



No.138

**Experiencing Sacred Spaces:
The Negotiation of Authenticity
by Tourists and Worshippers**

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ISSN 0129-8186
ISBN 981-3033-32-0
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Experiencing Sacred Spaces: The Negotiation of Authenticity by Tourists and Worshippers¹


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I. Introduction

There has been an emergence of what one can term the authenticity problematique. Increasingly, the terms "authentic" and "authenticity" have become easy catchphrases used to refer to an array of things. One, for instance, notices that Delifrance calls itself the "Authentic French Café", that Mum's Cuisine (an eating place) serves "authentic sweet and sour pork ribs" and that Nike carries a product known as "Authentic Replica". It does appear that as Trilling argues, the word "authenticity" "has become part of the moral slang of our day" (Trilling quoted in Redfoot, 1984: 304).

The term "authenticity" has been used in many connections and this paper concerns itself specifically with the authenticity motif as it relates to tourism. The pull of authenticity is not a new characteristic of tourism and the industry has become an expert in marketing images of authenticity to tourists. With the increasing popularity of cultural and heritage tourism, the interest now is to explore and understand the links between issues of authenticity and culture, and importantly, the tourist industry's claims of "authentic culture" or "authentic heritage".

Within these claims, authenticity is firstly held to refer to the possibility of getting past the more usual, and inauthentic tourist experience towards a backstage encounter² (MacCannell, 1976: 91-107). Secondly, it is also held to refer to a creation of authenticity that contrasts the inauthentic and alienating nature of modern life with the authenticity of a simpler, more unsophisticated native existence (Cohen, 1979; 1988; MacCannell, 1976,

¹ This paper is based on my Honours thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology, NUS. Here I express my thanks to Associate Professor Ho Kong Chong for his comments while he was supervising my thesis. This working paper, in part, also originated in a presentation at the 14th World Congress of Sociology but it has since been considerably expanded. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Maribeth Erb for helping with the editing of the paper presented at the Congress, and to Alpha Kappa Delta for their Undergraduate Sociology Student Scholarship.

² Working on Goffman's model of front and backstage, MacCannell conceptualizes six different stages on a continuum which begins with the front region which the tourist wants to get past, and ends with the 'real' back region which is the ultimate goal of the tourist but one that is hardly ever reached. From stages two to five, the tourist encounters what MacCannell terms as "staged authenticity" (1976: 98) and these include contrived events and attractions that are passed off as authentic. Thus, the tourist is on a constant quest to reach the sixth and final stage since that holds 'total authenticity'. Nonetheless, MacCannell in his final analysis, argues that the tourist will ultimately find his efforts thwarted by his hosts who hide this region from him and he is "damned to inauthenticity" (Cohen, 1988: 373).

Silver; 1993). Such discussions argue that the experience of dramatic changes³ taking place during the modern era has resulted in a sense of dislocation and disassociation from the past and this has led to an acute need to relocate oneself and reclaim some authenticity in one's social life:

The search for authenticity is held to be understood as relating to a deep-rooted and widespread sense of alienation that first emerges with the advent...of modernity and in particular, the increasing reflexivity of the modern condition. (May, 1996: 716)

Tourism then functions as the medium through which the quest for authenticity is focussed since reality and authenticity is, for the modern man, elsewhere and out of his domestic contexts (MacCannell 1976: 160). This search for authenticity is perhaps best evidenced by current trends in tourism which increasingly sees tourists who want to discover "previously untouched worlds" (Silver: 1995:308).

Nonetheless, the assumption that all tourists are in search of authenticity is perhaps an overgeneralization considering the array of tour packages that cater to different tourist tastes. The fact that such holidays involving the three famous "Ss" - sun, sand and sex - are extremely popular amongst some tourists only goes to show that not all tourists are in search of the authenticity of a simpler or more primitive existence of native people. Also, it is clear that different types of tourism do overlap, such that a tourist interested in experiencing authentic cultures or traditions may on some occasions indulge in other aspects of the country such as any of the three "Ss". Hence, one needs to be aware that the concern for authenticity is negotiated by different tourists who have different needs or preferences for it.

Despite these qualifications against over-generalizations, it is nonetheless apparent that there has been a development of the authenticity motif in tourism and that it bears closer study. In particular, there needs to be greater understanding of the attempts made by the tourism industry towards the construction of authenticity or the creation of expectations amongst tourists that they will in fact experience the authentic. Also given these constructions, what are the responses of tourists to these presentations and do they impact the lives of the local community, since they often become the main actors in this "authenticity show"?

³The dramatic changes referred to here are associated with the rise of capitalism, industrialism and scientism (Miller, 1994: 67)

Recently, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) published "Yours to Explore" guides on Chinatown, Little India and the Singapore River. These free brochures invite tourists to explore Singapore independently, to know Singapore, her people and their cultures and significantly, the industry promises the authenticity of these experiences:

Singapore's Chinatown is *like no other*. A place where many of our forefathers first made their homes, where *historic buildings* have been lovingly conserved, where *century-old beliefs* are still practiced, and in a manner true to the New Asia-Singapore spirit, where fashionable new ideas have taken root. The *soul of Chinatown runs deep*, even as many exciting developments are taking shape. (Emphasis by writer, "Yours to Explore" guide on Chinatown).

Here, it is obvious that authenticity is constructed as being unique and at the same time as a state of "naturalness", unchanged by wider influences. Authenticity, it appears, also suggests "timelessness" (Ooi, 1997: 10). However, the fact that all societies cannot escape the movement of time attests that a recourse to authenticity is contradictory. Yet paradoxically, in Singapore, both images of timelessness and changing times are played up in tourist literature. This strategy attempts to straddle both a claim to an authentic past as well as the pride of Singapore's modern sophistication. Indeed, STB states that their new branding "New Asia - Singapore" aims to:

...capture and express the essence of today's Singapore. In many ways, with its progressiveness, sophistication and unique, multi-cultural Asian character, the city-state is an expression of the modern dynamism that marks the entire region, a place where tradition and modernity, East and West meet and intermingle comfortably. (Mr. Tan Chin Nam, then CEO of STB in his message to the travel industry)

The attractiveness of any country to a tourist is based on a confluence of factors, including the provision of amenities, a good transport system, friendly people, but importantly, having interesting things to do and see. Significantly, tourism is also tied to the landscape and built environment because these are visible representations of the country and her people. In a way, buildings and places tell a story and "evoke the essence and magic" (Savage, 1992: 11) of the country. Given the appeal of heritage tourism and the demand for authenticity, the STB has, with the help of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the Preservations of Monuments Board (PMB)⁴, directed its efforts

⁴ The PMB, formed in 1971, is an executive statutory board and its day-to-day functions are coordinated and handled by the National Heritage Board (NHB) and URA. NHB is PMB's Administrative arm whilst the

at making the local landscape visibly attractive to her guests whilst retaining their status as authentic representations of local culture and history.

However, STB's efforts at marketing authenticity are challenged by the reality that Singapore's rapid industrialization had left its marks on our built environment. The emphasis on urban redevelopment saw the clearance of much of the old city-centre, including landmarks and street culture which demonstrated "exoticism, 'wealth' and cultural diversity - themes that wholly endorsed the Western perceptions of an oriental city." (Savage, 1992: 11). In this sense then, is the STB's claims to authenticity threatened and if they are, what steps do they have to take in order to continue marketing authenticity? Given the country's limited land resources, as well as the years of urban renewal, the case study of Singapore is hence interesting as it examines how the state, through its government agencies like STB, URA and PMB, works within these constraints to lay its claims to authenticity.

In particular, this paper focuses on the use of places of worship gazetted as national monuments⁵ for the "staging of authenticity" (MacCannell, 1976).⁶ Many of these sites lie within both the Civic and Cultural District and the designated ethnic enclaves of Singapore, namely, Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam, and are popularly promoted in tourist literature on Singapore.

