

# The Influence of Cultural Congress on the Preferences of the Permanent Collection of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Since Malaysia's independence, the government convened the National Cultural Congress in 1971, which discussed building national identity in Malaysia through the culture of various races. The National Art Gallery, as an official institution with policy overtones, maintains a permanent collection of artworks for the nation, showcases the work of local and international artists, and encourages the development of art in the community. Therefore, this study uses a quantitative approach to secondary research, using the Cultural Congress as a dividing line, and to statistically classify works from each of the five years before and after by comparing changes in the nationality of the artists, the medium of the works, and the subject matter of the works to verify whether the emergence of the Cultural Congress had a significant impact on the National Art Gallery's collecting preferences. The results of this study show that the National Art Gallery's collection of works by national artists has also been on the rise since 1971, particularly in terms of the number of works by Malay artists and indigenous subjects. This research helps to examine the influence of the Cultural Congress from different perspectives and to understand the role of social factors on the views and approaches of artists. In addition, the collection of the art gallery will be collated and summarised to understand the preferences of the collection in each period and thus provide insight into the prevailing genres and approaches to art.

**Keywords:** National Art Gallery, Cultural Congress, quantitative research, collections, cultural capital.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a multi-racial country, Malaysia comprises a society of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous groups. However, the different cultural backgrounds of the diverse races are a formidable challenge in establishing a harmonious government. Some social scientists are keen to draw parallels between 'race' and 'cultural identity' because the main elements of race and identity are cultural: they include values, beliefs, and behaviours, and the meanings ascribed to or attached to these aspects as linguistic and material cultural differences and similarities (King, 2016).

For this reason, after Malaysia's independence and to establish a unified national culture and collective identity, the government convened a National Cultural Congress in 1971, the content of which undoubtedly had a significant impact on the cultural and artistic aspects of the region, a point that many scholars confirm. But some scholars argue that the Cultural Congress did not substantially impact the whole group but only a tiny part of its creation.

The National Art Gallery of Malaysia was established in 1958 as an official art venue commissioned by the Federal Government with the original intention of providing a permanent collection of artworks for the nation, showcasing the work of local and international artists, and encouraging the development of art in the community. As such, the works in the National Art Gallery's permanent collection represent local and international artistic and cultural visions and creativity and are in keeping with national art. This political context also makes it necessary for the National Art Gallery to consider the time's creative climate and social context when collecting and displaying artworks. Such iconic works, in Bourdieu's view, belong to what is Malaysia's cultural capital.

As a visual material, artwork embodies the cultural background and ideology of the artist. However, the choice of artwork needs to be considered in more ways than just the nature of the artwork. Whether an artwork can be collected depends on its value, which should have social value in addition to the intrinsic value it gives. In short, only works that conform to society's values, ethics, and aesthetic standards are eligible for collection.

This study is descriptive research of the catalogue of works in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery, selected artworks collected during the period 1966-1975, using the Cultural Congress as a dividing line and comparing the collection preferences for each of the five years before and after, focusing mainly on information about changes in the race of the artist, the subject matter of the work and the medium of the work. The data is presented using graphs and charts. To verify whether the Cultural Congress impacted the artistic preferences of the time. And whether the inclusion of works as an official art institution was in line with the principle of Malay culture as the centre of the Cultural Congress and weakened the collection and presentation of works by artists of other races.

The results of this study help to examine the influence of cultural congresses from the perspective of art institutions and to understand the role of social factors in the views and approaches of artists. In addition, the collection of the gallery will be collated and summarised to identify the preferences of the collection over time and to understand the prevailing genres and approaches to art. The significance of this study is to provide a new vision for the study of the Cultural Congress, to fill the gaps in current research in this field, and to expand the influence and dissemination of the National Art Gallery.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The multi-racial and multi-ethnic people have made Malaysia what it is today: a diverse nation (Noor A'Yunni et al., 2023). The Cultural Congress, an essential experiment in Malaysia then, undoubtedly impacted the art scene. Artists also made their works a kind of cultural capital and enhanced their artistic value by changing the style or expression of their works. As such, this study will compare artworks before and after the Cultural Congress, drawing on Bourdieu's perspective. The focus will be on the artists' personal information and the changes in the medium and subject matter of the artworks to argue whether the policy affected the art scene at the time.

### **2.1 National Art Gallery of Malaysia**

The National Art Gallery (Malay: Balai Seni Negara), built by the Federal Arts Council of Malaya in 1958, is part of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. As a statutory art institution, on 28 August of that year, Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Prime Minister and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, opened the first exhibition at Jalan Ampang, which established the National Gallery's official status and artistic influence. 1978 the art gallery was renamed the National Art Museum (Malay: Muzium Seni Negara) by 2011. With the National Council for the Development of Visual Arts Act 724 amendment, the National Art Museum has been renamed the National Visual Arts Gallery (Balai Seni Visual Negara).

As this study covers 1966-1975, The National Art Gallery (NAG) is used in this paper to refer to the institution. Since its establishment, The National Art Gallery has strived to showcase Malaysian art

and organize various exhibitions for local artists. It's The National Art Gallery presents a reimagined mission, vision, and values that seek to honour our past, respond to our present, and inspire our future with a common language approach has also been a critical strategy in guiding the development of its art industry.

According to Noor A'yunni et al. (2016), the essential functions of an art gallery include displaying artworks, holding art lectures or art discussions, organizing art competitions or seminars, and other art-related activities. Bruno Fredrik Resch (2011) also suggests that the main objectives of an art gallery consist of three critical elements. These elements include educational, artistic value, and social and ethical conceptual purposes. Fopp (1997) contends that galleries and museums are seen as places where knowledge is collected and that visitors choose to visit galleries to see things they cannot see and hear things they cannot see elsewhere.

