

State-Based Arts Funding in Asia - the next five years

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Arts funding has long been a contentious and evolving issue across the world, reflecting deeper economic, political, and cultural priorities. In Asia, however, state involvement in the arts has historically been far more centralised than in Europe, where independent patronage, commercial markets, and philanthropic support played a more significant role in sustaining artistic production. From imperial courts and religious institutions in China, Japan, Korea, and India, to modern-day government-backed film, gaming, and cultural soft power initiatives, the role of the state in shaping artistic expression remains fundamental to understanding the trajectory of arts funding across the region.

This chapter examines the past, present, and future of state-based arts funding in Asia, offering both a historical analysis of how government-controlled arts patronage developed and a predictive assessment of where it may be headed in the next five years. The first section explores how historical models of state sponsorship shaped artistic production from 1400 onwards, contrasting these traditions with European models that often relied on private patronage and market-driven economies. It considers how colonialism, political upheaval, and ideological shifts—particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries - reshaped the relationship between governments and the arts, paving the way for modern funding structures that continue to influence cultural policy today.

The second section builds on this historical foundation to predict the trajectory of state-based arts funding in Asia from 2025 to 2030. As governments across the region navigate post-pandemic economic constraints, geopolitical pressures, and rapid technological advancements, funding priorities are expected to shift in ways that reflect national agendas, commercial interests, and emerging digital landscapes. The chapter explores how some governments will continue using arts funding as a political tool, while others will invest in digital transformation, creative industries, and cultural diplomacy as means of economic expansion and global influence. It also questions whether increasing state control over the arts fosters cultural growth or limits artistic freedom, and whether relying on government funding is sustainable in an era where healthcare, education, and economic inequality demand urgent attention.

At its core, this chapter interrogates the role of the state in shaping artistic and cultural expression, asking: Should governments control the arts, or should creative production be left to market forces and independent institutions? While state support has been essential for sustaining artistic traditions in many Asian nations, history suggests that over-reliance on government funding can lead to politicised narratives, restrictions on creative freedom, and the marginalisation of artistic voices that do not align with state priorities. As the future of arts funding unfolds, it remains to be seen whether Asian governments will continue their legacy of strong state involvement in the arts, or whether new models—integrating private investment, philanthropic support, and digital monetisation—will emerge as alternatives to state-controlled funding structures.

Foundations of Control – The Evolution of State-Based Arts Funding in Asia (1400–2020)

Key Historical Differences in Arts Funding - Asia and Europe 1400 - 1800

In Asia, arts have historically been a “state”- sponsored affair. This is particularly prominent in China, Japan, Korea, and Mughal India, where the ruling classes closely controlled and defined artistic traditions. Imperial courts, dynasties and scholar-bureaucrats played the dominant role in sustaining and shaping artistic expression. Religious orders and institutions were also responsible for significant artistic production. However, unlike in Europe where the artists were often secular and only employed in their craft by “the Church” (e.g. Bach, Michael Angelo), those producing and controlling “religious art” in Asia had usually taken religious orders.

Europe’s system was quite diverse by comparison with the Church, monarchy, nobility, merchant guilds, and individual patrons all involved in commissioning artistic works suitable for their particular needs. The Renaissance era saw a surge in independent patronage from wealthy families such as the Medici in Florence, enabling far greater artistic experimentation than had been possible before.

Asia has also historically maintained highly centralised state control over artistic production. Imperial sponsorship dictated aesthetic traditions, and governments used art as a tool for reinforcing social order and in some locations, Confucian hierarchy. In China, calligraphy and painting adhered to strict dynastic conventions, while in Japan, the Tokugawa shogunate regulated artistic production through controlled patronage of Kabuki theatre (a Japanese classical theatre tradition integrating theatre, music and dance) and Ukiyo-e prints (stylised Japanese woodblock prints and paintings of the Edo period).

In contrast - Europe saw a gradual decentralisation of artistic control, particularly from the Renaissance onwards. While early European art was largely dictated by the Church and monarchy, the growth of independent markets and the Enlightenment led to greater artistic autonomy and freedom of expression.

