



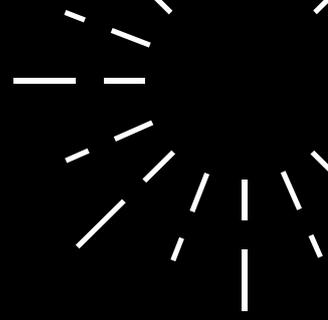
NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

OPMUN 2019

STUDY GUIDE

- 1: The Question of Revitalising the Local Contemporary Arts Scene*
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CHAIR BIOGRAPHIES



Get to know the dais of the National Arts Council

HEAD CHAIR: CHLOE YUNG

Chloe is a first-year student at the National University of Singapore, currently juggling Political Science, Economics and French. She fondly remembers her first Model UN, where she was shy and intimidated by more vocal delegates. Two years and eight MUNs later, Chloe is excited to chair the National Arts Council before she finally retires to pursue other endeavours. She hopes that delegates will have a meaningful and enjoyable experience at OPMUN 2019 whether they are a first-timer or experienced delegate. À bientôt!



DEPUTY CHAIR: ADITI KRISHNAN

Aditi is a constantly overworked and very sleep-deprived IB Year 2 student at Global Indian International School. She spends her time juggling all her school work and spends her limited free time binge watching Brooklyn 99 hoping to escape the harsh realities of life. Aditi is proud to bring the National Arts Council to OPMUN 2019 and hopes to provide delegates with a wholesome experience similar to ones she has had that made her love and stay in the MUN circuit.



DEPUTY CHAIR: NG SHENG YING

An actual full-time hobbyist, mere dilettante in everything she does, Sheng Ying is a first year International Baccalaureate student in Hwa Chong International School. Boggled down by the perpetual workflow of History, Economics and English LL at higher level, she clings onto her sideline interests in music (jazz piano), art and film incessantly.





Introduction to the National Arts Council

Welcome Delegates of the NAC,

Around the globe, Art holds cultural significance that tells of the history, culture and identity of communities. With growing dialogue about social cohesion and the Singaporean identity, we hope that looking into the local arts scene will provide a unique perspective. As Champions of Society, we seek to inspire passionate delegates to uphold the value of self-expression and creativity in our local community. At OPMUN 2019, we are bringing to you the National Arts Council (NAC) forum, where both relevant government positions and arts stakeholders will weigh the role of the Arts in Singapore, and brainstorm solutions in the form of advisory recommendations to revive and nourish both modern and traditional art forms. The National Arts Council (NAC) is a statutory board acting under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth that was established in September 1991 to oversee the development of the Arts in Singapore. The Council mainly supports the arts scene through providing grants and awards for arts practitioners, arts education programmes aimed at the public, and by providing arts housing and facilities.

In recent decades, such developments have manifested in an increase of arts events and audiences, growth in numbers and profile of arts companies, and more local artists enjoying a global presence. However, these developments do not overshadow the existing need to expand Singapore's arts scene and open up new perspectives for the long term growth and sustainability of arts. In this council, you will take a closer look at how modern developments have shaped both the contemporary and traditional arts scene today, as well as tackle contentious topics such as arts censorship. We hope that you will be able to draw from your own personal experiences to understand how the arts scene presents itself today, weighing the value and role of the arts in Singapore to direct how the needs of the arts scene should be met. Lastly, we hope that you will, through these four days of debate, not only learn more about the local arts scene but also forge friendships with other curious individuals and emerge empowered to make an impact within your own community.

Warm regards,
Chloe Yung
Head Chair of the NAC



TOPIC 1: The Question of Revitalising the Local Contemporary Arts Scene

Back in 1989, the Report on the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts marked the early blueprint for Singapore's cultural policy, which recommended that the 'thrust of Singapore's cultural development is to realize the vision of a culturally vibrant society by 1999. A culturally vibrant society is one whose people are well-informed, creative, sensitive and gracious'. The Arts are an essential ingredient for the development of local culture and the Singapore identity, as a medium of self-expression and commentary regarding pertinent political and social issues, including issues of politics, race and religion. For the purposes of this council topic, delegates will explore this issue with a primary focus on the literary, visual, musical and performing modern art forms. A vibrant art culture in Singapore cannot exist without the continued investment and engagement of Singaporeans; the local arts scene has been said to be stagnating, evidenced by the cancellation of this year's Art Stage days before its opening due to poor local sales and competition.¹

In the 2018 Singapore Cultural Statistics report, the total gross amount from performing arts tickets sales halved from \$166.5 million in 2011 to \$87.7 million in 2017.² This is although statistics published in 2017 have highlighted that 89% of the 2,023 Singaporeans polled agreed that the arts and culture helped them to understand the perspectives of those of different backgrounds and cultures.³ It is no hidden secret that Singaporeans are hesitant to invest significantly in the art scene be it financially or by pursuing a career in the sector due to a variety of factors, which will be explored in this topic. While the popularity of local museums and art festivals have been increasing, local artists and production companies still rely heavily on state support. Although the NAC has indeed devoted numerous programmes and financial schemes to cultivate the arts scene, it remains that the collective effort of artists, the government, and the people is necessary for it to flourish.

