Urban Studies, Vol. 37, No. 2, 343–366, 2000

Singapore's Little India: A Tourist Attraction as a Contested Landscape

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[Paper first received, July 1997: in final form, April 1999]

Summary. This paper explores Singapore's Little India historic district as an example of a contested urban landscape. Specifically, it argues that Little India is a site of struggle between 'insider' and 'outsider' groups. Using primarily Relph's notion of 'insideness' and 'outsideness', and other concepts dealing with spatial resistance and domination, different groups of people with differing degrees of attachment to Little India are identified. The insider–outsider cleavage is interrogated from three perspectives: the relationship between tourists and locals; ethnic tensions between Indian and Chinese communities; and, interaction between planners and users of the urban landscape. In exploring the myriad insider–outsider dynamics, it is contended that who represents an 'insider' and who is considered an 'outsider' is open to negotiation. This is because different people possess differing conceptions of 'insideness', in turn giving rise to varying senses of attachment and belonging to place. This paper critiques existing tourism writings which focus predominantly on the relationship between tourists and locals, and it argues that in any tourist destination the tourist–local conflict is only one aspect of a much larger struggle over place. For this reason, urban tourism studies must focus on the wider arena in which the tourist–local interaction is set.

Introduction

Urban areas are popularly viewed as 'sites of conflicts' or 'contested landscapes' between groups of people with divergent motives in and claims on the city. The social-urban geography literature presents many examples such as the tensions between 'yuppies' and 'yuffies' (young urban failures) in downtown redevelopment zones (Short, 1989); the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the urban poor in gentrified districts (Harvey, 1987); and frictions between dominant ethnic groups and minorities sharing a common urban space (Tunbridge, 1984; Western, 1985; Anderson, 1991). The premise for such works is that urban locales comprise people with differing senses of attachment to place. Feelings of 'insideness' and a sense of belonging are pitted against feelings of 'outsideness' and non-belonging, thereby giving rise to irreconcilable visions of the way space ought to be used and developed. In this paper, I wish to incorporate some of these ideas on spatial conflicts to explore the notion of tourist attractions as contested landscapes. Specifically, it is argued that multiple insider and outsider groups exist in any given

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0042-0980 Print/1360-063X On-line/00/020343-24

tourist landscape, and spatial conflict is a far more complex phenomenon than suggested by existing tourism analyses. The case study draws upon the urban historic site of Little India in Singapore, a cultural area for the local Indian community and a popular attraction with tourists.

I hope to accomplish two objectives through the discussion. At the conceptual level, Edward Relph's (1976) 'insideness–outsideness' concept is adopted to identify various interest-groups in Little India, and to show that the tourist–local relationship represents only one aspect of the wider struggle over place. Relph's framework provides a first step to engage critically with other concepts on spatial resistance and domination, and the complex relationship people have with places. At the empirical level, the paper hopes to provide a more nuanced perspective on the 'landscape contestation' phenomenon as it pertains to tourism. Towards this end, it will be demonstrated that insider and outsider boundaries are not as clear-cut as many tourism studies insist; instead, they are fluid and open to negotiation. Different people are either insiders or outsiders depending on their goals, ethnic ties or economic links to a place. Insider–outsider relationships are at times conflicting, and yet at other times complementary. As David Ley (1983, pp. 280–281) observed and Singapore's Little India will illustrate, the city is "a place of conflict" and its changing spatial form is "the negotiated outcome" between diverse groups with asymmetrical access to power.

The paper begins with an overview of the conceptual underpinnings of the argument. Relph's (1976) 'insideness and outsideness' dichotomy is introduced along with other supporting concepts on territorial struggle. The applicability of these concepts to urban tourist landscapes is then discussed. This will be followed by some comments on methodology and fieldwork. The substantive part of the paper discusses three different relationships between insider and outsider groups, and shows that Little India is a meeting ground where interpersonal conflicts and alliances intersect. The discussion concludes by drawing the implications of this study for urban and tourism research.

