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Orientalist Imaginations and Touristification of Museums: Experiences from Singapore

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ORIENTALIST IMAGINATIONS AND TOURISTIFICATION OF MUSEUMS:

EXPERIENCES FROM SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws inspiration from Edward Said's orientalism, and examines how the three National Museums of Singapore – the Singapore History Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the Asian Civilizations Museums – are orientalized. The process is mediated through the museums' close links to tourism promotion in the city-state. The tourism authorities in Singapore have found that the city destination has become too modern and western for many tourists, and the destination has embarked on a campaign to make Singapore more oriental. The creation of the museums is one strategy to orientalize Singapore; these museums assert different layers of Singapore's oriental identities. Each museum appropriates the tourist orientalist imagination in different ways. This paper argues that the orientalist imagination can be understood as a set of knowledge resources for the construction of local identities to enhance a destination's uniqueness and attractiveness. Besides reviewing Said's orientalism, this paper visits criticisms of the theory, within the context of the orientalization process of museums in Singapore.

Keywords: orientalism, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore History Museum, Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore tourism.

The relationship between museums and the tourism industry is often a closely intertwined but ambivalent one. Museums are tourist attractions, albeit many museums frame themselves as independent educational and research institutions. These museums want to avoid being swayed by commercial tourism interests; they want to be driven by a sense of scientific and social responsibility instead. However, many state-supported museums are under pressure to be more accountable to the public. These museums have to draw

more revenues and visitors. And tourists offer visitor and revenue streams that they cannot ignore.

The three National Museums of Singapore – the Singapore History Museum (SHM), Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and Asian Civilizations Museum (ACM) – are also under pressure to increase revenue and visitor numbers. They have established relatively close relationships with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). In fact, these museums were founded in 1997 through a tourism blueprint to make Singapore more oriental and more attractive to tourists. Each of these museums constructs different Singaporean identities. The SHM establishes Singapore as a unique country in Southeast Asia, the SAM presents Singapore as Southeast Asian and as the cultural centre of the region, and the ACM traces Singaporeans' ancestral roots to China, India and the Middle East and celebrates different Singaporeans' ethnic identities.

This article will show that the museums and the identities promoted are partly based on how tourists imagine Singapore. The tourist imagination, as used by the STB to create the museums and enhance Singapore as an outstanding tourism destination, is orientalist in character. The Singaporean authorities have, deliberately or otherwise, used orientalist tourist images to construct and reify various Singaporean identities in the three national museums. At the same time, the tourism authorities and the museums are also reformulating sets of orientalist discourses to present Singapore in a superior light, when compared to its regional neighbours.

The next section of this paper discusses the idea of orientalism, as introduced by Edward Said. Subsequently, the paper will deliberate on the relationships between tourism and orientalist tourist images before proceeding to the empirical discussion on how Singapore's tourism strategies led to the founding of the three national museums. The empirical section will also elaborate on how the three national museums showcase different oriental aspects of Singapore, and how these museums story different Singaporean identities. These museums also create their own sets of orientalist discourses, in order to accentuate Singapore's uniqueness in the region. By reflecting

critically on the idea of orientalism in the empirical context of this paper, the penultimate section acknowledges that the orientalization of societies is a negotiated process, and there is no single orientalist imagination. Orientalist images are resources that can be framed advantageously for oriental countries like Singapore. The conclusion will summarize the arguments in the whole article.

This study is based on data collected between 1997 and 2004. Besides documents and visits to the museums, interviews and discussions were held with top officials in the ACM, SAM, SHM, National Heritage Board (NHB, the central agency that runs the museums) and STB.

ORIENTALISM IN TOURISM

When Edward W. Said (1979) interrogated and challenged orientalist studies, he entwined political and cultural imperialism and argued that orientalists – "western" writers and academics who study the "Orient" – have misrepresented, and still misrepresent, the Middle Eastern Islamic world in a manner that has eased the way for the West to dominate the Orient. Following Foucault, Said argued that orientalism is not only an academic discipline but an ideological discourse inextricably tied to the perpetuation of western power. Said wrote (Said 1979: 13, *emphases* in original):

> Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious "Western" imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental" world. It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape

and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world.

