

the first comprehensive attempt to document and discuss the evolution of Singapore from 1945 to the present. I congratulate IPS and Terence Chong for this book.

Tommy Koh

Former Chairman of the National Arts Council, National Heritage Board and the 1991 Censorship Review Committee

most comprehensive and meticulously assembled collection of in-depth insights into the policies and institutes. For a theatre practitioner who is deeply interested in the policies that influence our arts practices, this book is a must-read. It is a good read for artists, civil servants, politicians, scholars and anyone else interested in how the arts in Singapore have evolved through the years. From the historical to the arts' instrumental role in nation-building, this book provides a comprehensive overview of our existing and most influential arts policies. As for artists, this book will help them to reclaim our role in contemporary society.

Alvin Tan

Artistic Director of The Necessary Stage, and 2014 Cultural Medallion winner

In addressing the gap hitherto in our understanding of Singapore's arts scene, this book bridges that gap with a "multi-angulation" (not just triangulation) of the most thoughtful and authoritative independent voices on the subject. Where the three most important considerations are location, time, and the three most important factors of this book are that it is enlightening, informative, and fun. This is everything you ever wanted to know about the state and its arts policies, were afraid to ask, or more accurately, didn't know where to look. I mentioned that I found it enlightening?

Chew Kheng Chuan

Chairman of The Substation Ltd, and member of the Intercultural Theatre Institute board

One of the key arts policies and art institutions which have shaped the country from the 1950s to the present.

In this volume critically assess arts policies and arts institutions to provide an overview of how arts and culture have been deployed by the state. The book is chronologically to cover milestone events from the forging of 'Malayan' to the 'anti-yellow culture' campaign; the use of 'culture' for tourism; the National Arts Council on Arts and Culture, the Renaissance City Report, the National Day of the Arts, and others.

That Singapore is a 'cultural desert', this volume is valuable reading for artists, policy makers who seek an understanding of Singapore's cultural landscape. For non-artistic readers interested in Singapore's arts and cultural policy.

CHONG

THE STATE & THE ARTS
IN SINGAPORE

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THE STATE & THE ARTS IN SINGAPORE

Policies and Institutions



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Editor

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Chapter 5

The Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts

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Introduction

The Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) released in 1989 is widely seen as the signature document, which laid the path for Singapore's arts development in the late 20th century. The Economic Committee that convened after the recession identified the "services sector" as a potential growth area and advocated a national strategy to accelerate the development of this sector to complement the traditional manufacturing sector as "twin engines" of growth for Singapore (Economic Review Committee, 2003). In view of the economic imperative underlying our arts and cultural policy directions, I have chosen to focus on the arts labour aspect of Singapore's arts policy arising from the ACCA Report. At the same time, it is important to place the ACCA Report in a historical perspective and consider developments in the arts and cultural scene of Singapore in the 1980s, particularly movements and activities occurring "on the ground." This chapter will firstly discuss the key recommendations of the ACCA Report in the context of Singapore's arts scene then, and then offer a perspective on how the "arts workforce" has emerged and been nurtured since the 1980s.

The ACCA Report has been described as “a significant report, marking the first dedicated recognition of the value of arts and culture for a maturing nation” (Kong, 2012, p. 281), as well as the “first serious official expression” of the economic potential of arts and culture (Chong, 2014, p. 24). It was noted by Tan (2009, p. 428) as a “watershed event” in the evolution of Singapore from a cultural desert to the so-called “Global City for the Arts.” The ACCA Report can also be seen as a logical offshoot of the Singapore government’s economic strategy, which had undergone a serious review in the wake of the recession of 1985. The first since Singapore’s independence, the recession prompted a recognition that the high-growth years were over, that the nation was inevitably exposed to the effects of economic globalisation and that Singaporeans could no longer expect future growth to “rebound to its previous average of 9%” (Economic Committee, 1986). Kong (2012) notes that the impact of the recession on Singapore’s future cultural and arts policy development should not be ignored and that the Economic Committee’s recommendations included the arts, culture and entertainment such as the performing arts, museums and art galleries, although these were categorised alongside film productions and theme parks. However, it also indicated the government’s perception of arts and culture not as public goods in their own right but as part of a sector with commercial potential, geared towards providing entertainment for the public and tourists.

