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ETHNIC CULTURES, GLOBALIZATION, AND TOURISM: EURASIANS IN SINGAPORE

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The subject of the article is ethnic groups and the manner in which their cultures are presented as tourist attractions, a topic explored within the wider framework of the debate about the relationship between the forces of localization and globalization. Specific reference is made to conditions in Singapore and its minority community of Eurasians who tend to be overlooked in comparison to the three main races of Chinese, Malays, and Indians. Globalization and international tourism, the latter a cause and consequence of the former, are seen to have the capacity to both threaten and help safeguard ethnic cultures. Eurasians receive comparatively little attention in destination promotion and this is indicative of the small size of the population and the hybrid nature of the culture. However, they merit attention as an interesting indigenous culture that embodies local distinctiveness.

Key words: Ethnic cultures; Eurasians; Globalization; Singapore

Introduction

Globalization is both a potential threat and possible protector of locally rooted ethnic groups and their cultures, indicative of the interactions between the local and global. International tourism is a manifestation of globalization and ethnic culture is an actual and potential tourism resource, frequently featured in destination marketing and sometimes new product development. While closely linked to premodern societies, representations of ethnicity and multiethnicity can be a visitor attraction in economically advanced countries and especially major cities. Not all ethnicities are selected for promotion,

however, while the presentation of those that are can inspire criticism about commercialization and exploitation for the purposes of social and political control. Singapore, the subject of this article, is a particularly instructive context within which to explore issues of ethnicity, globalization, and tourism given its defining characteristics as a globally oriented young country, once a colony, of mixed races. The city-state is a popular international tourist destination, and multiculturalism and its heritages are recurrent advertising themes with emphasis placed on the three main races of Chinese, Malays, and Indians. Eurasians, accounting for a significant proportion of the remaining category, are less prominent

and their situation is the focus of this discussion, which is timely in view of future uncertainties. The analysis reveals the relatively low importance allocated to an ethnic grouping on the margins of society with a culture that is not always easily marketable. It also illuminates some of the problems and opportunities confronting ethnic populations in a rapidly globalizing world and the dilemmas that arise when their cultures are used to serve tourism.

Issues of Ethnicity, Globalization, and Tourism

Ethnicity has been defined as "very strongly bounded, homogenous cultural identities, firmly associated with a particular homeland, and rooted in strong kinship ties" (Hall, 1995, p. 183), whereas culture can be conceived of as a "way of life, as a system of values and beliefs which, in turn, affects culture as a creative, recreational practice" (King, 1991, p. 2). Societies with a mix of ethnic communities are regularly referred to as multiethnic or multicultural, terms sometimes used interchangeably with multiracialism; the last implies shared physical characteristics that distinguish members, although race, too, can be socially constructed (Applebaum & Chablis, 1997). There are thus definitional ambiguities and some observers regard ethnicity as a fluid concept rather than a fixed state with layers of meaning embedded in sociocultural structures and processes (Eriksen, 1991). Ethnic diversity has the potential to enrich a nation's cultural heritage and the lives of citizens as well as exercising appeal to tourists. However, it can be a source of social and political friction if rivalries and inequalities emerge. Governments thus confront challenges in managing ethnic communities of assorted size and influence with fears about disintegration should they fail (Brown, 1994). Ethnic-related tourist attractions and destination marketing can be harnessed to averting fragmentation and a nation-building agenda in which hegemonic motives commonly play a part. The treatment of manifestations of ethnicity can help in reinforcing one selected culture and its values or reconciling "peripheral cultures with a dominant core" (Gradburn, 1997, p. 199), possibly employed in endeavors to depoliticize race relations (Horst, 2003). Tourism and ethnicity are thus interconnected, and ethnic tourism, describing tourist activity inspired primarily by aspects of

ethnic culture, is a well-established theme in the literature (Jamison, 1999; Yang, 2011).

