GLOBAL AND LOCAL INTERACTIONS IN TOURISM

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Abstract: Globalization is often viewed as a powerful force coming from "outside". Using Haw Par Villa in Singapore as an example, this paper counterargues that landscapes also change in response to forces emanating from "within". The geometries of power arising from the interaction of the global and the local transformed Haw Par Villa into a worldclass Oriental Disneyland in the first instance, then back to its mythological and cultural roots, and finally to a landscape marked by the personal influences of a small group of operators who managed the park. The restlessness of the attraction shows that landscapes evolve as they become contested and redefined according to changing historical-geographical trajectories. **Keywords:** globalization, locality, dialectics, change. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: La mondialisation se voit souvent comme une force puissante venue de "l'extérieur". En utilisant Villa Haw Paw à Singapour comme exemple, cet article présente le contre-argument que les paysages changent aussi en réponse à des forces qui proviennent de "l'intérieur". Les géométries du pouvoir qui surgissent de l'interaction entre le mondial et le local ont transformé Villa Haw Paw, en premier lieu, en une sorte de Disneyland Oriental de niveau international, puis l'ont fait retourner à ses origines mythologiques et culturelles et, à la fin, l'ont changé en un paysage marqué par l'influence personnelle d'un petit groupe d'opérateurs qui dirigeaient le parc. L'instabilité de l'attraction montre que les paysages évoluent au fur et à mesure des contestations et des redéfinitions selon les trajectoires historiques et sociologiques changeantes. **Mots-clés:** mondialisation, localité, dialectique, changement. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, it has been argued, is a powerful force that annihilates space and increases the mobility of capital, people, ideas and information on a universal scale (Harvey 1989; Ohmae 1990). The production, distribution, and consumption of commodities and services have benefited from the evisceration of space and speeded up many aspects of economic and cultural life. For the purpose of this paper, these developments have raised two important counterquestions. The

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first concerns the work of sociologists like Giddens (1990), Sorkin (1992), and Zukin (1992) and geographers like Britton (1991) and Harvey (1989) who maintain that time-space compression resulting from technology has the effect of "rolling social life away from the fixities of tradition" (Giddens 1990:53), such that local social practices become overwhelmed by the power of capitalist relations of production. As countries move toward a borderless global economy (Ohmae 1990), the process is seen to consummate the universal, "hollowing out" (Featherstone and Lash 1995:4) societies to give rise to what Sorkin (1992) calls "ageographical" cities without places attached to them. Fjellman's (quoted in Hollinshead 1998:105–106) description of globalization is even more scathing. He asserts that multinational companies such as Disney use "entrepreneurial violence" to "routinely … rob individuals of their thinking dignity … [and] obliterate 'difference' and … counterstories" in order to draw humankind into a "web" of universalism. Therefore, tourism as a "hyperglobalizer" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton 2000:327) is viewed as one of the most significant modes of homogenizing the world.

The counterargument comes from sceptics of globalization who say that local particularities, cultures, and identities always prevail because they exist as "geopolitical faultlines of modern civilizations" (Held et al 2000:327). Massey's (1984) work, for example, raises uniqueness and difference as important points of analytic interest. Robins (1991) and Wood (1993) in fact argue that tourism is appropriated by locals and used to symbolically construct culture, tradition, and identity. As such, globalization should not be seen as overbearing but is instead always *mediated* by local factors, producing unique outcomes in different locations.

A third view which is process-based, prefers not to reify space (as global or local) and instead suggests that space is "perpetually redefined, contested, and restructured"; thus "changes in the geometry of social power" lead to "multiple relations of domination-subordination and participation-exclusion" so that scale becomes intrinsic to transformations in the social, political, and economic landscapes (Swyngedouw 1997:141–145). An analysis that puts the dynamics of sociopolitical power and the sociospatial choreography of power alliances squarely into the path of change is, in this perspective, an effective scrutiny of the so-called effects of globalization.

How then is globalization to be understood? Indeed there is interconnectedness: an intensification of networks, flows, transactions, images, and ideas that transcend and connect states and societies (Giddens 1990; Held et al 2000). It does not only involve the geographical extension of events beyond traditional territorial boundaries, but more important, the "functional integration" of "internationally dispersed" economic, social, and political activities (Dicken 1998:5). In its cultural dimension, globalization involves a deepening of the consciousness of the world (Robertson 1992) and the adoption of the world as "an arena for social action" (Eade 1997:75). The clarion call to protect the environment in the 1992 Earth Summit is one such example of singularity in purpose and action (Robertson 1995:37).

