in work and play through print, radio and video.

Summary of *Pinoy Star*'s role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Employment	<i>Pinoy Star</i> works with the Bayanihan Centre to offer courses and workshops to enhance the skills and employability of participants.
Social bonds	Social activities such as beauty pageants bring Filipinos together and they get to know each other through such events.
Social bridges	As non-Filipinos are also welcome to participate in the series of social events organized by <i>Pinoy Star</i> , Filipinos have the chance to interact and befriend people of different nationalities and ethnic groups.
Language and cultural knowledge	The <i>Pinoy Star</i> magazine contains information on Singapore's laws and social norms. There are also services and counselling provided to Filipinos to cope with life in an unfamiliar land. Filipinos also get to know about parts of Singapore's culture through the celebration of festivals like the Mooncake Festival.
Preservation of own culture	<i>Pinoy Star</i> celebrates national events such as the Philippine Independence Day.
Giving back to country/area of origin	<i>Pinoy Star</i> engages in relief work when natural disasters strike the Philippines.



## ***SekolahSG***

### Introduction to SekolahSG

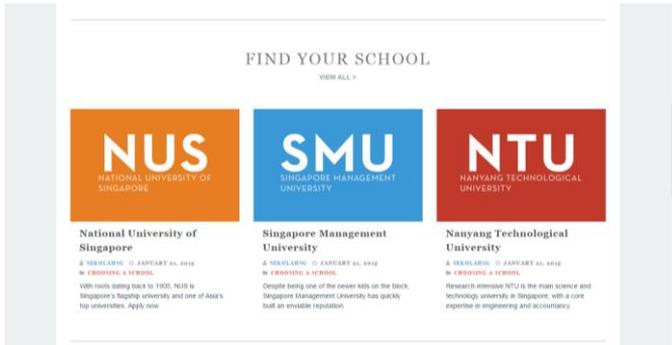
SekolahSG started out as a website for Indonesian women. In Indonesia, women are often bound by social conventions and tradition. For instance, instead of furthering their studies abroad, Indonesian parents often ask their daughters to stay home, where it is safe, and perhaps help with the family business. SekolahSG's audience however comprises both males and females. They all have one thing in common: to further their studies in Singapore.

Singapore has always been — and continues to be — an attractive destination for Indonesians. For many of them, Singapore is the closest foreign country. It is a mere 90-minute flight away from Jakarta, but feels like another world. Singapore is attractive as a destination for education because it has (1) high quality yet affordable universities, (2) a high standard of living and (3) a culture similar to Indonesia's.

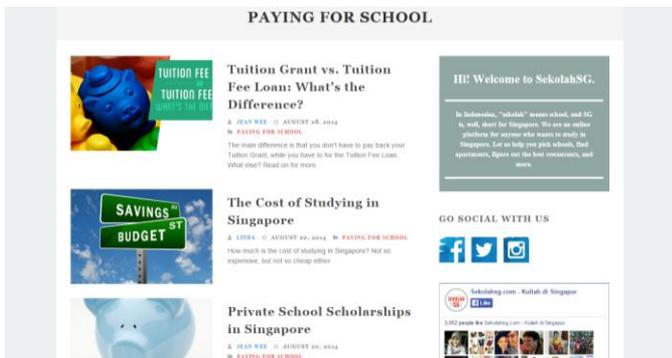
### Role of SekolahSG in immigrant integration

In a sense, SekolahSG is also a community — an online one, to be exact. SekolahSG is primarily an online community targeted at prospective and current Indonesian students who would like to come to Singapore to study. The audience is divided between Indonesians who are still in Indonesia (70%) to Indonesians who are already in Singapore (30%). The community also consists of blog post writers, who are currently studying in Singapore. Through their writing, they provide information to other Indonesian students with an idea of student life in Singapore.

Content at SekolahSG focuses mainly on academic information. Users of the website will be given information on how to apply to schools. The main page consists of a breakdown of the pros and cons of the three main universities in Singapore, namely, National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University of Singapore as well as Singapore Management University. There are also links to the homepages and application pages to these universities. Information on how to prepare to apply (i.e., tips on taking the TOEFL or SAT) are also available. Financial information, such as where to find scholarships and costs breakdown of the living expenses in Singapore are also covered by the writers of the site.



A screenshot of the homepage with links to more information about each of the three main universities in Singapore



A screenshot of a page dedicated to financial information pertaining to studying in Singapore

SekolahSG does not only have information pertaining to education. It also covers topics on lifestyle. Food is a popular issue, as many Indonesians need a *halal* diet. Once in a while, writers also post information about work, as many Indonesians want to work here, especially graduating students or those looking for internships. More importantly, information about how to apply for a student pass is available on the website. All these information help both current and prospective students navigate the unfamiliar systems and surroundings of Singapore, and that helps with immigrant integration.

Summary of SekolahSG's role in immigrant integration

Domain of integration	Initiatives
Employment	Information on internships and work opportunities in Singapore
Social links	Information on how to access government services like applying for a student pass as well as the education system in Singapore



## ***Thai Association (Singapore)***

### Introduction to Thai Association (Singapore)

Thai Association (Singapore) is a non-profit organisation set up in 1997 by a group of Thai people living in Singapore, with patronage of the Royal Thai Embassy in Singapore.

At its establishment, the organisation was named Thai Association of Professional and Businessmen (Singapore), a name reflecting its target group. However, the organisation has adopted the new name and is currently called the Thai Association (Singapore) to cover a broader range of Thais living in Singapore and to widen its scope of work.

The Thai Association's vision is to be the centre of Thai communities in Singapore. Its mission is to promote a better appreciation of the rich Thai cultures and enhance business opportunities among the Thais as well as other communities living in Singapore.

The Thai Association draws members from various segments within the Thai community and local businesses. Members include business owners, entrepreneurs, white-collar workers as well as students and those who relocated to Singapore due to marriage. Thai Association liaises with other associations, business entities, foundations as well as governmental organisations.

The Association's objectives are to:

- Encourage exchange and communication for professional and business advancement of members
- Foster friendship and harmony of the Thai community in Singapore
- Promote better understanding of Thai culture and traditions.

### Role of Thai Association (Singapore) in immigrant integration

The Association helps the members integrate into the Singaporean community through various ways. One way is through organising cultural activities such as Songkran Water Festival, Loy Krathong Festival and Vesak Day where Thais, the expat communities and Singaporeans could mingle. The Association reaches out to the other communities in Singapore (Laos, Vietnamese, Cambodians) through their embassies and invites them to join in for these cultural events. The Thai Dance Society is often featured in these events which provide opportunities for participants of these events to learn more about Thai culture.



Attendees of the Songkran Water Festival celebrations were entertained by tableside performances



Thai dances and cultural performances featured during the Songkran Water Festival celebrations



Releasing a *krathong* (floating decoration) into the water during Loi Krathong celebrations



In addition, the Thai Association collaborates with Singapore International Foundation (SIF) in promoting Thai culture. The Association takes parts in the programme “Little by Little”, a monthly series of cultural exchanges to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures which help bridge Singaporeans and the world communities. The programme focuses on engaging the diplomatic and professional community in Singapore. The workshops that the Thai Association put up were Loy Krathong (2012), Bamboo Dance (2013) and Phi Ta Khon mask dance (2014).

The Association also promote Thai culture through organising Thai lessons for young children born or living in Singapore. Thai cooking lessons are also available for members who would like to enhance their traditional cooking skills. Not all courses by the Thai Association is related to Thai culture though; English and Chinese lessons are conducted for the adults who would like to familiarise themselves with the languages spoken in Singapore. Members can also sign up for Korean cooking classes should they want to learn something new.

To cater to the needs of the Thai community in Singapore, the Association conducts business networking events that bring together Singaporeans and Thais to seek out opportunities for business opportunities, while also building relationships. The Thais in Singapore are also informed of the laws in Singapore through talks and seminars co-organised by the Royal Thai Embassy in Singapore. Collaborations with the Embassy keeps the Thai community in Singapore abreast with issues in Thailand, as they get to support the organisation of the Thailand’s General Election in Singapore and participate in the Thai National Day celebration.



The Thai Association has close ties with the Royal Thai Embassy of Singapore, and was also present for the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Embassy



The Thai Association partners with the Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand in supporting trade fairs, which seeks to promote business and commerce in Thailand

The Thai Association also makes it a point to give back to the Singapore society. Besides raising funds for the Red Cross Society, the Association also contributes to academic discussions organised by the Thai Department under the Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS), and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).

#### Summary of Thai Association's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Employment	Business networking events and trade fairs organised by the Association enhance business opportunities for members.
Social bonds	Members get together to celebrate festivals and events.
Social bridges	Members of other communities are invited to join in the celebrations of cultural festivals.
Language and cultural knowledge	English and Chinese classes are available for members. Members also learn about Singapore laws through talks and seminars.
Preservation of own culture	The Association has Thai lessons for children as well as Thai cooking classes for those interested. The Association also partners Thai dance groups during events to showcase Thai culture through performances.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Association conducts fundraising for the Red Cross Society and is involved in academic discussions.



## ***University of Philippines Alumni Association (Singapore) (UPAAS)***

### Introduction of UPAAS

The University of the Philippines Alumni Association (Singapore) (UPAAS) is a non-stock, non-profit association organised in 2003 for the primary purpose of bringing together the UP Alumni in various parts of Singapore. The organisation seeks to devote its efforts to the advancement of the UP cause and ideals as well as pioneer in the identification, conceptualisation and implementation of projects for the benefit of the UP campus and the community at large.

### UPAAS' role in immigrant integration

The UPAAS has participated in the One Community Fiesta 2014, organised by the People's Association which aims to foster friendship among locals and immigrants. UPAAS was privileged to be invited to this nationwide event. UPAAS in return showcased the best of what the Philippines has to offer, from beautiful destinations, stylish dresses, traditional games and colourful festival ornaments. It was UPAAS' way to better interact with the Singapore locals and integrate with the community. All visitors to the booth were treated as well to some tasty children's snacks. Around 4,000 people from different GRCs attended the event. The Guest of Honour, Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for National Development, together with some GRC leaders, visited their colourful booth. Some of UPAAS' members also participated in the community ukulele performance.



Group photo taken in front of the booth set up by UPAAS for the One Community Fiesta



UPAAS joined in the ukulele performance put together by people of different societies, associations, races and religions

UPAAS also organises socio-cultural events for its members to interact and mingle. For instance, some 30 members of the UPAAS made a visit to the annual open house held in Changi Naval Base organised by the Singapore Navy. Attendees of the event learnt about Singapore's national defence, and had a first-hand experience on a navy ship.