The role of artists also differed significantly between Asia and Europe. In China and Korea, scholar-officials were expected to be proficient in artistic practices, with painting, calligraphy, and poetry serving as marks of Confucian refinement rather than independent commercial pursuits. Similarly, Buddhist monks across Tibet, Japan, and Southeast Asia often functioned as custodians of their religious artistic traditions, producing religious murals, sculptures, and mandalas.

In contrast - European artists were integrated into guilds, workshop apprenticeships, and independent commissions, allowing for a professionalisation of the arts that enabled greater financial independence and autonomy for the artist.

Unique Aspects of Asian Arts Funding

Unlike Europe, where independent workshops and market-driven art economies diversified, expanded and flourished, much of Asia maintained state-controlled artistic production well into the modern period.

In China (Tang, Song, Ming, Qing Dynasties), the imperial court directly controlled the arts, with scholar-officials acting as both bureaucrats and artists while in Japan (Edo Period), the shogunate regulated artistic

output to only state-sanctioned art forms - such as the aforementioned Kabuki theatre and Ukiyo-e prints as well as Gagayu, a traditional form of Japanese classical music.

Korea's (Joseon Dynasty), Neo-Confucian principles dictated state-sponsored artistic production, emphasising tradition and hierarchy and in Mughal India, Royal ateliers produced Persian-style miniature paintings under strict state supervision.

Religious institutions were also key patrons across Asia, but as already stated, this artistic production was usually serviced by those within the Order or Institution.

In India (Gupta, Chola, Vijayanagar Empires), temple complexes commissioned spawned sculptures, frescoes, and dance performances as part of Spiritual Devotion and a way to transmit religious messages and ideals.

Tibet, China, Japan and Korea's Buddhist monasteries supported the production of Thangka paintings (Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings), temple murals, and spiritual iconography while the Islamic Empires (Mughal, Safavid, Ottoman) ensured that calligraphy, geometric art, and architecture flourished under religious sponsorship and control.

While most of Asia's artistic production remained court-controlled, China and Japan developed early art markets. A good example of this in China (Ming-Qing Dynasties, 16th–19th Century) is how the merchant classes in urban centers like Suzhou and Beijing, wanting to enhance personal status and having disposable income, fueled demand for commercially produced paintings and in Japan (during the Edo Period, 17th–19th Century) Ukiyo-e prints became mass-produced commercial art, catering to the tastes of the urban middle class.

The Changing Arts Funding Model in Asia (19th-20th Century)

European colonialism disrupted traditional arts funding models in India, Southeast Asia, and China, replacing imperial and religious patronage with Western-style academies. In India, British rule dismantled Mughal royal patronage, while Japan's Meiji Era (1868–1912) saw the adoption of European-style museums, music conservatories, and Western painting techniques.

In Communist China the government eliminated private patronage, focusing on propaganda-style socialist realism while in Soviet-Influenced North Korea, art became exclusively state-controlled to be used as an ideological tool. It is only since the reopening of the Chinese economy that private patronage has again been allowed - however, this remains strictly regulated with significant censorship imposed.

South Korea, Japan and Taiwan's governments started to invest in film, music, and design industries, shifting arts funding towards cultural soft power initiatives.

What Lies Ahead – Predicting State-Based Arts Funding in Asia (2025–2030)

The future of state-based arts funding in Asia is likely to be shaped by a complex interplay of economic pressures, national priorities, and shifting political landscapes. Unlike in Europe, where private patronage, commercial markets, and philanthropic foundations have long played significant roles in supporting the arts, many Asian nations have historically relied on strong government involvement in artistic production and cultural

policy. As a result, changes in funding priorities are rarely isolated decisions; rather, they are deeply embedded in broader economic strategies, political ideologies, and technological transformations.

As explored in the first section of this chapter, historical patterns of arts funding in Asia have been shaped by imperial patronage, religious institutions, state-directed cultural projects, and, more recently, nationalist agendas and commercial markets. These traditions continue to inform how governments allocate funding today, with some nations expanding their creative industries as tools of soft power, while others tighten control over cultural production to reinforce political narratives. However, in an era of rapid digitalisation, environmental challenges, and intensifying global competition for cultural influence, the role of the state in shaping artistic production is evolving once again.