1: Akshita Nanda and Toh Wen Li, "Art Stage Singapore Fair Cancelled Days before Opening; Exhibitors Scramble for Alternative Venues," The Straits Times, January 16, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/art-stage-fair-cancelled-days-before-opening>.

2: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Singapore Cultural Statistics, 2018 <https://www.nac.gov.sg/dam/jcr:37e86051-f3d7-4673-98fa-ce52cdba8ea6>

3: "Population Survey on the Arts." NAC. <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/research/Research-Main-Page/Arts-Statistics-and-Studies/Participation-and-Attendance/population-survey.html>.



PAST ACTION

ARTS FUNDING INITIATIVES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The NAC's Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) in 2012 allowed for the allocation of \$300 million into the culture and arts industry from 2012 to 2016. Initiatives such as the Cultural Matching Fund in 2013 set up by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth facilitated private funding from corporations and individuals to arts and heritage groups, with up to \$172 million allocated amongst 95 of such groups by 2017.⁴ Cultural infrastructure such as the National Gallery Singapore, the Singapore Art Museum, the Esplanade, Victoria Theatre and Victoria Concert Hall were built and funded by the National Arts Council to encourage a local arts culture to develop within the heart of Singapore. The NAC currently has multiple funding schemes, such as the Seed Grant and Major Company schemes. Short-term funding schemes include the Production Grant, which supports the production, presentation and marketing costs of different kinds of arts projects. Arts and heritage charity groups may also turn to the MCCY's Cultural Matching Fund, which matches cash donations dollar for dollar. However, funding for some arts groups such as the Necessary Stage and Singapore Repertory Theatre was cut by no more than 10% in 2017.⁵ As a result, the Singapore Repertory Theatre cancelled the 2017 edition of Shakespeare in the Park, which was brought back the following year as they were able to raise \$100,000 through the SOS (Save Our Shakespeare) crowd-funding campaign.⁶

CORPORATE AND INDIVIDUAL PHILANTHROPY

That being said, corporate sponsors have a significant role to play in the arts scene. Yearly, the NAC commends patrons at the Patron of the Arts Awards ceremony. Amongst others, outstanding patrons include the United Overseas Bank Limited, Orchard Turn Developments, and M1 Limited - which sponsors the annual M1 Singapore Fringe Festival.⁷ Although arts funding is largely supported by individual or corporate philanthropists in most countries, Singapore's arts scene relies mostly on government funding allocated through the National Arts Council. Total government spending on Arts and Culture was \$840.7 million in 2017, which accounted for approximately 92.9% of all arts and heritage funding that year according to the 2017 Singapore Cultural Statistics report. However, philanthropic contributions totalled at only \$63.8 million the same year, signalling that private support of the local arts scene is not enough to sustain the arts industry without substantial government contributions. Due to concerns such as rising rent costs, arts groups are understandably anxious about funding.

The profit from productions barely cover total costs and grants are effective only as a short-term solution to support the growing pool of artists in Singapore, but further measures need to be taken to encourage investments from the private sector. The NAC conducted a survey in 2016 which found that out of 1,035 individuals who were polled, lack of awareness was one of the major reasons most of them did not donate to the arts, while a quarter noted that they had no interest in the arts. Furthermore, 16% of non-donors claimed they would not consider giving to the arts, compared to religious organisations, community and grassroots efforts.⁸ While government funding initiatives have been very effective towards allowing avenues for aspiring artists and funding cultural infrastructure in recent years, perhaps the overtly 'top-down' approach that has been taken so far by the NAC is insufficient to meet the needs of a young arts scene. Delegates should consider ways to inspire Singaporeans to engage with the arts scene more actively and meaningfully by raising the profile of the Arts in Singapore.

4: "Our SG Arts Plan (2018 - 2022)." NAC. <https://www.nac.gov.sg/aboutus/Our-SG-Arts-Plan-2018-2022.html>.