Tourism is undoubtedly part of the macro forces described in much of the literature on globalization. According to the Pacific Asia Travel Association there were 178.1 million international tourist arrivals in 2000 (PATA 2000:3). Cultural theorists describe scenarios of hydridization, syncretism, and homogenization across the globe (Appadurai 1996; Bryman 1995; Ritzer 1993). While acknowledging that globalization is a macro-force, it is also worthwhile to consider the alternative view that it is more part of a process which is dynamic, contingent, and contested. As much as tourism impinges, it is itself impinged upon by individual actors and social groups beyond the overpowering structures of economy (Giddens 1999). The dynamic articulation between local and global economic flows influences the social and political power geometries and leads to shifting alliances that influence the landscape (Swyngedouw 1997). As Yeung argues, even global markets are socially regulated and nation-states continue to be the key players of such regulation (1998:296–303). Territoriality remains an important organizing principle as the state's role is to guarantee the rights of capital; create conditions necessary for the global expansion of domestic capital; regulate economy "within" and outside its jurisdiction; and perform a key role in the internationalization of capital. In reality, global capital, supranational institutions and other processes are embedded in specific locations, dug deep within locally constituted social relationships such as community ties, cultural traditions, and power relationships which will "determine the ways in which globalization [is to be] experienced and responded to" (Kelly 2000:162). In short, local particularities, cultures, and identities are juxtaposed with global influences, producing unique outcomes (Massey and Allen 1984).

In recognizing the limitations of the globalization rhetoric, a global/local framework has been increasingly used to study social phenomena in contemporary societies. According to Chang, two bodies of literature are important: the "locality concept" spearheaded by economic geographers in the 80s; and writings on "globalism-localism", dominated by sociologists and cultural geographers in the 90s (1999:94). The former have argued for the salience of locales by studying how they react to economic restructuring processes in Britain in the 70s and 80s (Cooke 1989; Massey 1984; Massey and Allen 1984). The general idea is that forces emanating from specific localities will materially affect the impacts of external processes that encroach on them, resulting in specific outcomes. According to Massey and Allen, "spatial distribution and geographical differentiation may be the result of social processes, but they also affect how those processes work" (1984:4). Bringing the argument further, Cooke emphasizes that in the face of globalization, localities are capable of mobilizing and projecting the interests of their members beyond their political, economic, and social arena. Hence, localities are not merely recipients of global forces but are "actively involved in their own transformation" (1989:296).

However, to speak of the existence of distinct localities in an age of intense globalization may have the harmful effect of underestimating

the contribution of such broad forces. The world is according to Wilson and Dissanayake "simultaneously becoming more *globalized* (unified around the dynamics of capital moving across borders) and more *localized* (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition and resistance)" (1996:1). In other words, the world today is simultaneously becoming more homogenized in certain aspects and more heterogenized in others, hence the popularity of such phrases as "the universalization of particularism" (Robertson 1992:130), "the global in the local" (Dirlik 1996), "glocalization" (Swyngedouw 1997), "indigenization" (Appadurai 1996) and "hybridization" (Pieterse 1995).

In tourism, global/local dynamics have been most researched in the field of cultural and heritage tourism. These studies generally adopt a more integrative approach and critique the idea that tourism development in cities is dictated by the needs of tourists and global market forces. (Kearns and Philo 1993; Robins 1991). First, tourism development is often viewed as a manifestation of the "global-local nexus", whereby outside forces that impinge on societies from "top-down" interrelate with internal forces which emanate from "bottom up" to create distinct urban forms (Chang, Milne, Fallon and Pohlmann 1996; Robins 1991). The state, as the planner and marketer of tourism in most cities, and the local people, through their reactions toward tourists or the decisions made by planners, play a crucial role in mediating the outcomes of global tourism (Chang 1999; Oakes 1997; Wood 1993). Therefore, while the convergence of global trends is resulting in a duplication of similar urban forms worldwide, such as waterfront zones and festival marketplaces, local uniqueness is not sacrificed (Chang and Teo 2001; Teo and Yeoh 2001).

Tourism, which involves the interplay of various scales, is highlighted in this paper as a good example of the struggles that emanate from both global and local scales. Using Haw Par Villa, Singapore's first cultural theme park and in itself an attraction, the paper will show how tensions in the power relations originating from the global and the local play out. It discusses the main concepts of globalization and local assertion of identity, emphasizing their *contingency* and *influence* on each other. The paper further outlines the conversion of the park by private enterprise in its bid to enter the attractive leisure market and to position itself as a world player in the theme park business. It highlights the role of the state in pushing forward Singapore as a global city, alongside the place tourism has in fulfilling this objective. The discussion probes the dynamics underlying the role of the local, making a case for the need to take a more critical look at the various scales and degrees in which its assertion takes place. As opposed to the global, the concept of local generally connotes a smaller space characterized by close-knit social relationships, placed-based identities and the realities of everyday life that turn the location from a "physical space into a place" (Featherstone 1996:47). While it is often believed that globalization forces will undermine such "local" elements and threaten their survival, it is also posited that culture and traditions are never static. Rather, they are the unstable outcomes of the interactions

between a variety of forces that act upon them. The paper emphasizes several points of interest, including what is the rationale for going global? How may this take place in such a small city-state as Singapore? What constitutes the local? In the face of rapid globalization, can distinct local identities exist? How do different forms of local assertions take place? In elucidating these questions, the paper intends to show that scales are important in the process of restructuring (in this case, tourism landscapes) and that outcomes are reflective of the relative power positions of nested interests. The experience of globalization in Singapore may be used to shed light on the subject in general.