Said argued that many western scholars who study the Orient present and distribute particular images of the East, centred on the distinctiveness of the Oriental mind, as opposed to the Occidental mind. Such images create, essentialize and caricaturize the Orient, and the images do not correspond to empirical reality and reduce the significance of the varieties of language, culture, social forms and political structures in the so-called Orient. And the Orient is also seen as inferior, despotic and uncivilised.

The logic and premises behind Said's orientalist arguments have inspired many scholars to think critically about how they imagine other societies, and how they inadvertently disperse particular geopolitical messages in their activities. Orientalist debates have been extended to the study of places like Africa (Jeyifo 2000, Mazrui 2000), East Asia (Clarke 1997, Dirlik 1996, Hung 2003, Hill 2000) and Eastern Europe (Ash 1989, Kumar 1992, Ooi et al 2004). Orientalism has also inspired scholars to look at how discourses have come to misrepresent and caricaturize the Other with regard to sex and gender (e.g. Albet-Mas & Nogue-Font 1998, Prasch 1996, Lewis 1996, Mann 1997), race and ethnicity (e.g. Mazrui 2000, Jeyifo 2000) and religion (e.g. Amstutz 1997, Burke III 1998, Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins 2002, Zubaida 1995). Similarly, the North—South, Rich—Poor, Developed—Undeveloped divides are seen as parallels to the Orient—Occident dichotomy. As a result, tacit and biased discourses are highlighted by many anti-globalization lobbies as they protest against the political, economic, social and cultural domination of the West (Chua 2003, Klein 2000, Shipman 2002). This paper draws inspiration from Said's orientalism, and uses it as a starting point to examine re-presentations in museums, in the context of museums having to meet tourism demands. There are many criticisms to Said's ideas, and they will be addressed later within the context of the empirical cases from Singapore.

So, how are orientalist images perpetuated in tourism? Researchers have argued that tourism can be a form of imperialism, transmitting a set of orientalist discourses and representations on less developed and non-Western countries (see Ooi et al 2004, Silver 1993). Echtner & Prasad (2003) emphatically argue that "tourism marketing is one of the many forms of Third World representation that, in sometimes subtle but nonetheless serious ways, serves to maintain and reinforce colonial discourse and the power relations and ideology it fosters" (Echtner & Prasad 2003: 672). Inadvertently or otherwise, orientalist images, which affluent western tourists may have, may form a basis for destinations to imagine and package themselves. For instance, national tourism promotion authorities may use orientalist tourist images to develop destination brand identities, provide initiatives to create relevant tourism products, train tour guides and advise the local tourism industry. These agencies present and promote particular images of their destinations to the world. While many of the images promoted are aimed at influencing tourist perceptions, these images are also based on what tourists and tourists-to-be expect and want;. These authorities promote those images that tourists are attracted to, and the destination may highlight and even invent tourism products to reify these images. The expected and desired images are orientalist in character as they are abstract, one-sided and superficial. Many of them are wrong or outdated because foreigners do not have the same opportunities as locals to cultivate the local knowledge and deep understanding to know the place. But tourists and tourists-to-be have expectations, and many are attracted to exotic images. These tourists would seek out and affirm their images, although these images may be based on misconceptions (see Waller & Lea 1999, Prentice & Andersen 2000 on the affirmation of tourist images). So, for instance, many Europeans and Americans perceive Southeast Asia as a regional entity of many similar Asian countries situated close to each other. The reality is that the region of ten countries has a population of more than 500 million people, is physically bigger than western Europe, made up of hundreds of different ethnic communities, with people believing in hundreds of different religions and speaking different languages. And through processes of

development, modernization and globalization, all these countries are trading with the rest of the world, use modern technologies and most people are familiar with Coca-Cola, David Beckham and Microsoft.

