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‘I realised then how ‘Parisian’ Egypt was.’ Challenges and rewards of de-westernising travel journalism

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Abstract

Bypassing the dominant Western bias in journalism scholarship is a challenge; it raises the question of what might replace it. Similarly, to evade the Western post-imperialism orthodoxies recurrent in cultural studies scholarship into travel and tourism would require other perspectives. This study combines the two and attempts to circumvent the Western bias in scholarship on travel journalism, given that its constituent parts are – for different reasons – becoming de-centred from the West. Textual analysis of Singaporean newspaper articles in Mandarin and English shows that questions of privilege and power remain but need not be associated with narratives of post-imperialism. Instead, destinations are textually constructed to justify the writer’s decision to travel. The intention for this article is to suggest ways that dominant Western perspectives in media studies may be balanced by other viewpoints which still expose issues of power and privilege but offer a less hegemonic, more culturally neutral starting point.

Keywords

de-westernising, journalism, post-imperialism, textual analysis, tourism, travel

Scholars have increasingly critiqued academe for assessing journalism according to the norms of Western countries, with ‘a growing reaction against the self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory’ (Curran and Park, 2000: 3). This has driven calls to separate the study of journalism from a hegemonic Western bias (eg. Josephi, 2005; Couldry, 2007; Erni and Chua, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2007; Wasserman and De Beer, 2009). Simultaneously, scholars have questioned Western-dominated media representations of tourism because travel patterns

are rapidly changing, challenging assumptions that tourists come from the Global North (Edensor, 1998; Ghimire, 2001; Gladstone, 2006; Williams, Hall and Hew, 2004). Tourism is no longer a question of the West visiting the rest, then, as the 'rest' pack their bags and go West; and while Anglo-American journalism struggles, media in Asia, for example, flourishes. Increasingly, therefore, it is counterintuitive to use Western-based models to study journalism or travel, which have both become de-linked from their Eurocentric origins. This paper examines their point of intersection—travel journalism—to explore the rewards of 'de-westernisation' and the challenges of such an undertaking.

Travel journalism is a valid locus as Western imperialism, particularly, still overshadows much scholarship on the subject. This is not to say that post-imperialist approaches are the *only* means of analysis—it would be as foolish to claim of travel writing that it is uniformly imperialistic as it would be to defend travel writers as being harmless entertainers' (Holland and Huggan, 2000: ix). It is just one of many perspectives in the bigger picture that

it is up to critics to show if media elude, avoid or suppress certain elements (because of advertising pressure, institutional constraints, governmental pressure, technical shortcomings, hindered access or hegemonic thought systems such as in the case of lingering colonial representation) (Fürsich, 2002: 72)

Still, it is a lens often associated with the study of travel journalism, and is therefore the one confronted here. The question arises, then, if travel journalism is to be de-linked from a post-imperialist Western perspective, what would be a suitable mode of enquiry to interrogate it? It is one thing to reject a viewpoint; it is another to replace it.

To do so, this paper analyses travel journalism from a non-Western country—Singapore—to offer an alternative discourse, as suggested by Winter (2009). Simply shifting the locus to a non-Western country is insufficient to de-westernise, however, as

many Asian media studies research communities, associations, and their journals have persisted in conducting their research according to methods and problematics often originally articulated in Euro-American contexts ... such persistence has developed alongside a sustaining cry of media imperialism voiced by the same research communities (Erni and Chua, 2005: 2).

The intention is to identify culture-neutral perspectives and methods of enquiry that offer direction for both journalism and tourism scholarship.

Using an inductive-deductive textual analysis approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2016), this study analysed non-Western travel journalism from a major Singaporean news organisation in both Mandarin and English. Textual analysis was chosen as it ‘allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text’ (Fürsich, 2009: 241) making it suitable for seeking fresh perspectives. The study observed that, just as news reports are structured to tell a certain story (Hartley, 1989) travel journalists also create mythologies of a country to allow themselves to inhabit it in a certain way, creating the destination for travellers to consume. This paper outlines the strategies they use to achieve this; but first, it looks at the de-westernising desire in both journalism and tourism studies, and how it transfers to travel journalism scholarship.