GLOBALIZATION IN SINGAPORE

The early days of colonial imperialism in Singapore laid the ground for the development of modern (or Western) administrative, legal, and education systems and development ideologies. Singapore's Western educated ruling elite had embraced beliefs and values that stressed efficiency, law and order, meritocracy, and a strong government. As a tiny city-state with neither natural resources nor a large domestic market, Singapore's national objectives had and continue to be concerned with the survival of a small and vulnerable economy that is subject to global forces. In order to attract foreign investments that are perceived to be vital for its economic viability, the state has always adopted a global outlook and a liberal economic orientation. Beginning as a center for entreport trade to an economy based on industrialization and foreign investment, Singapore's historical trajectory has always been inextricably tied to capitalism and the global economy (Goh 1995).

In particular, the perceived need to develop "science-based and technology-oriented industries" in the 70s led to the promotion of science and technology in every aspect of the society, notably the education system (Goh 1995:238). The state believed that for Singapore to succeed in the global economy, it must upgrade itself from an economy based on low-end assembly industries to one that is situated at the frontiers of knowledge, as in the case of the West. Such a development facilitated the spread of a scientific rationality that has since encroached into every facet of the society. Economic rationality and forward thinking form the basis of the state's development strategies. Consistent with such a development ideology, the state perceives that globalization is "the mechanism that drives progress and prosperity" (Kelly and Olds 1999:1) and ensures Singapore's viability in the world economy. Meeting such imperatives has become one of the state's top priorities.

In order for Singapore to maintain its economic growth in the face of global competition, it is crucial for the city-state to be constantly ahead of others in every conceivable aspect; to adopt worldclass standards as well as to become an international center for trade, finance, technology, and services. In virtually all of these areas, the state has a blueprint that complements each grouping's role in entrenching and enhancing Singapore's place in the world market. Tourism is no differ-

ent. In 1996, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), whose policies have closely reflected the concerns and economic orientation of the state, released a masterplan entitled "Tourism 21", which aims to develop the country into a "Tourism Capital" and to maintain its appeal in the face of keen global competition (STB 1996). Six strategic thrusts that are globally/regionally oriented will be used to achieve the status of tourism capital. One, Singapore will be developed into a tourism business center and hub. Two, attractions will no longer be developed as stand-alones but will be regrouped into thematic zones in order to enhance the product that Singapore already has to offer. Three, in order to create a meeting point for tourism entrepreneurs, clusters of functions (such as travel agencies, cruise companies, airlines, and hotels) will be developed further, with gaps in their services plugged for their spontaneous horizontal integration. Four, Singapore's complementarity with the region will be taken advantage of so as to create new tourism space (called "Tourism Unlimited"). Five, partnerships with private enterprise inside and outside of Singapore will be undertaken to achieve the above. Six, cooperation with the national statistical board will be fostered in order to advance tourism research.

The editors of *Foreign Policy Magazine* named Singapore as one of the world's most globalized nations (*The Straits Times* 2001). Indeed, the size of its tourism industry indicates the nation's external orientation. In 2000, Singapore received 7.6 million tourists (twice the population of the city-state), with tourism receipts totalling about $5.6 billion and accounting for 24.8% of service exports (STB 2000). More Singaporeans are also going overseas for business, study, and holidays. These trends, coupled with the global orientation of Singapore's mass media, have facilitated the influx of ideas, information, images, culture, and values, notably from the developed West and from Japan. These tendencies will inevitably engage local society in diverse ways.

Haw Par Villa and Methodology of Study

The original Haw Par Villa was a millionaire's mansion that incorporated a large fantasy garden. It was built in 1937 by Aw Boon Haw for his brother Aw Boon Par with whom he made a large fortune from a menthol ointment called Tiger Balm. As it was common in prewar Singapore for successful entrepreneurs to underwrite their rise to power and status with philanthropic acts (Yeoh and Teo 1996:32), the brothers decided to open the gardens to the public so that they too can enjoy and learn about Chinese traditional and moral values from the many garish and ostentatious stone tableux of animals, and Chinese folklore and mythology.

As one of Singapore's top leisure spots from the 50s to the early 80s, Haw Par Villa was marvelled at by tourists and locals alike, despite (or because of) the crudity of the statues and scenes depicted (*The Straits Times* 1990). In 1985, in line with its efforts to capture a larger market, the Singapore government acquired the park for development into a worldclass cultural theme park. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a losing venture and in 2000 a debate emerged over whether the park

should be conserved or torn down for more lucrative developments. STB's plans included restoration of the park to its pre-1985 form by the end of 2002.

