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Immigration and Its (Dis) Contents: The Challenges of Highly Skilled Migration in Globalizing Singapore

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Abstract

In the past three decades, the bid to develop Singapore into a global hub for high-tech, knowledge-intensive industries has underpinned Singapore's push to augment its local talent pool by attracting highly skilled transnational migrants. The ensuing influx of "foreign talent" into the "nation-city-state" has triggered major questions relating to social integration and cohesion, and raised implications for Singapore's demographic future and its "multiracial" identity. The article seeks to understand the politics of identity stemming from the increased presence of highly skilled migrants. After reviewing conceptualizations of the globally mobile "international talent" and tracing the key changes in Singapore's immigration-cum-labor policies (particularly those relating to highly skilled migrants), the article examines the fraught terrain on which the "integration" of highly skilled immigrants is staged, giving attention to the social dynamics of interaction between "foreign talent" and the "Singapore core" (popular terms often used in the media), the ensuing identity politics of inclusion and exclusion, and the slippages between the closure associated with building a "nation-state" and the openness critical to "global city" ambitions.

Keywords

highly skilled transnational migration, foreign talent, integration, contestations, Singapore

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Introduction

Immigration has long been a strategy that is closely interwoven with Singapore's history as well as its economic and population growth. Limited by its physical and population size, the government of the small, natural-resource scarce nation-state has drawn on a range of migration strategies as a means of augmenting Singapore's local labor pool. From the early days when colonial Singapore welcomed immigrants in the form of laborers from China, India, and the Malay archipelago, to embracing both highly skilled and low-skilled labor between 1960s and 1980s to stimulate labor-intensive export manufacturing, and subsequently—from the 1990s—to the move to capital- and technology-intensive industries and high value added services to achieve its regionalization and globalization dreams, Singapore's migration policy can be said to be generally liberal (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). Particularly in the past 15 years, the bid to develop the city-state into a global hub for knowledge-intensive industries in manufacturing and services with the emphasis on high-end technology and innovation has underpinned the push to augment the local talent pool by attracting "foreign talent"—as they are commonly referred to in the Singapore context—who can help Singapore move up the value chain in key industries such as electronics, chemicals, engineering, life sciences, education, health care, headquarters, communications and media, and logistics.

The recent challenges of an aging citizen population coupled with ultra low fertility rates have not only further fueled the government's urgency to attract more foreigners "who can contribute to Singapore" (National Population and Talent Division, 2013, p. 3), they have also triggered major questions that have quickly spilled over from the straightforwardly economic sphere to other more complex arenas including Singapore's demographic future, its social landscape, and fundamental identity as a nation-state. Indeed, despite the government's repeated extolling of the benefits of keeping Singapore's doors to talented foreign labor unlocked (e.g., news headlines such as "Foreign talent allows Singapore to punch above its weight," attributed to the late Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, in *Channel NewsAsia* on July 22, 2011), Singaporeans have become increasingly antagonistic toward the government's continued open stance on immigration. In fact, vociferous voices of dissent against the government's foreign talent policy have become louder in the press and social media since the "watershed election" of May 2011, when the ruling party's vote share dropped to an all-time low of 60.14%. The nativist "Singapore for Singaporeans" groundswell has since spurred the government to recalibrate its immigration policies and tightened work visa quotas, a factor that is thought to have contributed to the better than expected showing in the September 2015 general elections (Han, 2015; T. Koh, 2015).

In view of these recent developments, this article seeks to understand the contested place of highly skilled migration in the globalizing city-state of Singapore. It begins by reviewing conceptualizations of the "highly skilled transnational migrant" or globally mobile "international talent," with a view to summarizing what the scholarly literature has to say about the links between talent migration, global cities, and nation-states. This is followed by an account of key changes in Singapore's

immigration policies, focusing particularly on the policies relating to highly skilled migrants. Drawing primarily on recent state-produced discourses and publicly ventilated debates, it then focuses on examining the fraught terrain where the "integration" of highly skilled immigrants into different spheres of influence in Singapore is played out. The conclusion considers the fundamental questions that underpin the dilemmas and paradoxes that Singapore faces in coming to terms with the place of the highly skilled migrant in its own future.

The Global Mobility of the Highly Skilled and the Nation-State

Complementing the increased volume and velocity in the global flows of goods, capital, and services, scholars have noted the emergence of a highly mobile cadre of the "transnational capitalist class" or TCC[1] (Sklair, 2001) or "transnational elites" (Willis, Yeoh, & Fakhri, 2002). Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2006, p. 2) named them "heroes of global free movement—top ranked employees of multinational corporations, international finance, IT companies, scientific research agencies, and so on … the human hands, brains and faces behind impersonal dynamics of global markets and nation-state decline." Used in frequent conjunction with other descriptors including "expatriates"; "global talent"; "human capital"; "knowledge workers"; "professional, managerial, and technical specialists (PMTs)"; and the "creative class" (Beaverstock, 2002; Khadria, 2004; Kuznetsov & Sabel, 2006; Mahroum, 1999), highly skilled migrants gained prominence in the management literature when several business review writers began to realize the value of "talented" workers in securing competitive advantage for the firm through knowledge transfer (Burton-Jones, 1999; Crawford, 1991; Drucker, 1993; Gifford, 1996; Johnson, 1998). According to Robert Reich (1991, pp. 81-83), for example, companies striving to survive in the 21st century must "[shift] from high volume to high value," because "high-value businesses cannot easily be duplicated by high-volume competitors around the world." He adds that winning businesses must use knowledge creatively by relying on three interrelated but different skills supposedly wielded by "talent" in pushing themselves forward: problem-solving skills (e.g., technicians, engineers), problem-identifying skills (e.g., market and product analysts and evaluators), and skills in strategic brokering (e.g., executives and entrepreneurs).

