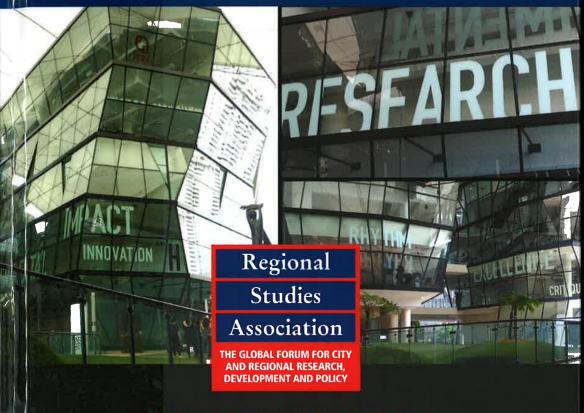ROUTLEDGE

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

BEYOND THE CAMPUS

REGIONS AND CITIES

EDITED BY ROBERTA COMUNIAN
AND ABIGAIL GILMORE

11 Cultural policy, creative economy and arts higher education in renaissance Singapore

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Introduction

Since the tail end of the twentieth century, postcolonial Singapore has seen an astonishing investment, development, and growth in the cultural and creative industries aimed at creating a renaissance city-state. The opening of the National Gallery, on the fiftieth year of independence in 2015, ushers in a symbolically central place for the arts in ensuring Singapore remains a distinctive global city in a rapidly shape-shifting geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia. This global city remains small, nimble, and directed: a city-state of 718 square kilometers, with a population size of 5.5 million, boasting a literacy rate of 97 percent, a near perfect employment economy, and a per capita GDP that is the envy of even first-world nations.[2] Central to the unprecedented development for a city-state that gained independence in 1965 are principles of economic pragmatism and nationalism based on multiculturalism and Asian values, which direct social and political life in Singapore. These principles have provided Singapore with world-class transport, public housing, financial, and industrial systems.

Singapore also boasts a world-class educational system. The 2015 OECD global ranking places Singapore at the pole position above most developed economies in the Western world for its quality education and high literacy rate among its citizens.[3] OECD research shows a clear correlation between investment in education and economic growth; this is underscored by Singapore's annual budget where education is the second largest recipient of allocation following defence.[4] Unlike many governments where economic downturn sees budget cuts in education, in Singapore the education sector thrives, receiving serious injection of resources. This is a clear directed belief that a nimble economic system must rely on continuous self-reflection, restructuring, and repurposing of the skills of the workforce. This has augured well for Singapore to allow it to tide over economic challenges. In 2015, the government established the Skills Future Council in a national effort to 'develop skills for the future and help Singaporeans develop a future based on skills mastery.'[5] This generous support for all citizens proposes to help Singaporeans compete in the marketplace through skills mapping, planning for career progression, and developing a culture of lifelong learning. This is championed by the top brass of the government, notably the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

Since the 1990s, Singapore has invested in the arts in the way it knows best: anchored in the economy. The ultimate aim is to generate a creative economy that will develop alternative modes of economic output as traditional modes, such as manufacturing and electronics, face increasing global competition from emerging market economies in Asia. From arts centres and museums to musicals and circuses, from arts festivals to Formula One races, and from food festivals to design and media festivals – Singapore has opened up to the possibilities of the creative world in ways that were deemed fictitious in a city known for its tough economic pragmatism. The arts have become one of the drivers of economic innovation and growth (besides education, science, and technology), as well as making Singapore a liveable city attractive to international investment and maintaining its competitive advantage in the global economy. Singapore takes this seriously and clearly sees the benefits of a creative and vibrant culture, benchmarking itself against cities such as Hong Kong, Glasgow, and Melbourne, aspiring to becoming the London or New York of Asia.

The competition to be a global city is on the rise in Asia. Other Asian cities, such as Seoul, Hong Kong, and Abu Dhabi, demonstrate similar aspirations to become global cities through the arts, flagging an existential jump into the global league. Unfazed by geopolitical shifts, changes in critical political leaderships – in particular China, India, and Indonesia, where such investments in the arts and culture are part of a larger socio-political-culture agenda – Singapore's proposition remains focused on the economy. While a multi-billion dollar investment in the arts in Singapore has helped the development of artist communities and increased economic multipliers (STB Report 1998), the arts and culture are relevant, insofar as their nexus to the economy, making it increasingly difficult to articulate a culture outside of its economic conditions.

To support the creative economy, art and design education was fortified, gaps were identified, and new areas developed through input from industry. Since the 1990s, the National Arts Council has invested in arts enrichment programs, while the Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced a range of elective arts education programs to permeate every stage of a student's learning journey. From 2009, MOE rolled out an Arts Syllabus for primary school education (ages 6–12 years) to systematically and methodically introduce art to young learners. The Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Arts (MICA) established a pre-tertiary (ages 13–18 years) School of the Arts (SOTA) in 2008 in the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum for secondary arts education. Yet there are also community-based arts organizations providing hobbyist and/or skills-based training. Schools such as the Theatre Practice, Intercultural Theatre Institute, Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society, and Sri Warisan provide self-validated certificate programs in niche areas. In addition, Singapore's business development arm, the Economic Development Board, courted educational investment in a short lived enterprise called the Global Schoolhouse project.