The key actors involved in the transformation of Haw Par Villa include private enterprise represented by International Theme Parks (ITP); the state acting through the statutory board, STB; and Singaporeans (defined here as those who are born and reside in Singapore). A survey was conducted in January 2001 on 120 Singaporeans and respondents were asked about their reasons for ever visiting or not visiting the park and why they thought the park should (not) be conserved. It was conducted in the town centers of three major public housing estates (Ang Mo Kio, Clementi, and Tampines), as well as Orchard Mass Rapid Transit station (the most busy station in Singapore), over a period of 10 days to ensure an even geographical distribution of respondents. Interviews were conducted in English, Malay, Mandarin, and Chinese, depending on which language the respondent was most comfortable with. In this stratified sampling, efforts were made to ensure that the respondents were representative of the age, sex, and ethnic composition of Singapore's population (Table 1). Tourists were not included in the survey, as another study (Teo and Yeoh 1997) had covered their responses fairly extensively. By focusing on the local viewpoint and how the state's tendency to favor the global acts as a useful counterpoint, the study should be a useful addition to the existing literature on theme parks.

A subsequent round of in-depth two-hour interviews was also carried out to obtain greater insights into relevant issues, particularly about

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Categories	Sample (%)	Singapore (%)[a]
Age		
11–20	15.0	15.9
21–30	20.8	17.2
31–40	21.7	21.9
41–50	20.8	20.5
51–60	11.7	11.9
>61	10.0	12.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Ethnicity		
Chinese	71.7	76.8
Malay	15.8	13.9
Indian	10.0	7.9
Others	2.5	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Gender		
Male	50.0	50.0
Female	50.0	50.0

[a] Compiled from Singapore Census of Population, Department of Statistics (2000).

respondents' opinions of changes at the park, future conservation options, and the popularity/unpopularity of the park. A total of 15 interviews (from the main sample) were carried out. The age distribution was 20% each for similar age groups in Table 1, except those aged 51 and above who formed the remainder of the age distribution. The gender breakdown was 53.3% male and 46.7% female. The ethnic distribution was 60% Chinese, 20% Malay, 13.3% Indian, and 6.7% Others. The same-length interviews, with two senior staff at STB and four management/operations employees at Haw Par Villa, sought their insights as to the problems of making the theme park more attractive and fiscally viable. The respondents had worked for their employers for an average of approximately 8.5 years.

Going Global

The story of Haw Par Villa's redevelopment began when a slump of 3.5% in tourist arrivals in 1983 prompted the establishment of a state-appointed Tourism Task Force to provide recommendations on how to revitalize this industry in Singapore (Teo and Chang 2000). The taskforce recommended more emphasis on local charm and exotic ambience. US-based Economic Research Associates, which had done feasibility studies for Disney and other leading theme park conglomerates, was commissioned by STB to study the viability of developing a theme park at Haw Par Villa. It was reported in the *Business Times* (1984) that Economic Research Associates suggested Haw Par Villa promote itself as "both the epitome of oriental mystic and a high-tech entertainment center". In other words, it was to be marketed as a unique destination that encompassed both elements of modernity and cultural tradition. As the only "Chinese Mythological Theme Park in the world" (STB 1984/85:21), it had to appeal to a global audience by marrying particularity with the universal instrument of technological wizardry that has proven foolproof in theme parks all over the world (*The Straits Times* 1985). The landscape was to become rewritten by an *invited* external/global force into a canonized version of Chinese culture that is universally recognized and that would appeal to most leisure-seekers around the world.

Following the trend of global capitalization in the United States and Europe, private enterprise was invited to invest, so that their commercial expertise would assist in positioning Singapore as a player in the global leisure market. A consortium led by beverage group Fraser and Neave and Times Publishing formed ITP to win the tender to develop the park. Following the recommendations of Economic Research Associates, ITP engaged Battaglia Associates Inc., an off-shoot of Walt Disney Productions, to design the masterplan. It was given very explicit instructions: to develop the park as an Oriental Disneyland that would attract locals and tourists "the way Disneyland and Epcot Center are doing in the US" (*The Straits Times* 1986). Altogether about $44.5 million was spent and the name of Haw Par Villa was changed from Tiger Balm Gardens (as it was more popularly known) to Dragon World. A concrete dragon measuring 65 meters replaced the tiger as

the ruling icon of the park and water rides, and multimedia shows and laser strobe lights were introduced to sell the park (Yeoh and Teo 1996). Its management followed closely the recommendations of Battaglia regarding entry price, interactive attractions, food and beverage options, souvenir sales, the management of crowds, and cleaning.

Smacking of Americana, Dragon World eventually turned out to be a losing venture for a variety of reasons. It was shunned by local people who found the park too expensive and too commercialized and by tourists whose short length of visit of 3.5 days meant that shopping took a higher priority (Teo and Yeoh 1997). Initial success resulted from novelty. When it opened, visitorship to the park steadily increased from approximately 870,000 in 1992 to 1.44 million in 1993, but soon turned for the worse, declining to 565,000 in 1995 and down to 382,000 in 1997. Dragon World went into the red because of high capital and operational costs (*The Straits Times* 1996). ITP came to realize that Battaglia's projections were unrealistic and more had to be done to cater to the preferences of *local* people who were the main clientele and repeaters. In the mid-90s, the marketing focus shifted away from Americanized entertainment rides and shows to the promotion of Haw Par Villa's heritage and the legacy of the Aw brothers. Through a new manager, ITP tried to bring back its eccentric character and to steer the park "towards the creepy wonderland that Singaporeans … remember" (*The Straits Times* 1994). In 1995, the name of the park was changed back to Haw Par Villa—The Original Tiger Balm Gardens. Elements of the Aw family history and Chinese culture were consciously emphasized and marketed.