Interestingly, this form of valorization of the internationally mobile talent worker at the firm level has also been taken on board in network approaches to the world city—or as Saskia Sassen (2005) prefers, the global city—where the city represents the "mega-cephalic" corporate and financial epicenters and localized "basing points" for capital accumulation within a "hierarchical articulation of global space" (Knox, 1996, p. 125). Highly skilled international labor migrants in this iteration are crucial to the (re)making of the world/global city, where they function as "dominant managerial elites" who serve as "conduit[s] through which capital is accumulated, networks built, [and] connections made" (Beaverstock, 2012, p. 240). While migration is a

fundamental component of the "new transnational political economy and trans-local household strategies," the migrant workforce coexists uneasily alongside global capital within global cities to unite "properties across borders" (Sassen, 2005, p. 39). Amid the burgeoning scholarship and debates on world/global city, the notion of "international talent" or the "highly skilled transnational worker" continues to be, for the most part, a rather nebulous concept, with imprecise and ambiguous boundaries. Its meaning is often constructed relationally and with respect to the (equally vague) "global knowledge economy." From this literature, however, we can discern two characteristics that appear central to the conceptualization of "talent."

First, the talent worker is by definition (and in fact *produced* by being) internationally mobile. For example, in their analysis of Hong Kong as a global city, Findlay, Li, Jowett, and Skeldon's (1996, p. 52) contention that "technical expertise" (in engineering and electronics, in their study) is a cultural construction that has come to incorporate an element of "internationality," by virtue of its value as a symbolic proof of (English) language and intercultural abilities. They argue that this contributes to the preference for "skilled foreign nationals" or "expatriates" over their local Hong Kong counterparts. International mobility, according to Beaverstock's (2005, p. 256) study on highly skilled British intercompany transferees in Manhattan, is similarly the reason why these "transnational elites" are able to accrue "intellectual and social capital . . . through [their] business interaction in the New York business community" and elsewhere. The complementary relationship between global cities and the international mobility of skilled migrants that circulate between them is also central to the literature that considers international students (ISs) as potential talent workers. Li, Findlay, Jowett, and Skeldon (1996), for example, consider IS mobilities associated with the acquisition of tertiary educational qualifications overseas as a kind of *highly skilled* mobility in its own right. This is often justified on the grounds that (international) students tend to settle abroad after their programs, and have become "[one of] the main sources of workforce supply to the labour market and to local and global knowledge pools" (Mahroum, 2000, p. 28).

A second important dimension of how the highly skilled migrant is defined pertains to the extent to which "talent," as purported embodiments of "knowledge," do what they are expected to do—transfer knowledge for economic/innovative purposes. A significant piece of work on knowledge transfers can be traced to Michael Polanyi's (1966) much-cited work, *The Tacit Dimension*, which sets a simple dichotomous distinction between codified and tacit knowledge. As the former can nowadays be easily—though not perfectly—transmitted in the form of signs and language (textualized/recorded) employing rapid telecommunication systems, it is the tacit that has received much attention in the talent debate, as (mobile) individuals are seen as important embodiments of knowledge crucial for its transfer (Bunnell & Coe, 2001). This has popularly spawned a host of literature on "innovative clusters" and "learning regions," as it is believed that copresence and physical/corporeal proximity facilitates trust, which in turn facilitates knowledge transfer and collective learning (Malmberg & Maskell, 2002). Florida (1995, p. 528), for instance, declares that learning regions are "becoming focal points for knowledge-creation and learning in the new age of

capitalism . . . , function[ing] as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas, and provid[ing] an underlying environment or infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning" (see also Maskell & Malmberg, 1999). Beyond spatially proximate transfers of tacit knowledge, others such as Amin (2002) have drawn on actor-network theory to propose that tacit knowledge could be shared, for example, electronically, offering a topographical view on the spatialities of globalization and informational flows. In this vein, Saxenian and Hsu (2001) empirically show how a technical community of Taiwanese transnational entrepreneurs manages to coordinate a decentralized process of capital, skill, and know-how transference between Silicon Valley and Hsinchu, Taiwan. This "movement of skill and talent" results in, as Saxenian (2002, p. 28, 2005) espouses, a "brain circulation" that is advantageous and beneficial to both sending and receiving countries.

While considerable work has been done on the relationship between "talent" and the knowledge economy from the firm or urban managerial perspective, more recent work has attempted to rescale the analysis of "talent" and their value to the national level. For instance, three economic trends were used by Kapur and McHale (2005, pp. 2-4) to justify the recent significance of "talent"—and the ensuing "international competition"—to nation-states: First, "the skill bias of recent technological advancements is leading governments to strive for a competitive advantage in emerging knowledge-based industries"; second, "international competition for skilled labor will be abetted by the aging of rich-country populations together with the . . . technical possibilities for costly … health care"; and third, "international competition for talent is bound to increase because of the broader globalization of production and trade" (see also Abella, 2006; Clark, 1996; Kuptsch & Pang, 2006; Yeoh & Lai, 2008).

By reflecting on the above scholarship on talent migration through the lens of nation-state Singapore, we suggest that such rescaling of the analysis from the firm/city to the nation-state level is problematic because the two assumed characteristics of international talent outlined above—international mobility and knowledge transfer—experience considerable slippage when applied to the nation-state context where the rules of engagement are vastly different from those of the firm or global city.