UPAAS members posing in front of RSS Endurance during their visit to the annual Open House organized by the Singapore Navy

UPAAS organises health talks such as Affairs of the Heart 2012, which educated participants on heart disease, raising awareness about leading a healthy lifestyle. Members were also educated about the Central Provident Fund through informative talks. UPAAS also organises inspirational Oblation talks to empower and inform the audience. Some of these

Oblation talks also help solve employment issues and difficulties of members.



A banner showcasing the different speakers for a series of Oblation Talks organised by the UPAAS in conjunction with the Philippine National Bank. These talks covered a range of employment issues and aimed to motivate and equip participants to achieve more in their careers.

### Summary of UPAAS' role in immigrant integration

Domain of integration	Initiatives
Employment	Members can attend oblation talks that seek to motivate members and help them with the employment issues they face.
Social bonds	Social activities, both formal and informal, allow members to forge friendships with one another.
Social bridges	UPAAS participates in community and integration events, and members get to know people of different nationalities and ethnic groups.
Social links	Talks are organised on the Central Provident Fund and information is given to members on where and how to access government services.
Language and cultural knowledge	UPAAS organises outings, such as the visit to Changi Naval Base, which allows members to know more about various aspects of Singapore.



## Europe

### ***Belgian and Luxembourg Association of Singapore (BLAS)***

#### Introduction to BLAS

Since the late 1970s, Belgian businessmen regularly met under the chairmanship of Mr Guy Robbe, then SABENA (national airline of Belgium) regional general manager. Big social gatherings were frequently organised at his house, where a lot of Belgians got to know one another.

In 1984, a small group of Belgians took the initiative to officially start a Belgian club. During the first meeting, on 22 March 1984, different work groups (Economy & Business, Social & Recreational, Cultural, Scientific & Academic) were formed in order to work out a global proposal on the subject to be presented to the Belgian community.

The official installation took place on 4 July 1985 and the notification affecting the Belgian and Luxembourg Association of Singapore BLAS was published in the Singapore Government Gazette on 2 July 1985. The first General Meeting was held on 5 November 1985 at the Belgian pub-restaurant Saxophone and Mr Guy Robbe was the club's first president. Since then, regular activities have been organised for adults as well as for children.

The BLAS members who returned to their homeland, have formed another organisation named Singapore Old Timers. They meet yearly, alternatively in Belgium and Luxembourg.

The BLAS is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote Belgian and Luxembourg exchanges with Singaporeans in the fields of economy, business, culture, science, academics, as well as to organise social and recreational events. Each year, more than 50 activities are organised by volunteers.

#### Role of BLAS in facilitating immigrant integration

The BLAS conducts a series of social activities for members to get together and forge ties amongst themselves. These include weekly sports events; interested members can meet up weekly for tennis, soccer, cycling and dragon boating. Members also get together to celebrate special days like Easter and Halloween. The Association also holds frequent brunch outings and gatherings.



Members catch up over the frequent lunch meetings the Association organises.

Top: Lunch at Tamarind Hill

Bottom: Lunch at Seasons Bistro



Above, left: Children involved in an Easter Egg Hunt, part of Easter celebrations conducted by the Association

Above, right: Children decorating Easter Eggs during Easter celebration



Members have outdoor fun and quality family bonding time during outdoor picnics organised by BLAS

The Association also helps members accustom themselves to life in Singapore through heritage and cultural trips. Members pick up useful information about aspects of Singapore's history and culture through these trips. They also learn about traditional festivals celebrated in Singapore and some of the traditions and customs practised by the different ethnic groups in Singapore. In addition to these cultural and heritage tours, BLAS publishes a gazette every two months to keep members up to date about news and happenings in Singapore. The gazette contains lifestyle information (e.g., upcoming yacht shows and music concerts in Singapore), news, and updates on new members and activities of the Association.



Members visited Bukit Brown, one of the oldest cemeteries in Singapore



Members try local delights in the Tiong Bahru market during their heritage tour around the Tiong Bahru estate



Members learn about *fengshui* and how it is practised in architecture and urban planning in Singapore.



Members visit the Fountain of Wealth in Suntec City for an example of how *fengshui* has influenced architecture in Singapore



The Association conducted visits to Hindu temples during Deepavali so that members might learn more about the festival, which is celebrated by the Hindus in Singapore



Members witness the Taoist rituals conducted during the Ghost Festival (falling on the seventh month of the Lunar calendar) during one of the many cultural tours conducted

Besides trying out local food, BLAS holds cooking sessions that expose members to different types of food. To date, members have learnt to make sushi, pasta, Chinese *wanton* and Thai pineapple fried rice. These sessions allow members to appreciate the diversity of food and cultures in Singapore, and also interact with members of similar interests.



Above, left: A member of BLAS preparing to roll up a prawn sushi  
Above, right: Members helping each other in rolling out homemade pasta



Members learning how to make Chinese dumplings



Cooking instructor demonstrating how to prepare a pineapple to make Thai pineapple fried rice

Apart from social and cultural events, members of BLAS partake in charity events to help the less fortunate. BLAS partners with charity organisation The Red Pencil, which operates in Singapore and uses art to help heal emotional scars of left by overwhelming life circumstances. Members also ran a marathon to raise funds for the cause, and supported an art fair which also presented The Red Pencil to art enthusiasts.



Members attending a workshop conducted by The Red Pencil to learn more about art therapy and how it works

### Summary of BLAS' role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Frequent lunch meet-ups, sport sessions and Association-wide events provide ample opportunities for members to interact.
Language and cultural knowledge	Gazette contains information about Singapore's happenings and culture. Members also learn about Singapore through cultural and heritage tours.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Society collaborates with Singapore-based charity The Red Pencil.



## ***The British Association of Singapore (BA)***

### Introduction of BA

The British Association (BA), or British European Association as it was formerly called, was set up in April 1956. It quickly grew to provide help in many ways to both new arrivals and the local community. It has contributed to several landmarks of present-day Singapore as it was instrumental in helping set up Gleneagles Hospital and was a founder of both the Tanglin School and the British Club.

The Association has been working for the benefit of the expat community in Singapore. It has also run sheltered accommodation for the elderly. Membership of the BA means much more than meeting new people and learning new skills — it considers itself part of Singapore's history. With singles, couples and families of all ages the Association runs a lively schedule. Members do not have to be from Britain; the Association currently has over 28 different nationalities ranging from Turkish, to Australian, Kuwaiti, German, Czech and French.

### Role of BA in immigrant integration

The BA has a series of clubs and special interests groups that members can join. These clubs gather like-minded individuals and organise social activities. Members meet other members who share similar interests in sports, reading, card games or even mahjong. These gatherings act as a platform for members to widen their social networks and forge friendships. There are also Association-wide gatherings such as afternoon teas and pub nights for members who choose not to join special interest clubs.



Members getting together during Pub Night.



Dragon boat training at Kallang River.



Walkie talkies — for members who prefer leisurely exercises.

The BA Tours Team also organises frequent tours around Singapore to allow members to know more about the different cultural and heritage values of these places. Non-members are also welcome to join these tours. A few of such tours that the BA conducts included trips to Chinatown during the Chinese New Year period, the Asian Civilisations Museum, as well as a walking tour around Tiong Bahru.



Members learn more about Singapore through a heritage walking tour to Emerald Hill.

The BA also engages in volunteer and fundraising efforts. Currently, the British Association raises funds for The Haven, Dayspring, Breadline Group, Assisi Hospice and Star PALS. They also donate the proceeds from tickets sales to their Christmas Carols at Eden Hall to the Salvation Army. Other main fundraising events are the Ball and the Ladies’ Christmas Lunch. Each of their supported charities, including Riding for the Disabled, provides areas for volunteer work depending on members’ skills, interests and time available.

The BA raises funds for nominated Singapore charities via a series of events held throughout the year. Past events have included Valentine dances, Christmas parties, Christmas Carol evenings, summer fetes, wine evenings and the highlight of our year — a Charity Ball usually held around springtime. Funds are raised through a combination of sponsorship, ticket sales and auctions. Such activities allow BA members to meet up and enjoy the food and company, and for funds to be raised for the less privileged in society.

Summary of BA’s role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Association-wide gatherings and interest groups provide members with a platform to interact and forge friendships.
Social bridges	People of different nationalities are welcome to join the BA; thus members can get to know people of different cultures and ethnic groups.
Language and cultural knowledge	BA conducts heritage tours to culturally significant places in Singapore such as Chinatown and Tiong Bahru.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Association is involved in volunteer and fundraising efforts, as well as charity events.



## ***German Association – Deutsches Haus***

### Introduction of German Association

The German Association was firstly founded as the Teutonia Club in 1856. It is the first European Club to be formed in Singapore. In 1914, the Club closed due to the start of World War I. All Germans were interned in Australia and its Club House on Scotts Road (where Goodwood Park Hotel stands now) was confiscated as enemy property. It was never returned to the German Club by the colonial government. In 1939, a new German Club was founded in Shelford Road, but was again closed with the start of World War II. This time, all Germans were interned in Dehra Dun at the foothills of the Himalayas. The property was again confiscated as enemy property and never returned by the colonial government.

A new German Club, the Vereinigung Deutsches Haus was founded in 1955. The Club House at 12, First Avenue was opened on 9 July 1956. The club was later renamed German Club – Deutsches Haus, but closed in early 2000 as the club was not allowed to continue operating in a high-class residential area. The active members at that time joined the Swiss Club. Only much later in 2003, a small premise was rented at 36 Watten Rise as an office as well as a venue for meetings and cultural activities. Two years later, in 2005, a terrace house at 61A Toh Tuck Road was rented as the official venue of the German Association. The Association changed its name to German Association – Deutsches Haus, which is currently used, in 2006.

### German Association's role in immigrant integration in Singapore

The German Association helps new immigrants feel at home and share nuggets of information about Singapore through organising meet-up sessions, be it over coffee, sports or wine and cheese. There are also tours organised to cultural and historical spots in Singapore to enhance members' knowledge of the heritage and cultural of Singapore. Some of the spots featured in the tours are Geylang Serai, Little India, the National Museum of Singapore and Changi Beach. The tours also feature festivities such as Chinese New Year and Thaipusam to immerse participants in the spirit of the festivals.



Members gather in the clubhouse for Coffee Morning. This particular session features *fengshui* and Chinese zodiac signs. A wheel representing the 12 Chinese zodiac signs sits on the table in the middle of the room.



