

The Promises of Creative Industry Higher Education: an analysis of university prospectuses in Malaysia

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**Abstract**

In the context of economic growth policies that stress the importance of a 'creative economy', and the expansion of private universities, there has been an enormous growth in the number of creative industry degrees offered by Malaysian HEIs. This paper provides a critical discourse analysis of the promotional materials used by two private institutions, Multimedia University and Limkokwing University, to persuade students that these degrees will offer them a desirable future as employable 'industry savvy and tech savvy' creative graduates. We explore the structures of feeling that promotional material seeks to engender in potential students as it promises them future success in a globalised, high-tech world.

## **Introduction**

At the interstices between a burgeoning HE sector and a newly important creative industry sector sit a large number of vocationally-oriented degrees apparently intended to provide a future workforce of graphic designers, games programmers and brand managers (amongst others): these are a significant group of knowledge workers. The number of HEIs, including private institutions has increased in recent years, especially in Asia and Africa (Havergal 2015). Private universities offer a range of vocational degree programmes, some of which are validated by UK, US and Australian universities. We look at how cultural industry degrees in private institutions in Malaysia promise students entry into a global elite workforce as creative, entrepreneurial, technologically skilled, and aware of the needs of industry. University prospectuses imagine a workforce who will contribute both to national development and, being cosmopolitan and mobile, enter a global labour market. Students are promised that they will graduate “*industry savvy*” and “*tech savvy*”. Creative industry education serves as an interesting case study for exploring the production of subjectivity precisely because creative industry work requires - at least in principle - a set of skills, organised around aesthetic sensibility, which are notoriously difficult to articulate in a standardised, readily commodifiable form. As we can't hope to address that entirely here, we focus on just one part of this constellation: promotion, and consider this in the light of industrial, cultural and HE policies that have affected the recent growth of creative industry HE (Evers, et al. 2010). The question we explore in this paper is how, on what terms, students (and their families) are exposed to particular kinds of market logics as they consider entry into HE. What kinds of subjectivity are imagined for these potential students and future creative workers? What structures of feeling are articulated within the promotion of the courses, between possible experiences at the university (both inside and outside the classroom) and possible futures in global cultural industry workplaces?

## **Creative Industry Higher Education**

We turn to creative industry education as a productive site to explore the emergent subjectivities of knowledge work for two reasons. First, and following Latour, exploring “becomings” is imaginatively productive and insightful in contrast to trying to unlock black-boxes of routinized and stable social relations. The contingencies of the processes of mediation whereby a creative industry practitioner comes to be considered skilled are on display in the case of education, where subjectivity is (re)produced through multifaceted educational experiences and where students learn what it is to become a creative, employable, skilled worker and consumer. Borrowing from actor-network theory

for a moment, we might say that we are interested in the ways in which the agency of creative labour is put together through a constellation or configuration of techniques, policy, curricula, tacit knowledges, feelings, discourses and so on. The university - an extraordinarily complex assemblage - has its devices, its networks, its agents and its regimes of enunciation. Within such an assemblage, promotional material operates performatively as a component element in making an educational market (Callon 2007) that is particularly important, in so far as it aligns the (values of the) course, staff, potential and actual students and the university itself. In this paper, we provide a reading of university, faculty and course prospectuses for creative industry degrees. In making claims for what a university can and will do, we claim that prospectuses have a kind of choreographic function, linking together elements of the university as an organisation and other actors in the (quasi) market spaces HE occupies. But what kinds of promises, what “offer” of subjectivity (Latour 2005) do they contain?

Second, because the well-established research agenda that considers education as a site for the production of subjectivities (Fendler, 1998) has not considered creative industries education. HE teaching is under-considered by creative industry researchers who have tended to study research and industry links (e.g. Comunian, Faggian and Jewell 2014). Recent work by Gilmore and Comunian (2014; 2016) has highlighted the importance of considering the ‘crossroads’ between creative industries, HE institutions and public policies (2016: 6). This journal recently presented studies of the career trajectories of creative industry graduates (Bridgstock and Cunningham, 2016), accounts of the problem with art schools (Brook, 2016; Banks and Oakley, 2016) and, most usefully for us, considered CI policy and practice in Singapore (Comunian and Ooi, 2016). Our work complements this emergent field of research with its focus on how CI degrees are promoted in the context of economic growth policies. There is extensive and interesting scholarly work in the field of creative work. Whilst researchers increasingly, and rightly, look beyond Western Europe, there is comparatively little English-language research into creative industries in Asia (with exceptions including Ross 2006; Driscoll and Morris 2014). Florida’s (2002) “creative city” ideas have been adopted and adapted for the different political and social environments in Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere in Asia (Yue, 2006; Kong and O’Connor, 2009; Comunian and Ooi, 2016). However, there remain important questions to be asked about the relationship between creative industries and HE in Asia, about the interplay between economic, educational and cultural policies in different national contexts, and about how students are persuaded to study for creative industry degrees: what promises for the future are they offered?