De-westernising journalism studies

The observation that media scholarship shows a strong Western bias was first sounded out by Downing (1996: xi): ‘to extrapolate theoretically from such relatively unrepresentative nations as Britain and the United States is both conceptually impoverishing and a peculiarly restricted version of even Eurocentricism.’ In part, the Western bias is historical: journalism emerged principally in Europe (Couldry, 2007). Other voices have added to the debate (Joseph, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2007; Wasserman and De Beer, 2009), and Iwabuchi (2014: 45) states simply that ‘it cannot be denied that theories derived from some Euro-American experiences predominate knowledge production in the world, and the boosting Anglophone hegemony in academia has pushed this tendency further.’ As Thussu (2013: 40) puts it:

research in the media and communication arena too has been traditionally influenced by what Said (1978) has shown as a Eurocentric essentialism of thought, where the ‘other’ was imagined or created as part of an ideological discourse, privileging European imperialist epistemology.

Some scholars suggest localising content, for example in journalism education (Ullah, 2014). Others propose comparative studies (eg. Erni and Chua, 2005); yet others caution against such an approach, arguing that ‘the very categories within which such [comparative studies] are made are often deduced from concepts that have historically been central to Western, liberal-democratic, normative notions of journalism, like objectivity, truth-telling and the need for a free press’ (Wasserman and De Beer, 2009: 430). This study therefore takes an inductive-deductive textual analysis approach to suggest a new perspective, rather than relying on existing

epistemologies. Wasserman and De Beer (2009: 431) similarly suggest ‘to work inductively from non-Western contexts, through “thick descriptions” to re-establish epistemological dimensions for global journalism.’

De-westernising tourism studies

Many of the criticisms that media studies are overly Western have also been directed at tourism studies. And while tourism scholarship broadly has an applied business agenda and an interest in contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Hall, 2011), its place in cultural studies has been preoccupied with power and privilege, often labelled as post-imperialism, for example: ‘tourism becomes a form of cultural domination constructed by western countries – that is, tourism as a new form of imperialism’ (Fürsich and Kavoori, 2001: 160). This extends into travel journalism, and some see a parallel between writing and imperialism’s close cousin, colonisation: ‘The problem of the colonizer is in some sense the problem of the writer: in the face of what may appear as a vast cultural and geographical blankness, colonization is a form of self-inscription onto the lives of people’ (Spurr, 1993: 7).

Once again, it is largely a question of history. Leisure travel emerged in Europe. Winter (2009) identifies the Grand Tour of western elites seeing Europe, the package tour invented by Thomas Cook in the UK; mass tourism as a phenomenon in Victorian Britain; while the *flâneur* who saunters aesthetically from place to place is a particularly Parisian concept; and in the 20th century, MacCannell’s tourist is American.

Yet to view tourism through the lens of post-imperialism is to interpret it ‘through a tool-bag of theories conceived and re-conceived in the socio-cultural particularities of Euro-American societies’ (Winter, 2009: 23). In 2007, Franklin called for a new epistemology of the field of tourism, identifying and challenging the ideological and hegemonic values which underpin tourism studies (Tribe, 2006). Said calls it ‘orientalism’ (1978), a way of imposing Western values on Eastern cultures to legitimise and justify exploitation of the region. This has a knock-on effect as representations of peripheral cultures created by those at the centre become internalised by those on the periphery so that they transculturate themselves based on what they read. Similarly, Winter (2009, 21) argues that the historical pre-occupation with Western tourism is ‘institutionally and intellectually ill equipped to understand and interpret the new era we are now entering’.

De-westernising travel journalism

If tourism studies and shades of empire are so intertwined, and journalism studies are tied up in Western hegemony, where does that leave travel journalism? This paper employs Hanusch and Fürsich's (2014: 11) definition as:

Factual accounts that address audiences as consumers of travel or tourism experiences, by providing information and entertainment, but also critical perspectives. Travel journalism operates within the broader ethical framework of professional journalism, but with specific constraints brought on by the economic environment of its production. It is often disdained as light-weight. Alderson (1988: 27) refers to its relentless cheerfulness as 'the Pollyanna school of travel writing,' while Swick (2001: np) calls it 'journalism's tiramisu' because it is lavish but leaves readers feeling empty. Yet it is widely read and influential. Travel writing 'has always had a mixed reception, being seen by some as essentially frivolous or even morally dangerous. But the genre has proven remarkably immune to even the harshest criticisms, becoming one of the most popular and widely read forms of literature' (Holland and Huggan, 2000: vii).