Politically, too, change was in the air in the 1980s. There was leadership renewal in the government with a second generation of ministers groomed to take over from Singapore’s founding Old Guard under Lee Kuan Yew. An indication was the appointment of two Deputy Prime Ministers (DPMs), Ong Teng Cheong and Goh Chok Tong, both instrumental figures in the ACCA. The ACCA was one of six advisory committees looking into what could be said to be the “softer” side of Singapore’s future development, such as education, health, heritage and social services, and were coordinated from the office of Goh, then first DPM (Lim, 2009). This move suggests that the government had recognised that Singapore’s future could be predicated not only on hard economics but also on human and social development.

In 1990, the year after the ACCA submitted its report, Goh Chok Tong took over as Prime Minister from Lee Kuan Yew, marking a

transition from the authoritarian style of the Old Guard leadership to a more consultative style. The new political tone was influential, with Devan (2009, p. 31) opining that, during the Goh Chok Tong years, from 1990 to 2004, a “calibrated programme of social liberalisation” had taken place. The 1970s, broadly characterised by the government’s fears of the so-called “yellow culture” found in modern popular culture, gave way to an era of greater arts and cultural expression in the 1990s. At the same time, concerns about nation building and social cohesion were highlighted by the government. The White Paper on Shared Values was released in 1991 in an attempt to anchor Singaporeans to their nation and home through social and familial bonds. The new Prime Minister also spoke openly about cultivating a gracious society in Singapore, and the arts gained the attention of more politicians. Kong (2000) cites some Members of Parliament in the early 1990s pushing in parliament for more government support for arts and culture, albeit on the basis of developing tourism, producing culture for export and making Singapore a global arts marketplace. Goh himself wrote in his reply to the official letter from DPM Ong accompanying the submission of the ACCA Report that “we have reached a stage in our economic and national development where we should devote greater attention and resources to culture and the arts in Singapore” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989).

While the ACCA Report was noteworthy for its recognition of the intrinsic benefits of arts and culture, it also carried a subtext concerning the arts as instruments for economic benefit and social bonding. It begins with a clear statement on “the importance of culture and the arts” and lists four aspects of how arts and culture benefit the public: firstly, arts and culture can “broaden our minds and deepen our sensibilities”; secondly, it can “improve the quality of life”; thirdly, it can “strengthen our social bond”; and lastly, it can “contribute to our tourism and entertainment sectors” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 3). Here, the ACCA Report made a distinction between arts and culture *vis-à-vis* entertainment, a distinction that makes sense when the report is read against the context of Singapore’s arts development as well as the political aspirations at that time. The economic spin-offs of the arts were not yet fully articulated.

The ACCA Report

The ACCA was formed in February 1988 with the purpose of offering recommendations to make Singapore a “culturally vibrant society by the turn of the century” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989). It was therefore also tasked to craft a vision for Singapore’s long-term arts and cultural development. Read in this light, one could say that the ACCA Report laid the foundation for future government-issued policy papers such as the Renaissance City Report of 2000. The council was headed by second DPM Ong Teng Cheong, who was well-known for championing the cause of culture. Other members were drawn from the civil service (including the Ministries of Education and Finance), the private sector, the media and the arts scene. They were Arun Mahizhnan, Chia Kee Koon, Er Kwong Wah, Hawazi Daipi, Ho Kwon Ping, Koh Cher Siang, Leslie Fong, Loy Teck Juan, Prof. Edwin Thumboo, Robert Iau, Haji Suhaimi Jais, Tay Kheng Soon, Mrs Wong-Lee Siok Tin, Yeo Seng Teck and Vincent Yip. The secretariat was the then Ministry of Community Development, which also held the arts and culture portfolio. Under the council were also other committees on heritage, literary arts, performing arts, visual arts and a “new cultural development agency” (Lim, 2009). Members of the public and the arts community were also consulted in the process. The ACCA Report was completed in 1989.