If the entrenched link between higher education and economic output needs a creative boost, arts higher education in Singapore became a major pipeline for the creative economy. The university sector introduced western classical music

(Yong Siew Toh Conservatory) at the National University of Singapore and the School of Art, Design and Media (ADM) at the Nanyang Technological University. The Singapore University of Technology and Design was established in 2010 to bridge design and engineering education to develop a new generation of design thinkers who can effect change in various sectors of Singapore society. Singapore's renowned and established arts schools – Lasalle College of the Arts (1984) and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (1938) – remain central to the creative economy as producers of art, artists, and designers, even as local universities and polytechnics jump into the fray to supply much needed manpower to fuel the creative economy. Both schools remain important counterpoints to an instrumentalized economic model of developing the arts by continuously providing a critical opportunity for Singaporeans to express their identity and sense of place and as a citizenry focused on the arts' role in nation-building. This chapter first maps the development of the creative economy through key cultural policies and locates the place of arts higher education in Singapore. It demonstrates that the weighted hand of cultural policy, while critical to the establishment of a creative economy, is largely passive on the place of artist education within the world-class conventional educational system.

Decolonization and emerging cultural community

A segue is necessary. The founding of Singapore as a trading port in 1819 did not present itself as a site of inspiration to draw artists, artisans, and craftsman. Key developments in the arts emerged through personal interests and grass-roots community manifestations found in expatriate/colonial and migrant worker communities who engaged with arts and heritage from their country of origin in order to entertain themselves, as well as assert a sense of belonging within their community. History demonstrates that the British presence in Asia saw the introduction of arts education in the late 1800s. For example, immediately after the English language was made the language of the law courts and administration in 1835 in British India, arts schools (Madras in 1854, Calcutta in 1854, Bombay in 1857, and Lahore in 1878) emerged to help revive industries, train professional craftsmen, and improve public taste (Purohit 1988: 639). In 1923, British educator Richard Walker arrived in Singapore to assume the appointment of Art Master of Government English Schools. He oversaw incidental art activities within the formal educational system and the preparedness of a few students for art papers in the Cambridge junior and senior examinations (Kwok 2000). An avid painter trained at the Royal College of Art, he became a key artist of the emerging colonial enterprise of the early 1900s:

> From 1937, Walker's designation was changed to Art Superintendent Singapore Schools. He organised and taught art classes at the Raffles Institution for art teachers and interested students. That year, the Saint Andrew's School Sketching Club was formed, its establishment no doubt influenced by the school principal, Francis Thomas, who was also active in art

education. In 1938, Walker taught art to non-English speakers (mainly Malay teachers) for the first time.

(Kwok 2000: para. 5)

Around the same time, a number of European artists worked out of Singapore during the 1930s and 1940s, such as Russian artists Anatole Schister and Dora Gordine, British painters Margaret Felkin and Eleanor Watkins, Austrian sculptor Karl Duldig and the Belgium artist Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur, who brought classicism to post-impressionism into the language of their art work (Kwok 2000). This formed a small nucleus to inspire and influence an emerging group of Asian artist-migrants within a safe creative learning environment.

Art historian T. K. Sabapathy (1987) pegs the possibility for a modern art history in the making in 1937, when a few China-born artists and enthusiasts sought to establish an arts school. The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), under the stewardship of artist, educator, and administrator Lim Hak Tai, commenced in 1938 and modelled itself after the art schools in Shanghai. It became the first art school in Singapore/Malaya during British colonial rule and was a hothouse for many self-exiled artists before the World War II, particularly the affectionately known Nanyang artists Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, Liu Kang, and Georgette Chen. Drawing from Chinese painting and School of Paris traditions, these artists were comfortable in both traditions. They were very much part of the regenerative art movement of the 1920s and 1930s in China, particularly in major cities like Shanghai and Guangdong where artists engaged aggressively in 'reinvesting Chinese art with fresh scope and new dimension' (Sabapathy 1987: unpaginated). Caught between a growing nationalism in China and an anti-colonial regionalism in Southeast Asia, tradition, nativity, and modernity framed the works emerging from artist-migrants in a new-found homeland. That the idea of home was in a situatedness rather than a place of birth and was integral to the development of an artistic language and that of an identity through visual culture. This informed the development of various other art societies, notably the Equator Art Society (1956) and the Modern Art Society (1964); the former delved into pictorial realism and the latter into anti-realist, non-objective forms (Chia 2002: 164).