Despite these criticisms, travel journalism is a significant media representation of the world beyond the confines of a country (Day Good, 2013; Hanusch and Fürsich, 2014). Additionally, more people are travelling, and 'the perception of travel journalism as less important or of lower status than other journalistic genres does not take account of the massive expansion of the social phenomenon on which it is based' (Cocking, 2009: 56). It has been compared to international news in that it reflects readers' collective imagining of other countries (Fürsich and Kavoori, 2001). 'Travel writing ... belongs to a wider structure of representation within which cultural affiliations and links—culture itself—can be analyzed, questioned, and reassessed' (Holland and Huggan, 2000: viii-ix).

If it is taken seriously, it is because its precursor, travel writing, is associated with the power and privilege of post-imperialism since 'it was not until the advent of colonial discourse as a legitimate field of research in the 1970s that travel writing began to be considered worthy of study' (Mills, 1993: 2). Europeans were the first to travel for leisure, which coincided with the height of empire—which financed the wealth that allowed them to travel—so travel writing has been bound up with imperialism. This continued as the wave of European tourists in the Sixties coincided with loss of empire, and the need to re-establish a new relationship with foreign countries (Bishop, 1989). Campbell (2002) adds that travel writing found a new space after the Second World War as the West and the rest of the world renegotiated structures of privilege and the nascent phenomenon of globalisation. That renegotiation continues.

It is possible to side-step Western hegemonic approaches by examining non-western travel journalism without relying on the ideologies of the West. Bao (2005) studied the development of travel journalism in China, characterising it in terms of propaganda, regulation and state control; commercialisation; and non-professional participation. Each is very different from the preoccupation with neo-liberalism and cultural imperialism in scholarship on Western travel journalism. The relations of privilege Bao considers are not between traveller and destination, but among state, media and market. What is contested is not the identity of inhabitants and how they are represented; it is the Chinese travellers themselves. Alongside suggestions of where to go and what to do there, Chinese travel journalism gives advice on etiquette overseas to avoid discrediting the nation. All of these point towards the possibility of a different perspective.

The question, then, is what would travel journalism look like if viewed with fresh (and non-Western) eyes which allowed for new perspectives to emerge?

Method: Textual Analysis

This study analysed travel texts published between 2012 and 2014 by a national news organisation in Singapore, on the premise that ‘independent textual analysis can elucidate the narrative structure, symbolic arrangements and ideological potential of media content’ (Fürsich, 2009: 239). The articles were written by both professionals and amateurs, and appeared in Mandarin newspapers *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Lianhe Wanbao* and *Sin Min*; and English-language newspapers the *Straits Times*, *The New Paper*, *Business Times* and *My Paper*. Some journeys and some pages had been supported by travel companies and national tourism associations; other trips were paid for by the writer. The articles showed a lifestyle rather than a hard news or even ethnographic orientation. All are accessible on SGTravellers.com.

Singapore is a former British colony which claimed independence in 1963. It is a multi-cultural society which represents the emerging wealth of the Asian tiger economies. It is also multilingual, so its travel journalism can be assessed without the confounding factor of a language of empire—English—by also analysing texts in Mandarin. The texts are therefore analysed in a specific cultural context (Philo, 2007). ‘This type of qualitative content analysis that connects textual with systemic features will help explain how hegemonic power is performed in discourse’ (Fürsich, 2009: 248) and as such is apt for this study.

It is likely that travel journalists have different attitudes to different countries—developed nations are reported as sophisticated, while less developed nations may be ‘othered’,

for example. So to gather a representative selection of countries, this study chose both mainstream and less-visited destinations based on visitor numbers, and on five continents (UNWTO, 2013): Australia, the Bahamas, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Costa Rica, Czechia, East Timor, Egypt, France, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Peru, Saudi Arabia, the Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, the UAE and the USA. Research assistants searched Factiva using the name of these countries and search terms related to leisure travel, in order to gather lifestyle-related texts rather than international news. Texts that were not travel journalism were removed from the sample. This yielded 194 articles in Mandarin (309 pages, 190,000 characters); and 182 articles in English (311 pages, 127,000 words).

This study took an inductive-deductive approach in which ‘analysis of the raw data from ... transcripts and organizational documents progressed toward the identification of overarching themes that captured the phenomenon’ (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2016: 80). Textual analysis depends on the interpretive position taken by the researchers (Fürsich, 2009), so in order to counterbalance any single-researcher bias, the Mandarin texts were read by two Mandarin speakers; and the English-language texts by two English speakers, all from Asia. This was followed by discussions to identify writing strategies emerging inductively from the texts. This primary coding (Tracy, 2013) led to a coding book so that the four researchers then searched the texts for examples of two major strategies: *mythologies*, and expected *tourist behaviour*. Both are described below, and combine to offer an alternative, culturally-neutral perspective on travel journalism, described in the conclusions section.