The ACCA Report gave an overview of the contemporary arts and cultural scene in Singapore, identified the gaps that were holding back its development, proposed a vision for the future and recommended various strategies towards achieving that vision. The vision was to have a Singapore that was “culturally vibrant” and where Singaporeans were “well-informed, creative, sensitive and gracious” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 5). This also meant that Singaporeans should be literate in their multicultural heritage, producing “collective art forms” from that heritage, and that Singapore should aspire to be an international arts hub and marketplace, thus prefiguring the “Global City for the Arts” rhetoric that took hold in the following decade.

In terms of an overview of the sector, the ACCA Report pointed out that there was grassroots activity in the arts as well as state-organised and state-sponsored events, such as the Festival of Arts — which in fact had celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1988 (Purushothaman, 2008, p. 40). There were a total of 1,700 events staged in 1988, with 410,000 people having attended

performing arts events and visitors to the National Museum (then the only “national” museum) numbering 320,000. The Arts Housing Scheme, administered by the Ministry of Community Development, had already been in existence since 1985 and provided subsidised rehearsal, studio or office space to 23 arts organisations in four converted school buildings.

However, there were clear limitations in arts and cultural provision at that time. With regards to infrastructure, the report noted the inadequacy of the existing theatres and other facilities, including the National Museum galleries and storage space for the national art collection. There was also a lack of government support and grants to the arts, an example being that only 10% of the funding for the 1988 Festival of Arts had come from the government. Audiences also lacked “sustained interest” in the arts, while the pool of trained and qualified arts professionals for artistic creation as well as administration needs was small. Top-level educational opportunities for these personnel were also lacking. The report also found that licensing procedures for public performances were overly complicated and that, at the ministry level, there was a lack of coordination among the agencies handling culture and heritage.

To address these gaps, the report proposed focusing on the development of arts audiences, talent and administrators, developing infrastructure, encouraging the creation of Singapore works (which, incidentally, was already in the programming strategy of the Festival of Arts, where local arts groups were invited to stage new shows) and “stepping up” the number of arts activities (this remains one of the indicators of “cultural vibrancy”). As with all government reports, the emphasis was on what the state could do to stimulate activity on the ground. Many of the report’s recommendations have altered the local arts scene. Among the noteworthy recommendations were: the formation of the various statutory boards for arts, heritage and culture, such as the National Heritage Board, the National Arts Council and the National Library Board; the eventual building of an art museum, in the former St. Joseph’s Institution in Stamford Road, and other museums¹; and the development of a

¹The report recommended a children’s museum in the old Tao Nan School and, additionally, a Southeast Asian or ethnology or natural history museum. The old Tao Nan School is now the Peranakan Museum, while the Asian Civilisations Museum is in Empress Place. The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum opened this year at the National University of Singapore.

Singapore Arts Centre, which became established as the Esplanade — Theatres on the Bay (all discussed in this volume). The establishment of these statutory agencies and major arts institutions set the stage for institution building in Singapore's arts and cultural landscape. It engendered an arts ecology that looked to major state-run or state-funded institutions to drive Singapore's global city ambitions while supporting a large pool of smaller-scale, non-governmental arts organisations and individual artists who would be the creative engines for new Singapore content. These developments also placed our system of government support for the arts in parallel to the systems in the United Kingdom and Australia.

Preparing the “Hardware” and “Software” of the Arts

The 1980s were a time of burgeoning local expression in the arts. Indeed, the state had expanded its involvement in the arts, even though the government's arts funding stood at just 0.2% of the national budget (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 4). The Singapore Cultural Foundation, which was set up in 1978 under the Ministry of Community Development, was later amalgamated under the National Arts Council (NAC) when the latter was established in 1991. The state also organised the Singapore Festival of Arts, which had been relaunched in 1977, as well as other festivals, such as the Drama Festival, the National Short Story Writing Competition, the Short Play Writing Competition, the National Day Art Fair and Singapore Heritage Week.