Therefore, as a public institution that combines the functions of exhibition, collection, research, and promotion, the primary purpose of an art gallery is to disseminate art knowledge to the general public through the display of artworks and to improve the aesthetic ability and new understanding of art among the audience. Art galleries are the foundation of the art market, representing the highest level of art business organization; they are also educators and promoters of the national cultural heritage and participate in forming artistic tastes (Chernyaeva & Stepanskaya, 2013).

Thus, in the early years of Malaysia's independence, the National Art Gallery also built a national identity by providing artists with a sense of national recognition and belonging through art and artistic works." National identity does not refer to a set of qualities that define a nation but rather to its position in the world hierarchy of power. It changes from 'signified' to 'signifier,' from 'content' to the 'position' of the nation in the global system (Lisiewicz, 2013). Its presence has contributed to the development of Malaysian culture and art and has had a more significant impact on the formation of the art market. As Önsal (2006) argues, local, economic, and cultural contexts and traditions strongly influence and shape the appearance and characteristics of art markets worldwide.

Mohd Jamil (2023) has said that the National Art Gallery has been carrying out as many art-related activities as possible since its establishment on 27 August 1958 as an institution that looks after the country's artistic treasures. Defined as an official institution from its inception, the National Art Gallery is inherently political, and as a broker of the nation's artistic assets, this political dynamic affects the various types of projects of the gallery in many ways. In other words, the activities, public relations, and purpose of the museum's existence are all tied to the political context of the time. Bourdieu (1996) maintains that art galleries have played an essential role as a technique of aesthetic and epistemological modernity through the specific historical forms they have influenced. The history of aesthetic theory and art philosophy should thus be closely linked to the development of modern art institutions.

Gray (2011) explains the relationship between government policy and art galleries in such a way that, firstly, there is an instrumentalization of the practice of art galleries to meet the top-down demands of state actors. Secondly, these external demands have unintended consequences for the sector that seems to be instrumentalizing. Thirdly, art galleries can link themselves to these broader policy issues for various reasons, thus gaining access to economic or political resources.

Izme (2008) argues that the establishment of the NAG has provided institutional security for the cultivation of modern art in Malaysia, which has gradually acquired its own agenda and national identity, and that Kuala Lumpur will continue to be the centre of cultural and socio-political growth in Malaysia.

## 2.2 National Cultural Congress

1971 the government formulated a comprehensive and guiding policy for the humanities based on the National Cultural Congress (NCC). This Congress brought together 54 cultural practitioners to discuss building national identity in Malaysia through culture in language, costume, art, architecture, and food. For this reason, the main objective of the conference was not only to meet the community's cultural needs and to improve the standard and quality of the arts but also to establish effective communication to instil a sense of national awareness and Malaysian nationalism. The policy, therefore, sets out three fundamental principles:

1. The National Culture must be based on the indigenous [Malay] culture
2. Suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture
3. Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture.

(Azian & Rosiah, 2009).

Implementing this policy was a pivotal moment in the history of Malaysian art, an official attempt by the government to shape culture and art, through which Malaysian art began to move from a *laissez-faire* status to a somewhat restrictive and directive one. Many scholars believe this policy greatly influenced the subsequent development of Malaysian art. Firdaus Naif et al. (2018) then suggest that the impact of the national cultural policy can be seen in the 1980s when various works featuring Islam and Malay culture could be seen in visual artworks and exhibitions.

Wan Samiati Andriana (2017) argues that in terms of the context of art, the NCC had a significant impact, and the Malaysian artworks that emerged afterwards began to showcase the country's socio-cultural history and mythology with a deep and greater focus on Malaysia. Ahmadrashidi (2010) writes that to realize the cultural policy of national aspirations, these artists worked to stimulate awareness of the revival of Malay art and culture, and they played a vital role in the representation of Malay art in the late 1970s and 1980s.

From the views of the scholars above, it can be concluded that the Cultural Congress is more inclined to support indigenous Malaysian art and culture, i.e., Islamic art centred on the Malay orientation. However, as a multicultural and multi-racial country, Malaysia's emphasis on only one culture is bound to cause resentment and resistance from artists of other races. As Sulaiman (1997) suggests, non-Malays essentially see these policies as an ideological strategy of UMNO to legitimize the re-establishment of Malay religious and cultural hegemony within the broader context of forming a national cultural identity.

Izme (2008) has also documented that the privileging of Malay Islamic ideals in national culture has provoked a backlash from non-Malays. State-sponsored Islamisation stoked fears of social and cultural marginalization among non-Malays, who began to develop dynamic and innovative interpretations of their cultural heritage.

In addition, some scholars argue that the Cultural Congress has only had a marginal impact on Malay artists, not artists of other races. Sarena (2017) also points out that the New Economic Policy (NEP) proclamation, cultural policies, and Islamisation policies were part of the country's nationalist phase, which inevitably reconstructed the arts with a nationalist agenda. Despite the country's multi-racial skin colour, these collections of policies reinforced a nationally recognized identity based on Malay cultural hegemony.

These records indicate the impact, both positive and negative, both Malay and non-Malay that the Cultural Congress has had on the Malaysian art market. What is certain is that the emergence of the Cultural Congress has led Malaysian art to gradually move in a new direction, a change that exists not only in the creative process of artists but also in public art institutions such as schools, galleries, and art

museums, which fulfil the function of disseminating and presenting art, and therefore usually display works that are in line with the cultural perceptions of the current society and are contemporary.

Hence, to understand the evolution and positioning of a country's art in its history, one can appreciate the collections of its art galleries. This is because collections can give us a glimpse into the entire culture of a particular country at a specific time and provide clues to its way of life, socio-economic characteristics, and aesthetic and artistic preferences (Önsal, 2006). In other words, the artworks in an art gallery's collection record the cultural orientation and stylistic characteristics of a certain period, which, as a cultural heritage, is also a visual representation of the wealth and power of the country.