## **The Malaysian Context**

The analysis in this paper focuses on the promotional material of a representative sample of creative industry degree programmes offered at private universities in Malaysia. A significant feature of the “globalisation” of HE consists of the expansion of degree providers in countries – like Malaysia - that historically sent large numbers of (wealthy) students to the west. These degree providers are of three main kinds: state managed universities, often called “national universities”; private sector universities, usually with a technical and vocational focus, and sometimes explicitly supported by global corporations (e.g. Microsoft); and branch campuses of western universities (most obviously, the Middle-Eastern “university towns” such as “Education City” in Qatar. Each kind of educational provider may have multiple relationships with other universities from different regions, through the validation of courses, research collaborations, formalised student exchanges and so on (see Knight 2011).

There are a number of reasons why we have focused on private HE providers in Malaysia:

1. The cultural, social and economic position of Malaysia vis-à-vis its legacy of British colonial rule, historical migration from China and India, its mid-level economic development, its history as a prime location for outsourcing (Arshad, et al 2007), and its growing population of young workers make it an interesting case for exploring the changing global HE sector.
2. As a newly industrialised country (NIC), with a population of c28 million, which pursued a path to development from the 1980s that stressed manufacturing and resource industries, Malaysia has historically provided cheap, technologically competent (often female) workers for manufacturing corporations. The regional economic slowdown in the late 1990s as a result left it in the “middle income trap” (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2009), which in turn contributed to a broad shift in economic policy towards a “creative economy”. Private HE provision of the kind we are interested in are closely connected to this shift in thinking, exemplified in the Malaysia 2020 development plan, which brings together cultural, economic and educational policies. Nationalism and nation-building are significant to the plan, and the “culture industry” dimension of the plan is strongly technological (e.g. ETP Annual Report 2011 pp152-62). The cultural and creative sectors are encouraged to take the lead in jumpstarting stalled economic development. The 2020 plan sees Malaysia positioning itself as a key site for outsourced IT and multimedia. Crucially, the policy documents present an educated, flexible workforce as the key to success in the increasingly globalized creative industries.

The policy shift described here is not unique to Malaysia (see Lee 2004; Hui 2007 on East Asia more generally). Whilst in, say, China, cultural policy is directed at producing content for Chinese language markets (Li 2011), Malaysian cultural industry policy stresses global interconnectivity and provides workers to outsourcing global corporations such as Microsoft, Erikson and Nokia. Malaysia is now the 13<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of cultural goods (Anheier and Raj Isar 2008, p.422). Two assertions—that a knowledge economy is central to sustained economic development; and that Malaysia must train this creative industry workforce as quickly as possible—underpin much of the material we analysed.

3. The specific situation of HE in Malaysia is also significant. It is a propitious location for globalising HE provision. The Malaysian public university system has long been unable to provide enough places to meet increasing local demand for HE (Mok 2010, p.426) (and until recently it imposed ethnic quotas). Escalating overseas tuition fees provoked concerns about the costs to the public purse and encouraged the development of private provision (Arokiasamy 2011, p.76). Following the 1996 Private Higher Education Institutions Act, international institutions were allowed to offer university degrees, initially in collaboration with private Malaysian colleges. There are now 53 private universities and 6 foreign university branch campuses in Malaysia (Malaysia Education Info 2016). The most recent *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025* (Ministry of Higher Education 2015) stresses nurturing local and global student ‘talent’ in a university system that is benchmarked to global standards and where students are provided with a spiritual and moral context to go with the knowledge and skills they acquire.

As well as considering how Malaysian HEIs attract local students, it is important to acknowledge their appeal to students from culturally and geographically proximate neighbours, from countries without developed HE sectors (e.g. countries in Africa), and from students from western countries looking for cheaper education. The “market” in HE is global in a complex way (if we consider the global networks of students, staff, and the development of international reputations), and “private sector” in a complex way (if we consider both the role of private companies in HE and the ways in which they have taken on the discourses and practices of the private sector). All kinds of global interrelations and interdependencies are presumed and formed. We explore how this complexity is articulated in promotional material, using the idea of structures of feeling.

### **Structures of Feeling**

Creative industry research conceptualises “creativity” as complex and multi-faceted. However, it does not sufficiently take into consideration questions of technological skill and knowhow, or the

“global” market in cultural goods. Whilst not disagreeing with Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s stress that creative work is distinctive for the “specific importance of *culture*, of *mediated communication*, and of the *content* of communication products” (2011, p.58, italics in original), we suggest that their focus on the symbolic risks underplaying both the dependency of creative work on technological infrastructures and on embodied knowledge work. Creative industry degrees are characterised in our research by the intermingling of creativity, technology and (consumer and labour) markets in the service of developing cultural products. We suggest that these elements are manifest both as codifiable skills to be acquired, but more comprehensively, as structures of feeling in neoliberal capitalism. We consider neither ‘neoliberalism’ nor ‘structures of feeling’ as monolithic, but as multiple and contingent. Exploring the affective resonances of culture industry education in HE allows us to consider more directly the complexities of the generation of specific kinds of market logics and the inculcation of embodied skills in a potential workforce in “cognitive capitalism” (Boutang, 2012). It means, more broadly, having to attend not just to a kind of literacy inculcated through the degree programmes of HE, here specifically to a globalising HE programme of ‘creative industry’ work in Malaysia but also to the less obvious but nevertheless tangible “feeling” mobilised in such programmes. These include calls to becoming cosmopolitan, creative and technologically adept.