Mythologies

Writers create mythologies of place through references to history, fantasy and popular culture. Frequently, this is done to justify the decision to travel there; and to give the writer an identity appropriate to the destination.

History is used in three ways: to give a reason to visit the destination; as a fantasy world for the traveller; and to advance the writer’s agenda. First, history gives a reason to be there and a reason to consume. For example, Jordan has castles, Roman ruins, Biblical sites and cascading dunes, making it ‘the perfect place for adventure seekers’. Similarly, in this next example, China’s post-colonial history specifically leads up to the re-emergence of capitalism and consumerism:

After China lost the Opium War in 1842, Shanghai was zoned as a port that foreigners could access, and the locals responded by embracing international trade. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, the city tacked leftwards ... during the Cultural Revolution. Nowadays, the city leaves little doubt that capitalism is back in vogue ... Inside, amid ancient shrines, ornate red-beamed buildings and hallowed gods, Burger King and franchise eateries lined the pavements. (*Finding Love in Shanghai*)

Second, writers immerse themselves in history by imagining themselves in a romanticised (and, as it happens in this example, imperialist) version of the past: 'I had travelled back to the 1920s when this bar was The Shanghai Club, and for elites only' (*Old and New Shanghai*). Once again, this creates an idealised version of the destination as a means to legitimise travelling there. Sometimes, history is linked with popular culture, to create a myth of time and place rather than offer a factual account: 'I felt as if I had travelled back in time to ancient China when I wandered the grounds of a traditional village, much like the kind pictured in period dramas and classical sword fighting serials' (*Venice of the East*).

Third, history is co-opted to frame a destination in a certain way. Kuwait, for example, is reported in terms of conflict, while Paris is not—despite the city's strife-scattered history. Here, the writer appropriates the history of Prague for their own touristic imagination, making the destination a space for adventure by noting

a sense of the sinister and quiet malice lurking just underneath all this remarkable beauty. It's because so much has happened here, I suppose. History practically oozes out of every brick and stone, including the Nazi terror of World War II and the Soviet occupation. (*Bohemian Rhapsody in Prague*)

Local people are also idealised to validate the writer's narrative. One writer watches people on China's frozen Songhua River 'where families played and children ice-skated gracefully along the riverbank. We chose this scenic place to catch the beautiful sunset and learn how the locals spend their days' (*Land of Snow and Ice Castles*). Such a simplistic, romanticised narrative is reductive and only serves to fulfil the writer's fantasies of the winter wonderland. In other cases, inhabitants are worthy of gazing on when they are poor-but-scenic, as in this example in Malaysia—Singapore's neighbour from which it separated in 1965:

Visiting the Orang Asli settlement was an interesting experience. Little children running around playing games, makeshift zinc-roofed homes on stilts with little chicks scurrying around and a small shed plying souvenirs to visitors to the village — such is the simplicity of life for the indigenous people. (*Legend of the Lake Serpent*)

This approach to describing local people depends on the developmental status of the country relative to Singapore. Paris is still a place of romance and art; Mongolia, not so much, and travellers may be surprised at what they find:

在这种环境之下长大，蒙古人对私人空间难免和我们有天壤悬隔的诠释。因此，如果你寄宿的蒙古家庭的主人在你面前更换衣物，或是光着身子睡觉，千万不要误会，因为他们一丁点儿意思都没有 Raised in this environment, it is inevitable that Mongolians have a very different interpretation of ‘personal space’ from us. Therefore, do not get the wrong idea should the Mongolian family you’re living with undress or sleep in the buff in your presence. (*Getting to Know Mongolia*)