In terms of building infrastructure, the major theatre venues, such as the Kallang Theatre, Victoria Theatre, Victoria Concert Hall and Drama Centre, were operated by the state. The National Museum Art Gallery, set up in 1976, was presenting formally curated exhibitions, thus introducing the idea of a “curatorial based art museum” to Singapore's visual artists (Kwok, 1996, p. 151), and acted as a stimulus to further artistic activity in the visual arts.² As far back as 1981, the Ministry of Culture supported Brother Joseph McNally's setting up of St. Patrick's Art Centre — the forerunner of today's

² Kwok (1996) also noted the importance of infrastructure to the development of Singapore art, saying that “the history of art in Singapore can be narrated through the development of art events and exhibitions since much of its stimulus can be attributed to the emergence of an infrastructure” (p. 150).

LASALLE College of the Arts — with a grant of S\$30,000 for refurbishing a shed into a sculpture workshop (Lim, 2011). Perhaps more significantly for the creation of original Singapore art works was the Arts Housing Scheme, which is still in existence today. Brother McNally's LaSalle was one of the earliest beneficiaries, housed at the former Telok Kurau East School (Lim, 2011). Other arts housing properties dating from the 1980s included the Telok Ayer Performing Arts Centre, which housed various theatre, dance and fine art groups, providing them mainly with office space but, in some cases, with valuable rehearsal space as well.

The ACCA Report paid attention to the human resource problem in the arts by noting that “we have an inadequate pool of artistes, arts administrators, arts entrepreneurs and other professionals needed to support greater cultural development in Singapore” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 4). If activities and infrastructural development were to be ramped up for a culturally vibrant Singapore, then there was a serious need for a workforce ready to take on the work of culture building. In the discussion that follows, I will pay special attention to the “software” aspects: the arts workforce and the various government strategies adopted since then to address the “inadequacy” in this field, specifically in the arts sector³ rather than heritage and the library sectors, which were also covered in the ACCA Report.

Impact of the ACCA Report on the Arts Community

Against the backdrop of some government support and state-run festivals in the 1980s, Singaporean artists and theatre groups were innovating rapidly in terms of artistic expression as well as experimenting with new art forms and genres that until then had not been seen locally even though they were commonplace in the West.⁴ Some of the experimentation was a direct result of Singaporean artists having studied abroad and bringing new knowledge home. Experimental forms in the performing and visual arts, such as devised theatre, site-specific theatre, performance art and

³ The focus will mainly be on the performing and visual arts.

⁴ See, for example, Wee (2003) for an analysis of artistic developments in Singapore at that time.

installation art, were much in the public eye and quickly accepted by audiences. At the vanguard of these explorations, which often critiqued social mores and trends, were theatre companies like The Necessary Stage (established in 1986), TheatreWorks (1985), The Theatre Practice (1985) and the Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre (1987). The creators of these energetic artistic works were mainly from the post-independence generation, who had grown up in the late 1960s and 1970s, but there were also senior artists providing leadership, such as Kuo Pao Kun and visual artist Tang Da Wu, who founded an artists' collective, The Artists Village, at a farm in Sembawang as a "critical response to the *petit-bourgeois* urban society that Singapore was becoming" (Wee, 2003, p. 86). The apparent sudden flourishing of the arts may be argued to be a response to the changing socio-political conditions during the 1980s, when the country felt the impact of globalisation, not least in the shape of the aforementioned 1985 recession, and the uncertainties that it engendered.