In his 1999 *The End of Empire and Making of Malayan Culture*, T. N. Harper shows that the investment of the British in culture was an explicit promotion of citizenship, a civilising mission of late colonialism to enrich Southeast Asia with a colonial legacy and 'ideological resistance' to the festering problem of Communism that was on the rise in Asia. From the establishment of a National Museum and an Arts Council to research and publish the history and geography of the region, to blatant promotion of tourism by the Singapore Public Relations Office, 'Europeans took the lead in condemning the cultural starvation they felt in insular expatriate communities and the materialism of cities such as Singapore' (Harper 1999: 276). The British also deemed Malaya (of which Singapore was part) a 'cultural desert,' and sought to create a 'cultural renaissance' through British patronage of arts and culture. The formulation of a particular type of colloquial English was promoted through theater and film, while renowned

academic I. A. Richard and civil servant Victor Purcell sought to entrench the English language as the first language of the post-colonial elite (ibid.). It was a period of cultural vibrancy with urban and artistic cultures sprouting around movie venues such as Shaw Theatres and Cathay Cinema and amusement parks such as the Great World and the Gay World which served as family and communitarian leisure centres in a poverished yet industrializing milieu (ibid.: 283). These cultural developments balanced artistic and entertainment endeavours with communal aspirations for a social identity. Furthermore, the British supported these developments, as they were part of the process of decolonization.

From 1965 to 1990, post-independence Singapore gained a reputation for its investment in education, industrialization, public housing, and tightly managing a complex group of migrants to become citizens of a nation. While the arts in this period support principles of nation-building, it did not have the cultural vibrancy that an emerging community of newly arrived economic migrants expressed in the 1950s. It is only in the 1990s, when the arts emerged as a constituent of an emerging creative economy, that a semblance of vibrancy was ignited.

Cultural policies for a global renaissance city

What we are witnessing is an economic and cultural renaissance on a scale never before experienced in human history. Like the renaissance in Europe a few centuries ago, this East Asian renaissance will change the way humanity looks at itself, at human society and at the arts. The rise of cultural life in Singapore is part of an oceanic tidal flow that will wash onto every shore in the Pacific.

(Yeo 1992, cited in Bereson 2003: 6)

As a global city with no natural resources, Singapore is only relevant insofar as it is connected to global economies and their capitalisms, thereby anchoring a nexus between the economy, national identity, and survival. In this regard, any planned cultural policy cannot ignore this imperative. Two cultural policies, the Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (1989) and the Renaissance City Report (2000, 2005, 2009), foreground the ways in which they map cultural practice and the shape of the creative economy in Singapore.

The Report by the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) (Ong 1989), marked a cultural turn for postcolonial Singapore. Not only did this document outline strategies to transform Singapore into a 'global city for the arts' by 2000 (MITA 1995), it drew a clear correlation between art, commerce, and national identity (Koh 1989; Chang and Lee 2003; Kong 2000; Kwok and Low 2002; Chong 2005; Ooi 2010). This policy, which has been extensively deliberated by scholars, reveals the government's use of the arts as a tool to flag its status as a developed country, while simultaneously reinforcing the centrality of economic imperatives within artistic discourse. Moreover, the policy remains the first strategic platform of Singaporean governmentality to have used the arts to signal a new political order and change in political leadership in the 1990s. The

political agenda was premised on the need to build a cultural soul for Singapore and develop the arts as an economic asset (Chang 2000).

The ACCA report draws from the Economic Committee Report (1986), which sets the vision for Singapore to become a developed country by 1999. Signalling the ascent of a new Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, this formed the key engine for all major policy initiatives from 1990 onwards. The economic plan, which was benchmarked against the Swiss 1984 per capita GNP (MTI 1991), identified economic dynamism, national identity, quality of life, and the configuration of a global city to be central to this vision. This vision included the development of a cultivated society comprising 'well-informed, refined, gracious and thoughtful' individuals where ideas, art, literature, and music flourish (ibid.: 43). Goh's plan was to ensure Singapore sets out to:

> [...] match the quality of life of the best cities in the world if it is to retain its most talented people. By reaching for, and attaining, a high quality of life, Singapore can in turn attract talent ... to achieve economic growth. (Ibid.)

This economic imperative planted the embryonic development of a cultural and creative economy. The industry's function was to ensure Singapore's continued relevance as a centre for international corporate investment, to encourage Singaporeans to take greater ownership of their cultural and social life, and to imagine a sense of community and belonging in a group of migrants maturing to form a citizenry. This is informed by the need to cultivate a well-informed, creative, sensitive, and gracious society; to promote excellence in multi-lingual, multi-cultural collective art forms that make Singapore unique; and to make Singapore an international centre for world-class performing arts and exhibitions marketplace (ibid.: 5). Singaporeans were encouraged to develop an interest in the arts and culture through participation in a wide spread of cultural activities, as amateurs or professionals, which were provided through opportunities of extra-curricular activities at the workplace and at community centres, factories, social clubs, trade unions, clan associations, and religious institutions. This hegemonic system infiltrated layers of society to motivate the citizenry to move away from a third-world mindset and develop a first-world mindset, behaviour, and cultured self.

