

RSOG Seminar

“Preserving Malaysian Heritage through Creative Industry”

with

Mrs. Low Ngai Yuen

When : 27 January 2015
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Mrs. Low Ngai Yuen

About The Seminar

As a culturally diverse nation, understanding and appreciating other cultures is crucial for the nation’s stability. One of the medium for the preservation and the promotion of cultural heritage is through arts and creative industry. According to Chalmers Graeme in his book “Celebrating Pluralism, Art Education and Cultural Diversity,” arts is “*a powerful and pervasive force that shapes our attitude, values and beliefs.*” However, our current generation is no longer attracted to traditional cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, and archives. Various mediums of the arts such as dance, music, plays, and advertisements are becoming more popular with the masses. Sadly, most of these comprise contemporary elements of foreign culture that are embedded in the mainstream media, creating a disconnect from our national identity and colourful heritage. Nevertheless, the appeal of new mediums of arts and the creative industry such as theatre, buskers, dance, and advertisements can also be used to evoke a sense of identity, hence bringing people from different backgrounds together and fostering unity. This session served to examine the power of multicultural art in preserving and promoting Malaysian heritage and multiculturalism.

Summary

Arts is often the expression of creative skills that would capture one’s attention and cause immediate interactivity. Arts and the creative industry often sparks contentious debates on its meaning and practicality. The creative industry can be categorised into

multiple branches. These include performing arts such as theatre and film; and visual arts such as paintings and sculptures. The advent of the internet has seen a change in the way we look at arts through its reinvention, reconfiguration, and relevance. Music, film, and television for instance are impacted heavily by how people are consuming works of arts on the internet. How arts are being discussed, consumed, and configured are important dimensions when talking about the creative industry.

A key discussion in what constitutes the arts is whether a certain genre or piece of art can be considered as a heritage or not. Heritage, whether in the form of inherited traditions, monuments, objects, or culture, usually have the consensus of many and is owned in a sense as a representation of the society. Most of the time, art that is considered as heritage may not been considered as such 20 or 30 years before; and they are often underestimated and downplayed during their time. P. Ramlee's works, for instance, was not recognized until after his death. It is important to be mindful that heritage is often a product that serves as representation of the society as a whole instead of certain segments of the society alone. The preservation of arts on the other hand is the act of preserving, safeguarding, protecting, maintaining, and conserving a certain heritage. Preserving cultural arts is usually easier in its tangible forms such as historical sites instead of the intangible forms such as the collective tradition of the society. Therefore, it is important that efforts are not focused just on tangible cultural values but also the less tangible ones so that they will not be missed by future generations.

It is vital to also focus the discussion on the issue of the arts and creative industry on its development. Whereas a lot, though not necessarily enough, has been done on the preservation of the arts, the development of arts should not be overlooked. Reference to the arts are more focused on past works and less on its future evolution. However, the development of the arts and creative industry are often curtailed by factors such as rules and regulations. While rules and regulations are important in that they provide a general order for creative industry to operate, they sometimes restrict the artist through acts such as censorship. Censorship happens where elements are deemed sensitive to the public, but the line gets blurry on what is to be considered as sensitive and what is not. Artists can be demotivated if they feel their work is restricted by political factors; curtailing freedom of speech and expression.

The advent of the internet has allowed almost anything be put forth on the internet to be seen as art. This is a worrying trend for some as it has the potential to eventually shape the identity of a community. It is crucial therefore that the importance of the arts and the creative industry, its quality and what it constitutes, be widely communicated so that the industry can prosper in our country.

Issues Raised

- The commercial value of certain productions versus their cultural values requires delicate balancing act. For insane, should local horror movies be seen

as a heritage even if such films are not usually depicted as heritage? Would for instance graffiti be considered a lesser version of art than other genres of arts like sculptures and paintings? Some have argued that the commercial value of productions does not reflect the sense of connection to cultural values while others argue that the commercial value is a good indication of people's connection to the work.

- It would be a difficult issue to focus on the development of arts when not enough is being done on its preservation.
- The blurry line between what is considered as art as well as what is not is one of the major challenges in dealing with the issue of heritage. Having said this, the development of certain genres of arts should not be curtailed as one genre of art that might not be seen as a heritage now may be considered otherwise in the future.
- Community-building is necessary in order for the arts to be able to communicate important messages to the public. The power of the arts in communicating various nation-building issues should not be underestimated.
- It is important that early exposure to the arts is part of the education system in order to instil a value system in children from a young age.

About the Speaker

Mrs. Low Ngai Yuen has been one of Malaysia's top producer and director for some of the nation's highest rating TV programmes. She was also one of the prominent host of 3R before becoming the President of Kakiseni, a premier organization championing local performing arts and creative industry in Malaysia. Additionally, she participated in the TUKAR program (Program Transformasi Kedai Runcit) as contribution to the Economic Transformation Program. In 2011, she was selected as a subject matter expert for the Prime Minister's Roundtable on engaging the youth and subsequently, she heads the performing arts pillar, mapping out the industry's growth for the Dasar Industri Kreatif Negara. Yuen also conceptualized WOMENgirls, a non-profit and cause driven organisation to drive higher women's share of voice in various issues. Ms Low Ngai Yuen was also named Most Successful Woman of 2014 by Jessica Magazine.

Contact

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