Ethnic tourism was initially conceived of primarily as tourism involving indigenous people (V. Smith, 1977) and embraces native settlements and recreations such as folk museums and villages. It is also present in more developed regions of the world, and visits to ethnic neighborhoods in large American and European cities (Conforti, 1996; Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008) have been termed "ethnic urban tourism" (Santos & Yan, 2008, p. 879). In certain cases, doubts have been raised about how cultures are interpreted and presented to tourists and the exclusion of communities from decision making (Picard & Wood, 1997; Ryan & Aicken, 2005). Reservations are not confined to ethnic representations alone, but apply to the mining of culture in general by the tourism industry (M. K. Smith, 2003; M. K. Smith & Robinson, 2006). At the same time, tourism interest and income can assist in reviving ethnic traditions in danger of disappearing and be a catalyst for protection and conservation of built heritage. Ethnic minorities are not necessarily hapless bystanders in their own sales and marketing and may collude with private and public organizations, welcoming tourists and the ensuing benefits. However, images perpetrated of vibrant ethnic identities and harmonious multiculturalism do not always match realities of ethnic decline, disparities, and disadvantage (Liu, 2010). Analyses of "touristic ethnicity" may thus be valuable in offering "insights into the fate of ethnic identities in a globalizing world" (Wood, 1998, p. 235).

Globalization is a widely studied and sometimes controversial phenomenon describing the manner in which economies, societies, countries, and cultures around the world are becoming increasingly connected and interdependent (Robertson, 2001a). Flows of people, capital, and ideas cross national boundaries, as do environmental pollution, crime, disease, and terrorism (Hjalager, 2007). The desirability of outcomes is thus disputed, and globalization has been condemned as an instrument of exploitation and neocolonization (Bauman, 1998), but a potentially positive accompanying development is that individuals are likely to have greater awareness, if not understanding, of what is happening beyond their own shores. Nevertheless, citizens tend to remain locally anchored, and notions of what constitutes local and global are distinguishable

by the positioning of the first within the nation-state (Quayle, Jongerden, Essegbey, & Ruivenkamp, 2010). Strict demarcation, however, is obscured by their interactions as suggested by the idea of "glocalization" (Robertson, 1995) whereby globalization and localization operate independently and in combination to yield both homogeneity and heterogeneity, or sameness and difference (Robertson, 2001b). Despite the dissemination of a world culture (Lechner & Boli, 2003), national and other subcultures therefore survive and can perhaps be strengthened in opposition to its dictates (Kaplan & Loow, 2002). Old cultures may undergo some changes and new cultures evolve in a movement that has been variously called hybridization (Pieterse, 1995), creolization, and indigenization (Appadurai, 1996). Each of these has particular meanings, but all may incorporate the "critical reconstruction and reinvention of local cultures vis-à-vis other cultural entities" (Guilianotti & Robertson, 2006, p. 172).

While globalization appears to be accelerating in the current age, there have been periods in history when the world seemed to be similarly shrinking (Friedman, 2006). Heightened travel, notably for business, characterizes these epochs, and international tourism is both a cause and consequence of globalization (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 2000; Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012; Reiser, 2003). Opinions about the relationship between the conditions and forces of globalization and localization within the theater of tourism range from conflicting and destructive to symbiotic and productive, depending on perspective and academic discipline. The "glocalization" effect or a "global-local nexus" has been observed in tourist destinations (Chang, Milne, Fallon, & Pohlmann, 1996), and Teo and Li (2003) argue that globalization should "not be seen as overbearing, but is instead always mediated by local factors, producing unique outcomes in different locations" (p. 288). Global and local cultures and consciousness are thus more dyadic than dichotomous in relation to each other and united in a dialect with sometimes surprising results.

Singapore and its Multiethnic Culture: A Product of Globalization and Localization

Singapore has been hailed as one of the world's most globalized cities (Chong, 2010), and this status

is attributable in part to 19th century globalization, which also led to the city-state's cosmopolitanism. Originally inhabited by Malays, more modern history after the arrival of Stamford Raffles in 1819 saw the emergence of a multiethnic population. Raffles reached an agreement with the ruling sultan whereby the island became a trading post for the British East India Company, later administered as a British colony. It grew into a bustling international port that attracted people from around the globe, particularly mainland China. The Chinese eventually outnumbered the Malays and a sizeable community of Indians was also established. The current composition of the resident population of over 4 million is a legacy of the past and is formally classified into Chinese (74%), Malays (13%), Indians (9%), and Others (3%), sometimes referred to as the CMIO categorization (Department of Statistics, 2012). Racial classifications can be misleading, however, and ignore the variety of subgroups while certain backgrounds defy easy categorization. Peranakans, for example, are ancestors of marriages between Chinese traders who settled in South East Asia from the 17th century onwards and local women. Aspects of Malay life were accepted and sometimes modified, but Peranakans retained a distinctly Chinese identity (Clammer, 1979), which they continue to profess.