The strategies of the ACCA report yielded tangible benefits. The city saw the firm development in regulatory agencies, such as the National Arts Council, the National Heritage Board, the Media Development Authority, and the Singapore Design Council, who were tasked to discharge the strategies through expedient administration. A repertoire of works that reflected Singapore's multicultural traditions and artistic endeavours was developed, together with the establishment of a credible community of cultural workers (artists, arts administrators, and arts entrepreneurs) through the import of foreign talent to help nurture and develop them. The ACCA report's overemphasis on developing the city's cultural hardware (Kwok and Low 2002) brought about rapid infrastructural renovations of existing venues, the preservation of historical buildings with architectural and heritage value, and the construction of new venues. It also resulted in performance

spaces, such as the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay, new museums (the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Singapore Art Museum, the Singapore Tyler Print Institute, the Singapore History Museum and the Singapore Philatelic Museum), and highly technologized public libraries in major shopping malls island-wide. These developments provided Singaporeans with the opportunity to view and experience a wide range of performances, exhibitions, and art in public places in a mesmerising first-world, global-city aura.

The economic plans of the 1980s assumed that the vision of changing Singapore into a global city with Swiss living standards would weather conditions that may arise out of a range of natural and human calamities, including economic recession. However, calamities did surface, coupled with public criticism of the government's distribution of funds for arts infrastructure but reticence to provide for art and artist development. Building on the need to connect with disenfranchised Singaporeans, and the need to flag Singapore as a centre for a new renaissance to global investors (Wee 2003), the *Renaissance City Plan: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore* (MITA 2000) (hereafter RCP) emerged with the sole 'intention to chart Singapore cultural development into the twenty-first century' (Lee 2004: 289).

The concept of a cultural renaissance city is driven by two trajectories. As a remnant of the rising Asian Tiger economies of the 1990s, pundits predicted that the upward rise of these economies would naturally lead to a revisioning of culture. This was fervently developed and championed by then Arts Minister George Yeo in Singapore and then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim in his 1998 critical collection of writings and speeches titled *Asian Renaissance*. Yao Souchou (2000: 18) argues:

> The cultural resurgence in Southeast Asia is primarily a state project that celebrates the moral and utilitarian qualities of the 'Asian tradition' of which the contemporary states and their peoples are the proud inheritors.

Its rise, he asserts, cannot purely be accrued to state domination alone, but needs to take into account the 'active participation and tacit complicity of political subjects' (ibid.). Furthermore, the government saw the arts and culture as a viable economic sector as seen in first-world cities such as Venice, London, New York, Paris, and Milan, which had thriving economic and cultural sectors known as creative industries. Moreover, just as in the British colonial period, the government sought to invest in the arts and culture to mobilize and harness a citizenry that was increasingly desirous of greater social and civic space for socio-political discourse, and the arts and culture were adequate distractions.

With its perpetual penchant for reinvention, the government, in response to global economic changes, invested in the creativity, ingenuity, and imagination of Singaporeans as its next phase of development. This investment in the people as capital was to develop a connected society expressed through tangible links with their emotional and social capital. Just as the ACCA report found its engine in an economic plan, the RCP and the focus on a new cultural/creative economy was

fuelled by the 2003 Report of the Economic Review Committee (ERC 2003). The report was published as a formal manifesto titled *New Challenges, Fresh Goals: Towards a Dynamic Global City* (ibid.), and, much like its predecessor, was centered primarily on trade and economy but, embedded within its folds, were critical developments that would design the shape of culture for Singapore. The ERC report envisions transforming Singapore into a twenty-first-century hub for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism. It foregrounds the importance of 'creativity' and the need to build cultural capital as a way forward for Singapore. In so doing, it sought to build a 'creative and innovative society, always eager to try out new ideas and change for the better, with a culture that respects achievements in the sciences and the arts' (ERC 2003: 5). The ERC report notes that the growth of the creative industries was at 14 percent per annum in 2001, outstripping previous overall economic growth of 10.5 percent per annum from 1956 to 2000. The creative industries accounted for 3.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product and provided 3.8 percent employment. With the potential to garner financial gain from the creative industries, the Ministry of Information, Communication, and the Arts (MICA), tasked to build a creative economy, established Creative Industry Singapore, which oversaw the development of three cultural policies targeting specific sectors in the creative industries: *The Renaissance City Plan* (RCP), *Design Singapore*, and *Media 21*. I will focus on the RCP.

The RCP, bold in its expression of a twenty-first-century renaissance Singapore, came in three editions: *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore* (2000), *Renaissance City Report 2.0* (2005), and *Renaissance City Plan 3* (2008). For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to them collectively as the RCP and, where appropriate, refer to them as RCP I, RCP II, and RCP III.

The RCP articulates a clear business to 'integrate arts and cultural development more deeply and pervasively into the economic landscape of Singapore' (RCP 2005: 14) by harnessing the existing and new arts infrastructure and building bridges with the business sector. The RCP II is blunt that the government is less interested in the arts for its cultural and discursive value and significance. It starkly states:

> MICA agencies (National Arts Council, National Heritage Board, Media Development Authority, etc.) must shift away from the 'arts for arts' sake mindset, to look at the development of arts from a holistic perspective, to contribute to the development of the creative industries as well as our nation's social development. (Ibid.)

