

Partner Southeast Asia

Insights on connecting the Philippine-UK creative economy

January 2022

Highlights

- **The panel, ‘Entry points between the Philippines and UK’ organised by the British Council brought policymakers, cultural leaders, artists, and academics together in dialogue.** Focusing on arts and culture post-pandemic, they reflected on existing and potential cultural links between the Philippines and the UK.¹
- **International networks and TV shows on Philippine culture have succeeded in creating interest for the country’s rich heritage and cultural practices.**
- **The Cultural Center of the Philippines, whose longest-running play was UK-produced, *Miss Saigon*, is slowly opening its doors to the public and welcomes international connections through cultural agreements with foreign organisations.**
- **Filipino creatives are widely employed globally within game development, animation, and design. On the consumption end, Filipino start-up Yield Guild Games is engaging 45,000 gamers to participate in *play-to-earn* games.**
- **Filipino artworks like Pio Abad’s, as acquired by the Tate Modern, help expand ‘historical narratives within the British context.’**
- **The British Council can contribute significantly in paving the way for sector development in the Philippines through increased cultural connections.**

Overview

The key role of the British Council in supporting the arts and culture in the Philippines is hinged on the UK’s position as a global leader in the creative industries.² According to the UNCTAD 2018 report³, in the Philippines in 2014, the creative industries generated about \$3.2 billion in exports of intellectual property and services.

Indeed, the projects and institutions featured in ‘Entry points’ and discussed below, are vital to strengthening the thriving creative economy in the Philippines. Yet there are still many opportunities that need to be developed to improve these industries. For the speakers, these opportunities involve increased funding and capacity building.

Already, it seems that efforts of collaboration between the UK and the Philippines have been beneficial to the latter’s own creative industries. As British Council’s Lotus Postrado notes in her welcoming address, the Philippine Development Plan for the next 20 years identifies the need to strengthen the creative sector. Evidence of this push is in legislations such as the Creative

¹ The event was part of Partner Southeast Asia: Arts and Culture Matters, an online fora curated by the British Council. It ran from 22 to 25 November 2021. It aimed to strengthen ties between the cultural sector of Southeast Asia and the UK.¹

² These industries broadly include advertising, architecture, arts & culture, crafts, design, fashion, games, music, publishing, and TV & film, among others (See <https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/>)

³ See https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditcted2018d3_en.pdf

Industries Act of 2021, which has been passed by the congress and is currently awaiting approval from the senate. ⁴



Joan Monis Pabona, 'Ayuda Ko, Ayuda Nila (My aid, Their aid)', 2021. Shoe box, thread, dried leaves, bond paper, old newspaper, dried flowers, water color, luffa seeds. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm. ©Joan Monis Pabona

Government and media: Loren Legarda

Politician, journalist and Deputy House Speaker for the Philippines House of Representatives Loren Legarda outlined her achievements promoting Philippine art and culture. As a journalist, Legarda has produced valuable resources on Philippine traditional culture and the arts through her TV show '[Dayaw](#)' (Honour) (2015-present) on indigenous cultures, and '[Buhay na Buhay](#)' (Alive and Well) (2018) an eight-part documentary series featuring the eight living traditions of the country.

As a politician, Legarda championed the return of the Philippines in the Venice Biennale in 2015, an initiative that continues to this day. While establishing international relations, she has also developed local networks between artists and the public with her 'Likhaan' (Creation) workshops on traditional arts in Intramuros in 2019 and the establishment of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network in 2017.

Particular to UK relationships, Legarda supported the establishment of Philippine studies fora and programmes in universities abroad, most importantly in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Her existing programmes show that at the local and international

⁴ The British Council has also published many reports on the creative industries. In 2017, it commissioned [The Philippine Creative Economy](#) report by Tom Fleming, in partnership with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts.

level, networks and initiatives for education, culture and the arts have succeeded in creating interest for the rich heritage and cultural practices in the Philippines.

UK-Philippines grassroots connections: Prof Deirdre McKay

Through the British Council-funded 'Kamustahan Arts Projects' (Catching up), visual arts projects became the thread to connect Filipino migrant workers. The project was a collaboration between Professor McKay of Keele University, England, and Filipina fine artist Nathalie Dagmang of Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.

McKay is a researcher and curator who has written about and worked with the Filipino diaspora. In her talk, McKay notes that the UK-Philippines connections exist in channels of financial and social remittances and information that flows between the two countries, indicating how migrants are making contributions to development. A precursor to 'Kamustahan', her collaborative work with the Vargas Museum entitled 'Curating Development' made visible the migrants' diverse contributions to their hometowns. In 'Kamustahan' she continued to collaborate with four Filipino artists⁵ and three advocacy groups⁶ with Dagmang as the lead. Here Filipino artists guided migrant Filipino workers to create visual artworks for three online exhibitions.

McKay reports that the project provided a space for the workers to be able to care for each other, which strengthened their resilience amid the pandemic. With participants from the Philippines, UK, Hongkong and Taiwan, the project constructed a network of flow between each person enabling them to intersect and 'meet' through the arts. McKay called this an 'alternative venue for care' that enabled them to learn new skills and potentially lead to extra income.

