CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Singapore is the City-State located in the Southeast Asia region and on the south edge of Malaysia Peninsular. The City-State has a total area of 719.2 sq km and a total population of 5,995,991 (according to census of 2018). Even though having a small size of population and area compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Singapore has the highest GDP – per capita in Southeast Asia and ranks number 7 in the world at a total of $94,100 in 2017 with the highest stock of direct foreign investment both home and aboard which is ranked at no 9 worldwide.[1] Besides that, Singapore's life is considered one of the highest in Asia with 83.2 years.[2] Singapore can be considered a multi-racial society with several major ethnicities such as Chinese, Malay, Indian alongside with a minority such as Peranakan (Chinese descendants who married with Malays and settled in the Malaysian Peninsula), Middle Eastern, Eurasians and others.

Originally, people from all over Asia were drawn to Singapore in the 1880s due to its excellent reputation as the British Trading Post along with a booming mining industry in the Malaysian Peninsula and its safety guaranteed by the British

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[1] "Singapore - The World Factbook," *Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed December 11, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html.

[2] *Life Expatancy at Birth* (Singapore, n.d.), accessed August 28, 2019, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/visualising_data/infographics/population/life-expectancy2018.pdf.

Naval and Garrison forces. As a result, traders, labors and other professions decided to settle in that area.[3]

The financial success, prosperity and stability of Singapore were a result of several nation-building policies conducted by the Singaporean government which was controlled by a majority of the People Action Party (PAP) and directed by Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew (1959 – 1990), Goh Chok Tong (1990 – 2004) and Lee Hsien Loong (2004 – Present). Singapore's main ideas of nation-building were based on "ideology of pragmatism" which emphasizes on Singapore's determination to ensure survival in the regional and global environment in facing their challenges related to the non-availability of natural resources, ethnic composition and geopolitical conditions. The ideology of pragmatism also inspired several policies to ensure racial harmony and stability such as multiculturalism and meritocracy.

The implementation of multiculturalism policy in Singapore was based on the lack of racial harmony in the colonial and pre-independence era where Singaporeans previously lived in areas based on their ethnicity "marker" such as "Kampong Malacca, Kampong Kling, Kampong Siam and Kampong China" where they rarely interact with other races. In the early days Singapore was also filled with communal conflicts so it can be said that the British law and order acts as the "glue" to ensure racial harmony.

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[3] Reginand Sanderson, "The Population of Malaya," in *Twenty Century Impression of British Malaya*, ed. Arnold Wright, 1908.

The early PAP leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and S. Rajaratman realized that a strong foundation was needed to ensure the survival of a City-State that was very exposed to the global trading system.

Therefore, several multiracial policies were applied such as ensuring equal racial composition in the Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats and the implementation of CIMO (Chinese, Indian, Malay and Others) policy which categorizes different sub-ethnics into one of the four main ethnicities, "Speak Mandarin" policy which encourages the Chinese to leave their local dialect such as Hokkien and Teochew in favor of general Mandarin. Another multiculturalism policy is the attempt of introduced shared values ideology in 1991 that is based on morals and values accepted by different ethnicities in Singapore. Lastly, the system of meritocracy which emphasizes on the success of an individual social and occupational position determined by individual achievement, not racial, class or other backgrounds.[4]

As mentioned before, the growth of Singapore depends on the global economic system therefore in order to ensure its survival, Singapore keeps "reinventing" itself. From early days of independence where PAP decided to build new HDB Neighborhood Towns and Industrial Centers in order to increase the living standard and support foreign direct investment, until S. Rajaratman declared Singapore as a global city, the City-State to become a system of International

[4] Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First The Singapore Story 1965 - 2000* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2000); Selvaraj Velayutham, *Responding to Globalization Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2007); Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. (Robert Stephen) Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party* (Routledge, 2002).

Financial Network supported by modern technology such as Air and Sea transportation[5] that influences Singapore government under Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to modernize the city-state to maintain its advantage. However, the modernization effort has resulted in certain elements of cultural heritage that Singaporeans have kept in their lives. One critic said that Singapore is just like a western country which is "clean" but lacks Asian identity. One of the examples is the Old National Library in Singapore which was destroyed in 2004 to make way for Fort Canning Tunnel, while the restoration of several ethnicities-based area such as Chinatown and Bugis Street that were based on raw material of ethnic history rather than daily life of its occupants.[6]

Therefore, Singaporeans remember their cultural past through their distinctive food. Singaporean food was considered a reflection of Singapore multiethnic racial composition and a reminder of their immigrant origins and a key to understand distinctive characteristics between major ethnics and even the sub-culture. Several prominent Singaporean foods such as chicken rice, laksa, nasi lemak, satay, bak chor mee and oyster omlette originate from the immigrant homeland. However, what makes the Singapore version of those foods "unique" compared to their original version is the mixture of Singapore's multi-racial condition that resulted in the creation of different interpretations of those cuisine.

