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Singapore's Chinatown: Nation Building and Heritage Tourism in a Multiracial City

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the pivotal role played by the state in refashioning the Chinatown landscape as part of both nation-building and heritage tourism projects, and the ensuing cultural politics. After a brief history of the creation of Singapore's Chinatown, the paper discusses, first, Chinatown's place in Singapore's post-independence nation-building project and, second, the reconfiguration of the Chinatown landscape as a tourism asset. The final section reflects on the changing politics of place as Chinatown gains legitimacy in state discourses on heritage, tourism and multiculturalism, as well as in the popular imagination as an ethnic precinct par excellence.

Keywords: Ethnic Enclave, Historic District, Politics of Place,
Nation-Building, Heritage Tourism

Introduction

Chinese living in cities beyond China have formed compact and comparatively exclusive settlements known as Chinatowns, in which they resided, worked and traded.¹⁾ Following Crissman's classic model of ideal-type Chinatown²⁾, scholars such as William Skinner and Wang Gungwu have portrayed Chinatown as an extension of homeland practices, where principles of social organization based on descent, locality and occupation that had ordered rural life in China were transplanted to overseas urban settings.

This paper focuses on the historical development of and cultural politics surrounding Singapore's Chinatown, a landscape almost two centuries old. Unlike many other examples of 'immigrant ethnic neighbourhoods' discussed in European contexts where the neighbourhood is a creation of the 'minority culture' of specific 'immigrant' or 'ethnic' groups, Singapore's

1) Gregor Benton and Edmund T. Gomez, "Essentializing Chinese identity: transnationalism and the Chinese in Europe and Southeast Asia," in B.S.A. Yeoh, M.W. Charney and C.K. Tong ed., *Approaching Transnationalism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), pp. 251-300.

2) Lawrence Crissman, "The segmentary structure of urban Chinese communities" *Man* 2 (1967), pp. 185-204.

Chinatown is unique in representing the cultural heritage of the dominant racial category (i.e. 'Chinese') in a multiracial population. In contrast to the urban cultural politics revolving around the way immigrant entrepreneurs capitalize on 'ethnic neighbourhoods' to offer consumption and leisure opportunities with a 'difference' in many European and North American cities, the Singapore case shows the pivotal role played by the *state* in refashioning the Chinatown landscape as part of both nation-building and heritage tourism projects, and the ensuing cultural politics. To put it in more theoretical terms, migrant residential concentrations in western cities have often been seen in two ways, in negative terms either as an outcome of discrimination ("ethnic marginalisation") or an unwillingness on the part of the minority group to assimilate ("ethnic separateness"), or more positively in terms of "strategic choice" on the part of the group to form a geographical base to provide ethno-specific services, strengthen social support and preserve and transmit the community's heritage, culture and values (Dunn 1998; 2007). In contradistinction, we contend that an understanding of the making of Singapore's Chinatown situates the local cultural politics not so much in terms of "marginalization"/"separateness"/"choice", but in between the postcolonial state and its citizens, as part of the larger negotiations over state-led nation-building and heritage tourism. We also argue that the cultural politics of place is not static but

shifts with the emergence of new migrant enclaves as Singapore globalises and becomes porous to new streams of migrants and transients.

After a brief history of the creation of Singapore's Chinatown under colonial rule, the paper discusses first, Chinatown's place in Singapore's post-independence nation-building project and, second, the reconfiguration of the Chinatown landscape as a tourism asset. This is followed by a section discussing the negotiations between the state and the people over state-led efforts to transform Chinatown. The penultimate section reflects on the changing politics of place as Chinatown gains legitimacy in state discourses on heritage, tourism and multiculturalism, as well as in the popular imagination, as an ethnic precinct par excellence, while the conclusion draws attention to the emergent politics of place beyond Chinatown in the new millennium as migrant worker enclaves gain greater visibility in the globalizing city.

Colonial Chinatown: Racialised Landscape

As elsewhere, Chinatown's demography in Singapore during the colonial period was characterized in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries by either indentured labour systems or kinship-based chain-migration of predominantly men, followed by a post-World War Two phase during which this

'bachelor society' was gradually transformed by the presence of more female migrants and family immigration.³⁾ Largely self-organising entities, socio-political life and the provision of 'cradle-to-grave' services in these transplanted communities were anchored, to different extents in different communities, by Chinese associations based on clan, surname, dialect or provenance. Portrayed as an 'immigrant neighbourhood' or an 'ethnic enclave', Chinatown is identified as a reception area for newcomers, an agglomeration of ethnic businesses (including 'illegal' or 'immoral' practices such as drug trafficking, gambling and prostitution) serving its 'own kind', and the focal point of a well-knit community in a foreign land. Chinatown, depicted in this vein, is essentially an outpost of a foreign country, comprising a diasporic community of 'unassimilable foreigners'.

Recent scholarship argues, however, that Chinatown is not just an exported structure but the product of host society reception, colonial labour policies in some instances and, racially discriminatory and discursive practices more generally. As Anderson has noted, the term "Chinatown", both as a spatial entity and an idea, was ascribed by European society.⁴⁾ In Singapore, the inscription of "Chineseness" in a specific place

3) Chen, Hsiang-Shui, *Chinatown No More: Taiwan Immigrants in Contemporary New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Benton and Gomez (2003)

4) Kay J. Anderson, "The idea of Chinatown: the power of place and institutional practice in the making of a racial category" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (1987), pp. 580-98.

has its roots in colonial urban planning. A few years after founding the settlement of Singapore as a British factory in 1819, Stamford Raffles appointed a town committee to mark out separate quarters for the different “native” communities, including a Chinese *kampung* on the south-west bank of the Singapore River to accommodate this “peculiar” and “industrious race”. As with many Third World colonial cities, the idea of racial categorisation was firmly inscribed into the colonial urban landscape from the city’s foundation.

As colonial Singapore consolidated its position as premier entrepot of the Far East, it witnessed ever-increasing immigration of Chinese and Indians in search of livelihood and economic advancement. Chinese immigrants gravitated towards Chinatown where support structures such as clan-based accommodation, welfare institutions and the control of particular occupational niches by one’s group were already well established. By the turn of the century, Chinatown occupied only about 2 sq km but contained one-third of the municipal population, over 66,000 people of which the overwhelming majority (91%) was Chinese.

