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Panel 1: The Politics of Access and Collectivity: Cultural Work Across Shifting Landscapes

Cultural Infrastructure in Malaysia—When Hardware Met Software In Collective Arts Practice as Network

Clarissa LIM Kye Lee and Ali Alasri (ERTI Research Collective)

This paper proposes the notion of arts collectives as cultural infrastructure in Malaysia. Arts collectives offer a reframing of cultural civic governance in Southeast Asia. Embedded and reinventing beyond industrial and market-driven paradigms, collectives tend to conceptualise infrastructure not as a fixed system, but as a dynamic framework. It enables the distribution of people, practices, and resources. In conjunction with 'culture,' this approach foregrounds infrastructure as a living process. The living process is the dynamic social process of how arts collectives are part of the labour and maintenance of distributing art and culture as cultural infrastructure in their spatial context. How is culture then embedded into the social mechanism of everyday life in the context of Malaysia?

By thinking through theoretical insights of existing social processes of mutual aid, we examine local practices of *gotong royong, turba,* and *nyantrik*[1]—which serve as informal mechanisms that embed and expand the role of cultural infrastructure. Current research describes how social processes are also layered into local regulation and is also part of cultural practices (Ng 2022; Bowen 1986). To see how such processes are also part of art and cultural social mobilisation calls for a cultural infrastructural analysis. These practices are dialectical between the conventional top-down support of cultural policy, to embracing everyday cultural practices, and inviting the public to practice cultural engagement (Bain and Podmore 2024; Janamohanan 2025). The relationship between the social politics can begin to unveil the pressure points of the continual labour and conflicts in the arts and cultural network.

Reconsidering how social mechanisms are integrated into top-down cultural policies raises further questions— how we can encourage access to arts and culture in urban infrastructure and planning?

The methodology includes mapping exercises, interviews and intertextual analysis both in a workshop and evaluating the language and distribution of resources of how current cultural policy affects arts collectives. This paper uses the outcomes of a workshop of a past curatorial project, Making Mamak, and cultural policy research. Making Mamak is a series of workshops held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2024 with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, for Malaysian arts collectives to explore their relationship to their urban environments for ways to reinscribe a concern for the social in contemporary art and architecture (Lim 2024).

The findings indicate cultural policy often fails to address the spatial requirements and terms of engagement to embrace the vitality of local creative ecosystems. The barrier towards embedded engagement requires careful examination of the neighbourhood surroundings and speaking with the current residents and everyday users and their relationship with the public, current mechanisms of engagement and market economy. There is a sense of class distinctions between who can enter, participate and use the cultural infrastructure. Everyday cultural practice such as *gotong-royong, turba and nyantrik* are embedded into the practice of arts collectives, to maintain the space and cohesion to overcome plot holes of existing cultural policy.

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[1] The three practices can be defined by the following:

Gotong-Royong: can be translated and understood as the practice of mutual assistance, collective aid, or reciprocal care. The term, distinct to the Malay and Indonesian archipelago, underscores the commitment of the individual to greater social and communal concerns. (Making Mamak, 2023)

Turba: which comes from turun ke bawah or going below, comes from a pedagogical method created by the Institutde of People's Culture in the 1950s to 1960s. (KUNCI, 2023)

Nyantrik: a Javanese word "an ascetic form of teaching evolved from Islamic boarding schools and now associated with traditional forms of performing arts in Indonesia" (KUNCI, 2023)

Grassroots Queer Curatorship in Macau: Soft Governance and Cultural Futures in a Small City

Xavier CHAN

Situated within a city like Macau where cultural life is tightly controlled and colonized by the spectacle of tourism, the Macau International Queer Film Festival (MIQFF) represents an unconventional example of grass-roots cultural governance. The festival, developed in 2023, has now taken place for three years untethered to any government or state-subsidized cultural infrastructure. It endures via informal labour, understated promotion and earned trust, illustrating how civil-society initiatives generate cultural worth in constrained settings.

The article relies on an elite interview with the founding director, program archives and fieldwork at the 2024 and 2025 festivals. The materials demonstrate how the site festival-making works on, what I have called, curated opacity. Only a bare minimum of promotion is undertaken: word of the festival tends to spread largely through friends telling friends rather than extensive in-the-money promotion. These maneuvers allow for visibility without unnecessarily endangering participants, a crucial calculus at a time when the stakes of being seen are so steep.

