

CLOSED-DOOR SEMINAR ON SINGAPOREAN MIGRANTS IN PERTH

In the second of a series of seminars on issues of migration and Overseas Singaporeans, Daniel Soon, a graduate student, shared the results of his research on Singaporean migrants in Perth at a closed door seminar at IPS on 20 July¹.

According to statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Western Australia saw the highest number of Singaporean settlers in Australia over the past decade with 10,270 Singapore-born migrants. A closer look at the general profile of Singaporean migrants to Perth revealed that they generally comprised Eurasians who had emigrated immediately after Independence, blue-collar workers, and Singaporeans who wanted a middle-class lifestyle that would otherwise be unattainable in Singapore. It was noted that social mobility became more accessible for the lower qualified as less emphasis was placed on academic credentials in Perth.

Due to their high levels of adaptability to local cultures, in addition to their high stocks of cultural, human and financial capital, Singaporean migrants easily assimilated into Australian society. This consequently forestalled the creation of a strong, cohesive Overseas Singaporean community (unlike migrants elsewhere) and Singaporean migrants did not interact with fellow Singaporean migrants as much. Social networks were primarily based on specific interests rather than on ethnicity or nationality. Nevertheless, they continued to hold on to Singaporean cultural values such as the emphasis on hard work, thriftiness, strong family ties, and the importance of education within their own families. Activities organised by Overseas Singaporean associations in Perth were generally food-related, underscoring a common love for food.

While somewhat different – the Singaporeans in Perth tended to migrate for settlement and better quality of life while those in London were there mainly for career progression – some common issues emerged. The issue of dual citizenship was again raised, in this case, as a possible path for the children of migrants to return. The

¹ The first was held on 16 May 2007 with Dr Elaine Ho, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Royal Holloway University of London, speaking on Overseas Singaporeans in London (see July issue of Update).

composition of the leadership of Overseas Singaporean Associations influenced participation in these organisations. It was also suggested that the state should not be seen to have a strong hand in these associations. Rather, its role should be a supportive one. Yet there seemed also to be a need to keep Singaporeans overseas abreast on developments in the country as many still held on to images of Singapore at the time of their departure. The state could find appropriate ways to keep Singaporeans overseas abreast of developments back home.