A group picture taken at the summit of Bukit Timah Hill after a short hike



Members took part in a tour to City Gallery in the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). The tour also featured the Parliament House and Supreme Court.

Other than tours, the German Association organises courses for its members. This platform allows members to interact while picking up a skill. There are preparation classes for the Basic Theory Test to help new immigrants familiarise themselves to the traffic rules in Singapore. English and Mandarin classes are also conducted to help new immigrants pick up languages spoken in Singapore, facilitating communication between them and local Singaporeans.

The German Association is the publisher of *Impulse*, a magazine for the German-speaking community in Singapore. It features stories about Singapore, and helps the German-speaking community learn more about Singapore history, culture, people and heritage. For instance, the January 2015 copy of *Impulse* has an article charting Singapore's journey as the country celebrates its 50th anniversary since independence. There is also a feature on Thaipusam, and a listing of arts and cultural events.



Magazine covers of *Impulse*. The Singapore-specific content informs German readers on the culture, history and traditional practices found in multicultural Singapore.

The German Association does not only reach out to the German population in Singapore. The workshops and courses it organises are also open to locals. This provides opportunities and platforms for the immigrant population to interact and learn alongside the local population. Singaporeans are also welcome to join social events. The German Association also collaborates closely with other associations such as the Swiss Club in organising typical German events like Oktoberfest.

To celebrate Singapore's golden jubilee and the 50th anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Germany, the German Club cooperated with other German institutions to plan activities. Some of these German institutions include the German Embassy, Singaporean-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, German European School Singapore, German Centre, the German-speaking Catholic and Protestant Congregations, and Goethe-Institut Singapore.



Summary of German Association's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social meet-ups that bring members of similar interests together. Association-wide events also act as a platform for members to interact and get together.
Social bridges	Local Singaporeans are welcome to attend the workshops and courses organised by the Association, and members can meet people of other communities through these workshops. The Association also collaborates with other organisations in organising events.
Language and cultural knowledge	English and Mandarin classes are conducted to help members in language knowledge. Interest groups and events that expose members to aspects of the Singapore culture, e.g., Chinese zodiac signs and heritage trips. <i>Impulse</i> , a magazine that is published monthly by the Association, educates readers about Singapore's history, culture and society. Help in driving tests is also offered by the Association.



## ***Greeks in Singapore***

### Introduction to Greeks in Singapore

Greeks in Singapore was founded in 2008 by Dimitri Maroulis, a Greek expatriate who arrived in Singapore in that same year. The vision of the networking group was to connect people of Greek origin and people with a genuine interest in Greek culture and language who reside in Singapore. The group has more than 400 members.

### Role of Greeks in Singapore in immigrant integration

New members are connected to existing members of the club through social activities. They get to interact with people who have been living in Singapore for years and to Singaporean members that help them understand the local culture and adapt in a different working and living environment. Members are always happy to share information about Singapore, as well as tips and insights about living here, with newcomers.

Membership is not only open to people of Greek origin; the community has several Singaporean members. These Singaporeans have either been in Greece and would like to connect with Greek people or have friends or spouses who are Greeks. Singaporean and Greek members interact through its Facebook platform and face-to-face during the group's social events. Ties between Singaporeans and Greeks are hence forged by the group.

Some of the social events that Greeks in Singapore enjoy and celebrate include:

- Events on Greek National Days (in October and March), where they share customs and traditions and feast over Greek food
- Weekly Greek dancing classes by the Greek dancing group
- Occasionally, Greek drink events to catch up and meet new people
- Monthly Greek Ladies Coffee meetings to stay connected and explore Singapore

The community also features Greek-related products for members to know where to turn to when they want a taste of home. The addresses of the shops are listed on the website for easy access to all that are interested. Some of these products include Greek wine, Greek cuisine, feta cheese, Attiki honey and stuffed vine leaves. Locals alike are welcome to try these Greek-related products and learn more about the culture of Greece.



Looking forward, Greeks in Singapore wants to be more active in immigrant integration through being represented in seminars, speeches, social gatherings and other events that host various international communities in Singapore.

Summary of Greeks in Singapore's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social activities and events and allow members to interact with one another.
Social bridges	Singaporeans are also allowed to be part of the club, and hence members get to interact with people of different nationalities and ethnic groups.
Preservation of own culture	The group celebrates Greek National Days through sharing Greek food, drinks and upholding Greek traditions and customs.



## ***The Netherlands Charity Association (NCA)***

### Introduction to the NCA

The Netherlands Charity Association (NCA) was established in 1968 by a handful of passionate Dutch women who wanted to reach out to a struggling orphanage. Through the decades it has grown into a more professional organisation, but the original intention of the club still holds: they are expats raising money and awareness among peers for local Singaporean charities. NCA gives continuous support to carefully selected charities that benefit children, the disabled and elderly and others who fall between the cracks.

### NCA's role in immigrant integration

NCA considers Singapore a wonderful place to live — a beautiful country that has a lot to offer and filled with nice restaurants, lovely shops and hardworking people. Sometimes these people end up in unfortunate circumstances and depend on others to make ends meet. NCA wants to bridge the gap between the expat community and the local charities that help these unfortunate people. Apart from raising money, it aims to create awareness and show how they can enjoy Singapore, but give back to the community as well.

Creating awareness is about sharing stories; stories they hear through charities and stories people want to share themselves. For NCA, it is very important that people get to know the driving forces behind the charities they support. Therefore they inform members of visits to the charities through the website and newsletter and, at several occasions, the charities invite loyal NCA volunteers to visit them. Each year, during the annual general meeting (AGM), one of the charities will give a short presentation on their activities, their plans and their achievements. In all cases, members get to ask questions and in turn get more involved after they have met the people that directly work with those in need.

Next to raising awareness and creating a platform for local charities, the NCA organise numerous workshops and an annual Charity Christmas Fair. These activities are used to generate funds, as well as offer workshops that are typically Singaporean. In 2014, the NCA organised a Chinese arts and crafts tour in Ang Mo Kio. They visited a shop where they made paper houses with furniture, all in detail, that are later burned in commemoration of loved ones. They also visited a workshop making joss sticks, a much larger version of the ones commonly used at Chinese temples. This was a wonderful experience that taught members much about Chinese culture and religion.



A choir of one of NCA's supported charities performing at its annual Charity Christmas Fair



Above, right: Members listening intently as the tour guide explained Chinese arts and crafts

Above, left: Finished products of giant joss sticks used in temples

Recent NCA activities mainly focused on creating awareness and generating support from the Dutch business community. It offers customised merchandise, and can also work out a plan to involve employees in supporting activities, for instance, by volunteering at the Willing Hearts Soup Kitchen. NCA tries to be the missing link and encourages companies to help out those in need as part of their social responsibility.



The NCA offers a wide variety of events. These events act as platforms for members to mingle and get to know one another. Activities such as visiting charities also gives NCA members first-hand experience with the charities, allowing members to better understand the local charity scene and identify possible areas of collaboration. Here is a short list of their recent events:

- Awareness Night about human trafficking
- NCA corporate evening (hosted by the Dutch ambassador and his wife)
- Festive make-up workshop
- Semi-annual garage sale
- Volunteer meetings with visits to charities



Dutch TV celebrity Kristel Zweers hosted the NCA Awareness Night on human trafficking

Some of the upcoming events that are being planned include:

- The Black and White home tour for members to learn more about the variety of architecture in Singapore
- Awareness Night explaining about the hiring of foreign domestic workers



- NCA AGM where the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME) will give a presentation about their women's and men's shelters and education programmes for the shelter residents.

NCA considers helping local charities as a chance to give back to the community that they enjoy living in. This also makes it possible to get to know real Singaporeans. The group believes that meeting people in a different environment increases the interaction and integration between expats and local Singaporeans and simultaneously benefit people in need.

#### Summary of NCA's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Members engage in volunteering initiatives together and get to know each other through these initiatives.
Social bridges	The NCA partners other organisations and hence members get a chance to interact with people of different backgrounds. Non-members are also welcome to join the NCA in its volunteering initiatives, allowing members to mingle with non-members.
Language and cultural knowledge	Organising and going on heritage tours allow members to get to know various aspects of Singapore's culture and history.
Giving back to Singapore society	NCA is primarily a charity organisation. Proceeds go to local charities, and members actively volunteer with numerous social organisations.



## ***Scandinavian Women's Association in Singapore (SWA)***

### Introduction to SWA

SWA started out as an auxiliary to the Scandinavian Society of Singapore (SSS) in 1975, on the initiative of a Norwegian lady, Ms Marit Thome. At the closure of SSS in 1995, the SWA was formally registered as the Scandinavian Women's Association.

The Scandinavian Women's Association (SWA) is a social and charitable organisation. Its goal is to establish a good network among women from all nationalities. The Association wants to be a rallying point for Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Finnish women who have come to live in Singapore.

As expats, the members enjoy a relatively privileged life, which is why they wish to use their time and money to help some of those less fortunate. For SWA, it is essential that they support the Singaporean society through charitable activities directed at some of the less fortunate people here in Singapore.

### Role of SWA in immigrant integration

SWA offers members the opportunity to establish good networks and rapport with women of similar interests. The Association organises frequent coffee meetings and social gatherings for its members, where members can share experiences, thoughts and build friendships during these social events. Other such social events include cycling trips, hikes, as well as heritage tours. Members get to learn more about aspects of Singaporean life through these heritage tours.



Ladies let their hair down over food and wine during Ladies Night, organised by SWA



Members also organise cycling trips, which allow them to explore parts of Singapore they have never been to. In this particular trip, the ladies managed to catch a glimpse the last old-style village in Singapore, Kampung Buangkok, in the middle of lush nature.



A group photo at the HDB gallery. Members got to know more about the history of public housing and urban planning in Singapore.



During a heritage trip to Chinatown, members saw how traditional mooncakes were made. They also learnt more about the origins and traditions of the Mooncake Festival, which falls on the eighth month of the Lunar calendar.

With the income from members' fees, and through generous donations from Scandinavian and local companies, and private individuals, the SWA helps some of the needy people in Singapore. The Association supports the following charities:

- The Breadline Group — SWA supports families recommended by social workers in cooperation with the volunteer organisation. The Breadline Group is a member of the National Council of Social Services. Its focus is to help families with children by giving financial support towards paying their rent or public utility costs, school fees or other costs. The SWA charity officers visit the families on a regular basis.
- The Tent — SWA gives monthly donations to The Tent, which is a shelter for young girls, who have no support from their families.