Akin to many countries with polyglot populations, race is a sensitive matter in Singapore and the preeminence of those of Chinese origin has prompted anxieties about their privileging among non-Chinese (Lai, 1995; Rahim, 1998). Authorities have addressed the issue through education, promoting meritocracy, and proscribing political parties founded on race, although self-help groups dealing with social welfare matters are permitted. Most Singaporeans live in government-run high-rise accommodation in which quotas are implemented, a policy of spatial integration designed to avert the formation of ghettos. Nation-building efforts have encompassed defining and articulating a common identity and conceptions of shared history and destiny while acknowledging certain differences that are deemed to be cultural anchors. Heritage is a means of communicating government messages about identities and selected manifestations are the material for officially sanctioned celebrations of unity in diversity (Saunders, 2004),

notably the traditional ethnic enclaves. The Historic Districts of Chinatown, Kampong Glam, and Little India were awarded conservation status in the 1980s; the first two originated in the 1822 town plan initiated by Raffles whereby land was allocated for Chinese and Malay settlement, respectively. Little India evolved later with the growth of the Indian population.

The multiracial, multicultural ideology and government's efforts at enforcement are not without drawbacks, but have contributed to the political and social stability enjoyed in Singapore in the last 50 years (Ooi, 2005). Nevertheless, tensions persist, and worries about fragmentation, combined with the associated loss of political control, linger. The rise of Islamic extremism in recent decades has introduced new and potentially destabilizing dynamics, prompting questions in some quarters about the loyalty of Singapore's Malay Muslims. Race thus remains a highly political issue, despite attempts at depoliticization. It should also be recalled that the once seemingly unassailable government of the People's Action Party (PAP), in power since independence, won only around 60% of the vote in the 2011 election. The historic low was attributed to a disenchanted electorate and resulted in promises of greater responsiveness to citizen concerns by a regime purportedly democratic, but with a tendency towards authoritarianism (Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU], 2010, 2011). The racial landscape and policy framework, encompassing broader conditions, are thus unique to Singapore despite its exposure to global influences and aspirations to be a global city of the first order.

A Global and Local Ethnic Community: Eurasians in Singapore

Definitions can be debated (Braga-Blake, 1992; Rappa, 2000), but the term Eurasian in Singapore refers to descendants of those born from a union between a European (usually the male partner) and an Asian. There are no defining physical qualities and some Eurasians "may recognizably look more Asian than others" (Eurasian Association, 2009). The category of Eurasian seems to have been first used formally in Singapore in an 1849 census when there were about 500, the number reaching 10,172 (or 0.4% of citizens) in 1980 (Braga-Blake, 1992).

The current estimate is 17,000 and the multiplicity of ancestral origins is apparent in contemporary surnames. Many Singapore Eurasian families have Spanish, Dutch, and British connections due to the political and commercial activity of these countries in Southeast Asia from the 16th century onwards. Almost one third is of Portuguese-Malaccan descent, the Portuguese capturing Malacca on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula in 1511 and among the first Europeans to take up permanent residence in the region (Daus, 1989). Portuguese Eurasians have tended to remain a discrete group in Malaysia as a whole and especially Malacca (Allard, 1964; Fernandis, 2000; Sarkissian, 2005) where there is also a social legacy from the Dutch who took control of the territory after a siege in 1641. It was ceded to the British in 1824 (Hayes Hoyt, 1993) and governed as part of the Straits Settlements, which included Penang. Singapore was the third constituent of the Straits Settlements and Eurasians traveled there in the 19th and early 20th centuries from neighboring territories in British Malaya and other European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina as well as India. Inter-marriage continues, creating a new generation of mixed races distinguished from those with historic roots in both Singapore and Malaysia. These complications raise doubts about whether Southeast Asian Eurasians can be properly described as a race or ethnicity, but such is the official terminology. Their diversity must also be acknowledged and divisions of class and sometimes ancestral affiliation have existed historically (Rappa, 2000; Yap, 2011), not least in Malaysia where Eurasians are formally subsumed into a miscellaneous category that comprises around 0.7% of the 28.3 million population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). There are attendant risks of erosion of identity, although aspects of the various European influences are central to the destination marketing of Malacca (Worden, 2001).

