After the Death of Lee Kuan Yew, is Freedom of Artistic Expression Possible in Singapore?

Kenichi Kawasaki

Abstract

Since their beginning in 1989, Singapore art policies began to have nowadays been established as a cultural institution. Over the past 26 years, every genre of art infrastructure has been conceived and elaborated mainly by the National Arts Council (NAC). In fact, they have been strongly designed and supported by economic factors such as the Economy Development Authority (EDB). In 2015, two significant changing factors emerged: the death of Lee Kuan Yew and the 50th anniversary of independence from Malaysia. Both are having strong effects on the future of Singapore’s art policies and cultural institutions, which I investigate in this paper. In 2012, shortly before the death of Lee Kuan Yew, a new long-term plan was launched by the NAC which modified the old organizational structure. The NAC just moved from the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) to the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). This created a new distinction as the Singaporean government divided art structure under the jurisdiction of the NAC from cultural/entertainment industries governed by the Ministry of Communication and Information (MCI). In this new situation, how have art expressions been dealing with a standpoint of the past censorship in Singapore? I consider this question by exploring the possibility of art expression. Moreover, will artists’ situation be improved going forwards? Undoubtedly, both the death of Lee Kuan Yew and reaching 50 years of independence will be closely related to the transformation of Singapore art expression in the future.

Key words: Lee Kuan Yew, global city, censorship, cultural policy, cultural institutions

0. Censorship of Arts & Media in Singapore

Censorship of every aspect of the arts and media is managed by the Media Development Authority (MDA), which operates as a statutory board under the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI). They have six acts, including arts, movies, etc. (see http://www.mda.gov.sg/RegulationsAndLicensing/Pages/Overview.aspx).

In this paper, we consider the following three main discussion points.

1. Influences of the Death of LKY: Almost None (Short Term Perspective)
2. Recent Censorship: Maintaining the System (Loosin in Visual Arts and Music; Newly Online News & Internet)
3. Two Contrasting Narratives: 1) From Human Rights Perspective, 2) From Asian Values Perspective

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1. Introduction: Death of Lee Kuan Yew

Lee Kuan Yew died on 23 March in 2015. Aged 91, he had been the <Great Leader> from founding Singapore's independence to overseeing today’s prosperity, consistently guiding the country. His state funeral was held on 29 March at the National University of Singapore (NUS). On the day of his death, Channel News Asia (CAN), Singapore broadcasting center, broadcasted memorial programs in tribute to him throughout the day without breaking for advertisements. From 23 to 28 March, leading up to his funeral day, mourners flocked to, forming huge lines and waiting for up to 10 hours without disputes breaking out, given the highly unusual circumstances in this tropical environment. His death was extensively reported overseas, as well as in Singapore.(1) On this matter, I exhibit two typical reports, one drawn from Japan’s Toyo Keizai, the famous economics journal, and the other from the BBC in the U.K.

Lee produced many benefits for Singaporeans. Clean streets and high income! On the other hand, Lee had limits. That one had no interest in culture, art and literature. Then you failed to comprehend the limits of capacity and feelings of ordinary people in democracies should be natural. (Toyo Keizai, 2015: 31)

The BBC was more realistic:

As Singapore mourns the death of founding father Lee Kuan Yew, and questions are also quietly being asked about where the country goes next. Mr. Lee had been out of the political limelight for years when he died but his authoritarian model, which brought stability and wealth, remains. Yet economic success and globalization have presented Singapore with new challenges, such as a widening income gap and a new generation who are demanding greater political participation. Which elements of his model might Singapore move away from and which are here to stay. (Wong, 2015)

Taking a realistic and objective view of the latter and a common-sense view of the former, make!, Lee Kuan Yew passed away when, even to speculate whether Singapore should be the basic stance that simply be whether economic or political, but at the same time made reversing social and cultural culture system will become an important issue in the book paper discusses future of cultural institutions.

2. Lee Kuan Yew’s Cultural Stance

First, let me summarize my stance towards Lee. I said that was consistent in his lack of interest in cultural art it says previously from the conclusion. However, this trend conflicts with his culture and art connoisseur-ship and does not mean that he could not understand their significance.