Representatives of SWA taking a picture with a representative of The Tent, a temporary shelter for female adolescents in need. The SWA donated \$4,500 to The Tent during this visit, which will be used for buying new mattresses and cupboards for the girls.

- The Sanctuary House — SWA supports The Sanctuary House with monthly donations. The Sanctuary House provides emergency foster care for babies who require respite or short-term care, while their (usually very young) biological parents receive transformative support services so they can be reunited with their child.
- SWA also offers scholarships to deserving students. Through two scholarship programmes (The Scandinavian Women's Association-Marit Thome Scholarship and the Scandinavian Women's Association Scholarship), it is able to support students through their education at the Republic Polytechnic.



### Summary of SWA's role in immigrant integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	Social activities like lunches and Ladies' Nights bring members together to forge friendships.
Language and cultural knowledge	Members go on heritage tours and learn about aspects of Singapore's culture during these trips.
Giving back to Singapore society	The Association organises charity events and initiatives that benefit multiple local organisations.



## ***Swiss Association Singapore (SAS)***

### Introduction to SAS

In 2006, Luzia Kappeler, SAS's first President, created the Association as she wanted to offer a platform of contact and network to Swiss people living in Singapore. The Association's Constitution was approved by the Registry of Societies on 26 May 2008.

The Swiss Association of Singapore (SAS) is a non-political, non-religious and non-profit association of Swiss nationals and persons with a close relation to Switzerland residing in Singapore.

Under the shelter and support of the Swiss Embassy, as well as the sponsorships of few Swiss entrepreneurs and companies in Singapore, the SAS started to offer some events and activities for people to meet and mingle. More formally, the objectives of the Swiss Association are to:

- Facilitate contact among Swiss nationals living in Singapore
- Foster friendship and contact between the Swiss community in Singapore and friends of Switzerland
- Liaise between the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss community in Singapore  
to act as a link between other Swiss organisations in Singapore and the Swiss community in Singapore
- Organise social and recreational events that are in the general interest of its Members and the Swiss community in general

At the end of 2013, the SAS has almost 500 members. All of Switzerland is represented with more or less the same ratio of Swiss Germans, Swiss French and Swiss Italians.

### Role of SAS in immigrant integration

The Association regularly organises social gatherings to strengthen social relationships between members. Such events include jazz evenings that are held every month, coffee mornings, as well as afternoon tea sessions. Catering to special interests, the Association also conducts a range of activities such as cooking classes, wine-tasting sessions, baking classes, perfume-making workshops and English-speaking classes. This is to ensure that there is something for everyone. At the same time, members can learn more about the culture of other communities in Singapore.



SAS members get to mingle during social gatherings like ones depicted in this photo. This photo was taken during a welcome-back cocktail held every year.



SAS members got to learn how to make cuisines from all over the world like the chilli crab (top, left), sushi (bottom, left), and Korean kimchi pancake (right).



Learning how to put on a kimono in the tatami room



SAS members attending a tea-tasting session and learning more about Chinese tea culture

The Swiss Association also conducts talks and seminars on various topics for interested individuals. A wide range of topics are featured in these talks. Members get to interact with the speaker, who is more often than not from Switzerland, and also learn from the speaker about various issues.



The SAS collaborated with the Swiss Business Association in organising a lunch talk featuring Mr Claude Nicollier, the first astronaut from Switzerland, for its members. Mr Nicollier spoke extensively about his experience in space exploration and the lessons he learnt from his experience.



Members of the SAS also got to hear from Dr Martin Saxer, a Swiss photographer and anthropologist, on his research work in China.

To help members to get know Singapore better, the Association conducts a series of culture and heritage tours to different parts of Singapore. Through these tours, members learn how Singapore manages the problem of scarce water resources, how different ethnic groups celebrate their respective cultural festivals as well as how Singapore plans its urban environment. Participants of these tours also got to know more about the history of different parts of Singapore.



SAS members visited a Chinese temple (left) and a temporary Chinese New Year goodies market (right) during their trip to Chinatown close to Chinese New Year.



Taking a tour around Little India on the day of Deepavali. Members also got to witness some religious rituals in the Hindu temples.



SAS members got to know a little more about urban planning in Singapore when they visited the Urban Redevelopment Authority Gallery.



A visit to the Semakau Landfill, where Singapore transports all its material waste

### Summary of role of SAS in immigrant integration

Domain of integration	Initiatives
Social bonds	Social activities bring members together and allow them to forge friendships.
Language and cultural knowledge	English-speaking classes are available for members. Members also learn more about Singapore's culture through heritage tours.



## Oceania

### ***The Australian and New Zealand Association (ANZA)***

#### History of ANZA

The Australian and New Zealand Association (ANZA) was founded in 1948 to provide support to Australians and New Zealanders living in Singapore. It was founded by volunteers and today more than 300 volunteers run the many aspects of the Association, supported by an Executive Committee of 14 volunteers, as well as a paid staff of four full-timers and five part-timers.

The Australian and New Zealand Association became a registered society on 25 August 1961. Today, the Association provides networking, social, sporting and cultural opportunities for Australians, New Zealanders, other expatriates as well as all other nationalities living in Singapore. ANZA has a membership base in excess of 7000, from varied nationalities including Singaporeans.

#### ANZA role in immigrant integration in Singapore

ANZA facilitates immigrant integration in Singapore via three different channels, namely: (1) sporting activities and events, (2) interest groups, and (3) community service programmes.

Sports is a big part of the Australian and New Zealand culture and as such is a big part of ANZA. It provides a platform for participants to mingle and forge friendships through engaging in a cooperative environment. In particular, ANZA Soccer runs a programme sponsoring ANZA membership fees and ANZA registration fees for Singaporean children from underprivileged families.

ANZA Soccer has recently been approached with opportunities for collaboration by the Home United Football Club Chief Executive Azrulnizam (Azrul) Shah Bin Sohaimi. There could be chances for HUFC teams to play friendly matches with ANZA; some of these could even take place as “curtain raisers” for S-League weekend games. Mr Azrul is also keen for HUFC coaches to attend ANZA training sessions and games. Home United is closely affiliated to the Ministry of Home Affairs which has been mandated a community role to provide and promote activities that keep youth busy (and out of trouble). An integral part of HUFC community mission is to target at-risk and underprivileged youths by subsidising them to join Home United’s Youth Academy. This collaboration will give ANZA another platform to help the youths in Singapore, and allow ANZA members to bond with local Singaporeans through cooperative sport. ANZA seeks to be an inclusive organisation that welcomes local players



into its league and also seeks to help the less fortunate members of the Singapore community.



A group of children playing netball. Valuable friendships are forged while engaging in cooperative sports.



A mixed group consisting of Australian youths and Singapore youths. Such collaborations between ANZA Soccer and Singaporean Teams create opportunities for interaction and mutual understanding.

ANZA also has many interest groups catering to its vast membership. These interest groups provide a platform for its members to interact and share their knowledge and expertise. Some of these interest groups include book clubs, Business Women Network, mahjong, and a wine club.



Besides engaging its members from various nationalities, including Singaporeans, in a series of sporting events and interest groups, ANZA facilitates immigrant integration through providing a platform for its members to engage in community service in Singapore. Through these community service initiatives, members get to understand the social issues Singapore faces and contribute to the society at large. This gives rise to a sense of ownership towards the larger community and provides opportunities for members to interact with locals who are not part of the membership of ANZA. A few of these meaningful programmes run by ANZA Action are elaborated upon below.

ANZA Action supports many local charities through both fundraising and hands-on volunteering. For instance, ANZA members staff the front desk at Ronald Macdonald House, which is located at the National University Hospital, every Monday. This small facility supports the Paediatric ICU. ANZA members also run a New2U Thrift Shop. Proceeds support the Star shelter for women.

ANZA contributes an annual \$10,000 sponsorship of a Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) pony named "Kodie". The RDA provides therapeutic riding lessons for intellectually and/or physically disabled children. ANZA members also assist at RDA by providing the therapeutic riding sessions for disabled adults and children. The volunteers walk beside the horse, guiding and motivating the rider to achieve the tasks set by the instructor.



Volunteers guiding the rider during the therapy session through walking beside "Kodie"

The Salvation Army is one of ANZA Action's charity partners. For many years, ANZA members have helped with its food distribution programme at



the Family Services Centre (FSC) at Beo Crescent. Members help to pack the dry goods and get them out to homes. This programme allows the elderly to stay in their homes and maintain their independence. ANZA members also support the activities of the FSC, which provides a weekly drop-in morning where the elderly come to do crafts, play mahjong, have lunch and occasionally go on outings. In addition to hands-on support, ANZA raises funds to support the Salvation Army's programmes. The money raised will go to support the FSC in working with the elderly and frail in the areas around Tiong Bahru, Bukit Merah and its surroundings.



Volunteers distributing food to the needy elderly at the void deck of a HDB block

ANZA is in close collaboration with the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS). Besides teaching small groups how to knit caps for chemotherapy patients, ANZA provides drivers to take people to chemotherapy or radiotherapy on weekdays. ANZA is also active in fundraising activities for organisations and programmes like Singapore Breast Cancer Foundation and Singapore Cancer Society's Prostate Cancer Survivorship Programme.



ANZA members handing a cheque of \$2,470 to Mr Patrick Neo of SCS. The sum was raised during a fundraising event, ANZA Biggest Morning Tea. ANZA also organises the Race Against Cancer to raise funds for SCS.

Beyond fundraising and providing resources to organisations to help the less privileged and the sick in Singapore, ANZA is involved in improving the physical environment in Singapore. Each year in October, more than 100 ANZA members, including the two ANZA Scouts groups, get together to clean up a piece of Singapore's East Coast Beach. This year they removed more than one tonne of trash from a 230-metre stretch of Pasir Ris Beach.



Volunteers picking up litter along East Coast Beach. Some volunteers even managed to find a non-functioning fridge and disposed of it in a proper manner.

The Annual ANZA Ball 2015 will be supporting Melrose House, Singapore Children's Aid Society, a home for children who cannot live with their own families for various reasons including physical or sexual abuse, poverty or imprisonment. In 2014, the ANZA Ball raised more than \$30,000 for charity and more than \$70,000 in total across all of the charities it supports.



### Summary of ANZA's role in integration

<b>Domain of integration</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
Social bonds	The Association organises various social activities and interest groups. These are platforms for members to mingle.
Social bridges	Membership is open to people of all nationalities. Members hence interact with people of different ethnic backgrounds during social events organised by the Association. Other initiatives such as mixed soccer teams and charity work also allow members to get in touch with the local community.
Preservation of own culture	Sports, as a big part of Australian and New Zealand culture, is a big part of ANZA's activities as well.
Giving back to Singapore society	A slew of charity initiatives by ANZA Action, as well as subsidised rates for less-privileged youths for some sports programmes.