5: Devi, Reena. 2017. "NAC Ups Arts Funding, but Some Groups See Cuts - TODAYonline." March 31, 2017. <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/nac-ups-arts-funding-some-groups-see-cuts>

6: "Crowdfunding Campaign Held to Bring Back Shakespeare in the Park." TODAYonline, September 28, 2017, <https://www.todayonline.com/entertainment/crowdfunding-campaign-held-bring-back-shakespeare-park>.

7: "Arts Sector Receives Growing Support From More Patrons." NAC. <https://www.nac.gov.sg/media-resources/press-releases/Arts-Sector-Receives-Growing-Support-From-More-Patrons>.

8: "Arts Philanthropy: Individual Giving Research 2016," NAC, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/research/Research-Main-Page/Arts-Statistics-and-Studies/Giving-and-Support0/Individual-Giving-Research-2016.html>.

SCOPE OF DEBATE

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

More could certainly be done to increase active engagement by integrating the arts deeper into community life. Initiatives such as the biannual Arts in Your Neighbourhood were begun by the NAC to increase the representation of the arts outside the central area. Similarly, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) also works in collaboration with the People's Association to produce the PassionArts Festival in the heartlands. However, the accessibility of art to the general public remains a concern: Numbers from the 2017 Population Survey of the Arts found that 50% cited a lack of free time and 17% noted unfamiliarity with performers as the highest barriers to arts attendance. For those who did not attend any arts events in 2017, many found that time-constraints was the highest deterrence, with 28% stating that having events closer to where they live or work would raise their likelihood to attend.⁹ The Survey also found that those who attended arts events did so to spend time with their family, friends and colleagues. In this regard, the Arts serve as not only a means of entertainment but also as a means for social cohesion, be it through attending an event, discussing the concepts portrayed by an art piece or by making art with others.¹⁰

The role of public arts spaces should not be underestimated with respect to increased public engagement. The Rail Corridor Art Space became a space for street artists to showcase their talents, and was the venue for Off the Rails - an event to celebrate local street art and music before its closure for the laying of a new water pipeline in 2015. Public reception to this event was surprisingly positive, with 4,000 attendees.¹¹ Public art brings vitality and expression to a sense of belonging to our environment, and so creative placemaking has been highlighted in the recent Arts and Culture Strategic Review. Rosa Daniel, Chief Executive Officer of the NAC, identified the need for placemaking through arts and culture to provide 'contexts for positive interactions and shared experiences, emotionally anchoring Singaporeans to places, spaces and community'.¹²

CENSORSHIP

Due to a lack of alternative funding, arts groups rely heavily on government funding which comes with certain guidelines. As lawmaker Baey Yam Keng expressed, funding from the NAC comes with the tacit agreement that artwork "should not put any public institutions in a bad light or put them in a derogatory position".¹³ Artists are furthermore expected to abide by IMDA Arts & Entertainment Classification Code guidelines¹⁴ or their work may be censored through a withdrawal of funding, license withdrawal, stricter age ratings or by revoking the artist's license to display their art at the venue. However, many have claimed that these guidelines are ambiguous, such that artists are often in the dark about when their art may be considered in violation of these 'out-of-bounds markers'. Artists have complained that there is a lack of transparency between officials and artists regarding decisions made to censor, with little means for artists to clarify or make appeals. While the government may have dexterity with regards to the political and economic matters concerning the arts industry, the perspectives of local artists are still necessary as they are more in touch with the changing complexities and needs of the arts industry.

Case Studies on Censorship

In 2010, local theatre company Wild Rice had \$20,000 of its annual funding cut as it staged productions that were 'incompatible with the core values promoted by the government' or were critical of the government.¹⁵ Similarly in 2015, controversy was sparked when the NAC withdrew a grant of \$8,000 one day before the release of Sonny Liew's book *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* as it "potentially undermines the authority and legitimacy of the government and its public institutions" due to its depiction of Former PM Lee Kuan Yew and Operation Spectrum in 1987.¹⁶

9: "Community Arts," Community Arts | People's Association, <https://www.pa.gov.sg/our-programmes/community-arts>.

10: "Attendance and Participation in the Arts Continued to Rise in 2017: NAC Survey," CNA Lifestyle, September 17, 2018, <https://cnalifestyle.channelnewsasia.com/trending/attendance-and-participation-in-the-arts-continued-to-rise-in-10727786>

11: Said, Nabilah. "Rail Corridor Transformed by Upcoming Art Projects." *The Straits Times*, February 16, 2016. <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/rail-corridor-transformed-by-upcoming-art-projects>.

12: Daniel, Rosa. "Reimagining Singapore: Placemaking through Arts and Culture." Civil Service College. <https://www.csc.gov.sg/articles/reimagining-singapore-placemaking-through-arts-and-culture>.

