

CAMPUS LIFE

Recent graduate makes history

By **JENNANI DURAI**

REUBEN Ng seems to keep making history. Last year, he was the first Singaporean to be selected for the WorldSmart Leadership Programme, a semester-long educational tour of 18 cities around the world. And just last month, he made history again by becoming the youngest and first undergraduate to receive the Seisoh Sukemune/Bruce Bain Encouragement of Early Career Research Award. This award, presented by the International Council of Psychologists, is usually only given out to academics who have completed their PhD studies and have at least five years of research experience.

Reuben, 24, said that he entered his research paper for the award on a whim. He said: "I wasn't going to enter at first because 'Early Career Award' means that you already have a career! But then I saw that the requirements were to submit a research paper and your resume — and I had both of those, so I decided to give it a shot."

And the recent graduate from National University of Singapore (NUS) promptly forgot about it — until he received the notification of his win last month.

His award-winning paper, titled *Organisational Stress, Resilience and Success in the Singapore Police Force*, was born out of his internship with the Psychological Services department of the Singapore Police Force. He started thinking about the concept of organisational resilience, and the role it would play in an organisation like the police force. He said: "With the threat of terrorism, and the integrated resorts soon to be built, there is a lot of stress facing our security forces. Ironically, the more stress they have, the more the police force must succeed."

He was allowed to pursue this project through NUS' University Scholars Programme, which afforded him the opportunity to spend two semesters doing independent research work towards this paper.

Reuben said that resilience was originally a psychological concept used in studying people who were abused as children and managed to bounce back from the trauma to succeed later. Researchers have recently taken this research to an organisational level, and Reuben was especially interested in how organisational resilience can lead to organisational success for security forces. In his paper, he identified two components of organisational resilience that are very important for security forces as a whole: communication and openness, and management commitment.

Although his research process was long-drawn, he found it fulfilling. He said: "I was



YEN MENG JIN

Coming up tops: Reuben Ng was the first Singaporean to be selected for the WorldSmart Leadership Programme, and also the youngest and first undergraduate to receive the Seisoh Sukemune/Bruce Bain Encouragement of Early Career Research Award

able to give some affirmation to the work the police force has been doing, as well as some recommendations. I could see results."

Perhaps the most impressive part of his feat is that he wrote this paper after only two years in university. Reuben modestly attributed this to having had good advisers, and the psychology programme at NUS which placed a lot of emphasis on research methods.

His undergraduate journey has been anything but typical, having spent his third year writing a research paper that would go on to receive international recognition and taking the first semester of his fourth year off to participate in the WorldSmart Leadership Programme. He said: "When I first stepped into NUS, I never expected that my university life would be so rich. In retrospect, I realise that I was given the opportunity to learn in three ways: from books, through travels, and by in-

teracting with people who were totally different from me." And those who might think an undergraduate who has received international acclaim must be struggling socially would be surprised to learn that Reuben feels that his social life has only been affected positively. He said: "I now have friends from all over the world, and more importantly, they are friends who are passionate about the same kind of things."

As for the future, he has plans to embark upon a one-year Masters programme in Singapore, and then apply for a scholarship to a PhD programme overseas. Although he has not decided upon his area of expertise yet, he has a strong interest in conflicts and negotiations. He explained that his travels around the world had showed him just how many conflict hotspots there are in the world.

He said: "A lot of people have studied con-

flict situations in the field, but not many have studied it in the lab. I would like to design a psychological experiment to see what variables are interacting with one another to find out what is happening, and thus perhaps plan recommendations for peace processes."

Whatever it is that he will do in the future, he is sure of one thing: he wants to make a difference in society.

"It's my mission in life," he explained.

Reuben left last Friday to attend the 64th Annual Convention of the International Council of Psychologists in Kos Island, Greece. As the winner of the Early Career Research Award, he will give an address and join a panel discussion on stage. He will also present his paper at the International Congress of Applied Psychology in Athens, which will be attended by about 2,400 psychologists from 70 countries.

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