## Others

### ***Critical Xchange (CRIX)***

#### Introduction to Critical Xchange

Critical Xchange (CRIX), formerly known as Muslim Expatriates Network (MEX), was formed in 2012 as an outcome of the 3rd National Convention of Singapore Muslim Professionals on 30 June 2012, which was graced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The Convention, which was organised by the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), presented 18 strategies aimed at catalysing the progress of the Muslim community in Singapore. MEX was one of the 18 strategies presented at the Convention.

In January 2015, Critical Xchange was registered as an independent and separate organisation from AMP.

#### Critical Xchange's role in immigrant integration in Singapore

Since its inception in 2012, CRIX has organised several ground-breaking programmes and events to build and strengthen the local community.

It arranged annual Iftar (evening meal to break the fast in Ramadan), which provided an opportunity for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as well as locals and expats, to come together in a shared space to forge friendships as well as to network professionally. This event highlighted the social and professional benefits that our partners can reap through collaborating with CRIX.



A member of CRIX sharing about their events and activities and engaging partners who might be interested in collaborations



Participants of the sharing exchanging name cards while waiting in line for dinner.

CRIX has run a highly successful mentoring programme that allowed an exchange of skills and guided learning for the local undergraduate community and their volunteer mentors. It also organised several talks and lectures by speakers such as Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and Shaykh Professor Mustafa Ceric (former Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina). Locals were also present in the talks, and they got to know more about the Muslim community. CRIX looks forward to organising more of such events to foster understanding and have critical discussions.



Jamiyah Singapore, SimplyIslam and CRIX collaborated to organise a talk titled “Challenging Hate: Islam, Conflict & Peacebuilding” by Sheikh Professor Mustafa Ceric, a former Grand Mufti of Bosnia Herzegovina. People who attended the lecture learnt more about the Muslim world and how to deal with the negative publicity that terrorism has been giving to Islam.

CRIX has been instrumental in responding to global humanitarian issues as seen in the Aid to Syrian Refugees in Syria (ASRIT) project that raised \$500,000 in 2014 and saw the launch of a brand new school (Temasek

School) in Kilis, Turkey for 400 Syrian refugee students. The ASRIT Project brought together local and expatriates, Muslims and non-Muslims, together for a humanitarian cause.

CRIX is also interested in engaging members of different ethnic groups. On 12 February 2015, some Critical Xchange members together with members from the Turkish Cultural Centre met the senior citizens at Thye Hua Kwan's Senior Services Centre at Taman Jurong for a pre-Chinese New Year celebration. Everyone was treated to Ebru, the Turkish art of water painting, some karaoke fun, great food, Chinese calligraphy and Hong Bao decorations. The children learnt a lot from the elderly in the centre and the elderly also enjoyed the presence of these young children. Not only was the day great due to the inter-generation mingling, but also that there were Singaporeans and expats, Turkish culture meeting Chinese culture and a truly great reminder that we all share the same humanity.



The session started with a demonstration of Ebru by the Turkish Cultural Centre. Following that, the elderly are invited to make a piece for themselves. An elderly woman managed to execute the Ebru successfully.



A senior citizen teaching a child how to make Chinese lanterns from red packets (*hong baos*)

These events bring together people from different communities for a variety of different causes, and allow others to understand more about Islam. As CRIX is still a very new organisation, it looks forward to doing more to facilitate immigrant integration as the organisation matures.

#### Summary of Critical Xchange's role in integration

Domain of integration	Initiatives
Employment	CRIX conducts talks and mentoring initiatives.
Social bonds	Talks and social activities bring members together.
Social bridges	CRIX engages people of different organisations and communities through possible collaborations, or co-organising events together.
Preservation of own culture	CRIX conducts talks and lectures regarding Islam and related issues.
Giving back to Singapore society	Members visit social service institutions e.g. visit the elderly during Chinese New Year
Giving back to country/area of origin	CRIX conducts fundraising for global humanitarian causes.

### **SUMMARY OF THE ROLE OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, countries all over the world are facing the social consequences, both positive and negative, of immigration. It is heartening to note that immigrant associations can play some part in helping societies mitigate the negative social consequences of an influx of



migrants, and capitalise on the strengths of having a diverse population. With reference from the situation of different countries, immigrant associations can be co-opted to achieve state objectives, and can provide a multitude of programmes and services to facilitate immigrant integration.

Singapore, with its unique multicultural and immigration policies, has a unique landscape of immigrant associations. The table below summarises the role of the immigrant associations which are featured in this chapter, organised by the regions.

Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preservation of own Culture	Contribution to SG Society	Contribution to country/ area of origin
Africa									
South Africans in Singapore (SAiSG)	South Africa		√					√	√
America									
American Association of Singapore (AAS)	United States of America	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Asia – Central and West Asia									
Russian Club in Singapore	Russia	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Turkish Cultural Centre (TCC)	Turkey		√	√		√	√		√
Asia – East Asia									
The Japanese Association Singapore (JA)	Japan		√	√		√	√		
Korean Association in Singapore (KAS)	South Korea		√			√	√		
Kowloon Club	Hong Kong, China		√	√				√	



Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employ- ment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preser- vation of own Culture	Contribut- ion to SG Society	Contribut- ion to country/ area of origin
Singapore Chinese Friendship Association (SCFA)	China		√	√		√	√		
Singapore Hua Yuan General Association	China		√	√		√	√	√	√
Singapore Loving & Giving Society (L&G)	China		√			√		√	
Taipei Business Association in Singapore (TBAS)	Taiwan		√	√			√	√	√
Tianfu Association Singapore	China		√	√	√	√		√	√
Tianjin Association	China		√	√		√	√	√	√
Asia – South Asia									
Bengali Association Singapore (BAS)	India/ Bangladesh		√	√			√		



Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preservation of own Culture	Contribution to SG Society	Contribution to country/ area of origin
Bengali Community Singapore (BCS)	India/ Bangladesh		√	√			√	√	
BIJHAR	India		√	√			√	√	
Indian Institutes of Technology Alumni Association, Singapore (IITAAS)	India		√	√		√	√	√	
Maharashtra Mandal (Singapore) (MMS)	India		√	√			√	√	
Marwari Mitra Mandal (Singapore) (MMM)	India		√	√			√	√	
The Nepalese Society	Nepal		√	√				√	√
Punjabi Society	India		√	√			√		
Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA)	India		√				√	√	

Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preservation of own Culture	Contribution to SG Society	Contribution to country/ area of origin
Singapore Pakistani Association (SPA)	Pakistan		√	√		√	√	√	√
Singapore Telugu Samajam (STS)	India		√	√			√	√	
Asia – Southeast Asia									
Association of Cambodians in Singapore (ACS)	Cambodia		√	√			√		√
Malaysian Association in Singapore (MASIS)	Malaysia		√	√			√		√
Myanmar Club (Singapore)	Myanmar		√	√		√	√	√	√
Pinoy Star Magazine	Philippines	√	√	√		√	√		√
SekolahSG	Indonesia	√			√				
Thai Association Singapore (TA)	Thailand	√	√	√		√	√	√	



Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preservation of own Culture	Contribution to SG Society	Contribution to country/ area of origin
University of Philippines Alumni Association (Singapore) (UPAAS)	Philippines	√	√	√	√	√			
Europe									
Belgian and Luxemburg Association of Singapore (BLAS)	Belgium/ Luxemburg		√			√		√	
The British Association of Singapore (BA)	United Kingdom		√	√			√	√	
German Association – Deutsches Haus	Germany		√	√		√			
Greeks in Singapore	Greece		√	√			√		
The Netherlands Charity Association (NCA)	The Netherlands		√	√		√		√	

Name of association	Country/ Region of Origin and Profile of Members	Domain							
		Employ- ment	Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links	Language and Cultural Knowledge	Preser- vation of own Culture	Contribut- ion to SG Society	Contribut- ion to country/ area of origin
Scandinavian Women's Association in Singapore (SWA)	Scandinavia		√			√		√	
Swiss Association Singapore (SAS)	Switzerland		√			√		√	
Oceania									
The Australian and New Zealand Association (ANZA)	Australia/ New Zealand		√	√			√	√	
Others									
Critical Xchange (CRIX)	Muslims from all over the world, mostly from Southeast Asia and the Middle East	√	√	√			√	√	√
Total		7	39	32	4	20	28	27	14



The services and programmes offered by immigrant associations reflect largely the needs of highly skilled economic migrants in Singapore. Only seven of the 40 (17.5%) associations offer employment services. The bulk of associations do not do this, at least formally, since most of these highly skilled immigrants are already employed, or are in high demand in the Singapore economy. Besides, these immigrants also tend to be highly educated and experienced, and are competent in navigating the processes getting a job, such as resume writing and using social media and job portals for a job hunt. Informally though the social networks established through the immigration associations may allow immigrants to access different job opportunities with the referral of influential fellow immigrants.

Similarly, very few (four out of 40, or 10% of immigrant associations) contribute in the domain of building social links between members and the government. This primarily reflects the high level of access that immigrants and all those residing in Singapore have to the government's many platforms for information, many of which is available online. Thus, there is little need for associations to help in building such links. Moreover the profile of new immigrants to Singapore; these belonging to the upper socio-economic strata of Singapore society have significantly fewer welfare needs that need to be addressed compared to immigrants in colonial Singapore.

Rather than addressing the basic needs of healthcare, housing and education that immigrant associations in many other societies provide, almost all (39 out of 40) of the immigrant associations here are active in helping their members develop social bonds. This is probably driven by the demand for social support and meaningful relationships, as immigrants sometimes arrive alone or with immediate family members but not with the community they have been used to in their country of origin.

About three quarters (32 out of 40) of immigrant associations report that they build social bridges through collaborating with other associations and organisations, opening membership or extending invites to people of other communities. In this way members are able expand their social networks within the new society they are living.

The multicultural model used in Singapore, encourages diversity instead of assimilation. This it is amenable to the preservation of cultures. Twenty-eight out of 40 (70%) of immigrant associations organise activities that allow members to practise their cultures — whether religious celebrations, teaching ethnic cuisine or supporting cultural performances and festivals. These provide members with a familiar cultural space and an avenue to



pursue cultural practices. Immigrant associations are able to actively preserve and promote the culture of their members in this manner.