We see HE as an active participant in the production of cultures: national and regional cultures, consumer culture, work cultures and so on. In our desire to avoid a narrow “skill” and employability based account of education (e.g. Mustapha and Abdullah 2004) and critical of the tendency within, for example, postcolonial studies of aesthetic education (Spivak 2012), to focus exclusively on literary texts and culture in abstraction from the processes of its production, we turn to Raymond Williams’ ideas about structures of feeling to think through creative industry HE. A structure of feeling is variously defined by Williams, but in one formulation is characterised as

a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life . . . are in some way passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour . . . a particular and native style. . . . it is as firm as “structure” suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity (1961, p.48).

“Structures of feeling” have been identified in education (Britzmann 1992; Lingard and Gale 2007) and work (Kirk 2008). We use the term to help us conceptualise the social and cultural embeddedness of the peculiar technologies of the self (Foucault 1988) or productions of subjectivity (Guattari 1995) attendant on becoming a creative worker, noting Williams’ stress on the ‘particular’.

Britzman (1992) describes the process of academic socialisation as one where students learn “what they should value and what they should dismiss” (p.254). Britzman suggests this is an antagonistic relationship for the most part, with students “policed” into structures of feeling; we suggest that in HE, students are already sensitised to appropriate ways of feeling (and expressing feeling), for example that becoming desirably employable is a good reason to study. A student and their family, looking at promotional material, is engaging in

...a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not recognised as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies (Williams 1977, p.132).

Williams’ concept enables us in principle to address the tensions produced between culturally located forms of sensibility that act as a resource or starting point for aesthetic education of the kind creative industry degrees offer, and the sensory and affective qualities that form crucial material elements of the creative industries. In this respect, “structures of feeling” provides the conceptual linkage between the aesthetics of creative industry products, education and work.

Cronin (2002) has drawn on structures of feeling to consider commodities and consumerism. Her ideas are productive in thinking through what the advertising and promotion of a complex commodity like education might do to ‘culture’. For Cronin, all kinds of elements of social, economic and moral life flow through commodities and are thus transformed. “Structures of feeling” makes significant an integration of feeling and thought that affects and is affected by transformative commodities – here, education. Studying promotion, therefore, tells us about social changes. Promotional activities articulate individual feelings and invoke personal relationships but also derive discursive power and importance from how they draw on broader social contexts (Cronin 2002, p329). In the case of culture industry education, multicultural teamwork, technological expertise and creating desirable cultural goods serve to appeal to the individual imagining a future, and to the broader backdrop wherein the power of education to create economic growth is clear.

More pointedly, the concept of “structures of feeling” forces an acknowledgement that whilst symbolic goods of the kind the cultural industries produce might be immaterial, their success as such is dependent on the mobilisation of capacities in those who produce (and consume them). The creation of employable creative labour through HE entails a delicate articulation of “feeling”, “sensibility” or “affect”, an articulation that, as our focus on promotional materials suggests, draws together spatially and temporally distinct elements of the broader network of relations of which

creative and cultural industry HE is a part. We suggest that, in doing so, HE institutions seek to produce, in graduates, subjectivities that are congruent with being desirably employable in global creative industry workplaces. Students may come to question this kind of articulation; other elements of the university assemblage, including teaching staff, may generate rather different affective flows. In this paper we can only address the signals of the promotional material we study.

### **Promotional Materials and Promotional Culture**

We are not the first to take the university prospectus as an object of critical study (Fairclough 1993; Teo 2007; Wernick 1991). Our assumption is that the promotion of HE to potential students tells us something important about how HE is imagined to be a provider of flexible knowledge workers through access to future promises of success in global capitalism. State provision of subsidies of different kinds, institutional regulations and the lingering ideal of the university as providing a public good, means that universities are not simply "ordinary businesses competing to sell their products to consumers" (Fairclough 1993, p141). However, in other respects, they are market actors in a competitive environment, and they imagine and treat students as consumers. In other ways, universities may operate differently, for example when academic staff develop curricula intended to enhance students' critical abilities.

Seeing universities as entrepreneurial market actors (Barnett 2011) makes considering how they engage in competition for students an obvious topic for research. We conceptualise the university prospectus as part of promotional culture, comparable to how Wernick describes Oxford university: "through glossy brochures, catch-phrases, and public relations events, Oxford has come to be imaged and packaged just like any other marketed product" (Wernick 1991, p.156). Promotional culture, whereby, symbolic objects cannot be separated from their own promotion, and where objects are connected in "an endless chain of mutual reference and implication" (Wernick 1991, p. 187) is a significant part of university life; indeed universities are *in part* constituted through their promotional materials.