Singapore's Migration Policies to Attract the Highly Skilled

To fully understand where migrants, especially skilled talent, may be counted within the census of Singapore, one needs to first understand how Singapore's population is divided along with studying the possible categories in which migrants can enter Singapore. Singapore's population, since its early years, has included a fair mix of citizens (including naturalized citizens) and foreigners including permanent residents (PR) and nonresidents. PRs—consisting typically of immigrants who have been granted the right to reside permanently in Singapore and are entitled to most of the rights and duties of citizens, including eligibility for government-sponsored housing and mandatory military service for young adult males, though not the right to vote in general elections—are categorized under the same "resident" category as Singaporean

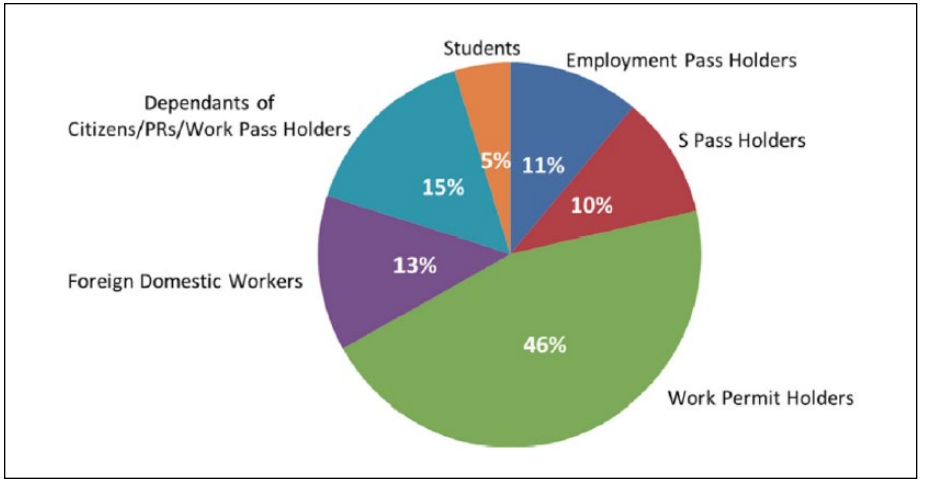

Figure 1. Breakdown of nonresidents in Singapore (as of June 2014).
Source. National Population and Talent Division (2014).

citizens (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). The proportion of foreigners becoming PRs was initially growing rapidly but has dropped drastically since 2010 due to tighter immigration policies.

On the other hand, nonresidents—a group whose numbers have been growing at an unprecedented rate over the past decade—comprise all immigrants who are in Singapore temporarily. In fact, nonresidents now constitute 29.2% of Singapore's total population (in 2014), up from 18.7% in 2000 (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). These nonresidents or foreign labor enters Singapore through different immigrant channels and in different categories including "foreign talent" (skilled labor or professional and managerial level employees often holding employment passes); "foreign workers" (unskilled/low-skilled labor in the construction, manual labor, and domestic industries holding work permits); workers with midlevel skills (such as technicians, chefs, and health care workers holding S passes); ISs (from primary to tertiary levels on student passes); entrepreneurs; trainees; confinement nannies; athletes and sporting talent; and family (spouses, parents, or unmarried children of Singapore citizens/PRs, as well as mothers accompanying their children to Singapore schools who stay in Singapore as dependents or on long-term visit passes; Yeoh & Lam, 2012). Figure 1 depicts the breakdown of these 1.63 million foreigners by categories.

Highly Skilled Foreign Labor[2]

Ranked second in the Global Competitiveness Index since 2011 to 2012, Singapore also remains as the top placed Asian country in 2014 (second overall) on the newly launched INSEAD's Global Talent Competitiveness Index. Reportedly, the most attractive Asian country to work in, highly skilled foreigners are hence a burgeoning

sector of foreign labor in Singapore and can be found under both the resident (PRs) and nonresident (employment pass or EP holders as well as ISs) population. There is currently no publicly released data for the total number of the highly skilled in the PR segment,[3] and only minimal data on the highly skilled who number among the nonresidents. Skilled workers and professionals currently form 21.0% (about 282,576) of Singapore's total nonresident workforce, eclipsing the 2006 record of 14.6% (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). Historically, most of them originated from Australia, Britain, France, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. However, the majority of skilled workers—apart from Malaysians—now come from China and India due to policies implemented in the 1990s to recruit foreign talent from nontraditional source countries.

Singapore's main economic strategy toward becoming a major player in the globalized world is based on being a "brains service node" that entices a highly skilled workforce. Alongside heavy investments in globally competitive information technology and human capital, the government is committed to facilitating what Stahl (1991) has termed "capital-assisted migration" and cultivating Singapore as the "talent capital" of the world. To attain this goal, Singapore—up till 2010—has been liberalizing selected immigration policies while constricting others concerned with low-skilled immigration to allow skilled migrants easier access to permanent residency and citizenship.[4] State-implemented programs facilitating the inflow of foreign talent into Singapore include short-term accommodation housing schemes for skilled foreigners, regular recruitment missions and networking sessions overseas, and company grant schemes for lowering the employment costs of skilled foreign-born. This goal is also one of the driving forces behind recent urban development policies designed to brand Singapore as a "Renaissance City" or "A Great Place to Live, Work, and Play!"