Half of the immigrant associations help with language and cultural knowledge, mostly through organising English and Mandarin classes as well as having lessons on various aspects of Singapore culture. Having heritage tours is one popular way immigrants are introduced to aspects of Singapore's history and culture.

A majority of immigrant associations (27 out of 40) also reported contributing to Singapore through engaging in charity events and fundraising for the less privileged in Singapore. This is partly reflective of the better socio-economic status of members of immigrant associations in Singapore and thus their interest in philanthropic work as well as their keen interest in being perceived as immigrants who are serious about serving the needs of the local population.

Fourteen out of 40 (35%) immigrant associations also contribute to their countries of origin, especially associations that represent communities from natural disaster-prone areas. Some of these immigrant associations maintain country links, through hosting foreign dignitaries, providing financial resources to build infrastructure in their country of origin, or providing natural disaster relief in times of need.

These findings however should be taken tentatively for two reasons. First, the analysis is based on 40 associations and not all the associations that exist in Singapore. We are confident however that the 40 associations capture a large enough sample since most of those that are active contributed information about their association. We however note that some were not able to do so. Second and more significantly, while we observe the execution of various programmes, we are not able ascertain the impact and take-up rate and hence the effectiveness of these programmes. Based on our observations they vary from association to association. Our analysis reduces the contributions of associations to a binary input, and is hence not indicative of the effectiveness of each programmes, something which we think might be useful to point out best practices in immigrant integration processes.

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## **Chapter 5**

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# Concluding Thoughts

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

### **COMPARISON BETWEEN EARLY CHINESE CLAN ASSOCIATIONS AND IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS TODAY**

The last chapter provided an extensive description of the activities of immigrant associations in Singapore. In many ways they differ from how immigrant associations in early Singapore which we discussed in Chapter 3, were structured.

The landscape of immigrant associations today is more varied, in terms of (1) who they are representing and (2) their activities. In the past, the great majority were Chinese associations, around 53 out of an estimated 65 immigrant associations. This is primarily because of the large numbers of Chinese immigrants who had entered Singapore in search of economic opportunities in the rubber plantations and tin mines. Modern Singapore however positions itself to attract talent globally especially as it seeks to be a global hub for a number of industries. This has meant that there are immigrants from all over the world. Moreover, immigrants today tend to be highly skilled and have the resources to mobilise and network easily, especially with the available social network platforms. This allows immigrants to easily identify others from the country of origin, region or even school who have come to Singapore.

The functions of the immigrants associations today reflect modern realities. Unlike the case of earlier immigrants who had required associations to ensure their welfare, new immigrants of today are well placed to handle most of their personal needs. Associations then focus on social bonding, bridge building and providing environments where immigrants can reclaim their identities as individuals originating from particular places. In that regard they are keen to maintain links to their country of origin and feel a sense of social responsibility towards it, which was similar to how early immigrant associations had conducted themselves. As such, at least some immigrant associations mobilise for disaster relief or help with development projects in their country of origin.

As was in the past, immigrants associations are cognizant of their responsibilities to see to the welfare of their host country as they did in the past. However, unlike clan associations that had engaged in infrastructural development through building of schools and hospitals for their communities, today's immigrant association contributes to the "heartware" of Singapore. These include volunteer work and fundraising activities to contribute to the less privileged in Singapore society.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the current presence and activities of immigrant associations, how can they be further mobilised for the purpose of immigrant integration in Singapore?

Some worry that the functions of immigrant associations can be a double-edged sword — while it provides a platform for intercultural interaction, it also can create an exclusive environment for new immigrants. New immigrants who are immersed in these associations have much less incentive to reach out to locals and other communities. This view should however be tempered by the reality that with social media, new immigrants can easily connect with those of their own communities, even without the help of an association. Immigrant associations that prioritise the integration mandate can mobilise their members to be proactive in building bonds with the local community. As such, they can be important bridges to facilitate such interactions. Beyond organising large cultural events where they are able to attract broad participation, it will be useful to find ways to encourage the building of authentic and long lasting ties with the local community. The Japanese Association for instance has established a fund for any sport activities conducted by its members which facilitates interaction and understanding between members and the larger community.

Essentially, immigrant associations act as a good starting point for immigrants to engage in civic participation, bearing in mind the Singaporean context. This is important since some new immigrants come from societies where civic participation on an organised level is weak. Others come from societies where such civic participation takes on a political nature, which is not compatible with Singaporean norms. Civic participation through immigrant associations provides a safe and familiar environment for community involvement. When immigrants are more familiar with their surroundings, they will find it easier to engage in grassroots activities and volunteer with local organisations, especially if these are facilitated through networks built by the immigrant community. This can be an extension of the current volunteering schemes that immigrant associations have already put into place.

As seen in Chapter 2, immigrant associations can be a valuable source of information and important partners in dialogue related to immigration and integration matters. Their active involvement in conferences and dialogues can shed light on how Singapore can continue to fine-tune its immigration policies to facilitate immigrant integration. Local community leaders are much able to appreciate the issues that immigrants themselves face when they hear it from migrant representatives. Such dialogue also opens up the

possibility for immigrant association leaders to better understand how Singaporeans view some issues and thus better able to share their thoughts with their members. These efforts can build mutual understanding and foster tolerance and acceptance towards new immigrants in Singapore, facilitating better immigrant integration.

Immigrant associations can also act as a voice to mediate conflicts and to provide useful commentary to locals. For instance, when Singaporeans were upset about the Filipinos in Singapore who wanted to celebrate their Independence Day in public, representatives of the Filipino associations stepped in to offer explanations and apologies. Leaders of other immigrant associations also took cues from the responses of this incident, and chose to hold their respective events in more acceptable venues. This is helpful for immigrant integration as the leaders of immigrant associations are in good position to dispel misunderstanding and tension, and to change the general public's perceptions of the immigrant population in Singapore. By highlighting their commitment to the norms in Singapore and whenever dispelling myths about behaviours in their country of origin, these immigrant association leaders can provide much help during tense moments when there is tension between particular immigrant groups and locals.

Singaporeans can stand to gain from immigrant associations too. Immigrant associations are valuable contact points as they represent the diaspora of their various countries. The strategic relationships that immigrant associations have with their country of origin and Singapore can be an important resource for Singaporeans who are looking for opportunities abroad. For instance, the Association of Cambodians in Singapore is currently helping Singaporeans plan their overseas community service projects in Cambodia. The Tianjin Association and Taipei Business Association have strong links with officials back home and they are in good position to help Singaporeans who are looking to expand their businesses or embark on social projects in these areas. As Singapore grows its place in the global economy, immigrant associations can act as a gateway of worldwide economic opportunities for Singaporeans. Since Singaporeans could also benefit from the services of immigrant associations, this will help change the general perception that immigrant associations are exclusive and inward-looking. This in turn can result in greater acceptance within the population.

The terrain that immigrant associations operate in today is by no means easy. While integration goals are important, immigrant associations face many challenges in their effort to gain and retain active membership. For one, many immigrant associations have difficulties engaging their



communities to become part of these associations, let alone commit to integration events. The stresses and multiple affiliations that are part of modern living keep many focused on their career and immediate family needs. To remain relevant, immigration associations must cater to the needs of their members to engage in activities that bring the practices and cultures of their homeland back to Singapore. Perhaps if they, whenever possible, can find ways to incorporate local participants into at least some of their events, the possibility for greater integration is enhanced.

Besides ensuring a sound immigration policy, empowering immigrant associations and acknowledging their important role in facilitating social cohesion is one of many ways Singapore can better manage its large and growing immigrant population. Immigrant integration is a big project which requires all hands on the deck if it is to be successful.





## **ENDNOTE: AN IMMIGRANT'S MUSINGS ABOUT IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN SINGAPORE**

**By Asad Latif**

### **I**

Many years ago, a man sharing a table with me at a noisy hawker centre enquired where I was from. When I said "Calcutta", he misheard it as "Jakarta". A conversation followed in which I tried to convince him that Calcutta was not in Indonesia any more than Jakarta was in India. Then he cut to the chase and asked me where I was originally from. "The Garden of Eden," I said.

My answer was not a frivolous one. Humanity's terrestrial presence, at least in the Western intellectual tradition, began with an act of expulsion and exile that led to arrival and belonging. Driven from Paradise, Adam and Eve shielded each other with themselves on cruel Earth, and Love was born. They raised a family. Admittedly, it was dysfunctional: Cain killed Abel. However, the family continued, and human history began.

Adam and Eve were the first immigrants. Their displacement is the genesis of every subsequent migration, from every place and state of being to another. I have no proof, but I suspect that some part of the First Family found its way to Bengal and settled down there because it was the next best to Eden. The arrival lasted thousands of years before one of the family – I – moved on to find other pastures. So, originally from the Garden of Eden and lately from Bengal, I arrived in Singapore on December 8, 1984, became a citizen in 1999, and am very much here today.

To arrive as an immigrant is to insert oneself into Singapore's immigrant past. It is to recover the vanished life worlds of the early immigrants; relate, if only vicariously, to the struggle and resistance with which they survived economic racism and social invisibility in a colonial coolie town; participate in the transience of their joys; and, above all, extend to them the tangible solidarity of being their national descendants. To be an immigrant is to implicate oneself in the past of Singapore and to take responsibility for the present, to share with the early arrivals the privilege of having inherited Singapore's material place in anonymous time. To be an immigrant is to protect one's labouring forebears from the "enormous condescension of posterity", as one would wish to be preserved in times to come (Thompson, 1968, p. 13).

Of course, all Singaporeans can (and should) do this. However, the stakes are higher for immigrants than they are for the local-born. Unlike the latter, immigrants need to justify their existence here. Their presence needs to be validated perpetually, day after day, event by event, choice by choice. They can do this by understanding the immigrant past which has created the possibilities within which they operate today.

In that spirit, let me survey briefly the immigrant's role in the shaping of Singapore.

## II

The quest for a national past is mythic ultimately. Kuo Pao Kun's play, *The Silly Little Girl and the Funny Old Tree*, offers an imaginative history of the origins of Singapore, combining a narrative of immigration with metaphors of rootedness (the tree) and communion with coming generations (the girl). The play is both a secular creation hymn and a parable of nationhood (Latif, 1997).