The university prospectus is, in this respect, a marketing document that presents potential students with information about the university, faculties, departments and courses that lead to recognised qualifications. Prospectuses exist as printed and web documents, generally produced by 'in house' marketing experts. We have downloaded the prospectuses for our chosen universities, and analysed specific promotional webpages. We make no claim that the prospectuses reflect the "real" university, nor the reality of student experiences on the specific courses described within



them. We take them in their own terms, as promotional items designed to sell a product by making explicit and tacit promises, generating atmospheres (Böhme 1993) and promises of future experiences and *structures of feeling* that link together workplace and classroom, origins and destinations of students. In this respect, they operate as semiotic devices which give shape to prospective students' expectations about the types of jobs they will work at, and how their experiences at work will be (as well as what will be required of them as workers), as well as how they imagine the contemporary workplace in general.

The prospectuses are part of a generalised, well-resourced promotional culture where there is no separation between “doing” and “advertising”, but where many activities in the university have promotional potential. Potential students are both consumers of education and “property to be acquired” (Wernick 1991) in order to continue the promotional cycle – in fact, institutions may employ their own creative industry programme graduates as marketing officers. Wernick’s cynical phrase points to how current and past students are part of the production of value in HE; Boutang (2010: 323) might read this as one of the many “opportunities” for (student) consumer activities to “reinject” information into productive processes. So a university's Facebook page draws current students in and then uses their posts as evidence to show the quality of the institution when seducing potential students. Indeed, we might also see students here not just as being engaged in the provision of the kind of free labour that is widespread in global networked culture (Terranova 2004, Scholz 2012), but equally as colluding with their university in a reputational game: what graduate would want to see their university labelled as poor quality?

In the next section, drawing on critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013) we present an analysis of promotional material, looking specifically the websites of Limkokwing University (Limkokwing) and Multimedia University (MMU), two private universities in Malaysia. Limkokwing University began in 1991 as a private college, established by the entrepreneur Lim Kok Wing: charismatic capitalism taking an educational form. It began with a mandate to provide training for the creative industries and attained university status in 2007. International students were first recruited in 1997, and from 2007 it has developed its own branches in other countries, focusing especially on those with limited HE sectors such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in Africa, and Indonesia, Cambodia and China in Asia (<http://www.limkokwing.net/malaysia/about/history>, accessed 18/12/15). Multimedia University is owned by Telekom Malaysia, a telecommunications company which was formerly owned by the state but privatised in the 1980s. It claims to be the first private university in Malaysia; it is based in Melaka, as well as the Cyberjaya campus (a “tech city” 50 km from KL) and does not

have branch campuses in other countries. It recruits local and international students, and has a higher proportion of home students to Limkokwing. Its current provision is affected by its historically strong ties to the state and to ICT industries. The paper draws on analysis of the following materials:

- Limkokwing and Multimedia University's *Vision* statements
- Several Limkokwing faculty prospectuses with courses relevant to our interests (*Information Communication, Communication Media and Broadcasting, Design Innovation, Multimedia Creativity* and *Fashion Lifestyle*, all from 2013).
- 3 of Limkokwing's "global" brochures: the degrees associated with *Curtin* and *UEA*, and the "Global Classroom" 1 month programme, where students spend a month at the Limkokwing campus of their choice, all from 2013.
- MMU's *Entitle04* and *Entitle05* in-house magazines, produced largely by students, both 2013.

We expected, and found, differences between the two universities. As Limkokwing's publicity was much slicker, there is a sense that their testimonials are quite heavily edited. In contrast, MMU testimonials were less obviously "on message" and some provided direct challenges to the prospectus claims. Limkokwing's material is more extensive, and so we tend to provide more discussion of this institution.

### **A future-facing university**

The double promise of a university prospectus is the offer of imagined futures for student/workers mediated through the immediate (yet always future facing) orientation of the two global Malaysian universities we have studied. The "future" refers to the potential student's future as a student (keen to be transformed into an employable worker), to the time *after* the period of study (when the potential student will enter paid employment), and to future economic development. In this section, we explore globalisation and technology, economic growth and social mobility, and links between industry and HE.

#### Globalisation and technology

Limkokwing and MMU both indicate that globalisation and technology are key to the development of a knowledge economy in Malaysia and in other emerging economies from where potential students may come. Each university is presented as an agent of change and innovation: Limkokwing claims that it is "not restricted by traditional rules and perceptions; rather there is a liberating innovative freedom" (UEA). Limkokwing's "Global Classroom" programme (in which students study at one or more of the university's branches for a month) specifically presented Asia as the site of

future economic growth and opportunities. Targeted primarily at international students from within and outside the region, it claims that “the future is in Asia”, and that the programme would cover topics such as how to do business in this region. In doing so, it would habituate students to a global creative industry context, and enable students to feel confident working in Asia with a minimum of misunderstandings or cultural *faux pas*, contributing to a structure of feeling where students are comfortable with and conformable to global capitalism.