In the colonial imagination, Chinatown as a landscape was comprehended through multiple lenses of moral, medical and racial categories. Such images were reinforced by, and

corroborated in, both scientific health surveys of the medical fraternity and the dilettante description of popular accounts. Within colonial medical discourse, Chinatown was a nursery of “dangerous infectious diseases”. Among lay observers, Chinatown was often depicted as filthy and pestilential, an image conjoined with that of moral decay evidenced by gambling houses, opium dens, gaudy temples, dimly-lit brothels and the higgledy-piggledy disorder of Chinese street-life. From the colonial perspective, Chinatown as a landscape derived its identity through association with the Chinese. In turn, by objectifying the physical and moral miasma of all things Chinese, the Chinatown landscape further contributed to the making of the Chinese as a separate racial category.

Chinatown and Nation-Building⁵⁾

In the early 1960s, Singapore wrested independence from the British and became a sovereign state. Within the newly-emerging state, Chinatown was no longer an exclusive Chinese enclave within a plural society under British rule but an anachronistic place name in a predominantly Chinese city. Independence, however, did not render the imagery of quintessential

5) For a fuller account of Chinatown's role in nation-building and heritage tourism, see Yeoh and Kong (1994) and Kong and Yeoh (2003a), pp. 131-161. This section and the next draw some of its material from these accounts.

“Chineseness” associated with Chinatown moribund. Instead, the reservoir of colonial allusions continued to be drawn upon, reconstituted and transformed to serve new purposes within the independent state.

Post-1945 Chinatown was an area occupied by dilapidated, densely-built shophouses⁶⁾, a complicated mix of residential, industrial and commercial land use in close proximity. The problem of severe residential overcrowding was exacerbated by a lack of sanitation, lack of public open spaces and community services, and congested roads. Overcrowding contributed both to high land values and irregular plot sizes, discouraging redevelopment. With independence, the eradication of these problems became a priority for a state seeking to secure political legitimacy, build ideological consensus and transform the population to a disciplined industrial workforce.⁷⁾

In 1966, urban renewal was accorded special recognition with the establishment of the Urban Renewal Department within the

6) A shophouse is a generic term referring to "a form of urban construction in which buildings are built contiguously, i.e. sharing party walls, and which collectively, form blocks separated from each other by streets and backlanes" (*Historic Districts in the Central Area: A Manual for Chinatown Conservation Area* (URA, 1988: 79). Shophouses are often used for multiple purposes, often with the upper floors as residences, and the ground floors as shops and stores.

7) Chua Beng Huat, "Not depoliticized but ideologically successful: the public housing programme in Singapore" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 15 (1991), pp. 24-41.

Housing and Development Board (HDB) (the post-independence successor of the Singapore Improvement Trust). The primary emphasis of urban renewal was slum clearance and comprehensive redevelopment of the Central Area of Singapore. In the same year, the Land Acquisition Act was enacted to facilitate the compulsory acquisition of land in the Central Area where buildings were largely rent-controlled and under fragmented ownership.⁸⁾ Redevelopment of the Central Area included the planning and designing of public housing and amenities such as shops, markets, hawker stalls, offices and open spaces; the sale of re-parcelled sites to private developers to build residential, retail or office properties; and the planning of infrastructure.

Comprehensive state-initiated urban renewal was seen as the key to giving valuable but slum-ridden areas located in the heart of the city a fresh lease of life. Like the redevelopment dreams for upgrading the Dharavi settlement that Nihal Perera discusses in the context of Mumbai, Chinatown was the target of urban developers' desire for legibility.⁹⁾ Unlike Dharavi (which continues

8) Aline K. Wong and Stephen H.K. Yeh, *Housing a Nation: 25 Years of Public Housing in Singapore* (Singapore: Housing and Development Board, Singapore, 1985).

9) Nihal Perera, "Competing Futures: Legibility, Resistance, and the Redevelopment of Dharvati", paper presented at Locality as Alternative Values: Resistance, Hybridism, Autonomy, The 4th International Conference on Locality and Humanities, Pusan National University, 21-22 June 2012.

to be negotiated between social groups with different power bases and a weak state), however, Singapore's Chinatown as a local neighbourhood was less able to resist the combined interests of private capital and a powerful state. In less than two decades, the built environment of Chinatown was dramatically redrawn along high modernist lines informed by efficiency, discipline and rationality of landuse. In the early 1960s, it was estimated that a quarter of a million people required rehousing if Chinatown were to be redeveloped. By the mid-1970s, the mosaic of low-rise shophouses which had formed the basic fabric of old Chinatown incorporated many new elements representing both public and private efforts. Demolition went in tandem with building "homes for the people" to accommodate relocated families.¹⁰⁾ Some public housing in the form of high-rise low-cost flats which allowed efficient use of high-value land was provided within Chinatown itself in order to keep the population in the city centre. The design of the project – shops and eating houses on the lower floors, wide staircases and ramps connecting the tower blocks with each other and to the neighbouring Kreta Ayer People's Theatre and community centre – signalled the state's attempt to retain the 'close and self-contained community living' which had characterised cubicle-living in the past.

10) Stephen H.K. Yeh, *Homes for the People: A Study of Tenants' Views of Public Housing in Singapore* (Singapore: Statistics and Research Department, Housing and Development Board, 1972).

Besides accommodating public housing, land freed as a result of demolition was amalgamated and reparcelled for sale to the private sector. Private sector developments included high-rise mixed-use complexes such as the Peoples' Park Complex, a development of three floors of eating and shopping space (formerly located in the open-air site) topped by residential flats, and the Peoples' Park Centre, consisting of a tower block housing medium-cost apartments, podium shops and a multi-storey car park. Another example is the twenty-storey Fook Hai Building, the first experiment of its kind in Singapore where businesses affected by clearance in Chinatown joined to form a public company to undertake the mixed-use redevelopment project in a cooperative manner. These commercial, retail and residential projects were to serve as means to generate both day activities and night life in the area so as to recreate the "traditional" liveliness and atmosphere of old Chinatown. The integration of residential flats with podium shops in both public and private housing efforts was an attempt to replicate the mix of landuse, convenience and easy access to market and retail facilities which had typified the original shophouse landscape. At the same time, by segregating landuse on different specialist floors stacked on top of each other, accessibility could be disentangled from the chaotic juxtaposition of activities in the former landscape.