Instead of intervening through scale or spectacle, MIQFF governs quietly: an art of curation and care that takes hold in atmosphere, in rhythm, in affective nurturance. Venues are recycled to create familiarity, screenings are scheduled according to resonance rather than recency, and repeat attendance is a primary measure of success. Publics persist through the pleasure of repetition and the moments of shared silence at the end of a film, not through numerical growth.

Set against Macau's wider cultural field, MIQFF opposes the dominance of casino entertainment and heritage tourism in official policy. It expresses an alternate idea of cultural value, of durability rather than growth. The most important factor is not scale, but fit: the harmony between curatorial tone, audience trust, and the city's risk environment. Modest yet sustainable, the model demonstrates that local efforts can flourish by staying careful, relational, and small.

This orientation extends beyond Macau. Small-city festivals across Asia often work outside metropolitan cultural economies while underpinning infrastructures of cultural access. MIQFF suggests that policymakers should consider atmospheric and affective measures of success more carefully. Silence after a screening, repeated attendance, and an enduring presence in a modest venue can all count as lasting impact where visibility must be delicately managed. These are measures through which cultural governance shifts from growth and marketability to resonance and return.

Viewed in this manner, MIQFF is about much more than a festival. It is an experiment in the persistence of cultural life without institutions, sustained instead by rhythms, atmospheres, and discreet networks of address. These activities expand our ideas of what constitutes cultural infrastructure and signal the possibilities of peer-to-peer curation as a supplement to state policy. The lesson for small, resource-poor cities is clear: cultural futures can be secured not only by institutions but also by the quiet, relational work of communities that curate with care.

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Panel 1: The Politics of Access and Collectivity: Cultural Work Across Shifting Landscapes

Reimagining Cultural Access: Digital Museum Pedagogy and Rural Education in China

Lingran ZHANG

Amid China's widening rural-urban divide, cultural policy has increasingly emphasized equitable access to arts and heritage. However, state-led efforts often focus on physical infrastructure—new museums in county seats or performance troupes touring villages—without addressing the everyday constraints of rural schools. My research intervenes in this gap by exploring how digital museum resources, when integrated into rural classrooms, can reconfigure cultural relations, pedagogical practices, and community engagement.

This paper draws on a three-year study conducted in partnership with a rural primary school in Henan Province, where I taught weekly online art classes to Grade 5 students through an NGO platform. Working with local teachers and several museums, my designed curriculum connected national cultural heritage to students' lived experiences. Activities ranged from making traditional kites to creating clay zodiac animals using online museum resources for background knowledge. In addition, the project incorporated museum-led livestreams and a planned field trip to a regional museum, forming a hybrid model of digital and embodied learning.

Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of interviews with teachers, student reflections, and classroom observations, I argue that digital museum pedagogy offers a decentralized and participatory approach to cultural governance. Evaluation demonstrates that museum integration into rural classroom can support students' learning in academic success, cultural competences, and socio-political understanding. The online courses also serve as important survival strategy for rural schools lacking human and material resources. Rather than relying solely on top-down cultural dissemination, this model creates relational networks between national institutions, local educators, and rural learners. It reframes students not as passive recipients of heritage, but as co-creators of cultural meaning.

The paper situates this work within broader East Asian debates around cultural value and access. While China's museum sector has grown rapidly, rural communities remain peripheral in cultural policymaking. In an era where digital transformation and demographic decline are reshaping rural Asia, this case study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how creative futures can emerge from the margins. I propose a bottom-up framework for cultural policy that centers mutual accountability, community empowerment, and the imaginative potential of youth in under-resourced settings. My findings suggest that digital strategies—when thoughtfully mediated by local actors—can shift institutional priorities and support more just and inclusive futures. This work contributes to the conference's focus on topics of networks, communing practices, and technology innovation in artistic practices, pedagogy, and research.