We saw in our discussion of Malaysian economic policy how the knowledge economy is both seen to be inevitable, and an explicit goal within a narrative of Malaysian economic progress and nation building, to which educational institutions contribute. In this uncertain future, MMU claimed that as an institution it would be “a catalyst for the development of the high tech ICT industry of the nation” (<https://www.mmu.edu.my/index.php?req=21>, accessed 18.12.15). It does not make as extensive reference to the “global” as Limkokwing, but instead presents a rhetoric of nation-building. As well as producing “local content” (Rosmadi, 2014, accessed 18/12/15), it looks to models where higher education institutions have close links to industry, mentioning the Stanford-Silicon Valley relationship as inspiration on their website (<https://www.mmu.edu.my/index.php?req=25>, accessed 18.12.15). The structure of feeling draws by implication on a different kind of “global” participation, one which idealises a digitally optimised and technologically innovative neoliberalism.

#### Social mobility and economic growth

At Limkokwing, individual success is framed as having a global benefit. The Limkokwing vision document says:

We are committed towards creating a new class of global graduates with the knowledge, skills, and cultural sensitivity to make the world a better place.

We want our graduates to be able to use their creative and innovative abilities to develop new streams for wealth creation and new initiatives for societal advancement.

We want our graduates to be able to bridge the development gap that is preventing their countries from profiting from the global economic progress.

We want our graduates to be able to lift their communities to new levels of economic growth by applying creativity and innovation to solve local issues.

([http://www.limkokwing.net/united\\_kingdom/about/vision](http://www.limkokwing.net/united_kingdom/about/vision), accessed 18/12/15)

The language of economic growth is clearly manifest here, in the form of corporate-speak (“streams of wealth creation”) and the buzzwords of development organisations (“bridge the development gap”). The 1<sup>st</sup> excerpt stresses upwards social mobility for the greater good, and the reference to

“cultural sensitivity” marks perhaps a shift in discourse to recognizing difference. Responsibility for economic development is in the hands of specific *kinds* of individual: those who are creative, and those with understandings of local conditions. MMU will produce a national elite as the institution is “educating the next generation the nation’s leaders and knowledge workers” (<https://www.mmu.edu.my/index.php?req=21> accessed 18/12/15).

It is asserted that creative industries will continue to provide jobs, although no evidence is presented. “New opportunities form constantly”, as Limkokwing said in its brochure for multimedia degrees; the welcome message from MMU’s multimedia faculty described “emerging fields in the creative content industry”, with an “ever-growing need for creativity and innovation”. We note how it is taken as a given that the creative industries do indeed facilitate economic transformation.

#### “Straight to industry”

The “industry” (<http://limkokwing.ac.ls/subpanel/industry.asp>, accessed 18/12/15), a term we have not seen elsewhere, is obviously a portmanteau word combining “industry and university”. The implication is hardly subtle: Limkokwing is inspired by a philosophy where education serves capital. From the perspective of more traditional criteria of prestige and status within education (which criteria clearly play an important role in global “league tables”), this may be a risky move as it demotes other potential benefits of education, regardless of whether they may also appeal to students. From a perspective that frames the worth of education in terms of its contribution to economic development via individualised acquisition of human capital, less so. Limkokwing claims that its approach has attracted industry support: collaborators’ brand logos are visible on various webpages and some modules offer research trips to transnational corporations. As a teaching philosophy, industry was made manifest through pedagogical strategies where the classroom mimics the corporate world: such as working on “multidisciplinary teams on assigned projects based upon the world of work which will be group assessed” (Global Classroom) The specific knowledges students acquire will lead to them understanding how business works but “more importantly, it cultivates intellectual capacity to allow students to continue to develop and keep pace with a changing business environment” (ARU). In doing so, such programmes claim to cultivate the attitudes, behaviours and expectations (structures of feeling) which they see as suited to the “business environment”. Students will not have much adjusting to do once they start working in such environments (because they have already been habituated to this as part of their education, gaining necessary tacit knowledges). Assessment techniques here, as on other creative industry degree courses, are oriented to employability (for example, end of year shows, portfolios and so on),

an indication of the commitment of academic staff and university governance to this form of HE. The “technopreneurship” course even offers “to enable students to exploit technical innovations commercially”. This is the most explicit of all promises of economic success, but it’s not the only such claim. Industry links are a key promotional strategy and very present in the student testimonials: real learning means aping the “real world” in order to better prepare students for employment within it such as through fostering “team building, problem solving, project management, analysis, evaluation and basic research skills”, or making a presentation to a “panel of industry professionals” (Global Classroom).

Real learning also means learning in order to become employable. At MMU, student futures are considered through the lens of employability. ‘A Word From the President’ describes graduates as “highly employable” and its programmes as meeting “industry preferences” (<https://www.mmu.edu.my/index.php?req=110> accessed 18/12/15). The ‘Word’ also includes statistics about graduate employment: 90% secured employment after 6 months (the “about the university” page lists it at 91%); 86% “working in multinational corporations or the private sector” and 7% having started their own venture. The implication is that these are desirable destinations – showing in turn that entrepreneurialism and self-employment are important. Studying at MMU offers “golden opportunities to join the best professional recruiters” when you leave the university.