## 2.3 Bourdieu's theory

Bourdieu's theory of art and literature contains three basic concepts, Habitus, Capital, and Field, which are closely related. In the field of art, he analyses the concept, style, and logic of the formation of art through the perspective of the interaction of artists, art institutions, and art genres. Thus, in Bourdieu's theory, not only is the formal analysis of the work of art included, but also the study of the external social conditions is favoured.

Cultural capital, a sociological concept first used by Bourdieu in 1980, represents a social relationship of accumulated cultural knowledge that can confer power and status and also involves the cultural tendencies of individuals, groups, classes, and societies. Cultural capital is thus accumulated in the individual's habitus, formed through the social context and the natural environment. Bourdieu classifies cultural capital into three types: Embodied, Objectified, and Institutionalised, of which works of art are Objectified cultural capital.

Bourdieu (1986) explains the term in these terms:

"In the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc." (p243)

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital was first developed in his research on the unequal academic achievement of children from different classes and scores. It was gradually elaborated in a different empirical context (RW Speller, 2011). In the case of artworks, at a physical level, they can enter the market as economic capital, enabling the social movement of assets. However, they can only be genuinely objectified as cultural capital through education in artworks' history, culture, and aesthetics. Otherwise, they are merely financial assets.

However, Benjamin (2008) has argued that the reception of artworks has its characteristics. Still, in general, there are two distinct types: one emphasizes the cult value of the artwork, and the other its exhibition value. Since its inception, the National Art Gallery has collected a selection of artworks of unique and aesthetic value for display each year. This act of collecting gives the artworks an intangible value and, as artworks in the permanent collection of official institutions, they are removed from the economic cycle and circulation, and their artistic value is much higher than that of other artworks of the same period.

As a form of cultural capital, especially when collected and displayed by national art institutions, artworks have been given the status of cultural symbols and cultural heritage of the nation, belonging to one of its cultural capitals. Through its social and political context, art does not need to be proven economically or otherwise but generates and rationalizes its value, creating its symbolic capital.

The artwork has long been defined as a visual channel consisting of a variety of elements that combine to form the essence of the artwork, that is, the form of the work. The form expresses the culture to which the artwork belongs and is the basis of artistic creation. The genealogy of form also constitutes

a representation or simulation of the character, mentality, or 'spiritual' genealogy of the individual artist or society as a whole, class, ethnic group, nation, or even 'race' (Preziosi & Lamoureux, 2012). As a result, galleries can collect artworks subject to higher scrutiny than works in private galleries or the marketplace, with a distinct artistic perspective and genre.

The work emerges from and draws on the activity of the artist. In other words, the artist is the origin of the work, and the work is the origin of the artist (Heidegger, 2017). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital then emphasizes the influence of the artist's identity on the work. He argues that cultural preferences emerge from the social conditions that come together with an individual's family, educational background, and living environment. These environments or habits contribute to the individual differences of the artist and produce different cultural practices. When analysing an artwork, one should first concentrate on the artist. Artists from other ethnic groups receive varying cultural values and formal inspirations and therefore create works with different themes, artistic forms, and creative techniques.

Secondly, Bourdieu also believes that social capital has an important influence on the formation of cultural capital. Culture is also influenced by social conditions such as policy, economics, media, and ideology, emphasizing the relevance of culture to society. As an actor in cultural activity, social constraints, or political policies, the artist can play a role in shaping the work, i.e., social conditions can restrict the spirit and ideas within the artist. As Bourdieu argues, the artistic field is a network of objective relations between different positions in which actors choose different action strategies according to their capital and habits, i.e., artists will create different types of works to achieve a part in the field or gain benefits.

### 3. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach by examining the available material 'Inventori himpunan tetap warisan seni tampak negare 1958-2003' (Inventory of the permanent collection of the country's visible art heritage 1958-2003) for a related study. And a statistical classification of works from the five years before and after (1966-1970 and 1971-1975), using the Cultural Congress as a dividing line to verify whether the emergence of the Cultural Congress had a significant impact on the National Art Gallery's collecting preferences by comparing changes in the nationality of artists, the medium of work, and the subject matter of the work. The study draws on Bourdieu's theories on the importance of social capital in forming cultural capital.

Quantitative research focuses on expressing data in numerical form to facilitate statistical analysis, and its findings are straightforward, objective, and quantifiable. In other words, quantitative research applies to explaining the behaviour and trends of the study group rather than the motivations behind their behaviour. Accordingly, the emphasis is more on measurable data and the descriptive study of such data.

Descriptive research is a type of quantitative design used primarily to analyse the whole picture of a particular subject or phenomenon. The task of this research is to discover the situation by collecting data and providing the necessary information, using statistical data to describe, document, and analyse the past and present state of the subject or phenomenon, to discover the main patterns and characteristics, to seek an overall summary of the variables studied. This type of research does not involve the manipulation of variables; it is identified and studied in a natural environment.