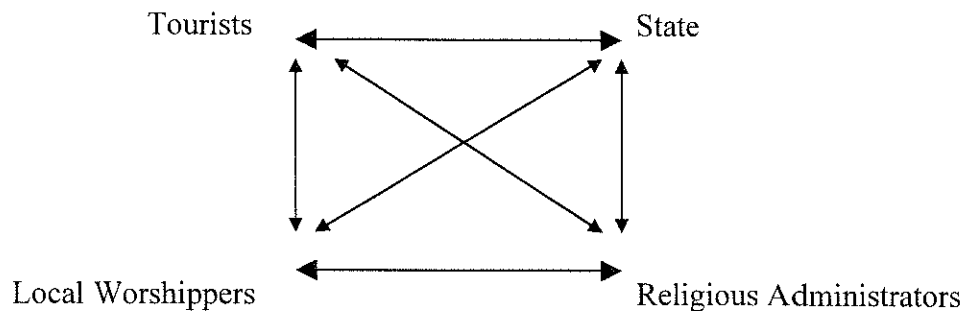
However, given that these religious buildings are a part of many Singaporean's lives, activities and experiences, would tensions as a result arise because these sites are now defined and used as places of interest? Religious monuments then become places

URA is its Technical arm. It is PMB that decides whether a historic building, structure or statue is worthy of preservation and they submit these recommendations to the Ministry for Information and the Arts (MITA) and upon approval from MITA, the PMB then proceeds to gazette the building/structure/statue as a national monument. After a historic building is gazetted, the URA Conservation Section (as PMB's Technical arm) will conduct research and draw up the preservation guidelines for the monument. URA will subsequently, process applications involving minor restoration works on the monuments. Applications involving major works on the monuments are evaluated by URA and approved by the PMB. The above information was kindly provided by PMB.

⁵ PMB is the government agency put in-charge for the gazetting buildings as national monuments. To-date 32 buildings have been gazetted, of which 18 are religious buildings. According to the PMB, "the purpose of preserving national monuments is to safeguard them as enduring landmarks and as testimony of the Singapore's unique, multi-ethnic and rich cultural heritage." (PMB's Tax-exemption Scheme Publication, 1994: 3). Hence, given their historical and social significance, it is these buildings that attract many tourists.

⁶ This paper focuses on Thian Hock Keng temple, Sri Mariamman temple, Sri Perumal temple, Sultan Mosque and St Andrew's Cathedral. These were chosen primarily because they lie within the Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India Historic Districts as well as the Civic Cultural District and have over the years become popular tourist attractions as well as regular features in many city tour packages. Indeed, they appear in the 1997 *Official Guide* as "The Surprising Sights of Singapore".

where multiple strands of relationship are worked out and negotiations carried out between different groups of people. These relationships can be conceptualized using the following diagram:



The above relationships will be explicated in the following sections and the first to be examined is the state-tourist relationship in Section II. This relationship is discussed in terms of the state's attempts to satisfy the tourists' demands for authenticity, especially in their use of religious monuments to market and present authenticity. Necessarily, the tourists' reactions to the state's attempts at staging authenticity will also be examined.

The state's incorporation of places of worship in its marketing strategy implies a need for them to justify the presence of tourists in these places to both worshippers and religious administrators. Section III thus seeks to understand the relationship between the state, worshippers and religious administrators. Importantly, I will examine how the different parties invest different meanings in places of worship and I will also argue that these differences exist because each has a different stake in them. In Section Four, the relationships between religious administrators, locals and tourists within places of worship are explored. How has tourism impacted on these places and to what extent do the meanings and values that locals invest in their religious monuments change? More importantly, to what extent also are these meanings shared by tourists, if at all?

II. The Commodification of Authenticity

A. The Business of Authenticity

When I first entered tourism, the first question I asked was, what *business* are we in? Are we in the tourism promotion *business*? Are we in the tourism development *business*? I thought about it and I said we should be in the total tourism *business*... We're in the tourism industry and our main

purpose is still to bring in tourists to Singapore. (Emphasis by writer. Mr. Tan, chief executive of Singapore Tourism Board in an interview with PATA Travel News, January 1995).

Given the demand for authenticity by tourists, it should come as no surprise that the tourism industry has made "authenticity" their "business". In this section, I will examine how the state, represented by its agencies like STB and PMB, relates to the demands of the tourists. In particular, I discuss how Singapore's built environment, as represented by its places of worship, is used to stage authenticity for the tourist gaze and explore why these are regarded as appropriate places to do so.

Silver's (1993) evaluation of existing travel advertisements and brochures to examine marketed images of authenticity in Third World tourism has been thought provoking. He argues that "travel literature seeks to portray indigenous peoples as authentic, in order to cater to certain images within Western consciousness about how the Other is imagined to be." (1993: 302-303). Importantly for him, touristic images of the Other can only be properly understood if they are examined from the historical context of the development of Orientalism⁷. Taken in this context, the marketed images of locals within travel literature and brochures usually depict in exaggerated manner what Westerners have historically conceived the Other to be like (Silver, 1993).

Integral to Silver's (1993) thesis is that tourism involves giving the tourists the opportunity to see what they themselves wanted and expected to see in the countries visited, thus verifying previously held images of the Other. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard argues that

when individuals cross cultural boundaries through face-to-face encounters, they naturally tend to rely on stereotypical conceptions of each other to frame and structure the interactions. Rightly or wrongly, stereotypical representations of the Other are resilient, widespread, and integral in cross-cultural translation, however, dynamic and experimental these conceptions can be (1989: 102)

If tourism is treated as an outlet through which people seek refuge from the alienating conditions of the modern world, because authenticity is to be found elsewhere (MacCannell, 1976: 160), it then becomes mentally comforting that they *do* see images of "authentic indigenous people" engaging in "authentic indigenous activities". Conversely, if

⁷ Here, Silver argues that these images of the 'authentic non-Western Other' have been "a part of Western consciousness at least since the first contacts were made between European and Arab peoples." (1993:303)

they were to be presented with images that rejected previously held notions of the Other, these may in fact be too mentally jarring and therefore also difficult to reconcile with. Hence, whilst it goes without saying that the tourism industry is geared towards providing creature comforts to tourists, it is perhaps more challenging to understand how the industry meets the tourist's demand to consume images of the Other.

In this sense, Singapore's multi-racial setting, makes for an interesting case study in this discussion because the conception of the "generic Other" can in fact be personified into several "ethnic Others". Indeed, ethnic tourism is integral to the marketing strategy of STB and this promotion of Singapore's multicultural traditions has also been discussed by Leong (1997). For him, images of ethnic traditions are represented in "shopping areas, places of worship, festivals and public holidays, food and cultural performances" (1997: 84) and these are organised along bureaucratised categories of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Other (more popularly referred to as CMIO). Leong argues emphatically that:

geography and landscape are *not selling points* for tourism in Singapore...And given the historical amnesia or erasure of most of the history of the settlement through cleanliness campaigns and technocratic rejection of the past, heritage tourism is *not something the STPB can boast about*. In place of scenery and heritage, the tourists industry capitalizes on the country's multicultural traditions. (Emphasis by writer, 1997: 83)

However, contrary to his arguments, I argue that "geography and landscape" *are believed* by government agencies like STB and URA, to be selling points for tourism in Singapore and that heritage tourism *is* in fact something the STB boasts about. I also argue that places of worship, especially when granted status of national monuments in fact form part of "geography and landscape" as well as represent Singapore's (official) heritage and are thus sold as such to the tourists. In fact, places of worship located within officially ethnicized areas become spatialized representations of Singapore's multicultural traditions. STB, for example, highlights the unique presence of a Hindu temple as well as mosques in their *Yours to Explore* guide on Chinatown, saying: "We take particular delight in suggesting that you start your Chinatown tour quite paradoxically at the Hindu temple."

That Singapore has experienced nearly two decades of rapid urban renewal, resulting in "the historical amnesia or erasure of most of the history of the settlement" (Leong, 1995:84), it does come across as ironical that the state continues to boast of possessing an urban heritage reflective of our country's past and our people's culture, and

in addition insists that these are authentic. Thus, it appears that although this presentation of authenticity is a challenging task, it is nonetheless one that the state needs to address given tourists' demand for it.⁸

B. The Resurrection of the Past

The desire of the tourism industry to present authentic local sites for tourism is perhaps nowhere better evidenced than STB's establishment of the Tourism Task Force and its subsequent commissioning of a Report on Chinatown by eight architectural firms to develop guidelines for its conservation in June 1986.⁹ Importantly, this move came in the wake of a sharp 3.5% fall in tourist arrivals in 1983 (Yeoh and Huang 1996: 413) and the economic recession in 1985. Impetus was given to preservation because it would enrich the cityscape and this was viewed as necessary because the fall in visitor arrivals was in part blamed on "the lack of color in the increasingly antiseptic city-state" (Burton, 1993: 36).

Thus, despite the claim that their promotions of Singapore are "rooted in reality and truth" (<http://www.travel.com.sg/sog/articles/branding.html>), STB has had to "resurrect" and "reconstruct" Singapore's landscape in order to meet the need for authentic sites in cultural and heritage tourism. As the spokesperson for STB I interviewed, states:

We don't by any means put ourselves on the same level as Indonesia or Thailand in terms of the richness of the culture, but we are trying very hard to make sure that traditional elements in the culture do come through...we try very much to show them the cultural elements (Personal interview)

The tourism industry has made "authenticity" their "business" and did so by championing conservation and subsequently marketing images of their authenticity. However, the authenticity of conserved historic sites have been restricted to "authentic architectural details" of shophouses. As such, the success of such strategies have been limited and they are questioned by locals who have a stake in local landscapes as well as by tourists. Indeed, one tourist I interviewed had this to say:

⁸ Of course, this demand comes not only from tourists, but from Singaporeans themselves who also protest against the state's sacrifice of the built urban heritage.