Students and their families are demonstrably concerned about future work prospects, and promotional material both reflects and reinforces how important future employability is. Students’ choice of study was not theirs alone, particularly when in the common scenario where parents pay for their children’s education. For example, Grace Lai, profiled in Entitle05 (the university’s in-house magazine) as the “best student of the year”, said that:

Initially, I wanted to be a fashion designer but it did not work out because the course was too expensive and my parents were worried that it might be difficult to find a proper job later on. So, I figured the next best choice was to be a graphic designer...

Thus far, we have focused on how prospectuses position HE as supporting corporate cultures and doctrines of economic growth. This reflects curricula and assessment structures, although classroom practices may well diverge from what the prospectuses indicate. In the next section, we explore the transformative promises the prospectuses make to students, where creativity and innovation are entwined with being technologically savvy.

## Promises of transformation

To do well in this imagined future of private sector employment, students are promised a transformation that will equip them with the attributes to succeed within the present and future economy. “Transformation” does not only suggest the learning of skills, but attitudes, practices and aesthetic sensibilities discussed earlier in relation to “structures of feeling”. The implication is that students can take these attributes into all kinds of (corporate) settings: they will acquire new confidence, and will develop “... the right **mindset** for a job in the global games industry” (Limkokwing Multimedia faculty), echoing the ways Cremin has understood how some kinds of emotional performances, such as enthusiasm, have come to be valued in those looking for work (REF). Students can be seen in this sense as being supported in acquiring essential attributes for labour market success.

### Creative and innovative work

Of the three themes we pay attention to, creativity is the one that existing research into contemporary knowledge economies had primed us to expect. So long a buzzword in policy discourses and managerial practices in many regions of the world, creativity emerges from the documents we analysed as a critical dimension to doing good work. Creativity at times is presented as an innate quality and at other times as a skill that can be taught (the contradictions reflecting contested understandings of its nature); it is also associated with two other markers of prestige: success and innovation.

In MMU documents, creativity is a highly employable skill: creative students will be able to find work in an economy that desires creative workers. In the degree prospectuses, creativity has both a resonance as artistic or aesthetic quality, and as the managerialist creativity of the innovative business person. Creativity is often associated with words such as “design” and “innovation”. For example, the welcome message from MMU’s Faculty of Creative Multimedia described an “ever-growing need for creativity and innovation” and the present is characterised as a “fast-paced environment”, or as “creative innovative design solutions” (Curtin). Creativity is linked to the language of success, for example where “winning is a sign of leadership” and creativity “...comes from the stimulating creative environment on campus and the encouragement of students to go beyond the ordinary” (Curtin) with success meaning economic success, as when “creative Multimedia has always posed as a vital sector of the economy” (Multimedia Creativity).

Creativity is discussed in brochures for all the programmes studied. In the more technologically complex ones, creativity is part of an orientation to using technology: “confident, creative and productive use of ICT as an essential skill for life” (Information Communication Technology). This differs from how it is discussed on courses aimed at careers in promotional work. For example, the Diploma in Multimedia, Advertising and Broadcasting, will promote “professional creative communication skills” through “intensive industry practice” (Communication Media): it is enacted as part of another key attribute. Creativity is not entirely “teachable” though: innate ability (talent) counts too:

...your creative talent and capability to assess industry requirements will ensure that you are successful in your career (Fashion Lifestyle).

Further, some jobs are defined by their relationship to creativity, as when interior design is presented as “qualified professionals, find creative solutions “ (Curtin).

We find these different conceptualisations of creativity to be interesting. The (potential) student must already be a certain kind of person (a creative), assumed to have some understanding of what being creative is (which cannot be taken for granted in view of the constituencies to which the brochures appeal) and is then invited to become a particular kind of a creative “problem solver”, always with a view to harnessing this creativity for economic ends (Oakley 2009). “Creativity” is structured and structuring (Bourdieu 1984). A potential student’s understanding and expression of aesthetics seems central to their success on vocational CI degrees – and hence “creative talent” counts, but the constant orientation to markets, to economic development and to the “real world” of business – where creative problem solvers are needed everyday – speaks more directly to a version of creativity as a tacit corporate norm, to which graduates must adapt. Here, graduates may apply creativity and resourcefulness to briefs set by a client, but have little autonomy to question the terms of the brief. Articulating this conception of creativity (as well as an awareness of the parameters within which it operates) is central to generating the presumed structures of feeling of “creative” workplaces.

Creativity is central to the development of a knowledge economy. Perhaps more surprising is the constant presence of a story about technology. As indicated by its original name, the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Limkokwing stresses the interplay of creativity and technology. Graduates ‘creative and innovative abilities’ are highlighted. This brings us to considering another entry into the list of graduate abilities, being tech-savvy.

### Techno-savvy

The promotional materials enable us to foreground the crucial importance of, and virtual invisibility of technology when understanding major elements of contemporary global culture. Technology operates as a significant mediating element in production of culture and various kinds of technology provide the mechanism through which global culture industries and global labour markets are made possible. Further, technology contains the promise of a better future and signals a kind of progress that makes no explicit appeal to obvious forms of cultural belonging in and of itself. It serves as a unifying focus, with the tech-savvy worker a “global citizen”. We suggest that in this respect, figures of the technological are tacit shorthand for a neutralised, beneficent globalization, promising a future modernity in which, through technological progress, Malaysia attains the same level of economic development as wealthier nations.