The sample size for this study was selected by purposive sampling, i.e., all works in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery from 1966-1975, totalling 350 works. The data was selected from the electronic material 'Inventori himpunan tetap warisan seni tampak negare 1958-2003' available on the National Gallery website to ensure the reliability and authenticity of the data. The data spans a decade and is consequently a longitudinal study, i.e., data collected on the same individual at different

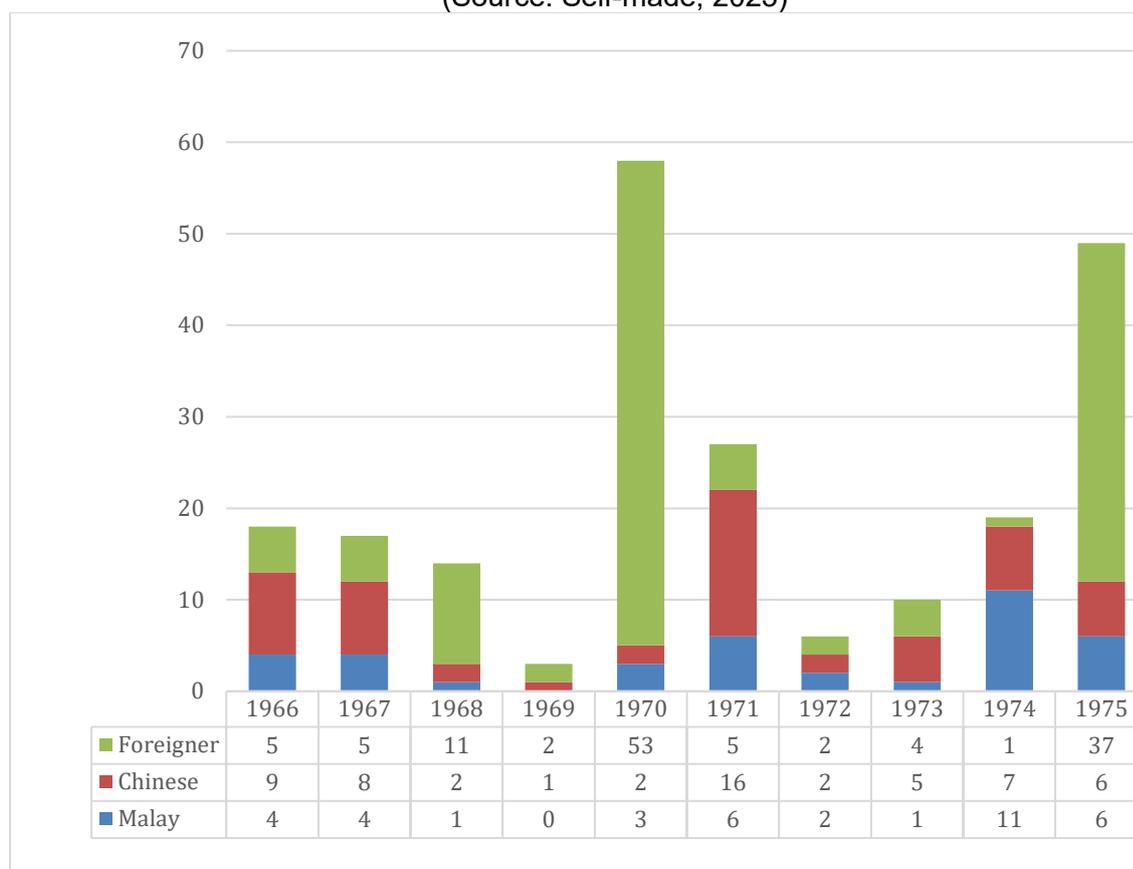
points in time. The details of the sample include images of the works, information about the author, the title of the work, and the medium in which it was created.

Secondly, this study will digitize existing pictures and textual information utilizing statistics, i.e., by collating and editing the data and converting it into numerical information. Because this data is pre-existing, the data is studied secondarily, employing graphs to present the data information in numerical form. The data is then analysed descriptively using statistical analysis, using Excel to calculate the data and analyse commonalities and trends. This analysis includes comprehensive data analysis, relative volume, mean, and variance index analysis. The digitized data is then reduced to text to reveal the various characteristics of the variables within it. Finally, hypotheses and conjectures are tested through the results of the study.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Bourdieu, the main factor influencing art institutions' collecting criteria is social. In this study, this is the Cultural Congress organized by the Malaysian government, which affected the artistic creation and activities of the time and caused the collecting behaviour of the National Art Gallery to change along with it. Hence, two sets of data from five years before and after the Cultural Congress were selected for comparison in this study to verify whether it had a direct impact on the collecting behaviour of the National Art Gallery, with the main factors of interest being the artist, the medium of the artwork and the subject matter of the painting.

**Table 1** The number of Malaysian artists and foreign artists 1966-1975  
 (Source: Self-made, 2023)

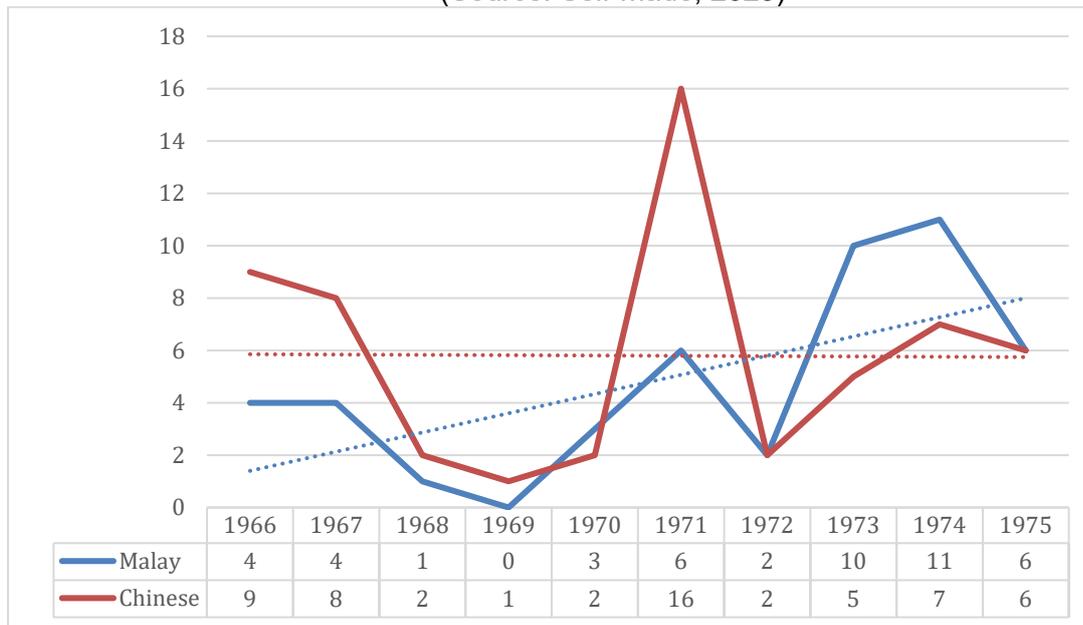


Firstly, this study is concerned with the nationality of the artists. According to the chart (Table 1), there were 76 foreign artists (69%) and 34 Malaysian artists (31%) in the first five years, of whom 12 were Malay and 22 were Chinese. From 1966-1967, the proportion of Malaysian artists was consistently higher than that of foreigners until 1968, when the proportion of foreigners was higher than that of local

