



NUS

National University
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SC2217 Travel Matters

Visual Analysis Group Project

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Link to video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amobCDcmBIc&ab_channel=DiahSastriPitanatri

The advertisement released by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) aims to promote Singapore as a tourist destination after the 2003 SARS outbreak (Lee, 2017). SARS and travel are intricately interlinked – Singapore's tourism industry declined because SARS' ease of transmission in jet settings heightened international anxieties. Thus, SARS forms an important motivation behind the content of the video to reinvigorate Singapore's economy. This is seen in the depiction of multiple activities and landmarks that may interest tourists from specifically Western countries. Singapore is also framed as a hub for economic activity and luxury, and features elements from parts of Singapore's multicultural identity as a selling point.

excellent para - your critique is so sharp!

The use of vibrant colours in the depiction of cultural monuments, food and artefacts denotes a sense of diversity, as if to say that Singapore offers something culturally refreshing. The oversaturation of the colours coupled with the use of Chinese orchestral instruments in the background music indicate a sense of richness, and culture becomes presented in a caricature-like manner, presented stereotypically to pander to an orientalist lens. The video stitches together a series of short clips, each providing a small peek into different cultural aspects of Singapore.¹ This reduces each culture into one clip and commodifies it, transforming them into bite-sized concepts made to be palatable to a Western audience. The mish-mash of various cultures into one video portrays Singapore's cultural diversity while simultaneously unifying all these cultures under one Singaporean identity. This alludes to Mongia's (2003) argument that race is constructed as a national attribute, and this racialisation may exist outside a biological framework and in a cultural one. Racialisation through culture is evident through the video's consistent portrayal of various cultures as being part of the Singapore "experience" for tourists. However, the video only features a few cultures, specifically Malay, Chinese, Indian and Peranakan. Despite its claims of diversity, the video reinforces the notion that only a few cultures truly form Singapore's national identity, driving home the fact that certain racial identities are more "Singaporean" than others.

The government aims to attract Westerners via the introduction of Singapore's material culture. This is highlighted by showcasing Orchard Road as a shopping district and certain activities, like massages and golf. Activities like these are often associated with those of the affluent, attracting Westerners who are perceived to have higher purchasing power. The focus on Westerners as the target audience reinforces the government's goal to kickstart the economy. The privilege of holding a passport from the state determines the ability to travel (Torpey, 1999). Western countries have a higher passport hierarchy than other countries, especially those in the EU, as they continue to rank among the top 10 on the passport index (Travel Weekly Asia, 2020). Western tourists are privileged in this regard, as they are more mobile than those from non-western nations. Analysing the campaign's economic impact, Singapore's attempt to market herself as a high-end tourist destination, with the goal of attracting with the Western tourists with higher mobility and greater purchasing power, would contribute greatly to Singapore's economy.²

¹ Timestamps for the introduction of the different cultures in Singapore: 0:26 (Chinatown), 0:33 (Kampong Gelam), 0:39 (Little India), 0:49 (Rumah Bebe).

² Refer to Figure A and B.

all great points - and to connect back with what you noted earlier, the kind of racialization of "singaporeans" and "singaporean culture" clearly occurs from the racial point of view of the desired/normative tourist

The use of mainly White western actors points to the hierarchy among travellers, positing the idea that the act of travelling in itself is a privilege. Khosravi (2007) argues that the freedom to travel is attainable via the exclusion of others. This exclusion is demonstrated in the video through the lack of non-White tourists. The tendency to present Westerners as tourists reveals the government's discrimination against potential tourists visiting Singapore from other Asian destinations. Beyond race being a marker for national identity, race is indicative of the socio-economic positions of an individual. Racial bias is portrayed through white-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Western actors.³ These are the physical features, or as the author puts it, the 'colour bar', that the government identifies as individuals who can contribute to Singapore's economy. Thus, regulating the movement of people using capitalism and race reinforces the idea that while travel is a marker of socio-economic status, it also prioritises and is more accessible for the affluent.

In conclusion, the advertisement has racialised both its national identity and the tourists it targets to promote tourism that would be beneficial to Singapore's economy. By constructing both identities along racial lines, it exercises control, in the form of influence and attainability, onto the type of tourists that are allowed mobility into Singapore, and even onto the types of racial identities that can be considered "Singaporean." Thus, it seems that this racialisation functions as a means to filter the type of tourists that would be beneficial to Singapore's economy after SARS, interlinking race as an economic asset. and race as ethnic culture to be commodified and consumed?

This is an excellent analysis! Well done. It's well written, to the point, and succinctly raised numerous points regarding the tourism campaign. What do you think was particular to the time/decade in which it was made? i.e. does anything feel dated given that we are now in another round of revitalizing tourism post pandemic? Your focus on race and racialization as the thread that connects questions of audience, commodification, marketing, and framing is effective and illuminating.

This connects across so many readings and discussions - from week 1's Thomas Cook's package tour to thinking about uneven urban mobilities and the global city as a destination. I hope you enjoyed working on this and will keep making connections.

A+

³ Refer to Figure A.



Figure A: Western actress interacting with local material culture by trying on a traditional Indian costume, Sari.



Figure B: Western actress, adorned in a traditional Chinese costume, Cheongsam, is indulging in local cuisine.

References

Khosravi, S. (2007), The 'illegal' traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders. *Social Anthropology*, 15: 321-334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0964-0282.2007.00019.x>

Lee, M. K. (2017, August 24). *STB's latest charm offensive Passion Made Possible: Revisit 5 past tourism campaigns*. The Straits Times. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/stb-launches-passion-made-possible-revisiting-past-tourism-campaigns> (Accessed: 10 September 2022)

Mongia, R. (1999) "Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport", *Public Culture* 11 (3): 527-556

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