However, the rewriting of the Chinatown palimpsest did not entail the total erasure of the amalgam of forms laid down during the pre-independence era. While certain parts of Chinatown did not escape the bludgeon of redevelopment, sufficient vestiges of the shophouse motif endured. For many years, the fate of the remaining old Chinatown landscape stood in the balance, but by the late 1970s, there were signs of a rethinking of the overall state policy pertaining to Chinatown. While this did not signify an overturning of the redevelopment juggernaut, it was symptomatic of the wider concern that transforming historically significant and culturally rich localities into an “environment of towers” would dilute the country’s heritage, an ingredient crucial to the pressing task of nation-building. Investigations into the viability of conserving Chinatown were set into motion as early as 1976, but these efforts did not bear fruit until 1986 when the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) announced its Conservation Master Plan, which included the preservation of substantial portions of the Chinatown landscape.

Chinatown and the Heritage-Enterprise Nexus

As noted, in the immediate post-independence period, the Singapore landscape was shaped by a demolish-and-rebuild philosophy to excise urban slums and rural *kampungs*, to etch

into the city the lineaments of technological progress and to optimise scarce land resources for economic development. However, if the first two decades of the nation's development was dictated by erasure of the past, the next two saw a more concerted attempt to recover lost memory and fashion an appropriate genealogy which would constitute the nation's legitimacy, clearly marked, signposted and concretised in the landscape. 'Remembering' emerged at a specific time and place in the nation's development, both as an inevitable condition of the cycle of progress and loss as well as a deliberate strategy of forging the nation's future. Chua argues that 'nostalgia' and a harking back to the past during the 1980s and 1990s were rooted in the wider critique of and resistance to the relentless drive towards economic development, the frenetic pace of life, high stress levels, the corruption of new-found materialism and the consequent 'industrialisation of everyday life'.¹¹⁾

Nostalgia is not only a construction of the past but also a condition of the present. The groundswell of public opinion in favour of the past coincided with state evaluations of the dangers of 'forgetting to remember'. In the 1980s, the governing elite noted with great apprehension the increasing westernisation of Singapore society. Though westernisation had served Singapore

11) Chua Beng Huat, "That imagined space: Nostalgia for Kampung," in B.S.A. Yeoh and L. Kong ed. *Portraits of Places: History, Community, and Identity* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1995), pp. 222-241.

well in its quest for industrialisation, it had also brought in train values which were perceived to be incompatible with traditional Asian values. This unease over what Kwok calls “the complexity of our cultural condition” took the form of pronouncements and debates in both official and public discourse on a number of themes urging the preservation of ‘Asian’ and ‘traditional’ values and the maintenance of ‘local’ cultural identity and heritage.¹²⁾ The perceived need to reclaim Singapore’s Asian roots as a bulwark against westernisation emphasised the importance of heritage and traditions as it was argued that these provide ‘the substance of social and psychological defence’.¹³⁾ In this vein it was argued that heritage inscribed in the built environment is of particular significance as without ‘visual landmarks’, ‘all other records of the past remain abstract notions, difficult to understand and link to the present’. ‘It is clear therefore’, continued the Report, ‘that the conservation of buildings, structures and other districts which provide the sign posts from the past to the present is critical to the psyche of a nation’.¹⁴⁾

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) announced its Conservation Master Plan in December 1986. The Plan covered

12) Kwok Kian-Woon, “The problem of ‘tradition’ in contemporary Singapore,” in A. Mahizhnan ed. *Heritage and Contemporary Values* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1993), pp. 7.

13) *The Committee on Heritage Report* (Singapore: Committee on Heritage, 1988), pp. 26.

14) *Ibid.*, pp. 46.

more than 100 hectares, including Chinatown, Kampong Glam (identified as a traditional Malay quarter), Little India, the Singapore River, Emerald Hill (a residential street distinguished for Peranakan¹⁵⁾ architecture), and the Civic and Cultural District (a precinct comprising museums and other civic and cultural buildings).¹⁶⁾

The creation of heritage landscapes not only provides the nation with a sense of historical continuity but also makes this city's visual identity immune against the homogenising forces of modernity and globalisation. Indeed, heritage becomes more, not less, important as Singapore aspires to become a 'cosmopolitan city'. This already began in the mid-1980s, when new economic diversification strategies were needed in response to a slowdown in manufacturing, as a consequence of the erosion of Singapore's competitiveness in labour intensive operations. As part of the city's strategy to carve out a specialised niche as an international business and service centre, strengthening the tourist industry played an important role. During the 1985 recession, the expansion of tourism projects, for example, was recommended by a ministerial committee as a means of reviving the flagging construction sector and absorbing the country's high level of savings.¹⁷⁾ The recession also came in the wake of a sharp 3.5

15) 'Peranakan' or 'Nonya and Baba' culture is a local hybrid comprising Chinese, Malay and colonial British elements.

16) Lily Kong, *Conserving the Past, Creating the Future: Urban Heritage in Singapore* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011).

per cent fall in tourist arrivals in 1983. This downturn was blamed, in part, on ‘the lack of color in the increasingly antiseptic city-state’.¹⁸⁾ In 1984, one of the three main problems for the tourism industry identified by the Tourism Task Force was the attrition of tourist attractions as Singapore has lost its ‘Oriental mystique and charm best symbolised in old buildings, traditional activities and bustling road activities’ in its effort to construct a ‘modern metropolis’.¹⁹⁾ The recommendations of the Task Force included the conservation of cultural areas and historical sites and these were later incorporated in the Tourism Product Development Plan of 1986.²⁰⁾ The Plan included the expenditure of US\$223 million for the redevelopment of inter alia, ethnic districts such as Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. In brief, once the economic viability of preservation had been identified, state conservation policies aimed at restoring old shophouses areas such as Chinatown became a priority.²¹⁾

As Zukin has noted, landscapes subject to the forces of globalisation are constantly undergoing a process of ‘creative

17) Chang, T.C., Milne, S., Fallon, D. and Pohlmann, C. “Urban heritage tourism: The global-local nexus” *Annals of Tourism Research* 23 (1996), pp. 284-305.