artists. 1970 was exceptional, as the number of foreign artists in that year was 96%. Except for one, the British. The other 52 were all Russians. In contrast, the number of Chinese and Malay artists has decreased yearly since 1966; in 1969, there were 0 Malay artists.

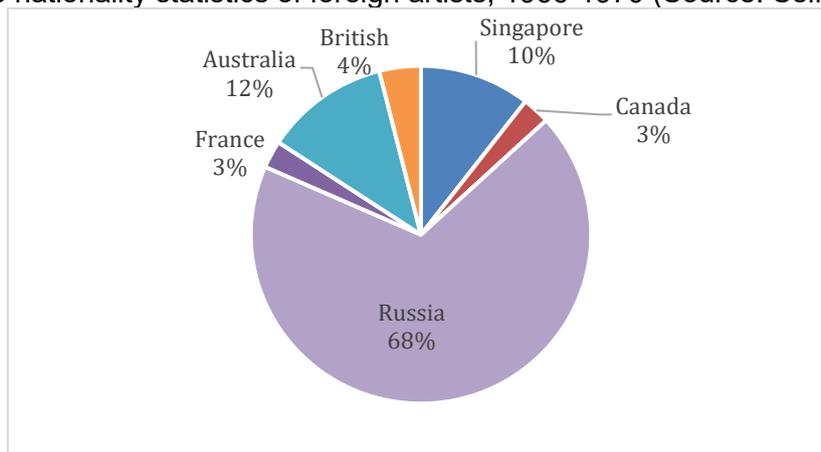
In the five years following the Cultural Congress, the number of foreign artists was 49(44%), a decrease of 25% from the previous five years. The number of Malaysian artists is 62, of which 36 are Chinese, and 26 are Malay, for a total of 56%, an increase of 25% over the previous year. In 1971, the proportion of local artists reached 85%. By 1974, it had even reached 95%. In the same year, the proportion of foreign artists was only 5% until 1975, when it showed an upward trend to 76%, the only year in the latter five years when the proportion of foreign artists was higher than that of local artists.

**Table 2** The number of Malay artists and Chinese artists 1966-1975  
(Source: Self-made, 2023)

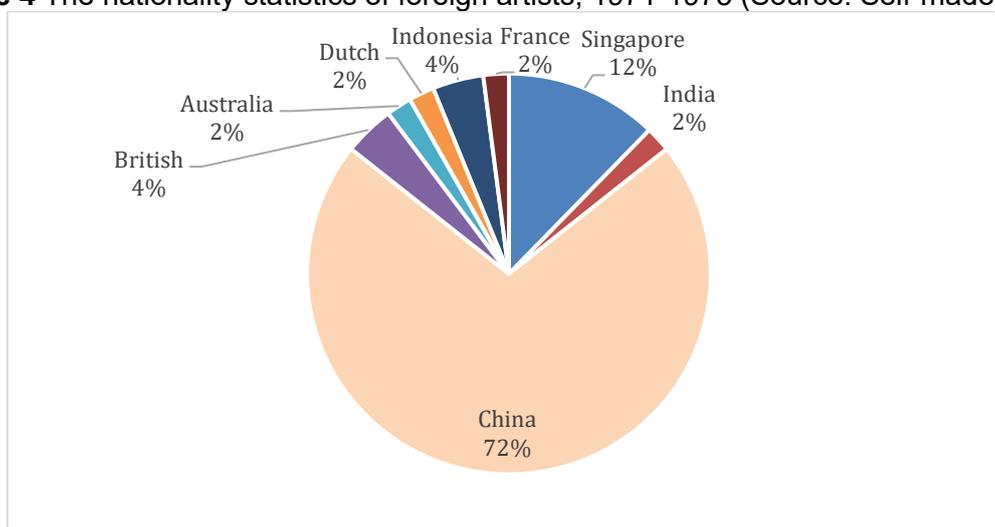


The situation regarding local artists in these ten years is shown in the chart (Table 2). According to the trend line, the number of Chinese artists, although higher than that of Malay artists, the overall trend is a subtle downward trend and not noticeable, while Malay artists show a clear upward trend. From 1966 to 1969, the Chinese outnumbered the Malays until 1970-1971, when the number of Malay artists first showed signs of surpassing them. 1972 was a watershed year, after which the number of Malay artists far outnumbered the Chinese, and these were the years with the highest number of Malay artists, especially in 1974, when they accounted for 61% of the local artists that year. The number of Chinese artists, on the other hand, had been on a steady decline for the first five years before rising suddenly in 1971, from 40% to 73% of the total in the previous year, and then dropping to 50% in 1972, and has not exceeded 50% since.