Will be in continued and on the back burner to make rather a firm foundation of Singapore society and its evolving infrastructure which consistently emphasized, it is closer to reality. In short, had many important than cultural factors. Point of view on them, especially important for culture and the arts, three should be highlighted. First and foremost, <Racial Harmony> to the sustained care. Chinese, Malay, India systems and continuation of the respect for the relationship between their ethnicity and ethnicity between. Secondly, in <Asiatic values> highlight. Certain overly individualistic values, such as the United States is believed to have about holding the family and family system, so-called <Asian values> is still respected. And last, thing <meritocracy> <minimal welfare>. This point is based on the approach to welfare in the U.S. differing from the approach to welfare in Europe and Japan.

3. Recent Censorship in Singapore

I wish to identify the following three outcomes following the death of LKY, followed by three interesting
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examples.

① As we all know, censorship applies wide-ranging restrictions to online media. I switched to the realized about online news media gave the equivalent of public Internet in the 2011 general election or introduce a new license from 2013, including a tougher stance. Apply or inciting crimes of Facebook, my support for which is fairly strong.

② On the other hand, while becoming permissive about the publishing media and performing is not perfect, I feel that to be. The article copied below is the publication ban list, which has been reduced considerably. There was no idea a number of years ago, published last month in the late 1980s by the public peace maintenance method violation imprisoned on suspicion of Marxist people’s documentary.

③ Furthermore, while in some very practical about censorship, in political terms, might a tougher stance be maintained? In this regard, see the attached reports on strengthening the censored copy of related articles and online media.

3-1: Visual Arts
<2 Major Art Museums>
① National Art Gallery (Opened on 15 November 2015)
② Singapore Arts Museum (SAM)
<Time of Others (21 November 2015 - 28 February 2016, SAM)>
A survey of contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region, Time of Others features works of artists representing social, historical and geopolitical concerns at this present juncture of living in today’s more interconnected world, where notions of boundary, difference and Otherness have also become more complex (https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/downloads/exhibitions/TOO_exhibition_guide.pdf). Further details are provided in Appendix 1.

3-2: Movies (Morita 2015)
<Rating System: Guidelines & severe rating System>
① Guidelines: sexual expressions, verbal expressions (Violence, Drag & Horror)
② Seven types of rating
http://www.mda.gov.sg/RegulationsAndLicensing/Pages/Overview.aspx
<Governmental Support>
① Establishment of MediaCorp Raintree Pictures (1998)
② Mediapolis @ one north project (2015)
③ Singapore Media Fusion Plan (SMFP, 2009)

3-3: Online News and Internet Issues
<New Regulation on Online News Sites: 2013>
① New Regulations on Online News based on License System
② Severe Regulations on SNS like Facebook (the Offence of Sedition applied to Facebook articles)
<On Internet Connections by Government Officers Since 2016>
Further details are provided in Appendix 2.

4. Continuing to Prioritize Economic Policies

Lee continually developed Singaporean society and consistently prioritized the economy. He also referred to a basic principle to guarantee the development of the economy, and followed three strategic goals from the
1960s to the 1990s: (1) economic development, (2) political stability, and (3) social equality among the three ethnicities. However, the 1990s would be entered in the Singapore economy is to take off, to join the top ranks of global cities, keeping those principles fixed. Essentially, <survival principles> from <post survival principle ‘to’, and the <Top Level of global city> that came out they will need to set goals again. These points, from the point of view of the three, we will now explain in more detail.

4-1: Cultural Institutions as Economic Policies

In many modern societies, the cultural system is essentially considered with economic and political institutional independence. Considering art systems, they establish the significance of their own culture and the arts which artists create. However, since its founding in Singapore, cultural development and institutions have consistently been part of the country’s economic policy, focused on economic development. I will later elaborate by explaining the history of Singapore’s cultural policies, but here provide a representative example. 1995 was set as the medium-term target of the <Global City for the Arts (1995)> policy: from the economic perspective, as regards global economic development and the development of cities and art, there is a need to achieve. In the chosen art and culture as an important component in how efficiently the top-level global city?

4-2: Singapore Cultural System

Now, about what its economic policy and specifically made to keep look at organizational structure. In Singapore, the bureaucratic system has frequently undertaken organizational change, but 1990 from the age 2000 in the beginning of the decade, there have been three hierarchically structured stratifications. The top stratification is economic: the EDB was taking its leadership as an organizational core. Under the EDB, the Ministry of Information, Communication and Arts (MICA) undertook the substantive formulation of cultural policies. In fact, MICA’s infrastructure incorporated the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Board (NHB), and it was responsible for cultural policy in particular. Cultural policy is in full swing, 1990, 2000 first of 2010, this system has basically continued up to the present year.

