**GP Essays 2018 – National Identity**

**Essay Question 1**

In a world where borders are vanishing, is it futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity?

**Essay Question 2**

How effective has your country been in creating a national identity?

**Essay Question 1**

**In a world where borders are vanishing, is it futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity?**

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, there is greater interaction between people from various countries, such that the borders among nations become less defined. As such, there is a growing concern that the vanishing borders may hinder Singapore from forging a national identity as most Singaporeans are able to move freely and greater number of foreigners is migrating to Singapore. However, we may still need to embark on such a development to ensure the progress of the nation despite the difficulties that Singapore may in a globalised world.

Main Body

**Opposing View:**

For those who embrace globalization, they will feel that it is futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity as the rise of modern technology in a globalized world contribute to greater interaction among diverse cultures in Singapore and other countries, thus reducing the sense of rootedness which will make it difficult to cultivate national identity.

From the 20th century onwards, the rise of modern technology has made travelling easier and tourism is part and parcel of life. In particular, social media technology raises the space for interaction. (e.g. 4G Technology, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter).

**Rebuttal:** Why we still can continue to instill our local and natural heritage despite the influx of foreign exposure

**Supporting View:** Why Singapore can still develop our national identity despite the influence of globalization

1. Cultivation of national identity through political indoctrination (flag-raising ceremonies, campaigns about our core values like Racial Harmony Day, National Service – Most Singaporeans see these as an essential form of participation in the development of national identity)

Why is political commitment a strong influence on national identity, creating a bulwark against the negative effect of globalization?

2. Cultivation of national identity through family rootedness which will create the emotional attachment to the society and the state.

**Essay Question 2**

**How effective has your country been in creating a national identity?**

Analysis

A country’s national identity is a vital constituent of its existence. How successfully the country manages its identity has a very significant impact on its expression of itself, how other countries perceive it, how the country interacts with others, and its international stature, in all sense of the word. It is definitely not easy to derive at or acquire a national identity, especially when the country does not have a homogenous population with similar needs and aspirations. Globalisation today and the relative ease of migration complicate this issue exponentially. As such, this question requires writers to evaluate well a country manages its construct of its own national identity, bearing in mind that each country is unique and therefore there is no one approach that could be deem to be the most successful as it all depends on the history, culture and composition of a country.

**Clarifications of key terms**

* How effective – Requires evaluation of the success or lack of, of how the creation of a national identity has been managed.
* Creating – The deliberate and planned process of conceiving and establishing.
* National identity – National identity is a sense of belonging to a state or nation, as represented by distinctive traditions, cultures, languages and politics. It does not necessarily need to be mandated or commissioned by the government. It could be something that is organic and personal even. (Sometimes, national identity is something that we do not even think about, and ironically, it only becomes an issue when leave a home country to go abroad for us to better appreciate it.)

Main Body

**Thesis: Singapore has successfully created a national identity**

**1. Singapore’s lingua franca, English, is a major bonding factor for its citizens, establishing its national identity as a united and harmonious multi‐racial society.**

The English language does not merely serve as a tool of commerce to facilitate communication with the rest of the world, it actually plays an important role in this multi‐racial nation to help bring about national unity. In the initial years of Singapore’s independence when its population was mostly illiterate, people spoke in their native tongues and dialects, and this segregated the different ethnic groups. Realising that this could be a potential incendiary racial sparkplug, the government instituted the bilingual education policy for children, with English being the principal language. Over the years, these children have grown up speaking English, and that serves as a common language now, such that regardless of race, Singaporeans are able to understand one another. This transcends any differences that they might have and provides a common platform for the various races to bond.

**2. Singapore’s meritocratic system is the common denominator that cultivates shared values among Singaporeans.**

Singapore’s education system adopts a common syllabus, with civics lessons that allow the sharing of our common historical and economic narratives. Many Singaporeans of humble backgrounds have benefited from this meritocratic educational system and risen in social economic status. As such, the Singaporean educational system plays a crucial role in enabling everyone an equal opportunity to go through the same system and to succeed. No one race has an unfair advantage over another. This shared system therefore imbues in Singaporeans the same set of values, attitude and ethos. Despite Singapore being be a young nation, a discernible semblance of national identity is beginning to emerge and will continue to be reinforced with time.

**3. The brand name of Singapore is synonymous to quality.**

The ascension of Singapore from a backward fishing village to a first‐world technologically advanced country – all achieved within a generation – is a miracle that is unlikely to be replicated anywhere else in this world. From its world renown peerless education system where its students dominate the global PISA educational rankings, to having a sea port and airport of international standing, to even being a famous food paradise, Singapore has surpassed many developed countries that are much larger than itself. Steeped in Confucian teachings, Singaporean workers are also known among employers to be both hardworking and honest.

**Anti-Thesis: Singapore has somewhat faltered in creating its national identity**

**1. Singapore’s paternalistic government and strict laws often caused it to be stereotyped as a straight‐laced and no‐nonsense nation, full of boring people.**

Tourists are often amused by what infringements of the laws here could land people in hot soup. It is well known that Singapore is a ‘fine city’, where we get fined for not only littering, but also not flushing the toilets and jaywalking. Vandals could be caned – literally. There is a ban on the sales of chewing gum. Opposition party members are sued for daring to smear the reputations of dominant PAP members. And horror of horrors, capital punishment for drug trafficking is still administered in this modern day and age! While we may enjoy a low crime environment and live in a Garden in a City, we have unfortunately been labelled as socialist country with dictators as leaders, and the citizens as compliant puppets who have no sense of humour and could not laugh at ourselves. Many articles in foreign publications have even questioned if Singapore is truly democratic and some of them have been sued for defamation.

**2. Singapore’s short history and heterogeneous population make it difficult to create a national identity.**

With no common traditions, Singapore has been having a hard time trying to derive a national identity. The Malay language is Singapore’s national language. Ironically, other than the Malay themselves, the rest of Singaporeans, who form the majority, do not learn Malay, and most are not even aware that Malay is their national language. In addition, Singaporeans no longer identify with the countries of origin of our ancestors, which translates to a weaker link to our roots, and therefore, an ethnic identity. We are just an assortment of disparate races that is not unlike oil and water. We don’t even have a national costume.

**3. There is not much – ideologically nor culturally – that bind Singaporeans to Singapore, causing our ties with one another to be tenuous.**

Pragmatism rules in Singapore, not anything that is ideological or cultural in nature. Unfortunately, the latter two factors are often what matter most in creating a national identity. It is precisely because Singaporeans are so pragmatic, they will not hesitate to move to a different country when conditions there are more ideal. Some top reasons why Singaporeans emigrate include less pressure abroad, more work opportunities elsewhere, more freedom and less strict in another country and Singapore literally having not much room to grow. And being well educated, it is easy for Singaporeans to leave. There is nothing ideological or cultural that could hold them back and cause them to think twice before settling their families in other countries. Pragmatism is pervasive, and it permeates the psyche of Singaporeans. Indeed, this tendency is observed especially in the millennials who are raised in a more affluent environment and have more opportunities to travel and compare Singapore with other countries. They find the educational system here overly pressurising and work life to be tough, with Singaporeans being one of the unhappiest people in the world.