Successful London-based Filipino artist: Pio Abad

Filipino artworks about Philippine history and objects are well-received in the UK. Pio Abad is a successful Filipino visual artist based in London, educated at the Glasgow School of Art and then at the Royal Academy of the Arts. Abad spoke about his exhibitions in the UK, the first being his Masters in Fine Art show in 2012, which launched his ongoing critical art practice of engaging with Philippine political history.

Abad is interested in the way that material can be used to generate narratives of Philippine history and politics, particularly to reorient narratives of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos to ensure that the ironies of their opulence, accumulation of objects, and 'royal fantasies of power' are never forgotten. An example is his exhibition with Gasworks, London, entitled *The Collection of Jane Ryan and William Saunders* in 2019, reconstructed through 3D printing the jewellery of Imelda Marcos.

⁵ Alma Quinto (Pampanga), Henrielle Pagkaliwangan (Manila), Jason Dy, SJ (Quezon City) and Guhit Kulay (Pinay Artists sa Hong Kong)

⁶ Filipino Domestic Workers Association, UK (London); Migrante International, Taiwan (Taipei); and Serve the People, Taiwan (Taipei)

These works were recently acquired by Tate Modern, ‘expanding the historical narratives within the British context’ and the types of material included in British collections. This work was later transformed into an augmented reality version of the project accessed publicly through a website in 2020. Abad also curated Pacita Abad’s work in Spike Island and later in Tate Liverpool. These are examples of collaborations and partnerships between the UK and the Philippines, which have already been established and continue to hold much potential for more productive collaborations between the two countries.

Emerging trends in Philippine arts and creative industries: Chris Millado and Pauline Suaco-Juan

Cultural Center of the Philippines’ Vice President and Artistic Director, Chris Millado points out that Filipino interest in British performing arts is evident through Shakespeare translations; the play, *Miss Saigon*; and the creative industries.

Today, the CCP, whose longest-running play was UK-produced, *Miss Saigon*, is slowly opening its doors to the public and welcomes more international connections by providing embassies with venues. Thus, although the pandemic halted the performing arts, nodes of engagement are in place as the institution continues to provide space, audience and training as part of the burgeoning creative industry that the British Council has been developing.

Pauline Suaco-Juan, Executive Director of the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (CITEM) export promotion arm of the DTI notes that Filipino creatives in service-oriented jobs are widely employed all over the world for sectors such as game development, animation, performance, communications, and design. Not surprisingly, Filipinos also have a stake on the part of consumption. For example, Filipino start-up Yield Guild Games is developing 45,000 gamers to eventually be able to participate in play-to-earn games.

For its part, CITEM has already established their digital infrastructure to promote exchange with different countries for creative sectors. These are websites for food, crafts, and fashion: fameplus.com, FOODphilippines.com, lfexconnect.com, Createphilippines.com, and Sustainability.ph.

While digital transformation exhibited in the platforms above provide opportunities to improve ‘quality of output and operational efficiency,’ there still exist challenges in ease of doing business, and poor internet service. Some recommendations include establishing career pathways and promoting the HB 10107 Philippine Creative Industries Development Act. The Bill outlines legislation necessary to support the growth of the industries and increase contribution to the economy.



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Clockwise: Dr Rafael Schacter, Pauline Suaco-Juan, Pio Abad, Deirdre McKay, Chris Millado.

Barriers and opportunities for connections

Amid established links and hopes for future development, barriers must be acknowledged to create a solution and widen the flow of exchange of ideas and creativity. Panel moderator, Dr Rafael Schacter, summarised these brilliantly:

- **Lack of mobility and time to build meaningful relationships.** For McKay, these include barriers to people's mobility to different countries, which prevent marginalised groups from experiencing museums, socialising, and doing in-person work. For Abad, these barriers can be overcome by enabling fluidity of travel through affiliations, and raising awareness on the Philippine context through knowledge production.
- **Lack of access to information.** For Suaco-Juan, the knowledge needed to travel, do exchanges and take advantage of opportunities needs to be made available to a wider range of communities. The government has a big role to play in making this happen and should make use of strategic digital communications to reach wider audiences.
- **Lack of funding.** For Millado, despite being the country's most established cultural institution, funding is still lacking to implement programmes, develop residencies and promote artists. The emergence of budget airlines and social media have greatly helped with artist mobility, but the situation is changing again due to the pandemic.

Keeping the momentum

'Entry points' maintains that the British Council can have a significant contribution in continuing these connections and paving the way for sectoral growth.

- First, British Council can continue to fund projects between Filipino diasporic communities. Inclusive art-making opportunities for non-artists create spaces of connection and care, and at the same time could lead to economic gain in the future.

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- Conversely, the British Council can further facilitate partnerships between established Filipino artists in the UK and the Philippines. This can open space for Filipino talent and creativity to be recognised abroad.
 - Third, the British Council can help equip government institutions with knowledge sharing and capacity building resources and resource personnel to be able to innovate digitally. They can also influence the promotion of the Creative Industries Act.

The passion for developing Philippine art and culture is evident in the presentations of UK-based and Philippine-based artists, cultural leaders and academics. Moreover, they were a demonstration of existing and thriving entry points between the two countries. For their part, the British Council can further open up these entry points by continuing their mission of brokering and connecting, grant support, and developing partnerships.

Watch the recording of the panel discussion [here](#).

Summary by Regina Bautista and Malaya del Rosario