**Culture**

*“If we are to preserve culture we must continue to create it”*

*- Johan Huizinga*

*“A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*

**1) Concept of culture**

**1.1. Definition of culture (culture is a slippery concept – difficult to define) – yardstick in defining culture varies from people to people**

- Culture is an extremely loaded word and is difficult to accurately define into a single phrase.

- However, if it is connoted, it can be seen as any human behavior or activity passed from one generation to the next, which describes, creates, preserves or transmits emotions or surroundings of human society, consisting of **languages, beliefs, ideas, customs, arts, sports, or other related aspects. (cuisine, music, values and norms) – Culture is a way of life**

- What is Singapore culture? – (efficiency, meritocracy, racial tolerance) – **modern or cosmopolitan culture** – tolerance on diversity, technologically influenced, globalized, fast-paced, influence from social media, fusion of ideas, (commercialized rituals – Xmas, Valentine’s Day)

**1.2. Development of cultural understanding**

-When the notion of culture was developed, it was a process by which culture did not originate overnight. Culture was a process whereby citizens of the society contributed to the formation of the unique culture.

- During the nineteenth century, culture was referred to as a process of education to develop human capacity.

- In the twentieth century, culture evolved as a core element of anthropology, which seeks to explain the values of human capacity and experiences and the understanding of human activities as in the way we live.

(born out of agriculture – way of life only develops when you settle due to agricultural activities)

**1.3. Characteristics of culture**

**a. Culture is learned**

- Everyone internalizes or incorporates cultural tradition through conscious or subconscious learning and interaction with others. Sometimes culture is taught directly, like when parents tell their children to say 'thank you' when someone gives them something or does them a favour.

- Culture is also transmitted through observation. Children pay attention to the things around them. They modify their behavior not because others tell them to but because of their own observations and growing awareness of what their culture considers right or wrong.

- Is culture prescribed or inherited? do you choose your culture?

culture is inherited – deeply entrenched – observed and emulated – behavioural indoctrination and instillation – cultural erosion is not possible – a strong cultural bulwark against subversion by globalization

(cultural subversion – as stated by Lee Kuan Yew)

**b. Culture is shared**

- Culture is an attribute not of individuals per se but of individuals as members of the society. Culture can be transmitted and spread throughout society. Shared beliefs, values, memories (history) and expectations link people who grow up in the same culture. Without doubt, we have distinctive features because we are individuals, but we have other distinctive attributes because we are members of groups.

- purpose of the shared culture – a cultural identity – a sense of belonging –

solace and comfort – determine the way of life

- benefits of a sense of belonging – familiarity of life – provide social comfort / reduce social conflicts -a common ground for understanding – similar social norms and values – solve social differences – promotes a more stable society with less conflicts

- Why this is not feasible in this globalized world? Influx of foreign values – Singapore is a young society – and very open to foreign influx of way of life

**- Local Context**: Singapore’s culture- can we as Singaporeans claim that our culture is unique given that our culture is a mixture of Indian, Chinese and Malay influences? : uniqueness is seen from the fusion of food, language (Singlish) and clothing – high degree of racial tolerance – achieved through social policies (HDB racial quota mix), education (racial integration), law (sedition Act)

**c. Culture is symbolic**

- Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to cultural learning. According to anthropologist Leslie White, culture originated when our ancestors acquired the ability to use symbols, that is, to originate and bestow meaning on a thing or event, and ,correspondingly , to grasp and appreciate such meanings.

- Symbols can be verbal or non-verbal; it can mean one thing for a particular language or culture and a different thing for another. Humans have the ability to think symbolically and thus create and maintain cultures.

**- Local Context:** What are some symbols of culture in Singapore?

Monuments, Media, clothing, food, songs, houses, religious sites

do you agree that it is important to preserve traditional buildings?

- source of information – significance and benefit of cultural heritage

- benefits of tourism, cultural identity, social unity and stability, ethical society

**d. Culture is all-encompassing**

- Culture includes much more than refinement, taste, sophistication, education, and appreciation of the fine arts. Everyone is 'cultured'. Culture encompasses features that are sometimes regarded as trivial or unworthy of serious study, such as 'popular' culture.

- standardized culture – common values that dictate the market – expand and widen it – huge commercial values

**- Local Context**: Is our local traditional Singaporean culture (or what is left of it) worth preserving?

**e. Culture is integrated**

- Cultures are not haphazard collections of customs and beliefs. Cultures are integrated, patterned systems. If one part of the system changes, other parts change as well.