18) Burton, S. “History with a bottom line” *Time*, 12 July (1993), pp. 36.

19) Wong, K.C. *et al. Report of the Tourism Task Force* (Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1984), pp. 6.

20) Pannell K. Forster, *Tourism Development in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, 1986).

21) Sim Loo Lee, “Urban conservation policy and the preservation of historical and cultural heritage: The case of Singapore” *Cities*, 13, no. 6 (1996), pp. 399-409.

destruction' (borrowing Schumpeter's term) whereby the 'longevity' and 'cultural layers' of the landscape are constantly fragmented, reworked and recycled in tandem with market forces.²²⁾ As Singapore globalises, its heritage landscapes, as marketable landscapes for a global audience, become subject to further annihilation and re-invention. The corporatisation of urban space in the name of global competition and consumption that Mike Douglass²³⁾ discusses did not just create new mega-projects such as large shopping, leisure and entertainment complexes, simulacra designs and superlative buildings but also transformed a selection of older localities such as historically and culturally significant areas that can serve to differentiate globalising cities from one another and help sharpen their competitive edge. The transformation of the city into a 'corporate globopolis' also requires the facilitating and managing role of the state.²⁴⁾ In preparation for the new millennium, Tourism 21, a new national tourism planning exercise mounted in 1996 charted the way for a further reconfiguration of heritage and cultural spaces from inward-looking "Instant Asia" to a global-looking "New Asia".²⁵⁾ In Tourism 21, the Singapore

22) Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), pp. 27.

23) Mike Douglass, "Corporatization and the Public City: From Globopolis to Grass-roots Cosmopolis in a Post-national Urban Age", paper presented at Locality as Alternative Values: Resistance, Hybridism, Autonomy, The 4th International Conference on Locality and Humanities, Pusan National University, 21-22 June 2012.

24) *Ibid.*

Tourism Board (STB) recommended 11 zones of 'thematic development' ranging from 'Ethnic Singapore', the 'Mall of Singapore' to 'Rustic Charm'. As one of the 'Historic Districts' (in the Urban Conservation Master Plan) and 'Ethnic Quarters' (themed under the 'Ethnic Singapore' thematic zone under Tourism 21), Chinatown²⁶⁾ was accorded high priority in the state's creation of heritage landscapes. As envisioned by the new agenda, traditional buildings in Chinatown's shophouse landscape were no longer viewed as obsolete structures incompatible with the image of a modern, dynamic city. Instead, shophouses 'create a sense of human scale, rhythm and charm not found in much of our modern architecture', providing relief from 'the monotony of a high-rise environment'.²⁷⁾ Traditional Chinatown is no longer the territorial domain of a community of Chinese in

25) Chang Tou Chuang, "Heritage as a tourism commodity: Traversing the tourist-local divide" *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 18 (1997), pp. 46-68.

26) The Chinatown conservation area is approximately 23 hectares large, accommodating a total of about 1,200 structures of which about 700 are privately owned. It is subdivided into four smaller districts: Kreta Ayer (a commercial area where the largest day and night street market was located until the early 1980s and the site of the Jamae Mosque and Sri Mariamman Temple, both gazetted national monuments); Telok Ayer (the main landing point for nineteenth century immigrant labourers; distinctive for the number of Chinese trading companies set up here as well as prominent landmarks such as the Thian Hock Keng Temple, the Nagore Durgha Shrine and the Hokkien Huay Kuan), Tanjong Pagar (formerly a residential area for labourers working in the port nearby) and Bukit Pasoh (formerly a residential area and also the site of the Ee Hoe Hean Club, a recreational club for the wealthy Chinese).

27) URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority). *URA Annual Report* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1985), pp. 13-15.

decline but is elevated to national importance as a civic asset, 'a common bond place' for 'Singaporeans living in outlying new towns'.²⁸⁾ Conserving Chinatown as a veritable repository of tradition, history and culture can thus be understood as having the sociopolitical purpose of binding Singaporeans to place, to the city, and ultimately and vicariously, to the 'nation' by rendering heritage in material form. Chinatown, alongside other 'ethnic quarters', is also central to the state's attempt to bolster the tourism industry by selling Singapore as first 'Instant Asia', then 'New Asia', 'a city of many colours and contrasts, cultures and cuisines'.²⁹⁾ While the colonial state had racialised the Chinatown landscape using negative Chinese stereotypes, the contemporary state has inverted this image and capitalised on what it deems to be positive Chinese cultural traits. Chinatown is now identified with the pioneering spirit and enterprise of early Chinese immigrants to Singapore and showcased as a distinctively Chinese cultural area.

In order to harness market forces to heritage conservation, rent control was lifted in 1988/89 under the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act to allow for the recovery of premises for redevelopment in accordance with conservation guidelines.³⁰⁾ To encourage private owners to restore their

28) *Ibid.*, pp. 15.

29) Chang Tou Chuang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "New Asia-Singapore: communicating local cultures through global tourism" *Geoforum* 30 (1999), pp. 101-115.

buildings, the URA made available various incentives such as waiving development charges, eliminating car parking requirements and assisting owners needing to relocate their old-single person tenants. At the same time, restoration has had to adhere to stringent guidelines pertaining to the facade design, internal structure, signage, materials used and any other forms of alteration or addition with a view to retaining historical consistency and the architectural distinctiveness of the place.

Following these guidelines, property owners and developers have seized the opportunity to evict former tenants, refurbish the visual and structural quality of shophouse units including their wall openings, five-foot ways, columns, pilasters, window shutters, balconies and ornamentation, and sell them on the market as 'heritage' properties of particular interest to retailers wishing to 'capture the shopping and gourmet traffic right in the traditional retail heart of Singapore'.³¹⁾ In determining the type of building use, approved trades – usually those identified as symbolic of Chinese tradition³²⁾ – are encouraged while certain pollutive or incompatible trades³³⁾ are proscribed.³⁴⁾ Within

30) URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority). *Procedures for Recovering Possession of Rent-Controlled Premises* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1990), pp. 2 & 6.

31) *The Straits Times*, 23 September 1991.

32) These include herbal tea shops, religious paraphernalia shops, Chinese medical halls, clog makers, *mahjong* makers, calligraphers and fortune tellers.