**Table 3** The nationality statistics of foreign artists, 1966-1970 (Source: Self-made, 2023)



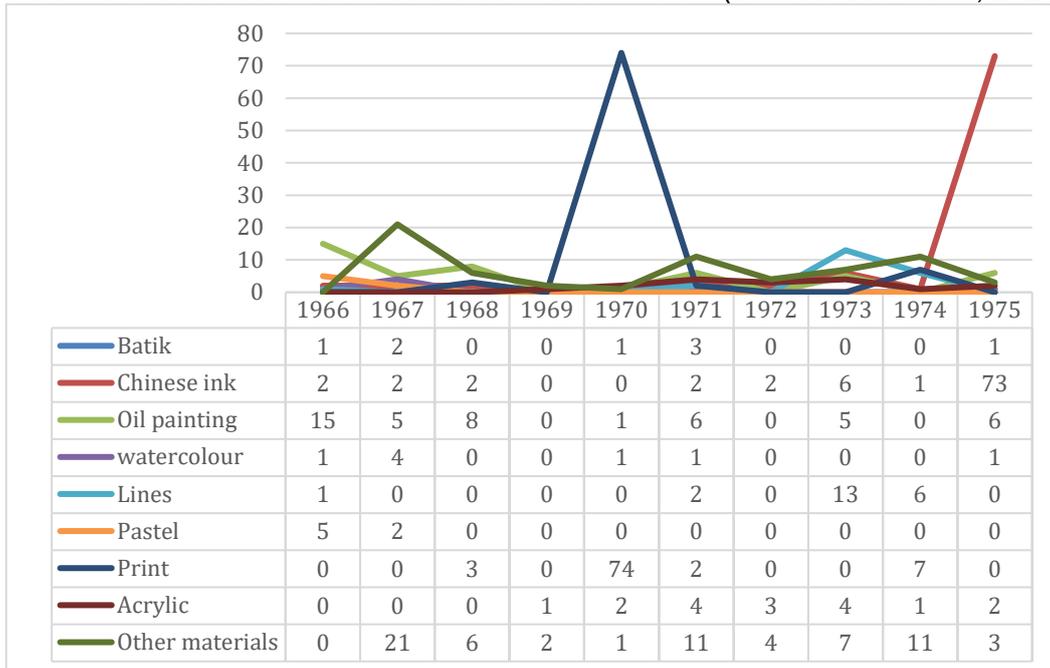
**Table 4** The nationality statistics of foreign artists, 1971-1975 (Source: Self-made, 2023)



As for foreign artists (Table 3), the highest overall number of artists in the first five years was from Russia, with a total of 68% and, notably, all concentrated in 1970. The second highest number of artists was Australian, with a total of 12%. Thirdly, there are Chinese artists from Singapore, with 10%. In the latter five years, the highest proportion of artists from China appears for the first time overall, with a 72% share, and in second place is the Singaporean Chinese artist with 12%, up 2% from the previous five years. The remaining countries accounted for 4% or 2%, with no significant difference.

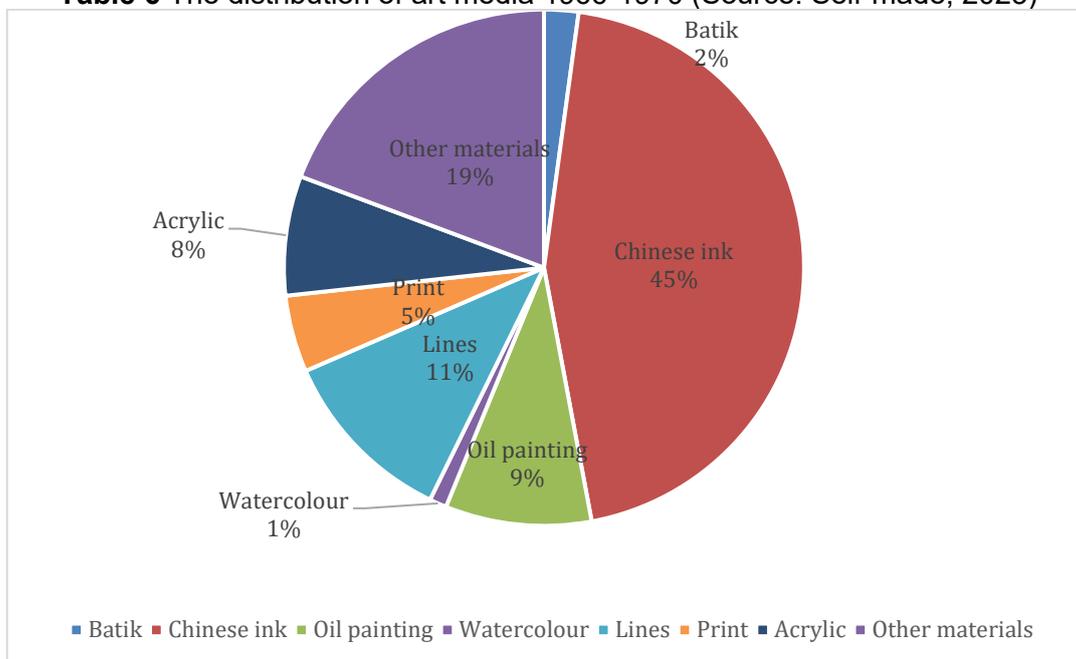
It is worth noting that there have been no Russian artists in the last five years (Table 4) and that the proportion of Singaporean artists has remained relatively stable throughout the decade, with the top three percentages. In terms of country distribution, the latter five years have seen a richer mix of nationalities, with the addition of artists from China, India, Indonesia, and the Dutch. By geographical location, Asian artists gradually take up most of the foreign artist slots, with a clear downward trend in the number of Western artists.