⁹ A total of US\$210 million was pledged to this proposal to conserve Chinatown as well other ethnic enclaves (Chang, et.al. 1996: 294)

I guess your government has realized that conserving the past is important, I mean I can see that there have been efforts to renovate these buildings. But I wonder whether its too late? Actually, are these restored or have they just been built? These buildings look very new like as if they have just been painted. ...did they used to be this color? (Jean is from Britain and she was referring to the shophouses around Sri Mariamman where I interviewed her).

At this point, it appears that a distinction must be made between the authenticity of the tourist setting and the authenticity of the people within these sites. In this sense, the argument here is that "tourists achieve authentic experiences through their relationships with people in tourists settings" (Pearce and Moscardo, 1986: 125)

Given these considerations, places of worship within the historic districts may perhaps be the "last bastions" of authenticity. Firstly, because they have managed to retain *both* the "old" settings and the religious activities within and secondly, because tourists also come into contact with the locals who are seen to be engaged in "authentically local" forms of worship.

C. "The Surprising Sights of Singapore - Places of Worship"

I argue that places of worship in Singapore have become convincing places to stage authenticity because they are a confluence of the various meanings of authenticity as discussed above. Firstly, the architecture of these religious buildings, like shophouses, act as sign posts of local culture and as gazetted monuments are also expressions of a historical and cultural story. Thus, for the spokesperson for the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan (SHHK), the temple is important to locals and is appealing to tourists because:

...it shows how we as a migrant community struggle hard and throughout our struggles, mutually help each other...The *temple symbolizes this* because the temple in those days was the apex of the Hokkien community. People come here to pray to *Ma Zo*¹⁰ and thank her for bringing them safely to Singapore. (Emphasis by writer).

Secondly, unlike shophouses where traditional activities have largely been removed, the activities within these buildings have been retained and locals are seen within a "natural" setting, engaging in a "natural and local" form of worship, thus giving a sense of authenticity. Lastly, religious rituals, considered as "Asian rituals", take place within them and are interesting because they represent an instance of the "Other" engaging

in their "indigenous forms of worship". Thus, the temple is interesting because it is a symbol of past struggles and cooperation. The spokesperson for the Hindu Endowments Board (HEB), that I interviewed, argues that tourists find an experience of Singapore meaningful because of

...the *artistic value*, the *cultural meanings*, the *feelings*, the *sights*, the *smells and also the sounds*. That is very important. I think the tourist promotion board has now understood the game. It is not just seeing, it is smell and also the sounds, each will give an impression, all these things must be present. So tourists when they walk into a tourist temple, you must have that smell of that incense, that kind of familiar sounds of bells. The temple is authentic because first thing you are told you must take off your shoes outside. Once they are in, during prayer time they will have sounds, drums and also incense, things to see, people to see, people in traditional dresses (referring to the *sari*). (Emphasis by writer).

My research did not uncover any records that showed when places of worship became tourist attractions but it appears that the intensity of tourists' visits have increased substantially over the years. For example, The spokesperson for SHHK states that:

I think that they have been coming for a long time, but I am not sure when exactly. But now, you know that many of them visit Thian Hock Keng because even the parking outside of the temple is reserved for tour coaches.

My enquiries at tour agencies featured in the *Official Guide* have revealed that all City Tours and the Lion City Classic (under the heading Nostalgia/History Tours) include at least one place of worship in their itinerary. The HEB spokesperson informs me that:

The tourist agencies, when they package Chinatown, they also include Sri Mariamman...Buses will drive in and the parking facilities there are very important. What they do is they try to park in front of the temple or along South Bridge Road and the tour is around Chinatown, the conserved area and ends up in Sri Mariamman Temple. So Sri Mariamman Temple is packaged as part of Chinatown. I think they see an average of 2,000 people coming in everyday and there are usually more on weekends.

It should be highlighted that Sri Mariamman Temple, like other Hindu temples also have set opening hours and these are 7.30-11.30 a.m. and 4.00-9.00 p.m. Given that within these nine hours, 2,000 tourists visit the temple, one gets a sense of the intensity of their arrivals in Sri Mariamman Temple.

¹⁰ In the Taoist-Buddhist religion, *Ma Zo* is the Goddess of the Sea.

Furthermore, when visiting the more popular places of worship, I found that certain services have been added to cater to tourists. For example, in Thian Hock Keng Temple, a souvenir shop has been opened in the temple's adjoining courtyard; in Sri Mariamman Temple, there are postcard stands carrying maps of Chinatown and Singapore, as well as signboards informing tourists about payment for photography and entry restrictions, and these are printed in different languages like English, Japanese, French and German; and in Sultan Mosque, there are pamphlets outside the main hall providing a short write-up on Kampong Glam and the Sultan Mosque, and these have also been translated to Japanese. Also in Sultan Mosque there is a sign requesting tourists to observe certain appropriate behavior on the premises. Thus, places of worship have become such popular tourist attractions, to the extent that their owners and caretakers have to take steps to regulate the presence of tourists. However, we note that these are only taking place in the above-mentioned places of worship, and not in those located in housing estates. Hence, we note that the location of these religious sites influence the intensity of tourist visitations, and the key locations include Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. Thus, contrary to Leong, it may be argued that places of worship are taken as part of, and promoted in terms of, their "geography and landscape" (1997: 83).

From the above analysis, places of worship are interesting to tourists for a variety of reasons - they represent Singapore's culture and history, their architecture is interesting, they are an amalgam of sounds, smells and sight and lastly, they depict the "old" aspects of modern Singapore. However, precisely because these sites are a part of many Singaporean's lives, activities and experiences, tensions have arisen over the way these sites are defined and used as places of interest.

III. Beyond Official Representations of Authenticity

A. Re-locating Other Actors in Tourism

Tourism does not simply involve an interaction between tourists and a country's built environment. Indeed, the activities and lifestyles embedded within the sites visited also play a pivotal role in adding to the experience of the place - in fact, tourists and locals now share the same space but each perhaps use it for different agendas. Hence, state

agencies like STB and PMB have found it necessary to justify their promotion of places of worship in tourism to both religious administrators as well as local worshippers. Necessarily, the opinions of the various parties on the current situation are shaped by the meanings they have invested in these places of worship.

Current works on tourism and conservation (as a means to preserve authenticity) in Singapore tend to focus on how conservation, “because it ‘museumizes’ or makes ‘elitist’ [the various conserved districts] to encourage tourism, has failed to preserve [Singaporeans’] heritage” (Teo and Huang, 1995: 589). They also argue that in the process of conservation, traditional activities and street life have been destroyed (Teo and Huang, 1995: 46), removing an important basis of authenticity. There are calls to put more thought into developing the human and activity environment, not just the hard infrastructure (Teo and Huang, 1995; Yeoh and Lua, 1995; Savage, 1992). However, such discussions have ignored an examination of religious spaces which have retained their original uses despite conservation. How has tourism impacted these places and how has the state justified its role in this to locals and religious administrators who witness the increasing encroachment of their places of worship by tourists?

B. Religious Monuments as Experienced by Worshippers

My current examination on the reactions of locals to the state’s promotion of places of worship as tourist attractions, builds upon past works done by Kong¹¹ (1990, 1992, 1993) which examined the opinions of locals when the state demolished or relocated their religious buildings. Significantly, both our studies seek to examine the symbolic meanings and values that individuals invest in their religious buildings and compare these to the ways in which the state has defined these places as functional space to be made use

¹¹ Kong’s works dated 1990, 1992 and 1993 make use of the same material collected between May and June 1989. A questionnaire survey involving 500 respondents from Clementi and surrounding private estates such as the West Coast area and the Sunset vicinity, was conducted. In addition, she also adopted a qualitative method whereby in-depth interviews were conducted with 23 interviewees from various religious groups. For a fuller report on her methodology, the reader can refer to Kong (1991). Of particular importance here is that her interviews intended to discover “detailed, personal information on (the respondent’s) religious lives and their relationships with their religious buildings” (Kong, 1993: 343). Kong’s findings can be summarized as the following: places of worship are firstly, “sacred centres where concentrations of religious activities take place”, secondly “they are places where one’s god(s) may be found and where one may undergo a sacred experience”, thirdly “they are also centres of intense personal attachments and experiences, closely associated with special people and special times in one’s life” and lastly, for some these religious places are also “social centres where social bonds are forged and developed” (Kong 1992: 40).

of effectively and pragmatically. Nonetheless, in my study, I am also interested in examining these meanings vis-a-vis those held by tourists and whether, these meanings are felt to have been enhanced, changed or even lost with the entry of tourists to places of worship. Importantly, my work is premised on the concept of authenticity and I will examine how locals and tourists do experience the authentic, but in very different ways and through different means.