Eurasians are found worldwide and the status has acquired a stylish cachet in some circles, illustrated by "cosmopolitan chic" fashion models (Matthews, 2007, p. 41), but those in Singapore have their own story. During the colonial era, the fact that most Eurasians were fluent in English allowed access for men and women to educational and employment opportunities not readily available to those from other races. While there were advantages of being

Eurasian, there was also a considerable degree of snobbery in colonial society and the position of Eurasians was somewhat ambiguous. Although frequently having white collar and professional jobs, integration with the British was restricted. The Eurasian label could be applied in a derogatory manner, implying inferiority, and discrimination was practiced (Choo, 2007). In 1883, The Singapore Recreation Club, in the city center, was founded by Eurasian men, and stands opposite the Singapore Cricket Club. The latter was opened in 1853, with membership confined to Europeans. Segregation is also evident in the setting up of a separate Eurasian Company during the First World War (in 1918) to help protect the colony, defended only by a garrison of European volunteers.

During the Second World War, after the ignominious British surrender, the Japanese occupied Singapore. This was a difficult time for Eurasians because of their European ancestry. The Japanese regarded Eurasians with suspicion and many were interned in camps, alongside Europeans, in which they had to bear the social slights engendered by the British class system as well as physical hardship. Some families were moved to the Bahau Catholic Colony in the Malayan jungle, which was purported to be a self-sufficient community but where they struggled to build a settlement and cultivate land (Yap, 2011). The Second World War was a turning point for Singapore and its citizens, most of whom felt that they had been let down by the British, and paved the way for independence. However, Eurasians faced accusations about being "colonial lackeys" (Braga-Blake, 1992, p. 19) because of their perceived prewar closeness to the colonial regime, which led to some prejudice in the early years of the new republic. There was a sense of exclusion among Eurasians from government pronouncements of nationhood and multiracialism in which they were largely ignored (Pereira, 1997, 2006; Rocha, 2011).

Official Speak Mandarin campaigns, intended to standardize the numerous Chinese dialects, also appeared to devalue English (Braga-Blake, 1992), which is the first language for most Eurasians. English, the medium of instruction in schools, is not recognized formally as one of the "mother tongues" that all children must take (Wee, 2002), so that Eurasians have to study Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil.

The CMIO system may not therefore favor Eurasians (Hill & Lian, 1995), and Benjamin (1976) states that "the more that Singapore's national culture demands that each 'race' should have a respectably ancient and distinct exogenous culture as well as a 'mother tongue' to serve as a second element of a bilingual education, the more will Eurasians come to feel that there is no proper place for them" (p. 12). According to Rappa (2000), Eurasians "survive" as a "politically and demographically marginal community" that is on the "fringes of the modern Malay world, subjected through the years to the state policies of the Portuguese, Dutch, British, Malay, and Singapore governments" (p. 153). The lack of political influence is symbolized by the appointment of a Chinese cabinet minister to speak for Eurasians in the absence of a Eurasian office holder (Wee, 2002). There is, however, a Eurasian Association, dating from 1919 and dedicated to the welfare of Eurasian Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, with 7,300 members. It became one of the officially acknowledged racial self-help groups in 1994 and is a registered charity (Eurasian Association, 2009).

Some commentators have noted a new willingness on the part of Eurasians to assert their identity (Pereira, 2006), and Rappa (2000) claims that, in spite of marginalization pressures, they are managing to preserve a culture that has been shaped by the imperatives of survival and adaptation. It is a product of European influences, the amalgamation of European and Asian traditions, and the consequences of being a minority. Choo (2007) writes of Eurasians as transcultural "in-betweeners" who formerly lived alongside the colonizers, assuming some of the latter's values and following their practices while constructing a culture of their own. Markers of identity are commonly seen as language, religion, cuisine, and clothing, and there is a certain ambiguity when these are applied to Singapore Eurasians. English is generally spoken as previously mentioned, but the 500-year-old "Portuguese-Malay trade language" known as Kristang (Scully & Zuzarte, 2004, p. 8) is occasionally used by the older generation. In terms of faith, most are Christians and adherents of Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism. Dishes associated with Eurasians constitute a type of fusion cuisine exemplified by devil's curry (traditionally cooked with leftovers on Boxing Day) and curry feng ("spare parts" curry using pig offal and head)

(Eber-Lim, 1992). Apparel once combined Western and Eastern styles worn separately or in combination, displayed in family photographs from the 19th and early 20th century (Braga-Blake, 1992), but this mode of dressing is rarely seen nowadays. Depictions of these cultural traits, alongside other aspects of Eurasian life such as sporting prowess and historical narratives, are exhibited in a series of small Eurasian Association heritage galleries. However, the Creole quality of the culture is accepted and there are concerns about its future and that of the community as a whole (personal communication). Marriages with non-Eurasians, emigration from Singapore, and assimilation are all leading to cultural dilution and loss. Whether tourism is yet another menace or a possible guardian is considered in the next two sections.