13: The Independent. "Baey Yam Keng Confirms That National Arts Council Does Not Fund Works Which Embarrasses Govt." *The Independent News*, February 18, 2016. <http://theindependent.sg/baey-yam-keng-confirms-that-national-arts-council-does-not-fund-works-which-embarrasses-govt/>.

14: Arts Entertainment Classification Code, NAC, 2014 https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imedia/files/regulation-licensing-and-consultations/content-and-standards-classification/arts-entertainment-classification-code_wef-2-june-14.pdf?la=en

15: "NAC cuts funding for Wild Rice," TODAYonline, May 6, 2010 <http://www.wildrice.com.sg/images/doc/news/2010/20100506TODAY.pdf>

16: "Graphic Novel 'Undermines Govt's Authority'," TODAYonline, June 2, 2015, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/graphic-novel-undermines-govts-authority>.

17: Akshita Nanda, "The Fear of Funding Cuts," *The Straits Times*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/the-fear-of-funding-cuts>.

SCOPE OF DEBATE

While this not only backfired due to the Streisand effect - granting the book greater popularity - it raised criticisms that state funding was being used as an instrument of censorship. The function of art in Singapore is called into question: Should art in Singapore be permitted to challenge or be critical of the government and public institutions? How can we draw the line between what is thought-provoking and what is offensive? Who should decide?

As a consequence, some may critique that censorship can be applied inconsistently. Haresh Sharma's play *Off Centre* was originally commissioned by the Ministry of Health, but funding was revoked from the theatre company the Necessary Stage due to concerns that the play presented a 'prejudiced view' of social issues and public institutions. Yet, the play was later selected by the MOE for the O-Level Literature syllabus. Unclear guidelines has been said to also encourage a climate of 'self-censorship', where artists may feel restricted from dealing with contentious issues or opinions to avoid pushback from authorities. Proponents of artistic freedoms would thus argue that this ultimately negatively impacts the local art scene, as this not only impacts the quality of art produced but also stunts open conversation about sensitive topics.

DIFFICULTIES IN PURSUING A VOCATION IN THE ARTS

Perceptions towards pursuing a career in the arts industry has improved over the years, however, this path is not an easy one as artists still face many challenges. Some question whether local arts education truly prepares and equips students with the skills necessary to pursue arts-related careers, as it was found that the proportion of graduates from the School of the Arts (SOTA) who were pursuing non-arts related undergraduate courses had increased from 60% in 2012 to 83% in 2015.¹⁸ However, this is certainly not an accurate indicator of the quality of arts education in institutions such as SOTA while other factors have to be taken into account, such as career instability.

As such, some artists may have to take on other jobs to make ends meet. Furthermore, artists have to abide by certain Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in order to obtain for NAC funding, which includes self-evaluation forms that ask for the total number of participants of the art event and number of tickets sold. The requirements that aspiring artists have to achieve to receive NAC grants make it 'onerous' for them to begin, according to Mr Kamil Haque, founder and artistic director of Haque Centre of Acting & Creativity. At a roundtable discussion organised as part of the IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series, the need to move beyond numeric KPIs was stressed upon,¹⁹ as they are not fully reflective of the intangible and meaningful impacts of an art work or performance.²⁰ Ms Wong, Head of the School of Creative Industries at LASALLE noted that KPIs are only one dimension of the effectiveness of an arts group, and not meeting up to its standards can suggest that an arts organisation has 'under performed' or 'failed'.

Neither should KPIs be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, as veteran arts groups may have more resources to reach out to wider audiences compared to individual artists. KPIs may have the adverse effect on arts groups if KPIs become the only benchmarks to weigh the value of their art. It was also questioned that KPIs are even required at all, with the argument that art, like education and defense and education, is intrinsically good and does not need justification to exist. However, it remains that government funding across the public sector is competitive, and thus the NAC must be able to present its impact to secure arts funding; it is thus a matter of which KPIs should be used to more accurately evaluate art works and events.

18: Tan, Winnie. "More Sota Students Go on to Pursue Non-Arts Related Fields." *The Straits Times*, May 15, 2017. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/more-sota-students-go-on-to-pursue-non-arts-related-fields>.

19: Elangovan, Navene. "The Big Read: For Artistic Millennials, Making a Living out of the Arts Is a Craft in Itself." *CNA*, January 13, 2019. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/arts-scene-singapore-artistic-millennials-making-a-living-11116848>.