Places of worship are to the interviewed local worshippers, sacred. This is because their gods can be found there and it is also a place where they sustain a religious experience:

In the temple, you can have a heart to heart talk with the Goddess...you get a sense of calm, you feel that the Goddess is there to help us. (Lisa, a Chinese religionist¹² on what the temple means to her)

In our Catholic Church, there is the presence of God, we believe that he is physically there in the tabernacle. I feel that God is there, and that he loves me and I feel very peaceful. (Sarah, a Catholic on what the church means to her)

A lot of Hindus, they come because of the priest and all the deities...basically, it is the environment, the peaceful environment. (Naidu, a Hindu devotee on the importance of the temple to devotees).

Respondents were further asked whether it is only in their place of worship that they can find their gods or undergo a religious experience, and their replies were:

We believe that god is everywhere, so you don't actually need to come to the temple, you can still pray in the house, but a lot of people will still choose to come to the temple. This is because in the temple there is a priest and he knows how to do certain things. Most of the Singaporean Hindus will not know how to do the things in the proper way and so there is guidance here by the priest. (Naidu)

The church is a place to seek God, it is not the only place but it is a good place to seek God and generally it is the fellowship, every Sunday you meet

¹² I use the term "Chinese religionist" as did both Wee (1976) and Kong (1993) which includes Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists, Shenists as well as those that follow other Chinese syncretic religions. Lisa, for example, visits both Buddhist and Taoist temples.

everyone to worship God together. We believe that when two or more are gathered, God is there. (Rachel)

I can pray at home, but by going to the temple, I show greater sincerity and respect for the Goddess, it is like visiting her at *her* home. (Lee)

Hence, worshippers still find it necessary to visit their places of worship despite stating that their gods can also be found outside of them. From their responses, one is able to extract several significant insights on what places of worship mean to worshippers. From Naidu's response, the temple is a place where prayers and rituals are done "the proper way". This highlights that within the temple, there is an insistence that proper behaviour in Hindu worshipping is adhered to and this further points to the fact that it is perhaps not so much the act of worship itself but the *proper way* of carrying out this act that is important here. Hence, in engaging in the *proper act* of worship, Naidu gains a *better experience* of his god. In another instance, coming together in fellowship is regarded as important for Rachel because a community in prayer confirms the presence of her god amongst them. Lastly, Lee highlights the importance of making a physical "journey" to find his goddess and there appears to be an inherent belief that this proof of dedication will ultimately be recognised by his goddess.

In this sense, it appears that worshippers see their places of worship as authentic settings for, within these buildings, they get a heightened sense of their religious experience which is at the same time felt to be a genuine encounter with their god who is present there. These definitions of authenticity are vastly different from the authenticity that is presented for the tourist gaze, defined more in terms of Singapore's past, culture and architectural traditions. It is these layers of meanings within the term "authenticity" that causes concern and at times even anger when places of worship are used as tourist attractions.

While individuals identify with their places of worship on a personal level and invest in them religious and symbolic values, the state on the other hand tries to maintain as far as possible, formal ties with these sites.¹³ In general, the buildings are affected by the

¹³Given the religious heterogeneity of Singapore, the state has adopted a secular position towards religion. This policy is sustained by four tenets. Firstly, "no one religion is identified as the official state religion", secondly, the state allows for "freedom of worship", thirdly, commitment to the principle of "multiculturalism" (This is explained in terms of the state's commitment to all cultural and religious groups, without prejudice to both majority and minority groups.), and lastly, the view that "religion and politics must be kept strictly separate" (Kong 1993: 26).

general principles of land-use policy in Singapore, that of efficiency, orderly growth and pragmatic use of space and land. As Kong argues, the state is “driven by material concerns in its treatment of religious buildings” (1993:346). Importantly these material considerations emphasized that the land on which places of worship are located be rationalized for economic purposes, and this can include its demolition or re-location to make way for “better” economic developments, or in the current study, be effectively used as a place of interest in tourism, an industry that brings in high revenue.

The existence of such conflicting conceptions of “sacred space” - as a place where one encounters one’s god and as a place that must serve or at least support an economic functionality - has inevitably resulted in tension between worshippers and the state and these become particularly apparent when specific issues like the use of these spaces for tourism arise. These can be gathered from the following sentiments:

I personally do not like the presence of tourists here. When a person enters the temple, he or she *must be clean physically and mentally*, that is why we take off our shoes, socks and even wash our feet before we enter the temple. But these tourists, when they come in, *they only want to take pictures*. So most of them take off their shoes, but they might not have purified themselves, or realised that this must be done in a Hindu temple...I think they should not be allowed to enter. Well, they can *stay on the outside* and look in but maybe not allowed to come in. This is one thing I don’t understand, *how can tourism be encouraged in the temple?* But only the government can do anything about this, but do you think they will? *Tourism brings in money!* (Emphasis by writer, Devi, a Hindu devotee in Sri Mariamman Temple).

Here, Devi raises several issues and concerns. Firstly, there is a belief that the temple and tourism do not “mix”. It is clear that certain assumptions about tourism are held and these are not congruent to those held about temples. These assumptions relate to the purity of intention - locals make themselves pure because of their intention to meet and worship their god; tourists may perform a physical act of cleansing by removing their shoes, but their intention is to take photographs. Hence, like Naidu, Devi is concerned about proper behaviour in the temple, which in this instance is the act of purification. Perhaps inherent in this concern, is that the sacred meanings of the temple will be affected given the entry of tourists and their intentions. His consternation that tourism is encouraged stems from this negative evaluation of tourism. Secondly, the role of the state is highlighted, but their willingness to help is questioned because of its attraction to the

financial returns when tourism in the temple is continued. At the same time it may be gathered that for Devi, the importance of the temple to tourism is significant to the extent that a discontinuation will have an impact on tourist dollars. Thirdly, there is a sense of helplessness ("only the government can do anything about this") and this is experienced twice- helplessness because of a personal inability to prevent tourist visits, stating that only the government can help, and a deeper helplessness when it is felt that even the state will not step in.

Hence, for worshippers like Devi, the sacred meanings of the temple are important and must be respected. The state, seen as the main perpetrator for why tourism takes place in the temple, is criticised for its concern with tourist dollars.

Despite these claims that the state is "doing it for the money", the state has on the other hand justified the presence of tourists by recourse to a more noble intention, which is a desire to promote Singapore's culture to tourists. They highlight that these places of worship have both historical and cultural value:

One of our key aspects is the multicultural facets of Singapore, *people are very intrigued* by the fact that so many different cultures can co-exist very harmoniously. So obviously, temples are *very important in terms of our culture* and how we as a nation work and live together. So I think it is very important that tourists when they come in, they see the modernity, but *how the real Singaporean lives* and what they do is also very important to visitors. We are encouraging more tourists to go out on their own to explore the suburban areas and see how real Singaporeans lives, and likewise for the temples and mosques. That is all part of the Singaporean's way of life, so it's very important and *it symbolizes the culture*. If you go around to Chinatown or Little India or Arab Street, you'll see many tourists who are interested in these. *Architecturally, they are also very eye-catching*, so that in itself will draw visitors. (Emphasis by writer, the STB spokesperson)

Devi is unable to understand how and why tourism can be encouraged in the temple and this "confusion" stems from his assumptions about tourism and the temple. The STB, on the other hand, is very clear on why tourism exists in places of worship, and this has to do with the way they are seen to represent Singapore's culture, the "real Singaporean" way of life as well, as its architectural merits. When worshippers see beyond these justifications, they, like Devi, are left with the feeling that the temple has been misused.

Importantly, the state further justifies the presence of tourists in places of worship by arguing that this is a by-product of the state's attempt to preserve artefacts of cultural

and historical value - that is, these places are important to the state not so much because it encourages tourism which brings in money, but because it retains representations of Singapore's history. Thus, the claim is yet to another noble intention and Mr Liu Thai Kher, then chief executive officer and chief planner of the URA makes the argument that "We conserve primarily for Singaporeans. Tourism is secondary" (cited in Lee, 1991: 1).

In another statement by URA:

conservation is a continuing process of planning the development of a city which recognises its history. In retaining parts of old Singapore, we are retaining the memory of the early immigrants as embodied in their churches, temples, mosques, houses, street names and localities. (cited in Lee, 1993:2).