Conceptualising Feelings of 'Insideness' and 'Outsideness'

In Staeheli and Thompson's (1997) work on the "Hill" business district in Boulder (Colorado), they identified four groups of people who possess divergent territorial claims on the place. They include the business community, the city government, the university neighbourhood and counter-cultural youth groups. While the University Hill Merchants Association envisions the business district as a shopping area for residents and non-residents, the local neighbourhood conceives of the need for public safety and the maintenance of 'rules' to ensure a secure living environment. The government, on the other hand, is concerned with urban redevelopment while counter-cultural youths are simply content in 'hanging out' and asserting their presence. Following a public brawl between rival youth groups in 1993, the government, merchants' association and residents aligned themselves as custodians of the place by checking the behaviour of the culprit youths. At the heart of this solidarity movement is the contention that the troublemakers are 'outsiders' literally and metaphorically. The youths are outsiders because they were non-residents passing through the Hill area. Metaphorically, they were considered to be on the margins of respectable society, and their irresponsible behaviour is explained by their sense of non-belonging to place and their lack of local community spirit (Staeheli and Thompson, 1997, p. 37).

Staeheli and Thompson's (1997) work echoes an important theme relevant to Singapore's Little India—that is, territorial conflicts are derived primarily from divergent spatial ideologies best conceived in terms of insider–outsider disparities. A useful starting-point which explains the divergent values held by people towards landscapes is Edward Relph's (1976, ch. 4) 'insideness–outsideness' distinction. According to him, the relationship people have with

places ranges from one end of the spectrum—a feeling of 'insideness'—to the other end as a feeling of 'outsideness'. He clarifies this distinction in the following way:

> To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place … from the outside you look upon the place as a traveller might look upon a town from a distance; from inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it. The inside–outside division thus presents itself as a simple but basic dualism, one that is fundamental in our experience of lived space and one that provides the essence of place (Relph 1976, p. 49).

The sense of belonging to place is a function of the different values and claims one brings to bear upon that place. Hence, there are as many 'inside' and 'outside' zones as there are human affiliations to places:

> These zones are defined by our intentions; if our interest is focused on our homes then everything beyond home is outside, if our concern is with our local district then everything beyond that district is outside, and so on. In short, as our intentions vary, so the boundary between inside and outside moves. In consequence there are many possible levels of insideness (Relph, 1976, p. 50).

Rather than a static dichotomy, therefore, Relph's concept suggests many subtle shadings of 'insideness' and 'outsideness', and human interaction with place is seen to fall "somewhere along a continuum between two polarities" (Kong, 1991, p. 54). The boundaries between insideness and outsideness are porous rather than concrete, and people's relationship with place may be transformed over time from one end to another, and vice versa.

The 'inside–outside' divide is conceptually useful as a starting-point to interrogate territorial conflicts as it tells us that spatial conflicts arise from ideological differences. Along this line, a number of other conceptual viewpoints can be further discussed as a way to deepen Relph's schema on the one hand, while throwing more light on the issue of territorial struggle on the other. Cresswell's (1996, 1997) notion of being 'in place' as opposed to 'out of place' is most relevant. According to him, feelings of 'displacement' or 'out-of-placeness' arise when individuals fall short of the rules and regulations governing society. As these rules differ from one society to the next, the sense of 'displacement' varies as well. An individual could therefore be 'out of place' in a particular locale, yet 'in place' in another locale—not because of any inherent differences in his or her behaviour, but because of differences in place rules.

Cresswell (1997) argues that 'outsiders' (particularly deviants of society) are often depicted by the media and government through disparaging metaphors—for example, weeds, plagues and bodily secretions. Such metaphors are not just a "tool of language" but prescribe "a kind of understanding and a way of acting" (Cresswell, 1997, p. 339). Through the use of metaphors, government clashes with deviant groups such as the homeless, prostitutes or immigrants are justified as strategies of 'local defence' and government protection of 'insider' agencies against harmful 'outsider' influences. Like Relph, Cresswell (1996, p. 10) maintains that there are many shades of insideness and outsideness because

> different groups of people have different ideas about what is and is not appropriate, and these different ideas get translated into different normative geographies.