Highly skilled and midskilled workers in Singapore are accorded less restrictive employment passes (in the P, Q, and S categories) and enjoy greater benefits compared with the lower skilled and lower paid work permit holders. Unlike the lower skilled foreign workers, all EP holders may apply to become PRs or citizens, and their accompanying dependents (with the exception of S pass-holders who must apply for a separate work pass) may also seek employment in Singapore by applying for a letter of consent.

Among the newer introduced measures to bestow greater flexibility onto skilled foreigners, a new subcategory of visas was introduced in 2007 to enhance the attractiveness of Singapore to skilled professionals and retain them in the country. Though the criteria and benefits have since been revised (such as needing to meet higher salary requirements for a shorter validity pass), the Personalized Employment Pass is generally open to qualified current EP holders and overseas professionals wishing to work in Singapore. Personalized Employment Pass holders can assume employment in any sector, bring in accompanying family dependents, and also remain in Singapore for up to 6 months to assess employment opportunities when in between jobs.

Changes across the board were also made to Singapore's liberal immigration policies after the May 2011 general elections due to mounting public disapproval and pressures placed on the Singapore government. Difficult global economic conditions resulting from the 2009 global recession further propelled the impetus to substantially

change Singapore's policy on skilled labor from July 2011. Although Singapore's visa categories for foreigners remained unchanged structurally, the bar for potential foreigners seeking employment in Singapore has been raised so as to restrict immigration flows. The subsequent rounds of policy tightening measures pertaining to EP and S-pass eligibility criteria from July 2011 resulted in skilled foreigners needing to command much higher salaries before procuring the right to work in Singapore. Instead of S$2,500, those seeking EPs now need to earn a minimum monthly salary of S$3,300. It has also become increasingly difficult for foreigners to attain PR and citizenship, and a provision allowing selected foreign-born professionals (those holding or had held certain university degrees and/or other country's skilled migrant visas) to apply for an EP eligibility certificate so that they can remain in Singapore for their job search for up to a year was also scrapped in December 2011. Hence, foreign students now only have 3 months to find a job after graduating in Singapore before needing to return to their origin countries. Overall, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) argues that such tightening measures are aligned with recent moves to improve the quality of EP holders in Singapore.

Given key ingredients such as healthy economic conditions over the past few decades underpinned by the sustained presence of multinational corporations, an *already* diverse and multicultural society with a foundational history of immigration, aggressive government-led strategies to augment Singapore's talent pool, and pathways to achieving permanent residency and also citizenship, Singapore has been relatively successful in attracting international talent to its shores as compared with other countries including Japan (Oishi, 2012) and elsewhere in Europe. The more recent political backlash against the government's immigration (and specifically foreign talent) policies have led to the application of several brakes on the growth of the immigrant population for the first time in decades. Nonetheless, the government has continued to insist that the influx of new immigrants into the city-state must continue, albeit in a more controlled manner, in order to complement the local workforce (National Population and Talent Division, 2013). In this context, attracting skilled foreigners to live, work, and settle—while keeping low-skilled workers under control as a transient population—will likely remain a priority strategy for the foreseeable future.

With the prospect that increased immigration could add increasing complexity to Singapore's migration reality and bring new social challenges to the country, the government has in recent years turned some attention to the maintenance of a state of harmony within what is already a multicultural nation. In several high-profile ministerial speeches in 2011, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day rally speech as well as former Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's recent reminders about the nation's reliance on immigrants for growth, Singaporeans were encouraged to take a long-term view; continue to welcome talent; be more gracious, "kind-hearted and respectful toward each other and others," and, at least for the short term, "accept the discomfort" of having more foreigners around. While not expected to relinquish their cultures and languages, immigrants have also been urged to participate in local events so that they can learn more about and adapt more quickly to the way of life in Singapore.

At ground level, issues of being able to communicate effectively in English and the ability to understand and respect Singaporean cultural practices and social norms feature prominently as the main sources of tension between foreigners and locals (Scully, 2012; Soon & Lim, 2012).

While there are various nationality based clubs and clan associations such as the Hua Yuan Association (http://huayuanhui.org/) that play a role in facilitating migrant adaptation into Singapore society, a concerted government program focused on the integration of immigrants was only launched recently. In 2009, Singapore's National Integration Council (NIC) was established to promote interaction and national solidarity between locals and newcomers (with the key focus on newly naturalized citizens). Notably, a S$10-million (US$7.95-million) Community Integration Fund was created to sponsor activities that foster bonds between Singaporeans and immigrants. Additionally, 2011 saw the launch of the Singapore Citizenship Journey, an enhanced orientation program for new citizens comprising online elements, field trips to heritage sites, and community sharing. The People's Association, which appoints "Integration and Naturalization Champions," further engages new citizens in Singapore through home visits, grassroots activities, and community work. Based on key initiatives to "open doors, hearts and minds" to be rolled out in schools, workplaces, the community, and the media (https://www.nationalintegrationcouncil.org.sg/Portals/0/Docs/opening_doors_hearts_and_minds.pdf):

> The NIC would seek to connect all who live, work and play in Singapore to our country's pulse and soul. All new citizens will have to go through the Singapore Citizenship (SC) Journey, to open their hearts to fully integrate into life in Singapore society. New immigrants will also be encouraged to volunteer, as an expression of their attachment to Singapore, and their commitment to our spirit of community self-help. (http://admiraltyrc.blogspot.sg/p/nic.html)

International Students

With the projected rise in global demand for international higher education from 2.2 million students in 2005 to 3.7 million by 2025, the Singapore government has also been taking steps to increase its own country's intake of foreign students. Already an attractive destination for Malaysian and Indonesian students, Singapore has been continually upgrading itself into an international education hub since 1997 for primary through university-level students by leveraging on its strengths (i.e., English-speaking environment, high educational standards, and safety) in recruiting foreign students from China, India, Southeast Asia, and other countries. It particularly used the tagline, "Singapore: The Global Schoolhouse," to advertise that Singapore fuses the best of Asian and Western education systems.