Selling the Local Globally: Marketing Singapore's Ethnic Cultures as Visitor Attractions

International arrivals in Singapore reached a record 13.2 million in 2011 (Singapore Tourism Board [STB], 2012a), the figure boosted by the opening of two integrated resorts with casinos in 2010. They are part of a strategy of reinvention that has required heavy public and private sector investment in large-scale amenities such as ultra-modern shopping malls and prestigious sporting events. The focus on these new style attractions has meant that cultural heritage tends to be overshadowed in destination promotion. However, it is still acknowledged to have the capacity to draw visitors and be a vehicle for differentiation and positioning in a fiercely competitive market, as evidenced by the emphasis on multiculturalism and the ethnic enclaves. The STB now classifies Chinatown and Little India as tourism "precincts" and the Precinct Development Unit seeks to make sure that visitors have a "multitude of memorable experiences," not least "exploring and reliving history and heritage." The STB stresses that it is not directly in charge of developing the precincts, which is the task of place managers identified as the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association, Chinatown Business Association, and Kampong Glam Community Club Management Committee. These are expected to take the lead in accordance with the STB's place management model, which integrates components

of space, software, staff, and sustainability. The aim is constant rejuvenation in response to market trends and precincts "bustling with activity," which contribute to "Singapore's appeal as a rich multicultural destination" (STB, 2011, p. 46).

The city-state's multiculturalism is a long-standing feature of destination marketing (Chang, 1997) and introductions to the country on the STB website boast of a "ubiquitous collage of cultures" comprising the "four main races" of Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Eurasians. Each offers a "different perspective of life in Singapore" while "coming together as a society and living in harmony." As a "multiracial society," Singapore is "as diverse as it is cohesive" and the "multicultural kaleidoscope" generates vibrancy in one of the "most cosmopolitan cities in Asia" (STB, 2012b). More detailed information about what to see and do reinforces the above ideas. Each of the "melting pot" cultures yields a "unique experience" and "even more amazing is how the different cultures come together to live as one cohesive society." Sections are devoted to Chinese, Malay, Indian, Peranakan, and Eurasian cultures, which are discussed encompassing religion and culture, festivals, the arts, food, and shopping. Tourists are urged to visit the ethnic quarters for a "meaningful time of cultural immersion" and "shopping and dining choices inherently unique to each ethnicity" (STB, 2012c).

The Historic Districts of Chinatown, Little India, and Kampong Glam are featured together with Geylang Serai and Joo Chiat/Katong. Geylang Serai was once a predominantly Malay neighborhood and retains a very close association with the Malays while Joo Chiat/Katong was formerly a popular residential area for Peranakans and Eurasians and the middle and wealthier merchant classes. The Chinatown, Malay, and Eurasian Heritage Centers appear in a separate listing of specific heritage sites, the first two in the respective Historic Districts and the last in Katong. The Peranakans have a dedicated museum in the city center and, although not mentioned, an Indian Heritage Center was due to open in Little India in 2013. Cultural events advertised include the Chinese New Year, Hungry Ghosts, and Mid-Autumn festivals; Malay Muslim Hari Raya Haji; and Indian Deepavali. Some of these have a religious significance and tourists are assured that various belief systems "coexist in harmony," evidenced by places of worship for Christians,

Muslims, Hindus, Taoists, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others. Finally, due to its “rich multicultural heritage, the city serves as a true melting pot of flavors and foods” with an “array of local cuisines on the menu—Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Peranakan, among others” (STB, 2012c).

