Book Review
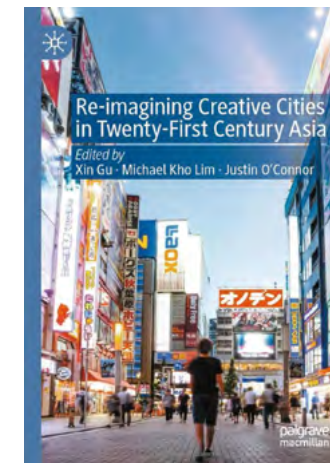
Re-Imagining Creative Cities in Twenty-First Century Asia

Zayd MINTY*

Edited by Xin Gu, Michael Kho Lim and Justin O'Connor.
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 325 pages.
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Local cultural governance is a relatively recent area of research, with early writing emerging from the 1990s focusing on Anglo-American examples initially. Writing on culture and policy on cities outside the West is even more recent. The book *Re-Imagining Creative Cities in Twenty-First Century Asia* published in 2020 by Palgrave Macmillan is therefore a welcome book of

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commissioned writings focussed on especially East and South-East Asia. The volume is a collection of essays and interviews with 28 different contributors from China, Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Philippines and Indonesia amongst others.

There are five main parts in the book: Conceptualising Creative Cities in Asia; Resisting Creative Cities; Creative Cities and Creative Industries; Governing Creative Cities; and Critical Reflections on Cultural Policy Making in Asia. The latter chapter consists largely of interviews with practitioners on their experiences related to creative city strategies while the former four are original research.

While the editors recognise that there is a plethora of ways to understand creative cities internationally, they argue that a dominant set of approaches to the creative city policy making in Asia has been strongly economic-centric, linked to ideas of neo-liberal governmentality. This, often consumption-heavy approach is associated with a greater privatisation of state services and resources, and with governments becoming increasingly more entrepreneurial in all spheres. Economic centred approaches to creative city making have often emphasized creative industries, cultural tourism, culture inspired urban regeneration, major eventing, and culture as branding. It was a highly seductive approach which sought to increase growth and investments. The approach is also strongly connected to the influence of Richard Florida who emphasizes ideas of a "Creative Class" and measurement indices which have become popular amongst many cities. The uptake of this economic heavy approach has been popular with Asian ones, many of whom have adopted such ideas for working with culture to reposition/remake cities.

A number of theorists working on local cultural governance, including those in this book, have critiqued this overly economic centredness as research in the last few years recognised that the approach privileges middle-class interests, with a tendency towards a global sameness in outcomes. More importantly the implementation has invariably resulted in increased challenges of inequality, displacements of less wealthy classes and social problems. These critiques raised in several of the pieces in this collection confirm that inequality has been the outcome of many of their states' use of culture in urban policy.

Asian cities use of creative cities as an urban policy tool are described by several writers as being "fast" or "Xerox policy" mode (following on academic Jamie Peck). This refers to the adoption of approaches based on Western models without sufficient self-reflexivity or nuanced adaptation to local conditions. There is often a de-politicisation of the culture's potential power along social, cultural or environmental lines, with local contexts, histories and values ignored. Asian cities, many of the writers suggest, are largely copying Western counterparts in their bid to be more modern. However, as several pieces demonstrate, this is an unrealistic and an unhelpful way to work with culture. It would put Asian cities at risk of being in a "perpetual catching up" mode "where Western cultural knowledge, cultural values and ways of life are privileged over local ones" suggests Gu (p. 53). Instead, a more local urban cultural approach is needed that draws on Asian contexts, histories, values, wisdoms and knowledge—one which favours authenticity. This vision for a more bottom-up approach to conceiving creative cities is therefore a useful feature in a number of articles.

Various writers show that while there are a number of seemingly positive examples of Asian cities working with culture, there are also many instances where the broader values of culture relevant for specific places have been ignored and negative impacts neglected. Several writers emphasize that another way to think about creative cities is to recognise how culture at a local level can further human development potential. Culture they say is important for furthering the participation of communities in public life, with its potentials embedded in local knowledge and histories and its emphasis on human ingenuity. This supports the shift towards more sustainable cities. There are several useful examples of how culture can be worked with from bottom up including one from George Town in Malaysia, showing the importance of local stories, and another from Tainan City in Taiwan. These fascinating pieces suggest alternative modes of practise which often rely on networked actions. Similarly, examples in Bandung, Indonesia and Chiang Mai, Thailand, show how new forms of governance are being conceived that respond to local networks.

Lastly, there are a number of chapters which touch on the question of technology in reshaping policy work on working with culture. This is an

especially interesting area as it raises the role of culture as a form of control through surveillance, showing that culture can be a double-edged sword.

The book is a timely one for the Asian context and it marks the beginning of a self-reflection around local cultural governance which is long overdue in contexts outside the West. It is not without its challenges. The book does not attempt to be reflective of the region as a whole and there is a preponderance of examples from some countries over others. Interestingly, there are few comparative pieces with an emphasis being largely on single cities or regions. Further there is a taken for grantedness in the book that becomes the basis for comparisons, and generalisation in some highly disparate conditions. Some of the writing also veers into a public relations exercise for the contexts being explored. On the whole, however, this is an excellent beginner volume for understanding how cultures use as urban policy is being conceived in the East. It is a much-needed attempt to explore a growing trend in this part of the globe.

Book Review

UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit

Jinsung JEON*
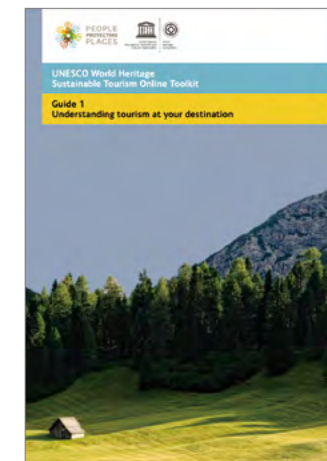
By UNESCO. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.
(Available online: http://whc.unesco.org/sustainabletourismtoolkit).

In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, archaeologist Indiana Jones, played by actor Harrison Ford, sets off to an ancient temple in the Middle East to find the Holy Grail, which is said to be the cup that Jesus Christ drank from at the Last Supper. After passing through a long ravine enclosed by red cliffs that extends over one kilometer, Jones beholds Al-Khazneh in awe.

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