Territorial conflicts arise precisely because there are multiple normative geographies in any given place.

Tourists have often been depicted through metaphors of outsideness. An example is offered by Cresswell's (1997) analysis of 'new age travellers' (hippie tourists). According to him, the British media frequently portray such visitors as plagues and diseases which contaminate landscapes, harm local societies and contribute to the spread of AIDS. This

negative view helps to justify government policies of breaking up hippie communes, prohibiting nomadism and controlling the movement of caravan trails. Similar descriptions of tourists as the 'golden hoardes' (Turner and Ash, 1975) and 'cool invaders' (Iyer, 1988) further perpetuate the image of invading pests and the harmful effects of outsiders on insiders.

The insider–outsider clash is also well captured by Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between 'representational spaces' and 'spaces of representation' (see Shields, 1992 and Domosh, 1998). While the first refers to spaces that are used in everyday life by the lay person, the latter refers to planned or controlled spaces of the powerful, members of which include urban planners, architects and technocrats. Where the behaviour of the lay person coincides with the 'rules of behaviour' as prescribed by planners, tensions are diffused. Conversely, conflicts occur when different stakeholders have divergent perspectives on the way space ought to be used or developed, contrary to government planning ideals. In urban planning, the state works from a functionalist perspective as an 'outsider', holding dear such values as pragmatism and rationalism. This posture of 'objective outsideness' demands that planners

> separate themselves emotionally from the places which they are planning and to restructure them according to principles of logic, reason, and efficiency (Relph, 1976, p. 52).

By contrast, the general public may have far more localised concerns as 'insiders' for their home, neighbourhood or community.

The upheavals at Thompkins Square Park in New York City (Smith, 1992) and the longstanding Volleyball riots at People's Park in Berkeley (Mitchell, 1995) are two cases of contested urban terrains. As Mitchell explains, conflicts arose because of the collision of two irreconcilable visions on the purpose of public space. In Berkeley, for example, while the planners of People's Park envision public space as a "place of order, controlled recreation, and spectacle", the homeless and activists harbour visions of "public space as a place of unmediated political interaction" free from the coercion of powerful institutions (Mitchell, 1995, p. 125). While the state considers insider status as a right to be earned through proper public behaviour, the itinerant users of the park see their insider status as a given. Territorial contestation arises because of conflicting definitions of what it means to be an insider, and what constitutes an outsider.

This notion of spatial conflict, however, should not be taken too far. While places are never entirely 'free' or 'constrained', neither are they always the terrain of ongoing confrontation. In other words, while the insider–outsider schema provides a good starting-point to conceptualise the relationships people have with each other and with a particular place, it should not lead us to think that conflicts are the definitive characteristic of urban dynamics. Indeed,

> the schema serves to focus attention on the times and places where these views [insider–outsider opinions] actually come into head-to-head contact—that is, when there are violent struggles between the people who represent them (Domosh, 1998, p. 211).

Instead, Domosh (1998, p. 212) reminds us that non-violent, everyday "polite petty" acts of transgression should also be observed as 'tactics' by which marginalised groups seek to reclaim space. She shows from historical accounts of 1860s New York that women and black communities engaged in 'oppositional politics' to reclaim public streets for themselves. Yet the tactics they deployed were subtle everyday acts—"'polite' politics where transgressions were slight, yet stunning nonetheless'" (Domosh, 1998, p. 213). In Singapore's Little India too, insider–outsider tensions seldom erupt in dramatic overtures; instead, it is through the subtle power relations between people that we can best appreciate landscape evolution.

Tourism Landscapes: Insider–Outsider Interactions

The study of urban tourist landscapes helps to extend the existing understanding of insider–outsider relations over space. Historic waterfronts, cultural precincts and conservation sites are multifunctional urban landscapes which attract tourists, locals and retailers, and fulfil many different goals such as entertainment, cultural, commercial and residential (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1990). The power relations between various stakeholders provide an opportunity to look at cities as shared spaces, and urban development as a "function of conflict and compromise" (Short, 1996, p. 168). Three lines of enquiry are suggested here: a study of tourist–local interactions; an understanding of interethnic relations; and, an appraisal of planner–user dynamics.