Beyond experimenting with expression and genre, Singaporean artists were also testing out new forms of organisation, working as groups and collectives, and learning how to manage these groups, promote their works to the public, liaise with the media and obtain support from the government. In short, they were learning arts management too. The first major arts company of national significance, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, had already been in existence since 1979. The first professional theatre company was children's theatre company Act 3, formed in 1984, and TheatreWorks soon followed suit. The Singapore Dance Theatre, under the leadership of Goh Soo Khim and Anthony Then, with a full-time company of dancers, was established in 1988. From the urban-rural collective utopia of The Artists Village to the establishment of arts groups as "professional" companies with decision-making and governance structures, they were discovering the ways that make it possible to sustain an artistic practice. Yet, this was still a time when most arts practitioners were only part-time or "hobby" artists who held full-time jobs elsewhere and practiced their art in the evenings or on weekends:

At that time, the idea of making decent money from theatre was unheard of, at least in Singapore. Then, "theatre practitioners" could only tread the boards on a sporadic basis at night, before returning to their full-time day jobs in the morning. (Koh, 2013, p. 6)

Over the next two decades, more such "hobbyists" would become arts professionals, either practicing the arts or working in the arts (as administrators, curators and so on) on a full-time basis. We could trace this back to the ACCA Report's recommendation to "build up a pool of good artistes, arts administrators, arts entrepreneurs and other related professionals" (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 5).

Even though the ACCA Report had recommended that the NAC be a non-profit company, the government set it up as a statutory board in 1991. As a statutory board, it had the mandate of distributing state funding to arts groups and artists and managing state resources. On one hand, artists and arts groups finally obtained what they were looking for, namely, systemic state support for their work. But this support came with strings attached and set in motion the subsequent dynamics between the artist and the state in Singapore whereby the arts in the 1990s began to settle into a particular *modus operandi* as state funding became a normalised means of support for the presentation of the arts. On the other hand, the artists soon realised, through the 5th Passage controversy of 1993 and the furore over Forum Theatre, that, as the state became more involved, it would have to be taken into account as a key stakeholder, and this would impact on artistic independence and freedom. In other words, the ACCA Report ushered in both state support and influence.

The ACCA Report, however, made it possible for artists gradually to professionalise through state funding. State funding enabled organisations to plan ahead, present better-quality productions and hire full- or part-time artistic or administrative staff. Two of the NAC's grants schemes addressed immediate needs of the theatre scene: the Theatre Grant funded projects by selected "major arts groups" as denoted by the NAC and enabled them to access priority booking of theatres, while an Annual Grant was given to nine arts groups, including Young Musicians' Society, Singapore Wind Symphony, Yan Choong Lian Dance Troupe (now Dance Ensemble Singapore), Theatre Arts Troupe and Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society Singapore (National Arts Council, 1992). Some arts groups listed under these schemes are still active today. In addition to grants, there was the Arts Housing Scheme, which provided a stable space, even if just an office space, for arts groups. The significance of an office space cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on the growth of an arts group: it confers legitimacy and identity, enables bonding of group members and has facilities to organise the

manifold operations of putting up a production for public view, such as office telephones to answer public queries, fax machines to send letters to sponsors and desk space to work from.

The training of the arts workforce was also given attention. From the start, the NAC administered scholarships and bursaries for further studies for artists and musicians in both local and overseas higher education institutions. Some of these scholarships were funded by private parties, such as the Rotary Club, Goodwood Hotel and Shell, which was a significant sponsor of the arts in the 1980s. There was a special scholarship/bursary scheme for students pursuing art studies at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the LASALLE College of the Arts (National Arts Council, 1992). In addition to support for studies leading to an educational qualification, the NAC also provided grants for practitioners to go on short-term training courses, workshops and seminars from the very first year of its operation.