Fantasy landscapes Bishop (1989: viii) looks at historical British descriptions of Tibet (or Shangri-La) and sees in travel writing the fantasy-making of a culture and its unconscious: ‘The creation of Tibet is located within the wider struggle by Europeans to redefine both global geography and their place within it.’ This study observed something similar, as travel journalists use myth and fantasy to elevate the destination and the act of travelling to it, as in this article on Hangzhou: ‘A pearl fell from the sky and became embedded on earth as paradise, goes the story about China’s famous West Lake’ (*Hideaway in Hangzhou*). Upon hearing a story about a princess and a farmer in Czechia, ‘we sighed dreamily. It was a romantic chapter from history that reads like a medieval drama’ (*Bohemian Airs*). Similarly, Brocéliande in France is ‘Merlin’s home ... the undergrowth here still rustles with the whispering wind’ (*Exploring Brittany*). And Czechia’s historical Cesky Krumlov castle is described in mystical, mythological terms to make it more desirable: ‘禁不住想象古时国王王后的故事，或王子公主的邂逅、骑士披甲出征的威严，或巫师念咒施法的诡异神秘 one almost catches a glimpse of the kings and queens of old, imagines the tryst of princes and princesses, the dignity of knights in armour, or the mystery of sorcerers’ (*Cesky Krumlov—Bohemian Town*). In another example, folklore that the writer hears influences their perspective of a place and enriches the sense of exotic, romantic adventure:

As the story goes, four brave girls attempted to save their parents from the evil monster Modora, but were transformed instead into Siguniang mountains. As we continued our journey, the view of the peaks took on a new meaning for us. (*A Long Walk to Paradise*)

In this case, the writer chooses to incorporate folklore into their narrative, regardless of its authenticity. The reason? It makes a good story.

Another aspect of creating this romanticised image of place is to transcend the everyday. The Merced River in the US is ‘mesmerising’; a sunset is ‘intoxicating’; walking through a medina in Morocco ‘we were lost in another world altogether, and the feeling was truly wonderful’; Big Sur in the US attracts a ‘boundary-challenging group of artists, seekers and intellectuals’; Christ the Redeemer in Brazil elicits a ‘sense of peace [that] washed over me’. Transcendence as reward for suffering is another common theme, which again validates a decision to travel and undergo hardships: ‘Our stay allowed us to see a side of Lesotho we otherwise would not have had we been safely ensconced in our vehicle. As I sat on my pony, surrounded by vast mountains and valleys, I felt minuscule’ (*Up in the Mountain Kingdom*). Separation from home, too, is an integral part of the process:

The view was majestic, and the ambience, surreal. We took in a bright blue sky, ice-capped mountain tops, glacier melt and a caldera. We sighted a sheltered refuge, and talked shop with a couple of climbers from Israel and Austria who said we were ‘a long way from home’ (indeed!). (*Coastal Charm of Cadaqués*)

Cultural reference points Finally, writers refer to cultural icons as a shortcut to illustrate what a place looks like and to legitimise the choice to visit. Occasionally, and in both Mandarin and English texts, these reference points are Chinese: writers mention stars Liu Hua, Shu Qi and authors Pu Songling and Guo Moro, while the ‘picture-perfect Hongcun village’ is described as the set for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. These cultural references are associated with a positive reason to visit:

Having watched many Chinese period dramas where the heroes gallop gallantly across grasslands, I decided to attempt something similar. And that exhilarating episode is one that I will never forget—the feeling of pure freedom being unleashed as the wind rushed past my ears as I galloped along, wild and free. (*Camping out in Mongolia*)

More frequently, however, the reference points are Western: Hermès, the Bible, Disney and Unesco are all mentioned to help the reader envision a place. Hainan is the ‘Hawaii of China’, Lanzhou’s Labrang Monastery is ‘the Oriental Vatican (东方梵蒂冈)’ while Tongli is ‘the Venice of the East’ and woodland in Brazil is ‘an enchanted forest, an Alice in Wonderland’. One indicator of how pervasive such westernisation is, would be the observation from an article about the Nile which gives the headline for this paper:

埃及充满着神秘感，但这个古老国度其实也有西式浪漫。我最近一次在黄昏时分从面向尼罗河的四季酒店阳台赏河，帆船在波光粼粼的河面上随着急流起舞，我这才发现，原来埃及景致也那么的巴黎。尤胜巴黎的是，她有金字塔。Egypt is mysterious but also romantic. As I watched the Nile from the balcony of the Four Seasons Hotel during dusk, the sailboats whirled past on the glistening river, borne by the strong currents. I only realised then how ‘Parisian’ Egypt was. (*Egypt: Five Thousand Years of Meetings*)

Comparing Egypt to Paris implies Western cultural dominance, where destinations are judged by how ‘romantic’ in the Western sense they are. It is easy, and reveals Western bias, to look for such examples; but it serves to reiterate that in tourism, Western often equals sophisticated. Cultural reference points can also be destination-specific, as in these descriptions of China using Chinese cultural icons, and invoking Americana to describe the US. Even so, the Chinese text still refers to a Western ideal—the Nobel Prize—as a marker of value:

从气派非凡的大门车道徒步走向耸立在静谧山丘上的大豪宅，需要 10 多分钟，像极了 80 年代美国《达拉斯》(*Dallas*) It is a 10-minute walk up the grand driveway to the stately mansion looming on the hill, reminiscent of the private home of the oil moguls in the American TV drama series *Dallas*... (*Passion in a 100-year-old Mansion*) 许多人来到凤凰，不仅为了追溯心中向往的美景，还希望能在这里寻找自己心中的翠翠，更是表达对一位文人的敬仰——沈从文，正如历史对他的定义‘不折不从，星斗其文，亦慈亦让，赤子其人’，这个曾与诺贝尔文学奖擦肩而过的乡土文学之父 Many people come to Fenghuang county not only in search of the ideal scenery, but also with the hope of finding their very own Cuicui [a character in Chinese novel *Border Town*] and to pay their respects to the man who created her. Novelist Shen Congwen’s ‘native soil’ literature was even shortlisted for the Nobel Prize. (*Elegant Ancient City*)

This dominance of Western cultural references has not escaped notice, and one writer argues that local narratives are just as relevant:

There are no blue-skinned Na'vi warriors in China's first national park, but that never hindered Hunan from rechristening one beloved pinnacle ... the Avatar Hallelujah Mountain, named for the principal peak on mythical Pandora planet in the blockbuster. I say the Chinese officials have gone over the top. These mountains in south central China have long been extraordinary and do not need Hollywood cachet ... the Hunan peaks also formed the backdrop for Mando-pop balladeer Jeff Chang's Genesis! music video. A recent Chinese television series, *New Journey To The West*, is set here. (*Pinnacles of Beauty in Hunan*)

Tourist behaviour

The second textual strategy concerned what tourists are expected to do, which was revealed in what the writer did; or in exhortations to the reader to behave in a certain way; or in accounts of other tourists. These activities are not unexpected: tourists shop, eat, and gaze at the scenery, the architecture and (rarely) the local people.

Yet what is worth gazing upon or doing is usually a tourist activity, referred to in exactly those terms. So Puerto Vallarta is 'a popular option for tourists'; the tourist activities on the Golden Gate Bridge are walking and cycling; '沙莫尼小镇最主要的旅游活动，就是登上法国最长的冰川 Chamonix's main tourist attraction is the longest glacier in France' (*Mont Blanc Snow, Mountain Style*); while in Johannesburg, '在这里，游客可乘吊车深入地下 220 公尺的矿坑内，观看黄金开采的情景 tourists can take a cart 220m deep underground to watch how gold is excavated.' (*Into the Sea to Explore the Real South Africa*). Tourists show other tourists what to see and do: '我们从老市政厅出来，发现门外站着好多游客。于是，我们顺着他们的目光一看，原来，他们都在盯着老市政厅的布拉格天文 We exited the Old Town Hall to find a large group of tourists looking at something. We followed their gaze to see the Prague Astronomical Clock' (*Europe's Most Beautiful Plaza in Prague*). Tourist activity is described in superlative terms, a 'once-in-a-lifetime experience', 'truly unique' or 'truly unforgettable' which once again justify the choice to be a tourist there.

When writers go beyond the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990), it is to enter into the world of the local inhabitants whose role, for example, may be to perform for tourists by being '各个穿着亮眼 ... 单是人看人就足以令人陶醉 dressed to the nines ... people watching is enough to

entrance you' (*New York, You Haven't Changed*). Local people become bodies upon which the writer projects fantasies. They have value when they conform to tourist behaviour, as in this optimistic appraisal of life in Washington DC: 'To spend the weekend as Washingtonians do, I head for Georgetown. Here's where the locals make an appointment at Galerie Lareuse to view Picassos and Matisses to decorate their homes' (*Holiday Escapade*).

Alternatively, local people conform to the leisurely pace of the tourist. So, for example, 'most Mauritians love going to beach in their free time ... Both locals and tourists flocked to the beach when we were there' (*Romance in Mauritius*). Similarly, one writer's reward for travelling is to achieve the same state of relaxation as the local people, whose function is to be guides to a better life:

'How strange,' I said to my wife. 'People here all have the same look.'

As we waded in ankle-deep water, strangers nodded amiably as they passed by.

'Relax.' She pointed down.