However, the park's popularity did not show signs of revival. Through the years, apparently, the leisure patterns and tastes of Singaporeans have changed such that many, especially the younger generation, are no longer interested in visiting the park. In the early days of Haw Par Villa's history, the lively scenes were thrilling to the common folk because entertainment in general was unsophisticated and there were few leisure spots to visit. By the 90s, Singaporeans had become exposed to different forms of entertainment that made their way into their country from the United States and Japan, including action films, interactive video, and computer games. Shopping has also emerged as a popular national pastime (Ho and Chua 1995) since current malls have morphed into trendy lifestyle attractions. In addition, with the growth of global tourism and rising affluence, Singaporeans have become more well-traveled and hence exposed to alternative leisure attractions in other countries. As such, Haw Par Villa ceased to be a source of fascination and novelty.

Reactions from Singaporeans

By 1998, the park had already incurred losses of $17.5 million (*The Straits Times* 2000a). Consequently, ITP announced that it would return the park to STB in March 2001 (*The Straits Times* 2000b). True to the logic of market forces and pragmatism of the state, Haw Par Villa now

faced the threat of being demolished to make way for more lucra-
tive investments:

> We have to answer to the taxpayers…if indeed the visitorship is poor,
> we have got to move on. We will run it [for now] … if it does not
> work out, we will have to give it up and return the land to the govern-
> ment (STB official).

After all, it was not rational to preserve Haw Par Villa for its own sake
when its maintenance cost was high and few Singaporeans were inter-
ested in visiting it. At the global scale, it was socially constructed as a
failed venture and should be torn down. However, this decision
sparked off resistance from many Singaporeans who have a different
construction of the value of the villa and have made passionate pleas
for its conservation. Indeed, this local voice has become increasingly
audible regarding the issue of the destruction of cultural heritage in
the name of economic development in the recent years, as revealed
by their increased participation in public forums and their letters to
the press (Chang and Teo 2001). Arguments include "Don't demolish
the park, it's there to remind us of the beauty of oddity" (*The Straits
Times* 2000b), "Keep it quirky and free" (*The Straits Times* 2000c), and
"What are we really tearing down?" (*The Straits Times* 2000d). Underly-
ing the people's unease over the fate of Haw Par Villa appears an
attempt to gain control over their cultural heritage "rather than have
it controlled by the logic of capital" (Chua 1995:238). Therein lies the
tussle between state and local constructions of a particular landscape.

The views expressed in the local newspapers tally with the survey
findings of this study. Of the 120 respondents interviewed, only 19.2%
felt that Haw Par Villa should *not* be conserved. Among the 80.8%
majority who felt otherwise, the most popularly cited reason was that
it "educates Singaporeans, especially the younger generation, about
Chinese mythology and moral values" (61.9% of "conserve" responses
or 25.4% of *all* responses). This was followed by "Haw Par Villa is part
of Singapore's cultural heritage and history" (60.8% of "conserve"
responses or 25.0% of *all* responses). The surveys revealed a local
dilemma—although the park is no longer popular with Singaporeans,
they do not want to see it demolished because it holds cultural, histori-
cal, and educational value for them:

> The new Haw Par Villa has become one of those over-commercialized
> places with little character…the huge dragon looks too "cute" to fit
> in. Plus everything is so overpriced, from entrance fee to food. Since
> then, I never want to visit that place again (a 25 year-old female
> Singaporean).

> Right now all you have in Haw Par Villa are statues. People get tired
> of the park after one visit and will not go again. Today, many Singapo-
> reans can afford to fly to Disneyland to see the real thing. Why would
> they want to visit Haw Par Villa, a Disney copy-cat and failed theme
> park? [But still it should be conserved]…Why Haw Par Villa should
> be conserved is the same as why the National Museum should be con-
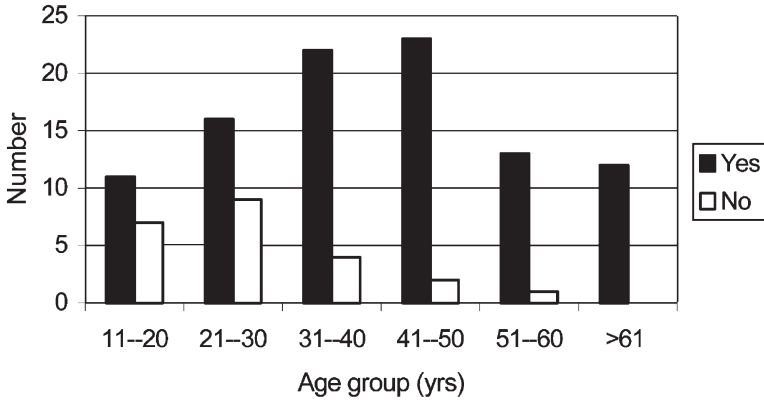> served. Most of us do not go to the museum but does it mean that it

Figure 1. Should Haw Par Villa be Conserved? Perceptions by Age

should be torn down? Sure, the land Haw Par Villa occupies can be used for more profitable purposes. But do we really need another industrial building or condominium? Won't it be better for our future generations to be able to hang on to a part of our local history and culture? (a 20-year old male Singaporean).