Tourists and locals embody fundamentally different needs even as they share a common meeting ground. In tourist sites, 'insider locals' and 'outsider visitors' are brought face-to-face with each other, often on an unequal footing. While the visitor is there by choice for the purpose of entertainment, the locals are there by circumstance with immediate needs of economic fulfilment. The outcome of this meeting, tourism writers suggest, is one of two effects: a 'demonstration effect' or a 'commodification process' (MacCannell, 1976; Greenwood, 1977; Smith, 1977; Dearden, 1991; Cater, 1995). In the former, local cultures and landscapes are modified *by* tourists in an unconscious manner as locals coming in contact with foreigners are influenced in subtle but profound ways. Also described as the 'billiard ball effect', local societies are seen as passive whereas tourism is regarded as a dynamic external force intruding upon and transforming indigenous cultures and landscapes. Such a process usually occurs in developing countries where locals are most prone to aspire to Western habits and standards of living. Alternatively, the impact of tourism may be described as a commodification process in which local societies are changed *for* tourists under a consciously crafted scheme initiated by profit-minded entrepreneurs and governments (Greenwood, 1977; Cohen, 1988). Such visitor-oriented projects occur equally in developed and developing countries where the needs of tourists are prioritised over those of locals.

Two qualifications must be made. First, tourists are not necessarily outsiders nor are all locals always insiders. The insider–outsider relationship is far more nuanced because not all tourists will embody feelings of outsideness, nor will all locals necessarily embody a sense of belonging to their homeland. Relph (1976) offers the example of 'empathetic insideness' which he describes as a sense of belonging to place derived from a deep respect for or knowledge of the place. This is not unlike the reverential attitude tourists on pilgrimage might feel towards religious sites. On the other hand, locals may also embody a sense of 'existential outsideness' towards a place, particularly a locale which they have grown accustomed to over the course of time. In insider–outsider dynamics, it is presumptuous to generalise that all tourists will share a sense of alienation towards place, and that all residents are inextricably linked by feelings of local solidarity. Similarly, it is presumptuous to assume that tourist–local relations are always combatory since insider–outsider alliances do exist too (Hitchcock *et al.*, 1993; Chang, 1997).

Secondly, the demonstration and commodification schools of thought have been largely confined to the relationship between locals and visitors. These perspectives view spatial struggles from the parochial lens of the tourist–local duality while neglecting other forms of territorial claims. Tourism is certainly not the only 'outsider' agency impacting urban areas, and the tourist–local dialectic is only one component of a much larger struggle over place. Gamper (1985, p. 251) reminds us that tourism is "not the only context in which host populations interact with outsiders, nor is it always the most important one". Changing social norms, political factors and other 'local' and 'global' forces lead to the rearrangements of cultural

boundaries, and "tourism might be best viewed as one of several, albeit a very important, catalyst of change" (Gamper, 1985, p. 251).

Moving beyond the tourist versus local dimension, therefore, two additional avenues for exploration include the relationships between ethnic groups within a tourist site, and the affective ties between planners and users of the city. Studying ethnic relations is particularly essential in multicultural cities because urban heritage tourism involves issues of ethnic rights and interethnic rivalry. The cases of Chinatowns in Vancouver (Anderson, 1991) and Singapore (Yeoh and Kong, 1994) and colonial neighbourhoods in postcolonial cities (Western, 1985; Teo and Huang, 1995) exemplify this concern. As cities become increasingly multicultural and ethnic communities begin to assert their identities, questions on 'what to develop' and 'who benefits' will have to be interrogated. Urbanisation is therefore politicised because as Tunbridge (1984, p. 174) observes, it is in

> truly plural societies that our question of 'whose heritage' comes to a head … urban heritage conservation becomes a political exercise, frequently with sinister overtones for those groups out of power.

Minority ethnic communities (outsiders) and majority groups (insiders) are therefore pitted against one another in the urban conservation arena.

