

What do we know about singaporean culture

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CULTURE – ENGINEERED OR EVOLVED?

Intro

Since attaining independence in 1965, Singapore has slowly developed a national identity where Singaporeans can proudly say they are “Singaporean” and identify with fellow Singaporeans through similar experiences. This national identity has been artificially moulded by the government through housing policies and national service. However, it has also been naturally developed by the gradual creation of a new “language” that is exclusive to Singaporeans, Singlish, and also through sports like football during the 1970s era. Engineered in this context means the government has involved itself directly in moulding the nature and process of the national identity. Evolution means developing the national identity is gradual, natural and without state inference. This essay aims to argue that the national identity of Singaporeans were largely engineered, and thus I agree to the statement to a larger extent

Argument (Education)

One of the ways the government engineered national identity in Singaporeans were through their education policies. The government introduced the policy of bilingualism. In 1966, bilingualism was made compulsory for pupils in Secondary 1. The mother tongue was used to impart moral values and traditions of each race so that pupils had greater awareness of their cultural roots. Additionally, national symbols and practises were also introduced. Common practises were carried out in schools to inculcate loyalty and national pride. From 1966, pupils participated in a daily flag-raising and pledge-taking ceremony. Furthermore

Uniformed Youth Organisations were formed. The government emphasizes the importance of uniformed groups such as National Cadet Corps (NCC) and the National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC). The activities conducted provide pupils with opportunities for interaction and healthy competition. They also instilled loyalty to the country and develop ruggedness in pupils. Therefore this was one of the ways that the government used to engineer.

Argument (Housing)

Secondly, another way the government engineered national identity in Singaporeans were through their housing policies. Different racial groups settled into the same housing estates, where they got together via facilities like community centres. The people living together also shared the same problems and these shared experiences allowed Singaporeans to bond closely together. However, the government observed that certain housing estates had a higher concentration of people of the same race. For example, the Malays tended to move to Bedok and Tampines while the Chinese preferred Hougang and Ang Mo Kio. Therefore, in the 1980s, the government introduced a limit on the balance of races in every estate, with multiracialism and culture development in mind.

Counter (Singlish)

However, some aspects of national identity in Singapore have evolved naturally over time, like Singlish, a modified Singaporean version of English. The language is widely seen by Singaporeans as one of few indicators of national identity. Its vocabulary developed over decades of Singaporeans trying to communicate with other races and languages, and it consists of words that originate from Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, etc. Despite Singlish

being extremely popular among Singaporeans, the government has attempted to discourage the use of Singlish for the fear of English standards dropping, with campaigns like the Speak Good English campaign. While the government's motives are understandable, they are stifling one of the main contributor towards national identity

Counter (Sports)

Moreover, sports, especially football, has also evolved national pride in Singaporeans. The Malaysia Cup fever of the 1970s promoted nationalism among the population, with tens of thousands of Singaporeans travelling all over Malaysia to witness the likes of Quah Kim Song, Rajagopal and Fandi Ahmad . The dramatic 3-2 win in the final of the 1977 Malaysia Cup was the highlight of the Singapore sports history, and was cause for much jubilation among the whole population. Through sports, many people unite to cheer and share the experiences of victory and defeat. The Kallang Stadium attracted up to 70, 000 Singaporeans during cup finals and semi-finals.

One of the famous Singapore cheer that came out of the 1970s era was the “ Kallang Wave”, and this was one of many evidences that illustrate how sports created national identity and pride among Singaporeans

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that national identity among Singaporeans is largely engineered by the government. This is because the government is largely responsible for quickening the pace of the evolution of national identity.

Essentially, the housing policy that brought different races together can be seen as a catalyst in the creation of Singlish, as Singaporeans of all races

were put together by the government and hence, in an attempt to communicate with one another, Singlish was developed. However, we have to realise that the government has been put in a difficult, lose-lose situation. Unlike most countries, Singapore has only had independence for just over half a century, a fraction of what other countries have the luxury of to slowly evolve a strong national identity. Singapore is forced to play catch up and develop a distinct national identity and thus the government has had to make the tough decision to try and speed up this process through “unnatural” methods. The success of these much maligned interventions will be revealed in the next half a century.