When the responses were tabulated across age groups, it was found that younger Singaporeans felt less strongly about conservation than the older generation (Figure 1). This was because Haw Par Villa held less value for younger Singaporeans who nevertheless still want it to be conserved. More respondents from the older generation viewed Haw Par Villa as a place that "educates the younger generation about Chinese mythology and moral values" than the younger generation (Figure 2) who tended to see it as "part of our heritage and history" or simply a "good tourist attraction". According to an older respondent:

People are less superstitious these days. Even if they still believe in the existence of Hell, they probably do not think much about it. In the
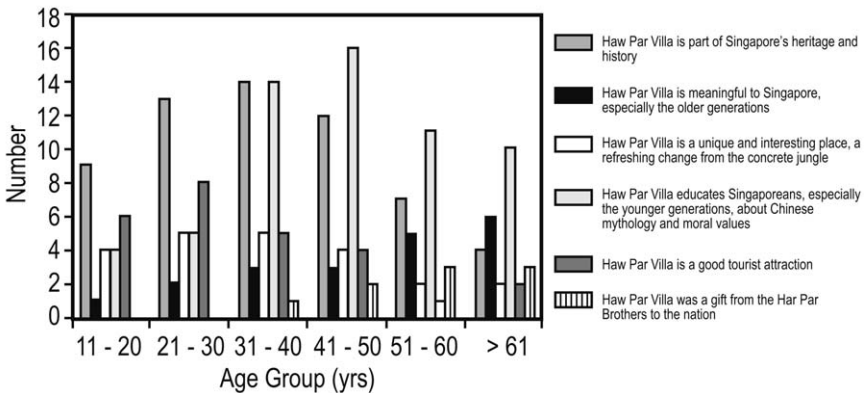

Figure 2. Reasons Why Park should be Conserved by Age

> past, people could identify with the Ten Courts of Hell in Haw Par
> Villa. I don't think that's the case anymore (a 55 year-old male
> Singaporean).

As to other views, "Times have changed, people are not interested in
such things anymore. I'd rather go watch a movie" (a 35 year-old
female Singaporean); "I'd rather go shopping during my leisure time.
At least shopping centers are air-conditioned and comfortable, unlike
Haw Par Villa" (a 21 year-old male Singaporean). One possible expla-
nation for the difference is that the older generation contain a bigger
proportion of "Chinese-educated" Singaporeans who embody more
traditional values. For the younger generation who are relatively more
"English-educated", Haw Par Villa does not have the same cultural
meaning that it does for their parents. As to ethnic views, for example,
Chinese (89.5%) felt more strongly about the need for conservation
than the other ethnic groups (average of 63%).

Underlying the respondents' desire for conservation are feelings of
nostalgia and fond memories of the past, as samples of opinion
obtained from in-depth interviews revealed:

> Although Haw Par Villa is no longer popular, it is nevertheless a part
> of Singapore's history…it is a symbol of the philanthropy of the Haw
> Par brothers. In today's materialistic world, would anyone think of
> building a park for the public to enjoy (a 23 year-old female
> Singaporean)?

> If you look carefully at the park's surroundings, you can feel how Aw
> Boon Haw had painstakingly built the park to educate people on
> moral values. All the stories depicted in the park are very meaningful,
> especially the ones about filial piety. The park can be used to educate
> our younger generations (a staff member of Haw Par Villa).

Similarly, a survey conducted by STB in 2000 on 600 Singaporeans
revealed that over 85% of those polled did not want the park to close
(*The Straits Times* 2000a). Hence, it would be difficult for STB to legi-
timize any decision to close it. The STB is aware of the dilemma
faced—although most people are not interested in Haw Par Villa any-
more, they do not want to see it torn down. Left with few options, STB
decided to "reconfigure" the park back to "the original 3 hectare Tiger
Balm Gardens" since "feedback from the public and industry players
indicate [that] they would like it to remain" (*The Straits Times* 2000a).

As a result of the negotiation process between the state and local
people, there has been a visible softening of STB's treatment of Haw
Par Villa. After all, the park was redeveloped in 1990 with a strong
profit motive to increase tourism receipts. In a recent press release,
STB announced that when the restoration of Haw Par Villa is com-
pleted, admission fees may be charged, but "any such revenue would
be used for maintenance, not to generate a profit" (*The Straits Times*
2000a). The restored villa will be somewhat similar to what it was in
1937—a "Chinese mythology park, with some food and beverage

kiosks" (*The Straits Times* 2000a). It is clear that STB no longer envisions grand plans for Haw Par Villa nor expects it to generate huge economic returns, having realized the pitfalls of commercialization. It is increasingly being recognized as an indelible part of Singapore's culture and history, a place that gives people a sense of their roots in a rapidly globalizing era. As for Singaporeans who negotiate global and local space routinely in their work and play, their construction of the meaning of Haw Par Villa reveals a restless landscape shaped by changing historical-geographical trajectories. The outcome is process-oriented (Swyngedouw 1997), produced as a "plenitude of different relations", taking shape only in their passing and always incomplete (Thrift 1999:310).