Policy-makers and bureaucrats got into immediate action and in the urgency to fulfill the ambitious economic goals, developed complex systems of funding and support leading to the bureaucratization of the arts and esthetics eschewing the purposiveness of art in Singapore (Chong 2014). This was discharged by developing hegemonic systems to embed arts, design, and media education within all levels of education in Singapore, and beautify the living environment through art

and design. This reinforced past policy imperatives to establish Singapore as a global arts city that would be ideal to live, work, and play in (for both Singaporeans and expatriates) and conducive for a creative and knowledge-based economy, and provide cultural ballast to Singaporeans to strengthen national identity and, more importantly, a sense of belonging. A financial pledge of S$50 million over a period of five years, for 'software' development of the arts, aimed to transmogrify the harsh physical infrastructures into 'incubators for the arts' (Chang and Lee 2003: 133) and in the process 'strengthen the Singapore Heartbeat through the creation and sharing of Singapore stories, be it in film, theatre, dance, music, literature or the visual arts' (MITA 2000: 4). Terence Lee (2004: 289–90), in his critique of this policy, purports that this investment is a 'tacit admission of Singapore's "cultural lack" marked by Singaporeans' inability to understand or appreciate the fullness of the arts, as well as an attempt to further shore up the economic potential of the arts.'

I would assert that this laid the ground for the bureaucratization of art not dissimilar to the colonial imagining of arts' role to connect industry, citizenry, and life (Dutta 2006); the bureaucratization of the process of imagining the place of art in the economy (Chong 2014); and the financialization of the arts in Singapore, where principles of financial or esthetic deficit are countered through a key performance index (KPI) system to monitor funds granted to arts groups, the transactional impact of art on audiences, and the groups' abilities to develop business plans.

The tracking and measuring of the value of the arts to the economy and its contribution to national employment figures commenced in 2005, entrenching the place of the arts as a source of cultural consumption for domestic and international markets touring at the top global festivals, biennales and fairs, and art markets. Key statistics from the National Arts Council reveal that from 1996 to 2006/7 the number of performance and visual arts exhibition days rose from 6,000 to 27,000, the total nominal value-added to the economy rose from S$557m to S$978m, and contribution to employment rose from 16,000 to 21,000. With these astounding figures the arts were fast becoming financialized.

Arts higher education and arts schools

A financialised and transactional cultural environment is nurtured through a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) oriented educational system. Arts higher education, though vibrant at every level of post-secondary education, is still at a nascent stage. Post-secondary education in Singapore (after ten years of primary and secondary education) is a composite of institutes of technical education (ITEs), polytechnics, arts schools, and universities. ITEs and polytechnics are clearly geared towards skills training and industrial preparedness. These institutions have been globally lauded for their excellence and emulated by many aspiring third-world countries. Design and media education has been concentrated in these institutions to provide the battalion of workers needed for the creative economy, from film assistants and animators to fashion designers, interior designers, etc. The universities have historically been teaching

institutions and, in the past 15 years, have transformed themselves into research universities, topping the league tables at annual Times Higher Education and QS rankings.

Lasalle College of the Arts (LASALLE) and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) are Singapore's main arts schools at the tertiary level, dedicated to artist education in fine arts, performing arts, media, and design. If colonialism rendered art as an enculturing instrument for a migrant society, the two arts schools provided artists with a safe learning and working environment to hone their practice and build a body of work. The arts schools' survival, in a highly instrumentalized educational environment, came about through their ability to become cultural centres for an emerging arts ecology built around the professionalization of the artist's condition, their engagement with the global and local art market and industry, and their becoming purveyors of standards in the quality of artistic practice. Their pedagogies vary culturally and philosophically, differentiated by the artist studio and the preservation of heritage and artistic traditions (NAFA), as well as the interdisciplinary studio and promotion of experimentation and abstraction (LASALLE). NAFA, one of Southeast Asia's oldest art schools, draws from its rich traditional heritage and cultural lineage located in China, and maintains to date a bilingual (Mandarin-English) ethos, while LASALLE was a young Turk, founded in the 1980s as a response to established practices in keeping with Singapore's youthful contemporaneity as an English-language medium school. It should be noted that there was another institution, Singapore's first tertiary institution for the commercial and applied arts: Baharuddin Vocational Institute. Founded in 1965, it was focused on the craft of three-dimensional art (pottery and shell craft) and design (furniture-making, dress-making, and graphic design and illustration). Its aim was to upgrade the skills of the craftsman and apprentices who were part of the team that was building the fast industrializing Singapore. In 1990, the Institute was moved into the Singapore's polytechnic system and formed the Temasek Polytechnic's School of Design.

The curriculum offering in each arts school corresponds to their uniqueness, in that they relate to skills/vocational development, artistic practice/esthetics, professional development/industry needs, and/or applied/inquiry-based research. They are para-sites of openness, exploration, and critical innovation, which is alluring to the creative sector that is continuously seeking the unconventional, the next big thing. Both offer a portfolio of programs: diplomas for those who have attained an 'O' level equivalent education (16 years and above) and degrees for 'A' Level/International Baccalaureate equivalent education (18 years and above). Postgraduate programs are offered for artists working in the creative industry who seek to upgrade and upskill their practice. LASALLE, to date, offers the most comprehensive set of arts provision in Southeast Asia and continues to attract world-renowned artists, such as film director/producer Lord David Puttnam, theater director Robert Wilson, and artists Stelarc, Gilbert and George, and Thomas Heatherwick, to name a few. The graduates of these schools remain flag-bearers of Singaporean artistic temperament and remain the main artistic leaders for the city-state. These two schools have survived the tide of the conventional

STEM system and asserted their presence in an Asian environment, where the arts are often relegated to the fringes as a hobby or cultural celebration and not a possible career choice.