More familiar, though, is the story of Sang Nila Utama, the legendary founder of Singapura. He was foreign talent. He was no less than the ruler of the Sriwijaya Empire based in Palembang, Sumatra. For Sang Nila Utama — known also as Prince Nilatanam and Sri Tri Buana — to want to set up a kingdom on Temasek, which he saw from afar, was no big deal, but his arrival here in 1299 took some doing. Almost swallowed by the turbulent waters beyond his command, he had to throw his crown to calm the churning sea. Whether or not that act was a propitious omen of the island's republican destiny, he landed safely at Telok Blangah<sup>9</sup>, saw a lion and named the place Singapura — the abode of lions. Whence and how the lion itself had arrived on an island is a geographical curiosity that detracts nothing from the subtly mysterious origins of Singapore. What matters is that pre-colonial Singapore grew into a bustling settlement in which Chinese immigrants were so well integrated with the majority Malays that they did not need to live in fortified enclosures. In this, it is possible to see early signs of the cosmopolitan multiracialism with which Singapore would come to be identified.

Like his illustrious predecessor, Stamford Raffles survived a shipwreck near Calcutta before he could obtain the East India Company's permission to set up a colonial settlement in Singapore. In 1819, he inaugurated a new chapter in Singapore's seaborne history. The maritime trade in opium

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<sup>9</sup>I, too, live in Telok Blangah, but my connection with Sang Nila Utama ends there.



between Bengal and China that would pass through Singapore was not a salubrious one, but it helped to establish it as a major international port. Between themselves, Sang Nila Utama, from the archipelagic hinterland, and Stamford Raffles, from the imperial sphere beyond, turned Singapore into a player in regional and world history.

The Age of Raffles — which lasted till the Japanese invasion and occupation of Singapore in World War II — peopled it beyond imagination. Since his time, it has been impossible to imagine Singapore except as a world city where indigenous lives and horizons were expanded by the arrival of sojourners, transient workers, colonials who sometimes went native, immigrants who became settlers, and their descendants. Bumboats carried China's unwanted over the dangerous seas, with no crowns to pacify them, to build Singapore's economy literally on their coolie backs. The sound of chains kept convict Indian labour rhythmic company as the rejects of the Raj turned Singapore into the third city of the British Empire, after London and Calcutta. Eurasians straddled the worlds of Europe and Asia, refusing to accept that they could not co-exist. Above all, the gentle magnanimity of indigenous Malays welcomed all these arrivals, who had nothing to offer but the labour of their hands and the unrest of their dreams.

The unfolding of Singapore's immigrant history reached its peak with the Chinese and Indian arrivals. Early colonial-era Chinese labourers, indentured or free, came to Singapore to make a living and save for the time when they would return to China more economically secure. Unlike the settled Straits Chinese, who had families, the new arrivals lived as an all-male community (Lee, 2008, p. 28). That changed when Chinese women began to arrive. It was they, more than the men, who turned a point of sojourn into a land called home.

The new settlers contested not only the colonials but also the Straits Chinese for economic and social space. The identification of these English-educated Chinese with the ideational and linguistic apparatus of the colonial state created a social divide between them and *sinkeh* that would last well beyond the Age of Raffles. The Great Depression of 1929–30 robbed many immigrant Chinese of even the little they had. Many were repatriated unceremoniously to China, their surplus labour having become a burden on the *laissez-faire* state. Those who remained were divided politically between supporting the Kuomintang and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which was set up in Singapore in 1930. Both parties drew on the subaltern energies of the Chinese-educated, and both acquitted themselves well during the war through their membership of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA).

However, the MCP left a deep imprint on post-war Malaya by opposing Britain's imperial return. A battle over the future of Chinese language, education and culture ensued, between left-wing Chinese — inspired by the emergence of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and encouraged by the MCP's open-front cultural programme — and the late-colonial state and those, like the English-educated Straits Chinese, who could look forward to educational advancement and career preferment under the old regime. The radicalism of students from Chinese middle schools and the Chinese-medium Nanyang University in the 1950s; trade union activism; and the expansion of the electorate under the Rendel Constitution, published in 1954, created a buoyant public sphere and a politicised citizenry that would settle for nothing less than a democratic-socialist post-colonial Singapore. It was with the support of pro-communists in the ranks of the People's Action Party (PAP) that its English-educated, democratic-socialist and moderate leadership, in the evocative words of Lee Kuan Yew, "bridged the gap to the Chinese-educated world — a world teeming with vitality, dynamism, and revolution, a world in which the Communists had been working for over the last thirty years with considerable success" (Lee, 1962, p. 17).

The MCP's ill-advised, ill-timed and ill-fated armed struggle, which had begun in 1948, had exacerbated the contestation between the old and new orders, but it was crushed soon. One reason for its failure was its almost completely ethnic Chinese profile — it failed to attract any meaningful degree of Malay, Indian or Eurasian support — and its identification with China. Among those who paid the price were China-born Malayan student radicals who were deported home after their arrests. "It was said that some of these people were protesting as they were forced to board the ships to China; they refused to disembark when they reached the Chinese harbour and insisted on taking the boat back to Malaya," activist Tan Kok Chiang recalled in an interview. "In the end, they remained in China but still regarded themselves as people from Malaya" (Teng, Chan & Lee, 2012, p. 109). Before the 1949 revolution, repatriation to China could mean execution at the hands of the Kuomintang. After 1949, the Malayan activists were reabsorbed into a socialist society. However, for all its ideological attractiveness and seamless Chinese-ness, it was not their society. Effectively exiles to China, they longed for Malaya. They had been born in China but had come of age politically in Malaya. They were immigrants who had gone native forever.

Immigrant Indian labour — indentured, convict or free — followed a similar trajectory. It literally created the architectural identity of Singapore. Convicts, for example, filled up swampy grounds, reclaimed large plots of land, blasted rocks, erected sea and river walls, built bridges, viaducts and



tunnels, and surveyed and constructed roads. They built the civil jail, the courthouse, public offices, the general hospital, the lunatic asylum, the pauper hospital and Government House, and erected the grand Sri Mariamman Temple on South Bridge Road and St. Andrew's Cathedral. Underwriting their place in the imperial scheme of things, the convicts also built their own prison building (Krishnan, 1936, pp. 16–17). After the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the Colonial Office in 1867 — till which time colonial Singapore had been ruled from Calcutta — Indian life-convicts in Singapore were sent to the Andaman Islands. Some of those pardoned unconditionally returned to India, “but that country was no longer their piece of work; they could not recognise themselves there” (Latif, 2008, p. 28). So they turned towards the Straits again, and re-entered the colonial economy as shopkeepers, cow-keepers, cart-men and so on. Absorbed into the local population in Singapore, Penang and Malacca, Superintendent of Convicts John McNair reported that none of them ran afoul of the law or was re-convicted (cited in Krishnan, 1936, pp. 17–18).

However, World War II inaugurated strident departures from habitual identification with the remit of colonial rule. The Indian National Army (INA), rejuvenated by the charismatic Bengali politician Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore in 1943, sought nothing less than to reverse the direction of colonial history. Raffles had travelled to Calcutta to seek a mandate for the setting up of Singapore: Colonial Singapore had been “made” from India. Bose of Calcutta sought to unmake that connection by using Singapore as a bridgehead against the British colonisation of India. The Indians of Singapore and Malaya, including many who had never seen India, were seized with his visionary anti-colonialism.

In that endeavour, supporters of the Indian National Army were motivated by an ethno-nationalism as intense and acute as that of the MCP. Unfortunately, Bose allied himself with the imperial Japanese — responsible for the worst barbarities in Singapore's history — in his quest to liberate India. There was nothing “anti-national” in the Singapore Indian support for Bose, just as there was nothing anti-national in the Chinese support for the MCP (with which, in fact, the British allied themselves during the war): Singapore simply was not a nation then. Indeed, neither the INA nor the MCP represented racial hostility towards each other. What set them on divergent paths was their ethnic experience of World War II. For Chinese, whether in China, Malaya or Singapore, the war was an extension of Japan's war on China, which had begun in 1937, two years before the outbreak of war in Europe. For Indians in India and Southeast Asia, the war was an extension of Britain's colonial war on India that had begun with the Battle of Plassey in 1757. As Janadas Devan writes, “the Japanese were not occupying India; the British were. The British were not

occupying China; the Japanese were. Different communities, therefore, responded differently to geopolitical events..." (Devan, 1999, p. 31).

There were large-scale reprisal killings of collaborators, including Chinese, after Japan's defeat in 1945. However, Indians were not singled out because the INA had not collaborated with the Japanese against the Chinese of Singapore and Malaya but had allied itself with Japan against Britain in India (Lee, 2008, p. 38). Indeed, post-war Singapore and Malaya witnessed a coming together of radical Chinese and Indian streams to resist Britain's imperial return. After the INA's debacle at Imphal, on the Indian border, many of its partisans returned home and joined trade unions affiliated to the MCP. "Since they could not liberate India from the British, joining the left-wing trade unions meant not only getting back at their oppressor — the British — but also improving their socio-economic lot," Penang Deputy Chief Minister P. Ramsamy wrote. Left-wing trade unions emboldened Indians in the plantations and urban areas, organising and training Tamil labourers whom the British had derided as meek and docile (Ramasamy, 2013).

Nevertheless, the ethno-nationalism displayed by the MCP and the INA had divided the population. The moral of the story is that immigrant imaginations, whether political or social, must go local if they are to unite communities. It lies to the credit of independent Singapore that it developed a model of multiracial coexistence to bridge the ethnic affiliations of Singaporeans. This the People's Action Party (PAP) government did, not by getting citizens to discard or downplay their ethnic identities, but by creating overlaps and new connections among them by utilising the post-colonial possibilities of civic nationalism. Immigrant pasts do not converge, but immigrant futures may.

### III

To me, the chief lesson of an immigrant history of Singapore — even one as brief and selective as the preceding one — is to recognise the agency of labour. The indigenous, too, toil, but their claim to the land lies in their birth. Immigrants, however, must justify their presence on the basis of how far their labour contributes to the well-being of Singapore.

The second lesson is to indigenise one's arrival. This lesson is most pertinent for immigrants who wish to settle here, as I decided to. Throw away those useless crowns. Do not import the old country into Singapore; do not seek to pull it into the orbit of your past. Singapore is no appendage of archipelagic kingdoms, no outpost in the southern seas, no unimpragnable fortress of geriatric colonials, no Syonan that can be reset



to run on imperial time. It has been all those, but it has survived them all. Empires have come to grief around it. So will those who hallucinate about incorporating Singapore into a new *satrapy*, Asian or Western.

The third lesson is important for today's skilled immigrants. They should ask themselves why they are here. Some believe that they are globalisation's gift to Singapore: They are here because Singapore needs them. What they forget is the second half of their own story: They *need to be needed* by Singapore.