20: "IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series: Roundtable on Bang for the Funding Buck: KPIs and Capturing the Impact of the Arts." https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/enev_ips-sam-roundtable-on-bang-for-the-funding-buck_final.pdf.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. What is the role and value of art in Singapore?
2. To what extent may local art works present contentious ideas and criticisms of public institutions?
3. What can be done to elevate the profile of the arts and encourage private philanthropy?
4. How should the value of art be evaluated based on its impact and meaningfulness - what are some possible Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can be used?
5. How can we inspire public interest and patronage of the arts scene that is authentic and sustainable in the long-term?
6. What avenues can be taken to decrease the opportunity cost of attending arts events by making the arts more accessible and meaningful to not just the youths but also other communities such as families and the elderly?
7. What measures can be implemented to encourage and prepare the youth to pursue a career in the arts industry?
8. How can artists, arts stakeholders and the government work together more closely in the future to address concerns relating to the arts industry?





TOPIC 2: The Question of the Preservation of Traditional Arts

Traditional arts today is an amalgamation of Singapore's past and present, a potent testimony of heritage and the remnants of Singapore's Asiatic roots. The perilous threat of time that ails traditional practices only foreshadows the endangerment of our traditional art forms which are essential to relating to our Southeast Asian roots. Reflective of our multi-racial and vast ethnic heterogeneity, the survival of our traditional arts is closely tied to the retainment of the Singaporean identity within an increasingly globalised and westernised world. Collectively, they help preserve Singapore's plural national identity and basis for cultural longevity. Recognising this, funding to traditional arts groups has doubled from 2011 to 2015, and a further \$25 million has been committed to the traditional arts scene until 2020.

Administering the right reforms to preserve the traditional artistic plane has been no easy feat. The traditional arts scene has more than 1,400 activities and performances held each year, yet with the emergence of new generations, there has been a declining number of young practitioners. It is imperative that we do not leave behind traditional means of art as we seek to expand the contemporary arts scene. While different in many ways, traditional and contemporary art forms are not exclusively binary; many traditional arts practitioners have had to seek ways to modernise to appeal to younger audiences and at the same time preserve the practices intrinsic to cultural expression, whereas some groups choose to adopt hybridised art styles by incorporating both modern and traditional elements.

However, to attribute the cause of our fading art forms to modernisation means remitting the responsibility of the nation-state to preserve and promote traditional artistic practices. The current measures in place and challenges to the traditional arts scene will therefore be further investigated to develop ways to encourage the traditional arts to flourish again.



Historical Background

OVERVIEW

In the years during British colonial rule, Singapore became home to migrants from Malaya, China, India and other parts of Asia who moved in large numbers to escape situations in their home countries and to seek new job opportunities. The traditional arts continued to flourish amidst the search for a new identity when Singapore fought for self-governance and began to build its concept of a Singaporean nation-state at the tail end of World War II. The diversity of local traditional arts bears testament to a vibrant and multicultural Singapore. Many cultural activities and festivals were organised by the People's Association in 1960 to encourage cultural and social cohesion at the community level. The urumi melam, a percussion ensemble using traditional South Indian instruments (including the thavil and urumi) originating from the Tamil Nadu area of India, has gained in popularity amongst the Tamil Hindu diaspora since the 1980s.

These groups, the most prominent local one being the Siva Sakthi Muniandy Urumi Melam, makes its appearance at Hindu festivals such as Thaipusam and occasionally with Chinese 'Lion Dancers' at events such as Chinese New Year. While the playing of music in public was banned back in 1973, regulations towards such performances have been relaxed in recent years.²¹ Another popular art form is Dikir Barat, a traditional Malay art form originated from Kelantan, Malaysia, which comprises of a choral ensemble and musicians playing the drums, gongs, gong-chime, maracas and a bamboo flute. Many schools have interest groups dedicated to this art form, which is popularly performed at ceremonies such as Malay weddings and festivals.

CASE STUDY: MALAY MUSIC

Malay traditional music has had its mark on Singapore since the early 1800's and was highly influenced by the early migrants that came to Singapore. Singapore became a hub for Malay music because of its small size and geographical proximity, and so the art form slowly became an integral part of the Singaporean identity. There are several musical genres in Malay music which can be characterised by its slow and gentle melodies and simple lyrics that often tell a moving story, often accompanied by a Malay dance form called Zapin - which actually originated from the Middle East. In the 1930's Malay pop music was popularised in Singapore by troupes which usually performed for wealthy Persians who resided in India. At this time, Malay music was becoming highly popular in Singapore, which led to these troupes adding cultural touches to their music in order to suit local tastes. The mixture of these two types of Malay music opened up a market for recording companies such as EMI and HMV in Singapore, who were responsible for manufacturing cassette tapes and vinyl records at the time, encouraging musicians from different countries in the Malay Archipelago to move to Singapore, increasing the local profile of Malay music, although not as prominent in recent years.²² Groups such as the Orkestra Sri Temasek strive to bring Malay traditional music back into the spotlight - the group has been performing at various PAssionArts Festivals since 2012.