- Cultures are integrated not simply by their dominant economic activities and related social patterns but also by sets of values, ideas, symbols and judgments. Cultures train their individual members to share certain personality traits. A set of characteristic central or core values integrates each culture and helps distinguish it from others. It is also important to note that the integration of 66 does not happen overnight and in some societies, it may take hundreds of years to form a distinctive culture.

**- What is the significance of culture from the social perspective?**

Cultural development promotes social stability – a common identity – a sense of belonging – common set of values – reduce conflicts as there is a common source of agreement and reasoning – a source of reference for the society to resolve disputes

**f. Culture is actively being utilized by the populace**

- Although cultural rules tell us what to do and how to do it, people don't always do what the rules say should be done. People use their culture actively and creatively, rather than blindly following what it dictates. We are not robots programmed to follow our cultural traditions. Instead, people can learn, interpret and manipulate the same rule in different ways.

- Culture can also be contested by various stakeholders, each looking at different definitions, processes and outcomes of culture That is, different groups in society often struggle with one another over whose ideas, values and beliefs will prevail. Even common symbols may have radically different meanings to different people and groups in the same culture.

**- It creates counter culture – conflicts of culture as sub culture challenges the status quo of mainstream culture. – a source of tension between parents and children**

**g. How does society reconcile these different strands of changing and varied culture?**

Education in our social interaction – provide opportunities for interaction – influence social norm and behaviours – information about different cultures – provide mutual understanding – promotes empathy and respect – reduce social and family conflicts and racial harmony

* provide information - influence perception – instill acceptance – common values – source of reference for disagreements – promotes understanding – reducing conflicts

**- Local Context**: How do we ensure that each ethnic group in Singapore retains their unique identity? Or should they discard their ethnic identity and become ‘Singaporeans’?

**h . Levels of culture**

i. Community culture/ Subculture refer to the different symbol-based patterns and traditions associated with particular groups in the same complex society such as families, institutions, organizations and regions.

ii. National culture refers to the beliefs, learned behavior patterns, values and institutions shared by citizens of the same nation.

**Local Context**: Does Singapore have a national culture to call our own?

Yes: cultural values – meritocracy, racial integration, a sense of academic excellence

- fear of losing, very organized way of life,

- food – unique multicultural type of cuisine

- very concerned about efficiency

Singapore culture – modernized culture – modern way of life

No: lesser emphasis on traditional values, young nation without deep heritage.

iii. **International culture** is the term for cultural traditions that extend beyond and across national boundaries.

* **Name some examples of International culture**
* **Earth day, Tourism, Modern way of life, consumerism**

**2) Main influences of culture**

a. Role of language in Culture

Language serves as a means of communication to enable understanding among the different members of a community. It attempts provide the meanings of symbols and expressions which will facilitate human activities. It will serve as the means to educate and allow the preservation of human heritage.

The role of language in cultural development stems from its influence on the capacity of reasoning and explanation that is significance in the education of cultural heritage as seen from Western philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes who stressed on the power of reasoning which language can provide.

The influence of language over culture can be glimpsed from the way expression is conducted which will shape the perception, values and behavior. In our colloquialism, the choice of words and the form of grammatical structures determines our form of communication, shaping the way we view our environment, process our thinking and the way we behave which is unique for different cultures as seen in the idioms and proverbs develop by different groups with their forms of language.

In our contemporary society where communication plays an imperative role in the efficient and effective functioning of the societies at different levels and regions, we can ill-afford to ignore how language will dominate the core values and norms of the society. This can be seen from how the English language has grown to become the lingua franca of the globalized environment whereby its influence will stretch beyond the operation of the society changing the social and political fabrics of the respective society.

**Local Context: Does Singapore have a lingua franca that we can call our own? Will Singlish ever be accepted by our government as something that is ‘uniquely Singaporean?’**

Other influences of culture

b. Religion

c. Technology and Mass Media

d. Behavioral development

e. Values

f. Arts

**3) Values of culture**

a. Personal Development

b. Social and political impact

i. Identity

Cultural background is one of the primary sources of identity. It is the source for a great deal of self-definition, expression, and sense of group belonging. Understanding our cultural background gives us a better understanding of who we are today.

ii. Social stability

c. Economic impact

d. Educational impact

**3. Critical Issues of Discussion**

1. **Cultural diversity versus popular (pop) culture**

Notion of culture diversity and pop culture

Cultural diversity is the variety of human societies or culture in a specific region. The General Conference of UNESCO took this position in 2001, asserting in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that "…cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature"

Popular culture (or pop culture) is the collection of ideas that are popular, well-liked or common and create the prevailing culture. These ideas are heavily influenced by the mass media. Pop culture is the views and perspectives most strongly represented and accepted within a society. It is also considered the widespread cultural elements in any given society that are perpetuated through that society's vernacular language or lingua franca.