Singapore is, as recommended by a government economic review panel, targeting to attract 150,000 foreign students by 2015. This is more than double a 2005 figure of 66,000 and is estimated to create 22,000 jobs and increase the education sector's contribution to the nation's gross domestic product to around 3% to 5% from the present

1.9% (S$3 billion or US$2.29 billion). As part of this endeavor, government bodies have actively courted reputable universities to set up branch campuses or partnership programs with local universities, encouraged the creation of private schools, delegated an "arts and learning hub" in central Singapore, and established the Singapore Education Services Center as a one-stop information and service center (similar to the British Council) for foreigners wishing to study in Singapore.

While Singapore was steadily successful in attracting ISs to Singapore, the figures have dropped from around 100,000 in 2008 to 84,000 in 2012 (Davie, 2012) signaling that the government's grand plans are gradually grinding to a halt as the unhappiness over the influx of foreigners into Singapore spills over into the education sector. Singaporeans are increasingly worried that ISs are usurping the places of the children of citizens in local universities. They are also upset that ISs are not paying significantly higher fees as compared with those in countries such as Australia and yet are also readily receiving generous government subsidies and scholarships in Singapore (E. Tan, 2011). As part of the measures taken to address these concerns, the government has announced in 2011 that it is putting a cap on the "IS undergraduate intake at the present levels"[5] while expanding the number of university spaces for local students (https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/number-of-international-students-in-local-universities). While it did not release the exact figures of the proportion of ISs receiving government grants, the government reassured the public that the larger majority of ISs who do receive grants have to pay fees that are "about 70% higher than the fees paid by Singaporeans" and "are required to work in Singapore for three years. Some IS are also on various scholarships which cover their tuition fees, but they have to serve a longer bond period of six years" (see the website above).

Foreigners in Our Midst: Issues and Challenges of Integration

While a number of models of integration have been developed based on the experience of immigration in Western countries, few are immediately and unproblematically relevant to Asian countries. Not only are "diversity" issues understood through different cultural, social, and political assumptions and contexts, migration regimes, systems, and infrastructure in Asia also operate differently. Research on the conceptual links between migration and diversity remains underdeveloped in the Asian context and deserve more attention (Collins, Lai, & Yeoh, 2012). In Singapore's case, Rahman and Tong (2012) usefully developed what they call "transnational inclusion" as a new model of integration that takes into account large groups of emigrants and immigrants who "remain transnational" as one better suited to the challenges of globalization and transnationalism in the past few decades (as opposed to Western models which distinguish between "temporary migration" and "settlement immigration" as two separate categories).

In this section, we focus on public debates and discourses around the question of "integration" of a specific group of transnationals, that is, highly skilled labor migrants,

in the context of different spheres of influence.[6] We divide the discussion into two arenas: integration based on economic functionality and integration based on common social norms.

Integration Based on Economic Functionality

We use the concept of "integration at the level of economic functionality" to refer to the extent to which highly skilled migrants are perceived to serve a complementary purpose in strengthening the economy rather than pose unfair competition or play an antagonistic role. The state has consistently propounded the view that foreign talent are vital in providing the skills and expertise that are currently in short supply in a city-state with globalizing aspirations and that the ability to draw in talent from all corners of the world will enhance the economy's global competitiveness. A survey conducted over a decade ago (in 2001) with 400 Singaporean respondents showed majority support (80%) for this rather rudimentary form of integration focused on the economic gains of highly skilled immigration (Yeoh & Huang, 2003). At about the same time, a poll of 10,000 Singaporean youths yet to enter the labor market, however, showed more than half (58%) felt "threatened" by foreigners working in Singapore (Anon, 2002). More recently, a survey on integration conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies in 2010 revealed a very different picture, where only 36.1% (n = 1,001 local-born Singapore citizens) feel that Singapore should depend on immigrants for economic development (Leong, 2013). In the same study, 73.2% agreed or strongly agreed that job opportunities for local-born Singaporeans will be reduced if we have more immigrants but 61.5% conceded by agreeing or strongly agreeing that immigrants contribute to Singapore's development as much as Singaporeans do.

The presence of foreign professional and managerial elites in various industries have become commonplace in Singapore workplaces although difficult to quantify given the lack of publicly available statistics. In their last available report, MOM (2008, p. 1) revealed that "out of every ten persons working [in 2006], . . . one was permanent resident (241,100 or 9.7%) and the remaining three were foreigners (30% or 756,300)." There is unfortunately no further breakdown in terms of their skills and occupations apart from major sectors, that is, manufacturing, construction, and services, all of which may contain highly skilled migrants. Only piecemeal information on various skilled professions is available sporadically. It was reported in the press that there were 1,142 (20%) foreign lawyers in Singapore in 2013, up from 303 in 1999. Similarly, over 20% of those doctors practicing in Singapore are also reportedly from overseas. No data are available on the banking and finance industry, although this—according to Towers Watson Singapore's global data services manager Sean Paul Darilay—is likely to have a higher proportion of foreigners compared with other industries as "it is one of the fastest growing industries in the past five years, and the supply of local talent has been unable to match up to increasing demands" (as cited in Yap & Teh, 2012). Various recruiters estimated that around 40% of the workforce in the banking and finance industry are foreigners, while Robert Walters Singapore posits

that foreigners and PRs occupy 30% of midlevel posts and 60% to 70% of senior level jobs (Yap & Teh, 2012).