CASE STUDY: CHINESE OPERA

Chinese Opera is the most frequently cited traditional art form under threat. Its appearance in Singapore traces back to the first exodus of Chinese migrants from the oppressive Manchu Qing dynasty at the peak of 1911 Revolution, which facilitated the mass migrants towards the Nanyang nations of Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam before spilling into the South China Sea.²³ This irreconcilable Chinese dysphoria sent estranged Chinese migrants in fervent search of fertile business opportunities. A majority of Chinese immigrants arrived from the prosperous southern coastal cities of China, namely the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Haian during the 19th and early half of the 20th century, as well as a third wave of migration in the 1990s and early 21st century; they form the crux of the array of Chinese dialectical groups in Singapore. Chinese Opera is therefore not a monolithic art form, but is performed in various dialects such as Cantonese Opera, Hokkien Opera, Teochew Opera and Peking Opera, each with distinguishing characteristics. Despite being listed as one of the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Chinese Opera has been confronted with dwindling cultural agency in Singapore over recent years. Chinese Opera troupes continue to operate in Singapore, such as the Chinese Theatre Circle (CTC) established in 1981, which is one of the oldest circles with the main objective of preserving and promoting the traditional art of Chinese Opera. It has been an active force in organising Chinese Opera activities and performances in Singapore. Lectures and programmes are also regularly held at the Chinese Opera Teahouse at the association's headquarters in Chinatown.

21: Begum, Shabana. "Devotees Cheer New Rules That Allow More Music during Thaipusam Procession." *The Straits Times*, January 21, 2019. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/devotees-cheer-new-rules-that-allow-more-music-during-thaipusam-procession>.

22: bin Salleh, Muhammad Hafiz. "Malay Music in Singapore." National Library Board, August 2010. <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/music/Media/PDFs/Article/cb326366-195b-4307-a115-4d388ae47879.pdf>.

23: Lee Jian Xuan. "Singapore Budget 2015: Traditional Arts Sector to Receive \$25m in Funding." *The Straits Times*, February 11, 2016. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-budget-2015-traditional-arts-sector-to-receive-25m-in-funding>.

Past Action

2011: FIVE-YEAR TRADITIONAL ARTS PLAN

Singapore's NAC implemented the Five-Year Traditional Arts Plan in 2011 with hopes of invigorating the traditional arts sector by galvanizing the youths of Singapore.²⁴ The plan codifies Chinese music, dance, theatre, Malay music and dance as well as Indian Music and dance as definitive traditional art forms, and recognises the importance of traditional arts and its maintenance. The NAC is inclined to improve the quality of art productions, encouraging newer traditional arts groups as well as stimulating public reception and accessibility of the art form; the NAC has thus pledged to assist local talents and reach out to broader audiences.

Since 2011, NAC has co-organised several skills development programmes with partners such as The Esplanade Co. Ltd (TECL), Chinese Opera Institute, PERKAMUS and Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan. These programmes are usually in the form of workshops, seminars or short term residencies which helped to develop the capability as well as the technical skills of the artists.

2016: NEW INITIATIVES TO GROW TRADITIONAL ARTS

In 2016, The National Arts Council (NAC) announced three new initiatives to boost the development of traditional arts in Singapore:²⁵

- 1. Expansion of Presentation and Promotion Grant Scheme:** It planned to increase funding support to 30-50% of artists and art groups to help grow in areas like professional marketing, public relations etc.
- 2. Seed Grant Scheme:** This scheme is a two-year seed funding which is provided to a limited number of promising traditional arts organisations for strengthening their long-term artistic growth. It aims to cover operating costs and overall development of the organisations. It further aims to grow organisations into full time traditional arts organisation that provide quality programmes which will help enrich Singapore's art scene.²⁴
- 3. Strategic Partnerships for Outreach:** NAC will develop strategic partnerships with cultural organisations and venues to grow platforms for traditional art artists. It predominantly aims to increase the visibility and accessibility of traditional arts to the public.

To promote the traditional arts to a wider audience, the NAC has also established partnerships with traditional arts companies on larger scale platforms including the Ding Yi music company, NADI Singapura and Apsara Arts Academy. Although there has been more interaction and opportunities for collaboration among the groups and practitioners, the ability to build a larger base of paying audiences has yet to be demonstrated. Furthermore, the Council has held open discussions with traditional art practitioners in order to further understand the issues faced by them and probable solutions proposed by the practitioners for the same. This has helped further the NAC's for measures need to help the practitioners and point traditional arts to a more sustainable future.²⁶ The Traditional Arts Repository, introduced in 2017 in conjunction with the National Library Board, is tasked with the digitisation of materials such as photographs and scripts to preserve the arts and cultural legacies and increase awareness of the traditional arts to the public.

