

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

Strong Institutions

In the film industry a lot of the institutional focus has been on production funding – namely providing the money to make the film. As the global landscape has changed with streaming and digitalisation, projects need differing kinds of support along their pipeline from development and incubation, and after production in marketing, promotion, and support to find distribution. There is a role for institutional support here by Screen Australia, and the state/territory-based Screen agencies.

Screen agencies can look to what international film festivals are doing (Busan, Locarno, Rotterdam, etc) and develop similar domestic programs to support Australian creations with a focus on pipeline development. Australia is being left behind by the creative developments in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea which have leveraged these opportunities to develop innovative screen ideas and support talent.

Reaching the Audience

Australia's growth audience is in Asia – but we don't yet make content that Asia wants to watch. This will involve more co-productions and stories that speak of the Australia-Asia relationship in non-orientalist or cliché terms, that will speak about Australia as a part of Asia rather than as an outsider looking in. This will involve embedding Australians and Australian talent in screen products from across the region and bringing Asian stories and locations into Australian productions in new ways. But it also means supporting and making compelling content that speaks of modern Australia and that has an eye to audiences outside Australia. South Korea's CJ Entertainment is already active across Southeast Asia, and streaming services like Netflix and Disney provide distribution channels.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why.

Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

Strong Institutions

Australia's engagement in Asia relies on identifying the institutions that can be supported to drive that engagement. Primarily this will be educational as this is where Australia has some comparative advantage (NIDA, AFTRS, etc) but also where Australia can help incubate emerging talent from the region. These relationships take time to build and to see their results – so this institutional building and support needs to be long term investment (10 years for example). It will need more institutions thinking about how they can develop their Asia linkages either in content, scholarships, internships, and the like or building new curriculum that has a focus on Asia.

Reaching the Audience

It would be good to see new outreach to a modern Asian audience beyond the 'cooking show' formula which has been somewhat successful but only one-dimensional. This may require more investment in the platforms that are becoming important across Asia; it may be about sponsorship that places Australia and Australian products into view through product placement; it may be supporting Australian content onto platforms and broadcasters across the region.

Leveraging talent and audiences across Asia to build an audience for Australia across the region will be essential to deepening Asia-Australia screen industries ties.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

The focus of my submission is on Australia's creative connections to Asia, especially the screen industries which are a focus of my academic research work. Here I reference the 2013 Creative Australia report and the need to "enhance focus on Asia" (pages 12, 24-25). This needs to be included in the current iteration of a National Cultural Policy.

Mainstream Australia remains culturally orientated towards America and the UK and often uses these two markets and industries as benchmark. Hollywood productions that use Australian locations are supported and celebrated as we celebrate Australian talent in Hollywood. Connections to the US and UK will continue into the future. However recent events such as the cancelling of *Neighbours* driven by declining interest from the UK market requires Australia to rethink its cultural orientations, markets, and direction in the decades ahead.

Over the past twenty years media markets across Asia have blossomed from South Korea to Indonesia. These countries and industries have accelerated their creative output across a range of sectors, developed local audiences alongside growing wealth and spending ability, and achieved market and critical recognition. Australia has been largely peripheral to these events despite being a near neighbour, despite our multicultural and multilingual population, and despite our history of engagement with Asia.

Part of the problem is our thin engagement with Asia which has lacked significant investment in Asian languages, dedicated outreach and engagement, and transnational institution building. I will detail these in turn:

- 1) Asian languages have seen declining investment at school and university level, with the lowest levels of foreign language learning since the 1990s. Government investment is necessary to reverse this trend, but it also calls for a rethink of what is taught alongside language. This opens the opportunity to engage with contemporary forms of culture (film, music, etc) from the region rather than traditional forms such as wayang or gamelan. Building recognition of the dynamic pop culture from the region can help build connections and interest. This will enhance our Asia literacy and ability to engage more thoroughly as partners and equals in the Asian region.
- 2) Australia hosts some phenomenal Asia-focussed events such as the Asia Pacific Triennial at GOMA in Brisbane but too many of these events are isolated and short-lived and do not build sustained engagement with the region or with audiences in Australia. Other events such as the Asia Pacific Screen Awards have become orphaned relics without much connection to either audiences in Australia or to the creative industries of Asia they seek to represent and recognise. Existing events that can enable outreach and engagement need to be reformed to focus as much on outreach and engagement, facilitating transnational flows of people, ideas, and talent as much as they showcase work from the Asian region.
- 3) Australia boasts some of the best training institutions and facilities in the world – think AFTRS, NIDA, and studios for (post)production. Finding ways to transnationalise their work to become components in the creative industries of Asia will not only broaden their business opportunities, but also integrate Australia's talent with that from the region. TAFE recently partnered with the new Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia film school in Brunei, but there are many other ways

Australian creative industries and businesses can link up with Asia, sharing expertise, building brand Australia, and developing deeper ties.

My concern is that Australia is losing out on the opportunities that Asia presents. Without this soft power engagement through arts and culture, Australia will become irrelevant to the emerging markets in Asia and find itself isolated culturally. A National Cultural Policy will focus on Australia (as others will suggest) but it also needs to be outward looking and developing opportunities for Australians, Australian products, and Australian ideas in Asia.