Many third world countries, including those in Southeast Asia, tend to market themselves as exotic, authentic and unspoiled places for visits (Echtner & Prasad 2003, Silver 1993). Many of these destinations will boast of the modern comforts and amenities available to tourists but these are essential selling points, not unique selling propositions (Ooi 2002). To enhance the uniqueness of the destinations, exotic images are selectively presented to attract the attention of tourists. Many western tourists seek exotic places that are different and untouched by modernization (Errington & Gewertz 1989, Jacobsen 2000, MacCannell 1976, Silver 1993, Sørensen 2003). And many of the promoted images feed into the 'Western consciousness' (Silver 1993: 303). In other words, by marginalizing images of contemporary changes and development in their own societies, these destinations are presenting orientalist images of themselves (Echtner & Prasad 2003, Silver 1993). Although not all tourists seek the authentic and the untouched, images of indigenous peoples, pristine nature, exotic cultures in non-Western or third world destinations are better able to draw the attention of western tourists. And new tourism products, including museums, are created to support these images. Destinations start packaging and transforming themselves according to the images tourists and tourists-to-be expect and want; inadvertently, tourism becomes another form of imperialism (Echtner & Prasad 2003, Ooi et al 2004).

And studies have shown that over time, seemingly alien cultural effects of tourism can be appropriated into the destination (Boissevain 1996, Erb 2000, Martinez 1996, Picard 1995). The expectations and images tourists have of a destination may be manifested in and eventually adapted into the host society. The processes of catering to tourists' needs and expectations from a destination may not only lead to the material manifestation of tourists' images of the place but also lead to local acceptance of tourism-led changes in the host society.

More specifically, in the context of having established intimate relationships between tourism and national museums in Singapore, these museums also communicate messages consistent with the country's tourism destination branding and marketing programmes. And museums function as 'contact zones' (Clifford 1997). Contact zones are sites where geographically and historically separate groups establish ongoing relations (Clifford 1997). And if museums are concerned with attracting tourists and fulfilling tourists' expectations, the imaginations of tourists and tourists-to-be will unavoidably be factored in the construction of local identities. For example, Clifford (1997) examined the ways 'primitive' societies are represented in 'civilized' museums; they reflect an ongoing ideological matrix that governs how 'primitive' societies respond to and are perceived by 'civilized' people through these museums. Museums construct the Other under their own assumptions and worldviews, and the Other re-imagines oneself in, and responds to, the exhibitions. As this paper will allude to in Singapore, the national museums have become sites for locals to reflect on who they are, and the ideological matrix behind the identities presented is partly shaped by the orientalist imagination tourists and tourist-to-be have of the country. So, in an insidious manner, simple, superficial and orientalist images that tourists may have of a destination are being translated into reality. The case of Singapore will be elaborated and examined next.

SELF-ORIENTALIZING SINGAPORE AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS

In 1995, while facing fierce competition in the tourism industry, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB)[1] and the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) released a blueprint to make Singapore into a 'Global city for the arts'. Among other things, Singapore will have the SHM, SAM and ACM (Chang 2000, STPB 1996a, 1996b, STPB & MITA 1995). These three national museums will showcase the island city-state's unique Asian heritages and identities. Since the late 1980s, Singapore finds its modern and efficient image less attractive, as tourists flock to other exotic neighbouring destinations in Southeast Asia (National Tourism Plan Committees 1996). Singapore is being perceived as just another modern city (see Figure).

Figure: Where's the Orient: Skyscrapers along Singapore River

The thrust of the tourism strategy is to re-brand Singapore as 'New Asia'.[2] 'New Asia' intends to communicate the image of Singapore as a destination where the modern blends with the old; the East blends with the West (Ooi 2004). Many destinations, besides Singapore, have also branded themselves to lure visitors (Morgan et al 2004). Besides attracting more tourists, there are a number of other purposes in branding Singapore: it is an attempt to change the world's image of Singapore; it shows the industry how to selectively package Singapore into an attractive branded product; it offers a vision to develop Singaporean society and cultures; and the brand story helps tourists understand Singapore in a desired way (Ooi 2004). In this context, the creation of the three national museums is one of many products to make Singapore unique and more oriental. Other attempts at self-orientalizing Singapore include conserving and

enhancing Chinatown, Little India and the Malay Village, tour products are packaged in ways to accentuate the Asian characteristics embedded in the modern settings of the city-state and stories in new tourism products communicate the Singaporean Asian soul (Ooi 2004). Likewise, the three national museums tell locals and foreigners about Singapore's 'Asianness'.