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The In-Between Space of Cultural Work: Practices of Labor in a Shifting Cultural Landscape

Sukma SMITA Grah Brillianesti

This study extends a series of inquiries into the conditions of labour within Yogyakarta's art and cultural ecology, building on previous investigations into the experiences of young cultural workers engaged in volunteerism and internships. Rather than positioning these prior engagements as isolated, this research understands them as symptomatic of broader structural patterns—where communal values and working ideals are mobilized, yet often entangled with precarious material realities. Drawing from these foundations, the present research expands its scope beyond the festival circuit to trace the variegated labor formations among freelance practitioners, gallery staff, collective members, and organizers of cultural initiatives across the city's dense and vibrant art scene.

The notion of an in-between space serves as a conceptual entry point—marking a social and affective terrain where culturally embedded logics of work (mutuality, trust, embeddedness) converge and collide with formalized structures of professionalism (contracts, deadlines, deliverables, project-based management). This space is not only operational but ethical; not only practical but symbolic. It is here that negotiations around value, legitimacy, and labour take place, shaped by both inherited cultural vocabularies and shifting socio-economic conditions.

Grounded in the framework of moral economy and social and cultural capital, this research seeks to interrogate the romanticism often attached to "working together." While collectivism, voluntarism, and relational labour are central to how cultural work is narrated and performed in Yogyakarta, such practices can also obscure the asymmetries of power, informal exploitation, and the absence of structural protections. At the same time, this research recognizes how the same moral and cultural repertoires—rooted in forms of shared life, obligation, and aesthetic kinship—can be mobilized as quiet but enduring modes of resistance and refusal. In these gestures, value is not only negotiated but reinvented.

Yogyakarta, long celebrated as a city of art and cultural imagination, offers a particularly resonant context for this study. It is a city where alternative and institutional forms coexist, where collectives proliferate, and where the discursive life of art extends beyond exhibitions—into conversations, collaborations, refusals, and experiments. Art here is not only made and displayed, but lived with and through. The density of artistic events, from the ephemeral to the monumental, fosters a complex ecology of relations: between people, between institutions, and between competing notions of value.

Aligned with the conference theme Cultural Value, this research reflects on how cultural values in Yogyakarta are not merely inherited or symbolic, but actively operational in shaping labour relations, structuring legitimacy, and sustaining artistic life. These values inhabit a fragile balance: as tools for survival and self-determination, but also as contested sites where meaning, compensation, and belonging are negotiated. By foregrounding the everyday textures of cultural labour—its contradictions, attachments, and potentials—this study offers a situated contribution to reimagining the politics and poetics of cultural work in Asia's evolving creative futures.

CCP Thirteen Artists 2006 to present: Institutionalizing the artist-curator

Rica ESTRADA Uson and Con CABRERA

The Cultural Center of the Philippines' (CCP) Thirteen Artists Awards (TAA), a pioneering program for artistic validation in the country, has, since its 2006 exhibition, systematically engaged former awardees to curate succeeding exhibitions. This strategic institutionalization of the "artist-curator" role—a hybrid professional who bridges creative and critical practice—raises fundamental questions about the professionalization of the art world, the dynamics of community-building, and the direction of artistic discourse in the Philippines. Our presentation argues that while this model offers significant benefits, it also presents distinct challenges that warrant critical examination.

The practice of artists taking on curatorial and institutional roles has historical precedents in the Philippines, exemplified by figures like Roberto Chabet, who founded the TAA itself. However, the CCP's deliberate policy has formalized this relationship, transforming what was once an organic, sporadic occurrence into a codified system. By entrusting exhibition-making to individuals with an embodied knowledge of the creative process, the institution provides an official sanction to an identity that often thrives independently. This institutional endorsement is particularly vital in the Philippine context, where formal curatorial training and education programs are limited and where opportunities to curate are scarce when not done independently. In this sense, the CCP's program formalizes a system of peer-led curatorial practice, fostering a more collaborative ecosystem where artists are empowered to not only produce work but also to shape the narratives and conversations surrounding it. This inside-out approach reinforces the TAA's relevance and credibility, ensuring a curatorial perspective that is deeply connected to the realities of contemporary practice.