These justifications have been accepted by some worshippers who also share in the official sentiments that these monuments have a rich history which should be shared with both future Singaporean generations and tourists. The state is praised for its decision to preserve these monuments and is in fact thanked for safekeeping buildings that hold dear memories and histories for the respondents:

My grandmother as well as my mum brought me here to pray last time when I was small. That is part of the reason why I still come to Thian Hock Keng, the other is because I believe in Ma Zo¹⁴... I am glad that it is a National Monument because I feel that it is part of my *family tradition* to come and next time when my son and daughter are older, I can still bring them here to pray. (Emphasis by writer, Mrs. Lim)

I don't know about other families, but my family has been coming here for many years... so I am very *proud* that this is a monument, we should be *proud about our heritage*, lucky thing that the government has made Mariamman a monument. The tourists, when they come, they are also interested in this so I think *we should also show it* to them. (Emphasis by writer, Raj).

From the above responses, one can gather that places of worship are meaningful to worshippers not only because their gods can be found there but also because it holds other meanings like tradition and heritage. Indeed, it may perhaps be argued that this sense of pride is further enhanced and the cultural value of their places of worship reified *precisely because* of the presence of tourists there. That is, the very fact that tourists are interested in them lends value to these sites. Hence in this instance, the presence of the tourists is regarded positively. Indeed, for some temples like Po Chiak Keng, another gazetted

monument, the arrival of tourists signifies attention and appreciation, and this is important to them:

...(after the renovations are completed) we expect not only more worshippers but also more tourists to visit our historic temple which at the moment, has touched bottom with only a few people visiting a day. (Mr. Tan Khuan Seng, secretary of the temple, *ST*, 23 April, 1994).

Interestingly, when the worth of places of worship are placed on the number of people that visit it, the concern here is what happens when not enough people visit? Will the place of worship then be seen as having little value and hence liable to be demolished? This fear that places of worship may be demolished or re-located perhaps encouraged locals, particularly religious administrators, to cooperate with state agencies to assure their monument's survival. This could explain the concessions for the entry of tourists into the sites as this gives added value to the sites. Hence, just as it can be argued that the state has a stake in the place of worship because it attracts tourists, so can a case be made that these monuments have a stake in the presence of tourists since this ensures a recognition of their value which lessens the likelihood of demolition.

C. State ↔ Religious Administrators

Integral to the relationship between the state and religious administrators is the issue of the monuments' preservation. Religious administrators are bounded by law to liaise closely with the state regarding matters of renovation, and conversely, the state insists that temples be kept at their most original, thus authentic state. However, there is also a desire for religious administrators to comply with these regulations because in so doing, the cultural and historical value of the place of worship is recognized and maintained, and the state will hence continue to have vested interests in these places. The concern that religious monuments remain of value are perhaps a recognition on the part of administrators that the state takes a modernist stance towards its land programs, which includes taking out all that is not useful or relevant. The 1974 official statement made by Othman Wok perhaps reflects the greatest fears of religious administrators:

¹⁴ Ma Zo is the Goddess of the Sea, and it was for devotion to her that Thian Hock Keng was built.

It is not a deliberate policy of the Singapore Government to demolish places of worship... the object of development is to upgrade the living standards of the population as a whole...In the process of development, the old must make way for the new and demolition of some masjids, temples and churches affected by redevelopment is inevitable. (cited in Kong, 1993: 37).

Indeed, that “there is a provision under the Preservation of Monuments Act for the preservation order of a gazetted national monument to be revoked” (personal correspondence with Dr. Phang, executive secretary of PMB), only serves to reinforce the need for places of worship to remain “of value”.

Nonetheless, it is still necessary to highlight that the preservation of many places of worship have been state led. For example, Thian Hock Keng Temple, now a national monument, was nearly pulled down because the owner had wanted to sell its land. However, because it was gazetted, it was “saved” (ST, March 14,1996). It may be argued here that on hindsight, the Preservations of Monuments Act of 1971 “protected” the temple from destruction and local worshippers should be thankful for it. Nonetheless, I continue to argue that, whilst it does seem that the PMB did step in at an opportune time, preservation has been costly to the temple.

Whilst they are National Monuments, these sites continue to be privately owned. Yet, owners have to send in all construction plans related to their conservation to the URA for approval. Guidelines were released in 1992 to help the owners restore their buildings in a systematic manner and ensure that “all the intricate details which make up the particular character of each be fully preserved in the restoration process.” (PMB chairman Lim Kee Ming cited in ST, 5 June,1992). However, these guidelines have to be bought at \$1,000 each!

For some monuments, like Sri Mariamman Temple, artisans were flown in from India to restore various figurines of the gods and goddesses. These costs were in addition to that paid to the URA for their own set of guidelines. Likewise for Thian Hock Keng Temple, artists and architects familiar with Hokkien architecture had to be carefully selected and flown in from China to help with the detailing of the temple’s layout and architectural design so as to ensure the architectural authenticity of the site. These costs were also borne solely by the owner, the SHHK.

However, despite URA's rhetorical insistence that restoration be sensitive, reality shows a lack of co-operation by state agencies in assisting religious administrators in their compliance to restoration rules. For example, the SHHK spokesperson was, at the time of the interview, faced with the problem of getting work permits and employment passes for experienced Chinese artisans from the Construction Industry Development Board, which insisted that the workers undergo skills testing before being issued a permit. However, The spokesperson for SHHK has this to say,

But I ask the officer in-charge: do you have testers who are proficient enough to test the Chinese artisans? I have already put up so many justifications but yet all my work permits and employment passes have been turned down. We usually employ workers from Indonesia and Malaysia, but can you get a Malay, Bangladeshi, or Thai worker to do that kind of carving, to replace that damaged part? Crazy I tell you! It's a very frustrating experience.

Although conservation is dictated by the URA, it is clear from the above that all funds for the restoration of national monuments had to be raised by the owners. It was only recently that efforts to raise funds were made easier through the Preservation of Monuments Fund set up in 1994. According to a URA spokesman,

the scheme helps the owners, trustees or management committees of a national monument to raise funds, obtain tax-exemption receipts for donors and to use the donations to restore the monuments (ST, August 29, 1994).

The donations are directed to the monument of the donors' choice. Nonetheless a year after its implementation, it appeared that the tax exemption scheme was not all that helpful, especially to those monument owners who did not have such a large network to fall back on. A PMB member states: "People still make donations on an ethnic basis – Chinese temples get donations from the Chinese." (ST, August 13, 1995). However, the problem goes beyond that of attracting more donors as the spokesperson for SHHK states:

Actually, there are no benefits of becoming a national monument, unless you want to make use of the tax-exempted donation scheme. But even then, there are a lot of restrictions and conditions. So the Huay Kuan has decided not to use the scheme and instead raise our own funds.

Nevertheless, the state is able to legitimise their minimal financial role in the actual conservation process – emphasizing it's stand that religion and politics (and hence also any

outright monetary assistance) be kept strictly separate. Also, a commitment to "multiculturalism" necessarily means that the state must be even-handed in all assistance rendered to the different religious buildings (since they represent the interests of different community groups) but this is a financial burden that the state is unwilling to bear.

Thus, we realise that while the PMB and URA have been praised for their role in urban conservation, the real work continues to be carried out by the owners of the monuments, whose efforts are constantly thwarted by the very institutions put in place to help them. We witness on the whole that preservation has been tightly controlled in order to preserve the sites' authenticity. In fact, this presentation of authenticity is insisted on to the extent that the surroundings of the place of worship also have to comply with certain architectural designs. HEB, for example, wanted to add two more stories to a complex that is located on Sri Mariamman Temple's compound, to make it four stories high. The suggestion was with the intention of providing more facilities to the temple's devotees. However, the Board has been instructed that the complex can only be three stories high, for any higher would affect the pattern of Chinatown since the shophouses in the vicinity are only three stories high. Thus, the HEB spokesperson states:

Now, when we do extensions or renovations, we also keep visitors and tourists in mind, formerly, we don't, we just cater to the devotees. Now that we are a National Monument, now that tourism is part and parcel of Singapore, we keep in mind tourists, of course we don't like them, but we have to cater to them, we cannot tell them don't come.

In another instance, the Land Transport Authority has stipulated that all parking outside Thian Hock Keng Temple be for tour coaches only, rather than public parking for local worshippers. When I queried, the spokesperson for SHHK replied "If it was left to us, we would rather that there be no parking at all outside the temple so that it is a clear passage outside of the temple." Again, it becomes clear that despite owning the temple, the SHHK is not always given the freedom to make decisions regarding the temple or its surroundings.

Although the relationship between the state and religious administrators has been one of cooperation, such cooperation has not always been amicable but required negotiation and compromise. At the moment, it appears that more sacrifices have been made on the part of religious administrators and made for the better presentation of authenticity in tourism.