With the increasing presence of foreigners in the professional workplace, there have been continual currents of unhappiness within public discourse that foreign talent compete unfairly with Singaporeans for jobs. While the state insists that only jobs unfilled by citizens are assumed by foreigners, the government is still frequently criticized for not curtailing the uptake of white-collar, managerial, and professional positions by non-Singaporeans. Suspicions that the labor market is giving preferential treatment to the foreign-born—described as "cheaper" and "harder driving and harder striving" than Singaporeans—are not helped by the lack of official data. Unemployment figures are particularly routinely published as an aggregate comprising citizens and PRs, which obfuscates the actual unemployment rate among Singaporeans.[7]

Debates on highly skilled migration have also coalesced around certain high-profile cases in recent years. What is striking about the banking and finance industry is that many of the chief executives (CEO) and directors are increasingly foreigners, even among the local Singapore banks. This is quite different from some two decades ago where only about 10% of the local bank's senior management staff in Singapore would have been a foreigner (Fernandez, 1997). Today, even major local banks such as DBS have not had a Singapore-born CEO since 1998, thus prompting its recently appointed chairman Peter Seah to argue that the bank's next CEO should be a "home-grown talent from within the bank" and that a local should be appointed "if it is a choice between a Singaporean and a foreigner" with the same qualifications (Chen, 2010). His comments were said to "reignite a long-simmering debate on the use of foreign talent for top posts at leading Singapore companies" (Chen, 2010), and came around a year after the highly publicized sudden departure of Charles Goodyear, the American CEO designate of Temasek Holdings (a government-owned investment firm) after 4 mere months of being appointed. Singaporeans were particularly interested in Temasek Holdings' CEO debacle given that it is a government-related organization that manages a significant amount of Singapore's financial assets, and that appointing a foreign CEO to manage this organization was something that has already been debated by the Cabinet. When questioned in parliament, Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam remained reticent over the fallout but acknowledged that though the government will not restrict Temasek's selection, it would be ideal to appoint a Singaporean as Temasek's CEO (Chan, 2009).

It would appear that the integration of the highly skilled on the basis of economic functionality remains a fraught terrain. Despite statements from the country's political elites that "without educated foreign residents, Singapore faces the threat of a declining economy with a shrinking labour force" (Oon & Goh, 2009, p. 1), citizens' acceptance of the economic argument for welcoming foreign talent has been ambivalent at best. While talented economic migrants may be vital to powering up the "global city vision" for Singapore, they are increasingly seen to be unfair competition when this vision is folded into "nation-state building," where the citizenry expects membership to have its privileges. The tensions stemming from conjoining "global city" and "nation-state" has led some observers to suggest that there are limits to the global city

vision and that a new social compact is needed to move toward "a just city, not (just) a global city" (Low, 2013).

Integration Based on Sharing Social Norms

The 2001 survey (Yeoh & Huang, 2003) referred to earlier concluded that while the interaction of foreigners and locals in social space cannot be described as "social apartheid," the habitual sharing of daily routines and points of everyday contact between foreigners and locals as a means of increasing mutual acceptance of each other's presence was uneven, and that the emergence of common social norms across the divide rather underdeveloped. The same study also observed that social interaction among citizens and foreign talent was rather superficial and that there was a lack of formal and informal institutions or structures beyond the workplace that facilitated greater interaction, cooperation, and collaboration between foreigners and locals. It was hence not surprising that about half the Singaporeans sampled felt that attracting and inserting foreign talent into Singapore society was at odds with the building of a cohesive nation (Yeoh & Huang, 2003).

Years later, recent findings drawn from a study on racial and religious harmony in Singapore by Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg (reported by Saad, 2013) continue to reveal a sense of discomfort among Singaporeans toward new immigrants. While Singaporeans are generally comfortable with having the majority population, colleagues, bosses, employees, and neighbors coming from different local-born races, they are much less comfortable working or living near new immigrants (e.g., a new Singaporean Chinese, Indian, or Malay from China, India, and the region, respectively; Mathews, 2013). More specifically, though Chinese Singaporeans remain as a numerical dominant in the multicultural state, social tensions between Singapore-born Chinese and new Chinese immigrants from China have been increasingly apparent. Ironically, while the ancestry of many Chinese Singaporeans originated from China during colonial times, they have been most vocal against their new ethically similar yet culturally dissimilar nationals culminating in several major war of words over their different lifestyles, cooking, and eating preferences and behaviors (see Yeoh & Lin, 2013).

In the aftermath of a decade marked by an unprecedented increase in the rate and volume of immigration, if the bridging of the local–foreign divide by considerations of economic functionality continues to be perceived with some ambivalence, the integration of foreigners in the social sphere is even more controversial and has generated even more heated discussion.

