

Race, Cultural, Political and Religious impact towards policies on Theatre and Film Production in Malaysia

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Abstract

Government policies in Malaysia have long supported a strategy of racial discrimination promoting the interests of Malays over the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. An important aspect of this problem is the repressive government control over cultural and creative production in the country to promote its political agenda of Malay dominance. Many studies have suggested that these biased and authoritarian current policies have stymied the growth of creative industries and cultural practices in the country. This study intends to explore the effects of government policy on creativity in film and theatre production in Peninsular Malaysia. It also examines the ramifications of the nexus between government control and film/theatre production on multiculturalism in the country today.

Keywords: Creative Production, Cultural Practices, Malaysia, Malay, Chinese and India

1. Introduction

Malaysia's history as a nation has always been fraught with tensions over cultural identity and political sovereignty. The region's history begins as a group of feudal kingdoms of the indigenous Malay population ruled by their kings called 'Rajas' or Sultans. Under this monarchic system, the Rajas exercised absolute power as the rightful owner of the lands over the people of the state (negeri) who were also considered the hamba (servant) of the Raja. As rakyat or hamba, people of the state lived in the kingdom with the king's permission and they could also be rewarded with a tanah (land) if the king was pleased with their service or loyalty. In Malay literature, one often sees stories about Hang Tuah, a Malacca warrior who commit many great noble deed and are then rewarded by the Sultan of Mallaca with a piece of land. But being subject to the king's mandate, people could also be expelled from the kingdom or brutally slaughtered if they committed any act disobeying the king (derhaka). Due to this authoritarian social set-up and use of barbaric power, Benedict (2000) has described the Malay race as 'half-wild primitive tribe' (p. 117).