The images depicted in promotional material and experiences promised are thus in alignment with the CMIO model of society and formal conceptions of national identity. Ethnic differences are a cause of celebration, but there are constant reminders that they are not divisive; “melting pot” may not, however, be an apt analogy in light of the rigid racial demarcations adhered to within and outside official circles. Even-handedness is attempted in accounts of the main ethnic cultures and the expressions of cultural heritage that are showcased. The more colorful and tangible forms of ethnicity, often capable of consumption in various ways, are emphasized. While the target of such messages is international visitors, citizens are also an audience and tourism marketing acts as a vehicle for inculcating prevailing ideologies. Local residents are encouraged to conform to visions of harmonious multiculturalism in order to satisfy tourist expectations, as well as in the interests of nation building (Chang, 1999). Interpretations of ethnicity for tourism do not therefore allow for any tensions or complexity in race relations. There is a tendency to stereotyping, oversimplification, and commercialization, which has been observed in other instances of heritage presentation (Chang, 2000b; Chang & Teo, 2001). The stance is unsurprising in view of the dictates of destination marketing and political agendas, but has implications for the importance attached to Eurasians and their culture as a tourist resource.

Finding a Place for Peripheral Cultures: Eurasian Culture as a Tourism Resource?

As already stated, Eurasians are recognized as one of Singapore’s races and cultures in Tourism Board promotion where they are described as “rich heirs to a diversity of traditions and customs from the East and West.” Many are said to “celebrate Christian festivals such as Christmas, Easter, and Corpus Christi” and their food “blends Portuguese, Dutch, and British cuisines with local influences” (STB, 2012d). Katong, encompassing Joo Chiat, is

the venue for a walking tour of what is a “charming old neighborhood where Peranakan and Eurasian influences can be seen in its architecture and food” (Asia City Media Group [ACMG], 2011, p. 66). There are exhibitions dedicated to Eurasians and their history at the Eurasian Heritage Centre, recently enlarged in cooperation with the National Heritage Board. Nevertheless, the amount of marketing space devoted to Eurasians is restricted and Eurasian culture is much less evident as a visitor attraction compared to that of other ethnic groups. There is no information on the STB website about Eurasian arts and shopping and very little about cuisine, while Peranakan attributes dominate the Katong tour itinerary. The Eurasian Heritage Centre is housed in the Eurasian Association headquarters and not as easily accessible or elaborate as the other heritage centers, with a modest collection of exhibits.

These circumstances reflect the nature of the Eurasian culture, the small size of its population in Singapore, and the absence of a striking visible presence. Eurasian culture is by definition mixed and does not lend itself to easily recognizable representations of a sort associated with the Chinese, Malays, and Indians. While the Peranakans have a similarly hybrid culture, they possess an eye catching material legacy of architecture, textiles, jewelry, porcelain, costumes, and traditions (Henderson, 2003). Peranakan heritage embraces a cuisine on offer in several restaurants whereas very few specialize in Eurasian food (Chua & Rajah, 2001), which may be perceived by officials to be less palatable or exotic to visitors, denying it a prominent place in strategies to promote Singapore as a food paradise (Chaney & Ryan, 2012). Eurasians are further disadvantaged in tourism terms because they do not have a district with which they are closely connected historically to act as a hub of cultural activities and be marketed to visitors. There may be traces of former Eurasian life in Katong (Duruz, 2011; Phua & Kong, 1995), but it is not synonymous with the ethnic group in the manner of Chinatown and Little India and their respective races. Indeed, Shaw and Ismail (2006) maintain that Katong’s “two abounding cultures” of Peranakan and Eurasian became “increasingly rarefied, relinquishing their distinct identities to the inexorable assaults of state-led modernization” (p. 189) in the postindependence years. They also write of

the “somewhat selective revival of idiosyncratic tourism-related elements” engineered by the tourism industry in recent decades in which Eurasians have been overlooked (Shaw & Ismail, 2006, p. 192).

Conclusion

The neglect of Eurasians in formal depictions of Singapore for tourists may be deemed fitting and in accordance with their position on the fringes of society as conveyed by the “others” categorization. It is, however, somewhat ironic given that they “already seem to have achieved a genuine Singaporeanness of culture—theirs, after all, is the only one of the four cultures to have evolved within Singapore” (Benjamin, 1976, p. 127). The minor role allocated to Eurasian culture in tourism promotion may also be indicative of the constraints of its marketing which, in turn, could contribute to the further dilution of identity. As Firat (1995) comments, “all types of cultures—ethnic, national, regional, and the like—that are able to translate their qualities into marketable commodities and spectacles find themselves maintained, experienced, and globalized” while others “seem to vanish only to become museum items” (p. 118).