Maintaining Local Identity in the Face of Globalization

Having discussed the sentiments of the general Singaporean public, the paper now shifts its focus to another local group, the staff members of Haw Par Villa, whose lives are bound up with the park to a greater extent than others. Through their activities, the staff have imbued the park with multiple meanings and reconstructed for locals and tourists alike their vision of a unique place. This group has not been acknowledged as having played a critical role in the construction of Haw Par Villa's landscape. Instead, they have fallen into the interstices between the state/global and Singaporean/local viewpoints. The gap needs to be closed, by discussing how this group negotiates alliances which they believe can help in the survival of the park. In many ways, their influence reveals that "all kinds of *other* practice may in fact be going on … which … were never designed to admit (but which they may become a vital part of those places' intelligibility)" (Thrift 1999:310–311).

In late 1996, Haw Par Villa was pronounced a losing project and "given up" by the corporate directors of Fraser and Neave, which owned 75% of ITP. However, because the latter had a 20-year lease on the land, it had to continue operating the park. This it did reluctantly with a limited budget and no new investments into the park. The retrenchments and resignation of staff over the years have left Haw Par Villa in the hands of 12 local Chinese staff members (as of March 2001), who were given a free hand to keep the park going. This endorsement allowed the staff the space to assert their own identity and to reconfigure the park in the ways they deemed fit, according to their perceptions of what it should be and according to their own Chinese traditional beliefs. It was clear to them that profitability should never have been the *raison d'être* of the park. To them, the villa is a serious piece of history and heritage and should be treated as such. Hence, in spite of mounting odds, the staff struggled as a team to revive Haw Par Villa's sense of place and to save it from the fate of bulldozers. Their perseverance and enthusiasm stem from their strong sense of attachment to the park, as well as the close social ties among themselves. Most of them have been working in Haw Par Villa since 1990 and a few even grew up in the park because their parents were

either stall-holders or artisans working there prior to 1985. As a staff member revealed:

> Sometimes we ask ourselves, why is business so bad? Over the years we have sincerely tried to beautify the park, keep it simple and bring back its original atmosphere. We want to make our guests happy in the hope that more of them will come so that the park can survive … unfortunately, business did not improve. Although we feel discouraged, we will not give up because we cherish this place so much.

In various ways, the staff asserted their cultural and religious identity against the disneyfication of the park. First, through their actions, elements of local culture and Chinese religions continue to proliferate in Haw Par Villa. The statues and figurines in the park, for example, are believed to have divine powers even though they were merely used as backdrops for the theme park in the early 90s. This is similar to the local Chinese belief that spirits and deities can reside in non-living objects. Hence, the staff worship and make daily offerings of incense to various statues around the park. They pray for its smooth operation and for the safety of the staff and their daily visitors. According to a staff member:

> In the past, before when we start[ed] the Flume ride every morning, we would pray to the statues of the four Sea Dragon Kings, the Earth God, the Rain God and *Zhong Kui* (The Ghost Catcher), which were located in the "dungeon" of the Flume ride. Those were very "sensitive" statues. You had to pay respect to them so that unlucky things would not happen.

In addition, "major" events (like the relocation, painting, or repairing of statues), usually involved the carrying out of religious rites to ensure that the spirit or deity involved is not offended by the "disturbance". To outsiders, the painstaking efforts of the staff members over seemingly mundane tasks may seem exaggerated. But to these workers, every act is imbued with symbolic intent and meaning. Their world is one in which man and spirits coexist in harmony, and misfortune will strike if this balance is disrupted. Through their activities, the staff have imbued the park with religious symbolism, meanings, and a sense of place that will not be lost to people visiting it.

Second, the staff have tried to restore Haw Par Villa's old charms by making it look aged, "authentic", and "natural". According to one, "Haw Par Villa cannot look too new because it is a piece of history. Like an antique, the older it is, the more valuable it will be". For example, the "mountains" at Haw Par Villa's entrance, which were painted bright blue when it was redeveloped into a theme park, were painted brown a few years ago to make them look more realistic. Certain plants like the croton have also been grown all over the park because their brownish red leaves make the park look "older".

Last but not least, the staff have actively tried to create meaning in Haw Par Villa. For instance, they have erected a wooden pillar at its entrance. It carries the inscription "The Spirit of Haw Par" which is encapsulated in two Chinese phrases, *ke ku nai lao, yin shui si yuan.*

These roughly translate into "perseverance and hard work" and "remember your benefactor". According to one staff member:

> This is what *we believe* to be the *essence* of Haw Par Villa, the reasons why Aw Boon Haw built the park. You see, he built his *Tiger Balm* business empire up from scratch, with his sheer hard work and with the help of his brother, Aw Boon Par. When Aw Boon Haw succeeded, he built a park and dedicated it to his brother. He later donated the park to the country because he wanted to repay the society from which he had derived his wealth. The "Spirit of Haw Par", therefore, is the most important message we want to bring across to visitors.