However, the celebration of the artist-curator's unique perspective is not without its challenges, particularly in the context of a professionalizing curatorial field. The skills that make artist-curators invaluable—their intimate understanding of materials and processes—can sometimes be a trade-off for other critical competencies. Unlike traditional curators with advanced degrees in art history or curatorial studies, artist-curators may lack formal training in academic and art writing, which are essential for producing scholarly texts, catalogue essays, and critical reviews that create a lasting archive for exhibitions. Furthermore, the logistical and managerial demands of a major exhibition, including budget oversight, contract negotiation, and staff leadership, are not necessarily inherent to artistic practice. A potential for aesthetic bias or conflicts of interest also exists, as an artist-curator may subconsciously favor a particular style or their personal circle, thereby limiting the scope and diversity of the exhibition.

Drawing on our personal experience with artist-curators within the TAA context, and our broader research on independent artist-curators and their self-initiated art spaces, this presentation will use the CCP's program as a case study to critically explore the evolving identity of the artist-curator. The talk aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on contemporary art, highlighting how artists are not only creating but also actively shaping the narratives, professional standards, and future direction of art in the Philippines. This presentation directly contributes to the "Shaping Asia's Creative Futures" theme by answering its key questions. We will show how a cultural policy led by a major institution has responded to an artistic phenomenon of artist-led curatorial practices, offering a model for what can be learned across Asia. The presentation will also highlight new relationships that define the Philippine cultural sector, demonstrating how practitioners work across the traditional boundaries of creative and critical practice. In doing so, we will explore how this specific model of self-organization and communing—fostered by a sense of solidarity among peers—contributes to shaping cultural policy and the overall art ecosystem.

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Panel 2: Staging Policy, Curating Practice: Rethinking Cultural Work in the Region

Cross-National Perspectives on the Sustainability of Regional Art Festivals: From Echigo-Tsumari to Nanhai

TENG Huimin

This study focuses on the sustainability of regional art festivals in the context of rural revitalization in Asia. Over the past decades, regional art festivals, represented by the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale in Japan, have emerged and developed, later influencing neighboring countries. With their growing numbers, such festivals are increasingly recognized for their role in local development. While existing studies have highlighted their positive impacts, both the sustainability of the festivals themselves and their contribution to long-term local development remain contested. As cross-national transfers of regional art festival model increase, it becomes necessary to examine how similar practices diverge under different institutional and social conditions.

This paper undertakes a comparative study of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale in Japan and the Art Field Nanhai in China. Both aim to revitalize rural areas through art, yet they are situated in distinct governance frameworks and cultural contexts. The analysis is structured around four dimensions: governance, focusing on policy backgrounds, the distribution of responsibilities, and the role of institutional support in shaping development paths; cultural practices, examining how artworks interpret local narratives and reinforce place identity; social participation, considering residents, volunteers, and the formation of new community networks; and economic aspects, assessing the festivals' effects on local business activities and regional economies.

Preliminary observations suggest that sustainability is not a predetermined outcome but a dynamic process involving negotiation and tension among multiple stakeholders. This study aims to contribute an empirical perspective to discussions of cultural policy and rural revitalization in East Asia, while also demonstrating the methodological value of cross-national comparison and participatory observation in understanding the conditions of sustainability for regional art festivals.

Philippine Dance Higher Education: Discourse, Practice, and Policy Innovation

Eugene Ellison Chan ONG

Despite the growing global recognition of artists' contributions to the economy, dance remains underrepresented in research and policy, particularly in developing contexts such as the Philippines. Incomplete data, inconsistent statistics, and the absence of regulatory standards obscure the sector's cultural and economic value, leading to misinformed budget allocations, weak institutional support, and persistent misconceptions that dance is a non-academic or unsustainable career path. This study addresses these gaps by examining the systemic factors that limit the credibility and visibility of dance and its practitioners, the strategies dancers employ to sustain their practice, and the institutional responsibilities necessary for affirming the profession's legitimacy.

Guided by four research questions, this inquiry explores: (a) the underlying causes of dance's marginalization, (b) how Filipino practitioners navigate creative and non-creative sectors, (c) which institutions should assume responsibility for shaping supportive policies, and (d) what strategies may foster long-term viability for dance as a profession. Using an artist-researcher lens, the study synthesizes literature on cultural economics, education, and policy with the lived narratives of Filipino dance practitioners across higher education, community, and industry contexts.