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[5] Chong Guan. Kwa, *S Rajaratnam on Singapore : From Ideas to Reality* (World Scientific, 2006); Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First The Singapore Story 1965 - 2000*.
[6] Ooi Giok Ling, "Reshaping Urban Space: From a Tropical to Global City," in *Impression of the Goh Chok Rong Years in Singapore*, ed. Bridget Welsh et al. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).

One of the examples is Nasi Lemak which is a rice dish that is cooked with coconut milk and served with sambal tumis, and several additional dishes such as egg omelette and ikan bilis. There are two versions of Nasi Lemak in Singapore, namely, the Chinese and Malay version.

The difference is that the Malay version includes rice that is grown in Malaysia that makes it very sketchy and light. Also the restriction of Islamic laws resulted in their meat option featuring rendang chicken and beef, while the Chinese version will use Thai jasmine rice which is more fragrant and less starchy and features non-halal add-on options such as pork luncheon meat.[7] Another example is the traditional Indian rojak with additions from different racial cultures such as Teochew (Chinese) fish ball, tofu (Tahu) and tempe goreng from Java with sweet fiery battered egg.[8]

Analyzing food variations in a major ethnicity is also one of the keys to understand sub-ethnicities that exist in Singapore. For example, Chinese food in Singapore consists of different variations based on the homeland origins of the immigrant such as Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, Cantonese and others. The food which comes from Hokkien usually uses pork as the main dish such as braised pork in black soya sauce (Tau Yew Bak) while Teochew cookery is more famous for its seafood such as fish balls and streamed fish and Cantonese food such as dim sum is more famous for its small portions and fruity flavors.[9]

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[7] Tony Khoo, *The Singapore Heritage Cookbook: Past, Present, Future*, 1th ed. (Singapore: Tien Wah Press, 2015).
[8] Carl Withey, *International Cuisine South-East Asia* (Hodder Arnold, 2004).
[9] *Ibid*.

One of the prominent places to experience Singaporean food are Hawkers Centers, a dining place located in a covered, non-air conditioned, open complex and the existence of common seating which offers food with affordable prices. There are two types of Hawker Centers that consist both of cooked food section and a market products section such as in Tekka Market and the only stand-alone cooked section such as in Newton and Maxwell Road Food Center. The definition of hawkers which comes from the Oxford English dictionary is a person who travels while selling goods. This definition is used considering its origin from mostly unemployed immigrants in the British colonial era who decided to become street food vendors due to high profits with low capital needed. The street food vendors provide an "exotic" experience of Singapore's diverse culture. However, it also causes criticism with regard to hygiene and traffic issue.[10]

To address the issue, the Singapore government under PAP decided to relocate cuisine centers to newly build dining places in new industrial areas and neighborhood towns in the 1970s, as a part of an attempt to create a national branding of clean & green Singapore to attract foreign investment.[11] At present, there are 110 Hawkers Centers with several notable ones such as Newton, Maxwell Road and Chinatown Food Center.

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[10] Lily Kong, *Singapore Hawker Centres People, Places, Food* (Singapore: National Environment Agency, 2007).

[11] Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First The Singapore Story 1965 - 2000*; Kong, *Singapore Hawker Centres People, Places, Food*, 18–62.

**Exterior of Newton Food Center, one of the prominent Hawker Center in Singapore
(Source www.wikipedia.com) (Picture 1.1)**

One of the stories of Hawkers is Enrick Yusuf who is an owner of Satay stall in Pasir Panjang Food Centre. His father was a Javanese who migrated to Johor during World War 2 before moving to Singapore. Since the age of 12, he already helped his father by running part time a Satay stall at the famous Esplanade Satay Club and full time during Secondary 4. He later inherited his father's stall and the technical skill needed to create Satay.[12] The story of Enrick Yusuf proved that Hawkers Centers are inseparable from the theme of families passing their stall and skill to the next generation in order to be refined to fulfill present days trend without losing the element that makes the food special.