Migrant labour rarely forgets this: It is always in need of Singapore. Today's foreign workers from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines understand the temporary nature of their presence here. Yet, it is they who, in spite of the temporality of their labour, build the homes, cook the food, raise the children, clean the housing precincts, man the shipyards and refineries, and otherwise *run* much of Singapore. Transient workers help make Singapore permanent. Just a century ago — a wink in the eye of historical time — Chinese coolies built the economy step by struggling step from the Singapore River as they carried the merchandise of prosperity for others. Their labouring Indian kinsmen turned tropical swamps and marshes into the Clapham Junction of the East. Today's Singaporeans, whether local-born or immigrants, owe it to their fidelity to Singapore's sense of self to treat foreign workers as humans in their midst. Their agency and subjectivity deserve to be respected. They cannot be disembodied objects whose labour is needed but whose presence is not desired.

I believe that the right immigrant attitudes will go a long way in soothing the angst that occasionally takes a nasty turn to xenophobia. Singaporeans understand that most of them are the descendants of immigrants; to be anti-immigrant is to deny their own diasporic history. However, they are concerned with preserving the Singapore core of society and the economy. New arrivals, particularly those moving from permanent residence to citizenship, need to convince settled Singaporeans that they can and will contribute to the strengthening of the core. There is no need to eat durians and speak Singlish, although those who wish to do so can. There is a need to throw in one's lot with Singapore.

It is worth the effort. This country is worth the trust one puts into it. I should know, for I was from the Garden of Eden once — if only originally.

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## APPENDIX: CONTACT DETAILS OF IMMIGRANT ORGANISATIONS

Name of Association	Contact Details
<b>Africa Society of Singapore*</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.africansg.com/">http://www.africansg.com/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:africasociety.sg@gmail.com">africasociety.sg@gmail.com</a> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/722618821119918/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/722618821119918/</a>
<b>American Association of Singapore (AAS)</b>	Tel no.: 6738 0371 Fax no.: 6738 3648 Website: <a href="http://www.aasingapore.com/">http://www.aasingapore.com/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:aas@aasingapore.com">aas@aasingapore.com</a>
<b>American Women's Association of Singapore (AWA)*</b>	Tel no.: 6734 4895 Fax no.: 6733 6190 Website: <a href="http://www.awasingapore.org/">http://www.awasingapore.org/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:office@awasingapore.org">office@awasingapore.org</a> Address of Office: 10 Claymore Hill Singapore 229573
<b>The Arab Association Singapore*</b>	Tel no.: 6747 5590 Fax no.: 6746 4330 Website: <a href="http://alwehdah.org/">http://alwehdah.org/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:info@alwehdah.org">info@alwehdah.org</a> Address of Office: No. 11 Lorong 37 Geylang Road Singapore 387908
<b>Association of Cambodians in Singapore (ACS)</b>	Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/associationofcambodiansinsingapore">https://www.facebook.com/associationofcambodiansinsingapore</a> Contact person: Ngor Pengty Hp. No.: 9712 5959
<b>Association of Dutch Business People in Singapore (ADB)*</b>	Website: <a href="http://adb.org.sg/">http://adb.org.sg/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:adb@adb.org.sg">adb@adb.org.sg</a> Address of Office: 541 Orchard Road #13-01 Liat Towers, Singapore 238881
<b>The Australian and New Zealand Association (ANZA)</b>	Tel no.: 6223 7992 Fax no.: 6220 5239 Website: <a href="http://www.anza.org.sg/">http://www.anza.org.sg/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:info@anza.org.sg">info@anza.org.sg</a> Address of Office: 47A Kampong Bahru Rd Singapore 169361

<b>Bangla</b> Universal Society*	Website: <a href="http://www.hmsultan.com/">http://www.hmsultan.com/</a> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/bussingapore/">https://www.facebook.com/bussingapore/</a>
<b>Belgian</b> and Luxemburg Association of Singapore (BLAS)	Website: <a href="http://blas.org.sg/blas-home">http://blas.org.sg/blas-home</a> Email Address: refer to <a href="http://blas.org.sg/new-contact">http://blas.org.sg/new-contact</a> for a list of email addresses Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/111636152217448/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/111636152217448/</a>
<b>Bengali</b> Association Singapore (BAS)	Website: <a href="http://bengaliassociationsingapore.com/">http://bengaliassociationsingapore.com/</a> Email Address: MC@bengaliassociationsg.com
<b>Bengali</b> Community Singapore (BCS)	Website: <a href="http://www.bengalics.org/">http://www.bengalics.org/</a> Email Address: info@bengalics.org
<b>BIJHAR</b>	Website: <a href="https://bijhar.wordpress.com">https://bijhar.wordpress.com</a> Email Address: bijhar.singapore@gmail.com
The <b>British</b> Association of Singapore (BA)	Tel no.: 6339 8229 Fax no.: 6339 1167 Website: <a href="http://www.britishassociation.org.sg/">http://www.britishassociation.org.sg/</a> Email Address: info@britishassociation.org.sg Address of Office: 19 Tanglin Road #03-61 Singapore 247909
<b>Cambodian</b> Students in Singapore*	Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Cambodian-Students-in-Singapore-445867165275/">https://www.facebook.com/Cambodian-Students-in-Singapore-445867165275/</a>
<b>Canadian</b> Association of Singapore*	Tel no.: 6622 5485 Fax no.: 6622 5999 Website: <a href="http://www.canadians.org.sg/">http://www.canadians.org.sg/</a> Email Address: info@canadians.org.sg Address of Office: Level 25, North Tower, One Raffles Quay, Singapore 048583 Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/canadianassociationofsingapore/">https://www.facebook.com/canadianassociationofsingapore/</a>
<b>Chinese</b> Scholars and Students Association in Singapore*	Website: <a href="http://www.sgcssa.org/">http://www.sgcssa.org/</a> Email Address: refer to <a href="http://www.sgcssa.org/_intro/contacts.html">http://www.sgcssa.org/_intro/contacts.html</a> for a list of email addresses



<b>Critical Xchange (CRIX)</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.criticalxchange.com">www.criticalxchange.com</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:connect@criticalxchange.com">connect@criticalxchange.com</a> Facebook Page: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/CriticalXchange">www.facebook.com/CriticalXchange</a> Contact Person: Ameera Begum (above email or <a href="mailto:ameera.aslam@gmail.com">ameera.aslam@gmail.com</a> )
<b>Danish Business Association of Singapore (DABS)*</b>	Tel No.: 9144 6272 Website: <a href="http://www.dabs-singapore.com/">http://www.dabs-singapore.com/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:dabs@dabs-singapore.com">dabs@dabs-singapore.com</a> Address of Office: 101 Thomson Road #13-01/02, United Square Singapore 307591
<b>French Association of Singapore (AFS)*</b>	Tel No.: 9475 7875 Website: <a href="http://afsingapour.com/">http://afsingapour.com/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:genevievegrosliere.afs@gmail.com">genevievegrosliere.afs@gmail.com</a> Address of Office: 22 Camden Park Singapore 299814
<b>German Association – Deutsches Haus</b>	Websites: <a href="http://www.german-association.org.sg">www.german-association.org.sg</a> ; <a href="http://www.impulse.org.sg">www.impulse.org.sg</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:president@german-association.org.sg">president@german-association.org.sg</a> Address of Office: 61A Toh Tuck Road Singapore 596300 Contact Person: Dieter Gumpert (President, can be reached at above email or <a href="mailto:dieter.gumpert@gmail.com">dieter.gumpert@gmail.com</a> ) Hp no.: 9754 1907
<b>Greeks in Singapore</b>	Website: <a href="http://greeksinsingapore.weebly.com">http://greeksinsingapore.weebly.com</a> Facebook Group: “Greeks in Singapore” Contact Person: Stamatia Cotsakou Hp no.: 8322 1372
<b>Indian Institutes of Technology Alumni Association, Singapore (IITAAS)</b>	Website: <a href="http://iitaas.org/">http://iitaas.org/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:president.iitaas@gmail.com">president.iitaas@gmail.com</a>
<b>Indian Women’s Association Singapore*</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.iwasingapore.org/">http://www.iwasingapore.org/</a> Email Address: refer to <a href="http://www.iwasingapore.org/contact">http://www.iwasingapore.org/contact</a> for a list of email addresses Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/iwasingapore">https://www.facebook.com/iwasingapore</a>
<b>Indonesian Muslim Association in Singapore (IMAS)*</b>	Website: <a href="http://imas.sg/">http://imas.sg/</a> Yahoo Group: <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/imas_sg/">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/imas_sg/</a>

<b>Indonesian Professionals Association (IPA)*</b>	Website: <a href="http://web.ipa.org.sg">http://web.ipa.org.sg</a> OR <a href="http://www.ipanet.org/">http://www.ipanet.org/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:contact@ipa.org.sg">contact@ipa.org.sg</a> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/ipabayarea">https://www.facebook.com/ipabayarea</a> OR <a href="https://www.facebook.com/ipasingapore/">https://www.facebook.com/ipasingapore/</a>
<b>Irish Graduates Association of Singapore (IGAS)*</b>	Email Address: <a href="mailto:admin@irish-graduates.org.sg">admin@irish-graduates.org.sg</a> Address of Office: 541 Orchard Road #08-01, Liat Towers Singapore 238881 Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/IrishGraduatesSingapore/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/IrishGraduatesSingapore/</a>
<b>Italian Club Singapore*</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.italianclub.org/">http://www.italianclub.org/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:313singapore@italianclub.org">313singapore@italianclub.org</a> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/italianclubsingapore?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/italianclubsingapore?fref=ts</a>
<b>Italians in Singapore*</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.italiansingapore.com/">http://www.italiansingapore.com/</a> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/italiansingapore">https://www.facebook.com/italiansingapore</a>
<b>The Japanese Association Singapore (JA)</b>	Tel no.: 6468 0066 Website: <a href="http://www.jas.org.sg/">http://www.jas.org.sg/</a> Email Address: <a href="mailto:info@jas.org.sg">info@jas.org.sg</a> Address of Office: 120 Adam Road Singapore 289899 Contact person: Mr Sugino Kazuo
<b>Kannada Sangha (Singapore)*</b>	Website: <a href="http://singara.org/">http://singara.org/</a> Email Address: refer to <a href="http://singara.org/current-commitee-members/">http://singara.org/current-commitee-members/</a> for a list of email addresses Address of Office: 1 North Bridge Road #19-04/05, High Street Centre Singapore 179094 Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/kannadasanghasingapore/">https://www.facebook.com/kannadasanghasingapore/</a>
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\*Note: We did not include the write-ups of these organisations as they did not get back to us in time for this publication.



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