This section examines how arts funding across Asia may shift between 2025 and 2030, analysing the drivers behind investment decisions, the regional disparities in funding priorities, and the potential consequences of state control over artistic expression. While economic constraints, commercial viability, and political imperatives are likely to dominate decision-making, technological advancements, climate considerations, and the push for greater inclusivity will also play increasingly significant roles. Which art forms will thrive, and which will struggle for survival? How will governments balance financial pragmatism with cultural heritage preservation and creative freedom? And in an era where pressing social issues such as poverty, healthcare, and education demand urgent attention, how justifiable is heavy state investment in the arts?

While no future outcome is certain, this section offers a forward-looking analysis based on current trajectories and observable policy trends, outlining the potential expansions, contractions, and transformations that may define state-based arts funding in Asia in the years ahead.

Economic Pressures and Budget Reallocations

Post-Pandemic Financial Constraints & Competing Priorities

Governments across Asia continue to grapple with the long-term financial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in major shifts in funding priorities. In Japan, South Korea, and China, economic recovery efforts have placed greater emphasis on infrastructure, healthcare, and digital transformation, reducing the availability of discretionary funding for the arts. These governments are likely to reallocate cultural budgets towards sectors perceived as critical for national stability and economic resilience, leaving traditional arts funding increasingly vulnerable to cuts.

In developing economies such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, arts funding is expected to remain strategically tied to economic growth, tourism, and commercial cultural exports. Governments in these regions view cultural funding not as an independent sector but as an instrument of nation branding and economic development. Investments are likely to flow into projects that enhance international visibility, such as cultural festivals, heritage site preservation, and creative industries, while experimental or non-commercial artistic ventures may struggle to secure state support.

China's Economic Slowdown & Its Impact on Arts Funding

China's economic downturn, real estate crisis, slowing GDP growth, and mounting national debt suggest a potential contraction in large-scale cultural investments. While high-profile state-backed projects—particularly those that reinforce nationalist narratives and heritage preservation—are likely to retain financial backing, contemporary, independent, and politically neutral artistic sectors may face significant cuts.

The China National Arts Fund, which traditionally supports major domestic and international cultural initiatives, may reduce its grants for international collaborations, particularly in response to escalating geopolitical tensions. This shift reflects China's broader strategy of cultural self-sufficiency, where state-funded arts serve as instruments of soft power, ideological reinforcement, and national prestige rather than vehicles for open artistic discourse.

Shift Towards Commercial Viability in Arts Funding

Across the region, governments are increasingly prioritising **arts funding that guarantees economic returns**. This has resulted in a growing emphasis on:

- **Cultural tourism** – Expansion of heritage sites, museums, and cultural festivals that attract international visitors and contribute to economic development.
- **Creative industries** – Increased state investment in film, gaming, streaming services, and digital arts, which generate high revenue and strengthen national cultural influence abroad.
- **Tech-based artistic enterprises** – Support for emerging sectors such as AI-generated art, NFT markets, and immersive digital experiences, aligning with national strategies for digital economy growth.

Meanwhile, traditional, classical, and non-commercial artistic sectors—such as fine arts, experimental theatre, and contemporary classical music—are likely to see a decline in government funding unless they can demonstrate economic impact or alignment with national policy goals. As a result, artists and organisations in these fields may become increasingly dependent on private sponsorship, philanthropy, or international grants to sustain their work.

Digital Transformation in Arts Funding

Government Investment in AI, Virtual Arts, and Gaming

Governments across Asia are increasingly recognising the economic and cultural potential of AI, virtual arts, and digital gaming, leading to a significant shift in funding priorities. South Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan are at the forefront of this transformation, actively investing in AI-generated storytelling, VR/AR-based cultural experiences, and the expansion of digital entertainment industries.