4-3: Innovation in Cultural Systems

However, about 20 years have passed since the first cultural policies began and some fruitful outcomes have been achieved in developing artistic infrastructure in Singapore. In both 1989 and 2012, it was positioned as a long-term plan and the art system at last coexisted with both nation-building and community and religious institutions, including the equivalent of art and culture in one hand. Conversely, it has been separated as regards new economic goals, such as the creative industries and cultural industries.

5. Establishment and Development of Cultural System in Singapore

In 1965, Singapore secured independence from Malaysia; since that year, Singapore has prioritized economic development and political stability-orientation. Until the end of the 1980s, they did not focus on enriching cultural institutions. In terms of policy objectives, the cultural sector has been the <last policy>.

In modern society, in many developed countries, it is unusual for <the national culture> to make and establish cultural institutions in their first stage of social development. Rather, the upper class have created arts culture. Conversely, in many Asian countries, which have experienced colonization, and conversely, the largest role in national cultural formation is played by national states. Sometimes, rather, due to its national cultural policy was whether successful or unsuccessful. Singapore is one of the few examples. In 1991, the NAC founded a cultural policy and pursued three ongoing points objectives: (1) cultural infrastructure, (2) Singapore’s people as the object of education and training, and (3) <community art> as a means of strengthening
the national identity. Objective (1) was targeted from the beginning, with (2) and (3) gradually introduced.

Entering into the 21st century, a new cultural system emerged, accompanied by new goals and creating new challenges for the establishment. It includes post-survival goals and <Top level of the global cities>. Lee Kuan Yew in 2006 from this point said in many places. And to develop further as the economic profit target <culture> will contain the following two goals are needed: (1) the development and refinement of creative and cultural industries, and (2) art and culture can efficiently use by the plan.

5-1: The History of Singapore's Cultural Policy
In outline, the history of the cultural policies of Singapore is as follows. One in time, I will look.
① Pre-1989: art and culture was supported mainly by the upper class, as in Hong Kong; cultural policy was very limited and both cities were called <cultural deserts>.
② 1989 - 1994: in 1989, after conducting two years’ research on foreign cases, the government used its research report to formulate its first long-term plan. Consequently, in 1991, the NAC, was founded, and artistic infrastructure began its development.
③ 1995 - 1999: arts and culture infrastructure progressed and, finally, medium-term objectives were confirmed. The policy was called <Toward A Global City for the Arts (1995)> and clear global goals were set for the first time.
④ 2000 - 2011: They were called at <Renaissance City report> and they have very precisely detailed art plans. Having undergone additional revisions in 2004 and 2008, these plans were finally implemented.
⑤ 2012 – to the present: the Art Culture Strategic Review (ACSR), based on 2012, formulated a new (second) long-term plan, containing many significant changes such as the NAC, etc. and this plan will provide a new direction for Singapore’s art culture system.

5-2: References by LKY to Art Culture
LKY’s mentions of culture and the arts were very few. As I undertook, much of the references by LKY are directly mentioned in two sources. In the first, he pointed out that producing high quality and after economic growth, it also included art of life. Then there is cited as an example of the second, namely that <higher quality of life> meant groups of artists and cultural institutions in arts areas. Will say that as long as literature is an important author, to culture and the arts are extremely small role and he mentioned according to the common sense.

How should Singapore’s art and culture progress? In 2012, a second long-term arts plan was produced. Here, I will briefly describe the outline. First, there is awareness of the country’s long-term cultural and arts policies, recognizing the importance of the accumulation of the 1989 first long-term plan and the 2000 Renaissance report. Second, they stress the strategic importance, setting out, in the second plan, clear goals and evaluations. Third, commandments of <inertia> are indicated in both the arts and cultural heritage areas. Finally, the <Four Ps> (Product, People, Participation and Partnership, and Place) are listed to embody the long-term vision.

5-3-1: Leading Arts & Culture Capital (ACSR Final Report part 1)
In the report, simply current global city to distribute as well as in the historical consideration. As an example to follow historically, it has pointed out the following six specific examples: (1) The Tang Empire of China, (2) 9th century Baghdad, (3) Renaissance Florence, (4) Mumbai under the British Empire, (5) 19th century Paris, and (6) New York after the Second World War. All of these cases are very prominent examples of remarkable ambitions, and the last plan always seen on same traits over 20 years. Common historical
examples of these characteristics include the following three points: (1) a trade centre, (2) a place with a high concentration of talent and ideas, and (3) a high concentration of wealth and patronage.

