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**Creative City as an Urban
Development Strategy**
The Case of Selected
Malaysian Cities

**Suet Leng Khoo
Nicole Shu Fun Chang**

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Creative City as an Urban Development Strategy

“This compendium is an invaluable read for urban geographers/planners. The Malaysian government has formulated a set of strategies to enhance urban development and the role of cities. This book contributes profoundly to this objective. It rises above previous work on competitive cities in Malaysia in terms of detail and richness of local knowledge.”

—Morshidi Sirat, *Professor of Urban Geography, Universiti Sains Malaysia*

“Ipoh is synonymous with an ideal retirement city and old town for many people. In fact, its rich history and cultural heritage lay good potential and endless possibilities for urban regeneration. This book is definitely providing a timely analysis and insightful perspective for us to understand more about this former tin mining city, and on efforts to develop it towards a creative city.”

—Tan Kar Hing, *former Perak state's executive member for Tourism, Arts and Culture*

Suet Leng Khoo • Nicole Shu Fun Chang

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PREFACE

The idea of writing this book was conceptualised in 2018 after I have indulged in a myriad of research projects related to creative city. As I delved deeper into the creative city discourse, there were more and more ‘insights’ garnered as well as ‘enquiries and ambiguities’ that surfaced in terms of fathoming the concept from practical, theoretical and policy viewpoints. This made me realise that investigating these enquiries cannot be merely captured in a journal manuscript but would require more audacious endeavours like writing a book. The aspiration to pen this book gradually morphed into reality after a casual conversation with my co-author, Nicole Chang Shu Fun, a budding scholar in the field who enthusiastically accepted the invitation to embark on this book project with me.

After undertaking extensive research in our home city George Town (capital of Penang) as testbed of the concept, the time is also opportune for us to transcend national boundaries and test the concept for other Malaysian cities. In recent years, the accelerated fashion in which creative city development has reached and anchored on Malaysian shores has further instigated us to explore this topic. The adoption and adaptation of this concept within Malaysian soils will in one way or another shape Malaysia’s urban development, policy discourses and thus warrant immediate attention and concerted actions from all stakeholders. These exigencies have also prompted us to systematically test out this urban development strategy for other Malaysian cities besides George Town which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Additionally, the motivation to pen this book is also provoked by the paradoxical convictions of the concept itself where its acceptance is

contentious and ambivalent. It is a concept that is both heralded and yet criticised. Globally, urban managers and policy-makers tend to advocate and promote creative city development as the way forward for their cities. Contrastively, scholars in the academic realm are rather sceptical about the concept and often label it as elitist, divisionary and exacerbating urban exclusion. It is against this dialectical backdrop that the creative city concept is being hypothesised and explored for four selected Malaysian cities, namely, Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Ipoh and Johor Bahru.

From 2018 to 2020, primary data collection (i.e. interviews, focus group discussions, fieldwork observations, etc.) was undertaken in these four cities and the data set was supplemented by extensive secondary data collection (i.e. technical reports, development blueprints, journals, etc.). By triangulating primary and secondary data, we managed to chronicle and depict existing creative city initiatives and pursuits embraced by each of the Malaysian cities, analysed each city's viability, identified their challenges and also examined the roles of each city's development actors in propounding and embracing this strategy. In testing the applicability and viability of the creative city concept, we also delved deep into deciphering, deconstructing and reconceptualising the concept to fit local Malaysian nuances and idiosyncrasies. With Malaysia's macro shift and strategic direction re-orientating towards the creative economy, the writing of this book is apt and timely to dissect and comprehend the way creative and cultural industries are fused within Malaysia's urban development policy for growth and development at the local, national and regional level. It is hoped that the narratives, recommendations and insights generated from this book will be useful for Malaysian policy-makers, urban managers, private entrepreneurs, scholars and civil society alike as we strive to model a Malaysian creative city that is inclusive, resilient, proactive and sustainable so that no one will be left behind.

Penang, Malaysia
December 2020

Suet Leng Khoo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this book has been both enriching and challenging. The fieldwork trips were particularly insightful and rewarding where we visited new places and met new faces along the way. Data collection in George Town and outstation fieldwork trips to Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Johor Bahru have indeed broadened our horizons and widened our circle of networks and contacts. Although the two authors are responsible for the text and content of the book, this book could not have been written without the kind assistance and cooperation of others. Their cooperation and contributions are invaluable. Thus, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all parties, organisations, institutions and individuals who have contributed in one way or another towards the successful production and publication of this book. We are also extremely grateful to all key stakeholders and informants who participated in our interviews and focus group discussions in the course of writing this book. We also take this opportunity to thank our family members for their patience, support and motivation when we were busy working on this book during the past two years.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEF	Asia-Europe Foundation
CAT	Creative Animation Triggers
CBD	Central Business District
CCI	Creative and cultural industries
CDP	Comprehensive Development Plan
CENDANA	Cultural Economy Development Agency
CI	Creative Industries
CMC	Creative Multimedia Content
CMCO	Conditional Movement Control Order
Covid-19	Corona virus disease
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sport (UK government)
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DoSM	Department of Statistics, Malaysia
EIC	East-Indian Company
ERC-CI	Economic Review Committee – Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries
ERL	Express Rail Link Sdn. Bhd.
EXCO	Executive Council
F & B	Food & Beverages
FGD	Focus group discussion
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GII	Global Innovation Index
GLAM	Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product