At the least contentious end of the debate continuum is the acknowledgment of the cultural gains as Singapore becomes increasingly exposed to other cultures embodied by new immigrants, including the welcomed addition of a wide range of international cuisines into Singapore's restaurant scene: "next to their contributions to the economy, the best thing about expats is the authentic food which follows them here" (T. Tan & Sim, 2008). Not only does the social heterogeneity resulting from multiple streams of migration have a transformative effect on the tapestry of everyday spaces such as

shopping malls, hospitals, offices, campuses, places of worship, and street-life in general, it also opens up opportunities for the new and spectacular (Yeoh & Lam, 2012). As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2006) elaborated:

> Today we get people from all over the world too. We have people from Turkey, there are Portuguese, somebody from Venezuela, somebody from Morocco, even a Korean or two, some Russians. And they add colour and diversity to this society. So our cuisine is something special. Singaporeans love food. You want Korean ginseng chicken, you can get the real thing cooked by a Korean. You want Arab food, you go to Arab Street, you can eat shawarma, which is shish kebabs. You can smoke the hubble-bubble, the waterpipe. . . . But it's something different for Singapore. . . . And we have other customs too. Recently there was a splendid wedding in Singapore. The groom came riding on a white horse. He was a Marwari, it's an Indian group, Indian businessman, very successful caste. So the zoo is now thinking of going into the service of providing horses and elephants for weddings.

At the other end of the continuum, social media interactions have become one of the most divisive sites suggesting that social integration has been deteriorating within the past decade. Given the broad spectrum of immigrants—from the unskilled to the highly skilled—who have been admitted into the island-state, some of the discussions on social integration does not differentiate by skill level but instead tend to take on ethnic or nationality dimensions. The figure of the ubiquitous Mainland Chinese, for example, has been negatively portrayed as uncouth and prone to objectionable behaviors like littering, eating on public transit, and talking loudly on the phone. Immigrants have responded with their own set of rejoinders. A spate of recent online disputes in 2011 involving Mainland Chinese immigrants ridiculing Singaporeans as "ungracious," "disgusting," and "inferior" reveals the extent of social discord despite the state's efforts toward immigrant integration. In a separate incident in 2012, a PRC scholar (Sun Xu) studying in the National University of Singapore created a furor when he passed online derogatory comments about Singaporeans by commenting after an encounter that "there are more dogs than humans in Singapore." This led to many of the public questioning the policies and rationale of the government in awarding scholarships to "ungrateful" foreigners who exhibit obvious difficulties in integrating into the society despite having studied here for some years. In yet another example, an online tirade by a "resident" assistant director with the National Trades Union Congress against the noise from a Malay wedding happening in the void deck of her home, quickly led to her being sacked from her position. Anger at the comments made by Amy Cheong soon turned into antiforeigner sentiments when the public realized that she is a Malaysian-born Chinese Australian who has been a PR in Singapore for the past 10 years (Yong & Poon, 2012). Even as she departed for Perth to escape the controversy, netizens have been questioning if migrants/foreigners have managed to integrate adequately into the community. To take another case, an incident whereby an immigrant family from China went so far as to lodge a complaint against their Singaporean-Indian neighbors for the smell of curry emanating from their cooking,

incited 57,600 supporters to back a campaign urging Singaporeans to prepare curry on a designated Sunday, and initiated Singaporeans to share curries from different ethnicities during National Day parties. Ironically, Singaporeans of different ethnicities have become more united in this time of discord with immigrants.

When Ma Chi, a new immigrant from China ran a red light, crashing his speeding Ferrari into a taxi, killing himself and two others, the tragic traffic accident assumed an additional social and political significance with many Singaporeans zooming in on the driver's nationality and wealth (L. Koh, 2012). Many are upset that the government is seemingly too lax in admitting foreigners but more important, they are angry over the blatant display of wealth and status of the super rich versus the majority of the Singaporean population. Their anger against the driver which has since been translated into increasing resentment against immigrants may further deter integration efforts between immigrants and locals. In sum, as a "nation-state" in-the-making *as well as* an aspiring "global city," Singapore exemplifies the tensions of being predominantly "Chinese" and "anti-Chinese" at the same time (Yeoh & Lin, 2013).

Conclusion

Singapore celebrated its Golden Jubilee as "One People" in 2015, marking its independence from its former colonial master as well as separation from the Malaysian hinterland 50 years ago. As Singapore comes of age as an economically developed nation-state in a time of increased transnational migration, it is caught in between the countervailing pressures of nation-state building and competing to become a global city. A major dilemma that confronts Singapore as a "nation-city-state" (Oswin & Yeoh, 2010) is to be able to envision a future that takes into account the porosity of national borders and the immense diversity of people—of different degrees of transience and permanence—who feature as inhabitants not just of a globalizing city with an increasingly high density of transnational networks, but of a nation-state that is trying to build deeper roots and sense of belonging among its people in order to overcome the shallowness of its own independent history.

In this context, highly skilled individuals, who are by definition highly mobile, fit comfortably with Singapore's global-city ambitions but are difficult to "fix" within the framework of the nation-state. High-waged professional and managerial workers operate within an interconnected global labor market located in the major cities of the world and in turn, their agglomeration in particular cities help extend the reach of globalizing cities. Their hypermobility as transnational subjects constituting an elite circuit of mobility (Yeoh & Willis, 2005), renders them elusive subjects of the nation-state. In their critique of the "transnational inclusion" model of integration, Rahman and Tong (2012, p. 92) conclude that "the model offers excessive leeway to new immigrants to remain transnational for indefinite period and to accumulate wealth for the country of origin or choice"—this is a drawback that "a small country like Singapore cannot afford to overlook." As Sennett (2001) notes, the "new global elite . . . avoids the urban political realm. It wants to operate in the city but not rule it; it composes a

regime of power without responsibility." It is hence not surprising that a study of skilled PRC migrants in Singapore concluded that

> even PR status and Singapore citizenship will not guarantee their integration into the fabric of society; ironically, accumulating such status may actually confer a higher degree of potential mobility, as the new status allows former PRC transmigrants to gain entry to other immigrant gateway [cities] around the world with greater ease. (Yeoh & Yap, 2008, p. 201)

