

Kudos for Esplanade in book on culture

By OLIVIA HO

GREAT global cities are not built on economics alone but arts and culture as well.

On that front, Singapore has some distance to go, but it is certainly moving away from merely importing other global cultural ideas, according to a new book by Singaporean and Taiwanese geographers.

Arts, Culture And The Making Of Global Cities, written by professors Lily Kong of the National University of Singapore and Ching Chia-ho and Chou Tsu-lung of the National Taipei University, compares arts and culture urban projects in Singapore, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and Taipei.

At its launch yesterday at the National Library, Prof Kong, 50, said: "As cities mature, their identities are rooted not just in their economic trophies but (also) their cultural capital."

The book outlines two urban strategies for harnessing arts and culture: state-driven construction of "icons", such as the Esplanade and the Beijing National



Prof Kong (right) and Prof Lionel Wee, vice-dean of research at NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, with the former's book on culture. PHOTO: NUS

Grand Theatre, and the development of creative clusters where artists gather in the same space to work.

Prof Kong said Singapore's Esplanade comes off more favourably than other icons studied as it has tried to be inclusive of local acts after initial criticisms that it mainly showcased big international performances.

But art clusters here fare less well compared to those elsewhere.

Prof Kong cited the example of Telok Kurau Studios, an old

primary school converted into a visual arts enclave. The classrooms there offer less area than repurposed factories in Shanghai and Taipei. Professional rivalries and government intervention also hinder growth.

"One of my interviewees (in the cluster) said what city governments can do is make space available and then get out of the way," said Prof Kong.

Arts, Culture And The Making Of Global Cities, published by Edward Elgar, is available as an e-book on Google Play at \$50.30.

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