This helps make sense of why all brochures have more images of technology than of anything else. The images in the prospectuses contribute to the ‘future facing university’ and to the promises of transformation. Often, images show multi-ethnic and mixed gender groups of students sat around high tech machines in pristine spaces. These group shots are, as Teo (2007) found, carefully managed ethnic representations as well as enactments of how skills are acquired: technology itself is a key participant. Sometimes it appears alone, as an input that students are in control of when doing their work (especially in Information Communication) or as output, that students produce through their studies (Multimedia Creativity). Technology – which itself contains the promise of mobile living and working for the always-on age – is here a promise of individual career mobility into a high-tech and globalised industry. Limkokwing faculty brochures follow a standard template, comprising a 3x4 square collage, with some of the component squares making a 2x2 picture. Most collages include images of a trio of students at work, one standing with arms round the others, of the technology students use and of the cultural products they make. There are no images of staff. The educational promises of cultural industry study is “coloured”, to use Williams’ term, by these collages, whereby aesthetic products, the lived experience of being a student, and the close up shots of technology - the seductive means through which global culture production can happen - are offered for their transformative potential.

Technology is discussed in prospectuses in relation to work environments and market settings, as when digital film and television students are offered (rather banal) insights into what high status industry players use:



the endless technical possibilities and flexibility of digital technology makes the digital format the preferred choice of some of the top filmmakers around the world. This is the opportune time for students to be fully equipped (Communication Media).

It is rare for the degree-specific brochures to specify what kinds of technology are being taught. Instead, technology is presented as abstract, as when “key skills” are listed as: “aesthetic, technological and professional” (Design Innovation). Technology appears as a taken-for-granted part of creative study. Only the Information Communication degrees are more specific, naming software packages – unsurprising against the background of a highly developed market in IT skills training.

The more or less constant presence of technology in the promotional material establishes it as a central feature of the environment of creative education. Our sense is that technologized learning is more about being “cutting edge” than about providing broadly transferable skills. Students may arrive with expectations about IT facilities. This was challenged by some of the testimonials in MMU’s *Entitle05* magazine. One student said that the internet was too slow; another that 80% of the software applications that he had learned at the beginning of his degree are now out of date.

Several Limkokwing documents claim that students will graduate as: “[C]onfident, smart, creative, innovative, techno-savvy and culture-sensitive” (Curtin). “Industry savvy” also appears in several brochures. “Savvy” is a colloquial English term (derived from the French, “Savoir-Faire”, know-how) and we wonder how comprehensible it is to non-native English speakers who make up much of the recruitment pool. “Savvy” connotes ability that is tacit rather than credentialised. We might interpret this as being intended to make potential students feel comfortable with what they will be learning (is the degree course challenging if it’s just about savvy?); we might also consider it as part of Limkokwing’s aim to be a cool brand - it takes savvy to claim to be savvy. In any event vagueness is productive as a way of mobilising understandings and expectations; it signals to students that they need – and will acquire – tacit understandings.

#### Culture-sensitive

Limkokwing outlines the role of the institution as “Creating a new class of global graduates with the knowledge, the skills and the cultural sensitivity to make the world a better place” ([http://www.limkokwing.net/united\\_kingdom/about/vision](http://www.limkokwing.net/united_kingdom/about/vision), accessed 18/12/15). There is an implicit invitation to see Limkokwing as an institution that listens to young people and will help them to belong in a new kind of workforce with the necessary sensibilities for successful careers, including ability to make sense of cultural differences. This sensitivity to cultural difference appears in a more

muted (and instrumentalised) version in the Limkowing-Anglia Ruskin partnership documentation (as “[c]ulturally competent global creative thinkers”). Education blurs with both cultural tourism and the demands of business for global cultural understanding. Cultural and aesthetic experiences matter as students are introduced to the “cultural tapestry of the host country comprising, in particular, its history, music, art, fashion, architecture, design and cuisine”. Meanwhile, the “educational dimension” of the programme, concerns “business ethics and dynamics, objective assessments of career opportunities in the relevant country and continent and advice as to how to proceed to harness your potential”.

It appears that the spectacular qualities of other cultures reinforce a connection between the virtues of global travel, global education and a consumer experience. Such a set of connections is not at odds with the question of production: feeling one’s way into global culture industry work demands a sensibility towards the products to be consumed, and to “local” business cultures. But the cosmopolitan mobility projected as a constituent element of cultural sensitivity is also connected to the innovative and entrepreneurial “future-focused, career-ready global graduate” (Global Classroom) - not in the least because, as the tagline of this brochure shows, the final goal of university is to graduate with proof of a “globalized mindset”. The instrumentalising quality of this is quite explicit, as the references to “building human capital” suggest. MMU frames this more explicitly in terms of nation building. On their “about the university” website, they state their purpose as fulfilling the initiative of their owner, Telekom Malaysia “to further develop the ICT industry in the nation as a whole” and fulfilling “the nation’s human resource needs as it grows into a knowledge economy”. The university also frames its role as building the capacity of the local workforce: “training its required human resources within its borders” (rather than overseas, and implying, possibly, concerns about “brain drain”) (<https://www.mmu.edu.my/index.php?req=21>, accessed 18.12.15). Also, it is claimed that “as a research university”, the Malaysian ICT industry can be “a creator and not just a consumer of technology” – also implying that it has not played this role in the past. What is this right mindset? We have suggested it is to develop a subjectivity, to acquire the intangible qualities of sensitisation to future creative work. Concretely, that might include the tacit normalisation of reskilling to adapt to continual technological change, and acceptance of globalisation as a key to local economic growth.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