Findings reveal that economic barriers—particularly high taxation, limited funding mechanisms, and informal labor practices—restrict the sector's growth and drive many practitioners to operate outside formal systems or seek stable careers abroad. Culturally, dancers demonstrate high creative and artistic capacity, yet continue to be framed narrowly as entertainers, an outlook reinforced by media representations and a lack of enforceable ethical and professional standards. Educationally, while some universities have introduced interdisciplinary and practice-based approaches, dance curricula remain uneven in quality, lacking coherence, progression, and industry alignment. These structural gaps perpetuate the undervaluation of dance in both academic and professional settings.

The study argues that higher education institutions (HEIs) occupy a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. By embedding competencies that align with both cultural imperatives and labor market needs, HEIs can serve as catalysts for systemic reform. Structured pathways such as curriculum integration, industry partnerships, and expanded accreditation mechanisms may bridge gaps between education, industry, and policy. However, transformation also requires a multi-stakeholder approach in which Filipino dance communities, faculty, students, and governing bodies collaborate to ensure sustainable reforms supported by institutional and policy frameworks.

Ultimately, this research affirms that dance is not inherently less viable than other professions; rather, its marginalization stems from systemic economic, cultural, and educational inequities. By recognizing dance as both an art form and a cultural product with measurable contributions to national development, the sector can be repositioned as a vital component of the creative economy. In doing so, this work aspires to inform curriculum innovation, influence cultural policy, and advance international reporting on creative economies by demonstrating how dance service contributions can be systematically identified, measured, and forecasted.

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Panel 2: Staging Policy, Curating Practice: Rethinking Cultural Work in the Region

Bridging Page and Stage: Towards a Practice-informed Pedagogy for Theatre Arts Managers in Singapore

Fervyn Kate TAN Yin Jing

Bridging the theatre arts managers' page and stage - in response to a time where arts managers are redefining our work and relationships in the ever-evolving arts and cultural sectors, this thesis navigates between educational theories, cultural policy framings, and societal expectations to the complex demands of real-world practice, to investigate the persistent gap between theatre art managers' education and the realities of their professional practice in Singapore. It examines across the individual, institutional and sectoral levels, and considers how a practice-informed pedagogy could serve as a bridge.

The research draws on three interrelated data sources in Singapore's context: semi-structured interviews with local theatre arts managers, a review of arts management curricula in key institutions, and an analysis of national cultural policy documents. Together, these triangulate an exploration of how arts managers learn, grow, and are positioned in the arts ecosystem, in relation to the education system and the cultural policy landscape.

Arts managers are central to sustaining artistic production, yet their contributions are often undervalued in policy and educational narratives, particularly in the early stages of their careers, where they are defined in narrow, functional terms. This disjuncture risks limiting their recognition, growth, and long-term sustainability within the arts ecosystem. While cultural policy roadmaps in Singapore emphasise the arts as tools for nation-building, social cohesion, and economic growth, they seldom identify arts managers as distinct actors. This lack of mention inadvertently influences educational priorities, where programmes tend to focus on competencies that mirror state-driven objectives for the workforce such as efficiency and productivity, leaving underdeveloped the capacities that practitioners themselves identify as vital for effective practice.

Guided by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) as its primary analytical lens, the study highlights how much of an arts manager's professional knowledge emerges not through formal instruction but through lived experience, dialogical exchange, and reflective practice. In this light, the omission of arts managers in cultural policy risks positioning them primarily as administrators of systems rather than collaborators in the co-creation of cultural value. Such positioning not only limits their agency but also narrows the collective understanding of creativity in the arts.

Drawing from the triangulated analysis of interviews, curricula, and policy documents, the findings developed into practice-informed approaches considered across four themes: redefining the arts manager's role; recognising creativity as a shared endeavour; valuing dialogical education; and cultivating a broader, systems-level understanding of the field. From these, the thesis proposes a triadic framework for professional development at three levels - self, community, and sector. The final recommendations discussed offer starting points for building a more relational adaptive, and critical pedagogy, alongside better-defined, co-creative, and sustainably supported pathways for theatre arts managers in Singapore.

To conclude, this presentation offers a perspective on how cultural policy framings of arts managers indirectly shape their training priorities, value, and sustained practice. Bridging this page-to-stage gap is therefore a cultural policy concern alongside a pedagogical one, as addressing it requires greater macro alignment between how arts managers are positioned in government prerogatives, taught in institutions, and grounded in professional realities