De-orientalising Asia: the Singapore History Museum

Singapore is economically developed, has a rich but short history and is different from its neighbours. The SHM sends this message through its exhibitions. Disputing some orientalist images people may have of Southeast Asia as a somewhat homogeneous region, Singapore is presented in the SHM as a distinct Southeast Asian country. And since its independence in 1965, a Singaporean identity has also evolved.

The SHM showcases 'trends and developments which have characterized and shaped Singapore, highlighting those leading to the emergence of contemporary Singapore (STPB & MITA 1995). Singapore's colonial past, the Second War World, struggle for self-rule from the British colonial masters, Singapore's volatile history with Malaysia and Singapore's independence in 1965 are the highlights in the museum. Among all the three national museums, the SHM is most involved in the national education programme, and it receives many school visits. The exhibitions complement the history taught in Singapore schools.

Singapore's sovereignty is asserted along these lines: Singapore fought for its independence from the British; Singapore suffered during the Japanese occupation; Singapore could not fit into the Federation of Malaysia (1963-1965); and Singapore has succeeded as an independent country. Therefore, not only is Singapore not British, it is also not Japanese or Malaysian. Singapore is a unique Asian entity. For example, the museum tells visitors Singapore's situation during World War II (NHB 1998: 31):

> The Japanese come proclaiming themselves as liberators of their
> fellow-Asians from colonial oppression but they are oppressors

too and treat their subjects even more harshly than the British ever did.

Further accentuating the fact that Southeast Asia is not a homogeneous and harmonious region, the SHM recalls that the creation of Malaysia in 1963 with the merging of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore was not well received by the Philippines and Indonesia. The Philippines laid claim to Sabah in 1962. Indonesia did not welcome Kuala Lumpur's increased influence in Borneo. With the formation of the new federation in September 1963, a series of Indonesia-led violent sabotage activities took place around Malaysia, including in Singapore. The violence stopped only in October 1965 when Suharto became the president of Indonesia (NHB 1998: 70-1).

While telling visitors about Singapore's turbulent past, the museum also celebrates the country's social and economic achievements and the leadership of the ruling People's Action Party (Ooi 2002: 205-208). This party has ruled Singapore since its self-governance under British rule in 1959. The policy of a Singaporean Singapore – with equal treatment for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, encouraging Singaporeans of different ethnic groups to mingle in their daily lives, the practice of meritocracy in the education system, and other multi-cultural related social engineering schemes – has created a unique Singaporean identity. The museum also suggests that Singapore, with a strong and honest government, has prospered and developed much faster than all of its neighbours. Singaporeans should be proud of what they have achieved.

In sum, the SHM story tells visitors that Singapore is part of Southeast Asia but it shines in terms of economic and social development. Singaporeans now have their own identity. The SHM asserts a Singaporean identity within Southeast Asia and presents a relatively sophisticated and complex picture of the region. It effectively debunks any simple orientalist image visitors may have of Singapore as just another country in Southeast Asia.

Orientalising Southeast Asia: the Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) presents a Southeast Asian identity for Singapore. The museum showcases contemporary Southeast Asian visual arts. The SAM is also part of the programme to develop Singapore into a reputable arts city. The master plan for the SAM states that the museum will be 'the first of its kind in the region to be primarily dedicated to the collection and display of 20th century Singapore and Southeast Asian visual art' (STPB & MITA 1995: 16). Besides the SAM, the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, a gigantic complex by the sea and right in the city centre also has aims to promote Singapore into a regional contemporary art destination by offering Southeast Asian visual art performances. So, in the context of destination positioning, the SHM helps assert Singapore's uniqueness in the region, the SAM wants to establish Singapore as essentially Southeast Asian, and as the heart of the Southeast Asian cultural scene.

In contrast to the SHM, the SAM presents Singapore as having strong and closely intertwined relationships with Southeast Asia. The SAM inadvertently finds itself attempting to homogenize the region, as it has to present Southeast Asia as an aesthetic entity. Since Southeast Asia is heterogeneous, a clearly distilled Southeast Asian identity has yet to be found. Besides accepting the fact that many people around the world perceive and imagine Southeast Asia as a regional and cultural block, the SAM borrows the concept of Southeast Asia from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This regional grouping was originally formed as an anti-Communist political alliance in 1967. The various member countries adhere to different religions, speak different languages and were colonized by different foreign powers in the last centuries. Some were even recent enemies, for example within the last twenty years, Vietnam occupied Cambodia and was a Cold War adversary of the original ASEAN members. Despite this varied backdrop, the SAM borrows ASEAN's political formulation in its definition of Southeast Asia as an aesthetic region.

