

Only 1 in 5 of Gen Y wants to emigrate

Survey also finds better qualified group feels most threatened by foreigners

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The Straits Times, 4 April 2011

After three years of studying in Britain, Ms Samantha Teo cannot wait to pack her bags and leave Singapore.

The 25-year-old, who did economics at a top university on a company scholarship, is counting down the days until she can spread her wings again in two years' time. It may not be better living elsewhere, she admits. 'But Singapore is too stifling, with little room for you to explore different paths, take the non-conventional route in life.'

Ms Teo, however, is an exception among her peers, according to an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey on Singapore's Gen Y released yesterday.

Only 20 per cent want to emigrate or spend an extended period of time abroad, and more than half, the survey shows, have no intention of leaving the country.

The door-to-door survey of more than 2,000 Singaporeans aged 19 to 30 also shows a substantial discomfort with the influx of foreigners exists among the young. More than 40 per cent feel threatened, with those from more privileged backgrounds feeling the most discomfort.

'It is the paradox of success,' said IPS researcher Leong Chan Hoong, who spearheaded the survey. 'The more you have, the more you have to lose.' He also notes that they feel more antipathy towards 'foreign talent' as these foreigners come into Singapore at a professional level, competing directly with them.

But there is a general unease among nearly half the respondents about the influx of foreigners: 49.7 per cent agree they are 'just here for the benefits' and 48 per cent agree 'Singaporeans shoulder more social responsibilities compared with foreign talent'.

About 20 per cent disagree and 30 per cent are neutral on the two statements.

Across the board, however, the respondents display an optimism about Singapore's economic future, with more than 50 per cent believing the country will continue to be economically prosperous over the next decade.

One in six (16 per cent) disagrees, while one in three (33 per cent) is neutral.

When asked if they agree they would prefer to be a citizen of Singapore than any other country, 57.2 per cent agree.

Just 12.4 per cent disagree and 30.5 per cent are neutral on the statement.

The researchers also found the respondents fall naturally into four groups, with distinct attitudes towards national issues, emigration and what roots them to Singapore soil (see infographic).

Only one of the four groups shows apathy and is 'disengaged' from national issues. Despite having strong family ties, the Explorer is keen to emigrate. On the other hand, the

Disengaged, while feeling disconnected from family and country, has no strong opinion on emigration.

'This shows that Generation Y is not monolithic,' notes IPS senior research fellow Gillian Koh, adding that only the 26.5 per cent who are Disengaged display qualities such as apathy and cynicism which observers like to attribute to Gen Y across the board.

Of the four, only the Cosmopolitan Stayer and the Explorer believe they are able and qualified enough to emigrate and do well overseas. Ms Teo represents the 20.2 per cent who are Explorers.

But lawyer Melissa Yap, 29, is an example of a Cosmopolitan Stayer, who despite being able to, has no intention of leaving the country. They make up 26.7 per cent of respondents, have strong national pride and display an optimism about Singapore's economic future.

The fact that she owns an HDB flat with her husband, and that their families live in Singapore, are the reasons she would not go elsewhere. 'There is no perfect governmental system,' she said.

'You just have to choose what is of priority to you. For me, it's stability in all respects, and Singapore has that.'