The importance of arts schools in the development of a creative economy was identified in the ACCA report, recommending the government to advance support. This led to the establishment of a high-level committee to study the upgrade of the two arts schools as centres of excellence. The report of the committee, released in 1998, was titled *Creative Singapore: A Renaissance Nation in the Knowledge Age*. As the two arts schools remain private, not-for-profit enterprises, the committee recommended to upgrade both arts schools into 'internationally renowned tertiary-level centres of artistic excellence which can contribute to the development of the arts in Singapore, enhance the competitiveness of the economy and extend the range of career options available to Singaporeans' (Tan 1998: 8). Following extensive consultation, which included visiting more than twenty arts schools around the world as well as manpower surveys and studies for graduate employment, the committee made the unprecedented recommendation for government to provide public funding to support diploma-level studies, degree-level funding within a five-year time frame with the local universities, and to consider moving the arts schools to the downtown civic district to sit alongside the Singapore Management University and the arts precinct. This new public-private partnership was not the only unprecedented recommendation. The committee also made other far-reaching recommendations to government, outside its terms of reference. It recommended the government consider expanding the range of arts education programs at the primary and secondary school levels, expand the pool of qualified and experienced visual and performing arts teachers, and establish an autonomous Institute of the Arts for degree programs in the performing arts.

The Arts Education Council was established, with representatives from the various ministries, to oversee this new public investment in the private sector to ensure accountability and realization of the vision for a knowledge-based economy. The Committee did maintain a key recommendation that both arts schools be preserved as private and autonomous institutions to deepen and preserve their strong character, heritage, and artistic expressions unique to them (ibid.: 25). With this recommendation, both arts schools came under the oversight of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Division of Higher Education. Both schools continue to report to the MOE and, as part of the upgrade, were relocated to the civic district at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Ninety percent of the new campus development was funded by government. LASALLE and NAFA's move to the city centre placed them at the heart of the creative energy of the civic district. The civic district was transforming into a rich arts, education, and cultural district with a number of museums, performing arts venues, and educational institutions coalescing into a centre connected to Chinatown, Little India, and Kampong Glam heritage centres.

In addition, the arts schools came under the oversight of the Council of Private Education, a regulatory arm of the MOE governing private-sector provision of

education. Clearly the relationship between the public and private value systems brings up challenges of independence and accountability. With regard to the arts schools, they demonstrably relate to the creative economy that is seeking to monetise their creative output, as they are centres of innovation, experimentation, and discovery. Ooi (2011) argues that creativity in this instance can lend itself to be exploited for wealth creation and organized with economic purpose, an intent contrary to the role of creativity, arts, and culture. This cautionary note remains key to tease out the co-optation of the arts into governmentality and economic viability that gets played out regularly, most often between the arts community and policy-makers, and less so between educators and policy-makers. With funding came a clear directive to align graduate output with manpower targets established by the Manpower Ministry, bringing the two arts schools within the ambit of the public-sector universities and polytechnics framework while maintaining their autonomy.

Ten years on, in 2011, both schools received public funding for degree provision. As neither arts school has their own degree-awarding powers, since 2011 LASALLE has teamed up with the world-renowned Goldsmiths College, University of London, to validate all its degree programs in art, design, media, and performing arts, providing graduates with Goldsmiths awards. NAFA, on the other hand, teamed up with the Royal College of Music in the UK to validate and top up its music programs. These partnerships with international universities are a unique proposition in Singapore. As a young society, the value of benchmarking against and learning from the best around the world has been a particular preoccupation of Singapore post independence. This leads to a continuously learning and reflexive environment at government and society levels, which has allowed Singapore to remain relevant and ride the tide of economic and geopolitical changes. Besides the two arts schools, public sector institutions have similarly teamed up with international partner universities to further this enterprise of benchmarking and learning. These include the National University of Singapore and Yale University (NUS-YALE College) to establish a liberal arts college; Nanyang Technological University and Imperial College (Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine) to establish a British-style medical school as an alternative offering to the Duke University-NUS medical school partnership; Singapore Management University and Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvannia; Singapore University of Technology and Design partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Zhejiang University. The intent to set up an Institute of the Arts, offering undergraduate degree programs in the performing arts, proposed in the early policies found little traction, and in its place a narrow and focused undergraduate program in Western classical music was considered. The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory was established in 2003 at the National University of Singapore and its four-year Bachelor of Music curriculum was designed, developed, and accredited by the Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins University. A School of Art, Design and Media (ADM), which was recommended under the then RCP, was established in 2005 at the engineering and science-focused institution, Nanyang Technological University. Though major international partnerships were not realised for the