A Southeast Asian art genre has also yet to be established. The SAM acknowledges that the artistic communities in Southeast Asia and their experiences amongst the member countries are diversely rich (Sabapathy 1996). So, the museum employs a harmony-in-diversity strategy to affirm Southeast Asia as a plausible aesthetic entity. Common themes are used to bring disparate works of art together. 'Nationalism, revolution and the idea of the modern', 'Traditions of the real', 'Modes of abstraction', 'Mythology and religion: traditions in tension', 'The self and the other' and 'Urbanism and popular culture' are themes used to connect the diverse exhibitions in the museum. SAM's curators are constantly reminded that they have to maintain their museum's unique proposition of presenting a Southeast Asian identity in their exhibitions.

However, the construction of such an aesthetic region is politically sensitive despite pronouncements of close friendship amongst ASEAN members. For instance, ASEAN foreign ministers declare that '[w]hile fully respecting each member country's sovereignty and national property rights, ASEAN recognizes that the national cultural heritage of member countries constitute the heritage of Southeast Asia for whose protection it is the duty of ASEAN as a whole to cooperate' (ASEAN 2000: point 1). But SAM's actions are perceived as signs of Singaporean cultural imperialism by other Southeast Asian countries (Ooi 2003). Individual countries want to keep their national art treasures at home. Moreover, although Singapore has the most resources, other Southeast Asian countries also want to be the contemporary art centre for the region. In other words, other Southeast Asian countries have the same rights to claim a Southeast Asian identity, and they are competing to be the cultural capital of the region.

Reverse orientalism: the Asian Civilizations Museum

Singaporeans' ethnic identities are celebrated in the ACM. The museum suggests that Singaporeans should be proud of their ancestral pasts because these pasts are the source of Singaporeans' Asian soul. In contrast to the SHM, which shows that Singapore is a relatively new country, the ACM re-claims

historical links to China, India, and the Middle East. The multi-cultural mix of Singaporean society legitimates this claim. And the museum offers a special tourism site where visitors can gaze at the material cultures of major ancient Asian civilizations.

Every Singaporean has an ethnic identity. They are boxed into the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (CMIO) ethnic model; ninety-nine percent of the population are Chinese (77%), Malay (14%) or Indian (8%). There is also the miscellaneous category of 'Others' (1%). The CMIO model is politically defined, and is central in the state's nation building and social engineering programmes (Benjamin 1976, Chua 1995, Siddique 1990). The ancestries of the Chinese, Malay and Indian communities are broadly defined as from China, Malaysia/Indonesia and the Indian sub-continent respectively. And the ACM brings together priceless material heritage from these countries, offering visitors a sweeping view of Singaporeans' 'ancestral heritages' (STPB & MITA: 17). To enrich the museum, the museum also displays ancient material cultures from other places in Asia, including Islamic art and heritage from the Middle East and Buddhist artefacts from Indochina.

Hill (2000) shows that Singapore's Asian heritages have not always been celebrated. It was not until the 1980s that the Singapore government embraced Confucianism and embarked on the process of "reverse orientalism" (Hill 2000: 176):

> This [reverse orientalism] process entailed the attribution of a set of cultural values to East and Southeast Asian societies by Western social scientists in order to contrast the recent dynamic progress of Asian development with the stagnation and social disorganization of contemporary Western economies and societies. The contrast provided legitimation for some of the nation-building policies of political leaders in such countries as Singapore and was incorporated in attempts to identify and institutionalize core values.