5-3-2: New Direction of Seven Global Cities (ACSR Final Report part 2)
Regarding the cities identified in this report, based on the survey results, as global cities, Singapore’s new direction at this stage should be to follow the following seven cites’ examples. And in those cities, specifically where to learn whether that goal is very clear that it deserves special mention. Moreover, the culture level, such as Japanese Old Usage, deserves unchanging respect.

1. London: cultural capital 2. Chicago (park) and Los (downtown)
7. Dubai: art and culture market

5-3-3: Meanings of ACSR Final Report:
Having established the first long-term plan in 1989, the ACSR’s 2012 report formulated its second long-term plan. The latter features the following four points.

1. 1989, 1995 and 2000 were three historic revolutionary turning points.
2. Government transformation means a strategic policy up to now for the social and cultural structure; it will remove everyday resources to support infrastructure.
3. The National Arts Council will give them global literacy through raising the artistic level.
4. At the same time, thereby, Singaporeans will develop national identities.

Under this plan, with the systematic modification of the ministries as mentioned above, almost all Singapore citizens, with the requisite of achieving <Top Level of the global city>, will be compelled to be involved.

6. How can Singapore Accomplish the Status of a First Level Global City?

Though Lee Kuan Yew’s references to artistic culture were extremely limited, he did focus on the development of Singapore as a City-State with the goal of becoming a global city. Until the half of 1990s he thought the way to <global city> and since 2000 further the realization of <Top Level of the global city>. So he would be mentioning <Singapore as the modern Venetia>. Venice has lasted for more than 1,000 years, yet its 20 minutes 1 in Singapore does not have such a long history. However, his ambition was great: Focusing attention on other global cities, Lee discussed the ways Singapore would achieve its aims, clearly setting the goal. While preserving economic development and political stability, Singaporeans would preserve both a mature and rich global city. Other Singaporeans wanted to see his remarks. However, the real Singapore is Top Level would be more likely to suffer from rising social inequality and cities closer to the living conditions.

6-1: Venetia and Singapore
At the beginning of 2000, Lee Kuan Yew here and there surveyed the future of Singapore, and said seeing various cities model. He focused his objectives into three points. First, Singapore’s long-term goal is 1,000 years in the Venetian prosperity achieved in the past years. He has likened to the famous St. Mark’s Square in Venice Marina for all core. Second, Singapore should emulate the three leading global cities of Paris, London and New York. Finally, of those cities to Top Level is mentioned as one of the global city, he wanted to make Singapore <a tropical version>. However, as Singapore has undergone development, inevitable problems have simultaneously emerged. Like working under analysis for that matter.
6-2: Domestic Social Problems

At present, Singapore faces domestic social problems, comprising two aspects: the problem of economic inequality and the issue of ethnicity. First, I will discuss the former.

In Singapore society, at the Independent days except national elite in Singapore did not seem to matter as economic or social inequality. Rather, at the beginning, there existed disparities between foreign residents and Singaporeans. However, since 1990, the number of wealthy & higher educated Singaporeans has increased progressively. They often went abroad, to such destinations as the U.S.A., the U.K. and Australia. According to the results of the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s income survey (URA, 2010), 15% of Singapore’s people became new wealthy hierarchy; there is evident disparity between them and the low-income portion of the population, which accounts for half of the total.

Another serious social problem is that of ethnicity, specifically, in the development of mixed-race communities. In Singapore, basically classified such as Chinese, Malays and India each ethnicity, increases other ethnicity and marriage, growing mixed-race <racial harmony (racial harmony)> policy have certain effects. This impacts significantly on the establishment of the Singaporean national identity; in other words, the <Singapore identity> has also resulted. The challenges to tackle and solve are ethnic purity and mixed-race problems.

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7. Conclusion: Post Lee Kuan Yew, its Cultural Institutions and their Implications

Finally, Lee Kuan Yew passed away when I consider the meaning and change in terms of introducing the culture of what could be. I make the following four observations.