25: "New Initiatives To Grow Traditional Arts," NAC, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/media-resources/press-releases/New-Initiatives-To-Grow-Traditional-Arts.html>.

26: "OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ART FORMS IN SINGAPORE", NAC <https://www.nac.gov.sg/dam/jcr:7d81e568-e737-4a03-9a60-034e0cadabc9>

Scope of Debate

INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL ARTS INTO EDUCATION

Traditional art forms have started to recede into the shadows of the contemporary arts over the course of a few decades. The lack of integration of traditional art forms into education in Singapore is one of the many factors for a lack of appreciation and patronage of the traditional arts today. An increase in the visibility of traditional arts practitioners in the education is necessary to encourage present traditional arts professionals and groups who struggle to reach out to the public. While many schools have traditional arts CCAs, measures could be taken to connect with external interest groups to work more closely to bring the arts beyond the school setting. The Council has introduced a “Traditional Arts Taster Programme for preschoolers” which aims to introduce traditional art forms in an engaging and accessible way for preschool children.²⁷ Even though the programme is helpful to expose younger children to an array of traditional art forms, more could be done to ensure that traditional arts education will continue for these children beyond preschool. While private institutes like the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) provide customised traditional arts workshops for secondary school students, these are voluntary, expensive, and declining in popularity.²⁸

Some government initiatives have proved fruitful, such as the Cultural Performance Exposure Scheme in 2009, which provided Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions with a \$3,000 subsidy yearly for Chinese-language students to attend arts performances by local or overseas groups - in 2018, 33,335 students from 253 schools benefitted from this scheme.²⁹ These arts have slowly lost their place in Singapore’s ever-growing populace of vast races and ethnicities, but still hold vast significance to the Singaporean identity. This poses the question: Has the Singaporean government done its part to actively promote the existence and relevance of traditional arts in the education sector? Avenues to allow students to connect more authentically and personally with a variety of traditional art forms could be developed more to strengthen belonging to their cultural identities while forging empathy with other cultures by normalising a truly artistically diverse and multicultural setting.

MODERNISATION AND WESTERNIZATION OF ENTERTAINMENT

One of the most common problems faced by traditional art practitioners is the increased westernisation of culture and rise of technology, which has resulted in an increase in public demand for western entertainment and media consumption over the Internet. Singapore is often described as one of the most westernised countries in Southeast Asia.³⁰ The globalisation of Singapore over the years has created a progression of non-Western artists into Singapore who have redefined and pushed the boundaries of art in Singapore. Children growing up in the digital age are more exposed to convenient digital forms of entertainment such as Disney cartoons, compared to during the colonial period when Chinese Street Opera, also known as Wayang (the Malay word referring to ‘a theatrical performance employing puppets or human dancers’) peppered the streets and audiences, including children, would flock to watch performances live, entranced by the colourful costumes and striking stage make-up.

Arguably, younger generations of Singaporeans are more estranged from the cultural practices of the generations before them. Such technological and cultural developments have made it imperative that traditional arts practitioners seek ways to make performances more accessible and culturally relevant to youths and millennials. One interesting illustration of this is the adaptation of Western superheroes such as the Avengers into wayang kulit, a traditional Javanese and Malay art form of storytelling through puppetry, music and handicrafts, by the Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts group.³¹

27: “Traditional Arts Taster Programme for Pre-Schools,” NAC, accessed October 6, 2019, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/singaporeartsscene/traditionalarts/Traditional-Arts-Taster-Programme-for-Pre-Schools.html>.

28: Camillia Deborah Dass, “Credits for Learning Traditional Crafts?,” *The Straits Times*, May 17, 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/credits-for-learning-traditional-crafts>.

29: “MOE Scheme Supported over 33,000 Students’ Attendances at Chinese Art Shows in 2018,” *TODAYonline*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/moe-scheme-supported-over-33000-students-attendances-chinese-art-shows-in-2018>.

30: Barbara Crossette, “WESTERN INFLUENCE WORRIES SINGAPORE CHIEF,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, January 4, 1987), <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/04/world/western-influence-worries-singapore-chief.html>.

31: Sahni, Aliyah. “Superheroes Unite to Give a Modern Spin to Traditional Art of Shadow Puppets.” *CGTN*, May 23, 2019. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d3155444f34457a6333566d54/index.html>.

Scope of Debate

MODERNISATION AND WESTERNIZATION OF ENTERTAINMENT (CONT.)