The high level of fluidity (as well as the perception of constant or potential mobility) attached to the figure of the talent worker also makes the "knowledge transfer" argument unconvincing, at least in the context of the nation-state where rules of engagement are not governed by workplace processes but by more informal rules of sociality and unwritten social norms. The integration of skilled migrants has largely been a state-driven project, and this has become a fraught and divisive issue in the public sphere in recent years. Singaporeans in general are not convinced of the longer term reliability and commitment to Singapore of "foreign talent" and do not see them as coinhabitants with knowledge to impart (this was already one of the main findings of the 2001 survey). Instead, a widely held view is that foreign talent are "fair-weather friends," here only for the benefits they can derive and will have no commitment to the country in times of crisis. A common image of the immigrant is that of the "leapfrogger" who does not "take on the full burdens and responsibilities of citizenship, yet benefit from the opportunities Singapore presents" (Chong as cited in Soon & Lim, 2012). These perceptions, often refracted through ethnicized lenses, underpin much of the discontent expressed in social media, making it difficult to build sufficient trust to pave the way for a form of social contract between Singaporeans and newcomers despite the latter's privileged class and educational backgrounds. This chimes in with Douglas et al.'s (2015) observation in the U.S. context, that "race" in different inflections continues to feature prominently in migration discourses.

On February 16, 2013, 5,000 people gathered at Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim Green despite the rain to protest against the recently launched White Paper on Population where the government proposed a population scenario of 6.9 million (revised up from 5.5 million in 2007) by 2030 based on an accelerated rate of migration. Given Singapore's low fertility rates and aging population, the government expected Singapore to reach this figure by admitting around 15,000 to 25,000 new citizens and 30,000 PRs per year, and eventually reaching a "6.5 to 6.9 million" population profile in 2030 comprising a "Singaporean core" of 3.6 to 3.8 million (55%) and a foreigner population of 2.9 to 3.1 million (45%; National Population and Talent Division, 2013). The unprecedented event was the most visible symbol of the simmering tensions around a host of migration issues, although many read the event not as a sign of antiforeigner sentiments but anger directed at the government for pushing out an immigration policy that would overwhelm Singapore. While not all the issues concern foreign talent directly but cover a broad spectrum from infrastructure crunch and congestion to the meanings of citizenship, it is instructive that part of the highly

charged debate turn on fears that the nation-state is being run like a "business corporation" or an "well-oiled multinational" that privilege the highly mobile, highly skilled transnational workers. Central to the simmering concerns were the tensions between citizen demands for closure symptomatic of nation-state formation on the one hand, and the rationale underpinning the functioning of a global city to fashion itself as a hub open to and animated by transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas on the other. This indeed, is the quintessential dilemma for a "nation-city-state" that will have to find creative ways to reinvent its social contract so as to balance the demands of being both "home" *and* a "global workplace" to a diverse range of inhabitants. In the words of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2014), as *both* a "city" and a "country," Singapore's future depends on "get[ting] the balance just right—between national identity and cosmopolitan openness, between free market competition and social solidarity."

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Notes

1. For Sklair (2001, 2002), the generally defined members of TCC may fall into four groups, namely, the corporate fraction of transnational executives and affiliates, state fraction of bureaucrats and politicians, technical fraction of globalizing professionals, and consumerist fraction of merchants and media. Skilled foreign talents in Singapore would fall largely into the corporate and technical fractions.
2. For more details, refer to Yeoh and Lin (2012).
3. According to an official paper released in July 2012, between 2007 and 2011, 48% of PRs were granted to working individuals, and the remaining were dependents (spouses and children) of PRs as well as Singapore citizens (National Population and Talent Division, 2012). The paper also stated that 63% of all PRs were younger than 30 years and that most have good educational qualifications (of those aged 20 and older, 74% had a diploma or higher qualification). It is reasonable to surmise that at least half of the PRs in recent years belong to the highly skilled category.
4. The strategy adopted by the Singapore government parallels the two types of movement of Asian workers proposed by Stahl (1991), namely the movement of lowly skilled workers from poorer labor-rich countries to countries with fast-growing capital such as Singapore, and capital-assisted migration where skilled labor move alongside direct foreign investment and foreign aid in and around the Asian-Pacific region.
5. According to the Ministry of Education, IS comprises 18% of the total undergraduate intake in Academic Year 2011 (https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/number-of-international-students-in-local-universities).

6. Lowly skilled workers are admitted into Singapore on time-limited work contracts as transient, disposable labor and do not have much prospect of settling down in Singapore. They face a different set of issues as compared with skilled migrants and are not the focus of the analysis here. For a discussion of the uneven incorporation of the lowly versus highly skilled foreigners in Singapore, see Yeoh (2006), Yeoh and Lam (2012), and Yeoh (2013).
7. The high degree of sensitivity surrounding foreign talents came to the fore when two Nanyang Technological University economists made front-page news headlines on July 31, 2003 with their findings that "foreigners took 3 out of 4 new jobs in the past 5 years." MOM immediately showed that these findings were "totally flawed" (their calculations—hitherto classified information—showed that 9 out of 10 jobs created in the past 5 years had gone to Singaporeans) and the economists were chastised for "unprofessional" and "irresponsible" conduct, and "going public with controversial findings without first verifying the data with [the] ministry" (Chia, 2003). The economists subsequently admitted that they had made an "honest error," and the saga concluded with the Manpower Minister replying that "This error should not diminish the standing you currently enjoy in the academic and professional circles" (R. Lee & Chia, 2003).

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