Given that worshippers and religious administrators continue to come into contact with tourists regardless of their willingness to do so, the next section explores the relationships between these parties as well as the various methods employed by the locals to manage the tourists' presence.

IV. Negotiating Authenticity: Intrusion and Management of Sacred Space

A. Religious Administrators ↔ Tourists

As discussed in Section II, the arrival of hundreds of tourists at such places of worship like Thian Hock Keng Temple, St. Andrew's Cathedral and Sri Mariamman Temple has become an everyday occurrence. Given this phenomenon, religious administrators now provide tourists with some background information on their religious sites and these have been discussed in the earlier section. In addition to these efforts, Sri Mariamman Temple is also planning their own guided tour.¹⁵ The HEB spokesperson states:

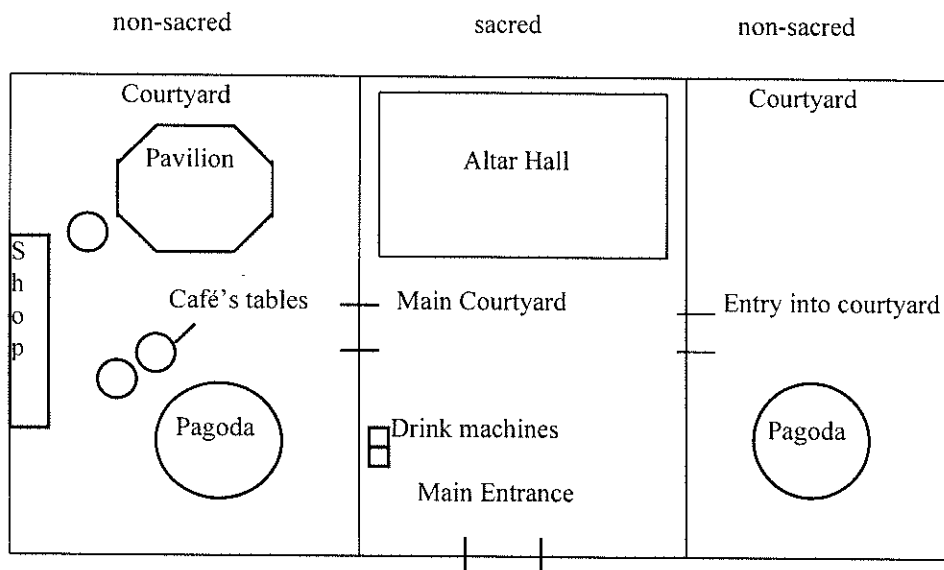
Since we are getting tourists everyday, rather than let them just come in take their photos and then leave, we might as well give them a tour around the temple. Most of them, they are told that they have 10-15 minutes to look around and take photographs. So, they walk in here move around, take photos but they don't know what is going on. Rather than make it look like a circus, we are thinking of giving this guided tour so they know why we do certain things.

Hence, for Sri Mariamman Temple, the irreversibility of tourist visitation has prompted them to make plans to make the temple meaningful for tourists. In other places of worship, the act of printing pamphlets is aimed at the same results - to give tourists a clearer understanding of the value of the place of worship and their significance to the worshippers. Nonetheless, the HEB spokesperson has possibly raised several other interesting issues. Firstly, it is felt that the mere act of taking photographs without knowing their significance removes the meanings of what is photographed. Similarly, the act of going into the temple without knowing its symbolic significance also has that same effect. Indeed, there is a fear that this lack of knowledge makes the temple look like a "circus". Thus, they feel that there is a need to save the temple from such an eventuality.

¹⁵ Presently, tourists who visit St. Andrew's Cathedral may also approach the church office for a guided tour around the premises.

Secondly, the HEB spokesperson has pointed out the existing scenario of a tour group's visitation to a place of worship - the tour bus arrives at the site, the tour guide gives a short history of the monument, like when it was built, its architectural merits and importantly, its significance in the wider setting. For example, a favorite point raised by tour guides is the presence of Sri Mariamman Temple, a Hindu temple, in Chinatown. After this, the tourists are told that they have about fifteen minutes to take a look around¹⁶. Thus, the place of worship becomes like many other tourist sites, where the tourists file in and then out and within that short period of time, take as many photographs as they can. The HEB on the other hand, would like to emphasize to tourists the symbolic meanings of the temple. Thus, the tour that they intend to give would include explaining to tourists the significance of the various gods and goddesses located in the temple, as well as the symbolic structuring of the temple. It is their hope that such information will enable tourists to better understand and appreciate why Hindus carry out certain rituals.

A different situation is however taking place at Thian Hock Keng Temple. There, a souvenir shop and small café have been opened in a courtyard adjoining the temple's main hall. The following is the temple's layout:



¹⁶ This was also compiled from my telephone inquiries at several tour agencies on what to expect if one was to join their City Tours, in which places of worship is a regular feature.

Figure 1: The above is the layout of the temple. Although it does not reflect all the features of the temple, its purpose here is merely to orientate the reader to the different spatial locations referred to in the current analysis. The shop refers to the souvenir shop. For SHHK, Thian Hock Keng Temple only refers to the main courtyard, although all three courtyards are their property. It is the left courtyard which has been leased out to a tenant which has decided to open a souvenir shop and a café. (Figure not to scale)

When asked whether it was the SHHK's decision to open the souvenir shop, their spokesperson was quick to point out that the two side courtyards were not part of the temple proper¹⁷. Although the land is also owned by SHHK, they have leased it out to tenants. He explained that it was the latter's idea to open the shop and café and emphasized that the figurines placed in the pavilion are for sale and have no religious significance in relation to the temple.

From SHHK's point of view then, there is a clear distinction between the temple and the courtyards in terms of religious significance, making it permissible for a tenant to open a souvenir shop. While the SHHK spokesperson agrees with me that tourists and even local non-worshippers fail to realize this distinction, he states that

the worshippers themselves know and they don't usually go to the shop and the shop is only a service to the tourists...(who) are not so much interested in the religion, but the temple's old building.

The current use of such a distinction between sacred - non-sacred to justify the presence of the souvenir shop is an interesting one and I will later examine how locals also have recourse to similar justifications to negotiate for themselves the presence of tourists in their places of worship. Here, the spokesperson's comment appears to suggest that the sacred - non-sacred distinction is important only to worshippers who have a direct stake in this site. Hence, for SHHK, they are not concerned about whether the tourists know that the courtyards are not part of the temple proper. This could be attributed to tourists not having a stake in the religious meanings of the temple.

Unlike the earlier situation in Sri Mariamman Temple, SHHK appears unconcerned over whether tourists are informed about the meanings of this religious site. Such a concern would have translated to attempts to make it known that the courtyard and souvenir shop are not part of the temple proper. Therefore, we have here, two very

¹⁷ However, it should be noted that in URA's guidelines, the temple is said to comprise of "the temple proper and two pagodas on either side, one with a pavilion" (ST, June 5, 1992).

different views on the potential impact of tourism. In Sri Mariamman Temple, the possibility that tourists enter the temple without realizing its religious significance means that they are liable to alter the existing sacred meanings, because they see rituals and the temple setting as a “circus”. This fear has thus prompted the administrators to step in and prevent such an occurrence. On the other hand, SHHK sees no need to inform them of any existing distinctions precisely because they *are* tourists. There is an assumption that tourists are not interested in such details and it does not mean anything to them. Furthermore as short term visitors who are unlikely to return, the knowledge of such a distinction is of no consequence.

Nonetheless, the presence of the shop has to some extent marred the authenticity of the temple for some tourists:

I like this temple very much. I think it is very charming...but I was rather surprised to see the drink machines and souvenir shop, they don't seem to fit in very much (Jaques, a tourist from France was interviewed at Thian Hock Keng Temple).

In this instance, authenticity was questioned although the overall authenticity of the temple was not rejected. This example suggests that “tourists...conceive ‘authenticity’ in different degrees of strictness” (Cohen 1988: 376). Here, Jaques recognizes but accepts the inauthenticity in the setting presented to him. Nonetheless, the authenticity that we speak of here is related to the physical setting - the fact that “it does not fit in” was perhaps based on a prior conception of what a Chinese temple should look like. However, in the case of worshippers, a more symbolic authenticity issue has been raised. While SHHK emphasizes that a distinction can be made between the religious significance of the courtyards and the temple proper, and that it is a distinction that worshippers are aware of, this was not true in my own research.