Sometimes, interethnic relations and user–planner dynamics coincide in the course of urban development. For example, Anderson's (1991) work shows how change in Vancouver's Chinatown arises from the government's reworking of its attitudes towards the Chinese community. The Chinese as a 'race' have been interpreted differently by a white-dominated government over time, and these interpretations have been projected onto the planned urban landscape. For example, in the early 20th century, Chinatown was considered a contaminated place and the government recommended demolition. This mindset reflected a general public fear of the outsider Chinese who, on the one hand carried the stigma as descendants of indentured labourers, and on the other hand were derided as arrogant upstarts acquiring properties once owned by white Canadians. By the 1940s, however, with the onset of urban tourism, plans to conserve Chinatown were broached instead because the place was rediscovered as an exotic attraction, and the Chinese community was regarded as providing the requisite 'colour' to the city. Today, Chinatown's exotic appeal has been banished and the place has been reinterpreted anew as a Canadian landscape,

> respected and valued for its contribution to the uniquely Canadian ideal of unity through diversity (Anderson, 1991, p. 212).

Vancouver's Chinese population has been perceived in contrasting ways—from outsiders to exoticised community and true Canadians. This changing mindset reflects evolving interethnic relations and planner–user dynamics, which have in turn guided government planning of Chinatown.

To understand urban tourism change in a multicultural and multifunctional context, it is imperative that we acknowledge the many stakeholders involved, and their relationship with each other either in the forms of outright conflicts or subtle negotiation. In the context of Singapore's Little India, landscape changes in the 1990s can be analysed through the relationships of various insider and outsider groups with each other, and with the place. This point will be argued by looking at three sets of interpersonal relationships: tourist–local relations; interethnic ties; and, planner–user dynamics. Before proceeding, some background material is discussed.

Background to Little India and Research Methodology

To set this paper in its proper perspective, a brief overview of Little India and fieldwork methodology is needed. Little India represents one of a number of historic conservation sites in Singapore (Figure 1) and was the fourth most popular free-access attraction

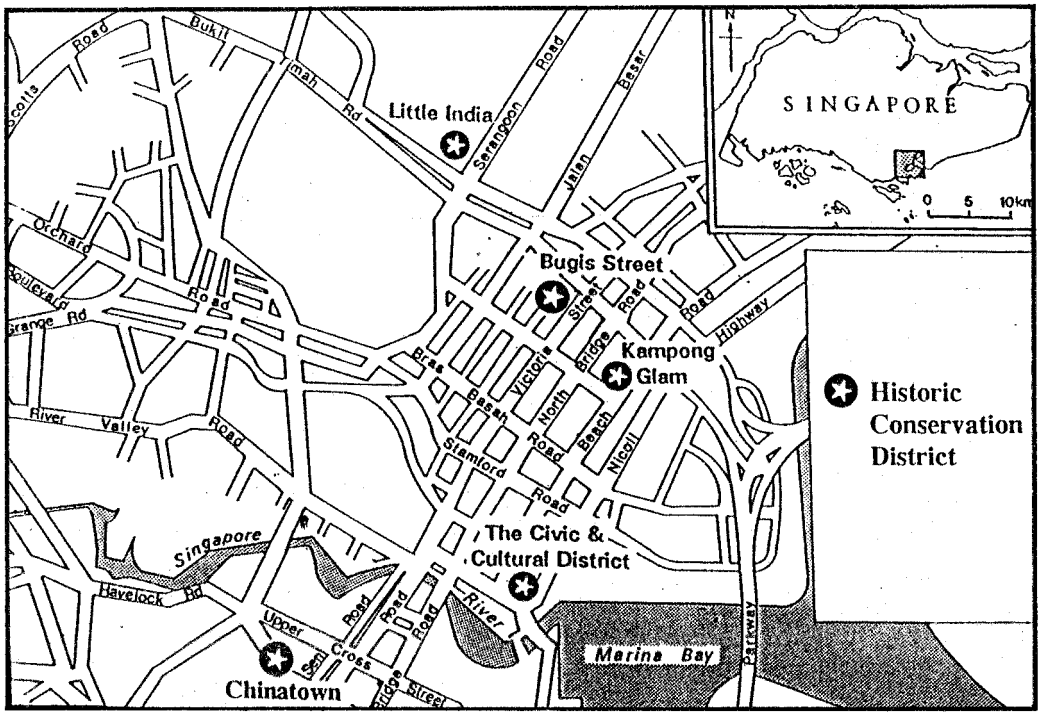

Figure 1. Central Singapore, showing the location of the Historic Conservation Districts.

