Section I: Narrative (Ideally two pages, not to exceed three pages. Please incorporate answers to the following questions within your narrative.)

Kritikos Malaysia seeks to promote critical thinking through philosophy education in Malaysia. This summer, we kickstarted two core projects: 1) Kritikos Fellowship where we have selected Mentors lead a cohort of high school students for 6 weekends (12 sessions) covering contemporary topics not prompted in school. 2) Felo Pendidik (“Educator Fellowship” in Malay) where we have educators attend 6 weekends (6 sessions) of material exposing them to philosophy and relevant to their teaching environment.

As a philosophy major, I love how the subject encourages us to think deeper. Growing up in Malaysia, philosophy has been overlooked as a worthy educational medium for critical thinking to be integrated into our national curriculum. For example, we lack quality tertiary instruction for philosophy majors in Malaysia; deserving scholars often have to pursue philosophy at western institutions, notably in the US and UK. Just to paint a picture, if you approach a random Malaysian on the street, chances are, they would probably conflate philosophy with psychology or another mainstream social science.

Due to an undeveloped national pipeline, it also follows that philosophy has become inaccessible to people from less privileged backgrounds. Furthermore, getting the necessary buy-in from parents has proven to be difficult due to a lack of consensus of the subject’s nature. These are further exacerbated by Malaysia’s taboo culture of avoiding complex but important conversations, such as resolving racial tensions and pursuing inclusive political agendas. To achieve lasting peace in my country, philosophical thinking remains to be one of the greatest untapped avenues to encourage productive, critical and necessary dialogues in our pursuit of lasting harmony.

The long-term pursuit of promoting peace and harmony in a nation as culturally diverse as Malaysia, inspires the intellectual need for a medium where people from various backgrounds can have respectful, meaningful, and stimulating discourses --- philosophy (and philosophical thinking) encourages that space for clear thinking, rigorous argumentation, and critical examination of sophisticated topics.

That was the theory behind the vision. Translating all that into action was hard.

We did not have any further fund-raising efforts for our project since winning a grant meant that financing the project was not an issue. One of our biggest hurdles is the uncertainty of our lockdown situation in Malaysia. Our team discussions begun in March 2021 but an unanticipated outburst of COVID cases have forced us to default to complete virtual mode. Going remote though has enabled us to reach an unprecedented scale of representation from different ethnicities and income groups; we've accepted 125 student applications across 13 states who came from incredibly varied high school backgrounds. Similarly, we accepted 60 educators for the Educator Fellowship and 15 Mentors to lead the Kritikos Fellowship; even 10 among 22 of my team members were not based in our capital city Kuala Lumpur throughout the summer!

I also believe I speak for everyone on my team that building this project in Malaysia has heightened our sensitivity to connect with our Malaysian-ness, or fostering a sense of pride in what makes us uniquely Malaysian. This translated to us insisting on students, Mentors, and educators getting comfortable to take up bilingual space, namely English and our national language Bahasa Malaysia. Most of our materials and website material reflect this belief.

There were of course, many points where I get cold feet and second guess my ability to pull off this project; imposter syndrome kicks in from time to time and you just have to deal with that distracting mental hurdle. I think the best advice I can offer to future grantees regarding overcoming pandemic-related challenges is to practice “fear-setting” that is largely inspired by stoicism; imagine the worst-case scenario in any given situation, let the consequences play out in your head, and reassure yourself that
you're going to be okay; expect things to fail. Lastly, chances are, you are most likely going to assemble a team to build the project, so open your bid with trust and know that your team has your back through the thick and thin.

As much as I've given to this project, I have also taken an absurd amount of growth: learning to trust my instinct to recruit team members, learning to come very prepared before a meeting to have productive exchanges in a large-group setting, learning to apply my sensitivity barometer towards designing better social media content and user journey experience, learning to work with multiple stakeholders representing different organisations, learning to be empathetic yet firm with my teammates, learning to develop talents you're never acquainted with, learning 10 new digital tools on the go, learning to be open to being wrong, learning to work under immense pressure, learning to have thick-skin to put your work out there, learning to build consensus amidst huge differences among team members, learning to apply my dusty translation skills, learning to steer the motivation of the team when spirits are low, learning to still make enough time for myself despite juggling the chaos… and so forth!

One of my biggest personal growth exposures is being a “living spreadsheet” — my primary job is that people know what they need to do and do them on time. Being in this project management position requires that I’m always on top of the minutia of things, crafting our grand timeline, delegating out tasks in a timely communicative manner, and weaving everyone’s efforts into a cohesive whole rather than working in silo so that my team’s functioning in a highly coordinate state.

I think the most profound shift in outlook about the world is that novelty is overrated. Basically, despite being an idealist at heart who loves seeking out novelty, I’m increasingly drawn to getting habits and boring tasks done right. There are way too many instances where consistently getting the most boring tasks right has amounted to the greatest sense of novelty. This takeaway has steered me towards building processes that deliver results.

**Personal statement suitable for quotation:**

“If you ask high school teachers if philosophy matters, some might agree; if you ask them if critical thinking matters, all would agree. Kritikos aims to promote critical thinking through philosophy education in Malaysia with a.”

- Chan Tzu Kit

**Team leader full name:**

Chan Tzu Kit.

chantzukit122@gmail.com
Kritikos: Democratising Philosophy
Malaysia
Occidental College
Tzu Kit Chan (Malaysia, Occidental College)
kritikos.my

Section 2: Photographs

Kritikos Mentor Orientation

Kritikos Educator Orientation

Kritikos Fellowship Orientation