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**The National Culture Congress 1971 — A Symposium 50 Years On**

***Reimagining the Foundations of Malaysian Culture***

# An initiative by PUSAKA, SVARA, UNIVERSITI MALAYA & CENDANA

2021 marks 50 years since the National Culture Congress 1971, a landmark moment that sought to forge a national culture in Malaysia. The National Culture Congress and the corresponding National Culture Policy were the culmination of efforts to define Malaysian culture and build a foundation for national harmony in the wake of the racial riots of May 13, 1969.

While some of the original intentions of the National Culture Congress of 1971 still resonate in contemporary Malaysia, the framework of a National Culture Policy does not always reflect the organic and ever-evolving complexity of Malaysian cultural life.

It is both pertinent and timely, then, to revisit and critically appraise the aspirations and ramifications of the National Culture Congress of 1971, through opening a space for public discussion and collective reimagining of the foundations of Malaysian culture, particularly among cultural practitioners across diverse communities and fields.

In this spirit of reflection, critical appraisal, and reimagining, cultural organisation PUSAKA, literary journal Svara, CENDANA (Cultural Economy Development Agency), and the Faculty of Creative Arts and Universiti Malaya are collaborating on an initiative to mark 50 years since the National Culture Congress of 1971. The initiative aims to reflect on the historical, social, and political context that gave rise to it, problematize aspects of its approach as subsequent development through the National Culture Policy, as well as explore possibilities for the present and future.

# A hybrid 2-day Symposium, The National Culture Congress 1971 — A Symposium 50 Years

**On** will beheld on **11-12 December 2021** at Universiti Malaya, the original site where the National Culture Congress in 1971 was convened. This Symposium will gather cultural practitioners and experts from diverse communities and fields to critically appraise the development of culture in Malaysia since the Congress and the formulation and implementation of the National Culture Policy.

“In the intellectual spirit of 1971, this Symposium will explore the role and influence of the National Culture Policy in the formation of our national character, while reimagining the foundations and possibilities of Malaysian culture,” remarks Eddin Khoo, Founder-Director of PUSAKA, and one of the curators and organisers of the Symposium.

According to Izan Satrina Mohd Sallehuddin, Founding CEO of CENDANA, “For *Art In The City* 2021, a programme curated for the benefit of the public, the creative industry stakeholders are broad. This includes a Symposium to mark 50 years since the National Culture Congress, to uphold Malaysian culture which encompasses our multiracial and multicultural society. Our cultural unity symbolises the resilience and harmony of the Malaysian people, who always come together to ensure that our plural society continues to support efforts to strengthen our country’s socioeconomic status.”

The Symposium entitled **“The National Culture Congress 1971: A Symposium 50 Years On”** will take place on 11-12 December 2021 at the Experimental Theatre, Universiti Malaya, and will also be live-streamed.

The Symposium will feature distinguished and experienced speakers from diverse fields including Culture, Arts, Heritage, Local Knowledge, Literature, History, Education, and Policy. The speakers are National Literary Laureate Prof. Muhammad Haji Salleh, scholar, and writer Prof Dato’ Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican, former Minister of Education YB Dr. Maszlee Malik, anthropologist Dr. Welyne Jeffrey Jehom, ethnochoreologist and ethnomusicologist Prof. Mohd. Anis Md Nor, celebrated dancer and Dean of ASWARA’s Faculty of Dance Zamzuriah Zahari, Deputy Dean of the UM’s Faculty of Creative Arts Dr. Roslina Ismail, filmmaker Muzzamer Rahman, musician and scholar Adil Johan, and En. Salehhuddin Md Salleh, Deputy Director-General, National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN). The Symposium will be moderated by PUSAKA Founder-Director Eddin Khoo and scholar-activist Dr. Teo Lee Ken. The discussions from the Symposium will later be compiled and published in book form.

In conjunction with the Symposium, PUSAKA will also present a Wayang Kulit performance by Kumpulan Wayang Kulit Sri Warisan Pusaka from Machang, Kelantan on the night of 11 December at the Experimental Theatre, UM.

To attend this Symposium in person, please register at: https://bit.ly/3DFzF1f

The Symposium will also be live-streamed on the CENDANA, PUSAKA, dan SVARA Facebook pages.

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About PUSAKA

PUSAKA is a non-profit organisation established to conduct research and create a comprehensive documentary archive of traditional performance in Malaysia, while strengthening the viability of these traditions at the community level. PUSAKA works intimately with some of the most distinguished performers of the Wayang Kulit, Mak Yong, Manora, Main Puteri and Dikir Barat traditions of Kelantan, and is expanding its work to embrace traditions from other states in Malaysia, including the Mah Meri of Selangor, Kompang, Kuda Kepang and Reog Ponorogo of Johor, Portuguese dance of Malacca, and Teochew Puppetry of Penang. PUSAKA also attempts to respond to present-day challenges that threaten the continuity and integrity of traditional performance. Through organising regular public performances and local instruction projects, PUSAKA aims to enhance the viability of traditional performance. In this way, PUSAKA supports the transmission of these performance traditions to a succeeding generation, while providing alternative performance platforms that, above all, preserve the dignity and stature of the traditional performer. In all its work, PUSAKA seeks to establish a deep interaction with aspects of history and contemporary ideas while illuminating and providing an intellectual context for the contemplation of broader aspects of culture, tradition and ideas. www.pusaka.org

About SVARA

Svara is a Malay-language quarterly journal on contemporary culture and society. Since its inception in 2020, Svara has reignited a passion among young Malaysian readers for longform creative nonfiction and short fiction in print, on topics ranging from history and literature to social-political current affairs in Malaysia and the region. Reaching beyond the borders of Malaysia, Svara is well received among readers in neighbouring countries, Singapore and Indonesia.

About CENDANA

CENDANA was launched on 6 September 2017 to shape a vibrant, sustainable, and ambitious cultural economy for Malaysia, further raising the profile of Malaysian arts and culture to help form the identity of Malaysia as an arts destination and strategically place Malaysia on the global stage. It is supported by the Malaysian Government through MyCreative Ventures Sdn. Bhd. (a whollyowned company of Minister of Finance Incorporated) and reports to the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia. For more information, log on to www.cendana.com.my .

About MyCreative Ventures

MyCreative Ventures is a government investment arm launched in September 2012 to spur the Malaysian creative industry via strategic and innovative funding. Find out more via www.mycreative.com.my .