GT	George Town
GTF	George Town Festival
GTWHI	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
GTWHS	George Town World Heritage Site
Habitat	United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development
HSBC	Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation
HUL	Historic Urban Landscape
ICC	Ipoh City Council
ICT	Information and communications technology
IIFAF	Ipoh International Art Festival
IM	Iskandar Malaysia
IMS-GT	Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle
IRDA	Iskandar Regional Development Authority
ITHC	Ipoh Tin Heritage City
JB	Johor Bahru
JBCC	Johor Bahru City Council
JSPA	Johor Society for the Performing Arts
KL	Kuala Lumpur
KLCCD	Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District
KLIA 1	Kuala Lumpur International Airport 1
KLIA 2	Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2
KRI	Khazanah Research Institute
KTM	Keretapi Tanah Melayu
LRT	Light Rail Transit
MATRADE	Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation
MCM	Ministry of Communications and Multimedia
MCMC	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
MCO	Movement Control Order
MDeC	Multimedia Development Corporation
MICC	Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture
MITA	Ministry of Information and the Arts
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
MSIC	Malaysia Standard Industrial Classification
MyPAA	My Performing Arts Agency
NCIP	National Creative Industry Policy
NCP	National Cultural Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUP 2	National Urbanisation Policy 2
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
PAD	Penang Art District
PARP	Public Art Review Panel
PDC	Penang Development Corporation
PETACE	Penang State Executive Council (EXCO) for Tourism and Creative Economy
PETACH	Penang State Executive Council (EXCO) for Tourism Development, Arts, Culture and Heritage
PGT	Penang Global Tourism
PORT	People of Remarkable Talents
RM	Malaysian ringgit
SAP	Special Area Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Southeast Asia
SUPERI	Sungai Perak Indah
TCPD	Town and Country Planning Department
TCSB	Think City Sdn Bhd
TFCC	Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy
UCCN	UNESCO Creative Cities Network
UK	United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	US Dollar
WHS	World Heritage Site
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

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Introduction

Abstract This introductory chapter will set the backdrop and discuss the motivation to write this book. It will begin by briefly illustrating the growing prominence of creative city discourse globally (to serve as foreground) before fleshing out the need to explore this strategy for the Malaysian context. This chapter will also provide a snapshot of Malaysia's overall development trajectory, the nation's strategic directions and the way they impact urban development policies thus exploring the notion of creative city as a viable strategy for Malaysian cities.

Keywords Creative cities • Malaysia • Urban development • Urban policy • Development trajectory

1.1 NASCENCY OF CREATIVE CITY DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

The concept of creative city has assumed centrality in urban policy-making and scholastic discourse in the last few decades due to structural economic shifts and global urban restructuring. Arguably, the original role of cities as sites of industrial manufacturing has been displaced and replaced with services, cultural and knowledge-based activities. As a result, cities worldwide are now restrategising to harness their cultural and creative endowments for local economic development (Boccella & Salerno, 2016) and to

enhance their competitive edge and comparative advantage. While much of the early literature originated from North America and Western Europe (Landry & Bianchini, 1998; Landry, 2005, 2008; Mercer, 2006; Smidt-Jensen, 2007), the notion of creative city transcends beyond Western political boundaries given that each city is, by default, culturally endowed and creative in its own way. Hence, what is observed is the way each urban area embodies and embraces the cultural and creative turn in its respective cities.

As the creative city hype moves across the globe, many urban managers especially in the Asian region (i.e. Korea, China, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong) have endorsed it as a viable urban development strategy (UNCTAD, 2017; Hidayat and Asmara, 2017; Chaudhury & Lundbergy, 2018; Karvelyte, 2018). This is despite critiques, predominantly from the academic realm, that opposed the concept as elitist, divisionary and exclusive (McCann, 2007; Pratt, 2011; Lee, 2011). Malaysian cities too are no exception with attempts to adopt this concept though in a fragmented fashion. This will be deliberated in subsequent chapters. Inadvertently, the processes and depictions of what define a creative city differ considerably across geographical and temporal contexts which are predominantly shaped by a city's or nation's politico-institutional framework and historical legacies.