33) Examples include engineering workshops, tyre and battery shops, western fast-food restaurants, supermarkets and laundrettes.

these broad parameters, however, URA's underlying philosophy stresses that market forces should be left to decide what types of trades exist in conservation areas as successful purchasers of conserved buildings have to make economic returns in order to continue to restore and maintain them. Thus, while meticulous attention is paid to preserving buildings and other structures 'for the past they represent', lifestyles and trades are left to the vagaries of free competition.³⁵⁾

The 1990s saw yet another round of revitalization of the Chinatown landscape. In re-inventing Chinatown in line with the 'new Asia' vision, the STB unveiled a S\$97.5 million plan to 'revitalise' and 'enhance the Chinatown experience'. The proposed 'facelift' aimed 'to bring out the full flavour of the place's sights, sounds and smells' and included an interpretative centre to provide a 'gateway' for visitors entering Chinatown; a new theatre for wayang (Chinese opera) performances; street performances from puppet-making demonstrations to martial arts shows; five 'themed' gardens; a food street with open-air cooking and dining; and a new market square selling fresh produce.³⁶⁾ This latest strategy draws heavily on the idea of 'theming' and the creation of 'narratives', or 'storylines which

34) URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority). *URA Annual Report* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1988), pp. 72-73.

35) *The Straits Times*, 23 October 1991.

36) *The Straits Times*, 29 September 1998; 22 November 1998.

connect places and experiences in visitors' minds out of the raw material of local history'.³⁷⁾ The key principle is to represent the history of the place as a linearised history, an 'ideal genealogy'. STB, for example, makes it clear that 'the final product [after being repackaged as a single themed narrative] should enable any visitor, whether in a packaged tour or in a free and independent format, to understand how and why Chinatown came to be - covering for example the Chinese diaspora, Sir Stamford Raffles' town plan which led to the creation of ethnic zones in Singapore, the trades of yesteryears, present conservation efforts and future developments'.³⁸⁾ The history of Chinatown, as mapped onto both 'real' (on the ground) and 'representational' landscapes (on brochures, maps, storyboards and tourist guides) is yet another version of the history of the nation as a unidirectional march of progress, moving inexorably from the past to the present and into the future. Like urban renewal before it, the incessant process of reworking the Chinatown landscape through urban conservation and subsequent 'facelifts' is state-driven, conceived as part of the need to refurbish the built environment as a means to enhance heritage tourism assets as well as to serve socio-political purposes of forging national identity.

37) STB (Singapore Tourism Board). *Tourism 21. Vision of a Tourism Capital* (Singapore: Singapore Tourism Board, 1996), pp. 63.

38) *Ibid.*, pp. 28.

The Muted Politics of Place in the Making of Chinatown

State initiatives in making Chinatown the centrepiece in urban conservation and heritage tourism projects in the 1980s and 1990s did not go entirely unchallenged. Local reactions, particularly from long-time residents, have not all been positive, with some lamenting the over-commercialisation and the privileging of tourism in the reworking of the landscape. Others have expressed concern that the strategies of adaptive reuse and the theming of the landscape have created an inauthentic “shell” with no “soul”.³⁹⁾ In the 1990s, the Singapore Heritage Society, a small local interest group which aims to promote heritage consciousness, critiqued the STB for turning Chinatown into an “ethnic theme park” using “the simplistic formula of capitalist profit criteria” and urged instead that festival activities, residential living and everyday lived culture should be brought back to Chinatown if the place is to regain its vibrancy and meaning for Singaporeans as well as tourists.⁴⁰⁾ Critics raised a number of issues of contention, including:

39) Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Lily Kong, “Reading landscape meanings: state constructions and lived experiences in Singapore’s Chinatown” *Habitat International* 18, no. 4 (1994), pp. 17-35; Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Lau, W.P. “Historic district, contemporary meanings: Urban conservation and the creation and consumption of landscape spectacle in Tanjong Pagar,” in B.S.A. Yeoh and L. Kong ed. *Portraits of Places: History, Community and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1995), pp. 46-67; Joan Henderson, “Attracting tourists to Singapore’s Chinatown: a case study in conservation and promotion” *Tourism Management* 21 (2000), pp. 525-534.

40) See Chang Tou Chuang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh (1999); Kong (2011), pp. 93-97.

- the superficiality of delineating sub-districts as this “wrenches the place out of context and ‘frames’ it for purposes of easier marketing for tourists” and instead conceiving of Chinatown as “a landscape dotted with critical nodes”; STB’s plan imposed sharp boundaries on Chinatown in artificial ways
- the “Mandarinised Chinese” version of Chinatown rather than the diversity of dialect groups and trades, as well as the multi-ethnicity of Malay and Indian residents, businesses and places of worship
- the “stage management and artifice” of the new theatre complex, Chinatown Interpretive Centre and themed streets with “colour-coded street signs, street lamps, street furniture and free-standing story-boards” and instead bringing back the “sensory experience” of Chinatown through “native elements” such as wayangs, pasar malams, festival markets, the marking and opening up of houses “where a notorious criminal or wealthy towkay once stayed, [or where] a famous club or brothel or lodging for the first labour trade” were once located, and “loud” signs displayed by shophouses; and
- the gentrification of Chinatown to draw people back through zoning land parcels for new residential developments and hotels and instead building low-cost, medium-rise HDB housing and giving priority to “families of hawkers in the area and to single-person old folk units for [the] existing aged population there”⁴¹).

In contrast to the above views, for the Chinatown Business Association, the remaking of Chinatown as a tourist landscape has not gone far enough. For example, without affordable hotel space in close proximity, stimulating night traffic presents a challenge. Conversely, given Singapore’s weather, the food street is not viable during the day. These challenges for the business

41) *The Straits Times*, ‘Chinatown - the debate’, 8 February 1999.

community prompt a counter-narrative in which more collaborative efforts between state and capital are sought to enhance business opportunities.