**Table 5.** The number of art media statistics 1966-1975 (Source: Self-made, 2023)

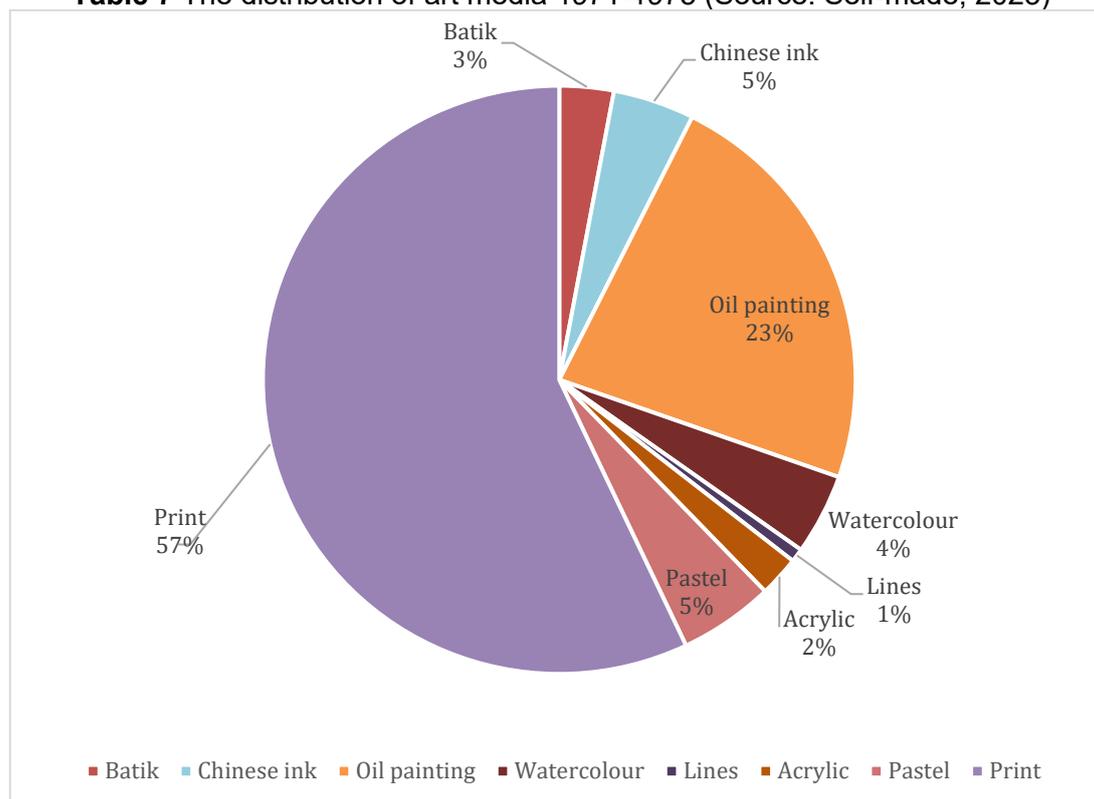


This study divides artworks into visual, plastic, and mixed art. Visual art media include oil painting, watercolour, pastel, ink painting, and acrylics, while plastic art is dominated by printmaking. Other forms of artwork, such as cast resin, sifted silk, emulsion paint, and other unique materials, or pottery and mixed media, are summarised as other forms of painting; no detailed division will be made here. The chart (Table 5) above shows the statistics of the format used for the collections' artworks for this decade.

**Table 6** The distribution of art media 1966-1970 (Source: Self-made, 2023)



**Table 7** The distribution of art media 1971-1975 (Source: Self-made, 2023)



In terms of artistic medium, the first five years (Table 6) saw the highest proportion of artworks in prints, at 57%. In 1970 alone, 74 prints by Russian artists accounted for 96% of the total prints and 93% of the whole collection for that year. The second highest proportion was 23% for oil paintings, and the third highest was 5% for Chinese ink paintings and pastels. It is worth noting that, except for ink painting, which is an oriental medium, most of the other media are Western. The distinctively Malaysian Batik accounted for only 3% in the first five years.

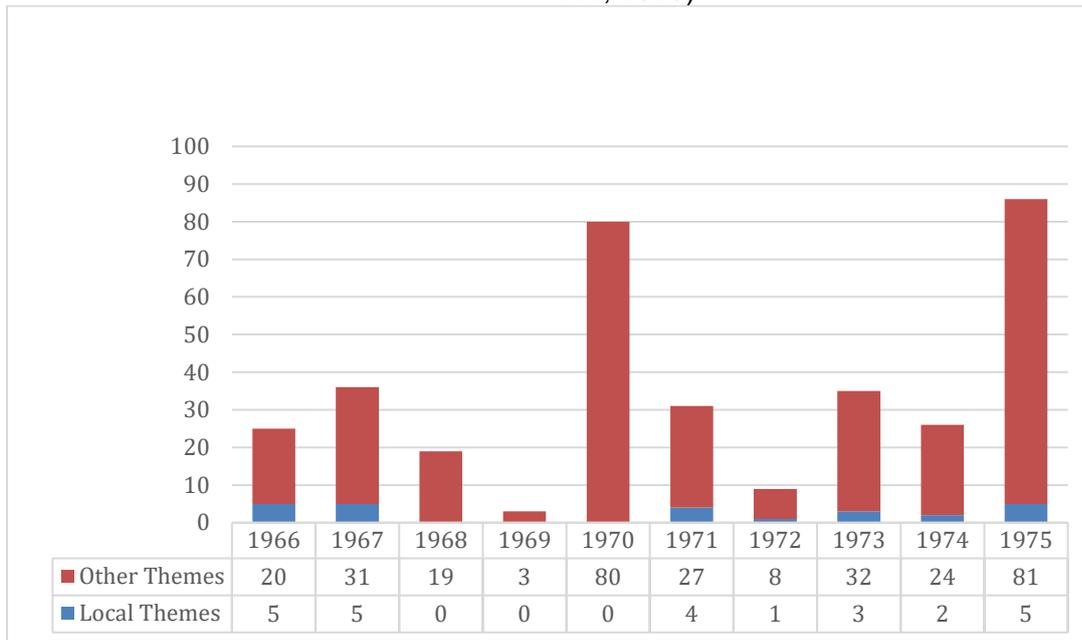
The highest proportion of the latter five years (Table 7) was in Chinese ink painting at 45%. This is a 40% increase over the previous five years. The second highest proportion was for paintings in other materials, with 19%. The third is line painting, up from 1% to 11%. Batik painting, at 2% in the last five years, has not changed much compared to the previous five years. Oil painting declined from 23% in the last five years to 9%, watercolour decreased from 4% to 1%, and pastel painting did not reappear in the previous five years.