7-1: Dissatisfaction of People with Economic Disparities and Exploring New Lifestyles

In Singapore, despite the achievement of social progress, economic disparities have triggered violence, as the public express their dissatisfaction with the differences. Conversely, people have started reaching for a new urban lifestyle for a richer life. Its exact features can be summarized in the following three points. First, the new lifestyle and pointed out that lives on. Typical examples focused on changing people’s lifestyle are featured in magazines such as Ana, for example, cited examples such as the following. Second, the younger generation is faced with <the right of Individual Freedom>. Finally, support for the freedom of the press. Singapore’s leading international news broadcaster, CAN, represents Asia in the current international news. Only limited new pattern within the country and could lessen the news value this.

7-2: How to Ascertain National Identity

Originally, Singapore comprised various ethnicities living alongside one another, such as Chinese, Malays, Indians, etc. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a single national identity for Singapore. In addition, while cosmopolitanism often facilitates connections in a global city, it is inconsistent with determining a national
identity. As culture and the arts help to establish a national identity, they both remain among the government’s considerations as cultural systems are formulated. The funeral of Lee, in combination with the 50th anniversary of independence, has temporarily caused increased nationalism, causing friction, in short, between cosmopolitan identity and national identity.

7-3: Post-survival Policies Economy and Culture Under Severe Globalization

Be <post survival period> first, Singapore’s current situation is rather short. I analyses some important changes in the cultural statistics in Singapore. We have seen the unilateral rise of cultural statistics in the past. However, recent indicators are in closer and, also, changing various regions are exposed to more realistic in the evaluation.

7-4: Turning Point: Singapore 50?

On 9 August 2015, Singapore celebrated the 50th anniversary of securing its independence from Malaysia. While excitement is not usually characteristic of Singaporeans, they seemed to be enthusiastic on this occasion and held various events, including an Independence Day parade. Fifteen thousand people gathered around the venue. Since the author began to study Singapore in 1993, this was the first experience of its kind in the country. I formed the impression that Singapore seemed to be changing and that this celebration would become an iconic event.(5)

It has been suggested that this more liberal stance was only temporary, in honour of the 50th anniversary of independence Festival of brush; they want to put here the hope that this change does not end.

Notes

(1) To represent Singapore in the otherwise ST (Straits Times), and see the following URLs:
http://www.straitstimes.com/tags/Lee-Kuan-Yew-death
http://www.straitstimes.com/Singapore/a-nation-mourns-for-Mr-LEE-Kuan-Yew-a-look-back-at-7-days-of-Straits-Times-covers

(2) On two notable occasions, Lee Kuan Yew refers to the cultural system. We state, as have other goals. Economic growth is not a goal in itself. High level after the economic success that is it for recreation, arts, spiritual fulfillment, intellectual satisfaction, quality of life ought to pass. In trying to invent a more gracious society, where we invest considerable funds in the arts. (1995) (“Lee Kuan yew’s self-chosen works saying leadership is what?”, 2014 Years, 165 P.) Had been a fool and we used the clean, green, safe and order is correct, true, but boring and dreary. However, art, culture, Museum, Museum of fine arts, Esplanade Theater on the Bay, Western Orchestra, Chinese Orchestra, vibrant city has. Playing music group for citizens, outside the Esplanade Theater. And Singapore-based writer and artist. (2010)(Ditto book,166 page)

(3) In an official speech on<no. 1 One of the global city>, Lee Kuan Yew gave typical examples in the following two passages.

① Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Minister Mentor, at the Tanjong Pagar Chinese New Year Dinner, 23 February 2007, at Tanglin-Cairnhill Community Centre
Singapore’s landscape will change. We will have an iconic city centre, a Marina with a promenade that will allow pedestrians and electric golf buggies unimpeded access round the whole Marina, with al fresco dining, restaurants, shops and electrically-driven pleasure boats for tourists to Cruise along the Singapore and Kallang Rivers. New elegant buildings are being built around the Marina will make Singapore an iconic city. The Marina will be like the St Mark’s Piazza in Venice. We must keep the water clean, so we must trap the debris and litter in our rivers, canals

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and drains. Our engineers are working on many systems to ensure the water that flows into the Marina is not polluted. Our drains and canals will be turned into ponds and streams. There will be clean running water, greenery and boardwalks for people and children to enjoy these streams and ponds-fishing, boating or dining al fresco. Hotels, condos and HDB homes that front these canals or drains will look out on greenery and water. Singaporeans will have to keep their streams and ponds clean for everybody to enjoy sailing, boating, wind surfing and fishing.