In the last decade, the redevelopment of Chinatown proceeded more or less in accordance with STB's plans. Given the proximity of Chinatown to the Central Business District, it soon became evident that, between the pulls of 'heritage' and 'enterprise', Chinatown's redevelopment tilted more and more towards commercialisation. In 2005, for example the Minister for National Development Mah Bow Tan announced revised guidelines that would allow bars, pubs and health centres on the upper floors of the shophouses in Chinatown, even though these were still ruled out for the Historic Districts of Kampong Glam and Little India.⁴²⁾ A month later, the Telok Ayer area of Chinatown was taken off URA's Historic Districts list to liberate the area from restrictive policies banning offices from the ground floor of shophouses as "the area has evolved and become more suited to small businesses and office set-ups".⁴³⁾ Zoned for commercial use, conservation shophouses in Telok Ayer soon became popular with creative companies such as advertising, design, financial and professional services firms seeking alternative commercial space amidst tight office supply and a

42) *The Straits Times*, 'More pubs, bars may open in Chinatown', 27 Sep 2005.

43) *The Straits Times*, 'Interest in Telok Ayer shophouses picks up', 25 October 2005.

surge in office rents in the city.⁴⁴⁾ Gentrification has become the underlying rationale for redevelopment, as seen in the “extreme makeover” of the iconic Majestic Hotel from a “creaky, cranky septuagenarian” into a boutique hotel “combining a hip design sense with a sympathetic nod to its glory days of old”⁴⁵⁾; the upgrading of Chinatown Square Central, a cluster of conserved shophouses and a 15-storey office block, into an “upmarket complex featuring more bars, live music pubs and shops”⁴⁶⁾; the cleaning up of sleaze in cobble-stoned Duxton Hill and its “rebirth” as a conservation shophouse neighbourhood with high-end restaurants and cafes⁴⁷⁾; and the planned multi-billion-dollar “glitzy revamp” of Tanjong Pagar, transforming “dodgy bars and seedy karaoke pubs” into “the next waterfront city” with “high-rise condominiums, glitzy hotels and plush offices”⁴⁸⁾ .

Protest against the increasing commercialisation of the heritage landscape in different parts of Chinatown has been largely muted, surfacing mainly in the form of the occasional murmur in the daily press:

44) *The Business Times*, ‘Shophouses in the CBD for sale’, 10 October 2007.

45) *The Straits Times*, ‘A fling of the past’, 25 Feb 2006.

46) *The Straits Times*, ‘Cheers to new-look China Square Central’, 5 Jun 2009.

47) *The Straits Times*, ‘Duxton Hill comes alive’, 24 Apr 2011.

48) *The Straits Times*, ‘Glitzy revamp ahead for Tanjong Pagar’, 27 Nov 2010.

Growing up in Chinatown, I saw how the life and soul of the area were taken away and reduced to what many see today - a tourist trap.... I do not deny that many buildings in Chinatown have been preserved, but for whom and to what extent? Were our pre-war houses painted in multi-colours like you see today? Did they house mostly bars, pubs and restaurants? Did the shopkeepers sell keychains, T-shirts and CDs? Is it not an irony that we spend money telling the world that we are 'Uniquely Singapore' yet we keep on destroying what is uniquely Singaporean?⁴⁹⁾

Alongside nostalgic voices against commercialisation, other views, more appreciative or tolerant of the difference afforded in living in conservation areas subject to the countervailing pulls of heritage and enterprise, have emerged. A young resident of Duxton Hill remarked,

Some friends have teased me about the dodginess of the area, but I personally find it exciting. In more enthusiastic moments, I have even dubbed my neighbourhood Singapore's answer to the East Village in New York City. Cheek by jowl in the terraced shophouses, the seedy bars co-exist with bridal studios, expensive restaurants, gay clubs and a Christian theology school - an eclectic mix that is a shining example of how disparate factions can live in harmony.⁵⁰⁾

Others dismiss complaints about Chinatown's sanitised artifice, pointing instead to appreciating Chinatown as a work-in-progress, and for the diversity it celebrates, including

49) *The Straits Times*, 'We are destroying what is uniquely Singaporean', 11 Aug 2007.

50) *The Straits Times*, 'Sleaze is not all bad', 26 Feb 2009.

the combination of different kinds of ethnic heritage that makes the place unique:

The other notable thing about Singapore's Chinatown - it's not just about Chinese people. True, during the festival frenzy of Chinese New Year, it's hard to see the forest for the faux cherry blossom trees. Chinatown seems to be all about red and gold baubles, pots of lime bushes and pussy willow, as well as scores of stalls flogging bak kwa, chicken floss, pineapple tarts, love letters, freshly-minted hong bao and rabbit-shaped balloons.... But even from its early days, Chinatown was home to a significant number of ethnic Indians or, more specifically, Hindus and Indian Muslims. There's a Temple Street in Chinatown, named after the Sri Mariamman Temple, the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore, as well as a Mosque Street, named after the Masjid Jamae. To imagine Singapore's Chinatown without the Sri Mariamman or the Jamae would be like imagining one's body without a heart or a lung - impossible.⁵¹⁾

Singapore-Style Multiracialism and Chinatown's Legitimacy

A product of colonial "race/space" policies, Singapore's Chinatown has continued to be reinscribed with new forms of legitimacy as it evolves in postcolonial times. Save for the early independence period when Chinatown was threatened with erasure as a result of the quest to modernize the city-state, the precinct has been accorded a secure and generally uncontested place in national and popular imageries of the Singapore self. In the state's visions and plans to develop national agendas in the

51) *The Business Times*, 'The cleanest Chinatown in the world', 5 Feb 2011.

areas of heritage, national identity and tourism, Chinatown features prominently as a pivotal site of interest. While there were alternative visions for the conservation of Chinatown as well as concern over the 'heritagising' of the landscape to minister to the needs of tourism, none of these dissenting voices - mostly of a disparate rather than organized nature - denied Chinatown a place of legitimacy in Singapore's past, present or future. This is partly because of the state's multiracial strategy to ensure 'even-handedness' in conserving and enhancing historical districts identified as the cultural hearths of different communities: while the conservation and development of Chinatown led the way, Little India⁵²) and Kampong Glam (the traditional Malay quarter)⁵³) were also accorded attention, resources and status as 'Historic Districts' alongside Chinatown. Singapore-style multiracialism is based on the formula of four 'separate' but 'equal' races in a nation of 'one people'. The philosophy propounds the need to submerge ethnic identity to the larger purposes of nation-building and national identity construction while at the same time provides space for each of the four founding ethnic groups - Chinese, Malay, Indian and 'Other' (CMIO for short) - to promote, valorise and reclaim ethnic links and identity. This form of multiculturalism

52) Chang Tou Chuang, "Singapore's Little India: A Tourist Attraction as a Contested Landscape" *Urban Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000), pp. 343-366.

53) Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, "The conservation-redevelopment dilemma in Singapore: The case of the Kampong Glam Historic District" *Cities: The International Quarterly on Urban Policy* 13, no. 6 (1996), pp. 411-442.

continues colonial classificatory schemas drawn upon under British rule and underlies ethnic policies governing inter- and intra-ethnic relations in different spheres of life.

It is also possible that when landscapes such as Chinatown become 'naturalised' as part of the everyday, its ideological content becomes masked and rendered innocuous.⁵⁴⁾ Certainly, the politics of place around Chinatown as a legitimate site of Chinese ethnicity has been far more muted compared to ethnically based politics around issues such as language and the role of ethnic organizations.⁵⁵⁾ As an 'ethnic' place of leisure and consumption, Chinatown testifies to and reproduces a version of multiculturalism based on consumerism (i.e. taste and preferences) as well as symbolic representation rather than social contracts (and which in fact may mask the lack of robust social relationships threaded into the making of Singapore-style multiculturalism).⁵⁶⁾ This is not to suggest that there are no

54) James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, "Rereading the landscape" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988), pp. 117-126.

55) Lily Kong and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "Nation, Ethnicity and Identity: Singapore and the Dynamics and Discourses of Chinese Migration," in L. Ma and C. Cartier ed. 193-219. *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003b).

56) There are similarities with Veldboer's (2008) study of the City Mundial in The Hague where he laments the lack of real 'diversity dividends' in the city's approach to ethnic neighbourhoods. The contrasting case study would be Vancouver's Chinatown where Professor Dan Hiebert (personal communication) argues that the strength of third sector involvement in sustaining Chinatown produces an emerging multicultural Canadian society which goes beyond multicultural consumerism.

other kinds of contestations in Chinatown. Comaroff, for example, argues that Singapore's Chinatown is constructed as a state landscape that renders certain subjects to the margins of society and that at the same time, it becomes 'open to powerful new forms of contestation that evade the techniques of a regime of "biopower"'.⁵⁷⁾

Chinatown's place in the popular imagination is also secure. A recent survey on heritage awareness among Singaporeans show that not only did an overwhelming majority favour the idea of heritage preservation in Singapore for current and future generations, they gave the highest level of priority to the nation's historic and cultural districts such as Chinatown (compared, for example, to museums or natural sites).⁵⁸⁾ While a large minority were critical of the over-commercialisation of heritage preservation in Singapore, it is also clear that visitorship figures (for the primary purpose of appreciating history and heritage) were the highest for historic districts such as Chinatown.⁵⁹⁾

57) Joshua Comaroff, "Ghostly topographies: landscape and biopower in modern Singapore" *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 1 (2007), pp. 56.

58) Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, "Strengthening the Nation's Roots? Heritage Policies in Singapore," in K.F. Lian and C.K. Tong ed. 299-331. *Social Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore* (Leiden and New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008). URA's own survey of Singaporeans in the same year revealed that more than half of its respondents identified conservation areas (such as Chinatown) to be one of the three major features that make Singapore special to the respondents, and more than half - the highest proportion - indicated that Chinatown was special to them, among all conservation areas (Kong, 2011).

During key Chinese festive periods such as the Lunar New Year, Chinatown is clearly the site where locals converge to consume 'authentic' Chineseness - for example, while essential new year goodies such as barbecued sweet meats can be found in almost every regional shopping mall or neighbourhood shopping centre, long queues still form without fail outside well-known Chinatown shops selling these traditional products when the new year approaches. Clearly, Singaporeans do not hesitate to converge in Chinatown during key Chinese festive periods such as the Lunar New Year, to experience and enjoy a certain ambience.

In partnership with the Chinatown Business Association and the local community organizations, the authorities have promoted Chinatown as the locus of Chinese New Year by locating the main festive celebration in Chinatown, as seen in the promotion for 2008's Chinese New Year:

From 19 Jan to 6 Feb Chinatown will be transformed into a fairyland of light and colour with spectacular overarching decorations lining the streets. [At the] same time the festive street bazaar will be waiting offering all the traditional Chinese New Year goodies such as waxed duck, barbecued sweet meats, assorted cookies and other new year accessories. This makes it the 'must visit' place for Chinese, locals and tourists to soak in the festive atmosphere. On the eve of Chinese New Year (6 Feb) the countdown to the

59) *Ibid.*

Year of the Rat gets underway with thousands of revellers partying all night long.⁶⁰⁾

In 2009 and again in 2010, more than 2 million people visited Chinatown during the Chinese New Year festivities.

Indeed, tourism has recently been booming in Singapore (over 11.6 million visitors in 2010, or more than twice its population) and of the free access tourist destinations in Singapore, Chinatown numbers in the top three (along with Orchard Road, Singapore's shopping thoroughfare and the historic district of Little India).⁶¹⁾ Of interest is the fact that while Chinatown remains popular with western tourists (particularly those from Italy, Germany, the UK and France in 2009), it is also becoming a major magnet for the rapidly growing numbers of tourists from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.⁶²⁾ As a tourism market, China has grown in importance very rapidly and has become in recent years Singapore's second largest visitor-generating market; the first millionth Chinese visitor milestone was recorded on 19 December 2006.⁶³⁾ In short, Singapore's Chinatown continues to

60) <http://wuerstelstand.blogspot.com/2008/01/chinatown-chinese-new-year-celebrations.html>, accessed 21 January 2008.

61) STB (Singapore Tourism Board). *Annual Report on Tourism Statistics 2009*, Singapore: Singapore Tourism Board, Research and Statistics Department, Corporate Planning Division, 2009. In https://www.stbtrc.com.sg/images/links/X1Annual_Report_on_Tourism_Statistics_2009.pdf accessed 29 August 2012.

62) *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. In contrast, tourists from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and India recorded the lowest level of interest in Chinatown.

hold its own as an object of the tourist gaze, even with the Chinese dominance of tourist numbers.