According to the trend orientation of the decade, those that tend to rise are Chinese ink painting, line painting, and acrylics in that order; those that tend to stabilize are batik painting, watercolour, and other materials; and those that tend to fall are oil painting, pastel, and printmaking. Of these, ink painting has the most apparent upward trend, and oil painting has the most pronounced downward trend.

In addition, the artwork's content and theme are also important, as the artist will convey their cultural orientation and change of ideology through the images. As such, the study of the titles of the works and the identification of the images will be used to make a preliminary judgment on the themes of the works by way of observation. Those with prominent landmarks such as Penang and Malacca described in the titles will be categorized as indigenous themes. At the same time, those depicting the daily lives of Malays and the local landscape in the images will also be judged as expressions of indigenous themes.

Thus, according to the chart (Table 8), it can be seen that in the first five years, the proportion of paintings with local themes was relatively small, 0 from 1968-1970, until 1971, when the proportion rose from 0 in the previous two years to 11%. And each year after that, there are works with local themes, albeit in small numbers, but on an upward trend.

**Table 8** The number of local themes and other themes in artwork 1966-1975 (Source: Self-made, 2023)



Based on the above findings, preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, in terms of the nationality of the artists, the proportion of Malaysian artists, especially Malay artists, is on an upward trend. Regarding art medium, the trend in the indigenous medium of Batik tends to be flat with no significant fluctuations, while the oriental medium of ink painting is on the increase, in marked contrast to the decline in the western forms of oil painting. Finally, regarding the themes of the artworks, the trend in artworks with indigenous themes also shows an increase in the latter five years. Overall, the number of works by Malay artists with indigenous subjects showed a steady upward trend after 1971, and it is noteworthy that among the indigenous artists, Chinese artists, although more than Malay artists in the earlier period, showed an overall downward trend.

The findings of this study suggest that the 1971 Cultural Congress did have some impact on the National Art Gallery as the official art institution of Malaysia. While the collection of foreign works continues, the collection of works by national artists has been on the rise, encouraging and promoting local artists and enriching Malaysia's cultural capital and artistic heritage. Collecting more works with Malaysian identity and national elements helps to showcase Malaysia's unique art to the world.

In contrast, some scholars argue that Cultural Congress is essentially an ideological strategy favouring Malay artists and holds undemocratic and marginalizing attitudes towards the art of other races. Although the figures show that the number of works by Chinese artists is on a slight downward trend, several works are still collected each year, and there has never been a year when there was zero. And as an overseas immigrant group, in terms of race alone, artists from Singapore and China belong to the Chinese ethnic group. The percentage is the highest among foreign artists overall. The statement is, therefore, one-sided, as is one of the principles of cultural policy, that appropriate elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the national culture.

It is evident from this study that the essence of the Cultural Congress is to promote inter-ethnic harmony and integration and to reduce social and cultural differences, not to exclude or assimilate other ethnic cultures. It advocates the reduction of dependence on and use of Western art by shaping works with Malaysian elements, making them 'localized' and 'Malaysian.' According to data, the use of Western art forms declined each year in 1971, with artists retrieving more forms of creativity through traditional cultural and social contexts.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The creativity of artworks as an Objectified cultural capital is closely linked to sociality and cultural awareness. For historical reasons, Malaysian artists have long been influenced by Western culture, and their works often adopt Western visual expressions, resulting in derivatives of the Western model for most artworks. As a transformative event, the Cultural Congress heralds the beginning of a fundamental shift in the development of Malaysian art. Artists will reduce their use of the Western artistic expression, choosing and experimenting with indigenous subject matter, images, and materials, shaping works with an indigenous artistic identity and aesthetic awareness.

The National Art Gallery, as an official government-run art space, is responsible for carrying out and enriching the nation's visual arts heritage and promoting public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of art through displaying its collections. In this context, the Cultural Congress has influenced its collecting preferences. From 1971 onwards, the National Art Gallery began to favour the collection of works by indigenous artists, which is well reflected in the data on Malay artists. Local artists retrieve and draw various artistic elements from traditional culture to display their Malay identity. As for the choice of works, Western visual forms are gradually diminishing, replaced by Asian art forms and emerging material experimentation, which confirms that modern Malaysian art is evolving and innovating. The artists have moved away from their inherent choice of media to find appropriate new materials to compose their images, reflecting the modernity of art.

The significance of this study is to understand the development of Malaysian art during this period through the counting and collection of the National Art Gallery's collection. By analysing the artists' background and the form and content of the artworks, it is possible to understand the cultural views and artistic styles conveyed based on the paintings of different eras. A comparison of the collections from the five years before and after the Cultural Congress clearly shows the changing nature of the Malaysian art scene and the new creative trends that emerged among the artists, reflecting the influence of the Congress. It is also possible to verify the extent to which social factors influence the composition of cultural capital through Bourdieu's theory.

The study is a reference value for studying Malaysian artistic styles of the same period, enriching the data with information. The shift in their creative preferences is shown objectively in numerical form. National cultures were shaped by accumulating a series of cultural institutions, and these policies pointed to creative directions and artistic themes for artists. The study also contributes to the study of cultural policy, demonstrating the influence of the Cultural Congress on the Malaysian art scene at the time through the collecting preferences of art institutions.

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

All authors contributed equally to this research paper.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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