AI-driven content creation is becoming a major focus, with funding being directed towards automated music composition, generative art, AI-assisted filmmaking, and digital scriptwriting. These technologies enable cost-effective production, real-time content adaptation, and hyper-personalised audience engagement, making them particularly attractive to both government and private investors. Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) technologies are also receiving substantial support, with initiatives aimed at developing immersive museum

exhibits, interactive theatre performances, and AI-powered cultural archives that can expand access to the arts beyond traditional physical spaces.

The gaming industry is another major beneficiary of digital arts funding, particularly in South Korea and Japan, where eSports, metaverse-based cultural spaces, and AI-enhanced gaming narratives are increasingly regarded as important cultural exports. In China, government-backed investment in the gaming sector remains strong, but funding is increasingly tied to state-controlled content regulations. Restrictions on foreign gaming influences, ideological content, and youth gaming hours have resulted in a highly curated digital ecosystem, where only state-approved narratives and themes receive substantial financial support.

Shifts from Traditional to Digital Infrastructure

As governments prioritise digital access and virtual experiences, traditional arts institutions—such as theatres, art galleries, and libraries—may experience declining state support in favour of technology-driven alternatives. This shift reflects both economic pragmatism and changing audience behaviours, with policymakers recognising that digital platforms offer wider accessibility, lower maintenance costs, and greater global reach than traditional physical institutions.

Streaming platforms and film industries are emerging as primary beneficiaries of this funding reallocation, particularly in India, South Korea, and Thailand, where governments have recognised the global market potential of digital film production. In these regions, government grants and subsidies are increasingly being directed toward online film festivals, AI-powered content recommendation systems, and the integration of blockchain technology for digital rights management.

Despite this shift, concerns remain regarding the long-term impact of digitalisation on traditional artistic forms. While AI-generated content and virtual experiences offer efficiency and scalability, critics argue that over-reliance on digital arts may erode the value of live performance, physical artistic craftsmanship, and human-led creative expression. However, given the commercial viability and global appeal of AI-enhanced creative industries, it is likely that digital transformation will continue to shape the future of arts funding across Asia.

Environmental and Social Responsibility in Arts Funding

Sustainability-Focused Arts Initiatives

Across Asia and the Pacific, governments are increasingly incorporating environmental sustainability into arts funding policies, recognising the role of cultural production in shaping public attitudes towards climate change. Countries such as Australia, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea are leading efforts to promote eco-conscious arts funding, supporting projects that reduce carbon footprints and incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into artistic creation. Initiatives range from low-carbon theatre productions and sustainable art installations to green music festivals that prioritise renewable energy sources, biodegradable materials, and ethical production processes.

Some nations, particularly within ASEAN (Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines), face challenges in allocating national budgets towards climate-conscious cultural projects. As a result, many of these countries rely on international grants and NGO-led initiatives to integrate sustainability into their arts sectors. Funding from organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and regional climate alliances plays a crucial role in

supporting cultural preservation efforts that align with sustainable development goals. However, the reliance on external grants raises concerns about long-term autonomy, as international funding often comes with specific conditions that may not fully align with local artistic traditions or priorities.

Despite the push towards sustainability, there is ongoing debate over how much government intervention should dictate artistic expression in relation to climate change. While some argue that climate-conscious funding helps drive public engagement with environmental issues, others contend that over-prioritisation of sustainability narratives could limit creative diversity by favouring projects that align with state-sponsored messaging.

Support for Marginalised Communities in the Arts

In recent years, several governments, including Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia, have expanded targeted funding programs for Indigenous arts, LGBTQ+ projects, and women-led initiatives. This trend reflects a broader commitment to social equity and representation in the arts, ensuring that historically underrepresented voices receive institutional support. Funding has facilitated Indigenous-led theatre productions, gender-diverse film initiatives, and intersectional arts festivals, creating spaces for artists from marginalised communities to share their perspectives.

However, in India, Indonesia, China, and Malaysia, conservative and nationalist governments have increasingly restricted or withdrawn funding from progressive social arts projects. In these countries, arts funding is often aligned with national identity and traditional cultural values, leading to defunding of LGBTQ+ initiatives, feminist art collectives, and politically critical artistic movements. In some cases, state censorship has intensified, preventing artists from securing alternative private sponsorship or international grants.