In Malaysia, the role of cities and the importance of urban development are increasingly moving to the forefront of policy agenda given that the share of urban population in Malaysia is 74.3% (22.66 million) in 2015 and projected to increase to 79.6% (27.30 million) in 2025 (TCPD, 2016). Major states like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Perak and Johor are rapidly urbanising and modernising with urbanisation rates of 100%, 96.2%, 81% and 79.8% respectively in 2019 (DoSM, 2020). The common trends in most, if not all, Malaysian cities are urban restructuring processes which are necessitated by changing demographics, alterations to the city's economic base shifting from industrial to services and reorientation towards the creative economy. While there are possibly upsides to transform Malaysian cities into creative cities given that these endeavours permeate into the development agendas of cities like George Town, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Johor Bahru, the process is also fraught with dilemmas that revolve around rudimentary yet fundamental issues such as what constitutes a Malaysian creative city, and the way cultural and creative industries/economy are delineated and defined in the Malaysian context. While Malaysia's ethnic plurality and cultural diversity are unique and can

be leveraged to showcase the nation's creative and cultural endowments, at the same instance, these are latent and contentious elements to be reckoned with when addressing the enquiry of 'what, whose and which cultural/creative endowments need to be prioritised, showcased and safeguarded in Malaysian cities for urban liveability and posterity. The case cities in Chaps. 5, 6, 7 and 8 will deliberate these in length.

Thus, this book is a novel attempt to investigate the viability of creative city strategies for selected Malaysian cities as well as to fathom the dynamics and nexus between the state, market and civil society in the process. Extending from the viewpoints of Western and Eastern scholars as well as policy-makers, this book will delve deep into the conceptualisation of Malaysian creative cities (in-the-making) by unravelling the contested and debatable meanings of culture, creativity, cultural industries and creative industries. The divergence or convergence that emerge will be juxtaposed against generically accepted notions pertaining to the foundations, people, networks, planning, markets and visions that should underscore a holistic and inclusive Malaysian creative city. More distinctively, this book is a pioneering work to contextualise and reconceptualise the creative city notion for Malaysia, which is a unique country shaped by multiplicities of ethnicities, backgrounds, creed and cultures.

1.2 CREATIVE CITY AS VIABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Since time immemorial, the creative city concept has existed but under different guises. The concept is generally viewed from two distinctively different yet intertwined notions of 'culture' and 'creativity'. At this juncture, amongst the biggest contention is to first fathom the delineation and differentiation between the notions of 'cultural industries' and 'creative industries'. Scholars have argued that cultural industries predate creative industries and the former are defined according to a combination of five main criteria, namely, creativity, intellectual property, use value, production methods and symbolic meaning. In particular, symbolic meaning is the defining concept of culture and the economic value generated will reflect their cultural value. Thus, the cultural industries should not be blatantly and carelessly be subsumed under the wider creative industries agenda due to heightened interest in the 'knowledge economy' (Galloway & Dunlop, 2007: 19, 25). This contention will plausibly alter the

meaning and making of a creative city. This will be further dissected in Chap. 2. However, the embeddedness of creativity in urban settings to spur more creativity and innovation cannot be dismissed either. Arguably, the notion of creative city dates back 2500 years ago when cities like classical Athens, renaissance Florence, enlightenment London and Fin de Siecle Vienna were the ‘hotbeds of revolutionary creativity’ (Andersson, 2011: 39). These cities functioned as magnets to attract migrants with creative prowess and to nurture creativity development among existing city dwellers. These were also sites to showcase discoveries from elsewhere and they doubled up as conducive locales to conceive new ideas together with other creative people. Andersson further argues that the formulaic blend of the right pool and interactions of creative human capital will consolidate overall creativity. This is further reinforced by an enabling environment or a ‘creative milieu’ that is large, deep, diverse and broad in cultural scope (Andersson, 2011: 51).

Extending the narrative from medieval times as espoused above, the creative city concept morphed and subsequently gathered attention through Peter Hall’s seminal work ‘Cities in Civilization: Culture, Innovation and Urban Order’; and also, Jane Jacobs’ conviction of a city’s diversity and its role as engine of economic growth. In her work ‘Economy of Cities’, Jacobs discerned cities as a co-existence and symbiosis of multiple levels/layers of clusters, intersected labour force, constant immigration of labour and also a diverse and rich milieu. Jacobs further highlighted that this ‘rich milieu’ will then affect and condition the birth of novel ideas, skills and knowledge that instil creativity and innovation in industries, firms and individuals (Jacobs, 1972). Later, more contemporary urban theorists like Charles Landry (2005, 2008) and Richard Florida (2002, 2004, 2007, 2008) have made popular the concept though much critiques have been levelled against Florida’s elitist ‘creative class’ terminology. While the notion of creative city has gained credence worldwide, especially amongst urban managers and policy-makers in cities like Toronto, Liverpool, Melbourne, Seoul, Curitiba and Aswan¹ who embraced this strategy as part of their urban development strategy, a lesser level of acceptance derives from the academic realm where scholars are ambivalent with its adoption given the conceptual ambiguities, blurry delineation between culture and creativity (Galloway & Dunlop, 2007)

¹ Creative Cities Network. Source: <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/creative-cities-map> (accessed on 19 September 2019).