In this paper, we have been considering the complex process where cultures of markets, work, technology, locale and values, are interwoven in HE promotional material in Malaysian HE. We have looked how these prospectuses articulate and project structures of feeling characteristic of an imagined future labour market where both the Malaysian economy and the world economy are more globalised, and based in communications technologies. In policy documents and in prospectuses, such changes are taken as both historically inevitable, and as the key to Malaysia's future economic success. Our analysis inevitably misses out significant elements of the assemblages of HE as we do not study here actual experience of teaching and learning, nor the details of curricula. We cannot address the complex and important question of how structures of feeling are encountered, resisted and accepted. Our focus instead has been on what can be understood about creative industry work and education from an exploration of the promises that are made on its behalf.

Related assumptions are made about what it means to succeed in such an economy: one must have some familiarity with other cultures (enough, at least, to be able to conduct business successfully without making cultural faux pas), one must develop IT skills, and be entrepreneurial and "creative". The prospectuses present the universities as equipping students with the skills to succeed within the present and future economy, as well as the necessary attitudes and dispositions so they can fit easily into global creative industry workplaces, indicated by the choreographed togetherness of multi-ethnic groupings around technology, that figure of a desirable modernity, and the entrepreneurial resonances of creative technological innovation. Creativity comes to be an attribute essential to a degree programme's claim to mobility: today's student in a creative industry degree can become tomorrow's entrepreneurial, innovative, technically savvy creative industry worker, able to understand consumer markets in order to prove their worth in the labour market. These rhetorics of innovation, of technological change, of the graduate of the future cohere in the *promissory* quality of the promotional material, as it asks prospective students to imagine themselves having future careers in global creative industry environments, and claims to give them a taste of what such workplaces would be like. To some extent, the rhetorical quality of such claims is inevitable – after all the material is designed to persuade potential students.

An easy route for us would have been to interpret the material that we have looked at through the tried and tested ideology-critical framework of *interpellation*. So, in our analysis we showed how creative industry (design) degrees in Limkokwing and MMU frame content in relation to "creativity", "technology" and markets in consumer goods and we show how would-be students are addressed

through the construction of subject identities as future flexible and entrepreneurial workers competing in a global corporate world. In the prospectuses, global capital's desired subject - a flexible, enterprising, lifelong learner, applying credentialised skills and willing to work the long hours in precarious employment that we might characterise as emblematic of contemporary capitalism is produced through HE. However, as satisfying as this interpretation is, it has its risks, one of which is the easy shortcut it provides to the rather general (and generalising) conclusion that what we see here is just another instance of "the" ideology of neoliberal capitalism in action. The delicate choreography of promotional material and the specificities of social and cultural context can quickly disappear when discursive formatting is "read off" global economic imperatives. Our reference to Williams' notion of the structure of feeling and to the role of promotional material within the "assemblage" of the university represents an attempt to complicate the often simplifying assumptions that pervade arguments about ideology. Prospectuses and other promotional material don't simply operate in the global discursive space that ideology is usually presumed to operate in: there is a more delicate articulation of different spaces and actors at work here that risks being missed by the obvious appeal to "neo-liberalism." Being tech-savvy, culturally sensitive or having a globalised mindset could, of course, be understood as forms of tacit knowledge but we think this risks missing the linking together of such qualities in the "colouring", as Williams might have put it, of practically intangible feeling. Our decision is as much methodological as it is substantive: to try to keep close as possible to the aesthetic/experiential dimension of the production of culture. In exploring these issues in a global context, we are problematizing the framing of these issues within Western-centric, and in particular national debates about cultural policy and cultural labour.

There is a serious question to be asked as a result of our analysis: will the shift in Malaysia's education policy towards technologically sophisticated cultural production fulfil the country's plans for economic development or change its position within global supply chains in the creative industries and/or technology sectors? Furthermore, will this advanced technological training in fact lead to better jobs for Malaysian cultural workers (as promised by the prospectus material we have discussed), or will it still leave them vulnerable to the labour arbitrage practices of flexible capitalism like the Chinese workers studied by Ross (2006)? It is also important to ask about the implications for HE, both within Malaysia and globally. Will the sorts of developments we have discussed - increased involvement of the private sector; the valuing of industry contacts and experience over research; the classroom as emulating the experience and structures of feeling of the creative business workplace - become much more widespread in the future? This is why the case of creative industry education in Malaysia will continue to merit close attention. Future research would usefully

explore the disjunctions between promotional promises and student's beliefs in the virtues of hard work and diligence.

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