Balancing Identity-Driven Arts Funding with Universal Artistic Expression

While governments have a role in ensuring greater inclusivity in arts funding, prioritising identity-based funding models over universal artistic expression carries certain risks. The emphasis on funding projects that focus on specific social or cultural identities rather than broader human experiences can sometimes contribute to fragmentation within artistic communities, where funding becomes politicised or distributed along ideological lines rather than artistic merit.

A potential drawback of over-prioritising funding for marginalised communities is that it can lead to an increasingly segmented arts landscape, where artistic projects are defined primarily by identity politics rather than shared human experiences. Governments may unintentionally foster a culture of division rather than dialogue if funding mechanisms overly favour works that reinforce differences rather than projects that explore commonalities between diverse populations.

Some critics argue that governments should focus on funding art that transcends identity categories and promotes universal themes such as human resilience, social cohesion, and shared cultural narratives. Art has historically served as a unifying force, providing a medium through which people can engage with collective struggles, philosophical inquiries, and emotional experiences that are not limited by nationality, gender, or ethnic identity. While it is essential to support historically underrepresented voices, an overly segmented funding strategy may reduce opportunities for collaboration across artistic communities, limiting the potential for shared creative innovation.

Moving forward, governments will need to strike a balance between supporting diversity and fostering artistic unity. While funding for marginalised communities remains crucial for equity, a more integrated approach that encourages cross-cultural and interdisciplinary artistic collaboration could ensure that arts funding does not reinforce division but instead nurtures a shared cultural heritage.

Summary of Likely National Arts Funding Trends (2025–2030)

Over the next five years, arts funding across Asia will reflect broader economic, political, and technological shifts, with some countries expanding investment in creative industries, while others tighten control or redirect funding towards state-aligned cultural projects.

Countries Likely to Increase Arts Funding

- **South Korea** – A strong emphasis on digital arts, gaming, and cultural exports will drive funding growth, reinforcing the country's position as a global leader in eSports, film, K-pop, and metaverse-based arts experiences.
- **Taiwan** – Increased funding is expected for international cultural collaborations, Indigenous arts initiatives, and digital innovation, particularly in VR museums, AI-driven storytelling, and blockchain-backed creative industries.
- **Singapore** – The government will continue investing in tech-driven arts, design, and cultural tourism, strengthening Singapore's reputation as a hub for digital creativity and cultural business development.
- **Indonesia** – Arts funding will be closely linked to tourism, gaming, and digital content development, with growth in commercial cultural production and state-backed media initiatives.
- **Malaysia** – Funding is expected to expand for film, gaming, and music industries, though conservative social policies may limit support for progressive or politically critical artistic projects.

Countries Likely to See Stable or Selective Increases in Funding

- **Japan** – While funding for traditional performing arts may remain steady, selective increases in anime, gaming, and cultural diplomacy will likely continue as part of Japan's soft power strategy.
- **Thailand** – Modest growth is expected in tourism-based arts initiatives and digital innovation, with increased state sponsorship of cultural festivals and entertainment sectors.
- **Vietnam** – Government support for traditional and heritage-based arts is expected to continue, though funding for independent or politically sensitive content will likely face greater restrictions.

Countries Where Funding May Decrease or Become Politically Directed

- **China** – Funding will prioritise nationalist, commercial, and digital arts initiatives, including state-approved gaming, AI-generated cultural projects, and propaganda-driven storytelling. Support for independent or internationally collaborative arts projects is likely to decline further.
- **India** – A shift towards heritage and religious arts funding will likely come at the expense of progressive, secular, or critical artistic movements, reinforcing government-aligned cultural narratives.
- **Philippines** – Due to ongoing economic struggles, state arts funding is expected to decline, leading to greater reliance on private sponsorships, NGOs, and international grants to sustain artistic programs.

- **Pakistan** – Funding stability will be affected by political volatility, with intermittent arts investment depending on shifts in government priorities and external economic pressures.
- **Hong Kong** – Increasing government control over cultural production is expected to result in a decline in funding for independent arts and greater alignment of state-sponsored projects with national ideological goals.