Popular culture permeates the everyday lives of the mainstream. It is manifested in preferences and acceptance or rejection of features in such various subjects as cooking, clothing, consumption, and the many facets of entertainment such as sports, music, film and literature.

1. **Arguments for cultural diversity**

Culture diversity is the common heritage of humanity

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

Think about cultural icons present in our world that transcends national and civic identity.

Cultural diversity promotes development

Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

1. **Arguments against cultural diversity**

Like most evolutionary accounts of human nature, the importance of cultural diversity for survival may be an un-testable hypothesis, which can neither be proved nor disproved.

It can also be argued that it is unethical deliberately to conserve 'less developed' societies, because this will deny people within those societies the benefits of technological and medical advances enjoyed by those of us in the 'developed' world.

There are also some people, particularly those with strong religious beliefs who maintain that it is in the best interests of individuals and of humanity as a whole that all people adhere to the single mode for society that they deem to be correct.

1. **Cultural imperialism and chauvinism**

Cultural imperialism refers to the spread or advance of one culture at the expense of others, or its imposition on other cultures, which it modifies, replaces, or destroys - usually because of differential economic or political influence. For example, during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore in the 1940s, the Japanese culture was forced upon Singapore, such that children had to learn the Japanese language and sing the Japanese National Anthem. Note that cultural imperialism is usually used in a pejorative sense, usually in conjunction with the call to reject foreign influence.

1. **Does the rise of American cultural imperialism negatively affect/influence indigenous cultures worldwide?**

Indigenizing popular culture

When cultures from around the world enter new societies, they are indigenized - modified to fit the local culture. This is true of cultural forces as different as fast food, music, architecture, science, celebrations and political ideas.

1. **Globalization of culture**

Definition

If globalization can be defined as 'compression of the world and strengthening the cognizance of the world as a whole', globalization of culture can be understood as 'compression of the world and its cognizance as the cultural whole in cultural differences'.

Globalization of culture hugely aided by developments in the realms of transport and communications, which allows the transference and distillation of different cultures across physical and national boundaries.

Multifaceted phenomenon

It interactively produces different socio-cultural effects such as homogenization of cultures, diversification of cultures, hybridization of cultures and fragmentations of cultures.

Influences the transformation of national cultures and identities

Under the influence of globalization of culture, national identities are being transformed, adjusted and complemented and are losing some of its former attributes while gaining new ones.

Represents the cultural integration of the world

Linkages in the modern world system have both enlarged and erased old boundaries. Globalization promotes intercultural communication, including travel and migration, which bring people from different societies into direct contact. People over the world can be more united with something in common.

Contributes to the disappearance of smaller cultures and languages and brings about the danger of elimination of culture and language pluralism.

1. **Forces contributing to globalization of culture**

Mass media

One important source of globalization of culture is the mass media. As print word had done for centuries, electronic mass media such as TV and radio also can spread and even help create national and ethnic identities. The rise and prevalence of the Internet provides even stronger connectivity to ensure that identities can be forged easily with stronger bonds of communications that transcend physical boundaries. With increasing reliance on the Internet to disseminate information to the public by both print and electronic media organizations, there is greater tendency for the masses to be influenced by cultures beyond international boundaries.

Finance

Another key force contributing to the globalization of culture is finance. Multinational corporations and other business interests look beyond national boundaries for places to invest and draw profits. Residents of many communities now depend on outside cash, remitted from international labour migration. Also, many economies are increasingly influenced by foreign investment and increasingly dependent on foreign labour. The influx of foreigners brings about an influx of diverse cultures that may affect the predominant cultural traditions in that country.

Technology

The world today remains driven largely by technology and the quest for information. Technological advances have revolutionized the way of life of many cultures, such as changes in domestic chores like cooking and cleaning. Technology has also brought about an increased craving for commodities and images throughout the world, thereby leading to a global culture of consumption. While some worry that technology is destroying traditional cultures (including that of tribes in the Amazon) , some see it as an important role to help smaller cultures express themselves to mainstream cultures.