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[12] Kong, *Singapore Hawker Centres People, Places, Food*, 63–100.

Hawkers Centers can also be considered as a celebration in Singapore multi-racial society as it a communal ground where all races, generation and classes are able to gather together and express their love towards Singaporean food which is considered as an element that can relate to every Singaporean and safe to be expressed in a semi- authoritarian City-State. This statement was proven by a survey conducted by National Environment Agency in 2016 where 85% of respondents felt that the establishment plays an important role in community building and the National Heritage Board survey in 2018 that food heritage was considered as cultural element that unifies people as a multiethnic society.[13] The dynamic of Hawkers Centers mentioned above resulted in the term "Hawkers Culture".

Hawker Culture can be considered as having important cultural footprint in Singapore highlighted by several outlets such as Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle Stall, Hill Street Tai Hwa Pork Noodle, Chai Chuan Tou Yang Rou Tang, Eminent Forg Porridge and others in achieving one-star Michelin which is the first time in history that street food vendors receive Michelin Guides Stars.[14]

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[13] "Hawker Culture in Singapore," *National Heritage Board and Ministry of Youth, Community*, accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.oursgheritage.sg/hawker-culture-in-singapore/.

[14] Rachel Tan, "MICHELIN Guide Singapore 2018 Bib Gourmand Selection," *MICHELIN Guide*, last modified 2018, accessed February 26, 2019, https://guide.michelin.com/sg/news-and-views/the-results-bib-gourmand-distinction-for-the-michelin-guide-singapore-2018/news.

It also enjoys numerous media presence such as Channel News Asia Belly Of a Nation documentary[15], Jack Neo 2002 Singapore social satire film "I'm Not Stupid" where one of the main characters Ang Boon Hock that runs Wonton Mee stall with his mother highlights family dynamics in the establishment and 2018 Warner Brother Romantic-Comedy "Crazy Rich Asians" where Rachel (played by Constance Wu) and her boyfriend Nick (Henry Golding) together with their friend visit Newton Food Centers.

During the National Day Rally 2018, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that the government will nominate "Hawker Culture" as a UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020. This can be considered as the second Singapore attempt to nominate itself after in 2015, a successfully made Singapore Botanical Garden a World Heritage Site.[16]

The definition of intangible cultural heritage according to article two of 32nd UNESCO General Conference at Paris is a heritage where "practice, representation, knowledge, objects and others that communities or groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Those which are considered as "intangible cultural heritage" should be inherited from generation to generation and should be continually refined while providing the community with a sense of identity and

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[15] "Belly Of A Nation" (Singapore: Channel News Asia - Mediacorp, n.d.), accessed September 6, 2019, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/video-on-demand/belly-of-a-nation.
[16] PM Lee Hsien Loong, "National Day Rally 2018 Speech (Chinese)," in *National Day Rally 2018 Speech (Chinese)*, ed. Prime Minister Offices (Singapore, 2018), accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/national-day-rally-2018-speech-chinese.

continuity in order to celebrate cultural diversity and human creativity".[17] Several cultural elements in UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity include French gastronomic meal which acknowledges the power of French meal to bring people together[18] alongside with other examples such as angklung from Indonesia, yoga from India and shadow puppetry from China.

The Singapore nomination of Hawkers Cultures for UNESCO intangible list was based on four key characteristics:

- Hawker Centers as **community dining** spaces for everyone

- Mastery of skills by hawkers, who are the bearers of **Hawker Culinary practices**

- A reflection of Singapore **multicultural society**

- A thriving culture in a highly **urban environment**

In March 27, 2019, Singapore officially submitted its nomination to include Hawker Culture in Singapore in UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The evaluation process by UNESO took one year where in July 2019, nomination documents were being processed by UNESCO Secretariat and in Early 2020, the twelve-member Evaluation Body (EB), a panel of experts appointed by the 24 member Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) for the

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[17] "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - Intangible Heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO," accessed February 25, 2019, https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#art2.

[18] Sam Chapple-Sokol, "Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 8 (2013): 161–183.

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The EB will put forth their recommendations to the IGC, which comprises representatives from different countries as States Parties to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. They will give a recommendation whether this nomination will pass on not. The final announcement whether Singapore Hawker Culture will be included or not will take place by the End of 2020.[19]

In order to succeed in UNESCO nomination, the Singapore government has implemented an action to ensure viability of Hawkers Centers such as on-the-job training and a field trips by culinary and training institutions alongside with documentation and promotion of several aspects of the establishment.