When I looked at the water, it was so still I could see my reflection — and I had the peaceful smile everyone else had. (*Relax, it's Cape Cod*)

Rarely do writers report on local people as a 'colourful' anecdote because their behaviour is different—usually less developed—than that of the writer. One writer envies the simple life of the Amish; another suggests trying (exotic) local food:

还有, 百年老店人民币 3 元一碗的 '豆腐脑' 是一绝, 与 1 元一个的葱油饼是绝配, 不可不尝。喜欢 '野味' 的游客, 不妨试试烤海星, 蒸海胆。不够刺激? 这里还有炸蚕蛹, 炸金蝉, 炸壁虎 You must try RMB 3 bean curd from a century-old shop, coupled with a RMB 1 onion pancakes. For the more adventurous, consider trying baked starfish, steamed sea urchin, fried silkworm larvae, cicadas and lizards. (*Not Just Beer, Qingdao is Full of Surprises*)

This last comes from an article about Shangdong province, giving the perspective of a diasporated Chinese writer representing their original culture as an object of strangeness, to be consumed as an outside rather than recognised for its cultural similarity.

Another writer suggests that tourists should '暂时抛开自己的成见, 学习融合他人, 开阔视野 learn to abandon one's subjectivity temporarily, and learn to conform to other cultures and broaden one's perspectives' (*Getting to Know Mongolia*). Yet when they *do* conform to

local life, it is a stereotype. Here, a writer went to Paris for a one-day croissant-baking workshop and suggests:

每天睡醒时, 推开那色彩缤纷形状各异的窗户, 和当地人说一声 ‘Bonjour’, 就开始了美好的一天 Every day when you wake up, open the windows with all kinds of shapes and colours, and greet the local with ‘Bonjour’—a wonderful day has begun (*Alsace—French Fairy-tale Town*)

Finally, tourist behaviour is directly connected with life back at home as much as with the destination. In Paris, macarons and carlissos are both to be bought as ‘是送给亲友的最佳’手信 a great souvenir for friends and family back home’; while the Louvre is worth exploring for its architecture as well as the ‘等世界闻名的艺术作品 renowned art masterpieces that immediately come to mind,’ revealing expectations produced by exposure to opinions of the media, friends and family. Often, the writer accounts for the destination purely in terms of the home audience: Hunting boars in China ‘sounds extraordinarily macho and adventurous to me, a Singaporean city boy’; a guide in Mauritius explains a herb in terms of its use in a popular Singaporean ointment; ski vacations are considered exotic for Singaporeans; Hong Kong markets are enticing because their equivalent in Singapore is dying out; while ‘the typical Singaporean who is looking for a destination to eat and shop till he drops will probably not enjoy Sri Lanka’ (*Old World Charms of Sri Lanka*).

Conclusion: A culture-neutral perspective for travel journalism study

This paper analysed travel texts in Mandarin and English from Singapore and found two distinct writing strategies. The first is that travel journalists represented foreign destinations for a home audience through a mythology of the place, its people, and their role as a traveller, legitimising their own and the audience’s wish to travel. The second strategy was the representation of tourist behaviour; the writer consumed the destination, shopping, eating, drinking and above all gazing on sights and people whose role is to be gazed upon. In both cases, the focus was on what the destination signified to the writer and the audience, rather than as a place in its own right and assessed on its own terms. As Bao (2005) found, travel journalism reveals as much about the audience as about the destination.

This paper’s contribution is to propose these as offering a new perspective, divorced from the Western hegemony and shades of imperialism that have been such a feature of cultural

studies discourse on travel journalism. Taken together, the two strategies allow the writer to create a destination based on the aspirations, cultural reference points and desired behaviour of the home audience, and thus reveal more about 'home' than about 'away'. These strategies both reflect existing traveller ideals, and inform the next wave of travellers so that: 'the cultural representations in travel journalism can be seen as cyclical in character—in affirming (at least to some extent) the cultural preconceptions of its audience, the degree of change at a representational level is inevitably gradual' (Cocking, 2009: 65). This perspective still reveals hidden 'thought systems' of power and privilege based on inscribing the writer's own identity onto the destination, but goes beyond the 'case of lingering colonial representation' (Fürsich, 2002: 72). Aside from the intrinsic benefit of assessing travel journalism using inductive criteria for a more appropriate critique, this perspective also yields a location-neutral approach which can be applied even-handedly to travel journalism from other parts of the world. This paper does not suggest that the perspective of Singaporean travel journalists is far different from that of their European or American counterparts.