(2) Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Minister Mentor, at the Tanjong Pagar Chinese New Year Dinner, 23 February 2007, at Tanglin-Cairnhill Community Centre

We have studied other cities. Paris with its beautiful human scale 19th century buildings is a most elegant city in the world. Its streets are furnished with attractive furniture, newspaper kiosks and toilets. There is much life on the sidewalks of the boulevards, and people sitting around tables of cafes and restaurants enjoying their coffee or ice cream.

London is the most international city, bustling with people from all over the world, hundreds of thousands of Europeans, French, Germans, Spaniards, Americans, Arabs, Asians work there, many serving the international financial centre. When I was there at the end of World War 2, in London, then, as the heart of the British Empire, the only non-British were people from their colonies and dominions.

New York is the business centre of the world. It has the UN headquarters; a great city for culture and the arts with great museums, theatres, plays, opera, and rock bands. Singapore must incorporate their best features in a tropical version.

(4) Here is the gateway to the wild life. Nature’s original, more severe, but Singapore, anyone can be accessed easily.

From the country while staying in the comfortable hotel can enjoy the tropical rain forest, Oh no! I’m awaking to the charms of nature thought I even in Singapore who not natural to their country, but recently many people have been leaving this country intentionally “(Andy Teng, May 2015 ANA)

(5) The Independence 50 Reports on the anniversary of the most common ones are detailed in the following two sources: https://www.singapore50.SG/en.aspx

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Appendix 1.

Singapore to regulate online news websites from June 1 10 websites to be licensed; foreign websites targeting S’pore market may be regulated from next year

By Teh Shi Ning

While the new ruling applies only to websites based in Singapore for now, the plan is to bring foreign websites offering media services to the Singapore market under the regime too, Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim told reporters yesterday.

[SINGAPORE] News websites that report regularly on Singapore and have a local reach of 50,000 or more will need to be individually licensed from June 1. This is to put them on a “more consistent regulatory framework” with traditional platforms such as newspapers and television stations, which are already individually licensed, the Media Development Authority said yesterday.

While the new ruling applies only to websites based in Singapore for now, the plan is to bring foreign websites offering media services to the Singapore market under the regime too, Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim told reporters yesterday.

“We will amend the Broadcasting Act next year, with a view to ensure that any other sites which are hosted overseas but reporting on Singapore news, are also brought into the licensing framework.”

At the moment, the Act does not empower the government to take action against any entity that is based overseas.

“But, if they are transmitting news to Singaporeans and Singapore is their target market, then we will have to do
something about it,” said Dr Yaacob.
For now, 10 local online news sites will require an individual licence with effect from June 1. These sites met the two
conditions under which individual licences, to be renewed annually, will be a must: that over a period of two months,
they report an average of one article or more a week on Singapore news and current affairs, and, are visited by 50,000
unique IP addresses from Singapore each month.
Currently, most websites are automatically covered under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification, and the In-
ternet Code of Practice, which already prohibits content that is against public interest, public order, public security,
national harmony and public morality. MDA’s overall Internet guidelines do not cover webpages operated by indi-
viduals, but individuals or groups providing a programme for business, political or religious purposes are covered
under the class licence.
Dr Yaacob said that the new rules come in response to the growing number of consumers that read news online, and
the larger number of news offerings online.
Licensing will be “no more onerous” than what news sites are already subject to and there will be no change in content
standards, he said.
He added that the new criteria would ensure “that when Singaporeans go onto online sites, when they read the news,
they know that what they read from online sites is the same as what they read from mainstream media”.
The new guidelines also provide more clarity on “prohibited material”, which will include content that denigrates or
offends the sensitivities of any racial or religious group and ads for prostitution entered in the comments section on
websites for instance.
One difference under the new framework is that licensees must comply with directions from MDA to remove content
that is in breach of standards within 24 hours. Current guidelines have no timeframe.
Second, a licensee must put up a performance bond of $50,000. This amount is what is currently required of licensed
niche TV broadcasters.
Seven of the 10 sites are run by Singapore Press Holdings: straitstimes.com, asiaone.com, businessstimes.com.sg, omy.
MediaCorp runs two, channelnewsasia.com and todayonline.com, while the tenth is Yahoo! News’ sg.news.yahoo.
com.
An SPH spokesman noted that the new licensing regime “is not significantly different from the current class-licence
regime for websites” while MediaCorp said that both its news websites “will be able to meet the requirements of the
new licensing arrangement by MDA”.
Yahoo! Singapore’s country ambassador, Alan Soon, said: “We are not in a position to respond until we receive the
actual licence conditions for review.”
The maximum penalty for illegal broadcasting under the Broadcasting Act is a fine of $200,000 or three years’ jail or
both. But for sites that are licensed, failing to comply with conditions could result either in financial penalties or the
licence being suspended or revoked.
NTU professor Ang Peng Hwa noted that the barriers to entry for lesser-known news sites are now raised, as the cri-
teria set for licensing may discourage the growth of online news sites. “Our emergent sites are free or practically free.”
He noted that this could also stifle the emergence of new online services.
“Think of Summly, which was created by a 15-year-old boy and bought by Yahoo for US$30 million. If you are a
teenager now in Singapore, you would worry about being caught by the law.”
Warren Chik, SMU associate professor, said that the change would be perceived as tighter regulation and a “less light
touch than before”. He noted that the licensing requirements may eventually extend to sites such as The Online Citizen
and Temasek Review. He said that the penalties under the licensing framework “may cause those running news sites
to be more careful than before”.
When asked, Dr Yaacob said that the new licensing framework is not a departure from MDA’s “light touch” approach
to Internet regulation, stressing regulatory consistency instead. “Whether we like it or not, Singaporeans are receiving
news both from mainstream media and online sites. Our mainstream media is subjected to rules, why shouldn’t the online sites be part of the regulatory framework?” he said.