Conclusion

Singapore's Chinatown has gained a place of unquestioned legitimacy both as a heritage artifact within a highly planned urban landscape undergirded by the CMIO multicultural ideology, as well as a leisure and tourism site which generates activities for both tourist and local visitors, and revenue for businesses and the state. Unlike most of the ethnic neighbourhoods located in western cities, Singapore's Chinatown cannot be described as a hub of 'immigrant ethnic entrepreneurship' in the same way. First, Chinatown in Singapore is a landscape created by Chinese immigration under a liberal colonial immigration regime in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it is no longer the receiving area for immigration streams but is *remembered* and *valued* as a tribute to the early pioneering immigrants. Second, it has to be understood as an 'ethnic' neighbourhood in a very different way, where 'ethnic' does not signify 'minority' or 'immigrant' culture but *represents* the dominant 'race' within the Chinese-Malay- Indian-Other equation characterising the fabric

63) 'Business services industry', BNET Business Network, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1NDC/is_2007_Feb-March/ai_n25006634/pg_3, accessed 19 June 2008.

of Singaporean society. Third, unlike the case of migrant residential concentrations in the west, the making of historic district needs to be contextualized within the cultural politics at play between the state and its citizens, as the city-state contemplates pathways of nation-building and heritage tourism. As such, Singapore's Chinatown is not so much the lynchpin of an alternative 'ethnic economy' but instead integral to the cultural politics of national identity as well as significant as a consumption site for heritage tourism selling a mainstream, memorialized 'ethnic culture'.

Finally, it is important to note that struggles over place identities are no longer focused on historic districts such as Chinatown, possibly because it has ceased to be a predominantly residential landscape integral to the everyday realities of the majority of Singaporeans - even as it continues its symbolic function as the fount of Chineseness in the popular imagination. As Chinatown becomes more akin to a vision of the "past" which is more like a "foreign country"⁶⁴), the historic district is no longer part of everyday lived culture but the locus of a cultural politics of nostalgia. The absence of open or organized place politics around Chinatown is congruent with the depoliticization of culture in the city-state and is an indication of the

64) David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

comfortable ways the historic district has been folded into the national imaginary of the multiracial self. As Yeoh Seng Guan notes (drawing on Appadurai's work), 'a locality is opportunistically regarded as a site that can either generate national level nostalgia, celebrations and commemorations or as a necessary condition of the production of nationals'.⁶⁵⁾ By harnessing Chinatown as a representative landscape within the logics of CMIO-multiracialism, the locality is clearly drawn into the work of reproducing compliant national subjects that cohere with state philosophy. This appears in sharp contrast to other contexts such as in Auckland, where a group of 1.5 generation and New Zealand-born Chinese conducted a very public and sophisticated "No Chinatown" campaign (aimed primarily at resisting what they saw as essentialising Chineseness in disadvantageous if not dangerous ways) when a local authority started toying with the idea of establishing a Chinatown in the city.⁶⁶⁾ Chinatown's place is also anchored by tourist dollars and the ethnic precinct looks to enlarging its role in Singapore's tourism game plans given the rapidly growing and lucrative China outbound market fuelled by the emergence in Chinese cities of a large middle class with strong consumption power.⁶⁷⁾

65) Yeoh Seng Guan, "Producing Localities and Nationhood in a Globalizing Southeast Asian city", *Localities 2* (2012, this issue), pp. 161-200.

66) TVNZ, "Auckland Chinatown idea splits opinion", 21 June 2011, see <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/auckland-chinatown-idea-splits-opinion-4253982>.

67) 'China tourism industry', China Knowledge Press, September 2004, p.376,

This of course does not spell the end of the cultural politics of encounter in the city-state. Current negotiations over the meanings of multiethnicity are concentrated at other newly emerging sites of contestation within Singapore's rapidly evolving transnational ethnoscaapes. In a 'cosmopolitan' city where over a third of the population of five million at the end of the first decade of the new millennium do not belong to the "CMIO citizen-races", the cultural politics of race, class and nationality are now most intense in the contact zones where Singapore citizens encounter foreign others, including 'weekend enclaves' of foreign workers⁶⁸), residential heartlands where locals and foreigners live⁶⁹) and professional or hi-tech workplaces with

http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reportinfo.asp?report_id=220246, accessed 19 June 2008.

- 68) B.S.A. Yeoh and S. Huang, "Negotiating public space: Strategies and styles of migrant female domestic workers in Singapore" *Urban Studies* 35, no. 3 (1998), pp. 583-602; P. Kitiarsa, "The Ghost of Transnational Labour Migration: Death and Other Tragedies of Thai Workers in Singapore," in B.P. Lorente, N. Piper, H.H. Shen and B.S.A. Yeoh ed., *Asian Migrations: Sojourning, Displacement, Homecoming and Other Travels* (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2005), pp. 194-220; Zhang J., "Shopping Centers as Ethnic Enclaves: The Emergence of the "Permanent Outsiders" in Public Spaces in Singapore", paper presented at the IMISCOE Workshop on Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Diversity, International School for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam, 26-28 May 2005.
- 69) S. Huang and B.S.A. Yeoh "Transnational Families and their Children's Education: China's "Study Mothers" in Singapore" *Global Networks* (Special Issue on "Asian Transnational Families") 5, no. 4 (2005), pp. 379-400; Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Natalie Yap, "Gateway Singapore: Immigration Policies, Differential (Non)incorporation and Identity Politics," in M. Price and L. Benton-Short ed., *Migrants to the Metropolis: The Rise of Immigrant Gateway Cities* (Washington: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 177-202.

increasing numbers of expatriate workers⁷⁰). In this sense, while discourses and practices continue to be negotiated as Singapore attempts to transform itself into a city-state of multiple ethnicities and nationalities, Chinatown as the ethnic precinct par excellence - with firm claims to historical legitimacy, revenue productivity and representative value as part of “CMIO-multiculturalism” - is no longer controversial.

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70) B.S.A. Yeoh and S. Huang, ““Foreign Talent” in Our Midst: New Challenges to “Sense of Community” and Ethnic Relations in Singapore,” in A.E. Lai ed., *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press for Institute of Policy Studies, 2003), pp. 316-338.

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