The artists themselves also provided important training for arts practitioners. Kuo Pao Kun at the Practice Performing Arts School ran various courses, where young artists such as Ang Gey Pin, Ong Keng Sen and Alvin Tan emerged. Stage and production managers and lighting and technical designers were also trained. Raising standards in the technical aspects of arts production then was generally left to the practitioners themselves, as the NAC's grants focused on artists' training. The *TheatreWorks* 25 anniversary publication recounts how Lim Yu Beng, who had studied theatre in the United States, shocked the staff at the NAC-run Drama Centre when he presented them with a detailed plan for the lighting and set for a TheatreWorks production (Koh, 2013, p. 46). Other courses for practitioners and beginners were also organised at The Substation when it was opened in 1990. These were run by teachers and practitioners like the late Christina Sergeant, Roger Jenkins and Suven Chan. Most theatre and arts groups had been organising their own training, drawing from what they had learnt in other workshops, from visiting artists or their own experience. Two examples were TheatreWorks' actors training ensemble and William Teo's work with his ensemble at the Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre. In the meantime, the traditional arts had always sustained training for performers and students even without state funding.

By the late 1980s, with the increased public visibility of several artists and arts groups, the state was beginning to embark on partnerships with

these privately run, non-profit groups in the development of arts infrastructure in Singapore, perhaps acknowledging that cultural vibrancy depended equally on the creative spirit of the people. Two watershed infrastructural development partnerships from this period were Black Box at Fort Canning Centre, which became the base of TheatreWorks, and The Substation, a former power substation along Armenian Street, which became Singapore's first multidisciplinary arts centre, run by Kuo Pao Kun's Practice Performing Arts company in the first 5 years of its existence. Thus, arts development at this time could perhaps be characterised as a confluence of energies from the state and from arts practitioners on the ground, though this relationship was not without tension.

In the short years after the ACCA Report, there was indeed growth in the arts sector in the early 1990s. Professor Tommy Koh, the first Chairman of the NAC, noted that between 1991 and 1992 — the first year of the NAC's existence — usage of Singapore's 14 theatres had increased by 20% while the number of performances had increased by 27% and the number of exhibitions by 16% (National Arts Council, 1992). Such quantitative indicators, and the economic imperative for arts and cultural policy, became more entrenched in the 1990s. The Economic Development Board's Creative Services Development Plan led to increased funding for the development of more arts and cultural "hardware," including new museums, as well as other stimuli to grow the broader creative industries sector (Kong, 2012, p. 282), which provided new jobs in the arts for Singaporeans. By the mid-1990s, the idea of a new "cultural economy" had taken root, where "the film, media, music and design industries came to be viewed as among the range of industries that could produce exports for the country" (Kong, 2012, p. 282). Although one can assume that more Singaporeans were being employed in the sector, there do not appear to be statistics for employment in arts and culture prior to the 2000s. However, by 2003, there were 20,677 people employed in the sector, rising to 24,795 in 2009 (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2011). In 2000, there were over 42,000 people employed in the overall "Creative Industries" sector, which comprised media, design and arts and culture (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2004, p. 13). Nevertheless, being able to focus on one's art form full-time remained a real struggle for many arts practitioners. The statistics at the

end of the 1990s hint at this. At the time of the ACCA Report, there were just 170 registered societies that organised “cultural events” (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989, p. 3). The Renaissance City Report of 2000 states that, in 1998, the number of arts groups had risen to 190 arts companies, with a further 213 art groups and societies (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000, p. 18). Yet, the report notes an imbalance here: out of these 403 companies and societies, there are only 18 “major arts groups,” about half of which are drama groups. A “major arts group” is defined as a company with an artistic vision, with leadership in place, a record of consistent quality work and full-time artistic and administrative staff (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000, p. 18). Hence, full-time employment in the arts, at least in the non-government sector, was limited. There was a clear divide between the major state-run institutions, such as museums, and the non-government sector arts organisations that were crucial for the creation of Singapore content in the arts.