The desirability of the commodification of a culture and its transformation into spectacle and whether these are critical to its sustainability are debatable, as is the assumption that the globalization and maintenance of a local culture are compatible. Efforts to increase the tourist attractiveness of the Historic Districts in Singapore, involving these processes either deliberately or inadvertently, have not always been well received. The authorities have been criticized for heavy handed interference with complaints about the creation of commercial and inauthentic tourist spaces that alienate and exclude locals (Chang, 2000a; Henderson, 2000; Ismail, 2006; Leong, 1997; Yeoh & Huang, 1996). Such comments have been made about Chinatown and Kampong Glam, in particular, and may have prompted moves towards a less interventionist and more organic approach in which responsibilities are devolved to local place managers. The shift is demonstrated by recent plans for Little India, which is agreed to have so far resisted becoming a destination primarily for tourists in the fashion of parts of the other ethnic quarters (Huang, 2008). Nevertheless,

and despite the professed commitment to conservation in Singapore (Urban Redevelopment Authority [URA], 2011), prevailing government views of heritage as a generator of income (Teh, 2006), which extends to its tourist attraction function may put the special character of people and places at risk. The demands of general urban development also frequently take priority in decisions about the use of scarce land (Channel News Asia, 2012) with damaging consequences for Singapore’s remaining built heritage.

At the same time, it can be argued that the interest of outsiders, and especially tourists, helps to safeguard and sustain ethnic cultures and their physical expression. Around the world, visitors are markets for the arts, crafts, and cuisines of particular peoples (Jamison, 1999; Yang, 2009). In Singapore, the actual and potential appeal of traces of ancestral cultures has assisted in saving the city-state’s ethnic enclaves and other sites from obliteration (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2008; Yuen, 2005). However, successful outcomes are dependent on proper management, which should incorporate consultation with relevant communities and suitable interpretation and presentation. Whether Singapore’s Eurasians will ever benefit from such an effect remains to be seen, but authorities could consider raising the profile of Eurasians in tourism marketing and development initiatives. Their story is an absorbing one and a window onto Singapore’s history and contemporary society. There are lessons to be learned from current and previous experiences regarding the promotion of ethnic cultures, with possibilities for public participation in the devising of Eurasian-based attractions. This scenario would necessitate revision of the entrenched style of centralized and top-down planning in which feedback is invited, but not necessarily acted upon; this might be anticipated in light of the new political climate, yet active citizen engagement seems likely to remain constrained in the near future due to the weakness of civil society. It would also call for a change in thinking about race and reappraisal of the CMIO model, as well as a more socially and politically assertive Eurasian population, which are perhaps equally unlikely.

Locally based groups with their own social and cultural profiles, linked to racial and ethnic backgrounds, thus confront problems and opportunities

in the modern era of globalization. Appreciation of local and group distinctiveness and their value may be enhanced among members, fellow citizens, and outside parties in the face of the spread of a universal culture; the latter's momentum and character, however, can be sufficiently strong to undermine other cultures. These repercussions can be observed in the handling of Singapore's three main races and the districts traditionally associated with them. For Eurasians, the dilemmas attending globalization appear to outweigh the rewards and they face an uncertain future overall. Marginalization is mirrored in and reinforced by their treatment at the hands of the tourism industry where the absence of a clearly defined and colorful ancestral culture has proved to be a comparative disadvantage. Nevertheless, Eurasians merit greater and appropriate attention as potent symbols of uniqueness in a city state tending towards global conformity and uniformity.

This article has explored facets of Singapore's Eurasian community with specific reference to tourism, revealing a close and dynamic relationship. The interplay between the local and the global is notable in the field of tourism where representations of destination difference become local products consumed by customers from around the world and are modified as a result. The phenomenon exposes cultures to the adverse impacts of globalization while also yielding the returns accruing from international recognition and awareness. Such analyses thus afford insights into wider economic, sociocultural, and political structures and processes and serve to illuminate the roles of and importance attached to ethnic minorities and their heritages. The subject is also of interest to those from other academic backgrounds in the social sciences and beyond and can be examined from a range of perspectives, each capable of enhancing understanding. There appears scope for more cross-disciplinary research into the meaning and significance of ethnic group identities and responses to internal and external forces, including tourism, in a globally assimilative age.

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