

**Francis E. Hutchinson and Johan Saravanamuttu (eds)**

*Catching the Wind. Penang in a Rising Asia.* Malaysia and Singapore: Penang Institute and ISEAS Publishing, 2012, xviii + 216 pp. ISBN 9789814379878. Price: USD 24.90 (paperback).

Two characteristics of this publication should be clarified at the outset. First, it is important to know that this volume arose out of the 2010 Penang Outlook Forum and the explicit aim to contribute to Penang's planning and policy agendas. As Johan Saravanamuttu and Francis E. Hutchinson note in their Introduction, the principle objective was 'to address the fundamental questions that lie before Penang as it seeks to position itself in a changing global environment' (p. xvii). The second point follows from the first, and this is to note the diversity of topics covered in this slim volume. In order to 'take stock' and 'chart the course ahead for the state' (xviii), the net has been cast wide to include industrial development, heritage preservation, water management, international temporary migrants, and medical and heritage tourism. It is fair to say that breadth has been privileged over detailed discussions of a smaller number of topics.

The book is divided into four sections. The first is a context-setting essay by Hutchinson that considers the economic and policy environment that shapes Penang's opportunities and challenges. Many of the economic and policy concerns noted by Hutchinson have a familiar ring—for example, how to remain competitive and attractive to MNC investment, how to ensure an adequate and appropriately skilled work force, how to support innovation amongst Penang's small and medium enterprises (SMEs), how to maximise opportunity relative to federal government policy frameworks, and how to overcome the constraints of space and of low private sector investment. These themes recur in the three chapters of third section. The first chapter in this section by Lee Kah Choon, Wein Siew Wei, and Sherine Loke commences with an overview of Penang's industrial development and the various forms of state government support. Lee was the Chairman of 'InvestPenang' and a Director of the Penang Development Corporation so can speak with some authority on these matters. The chapter concludes with a list of potential future investment areas that is heavily biased towards technology. The next chapter by Poh Heem Heem and Tan Yin Hooi considers the role played by the Penang Skills Development Centre (PSDC) and its current skills training programs developed in consultation with industry. The final chapter charts the former Penang Water Authority's transition from public authority to public company. Former Penang Water Authority engineer and now Chief Executive Officer of PBAHB (Penang's water corporation), Jaseni Maidinsa draws on international and national comparisons to argue that

corporatisation has improved the service provided by Penang's licensed water operator, despite increasing demands and a limited capacity to increase supply.

Returning to the second section, the focus of these three chapters is George Town's heritage precinct. George Town was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2008 and Khoo Salma Nasution provides an overview of the history and challenges of Penang's heritage movement both prior to and after the UNESCO listing. Khoo's long involvement in the heritage movement makes for an informed analysis of the political, planning, and financial hurdles to preserving George Town's outstanding architectural and cultural value. In the following chapter, Goh Beng Lan introduces a further challenge, namely, how to recuperate an awareness of the cosmopolitan and civic debates that once animated many of the buildings in the heritage precinct. Penang-born but now at the National University of Singapore, Goh wants to rescue George Town from forms of touristic commodification that uncritically reproduce racialised political and public discourses dominant in Malaysia today. Her suggestion is that we integrate in this heritage zone an acknowledgement of the earlier intellectual and civic life of George Town and its citizens. A final chapter considers the perspectives of George Town's poorer and marginalised Muslim community. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied's interviews document the pessimistic 'hidden transcripts' of George Town's Muslim minority and that of its non-Malay Muslims (a minority within a minority). In response to this sense of marginalisation, younger non-Malay Muslims increasingly adopt Malay language and culture thus further obscuring the diverse origins of George Town's multicultural Muslim community.

The final section of the book evaluates the economic futures of four distinct industries. Yoon Chon Leong draws on survey data from 600 firms to consider technology trends in the electrical and electronics industry, long the mainstay of Penang's manufacturing sector. Yoon starts with a sobering account of Penang's declining international competitiveness and the inability of small and medium enterprises to be more global in their operations. He ends with a call for a new industrial blueprint that builds on Penang's established technical competencies. Mika Toyota and Mayumi Ono's chapter sheds light on the growing phenomenon of long-stay Japanese retirees. They outline the demographic and political factors that have resulted in growing numbers of Japanese establishing temporary second homes in Malaysia, while offering a note of caution in relation to Penang's continuing urban development and traffic congestion. Their research has found that long-stay migrants tend to be rather footloose (few actually purchase property) and will move elsewhere if they feel a loss of amenity in Penang. Su-Ann Oh's chapter reviews another recent industry,

that of medical tourism in Penang. Penang accounts for around two-thirds of all medical tourism in Malaysia, yet Oh found a lack of reliable data to assist with planning or to measure the implications of an international private health market for the Malaysian public health sector. The final chapter in this section and in the book is Rosalind Chua's synopsis of the future prospects of Penang's *halal* industry. The *halal* industry is growing worldwide, but Penang faces tough competition from Malaysia's eight other Halal Parks, as well as from neighbouring Thailand, the world's fifth largest *halal* food exporter. In 2009, the state government established the Penang International Halal Hub (PIHH) and Chua's chapter basically outlines the achievements to date and future directions of the PIHH.

I finished the book with an overwhelming sense that there were a number of different Penangs being represented here, but without enough dots to join them. There is the export-oriented manufacturing Penang and the Penang of medical tourism. There is the Penang of the long-stay international retiree and the 'old George Town' Penang. Casting a shadow across several chapters is also the Penang of condominiums and urban development. These divergent and at times competing Penangs present a formidable challenge to the aims of the Penang Institute, the Penang Outlook Forum and this publication. Only a few chapters (mostly in the heritage section) reflect upon the contradictions of striving to realise multiple possible Penangs. For this reason, I felt that the book ended rather abruptly and I would have appreciated a final chapter to draw together the disparate threads.

So, who would find this book of interest? Given that the style of chapters is quite diverse, it is difficult to recommend the book to a specific readership—such as policy-makers, academics, or industry advisors. The spread of topics also works against a specialist audience. (One possible exception is the three chapters on George Town's heritage precinct, which together would be of broad interest to heritage researchers and policy makers). For these reasons, the volume is most likely to appeal to those with a general interest in Penang, such as myself. Having conducted research in Bayan Lepas in the mid 1990s, I was keen to read the book to find out how Penang is weathering global restructuring of the manufacturing sector, responding to George Town's World Heritage listing, and faring the political and electoral shifts of the past decade. *Catching the Wind* brought me up-to-date on a number of developments and debates, and was well worth the read. As I discovered, few of the manufacturing concerns of the 1990s have gone away, as niche industries and new stakeholders have entered the fray. Already apparent in the 1990s, the drive for economic growth tests the limits of amenity, community, and environment in Penang; now it also compromises the viability of some of the newer

and still emerging sectors. Managing these contradictions is the real challenge facing Penang, one that a later Penang Outlook Forum publication may address.

*Wendy Mee*

Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University

*w.mee@latrobe.edu.au*