By 2030, Asian arts funding will be increasingly shaped by digital transformation, commercialisation, and geopolitical tensions. Countries with strong creative economies (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) will expand funding, while those with authoritarian or politically volatile landscapes (e.g., China, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong) will see funding become more restrictive or ideologically driven. Private sector and international funding sources will play a growing role in sustaining independent and alternative artistic movements, particularly in nations where state support is declining or politically controlled.

The Future of State-Based Arts Funding in Asia

The landscape of state-based arts funding in Asia is undergoing a period of profound transformation, shaped by economic pragmatism, geopolitical forces, and technological advancements. Over the next decade, government priorities will increasingly favour commercially viable, politically aligned, and technologically innovative arts initiatives, while traditional artistic forms and independent creative expression may face greater challenges in securing state support.

A shift towards commercial viability is already apparent, with film, gaming, and digital content industries receiving greater investment, while fine arts, independent theatre, and experimental artistic movements struggle for recognition. In many ways, this reflects broader global economic trends, where governments seek cultural investments that generate revenue and contribute to national branding. While the rise of digital arts, AI-driven content creation, and immersive technologies brings exciting possibilities for artistic innovation, it also raises questions about what is lost when funding is increasingly directed toward entertainment-oriented media rather than art for its own sake.

At the same time, geopolitical tensions continue to shape funding priorities, with China, India, and Vietnam increasingly using arts funding to promote nationalist narratives, reinforcing state ideologies through historical revisionism, heritage projects, and propaganda-driven storytelling. Meanwhile, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are actively expanding their cultural soft power through film, gaming, and global creative diplomacy. While this divergence highlights the growing politicisation of the arts, it also demonstrates the strategic value that governments place on cultural influence in shaping international perceptions.

Technology and AI are emerging as dominant forces in arts investment, with VR/AR museums, AI-generated storytelling, and digital entertainment industries set to become major state-supported sectors. Governments see these innovations as both economic drivers and cultural assets, particularly in nations where entertainment exports play a crucial role in economic growth. However, as AI and digital arts funding expands, questions remain over the future of human-led creative expression. Will AI-generated art replace traditional craftsmanship? Will immersive virtual experiences make physical galleries and performance spaces obsolete? While these technologies offer new frontiers of accessibility and artistic experimentation, they also challenge longstanding notions of artistic integrity and authorship.

In some countries, sustainability and social responsibility are influencing arts funding policies, particularly in Taiwan, Australia, and parts of Southeast Asia, where governments are supporting eco-conscious artistic practices and promoting greater inclusivity. This funding shift acknowledges the need for socially and environmentally responsible cultural production, ensuring that arts investment aligns with broader ethical and sustainability goals. However, this raises another question: should arts funding be primarily about serving broader policy objectives, or should it be about fostering creativity for its own sake?

Ultimately, the future of state-based arts funding in Asia is a complex balance of economic realities, political interests, and evolving artistic landscapes. While government support remains a vital mechanism for sustaining cultural heritage and creative industries, it is also worth questioning how much we should rely on the state to determine what art is made, who receives funding, and what narratives are prioritised. In a world where education systems, healthcare, and poverty alleviation continue to demand urgent resources, is it justifiable to prioritise cultural funding over other social needs? The answer is not straightforward. The arts enrich societies, preserve cultural identities, and shape public discourse in ways that no other sector can. Yet, an over-reliance on state funding can also create artistic dependency, limit creative freedom, and result in funding being allocated according to political rather than artistic merit.

As Asia moves forward, a more balanced approach may be necessary—one that encourages both state and private investment in the arts, fosters independent artistic ecosystems, and ensures that funding decisions are made in the interest of cultural and artistic enrichment, rather than purely economic or ideological considerations. The arts have always thrived in times of uncertainty, adaptation, and reinvention, and regardless of how funding models evolve, creativity will continue to find its place in society. Whether governments choose to nurture or control that creativity will define the next era of artistic expression in Asia.

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