Impact of the ACCA Report on Artistic Labour

More than 25 years after the publication of the ACCA Report, it remains unclear whether the recommendation to develop a professional “arts workforce” has been realised. In 1989, it was common for most arts practitioners to present and create work in their free time; in the 21st century, artists, administrators, managers and production and technical personnel are working on a full-time basis in addition to a rather shadowy economy of freelancers and part-timers. According to the Workforce Development Agency’s website, more than 24,800 people are currently employed in the arts and cultural sector, more than 47,300 professionals are employed in the design industry, and more than 66,000 people in the media sector. It is difficult to state with certainty exactly who these arts and creative workers in these statistics are and whether they graduated from tertiary arts institutions, and it is impossible to state whether new entrants sustain careers in the sector. This is partly because the arts and creative sector is not always clearly defined when it comes to national statistics, and it is arguable which areas of work and employment constitute this sector. For instance, in the cultural statistics of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts from 2003 to 2009, the definition of the arts and creative

cluster include the wholesale and retail sale of photographic goods within the category of “visual arts” and news vendors within the category of “book publishing and sales.” The “visual arts” category also includes art, craft and toys (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2010, p. 47).

Kong (2011) summarises the factors that make it difficult to gather accurate statistics on employment in the arts and creative sector. One major reason is the rise of what is called the “portfolio career,” in which the creative worker goes where the projects are, rather than staying permanently with an employer or corporation. Careers do not depend on moving up the ladder of hierarchy within a corporation, but on reputation and quality of work from one project to the next. There are also periods of unemployment for creative workers. However, the worker is not necessarily out of a job, he or she may be attending a course or a residency, working on a non-paying project, and so on. Another reason lies in the very definition of “freelancer,” which in actuality relies on the worker identifying himself or herself as such.⁵ Official employment and tax statistics may not present a full spectrum of creative workers, as some may not earn enough to declare taxes, or some might not declare their earnings, particularly if the income is derived from part-time work. Despite the number of students studying the arts and applied arts, and the development of a professional workforce, the spectre of “precarity” is very much present for those in the arts and creative sectors. This phenomenon is common in other countries pursuing a creative industries policy (Kong, 2011).

The extent to which artists can support themselves and their practice is variable. In a small study of 182 freelance artists and creatives in 2010 which I carried out, some respondents indicated that their income did not increase despite working an increasing number of years in the sector. Thus, unlike conventional professions, seniority does not guarantee stability of

⁵This was discovered by the author while conducting an independent study into freelancers in Singapore in 2010 which included a survey of freelance artists and creatives. A few respondents classified themselves as “freelancers” even though they were in full-time employment in a non-creative sector, and some visual artists resisted using the term “freelancer” as a means of describing their employment status.

income. The majority of respondents (67%) had an annual income of less than \$60,000, with 35% of respondents indicating their annual income was less than \$15,000 (this might be due to some of them being part-time creative workers holding full-time jobs elsewhere).

Conclusion

Singapore's arts sector has come a long way since 1989, through the combined promotion of education and economic policies. While attention has been given to the hardware and software aspects of arts and cultural development, obstacles to the flourishing of human talent remain. If one considers artistic creation to be at the heart of arts and cultural development, then human "software" should be at the heart of the policies. Yet, Singapore's artists continue to feel a lack of recognition and support. Articulating arts policies in tandem with policies for the creative industries and the economic benefits therein may have led to a separation between the fine arts and the wider creative sector. Ooi (2011) contends that fine artists have been "subjugated in the creative industries" in 21st-century Singapore and argues that, while artists have internalised the market logic of the creative economy, they feel disadvantaged in terms of social status and the state's proscriptions on artistic freedom and its ideas of what constitutes art that should be celebrated. He states: "In spite of the attempts at promoting the arts in Singapore, fine artists are still struggling to get recognition for their profession and products" (2011, p. 132).

Reading the report today, it is interesting to see the committee's interest in the "softer" aspects of state policy, namely the attempt to articulate an intrinsic need for arts and culture in Singapore as well as a clear recognition of the importance of human labour for artistic creation, even if it is ultimately to serve an economic and nation-building agenda. Going by the statistics, Singapore today can be said to be "culturally vibrant." And yet we are still compelled to ask the question of how to secure a future for what we have established — a future that ought to be built on a core of artistic talent and creation.

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