The Singapore government argues that the prosperity and development of Singapore stems from its people embodying "Asian values". This argument is proposed after many scholars and researchers in the 1980s predicted that many far eastern economies would overtake western economies because of their Confucian values and ethics. Confucian values, as supposedly practised in Japan and the Asian tiger economies (namely, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) offer a set of work ethics – hard work, collective mindedness, thriftiness – that has an affinity with capitalism (Hofheinz & Calder 1982, Kahn & Pepper 1979, Vogel 1979). Confucianism and Confucian values eventually developed into another strain of orientalist discourse (Chua 1995). Confucian values have equivocally come to mean Asian values in Singapore, as the emphasis on Confucianism will privilege the Chinese and marginalize the Malays and Indians. Regardless, Singapore's social engineering programme has been Confucianized, so that Singaporeans will learn about social discipline, social solidarity and community responsibility (see Chua 1995, Hill 2000, Lam & Tan 1999).

The reverse orientalism process did not go unnoticed in tourism. For instance, Mr. Asad Shiraz, the then-STB Director of Destination Marketing Division, explains the message that the "New Asia" destination brand should communicate (interview in 1998):

> We needed to find a branding that better reflects the new Singapore. We also wanted something […] that would reflect that Asia is coming of age; we are listening to people talking about the [21st] century being that of the Asia Pacific. So, we wanted to include elements of these sentiments in the market place, into our branding.

So, the ACM is a site that shows off the glorious heritages of old Asia. The grandeur and glory of Singaporeans' ancestors are celebrated, and the values embodied in the artefacts are still said to be found in Singaporeans. Unlike the SHM, in which Singapore's identity is accentuated by the country's differences with its neighbours in the region, and the SAM, in which Singapore is said to

represent Southeast Asia, the ACM asserts Singaporean ethnic identities by claiming strong links to selected historical periods of particular Asian countries and communities. These links point to Singapore's deep-rooted 'Asianness', and a reaffirmation of the reverse orientalist image – Asia has a glorious and rich history, and is superior to the West in many ways.

CONFIGURING THE ORIENT

According to scholars sympathetic towards Said, orientalism generates discourses that essentialize and caricaturize other cultures and societies. Such discourses, when taken seriously, create structures that allow the West to dominate the Orient. This paper suggests that there are indeed orientalist imaginations in tourism. As discussed earlier, within the context of tourism, non-western and developing countries found that they are more attractive if they allow western tourists and tourists-to-be to continue perceiving them as untouched, exotic and even primitive. While it is debatable whether all westerners view these places in this manner, many of these places market themselves accordingly because such marketing strategies work. Many oriental destinations enforce the orientalist images and communicate orientalist place identities to attract tourists. Singapore is no exception.

But Said's approach to orientalism has also been criticized. For instance, scholars who criticize orientalism are sometimes accused of doing the wrong they themselves are censuring; these scholars dichotomize the Orient and Occident into essentialized entities (see Burke III 1998, Brown 1999, Mani & Frankenberg 1985, Sum 1999). The Orient and Occident are not monolithic wholes. This paper does not view the Orient and Occident as monolithic wholes but only as crude constructs. On the other hand, such a dichotomy is enacted out in the practice of tourism. For instance, less developed and non-western countries that want to attract affluent tourists from Europe and North America have come to embrace how tourists from rich western societies imagine them. As in the case of Singapore because its developed and wealthy, the island city-state finds itself too modern and unattractive to western visitors. As a result, the

STB acts accordingly to orientalize the country in spite of the fact that these visitors have only limited and superficial understanding of Singaporean society.

The case of Singapore shows that while the country is self-orientalizing itself, it is also creating and introducing its own sets of orientalist discourses. The tourism authorities, together with the national museums, selectively present Singapore as predominantly multi-cultural and Asian, so as to paint Singapore as a unique and superior tourism destination. This is seen in all three national museums. The SHM not only stresses Singapore's uniqueness in the region but also that Singapore is the most affluent and developed country in the region. The SAM emphasizes Singapore's Southeast Asian identity but claims that Singapore is the cultural hub of the region. And as for the ACM, it continues with the overtly positive reverse orientalist images of East Asia, and boasts of the glory of Singapore's ancestral heritages. The case of Singapore and the national museums shows that orientalist images of Singapore have become a set of discursive resources for the tourism and museum authorities to construct identities for Singapore. The authorities pick out orientalist elements that are attractive and relevant for them to use. While tapping into tourist demands from the country (i.e. Singapore should be more oriental), the tourism authorities accentuate and invent positive oriental elements in their marketing and branding campaigns and product development strategies, so as to fulfil tourist expectations. They also create new variants of orientalist discourses. Effectively, the STB and the museums are presenting desirable images of Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia. But in all cases, Singapore is unique and superior to its Asian neighbours. The museums, wittingly or unwittingly, have generated new sets of orientalist discourses that selectively differentiate the Orient.

