

# **National Identities of Tertiary-educated Chinese Malaysians as Foreign Talents in Singapore**

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For the past 50 years, Malaysia has been facing the serious issue of human capital flight. Ever since the Pro-Malays New Economic Policy was constitutionalized in the 1970s, this issue has been more prominent among particular races such as the Chinese and Indian. Most of these immigrants have chosen Singapore due to her geographical location, similar historical and cultural background, fast growing economy and the government's open-door immigration policy.

The aim of the thesis is to identify and investigate the key factors behind this growing issue. 34 Malaysians had been interviewed from September to December 2011, amidst a period of political tension within Malaysia and Singapore's tightening of her immigration policy. All interviewees share the similar profile of being alumni from the two Singapore universities (National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) since the 1990s and are current skilled immigrants in Singapore. The interview mainly focuses on their definition of national identity, reasons behind their leaving of Malaysia and comparisons between their social experience in both Singapore and Malaysia.

Through the research findings, one factor that was revealed as a key reason was interviewees' definition on 'nation' and 'state'. Many interviewees defined their national identity based on their personal experience, and these identities consist of both political and cultural aspects. The interviews produced the following main findings – 1) Those who valued political identity above cultural identity were less inclined towards Malaysia. 2) Despite being marginalized by Malaysia's new economic policy, there is still a group who perceive family and cultural roots as the main determining factor of their national identity. 3) Their personal social experiences in Singapore have brought about a comparison made between the two countries' politics, economy, social and culture aspect. Thus pushing them to re-look at their national identity. 4) Globalisation has brought about a pragmatic attitude in another group of immigrants, who acknowledge individual's welfare as the key factor for their national identity.

Since 2008, Singapore nationality policies have been modified to provide a distinction between the social benefits between Singapore permanent residents (PR) and Singapore citizens. As a result, quite a number of PR re-entry permits were not renewed so as to persuade some of these residents to convert to citizens. Due to pragmatic considerations such as career development, standard of living etc., many of these Malaysian immigrants eventually opt to change their citizenship despite their sense of rootedness in Malaysia. There are also Malaysian couples whom one still hold onto their Malaysia citizenship so as to enjoy dual citizenship benefits. Of course, there is a group who perceive their nationality as part of their self-identity and thus unwilling to simply change their citizenship.

It is also interesting to note that Singaporeans and the Singapore government have once again adopted a more open attitude towards Malaysian immigrants due to a surge in numbers of other foreign immigrants during recent years. This thesis will be exploring the historical background of Singapore and Malaysia to further discuss on this issue.

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