Also found in the park are paraphernalia associated with worship. These are openly displayed to augment its Chinese ambience. One example is the altar set up during the Hungry Ghost Festival which falls on the 7th month of the Chinese lunar calendar. The traditional belief is that during this time, the Gates of Hell are opened and spirits roam the human world. To appease them, religious rites and offerings must be carried out. The staff used to practice these rites discreetly at an area behind the park in the early 90s. Around 1995, the altars for the rites were shifted *into* the park and placed strategically behind the Ten Courts of Hell exhibit, another one of the "sensitive" areas where spirits were believed to lurk. As one staff member revealed:

> These are what we believed in … we thought displaying the altars would make the park more "Chinese" and more fascinating for tourists, especially the Caucasians. After all, the 7th month festival is very much related to the Ten Courts of Hell we have in the park. We pasted some information about the festival on the notice boards beside the altars and tried to explain to the tourists what the praying was all about.

In sum, the park is very much a "personalized" environment whose place identity is constantly being reinforced and reinvented by 12 people whose lives are bound up with it. It is they who have helped Haw Par Villa's old charms struggle through the winds of change, and allowed it to maintain a distinct local identity even as it faces the homogenizing effects of globalization.

CONCLUSION

Writing about postmodern society and contemporary tourism, Urry posits that "tourism is no longer a differentiated set of social activities with its own set of rules, times, and spaces … It has effectively become part of a broader 'culture' … with no clearcut distinctions" (1996:84–85). Thus, Gateshead's Metro Centre and Liverpool's Albert Dock in the United Kingdom draw on the same ideas evident in the festival marketplaces of Baltimore's Inner Harbour and Boston's Quincy Market in the United States. Euro-Disney, Tokyo Disneyland, and the soon to be Hong King Disneyland will provide the same spectacle, the same "dreamscape of visual consumption" (Zukin 1992:221) as Orlando's Disney World and Anaheim's Disneyland. Dreamworld in Bangkok is a replica of its own namesake in Brisbane.

Yet in spite of an apparently sweeping trend towards homogenization, Urry concludes that there is still a tendency for places all over the globe to "compete for visitors by auditing and developing *local* resources and the local sense of place" (1996:88). This paper renders support for this argument. Via the example of Haw Par Villa, it shows that globalization is mediated by local agencies and locally constituted relationships—in particular, cultural traditions, power relationships which are played out at a specific location, and the emotional ties of people to places. Haw Par Villa's unsuccessful transformation to a Western-style theme park implies that beneath the veneer of technological wizardry, it is still a symbol of local Chinese culture and religion, meanings and history. In short, the global does not annihilate the local, thus making a case for the notion that "geography matters".

It may be said that STB's decision to restore Haw Par Villa back into its original form reflects a worldwide trend in which "cities are organized around their own use value as against the notion of urban living and services as a *commodity* … [In addition,] the search for cultural identity … autonomously defined … [as opposed to] the monopoly of messages by the media" (Castells 1983:319) signifies a total triumph of the local over the global and a return of Haw Par Villa to its glorious past. While the park is presently tied up with the personal lives of people who imbue it with meanings, it must be emphasized that it is simultaneously caught in the wider processes of globalization and broader socioeconomic changes. Evidence is provided by Singaporeans' mixed feelings about the meaning of its landscape. What this really prognosticates is that Haw Par Villa, like many other places, reflects the unstable outcomes of the interactions between global and local forces that act upon it. The lesson that can be learned from this Singaporean experience is certainly that universalism and particularism need to be conjoined in order to better comprehend how tourism as a complex phenomenon can influence specific national identities and in itself become influenced in a highly interconnected world. Rather than binary thinking such as global-local, this paper shows that empowerment at both scales is occurring which will help towards producing anti-essentialist accounts of "globalization".

Implicit in the anti-esssentialist argument is the notion that tourism is not about balancing its "positive" impacts against the "negative" impacts. All too often, the literature focuses on how to avoid or avert the negative influences of tourism, especially in sociocultural matters which are the most difficult to control (Sorkin 1992; Wood 1993; Zukin 1992). What this paper suggests is that globalization, because it interweaves the internal with external, because it operates at several levels— at the local, the national, the regional, and the global arenas—and because it thrusts multiple structures and agents together in cooperative as well as competitive ways, interactions can only be shaped by unique patterns, according to the environments in which they occur. Viewed in this way, for tourism, the global and the local form a dyad acting as a *dialectical process.* It is not so much about balancing the "good" with the "bad". Rather, it is about responsiveness of the tourism system to the multiple inputs that comprise its constitution. Like Haw

Par Villa, landscape outcomes are process oriented and will evolve with time and tide. **A**

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