visited by 23.4 per cent of tourists surveyed in 1995 (STPB, 1996, p. 72).[1] Little India is a popular attraction where tourists can sample exotic food, shop for unique items while immersing themselves in a minority culture. Little India is also popular with Singapore's Indian community because of its wide array of retail outlets, restaurants and services catering to their specific needs. In 1996, Singapore's population numbered 2.99 million of which 7.2 per cent were Indians. Other ethnic communities include the majority Chinese (77.4 per cent), Malays (14.2 per cent) and others of Eurasian background (1.2 per cent).

The early beginnings of Little India, or Serangoon Road as it was originally known, were dominated by the presence of a cattle industry and an Indian convict jail in the mid 19th century. Both provided employment opportunities for the Indian community and served as a magnet for Indian immigrants. By the late 19th century, Serangoon Road's "reputation as a network of [Indian] community comfort, sustenance, and opportunity" was firmly entrenched in its cattle industry as well as in its burgeoning commercial, retail and construction activities (Siddique and Shotam, 1990, p. 71). The changing focus from cattle to people peaked in the early 20th century and the diminution of the cattle trade in the 1930s ushered in Serangoon Road's transition as a commercial and residential site. Former cattle stablings were converted into shops and residences, popularly referred to as 'shophouses'.

While the urban development agenda in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by slum clearance, in the 1980s attention shifted to conservation and adaptive reuse of shophouses (Kong and Yeoh, 1994). Symptomatic of this shift was the government's call for the conservation of historic areas and buildings as articulated by the URA's (Urban Redevelopment Authority) Conservation Master Plan in 1986 (URA, 1986) and the publication of conservation manuals for Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India in 1988. Ethnic neighbourhoods were considered repositories of the nation's