Such an analysis is close to Foucault and Said; constructing and articulating orientalist discourses must be understood within the context of use. Burke III (Burke III 1998) pointed out that Said also argued that all knowledge is created within its age and is necessarily contingent, no knowledge can be unaffected by the circumstances under which it comes to be. Said took his

inspiration from Foucault. For instance, with regards to history, Foucault did not deny the existence of the past but he argued that a historical discourse (in contrast to what actually took place) should be treated "as and when it occurs" (Foucault 1972: 25). This means that historical statements should be interrogated with the respective conditions in which they are being used (Foucault 1972, Dean 1994). With this approach, presented histories must then be read and understood as constructions by history mediators within the contemporary contexts the stories function, rather than as objective and unadulterated accounts of the past. Similarly then, Said's articulations against orientialism are also embedded in a set of contexts, and he has no privileged claim to truth either (Brown 1999, Burke III 1998). In other words, Said himself was bounded by circumstances and agendas, like those orientalists Said chided. The case of the three national museums shows how orientalist knowledge can be subverted, reclaimed and celebrated. The identities constructed are meant to attract tourists, assert Singapore's role as a cultural centre for the region, and to generate pride in Singaporeans' ancestral pasts. The use of orientalist knowledge is not just about the West controlling the East but also how powers in the Orient are able to use the knowledge to manage their own environments.

By situating orientalism as a set of discourses embedded in social and political circumstances, orientalism is not the unique imposture Said sometimes wished to reveal it to be but merely another example of a universal condition (Brown 1999). While this article argues that orientalist knowledge is also being generated in the Orient, the knowledge that Singapore promotes is also being challenged. So, the processes of de-orientalization, self-orientalization and reverse orientalization are on-going. Singapore's neighbours are not responding amiably to Singapore's plan, as they want to keep their own national treasures at home, and are wary of any cultural imperial tendencies that the national museums in the island city-state may demonstrate. The close familial-like relations, as expressed by the SAM and ACM, do not warrant enough good will for the free flow of cultural properties across fixed state boundaries, for instance.

CONCLUSIONS

The national museums in Singapore are founded on a tourism plan to make Singapore more oriental and also to position Singapore as a 'Global city for the arts'. Such a plan is rooted in the market research findings that Singapore is no longer oriental enough for the lucrative long-haul western markets. A number of strategies are used to orientalize the city destination. Based on the orientalist imagination foreigners have of Singapore (the tourists surveyed have limited knowledge of Singapore as they have not lived long in the country, their perceptions of the country were based on their short visits and on other sources of information), Singapore aims to fulfil tourists' image and expectations of the country. Inadvertently, these tourists, with their superficial knowledge of the country, have found a means to influence the culturalscape of Singapore.

The three national museums are part of the plan to orientalize Singapore. They each tell different stories and offer different types of exhibitions. Each one communicates different identities for Singapore: the SHM portrays Singapore as an independent and a successful sovereign state; the SAM tells the world that Singapore is part of Southeast Asia and the city-state is the art and cultural capital of the region; the ACM showcases the glorious ancestral pasts of various Asian civilizations, tracing the roots of Singaporeans' ethnic identities. These museums, although founded on the basis of tourism, are sites for Singaporeans to reflect on their layers of identities. They are also sites for tourists with the orientalist imagination to affirm their preconceptions. While Singapore self-orientalizes itself to attract more tourists, they are also introducing different sets of orientalist discourses; these discourses present Singapore as superior and unique.

NOTES

1. The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) became the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in November 1997. This temporal context is reflected in this paper

2. In March 2004, the branding changed again, this time to 'Uniquely Singapore'. The orientalization strategies of 'New Asia' remain relevant in this new branding.

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