Yes, says an overwhelming majority of 100 people polled by Insight, after the seemingly permanent angst over Singapore culture resurfaced again recently. Lynn Lee, Aaron Low and Keith Lin find out just what they mean by culture.

In March 1978, months after he had taken his ministry for culture, the then-Minister for Information, Mr Ong Eng Seng, was grilled by a group of students from National University of Singapore in the National University of Singapore campus.

In typical Singaporean style, the students were expected to second-guess Mr Ong's answers, and what happened next was a classic of the genre: Mr Ong was careful not to mention any names or personalities, but the nature of his answer seemed to indicate what he had in mind.

The television and radio programmes were of poor quality. The library had offered him 300 definitions, he noted, while Singaporeans to their home. The talk over coffee is that Singapore was a "cultural desert".

Fifty years have passed since Mr Ong's lecture, but the essence of the discussion is still valid today. Of late, Singaporeans' cultural education has been increasingly under threat.

The story of us

WILL Singapore define culture with the same parameters as that of the West? This is what the people are saying at the moment.

"Culture" is a buzzword that has been bandied about in Singapore for as long as people can remember. But what does it mean?

"Culture" is a term that has been used to describe every aspect of human life, from literature to sport, from art to dance, from music to food.

Singaporeans are creatures of habit, and they tend to define culture in terms of their own experience. For many Singaporeans, culture is synonymous with local food, with the Esplanade, with the National Theatre, with the National Gallery, with the National Museum, with the National Library.

But what is culture? And what defines it?

The consensus is that culture is the sum total of humanity's achievements in fields such as art, literature, music, dance, film, theatre, fashion, cuisine, and so on. It is the expression of a society's values, beliefs, and traditions, and it is shaped by the people who live in that society.

But what makes a culture unique? And how do we define it?

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