The Stanford Arts Centre was recently opened in 2018, which features the use of technology to make learning about Chinese Opera more accessible; a walking trail to discover more about the Centre and its artists is conducted using augmented reality, while virtual reality is used to present a tour of a Chinese Opera stage setting for participants to view the costumes, make-up, props and instruments to gain a deeper appreciation of the large amounts of preparation required to stage such performances.³² Technology is certainly one way to bring the traditional arts to the general audience, as it can lower barriers to accessibility. Furthermore, the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts indicated that 71% of the people preferred engaging in arts electronically instead of going to performing arts theatres and art exhibitions. However, it must be noted that the traditional arts performance is one that is made to be performed in front of a live audience. Furthermore, traditional arts must not be relinquished to museums as relics of the past. How then, can traditional art forms find its place in modern Singaporean society?

Some traditional arts groups have found an answer to this; the TENG Ensemble was recently awarded under the NAC Major Company Scheme - its niche is the use of both traditional and contemporary musical instruments to perform stunning pieces of music, creating a unique sound that is neither strictly modern nor traditional. However, not all arts practitioners are open to modernisation, due to concerns about the dilution of traditional art forms. While this fine line is ultimately to be drawn by arts groups, ways to facilitate the adaptation and integration of traditional arts into the public spotlight should be investigated more deeply. As the nation progresses forward, Singaporeans need tangible cultural representations of their identity to hold on to, be it signature local cuisines or traditional art forms - a form of cultural capital and identity within a rapidly changing and globalising world.

A GENERATIONAL DECLINE IN THE TRADITIONAL ARTS PRACTICE

The 2011 Youth Arts Qualitative Study identified the need to provide avenues to participate in the arts in a more 'fun' and low commitment setting, as a 'far greater number of respondents desired only to participate on a casual basis and sought simply to derive personal enjoyment from what they did'.³³ However, this is not a simple feat in the context of the traditional arts, some of which require long hours of preparation and years of training to become a professional, and - alongside a slow decrease in public demand - with seemingly little reward. Many traditional art forms are complex, and involve multiple forms of performance such as theatre, dance and artistic visual elements. Newer generations may find it difficult to begin learning these art forms without prior cultural exposure from a young age, or without proficiency in the language. For example, bharatanatyam is a classical Indian dance style known to be a 'living performance art' originating from the Tamil Nadu region in southern India. It is a dynamic dance form that incorporates elements of drama and theatre to present stories that are often spiritual and religious, inspired by Hindu myths and legends.

The art form requires proficiency in the Tamil language to understand, and may thus face difficulties appealing to non-Tamil speaking communities.³⁴ In the case of Chinese Opera, language policies such as the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 2000 has only catalysed the estrangement of younger Chinese generations from dialects - and consequently traditional dialectal art forms such as Chinese Opera. The traditional arts are not only symbols of Singapore's unique multiculturalism, but are also used to pass on moral and cultural values to subsequent generations. While Chinese Singaporeans would certainly benefit from an increased appreciation of Chinese traditional arts, delegates should consider how the value of these art forms to different communities - such as the enjoyment of Malay and Peranakan arts by the Chinese community. Raising the profile of the traditional arts as a common public resource could encourage more open-mindedness and receptiveness towards pursuing these art forms professionally in the long run.

32: Said, Nabilah. "Stanford Arts Centre to Become a Centre for Traditional Arts." The Straits Times, April 25, 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/stanford-arts-centre-to-become-a-centre-for-traditional-arts>.

33: "Youth Arts Qualitative Study." NAC. <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/research/Research-Main-Page/Arts-Statistics-and-Studies/Children-Young-People-and-Seniors0/youth-arts-study.html>.

34: "Indian Dance Forms." Roots. National Heritage Board. <https://roots.sg/Roots/learn/resources/ich/performing-arts/indian-dance-forms>.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer



- 1) What can be done to increase the accessibility of the traditional arts for different audiences?
- 2) What measures can be put in place to encourage inter-cultural appreciation of the traditional arts? Furthermore, how can the traditional art forms of minority races become more prominent in the public eye?
- 3) How can the government reduce barriers to entry for potential traditional arts practitioners and facilitate education in the traditional arts?
- 4) What role can technology play in the preservation of the traditional arts?
- 5) To what degree should traditional arts forms modernise to attract audiences? How can the needs of traditional arts groups that do not wish to modernise continue to be met?
- 6) What can be done to inspire youths to appreciate and actively engage in traditional art forms and pursue them as a career?
- 7) What are the efforts that are needed for the traditional arts scene to flourish and be sustained in the long-term?