

Australia's National Cultural Policy

Submission from Archibald E. B. McKenzie

Introduction: Archibald McKenzie is based in Sydney but has worked internationally as a concert pianist, music festival director, composer and translator. He is a founding Director of Alegria, an internationally recognised ballet academy based in Sydney. He is also a founding Director of the Kudos Foundation, a charitable organisation dedicated to support Ancient Greek and Latin studies in Australian universities. He has also lectured in Chinese studies in three universities, and translated numerous books and articles, especially on Chinese contemporary art.

Submission: I am in whole-hearted agreement with all Five Pillars and note that two of my special areas, dance and music, are explicitly mentioned. Ideally, both these areas could receive more funding and attention in the public schooling system, but there are obvious funding constraints.

Speaking here as an individual citizen, I urge the Australian Government to consider the arts and indeed the humanities in the current geo-political context. Many competing international cultural traditions are promoted as being of universal relevance and importance. Australian cultural traditions should also be promoted in a competitive way.

Culture is indeed one sector that provides economic benefits and social cohesion - always crucial factors in a multi-cultural nation. Where the National Cultural Policy website speaks of culture as being both generative and preservative, I would add 'developmental' or a similar word to capture the concept of developing and growing the cultural traditions of Australia.

First Nations culture should not just be promoted as very ancient or relevant to all Australians. Indigenous systems of belief and practice are globally relevant, not least in terms of respecting and sustaining the environment, but also in terms of the mutual respect for 'women's business' and 'men's business' and the proper relationship between individual and the group, not to dwell on their inherent aesthetic merit and cultural significance.

So too the various cultural traditions of the later arrivals. This applies to the liberal humanist traditions that underpin Australian society, and also to other philosophical, cultural and religious systems. Arts which refer to these systems are not just 'generative' - relevant to the present practitioners - nor just 'preservative' - respectful of the past tradition. Some appropriate level of support should also be allocated to the conscious and deliberate development of these living cultural and artistic traditions of various antiquity and geographic origin, with a specific view to their potential universal relevance, including to current and future generations of Australians.

The current age tends to have a shallow understanding of cultural history, yet cultural history is the key to our shared values and identity, and to meaning beyond the immediate needs of instant physical and psychological gratification. In the current geo-political environment of competing political and cultural models, some of which are antagonistic to Australian values, it is especially important to foster a shared motivational understanding of who we are, and the value of our way of life and society.

This deeper historical understanding of our component cultural traditions from First Nations to more recent arrivals thus becomes a matter of national interest, ultimately of national survival.

This consideration should inform the support of relevant school curricula as well as of specific cultural productions that also meet the other listed criteria. This will help make Australia not only rich and happy but also strong and wise.

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