Worshippers that were interviewed expressed dissatisfaction that a souvenir shop has been opened in the temple:

I don't understand why they set up that shop here, it makes the temple look like so *commercialized*. (Emphasis by writer, Lee)

Because of that shop, Thian Hock Keng has become quite *commercialized*. In fact I would call it a tourist temple. *Personally, it affects my devotion*. Of

course when we go to the temple, we rather pray in a peaceful environment, where there is peace and tranquility. Recently, I prefer to go to the Goddess of Mercy Temple at Waterloo Street...but I'm here today because Chinese New Year is coming and my mother-in-law wanted to come. (Emphasis by writer, Lisa)

For them, the shop is seen as an attempt to support tourism in the temple. So unlike the perceptions of SHHK, not all worshippers will differentiate the shop from the temple. The fact that the temple is felt to be commercialized and even described as a tourist temple, implies that its sacredness has been altered. Also, in the case of Lisa, whose act of devotion and pursuit for peace was felt to have been affected, the temple then loses its symbolic authenticity. That is, she no longer feels that this temple is a place where she can find her god - the "commercialization" of the temple has made this less of an authentic place of worship.

In its act of allowing its tenant to open up a souvenir shop, SHHK has, although perhaps unintentionally, altered the sacred meanings of the temple for the worshippers. Worshippers do not know and therefore are unable to appreciate SHHK's distinction between sacred and non-sacred space. Thus, we witness from above that for some like Lisa, the presence of the tourist trade has influenced her to worship at another temple. Therefore, when places of worship are opened for tourism, religious administrators have on their part attempted to provide some services to tourists. However, certain actions like those of SHHK have adversely affected worshippers because they feel that these actions have diminished the sacred meanings of their places of worship.

C. Worshippers ↔ Tourists

It should be clear by now that local worshippers invest symbolic meanings and values in their places of worship. Importantly for them, these premises and their wider settings assure them that their acts of worship are indeed an "authentic" experience with their god, but tourists do not necessarily share this sense of "authenticity". When these notions of sacredness are felt to have been impinged upon, and the religious authenticity of the site altered, worshippers have expressed dissatisfaction with the presence of tourists. However, when attempts are made to regard the place of worship as possessing both sacred and secular meanings, which can also become spatialized distinctions, the presence of tourists becomes easier to bear. Necessarily, it must be added that this distinction that I

refer to is not dissimilar to the one that SHHK has made, but here it is not so much to justify the entry of such tourist trades like in Thian Hock Keng Temple, but one that demarcates where tourists can or cannot enter.

Worshippers feel that tourists do not observe the same respect that they do when they are in their religious buildings. There is an assumption that tourists are there for a different agenda. The response of Devi, (quoted on Page 17) indicates a fear that the sacred meanings of the temple will be affected because of the presence of tourists and their exemption from purification rites before entering the temple. Distinctions have been made along the lines of sacred/profane, pure/impure, worshipper/tourist, inside/outside. Thus, the assumption that tourists, because they have not purified themselves, alter the sacredness of the temple, making it profane and thus, they should stay on the outside. Their entry, is hence for him an intrusion into a sacred space that he as a worshipper is a part of.

Other respondents have also similarly expressed this sense of intrusion, and it is an intrusion of tourists and their cameras into the worshipper's sense of personal and sacred space:

When you are worshipping your god, there is a unstated understanding with those around that you don't stare openly at each other, so I feel very embarrassed when there is someone or you know there is someone nearby or behind you taking a picture of you. I become very self-conscious (Lakshmi, a Hindu devotee at Sri Perumal temple)

Here, Anjeli highlights that worship is a personal experience with her god. The presence of tourists is the entry of a third-party in this one-to-one relationship, and worse, this stranger is armed with a camera with the intent of capturing on film her personal experience with god. There is, thus, the sense that the private space has been opened for public viewing.

For others, the presence of tourists is resented because they feel that they have been put on show for the tourists to take a photograph of:

Westerners are what they are, they just don't know the sensitivities of Asians. The people are praying, and these buggers will just go right up to his face and point his camera and shoot...a lot of westerners, they come to this part of the world, they think they are on a picnic, you see. If you go to Vatican they don't allow you to wear your mini skirts or your bare-backs, but you get people like that walking into the temple, very scantily clothed...They think its a circus...they think there is a big show going on here, most of them are very curious. Majority of the Westerners think that we are a downtrodden people ...Can you go to one of those churches in

USA or Europe and point your cameras just in front of their face, their brain and click. When you can't do that, where the hell do they get that courage to do it if they don't think of us as lower. They must be thinking that we are lower, right? If not, they won't do it...but this is a place of worship, people are sensitive to this. (The HEB spokesperson)

The HEB spokesperson has raised several concerns. Firstly, he points out that in a place of worship, certain appropriate styles of dressing should be adhered to, especially for women. Hence, by not complying with this rule, tourists have shown disrespect. More importantly however, the contention here is that tourists from the West do not respect locals because they are Asian. This lack of respect is for him most covertly expressed by their act of photography, because this is something that they would not do elsewhere. His argument that tourists think that it is "circus" is interestingly analogous to Chalfen contention that "tourist assume that everyone they see or every place and thing they encounter are 'open game'" (1979: 441).

The presence of tourists and their cameras are most acutely felt when the temple holds special festivals, because tourist arrivals at the temple are higher. This is further exacerbated by the STB who prints special pamphlets to inform tourists of the event: "One of the most spectacular festivals celebrated in Singapore, Thaipusam offers tourists and local shutterbugs alike a spectacle not to be missed." (STB Publication). For some tourists, "photographs help to document or "prove" that they have experienced some degrees of authentic life" (Chalfen, 1979: 438), and within the context of Thaipusam, the pictures taken are possibly regarded as one of the best documentations.

When asked about Thaipusam and the presence of tourists, the HEB spokesperson states:

They think that it's some *monkey doing some monkey business*, they think that they are seeing *something funny*, they see this guy poking his face, poking his chin and all that. What respect, I don't think any tourist is going to respect the devotee, again they think they are *seeing a circus*...but to them, they think that this is authentic and they would go back to tell: you know that day I was walking along and there was this festival going on at Serangoon Road, and these people are daring you know, they put skewers in their bodies! They probably don't know whether it is a Buddhist or Hindu Festival! (Emphasis by writer, the HEB spokesperson)

For the worshipper, Thaipusam is a religious event where great religious devotion and sacrifice are displayed. Hence, when the tourist is perceived to be disrespecting these meanings by treating it as a "circus show", indignation is expressed.

In a way, worshippers perhaps fear being regarded as a spectacle in which they become seen as a "monkey doing some monkey business", as suggested by the HEB spokesperson. The attempt then, is to prevent this from happening and the proposal for conducting their own temple tour is perhaps the HEB's way of providing tourists with knowledge of their rituals, which could lead to greater respect for their religion.

Nonetheless, it should be highlighted that not all tourists have been as disrespectful as the HEB spokesperson described them to be. In my interviews with tourists at Thaipusam, many knew that it was a Hindu festival and that the devotees who carried *kevadis* had been fasting for several months and many expressed respect for the devotees' faith:

I think it's just amazing... It takes *real faith* in their belief. (Emphasis by writer, Jill, a tourist who was interviewed at Thaipusam).

On another occasion, my interview with Christine, a British tourist, highlighted her desire to know more about Hindu rituals:

Two days ago, I visited the Hindu temple and they were having their worship session. The priest was there, and the people were holding these little cups? I don't really know what they were, but I wished I could have found out a bit more. (interview was done outside Sultan's Mosque)

At the same time, there are worshippers who state that it is alright to allow tourists in the place of worship *as long as* they observe proper behavior. These worshippers treat tourists as outsiders who want to come in to see Singapore's culture and traditions, and this absolves them of any intrusive behavior because they are uneducated on what is expected of them in an Asian place of worship:

You can't really blame them, they are new here. You can't expect them to know everything. Tourists should be better informed about the dos and don'ts. That should be the *responsibility of STPB and the tour guides*... I don't know about other families, but my family has been coming here for many years... so I am very *proud* that this is a monument, we should be *proud about our heritage*, lucky thing that the government has made Mariamman a monument. The tourists, when they come, they are also interested in this so I think we should also show it to them. (Emphasis by

writer, Raj).

They only want to see our culture, and since this building is part of our history, we should be proud to show it to them. (Mrs. Ling)

Mrs. Lim's and Raj's remarks serve to reiterate the earlier argument in Section III, that places of worship hold not only sacred meanings, but also secular meanings which include being apart of the worshipper's history as well as tradition. In this instance, one realizes that when worshippers disapprove of the entry of tourists, they do so with the view that tourists have misappropriated their sacred space either by not giving due respect to the rituals, or by rudely taking pictures of worshippers in prayer. On the other hand, when they approve of this entry, they do so on the grounds that there is heritage or architectural merits to be displayed. Hence it appears that there could perhaps be conceptions of what is permissible and what is not permissible for the tourist gaze.