Besides that, the nomination effort also involves the participation of the community as in September 6, 2019, approximately 1,461,780 people have pledged their support towards the nomination alongside organizing social media movement of #OurHawkerCulture in Facebook and Instagram (@SGHawkerCulture). Lastly, over 200 communities such as disapora, educational institutions, NGOs and others have provided their support to the nomination.[20]

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[19] *MEDIA RELEASE For Immediate Release HAWKER CULTURE IN SINGAPORE SUBMITTED FOR INSCRIPTION ON UNESCO'S REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY*, n.d., accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.gov.sg/~/sgpcmedia/media_releases/nhb/press_release/P-20190328-1/attachment/Media Release and Annexes for the Submission of Hawker Culture in SG Nomination.pdf.
[20] *Ibid*.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the backgrounds that have been described above, I would like to suggest two questions:

1) How does Hawkers Cultures reflect or portray Singaporean Identity?

2) How does Singapore use the UNESCO Nomination for Hawker Culture for its nation branding in International Communities?

1.3 Research Objective

Considering the eating out culture in Singapore and statistical fact that 80% Singaporeans visit Hawkers Centers once every week, the establishment can become an indicator in an attempt to identify Singapore's national identity.

Hawker Culture can become an ideal indicator for identifying Singapore national identity because the establishment has developed a history since the British colonial times. Therefore, the historical footprint of nation-building can be followed in the research. The relatability of subject matter toward Singaporean as mentioned above which make Hawker Centers as a place of social interaction that indirectly plays role in shaping the society identity and the function of food to become a cultural marker allows I to track down the City-State demographic condition alongside the global influence that shape Singapore.

The Singapore attempt to nominate Hawker Culture for UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Humanity is believed an attempt of the City-State to nation-branding itself in international communities. The research will be focused on which element of the City-State identity is being

reflected through the nomination, the desired messages that Singapore wants to highlight toward international communities through UNESCO nomination, the action that is conducted by Singapore Government to ensure the success of the nomination and the benefits that the City-State gain from UNESCO nomination of Hawker Culture in various sectors such as tourism, economic, diplomacy, etc.

1.4 Significance of The Research

I believe that describing Singapore national identity can be ambiguous considering the young age of the City-State (54 years of post-separation and 200 years since Raffles came to Singapore) compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors. Besides, its first generation population were immigrants that came from all parts of Asia (predominantly Mainland China, Malay Archipelago, India and others) and lastly, Singapore achieved its independence not because of a revolutionary war but because The British Colony decided to give local elites such as Lee Kuan Yew to rule the City-State with separation from Malaysia Federation in 1965. Therefore, it can be said that there is no binding among its citizen due to this factor which is a requirement for a national identity to be formed. Also, Singapore does not have an official ideology unlike its neighbors Indonesia (Pancasila) and Malaysia (Rukun Negara) except the official statement from PAP elite regarding "ideology of pragmatism" and "Asian Values" the closest attempt to create national ideology were the 1991 Shared Values.

Therefore, studying Hawkers Culture that has been in existence since pre-independence and something that Singaporeans have related from generation to generation will give us proper understanding of their national identity.

I also would like to analyze the attempt of National Branding by Singapore through its nomination of Hawker Culture as intangible cultural heritage either to enhance Singapore cultural footprint as a Global City or a cultural tool for diplomacy purpose or other potential motives.

1.5 Structure of the Writing

The first chapter, which is the introduction, provides an overview toward the main content of the thesis, which includes the background of the topic (basic explanantion of Singapore, Nation-building policy, food, Hawker Culture and UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity), the objective that I would like to achieve and the importance of the thesis.

The second chapter, which is the theoretical framework, will elaborate on International Relations theories (particularly the constructive perspective) and research that previous literature (journal article and textbook) has covered to give a deeper understanding toward the topics.

The third chapter, which is the methodology, will explain how I plans to collect the data, analysis method and research approach.

The fourth chapter, which is the discussion. will analyze all the data which have been gathered regarding Singapore UNESCO Nomination of Hawker Culture in a systematic method according to international relations theory and concept. In this chapter, the research question presented in Chapter 1 will be answered.

The fifth chapter, which is the conclusion and recommendation, summarizes and concludes the analysis from the previous chapters. This chapter will also give recommendations regarding potential future attempts to conduct nation building and branding that can be applied by all states particularly in this case is Indonesia.