Simon Chesterman, dean of the NUS Faculty of Law, said: “The move by MDA is an attempt to set higher standards for websites that are effectively serving as news outlets. The challenge will be how to implement the new framework in a way that does not have a chilling effect online.”

Appendix 2.

The Straits Times: www.straitstimes.com

Published on 7 June 2014: Art of censorship in Singapore By Corrie Tan, Arts Correspondent

CENSORSHIP has long dogged artists in Singapore. It is a dull ache, with the occasional painful twist. The most recent - and perhaps unintended - turn of the screw came on May 12 when the Media Development Authority (MDA) released its proposed amendments to the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act for public consultation.

The authority sees this new move as an “empowering” one, and it could have been. But a myriad of punitive measures and caveats have left artists dismayed that it might encourage self-censorship.

Under it, arts practitioners are to be trained by the MDA as “content assessors” to ensure compliance with the authority’s classification guidelines.

The trouble is that not all artists agree with the guidelines. Nor are they likely to always agree with what MDA might classify as a performance. It is, after all, a matter of subjective judgment whether a performance merits an Advisory 16 classification - no age restriction imposed but it suggests that the content may not be suitable for younger audiences - or labelled R18, restricted to those aged 18 and above. The most stringent classification is Not Allowed For All Ratings - which is effectively a ban.

The MDA argues that its across-the-board training sessions for content assessors help ensure consistency. But this in effect means that artists have to second-guess officialdom. Might they opt for a stricter classification to avoid falling foul of the authorities? Groups whose content assessors mis-classify performances could face a fine of up to $5,000, and may have their licences revoked.

It is no wonder that many in the arts community find it difficult to reconcile these measures with the supposed progressiveness of “co-regulation”.

Despite its good intentions, the scheme falls back into the same template of censorship, of allowing the authorities to be the arbiter of what is in the “public interest”, rather than trusting the artist to be responsible, and trusting the audience to be able to judge a work critically. As a result, on May 30, 45 arts groups registered strong objections to the scheme in a position paper addressed to the MDA.

Artists are often viewed here as a vocal minority of rabble-rousers separate from the man in the street. But these are not merely the grouses of a few. The 45 groups represent a large swathe of the arts community, including commercial heavyweights like the Singapore Repertory Theatre and Wild Rice, and traditional arts groups such as the Chinese Theatre Circle. It is also likely that their regular audiences will be supportive of their decision.

As the position paper puts it: “Artists and arts practitioners... are also citizens, parents, members of religious groups, live in the ‘heartlands’, and we pay our taxes - like everyone else. It is misguided to presume that artists’ interests are at odds with community’s interests.”

I believe that it is in the MDA’s interest to heed their concerns, if the arts landscape in Singapore is to continue to flourish - or risk falling into the relentless trap of “one step forward, two steps back”.

The 2010 Censorship Review Committee described censorship as “a necessary tool, but a blunt one”, and affirmed the need for consumers to be responsible in deciding what they choose to view. The Government can no longer act as gatekeeper, especially in a digital age where access to graphic material is a click away.