In this way, one can meaningfully employ MacCannell's (1976) use of Goffman's model of front and back regions to examine the place of worship. MacCannell (1976: 101-102) suggests six stages of a continuum, beginning with the front region and ending with the backstage. From stages two to five¹⁸ the tourist encounters what he terms as "staged authenticity", where front regions are made up to look like back regions, or back regions which permit only occasional entry of tourists.

The promotion of the religious sites' architectural merits can perhaps be seen as the tourists entry into the front region. Yet we note that increasingly, tourists themselves are not simply satisfied with such presentations and like Christine above, there is a growing desire to learn the reasons behind certain rituals. Yet at the same time, we realize that this desire to seek further entry has been viewed as problematic by worshippers because tourists have not approached this in a sensitive manner:

Tourists, you let them in, but they take advantage of it, they go right up to photograph people when they are praying. (The HEB spokesperson)

I once saw a tourist go right into the inner sanctum!¹⁹ He thought that nobody was looking. That was very rude, even worshippers are not supposed to enter. (Sashi)

¹⁸ Nonetheless, MacCannell's schema is limiting in that it is difficult to make reliable distinctions between stages two to five.

¹⁹ The inner sanctum is the innermost shrine where only priests are allowed to enter.

Hence, as the inner sanctum can only be entered by the priest, the tourist can thus be said to have forced his way into the sixth stage, which is the most sacred. Thus, the HEB's plan to conduct their own temple tour is perhaps also a reaction to this growing demand to see the "real" back stage. In so doing, they can also limit the possibilities of tourists' misdemeanor. Nonetheless, this tour can perhaps be seen as one of MacCannell's (1976: 101) intermediate stages, where tourists are given a glimpse into the back region.

Despite this concession, it appears that at present, tourists will continue to find their efforts to reach the "real" backstage thwarted (MacCannell, 1976: 98). This is evident in the Sultan Mosque or Sri Mariamman Temple, whereby efforts have been made to keep tourists apart from the actual place where worshippers are praying. Thus, in the mosque, there are plaques informing tourists of appropriate behavior and restricted entry into the main hall. In Sri Mariamman Temple, a sign has also been put up to inform tourists that a fee will be collected if they intend to use their camera or video-camera (\$2.00 and \$5.00 respectively). This, the HEB spokesperson explains, is an attempt to discourage tourists from taking photographs.

This separation of space is slightly more interesting in the Hindu temple. Whilst it may be argued that the inner sanctum can be considered to be the sixth and final stage, it is also a stage that most worshippers themselves cannot enter. Hence, for the worshippers themselves, apart from the sanctum, the space within which they carry out their worship can also be conceptualized as their back region, as this is the space where they experience their personal encounters with their god. Necessarily, it has been tourists' intrusion into this space to take photographs of the worshipper that the latter complains about. Yet it is this stage that is most interesting for the tourists, as worship in Hinduism involves various actions and responses from the priest and the worshippers in the form of a mini procession. To be able to witness this scene unfolding is thus taken as entry into a backstage setting.

However, precisely because this is the backstage, the tourists' accessibility to it is made more difficult. This attempt at demarcating the front and back region of the temple is carried out by a separation of physical space, such that only devotees are allowed beyond a certain point and tourists are prohibited from entry. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this space is not totally hidden from the view of the tourists since the partition is enforced not by walls but by a notice board and metal barriers. The tourists are able to visually partake in the local people's act of worship despite being ostensibly outside of it.

Notwithstanding, this demarcation makes the tourist conscious that he has been kept out from a back region and at the same time, assures worshippers that their sacred space has not been totally intruded upon.

In allowing worshippers to physically distinguish the sacred (their worship and experience with their god) and the secular (the presence of the tourist who is not there to worship their god), these have become coping strategies used to deal with the intrusion by tourists and their secular meanings.

Still, other worshippers have found it unnecessary to allude to such demarcation of space, arguing that a worshipper should give God his or her full attention rather than be easily distracted by the presence of tourists:

I believe that when you pray, you should forget about your surroundings and give full attention to God. If one is affected by the tourists, and the sound of a camera can distract him, then I think the person's mind and heart is not with God. (Naidu)

Here, the most sacred space is the worshipper's encounter with god and in that encounter, all is obliterated, including the tourists. Hence, the presence of the tourist does not and should not affect the worshipper's sacred experience.

The presentation of authenticity is not as simple as what the tourism industry wants it to be. The built environment is a confluence of relationships shared by different actors and these have to be worked out. Sacred and secular meanings are called into play and these, for many worshippers, must be kept separate if their place of worship is to remain sacred and symbolic. Tourists are thus kept apart from worshippers in places like the Hindu temple and denied entry into the final stage in the presentation of authenticity (MacCannell, 1976: 106).

V. Concluding Remarks

As an industry which provides stimulus to the national economy, tourism planners have concentrated on what sells in this business and the marketing of authenticity has become a leading strategy. Yet, as an industry that involves the establishment of social

relations between hosts and guests, researchers (Hughes, 1995; Getz, 1994; and Silver, 1993) have also begun to chart the social effects of such constructions and presentations of authenticity on local communities.

On many occasions, the state has been criticised for their emphasis on the physical and architectural aesthetics and their removal of community life from such locations as Chinatown and Kampong Glam. However, such studies (Lee, 1991; Teo and Huang, 1995; Yeoh and Huang, 1996; Ooi, 1997) have failed to highlight that when lifestyles and activities *are* retained, these bring with them a host of other problems. This is because, in such instances it is not only the buildings' facades that become open for visual consumption but also the activities that take place within them. Unless there is a conscious effort to manage this, it may lead to a scenario where not only buildings become commodified for tourism sake, but also the lives and activities of the locals within these sites. This is so argued because

ethnic and multicultural festivals may be seen as cultural products to be exploited for tourism ends. Individual ethnic cultures and multiculturalism itself are to be 'sold' using 'professional business practices', through the medium of festivals and other special events. (Dawson cited in Hall, 1994: 176)

Indeed, this may already be happening at places of worship which appear as the "last bastions" of authenticity in Singapore. Locals have been left alone to cope with the presence of tourists in their sacred sites:

Occasionally we will get letters from the Hindu Endowments Board saying: 'Can you help us because we have got tourists who are coming in without removing their shoes or they are going up and photographing people when they are paying their respects'. But from the Tourism Board's perspective, *there is very little that we can do* in that respect because once tourists are in the temple, and they are not respecting the people, than it is *up to the officials in the temple* to stop them. We try as much as possible to provide such information in our marketing collaterals, to make people aware of it before they come in. Then once the visitors are here, and they are in the temple, then it must be controlled very much by the people in the temple. (Emphasis by writer, the STB spokesperson)

At times, the responsibility of ensuring the sensitive entry of tourists to these sites have fallen on tour guides. However, when, tour guides themselves fail to educate tourists on how to behave, locals appear vulnerable to the constant unpleasant intrusion of the

tourist and his camera. Indeed, a tour guide at Thaipusam was overheard to be saying: "Take more pictures, this only takes place once a year. You can go right up to take a clearer picture you know, they don't mind". My study has, on the contrary, shown that many locals *do* mind as there exists a fear that they have become a spectacle for the tourist and his camera. Their resistance is aimed at preserving both their self-dignity (the fight against the perception that they are actors in a "circus") as well as the religious significance of their rituals.

Thus, there needs to be greater understanding between host societies and tourists. It is not the intention of the current study to suggest that locals have been made the victims of tourism. Rather, the point to be made is that both tourists as well as hosts may have exercised their own judgements when they enter into a relationship with each other. The locals' stereotypes of tourists are potentially as dangerous as the tourists' stereotypes of locals and these images need to be re-examined. Indeed, just as tourists need to learn about the sensitivities of the country they visit and realize that not everybody will appreciate being photographed, locals need to play a more active role in tourism rather than shun it. Their active involvement will help to bring their concerns to the fore so that they can be addressed. Necessarily then, the tourist industry has to open these channels of communication and dialogue. Tour guides, in their role as the middlemen between tourists and locals, need to realize that they play a crucial role in tourism. As "experts", tour guides are the first source of information for tourists. Rather than give answers that they think tourists want to hear, guides should instead help to bring tourists to a better and more nuanced understanding of locals and their practices.

Many authors, in their examination of the link between authenticity and tourism have tended to focus their attention on whether tourists discern for themselves the authenticity of the image they are presented (Cohen, 1988; Pearce and Moscardo, 1986; Redfoot, 1984). Such studies still privilege the concerns of tourists. Instead, I argue for the need to present more grounded studies on the marketing of authenticity and the representational and selective nature of these strategies. Hence the authenticity motif can be placed within wider studies of power relations in tourism - these relations are not necessarily between tourists and locals, but importantly also that between locals and the state since the latter has a direct influence on which aspects of local life are chosen for presentation. The current study is a step in that direction.

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