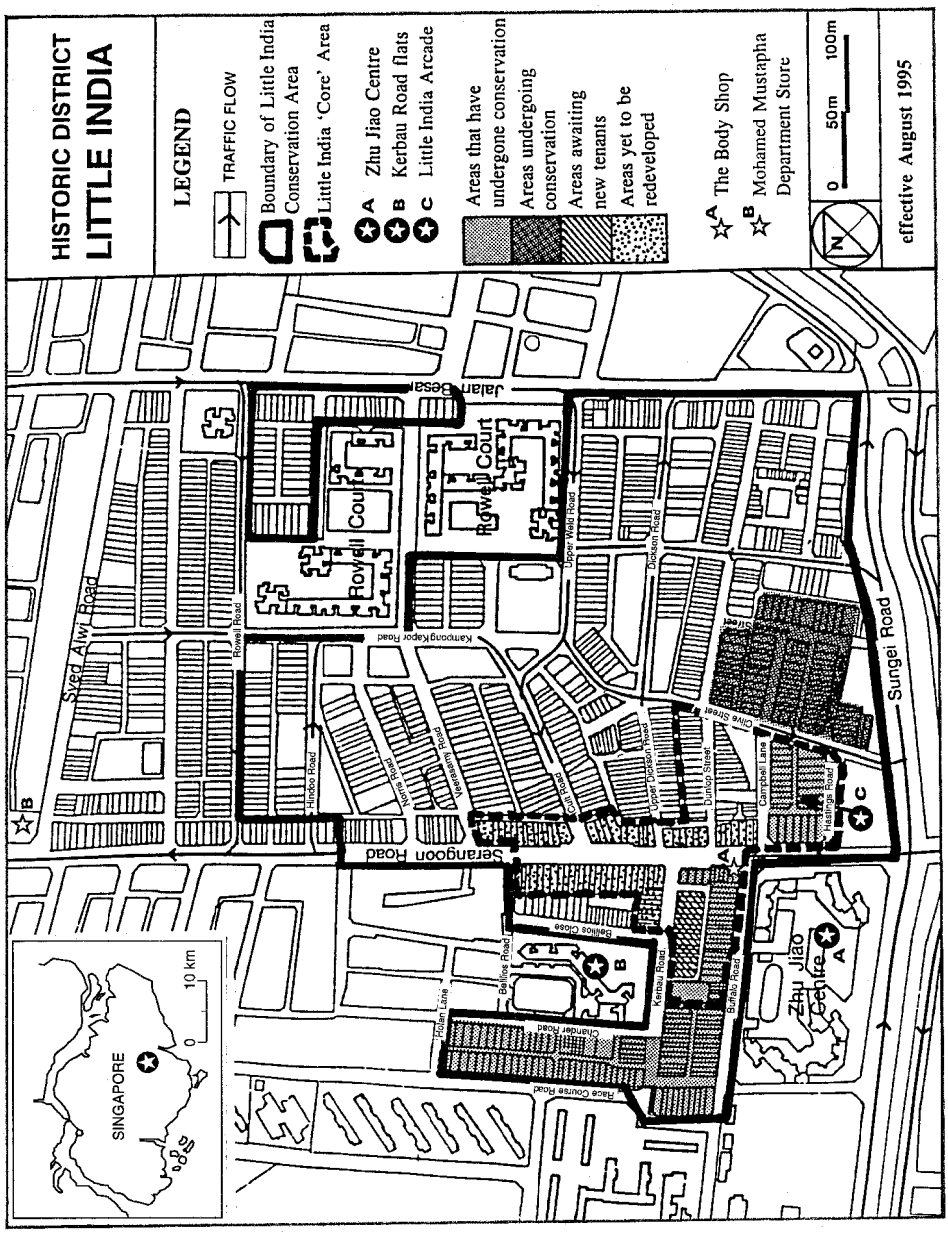

Figure 2. The Little India Historic District.

fast-diminishing heritage which give a sense of place and identity to the country and its citizens. An added impetus to conservation was the poor performance by the tourism industry in 1983 which recorded its first-ever fall in tourist arrivals. It was felt that conservation of ethnic districts might contribute to Singapore's "oriental mystique and cultural heritage" (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1986, p. 2). What were once local residential and commercial sites have now been elevated to national importance as civic and tourism assets (Yeoh and Kong, 1994).

In July 1989, an area of 13 hectares around Serangoon Road encompassing 900 shophouses was gazetted as the Little India Historic District (Figures 2 and 3). The URA stipulated that any structure to be removed, renovated or built had to be granted prior approval. The URA's vision was to develop Little India as a "distinct historic district within which dwells the heart of the Singaporean Indian heritage" (URA, nd). Although the whole of Little India was designated a conservation area, only a select zone will actually undergo an intensive process of adaptive reuse which includes eviction of former tenants, conservation of façades, renovation of interior areas and resale through a public tendering process. This zone is the 'core' of Little India which the URA described as "the area containing the greatest density of Indian trades" and where the "distinctive characteristics of Little India will be defined" (URA, 1988, p. 28; Figure 2). Property prices and rental fees in the conserved shophouses are to be pegged at market value in order to ensure that only commercially viable enterprises are attracted to the area.[2]

The transformation of Little India parallels the global urban redevelopment trend often termed the 'post-modernisation' of cities (Dear, 1986; Knox, 1991; Mullins, 1991). The redevelopment of ethnic neighbourhoods for pleasure consumption, the emphasis on heritage conservation and the inevitable commingling of traditional land uses with new

Figure 3. A panoramic view of Little India: note the mix of conserved shophouses and dilapidated buildings (c. 1995).

enterprises are all characteristics of contemporary urbanisation. How is this ideology of urban use viewed by the general public? To what extent has conservation succeeded in ensuring a mix of the old and new, and to what degree have there been conflicts and complementarities between various stakeholders? These were the research questions which steered my fieldwork.