The MDA has stressed that the Arts Term Licensing Scheme is optional. This provides arts groups with a false dichotomy: to continue with the current regime where the MDA issues all classifications and advisories, or to choose to be part of a different regime that is ultimately the same: being trained to heed the MDA’s specifications.
After the Death of Lee Kuan Yew, is Freedom of Artistic Expression Possible in Singapore? (Kenichi Kawasaki)

For so long, the authorities have been wary of trusting the populace with the responsibility of weighing what is in the “public good”. Knee-jerk reactions by small groups of people to what they view as “offensive” performances have led to clampdowns on arts groups, without the population at large being given a chance to grapple with various shades of grey of these performances.

The arts community has reiterated that it does not champion an irresponsible approach to artistic creation. Certainly performances must be within the ambit of the law, and those who break the laws of sedition or are guilty of inciting hatred between various groups of people must be held accountable.

But the role of the artist is to forge new paths and tackle new ideas. Some of these issues may be discomfiting to segments of the population - but the arts provide a safe platform, within the realm of imagination, where contentious issues can be discussed and grappled with.

One recent example is playwright Chong Tze Chien’s Charged (2010), a well-crafted army drama thick with suspense that confronted race relations in Singapore. It brought to light the secret prejudices many Singaporeans harbour despite co-existing in a multicultural environment. It received an R18 rating for “mature content and coarse language”. The MDA justified: “Due to the realistic portrayal of racial tensions and use of strong language within the army camp, the issues discussed could be... unsuitable for a young audience.”

But perhaps an Advisory 16 classification would have sufficed? This way, teenagers about to do full-time national service could have mulled over portrayals of racial tensions on stage and reflected on how the issue might emerge in real life.

As an avid consumer of the arts, I have not seen a single production here that exploits violence or sexuality in a way that would leave anyone vulnerable to attack. Rather, the art is mostly considered and thoughtful. It may not always be executed perfectly, but it is steeped in earnestness and social conscience.

I think it is time for us to trust the artists who have grown in our midst. Instead of fearing debate and fining a group for a piece that, perhaps, only two people found objectionable, the MDA could be a facilitator and bridge-builder. It could bring together the arts group and audience members for a mediation session, where the latter could better understand the artistic intention of the work, and the artists have a chance to see where the audience is coming from. This empowers the artist - who is given a chance to stand up for his or her work, and improve it - and the audience members, who can choose to embrace an alternative point of view, or decide not to purchase tickets from this group in the future.

In the end, we should not expect all art to be comforting or pleasant. The Guardian newspaper’s theatre critic, Lyn Gardner, wrote in a recent column: “I love being charmed and delighted in the theatre, but I don’t want to be killed with kindness by artists, I want to be provoked by them and made to look at the world differently... If that sometimes means they are going to risk boring me, offending me or even being cruel to me, then I’m not going to complain. Great art is seldom easy or kind.”

The mirror that art holds up to life may not always reflect beauty. It may reflect the ugliness of humanity, or its lack of virtue. But good art interrogates the human condition in all its weird and wonderful states, and puts them all on display, so that we who look gain insight into our own lives.

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A step towards ‘co-regulation’

THE Media Development Authority (MDA) announced its Arts Term Licensing Scheme on May 12. It is set to have a pilot run next month.

The voluntary scheme is meant to give artists and arts groups that sign up for it more agency in self-classifying their shows. This scheme was floated during the 2010 censorship review. Right now, the MDA assesses every single production - a process which can take up to 40 days. It then gives it an age-appropriate advisory or rating. Under the proposed term licensing scheme, selected arts groups can classify multiple productions on their own.
Groups taking part in the scheme will need to appoint an MDA-registered content assessor, who will be trained in classifying each show according to the authority’s classification code. Licensing officers from the MDA have the authority to reject groups’ classifications and revoke their licences. Groups whose content assessors mis-classify performances could also face a fine of up to $5,000. Those who disagree with the licensing officer’s decisions can appeal to the Minister.

MDA says this is meant to “facilitate the creation of an environment which allows arts practitioners to undertake greater ownership and responsibility for their content in ensuring it meets community standards; and to be able to directly engage in dialogue with society”.

The MDA views this as a step towards “co-regulation”, its term for working together with artists to define classification boundaries. It invited the public to give their comments on the scheme in a public consultation that closed on May 30.

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