

IFACCA WORLD SUMMIT on CULTURE AND THE ARTS, Melbourne
International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies

FORUM ON CHANGING PLACES--- EVOLVING CULTURAL POLICIES IN ASIA
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MaLou Jacob, Philippines

Culturally, the Philippines is one of the richest countries in the world. It is multi-cultural, after all. But why is it so marginalized, economically, politically?

I would like to open with my short poem, it goes this way:

COUNTRY

Navel of Kudarat,
Bonifacio and Macli-ing

Now
Beggar
Garbage

Of men in suits
devouring gold,
women and children.

Like the bloodied sun of Manila Bay,
My heart sets with you.

The 21st Century should put an end to poems like this.

Let us turn the world economic crisis into an opportunity. An opportunity for a new economic order to develop.

I believe that it is the time for a New Economic Order to emerge. An Economic Order that will bring together the best features of Capitalism and Socialism, a hybrid so to speak, in this age of hybridity and fusion. To benefit the world's marginalized majority.

There is a glimmer of hope. There is the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) that is talking and planning on a macro level; and there is us in Culture and Arts in the Philippines contributing in a very modest, micro way.

We know that even as we are one of the poorest countries, we are also one of the richest in Culture and Arts. Because of our Multiculturalism. The NCCA has been encouraging this thru our grants program, thru the GAMABA, and the establishment of the SLTs .

Years ago in China, the Creative/Cultural Industry has been described as a sunrise industry. It was so exhilarating to hear such importance given to Culture. But the question to ask is "Sunrise for whom?" "Is it possible to develop a unique Creative Industry that would financially benefit the artist, the creator, the originator of the Industry? The ASEAN States still have to effect this paradigm shift by putting together common strategies for the Asean Artist.

In NCCA, our battle cry is A Creative Industry for the Filipino Artist! And we have been experimenting for the past 2 years to give teeth to this cry. 1. After getting to know the basic principles of the Grameen bank of Bangladesh, founded by Prof Yunus turned banker, I looked for such a local organization, even if I found it unbelievable that such a group existed (I have never heard of a bank for the poor).

But after a few months, I found it in the MRI Card, successfully operating in my country for 2 decades. NCCA brought the founder, Dr. Aristotle Alip to a SLT in Digos, Davao. And the rest is history. MRI Card opened a window for our Indigenous women artists who are also farmers or fisherfolks. They have been given loans (eliminating the loan sharks). And they have paid back their debts at almost 100%.

MRI Card even went steps further by providing health care, insurance, scholarships and even jobs (streetbankers) to the college graduates of the IPs).From Mindanao, MRI Card is now ready to go to the Cordillera, north of the Philippines.

We are also trying to address the problem of Marketing. We all know how for example, that cultural products costing 200 pesos are being sold for 800 or maybe even a thousand with the main bulk of the profit going to the marketing. What if we come up with a strategy that would give the larger percentage of profits to the artists with a certain percentage to the Marketing as it should be. Wouldn't we truly have an Industry for the Filipino Artist?

Today, we are looking at how IP/C Rights could be thrown into the pot towards a genuine Economy of Culture for the Filipino Artist and Cultural Worker.

We are making some progress in Traditional Arts which is the main focus of NCCA (we have the CCP to take care of Contemporary Arts). In fact, we have just formed a pool of IPR lawyers who will be looking in at cases that will be brought to NCCA's attention. We are asking them to look into the Sus Generis as an antidote to the Public Domain.

Let us join together by creating a Cultural Industry that will also benefit the marginalized Traditional Artists. Let us make the Cultural Industry a sunrise Industry for them , that will spell economic upliftment for them.

Let us be the new breed of culture entrepreneurs who will be sensitive to them by taking up the cudgels for them.

In the spirit of cultural rapprochement, it is imperative that the meeting of Asia and Europe in the 21st Century be based on equality, mutual respect, and just remuneration for the Asian Traditional Artists.

Only, then, can the majority of the people of Asia partake of a better quality of life. Only, then, can we move forward TOGETHER for a better future.

To conclude, I just read IFACCA's strategies for 2011-2014:

“The arts are an agent of influence—for insight and reflection, for change and innovation, for individual and communal growth and connection, and for a sense of purpose.”

This is an opportunity for IFACCA to go beyond data gathering. It could make Australia the bridge between Asia and Europe thru ASEM.