Yet, it is not so clear-cut. Herein lies the challenge of such an undertaking, and a limitation of any study based on interpretation of texts: much of what has been quoted can also be interpreted in terms of consumers as neo-imperialists imposing their worldview on the countries they visit (critiqued in Aramberri, 2002). It is equally plausible that post-imperialist epistemologies are one means by which people in emerging nations are inducted into Western cultural activities such as tourism. In this analysis, travel journalism in Asia uses strategies borrowed from its Western counterparts, which also indicates the challenges of de-westernising studies into this area. Another dilemma of de-westernising is that any such project is *a priori* defined in terms of what it aims to separate from. The attempt 'implicitly re-iterates the otherness of the international in relation to the US/UK axis of cultural studies' (Shome, 2009: 700).

This is not to suggest that a consumer-centric perspective on travel or journalism is novel—indeed, it is a common strand in scholarship (eg. Martin and Lewis, 2016; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). Nor does this paper seek to undermine post-imperialism cultural studies work on tourism, any more than to dismiss the canon of journalism studies based on Western ideologies. Nevertheless, given the waning economics of journalism in the West and its rise in the BRICS nations and much of Asia, alongside changing patterns among travellers, it is timely to seek other perspectives. The point, then, is that while judging travel journalists from a previously imperialist nation through that lens is plausible; to judge a journalist from a non-Western culture that has *been* colonised through the same lens is less rational.

This paper offers a perspective on what happens between tourist and destination based on what the tourist brings to the destination and how that reveals them—and how journalism actively contributes to that process. It concurs with Bishop (1989: 8) in ‘proposing that we entirely *reverse* the usual reading of travel texts. Rather than being solely concerned with where the travelers and explorers were *going*, this paper examines from where they were *coming*.’ Looking at these representations of place reveals the mythologies, cultural icons and attitudes of the writer which in turn reveal the desires of the audience, far more than they tell about the place. This drives travel journalism studies into the realm of agenda setting as an expression of power and control (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) where ‘the media not only can be successful in telling us *what to think about*, they also can be successful in telling us *how to think about it*’ (McCombs, 2006: 546, his italics). The texts inscribe the attitudes of the ‘home’ audience on ‘away’ and create a meaning of a place shared between writer and audience. They feed into the agenda one culture holds about another, as travel texts ‘are limited by the discourse and socio-cultural beliefs of the community in which they are produced’ (Santos, 2004: 393). So if Europe defined itself by defining others, surely each emerging country does the same, and Singapore imagines a landscape for its neighbours in order to help establish what *it* is.

What is revealed here, then, is an emerging, wealthy tourist class negotiating a relationship with the world they are visiting, mediated by a commercial travel industry which is in turn mediated by a for-profit media. This is evident in the use of history and mythologies to create a landscape that fulfils the requirements of the writer and the audience; and the use of reference points that frame it according to a home agenda, rather than that of the nation itself: “‘Home’”, after all, is the frame of reference for most contemporary travel writers ... Their experiences of travel are predicated on the possibility of return ... And their vocabulary frequently reflects the security of a shared culture’ (Holland and Huggan, 2000: 5). Places are offered as loci for touristic activity, defined in terms of what they offer tourists rather than travel there being defined in terms of what the country is and does. Equally, this analysis reveals an instinctive and un-reflexive attitude towards tourism and its privileges, concurring with Blanton (2002: 7-8) who observes ‘the tendency of all travelers until very recently to carry with them the unexamined values and norms of their own culture and to judge a foreign culture in light of those habits of belief, thus establishing a kind of control over them.’ Certainly, a disparity in privilege is still evident, but it is hard to allocate this to post-imperialist attitudes on the part of writer or audience; to throw away the Western imperial baggage of travel journalism does not remove the issues of privilege surrounding the act of tourism.

Finally, one further contribution is a suggestion that journalism studies as a whole has long been linked to the liberal-democratic project in Western, developed countries (eg. Raeijmaekers and Maesele, 2015). Its role is quasi-political, to inform the electorate to make better decisions (Curran, 2002; Robinson 2006; Schudson 2003; Zelizer, 2013). Yet much—possibly most—journalism does not conform to this as lifestyle journalism increasingly becomes a ‘global phenomenon’ overlooked by academia (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013: 944). The benefit of de-westernising a soft target such as travel journalism offers guidance on harder targets such as news reporting. This paper thus opens the door to future inductive, text-based analyses of journalism, challenging the liberal democratic Western perspectives that have characterised scholarship for the past two generations.

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