ADM, it built its capacity through international and world-renowned faculty, such as Professor Ute Meta Bauer (formerly of the MIT and Royal College of Art) focusing on the interaction between art, design, and media, and the general humanities and social sciences. ADM offers four-year undergraduate degrees and postgraduate research degrees in digital animation, digital film-making, interactive media, photography and digital imaging, product design, and visual communication. Polytechnic graduates in design and media studies can enrol in the Glasgow School of Art Singapore (GSAS) programs, which has been in operation under the aegis of the Singapore Institute of Technology, a newly set-up university which provides franchised degree programs from the GSAS, Trinity College Dublin, Newcastle University, Manchester University, the German Institute of Science and Technology (TUM), the University of Glasgow, and others. These partnerships are intended not so much as a cultural importation, but are focused on rapid capacity-building within the educational sector for Singaporean institutions.

All these complemented the Economic Development Board's Global Schoolhouse Initiative, which sought to make Singapore an education hub for world-class education to capture some of the US$2.2 trillion global education market pie and transform Singapore into the 'Boston of the East' (Chan 2011: 24). Many world-class universities such as INSEAD, the University of Chicago Business School, Duke University, and arts institutions (such as the prestigious Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, Sotheby's Institute of Art, and DigiPen) arrived and helped to meet the rapidly growing demands for an education in the arts. But the financial imperatives made it difficult and many, including Tisch and Sotheby's, were unable to sustain their business, either shutting down or moving elsewhere in Asia where the market base was larger. Critics (Chan 2011; Olds 2007) have noted the complexity of the investment involved to transform Singapore into a knowledge economy. Long-term business strategy and the planning of sectoral needs by sector experts – instead of bureaucrats – is vital to ensure the success of these partnerships.

The RCP noted that while the public school system does have a full complement of arts-related extracurricular classes and activities, including the Arts and Music Elective Programs where top students are able to enrol in art or music at the ordinary and advanced level of the Cambridge high-school examinations, there was no clear pre-tertiary level education in the arts. In 2008, MICA established the School of the Arts (SOTA), a high school catering to those between the ages of 13 and 18 years. SOTA's vision is to 'develop creative leaders for the future – future artists, creative professionals and passionate supporters for the arts in all fields' (MICA 2008). SOTA embraces the International Baccalaureate diploma (IBDP). Graduates, while having a strong arts foundation, often go into mainstream tertiary education. Those keen on the arts continue their undergraduate studies at either overseas arts schools, or at LASALLE or NAFA. In recent years, SOTA has found that a number of its students do want to only pursue the arts and have adopted the International Baccalaureate's Career-related Diploma (IBCP). SOTA is a success story in Singapore with its students posting some of the top IB results in the world.

These examples show the rapid investment and development of the arts higher education (Comunian and Ooi 2015), in tandem with the rapid transformation of the creative sector. Inevitably, the question remains as to what kind of art and culture of representation would a financialized environment produce. Ute Meta Bauer, Director of the Centre of Contemporary Art at the Nanyang Technological University, in studying international practices argues that arts schools have increasingly been pulled into the art market:

> Art students have more knowledge of the market than ever before, and to 'create' successful artists – which largely suggests commercial success as a career artist – has become a standard promise read in almost every mission statement and call for application around the world.
>
> (Bauer 2009: 221)

This further compounds the situation in that, through the demands of graduate employment on arts schools, the 'route from art school to the gallery to the collector's wall' is very short (ibid.: 222). The creative economy's proliferation of biennales, art festivals, fairs, art markets, auctions, events, and mega celebrations continuously pressure institutions to produce quick fixes, and the allure of these remain a continuous threat to artistic development. There is little time for artistic deliberation or in-depth study of cultures and canons, of systems and processes, of modes of production and circulation, and of shifts in the esthetic and material. The quick-fix approach to appreciating the arts has become a key feature of a global city, a first-world nation, that is commodified, packaged, presented, and circulated.

Conclusion

The creative economy in Singapore remains an academic enterprise, measured purely by one mode of assessment: quantifiable dollars and cents, as an end in itself. As such, the Singaporean notion of culture, built on a communitarian ideology of multiculturalism and Asian values, was being replaced by a creative economy that was fast becoming institutionalized, formalized, and commoditized within the rubric of Lily Kong's (2000) 'hegemony of the economic.' Culture in twenty-first-century Singapore is markedly gluttonous and any form of existence seems to be acknowledged only through the deterministic processes of consumption (Yue 2006: 19), 'disneyfication' (Kwok and Low 2002) or 'renaissancification.' The economic shapes and legitimates the existence of culture in Singapore. A critical vigilance is necessary to admonish the creative economy's tacit commitment to lifestyle and consumption as the main mode of negotiation of culture, negating social histories and cultural specificities. As Yue (2006: 23) eloquently surmises, 'the good consumer is a good citizen.'

Sociologist Kwok Kian-Woon, in his article 'The Bonsai and the Rainforest: Reflections on Culture and Cultural Policy in Singapore' (2004), draws upon the apt metaphor of a bonsai tree. This bonsai is culturally debilitated through an arrest of its development to exude a structural esthetic. The bonsai self-regulates

itself to remain muted, yet beautiful. Cultural development in Singapore is moving along this esthetic path. Kwok argues that the larger concern is less the economic but the depletion of Singaporean cultural capital (through the modes of regulation), which 'cannot be regenerated without cultural depth' (ibid.: 17). Cultural depth is achievable through the spirit of free enterprise (freedom of expression, transparent funding policies, and self-regulation), which is displaced by the superficial excitations of the creative industries. He calls on cultural policy-makers and arts administrators to recognize the inimitable qualities in artists and arts groups, and to foster and support their endeavour to deepen the esthetic environment that in turn engenders all kinds of creative effort (ibid.).

Noting the above concerns, I would like to return to some emerging concerns of artists in Singapore and Southeast Asia (and the arts schools that train and develop them). First, artists are constantly negotiating the traditional and global as a way of life and as a means of defining their 'locatedness.' For many, sustainability is not merely a reductive correlation between society, economy, and their lived environment, but rather a deep concept of preservation of ways of life (arts, practices, and language) in dialogue with globalisation (technology, virtuality, and travel). While critics and theorists have drawn important distinction between preservation and sustainability in Singapore and Southeast Asia, they are not really too far from each other's line of sight. The development of the arts continues to be plagued, well into the twenty-first century, by debates about preservation and promotion of the traditional arts against the development and promotion of contemporary arts, that are demonstrably having an alignment with economic development and an emerging affluent and mobile society. In another twist, as institutionalized world economies face the darkest hour, nation-states are increasingly closing ranks to support and protect their economies – through the embrace of community participation and engagement. For example, in Singapore the National Arts Council has implemented a five-year National Traditional Arts Plan, which sets aside S$23 million to support the traditional arts. This type of participatory politics in countries like Singapore has seen a resuscitation of the traditional arts, which serves as a compass of locatedness for a fast consumerizing society. With an increasingly well-educated and confident population asserting its presence on the global platform, artists are seeking new ways to express their sense of being by revisiting their history and tradition.

Second, in the instrumental nature of the development of the creative economy through cultural policies, there is a bureaucratization of art. One is reminded of Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1968), which was an ode to modernity's impact on the 'irreversible supplantation of craft by the mass-produced object' in the nineteenth century and thereby 'engendering a mythology of the original' (Dutta 2006: 189). This corollary has remained an axiom of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, deepened and entrenched in not only visual and performing arts but, in particular, design and its extensions. The clutter of sameness cannot be ignored, as it supplants conceptual drought with an onslaught of visual culture, iconic valorism, and the estheticization of luxury as taste.

Finally, artists in Singapore and Southeast Asia are mining themes of a post-apocalyptic world where an unsettled public seem to reign. Art deals with the complex issues of outrage, disaffection, and social anxiety among the youth in a world which seems ordered and neat from a capitalist's binoculars. Lawrence Grossberg argues:

> […] youth have been condemned to a new modernity in which there can only be one kind of value, market value; one kind of success, profit; one kind of existence, commodities; one kind of social relationships, market.
>
> (Cited in Giroux 2012: 7)

In the commoditized creative environment in Singapore, it is about instrumentalism and supporting a workforce. The resultant outcome is the danger of erosion for critical thinking. Henry Giroux starkly enforces this:

> The value of knowledge is now linked to crude instrumentalism, and the only mode of education that seems to matter is one that enthusiastically endorses learning marketable skills, embracing a survival-of-the-fittest ethic, and defining the good life solely through accumulation and disposing of the latest consumer goods. (Ibid.: 17)

He further argues that with the instrumental dictates of education and commodification of all spheres of life, young people are no longer able to inhabit spheres of life that foster the opportunity for them to 'think critically, make informed judgments, and distinguish cogent arguments from mere opinions' (ibid.: 18). Therein lies the state of affairs.

What kind of esthetic environment does a young Singapore need? The answer potentially lies in the art, its maker, and the quiet arts school, where the idea of de-establishing frameworks and concepts and transforming individual capacities reigns paramount. The arts school is also a victim and perpetuator of the cycles of the economic factory, but within its ecology there is always space where culture breeds and the artist finds his/her voice. The commoditized creative economy is an institutionalized phenomenon across the world. The arts school environment thrives to appraise, resist, and support, to create parasitical opportunities and opportunities of engagement to innovate the new, the ephemeral and the process-oriented practice. While attracting new believers at each cultural turn, it is this constant reinvention that keeps the arts school ahead of the creative economy and the conventional in Singapore.

Notes

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chapter. Aspects of this paper were documented in the Taiwan conference proceedings, and in my 2007 book, *Making Visible the Invisible: Three Decades of the Singapore Arts Festival, 1977–2007.*
2. Department of Statistics Singapore (2014) available at: http://www.singstats.gov.sg.
3. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2015) available at: http://www.oecd.org.
4. Ministry of Finance, Singapore Budget 2015, available at: http://www.singaporebudget.gov.sg.
5. SkillsFuture Council Singapore – see http://www.skillsfuture.sg.

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