The data used in this study were generated between June and September 1995 through a questionnaire survey conducted with 41 retailers, 79 tourists, 76 residents (Singaporeans living in Little India) and 71 local visitors (Singaporeans visiting Little India but who reside elsewhere). While face-to-face interviews were conducted with all the retailers and residents, self-administered questionnaires were randomly distributed to the local and foreign visitors visiting the site. The retailers or shopkeepers sampled included only those in the core area of Little India in order to ascertain their views on working in a conserved shophouse. The residents interviewed came principally from two public housing projects: the Zhu Jiao Centre which comprised three blocks of flats and the Kerbau Road flats (A and B in Figure 2). In-depth interviews were also conducted with representatives from the Hindu Endowments Board and Raffles International, co-owners of the Little India Arcade, a retail/conservation project located at the junction of Serangoon and Sungei Roads (C in Figure 2).

The questionnaire survey comprised both close-ended and open-ended questions. Similar questions were asked of all four respondent groups in order to elicit data that would provide grounds for comparison. This was useful in identifying areas of conflicting opinions between user-groups. Open-ended questions were featured to probe more deeply into the reasons behind stated opinions. Where the survey was conducted on a face-to-face basis, as with shopowners and residents of Little India, open-ended questions were also used deliberately to trigger discussion and debates. It was from these sometimes-heated responses that many of the quotes in this paper are derived.

In interrogating feelings of belonging and alienation, I was made aware of my own position as both an insider and outsider in Little India. I discovered that one of the best ways to elicit responses from 'insiders' was to accentuate my insider identity. Being sympathetic to those facing problems because of gentrification and listening patiently to their woes and complaints often won me their confidence. This in turn helped me to probe further their feelings of disenchantment towards various government policies. Being able to speak a second language (Mandarin with some merchants and residents) and being a Singaporean further affirmed my insider status. On the other hand, being Chinese and not being conversant in Tamil or any other Indian dialects was a drawback. This was particularly the case with the Indian merchants I spoke with who might consider me an 'outsider', and who would withhold or dilute their views pertaining to race and ethnic issues. This was something I had little control over and the only precaution I could take was to be careful in asking sensitive questions and to be impartial in receiving contentious answers. Being cognisant of my fluctuating status made me even more aware of the fluidity of the insider–outsider boundary, which in turn impressed upon me the dynamic power relations between insider and outsider groups sharing a common urban space.

Little India: A Contested Landscape of Insiders and Outsiders

Little India is a contested landscape between three sets of insiders and outsiders. The discussion begins with the tourist versus local relationship which is usually depicted in tourism studies as the primary conflict, then proceeds to explore ethnic contestation and finally the relationship between users and planners of the urban landscape.

The Tourist–Local Relationship: Placing Singaporeans First

There is little evidence to suggest that Little

Table 1. Main reasons cited by merchants for locating their businesses in Little India

Reasons why merchants come to Little India	Number	Percentage
Central location for things/people associated with being 'Indian'	23	51.1
"*We cater to Indian clients*"	(11)	(24.4)
"*We sell Indian products*"	(9)	(20.0)
"*We are Indians*"	(3)	(6.7)
Emotional attachment to Little India—for example, lived/worked here previously, family inheritance	10	22.2
Popular shopping site for everybody	4	8.9
Presence of tourists/popular tourist attraction	3	6.5
Trying out market potential of site	2	4.4
Other reasons	3	6.5
Total	45[a]	100.0

[a]The total number of responses (45) exceeds the total number of merchants polled (41) because of multiple responses.

India's retail outlets are geared primarily towards outsider tourists at the expense of insider Singaporeans. Three sets of interrelated data support this contention. The first cites the reasons why merchants and shopkeepers have decided to establish their business in Little India. Here, we note that the 'tourism factor' was cited by only 6.5 per cent of the respondents, while the majority cited either the 'pull of the Indian' (51.1 per cent) or 'emotional attachment to site' (22.2 per cent) (see Table 1). More than a tourist attraction, Little India is perceived by the business community as first and foremost a shopping destination for Indians. The presence of Indian customers, the availability of Indian services and the historical attachment to an Indian locale are the overriding reasons why businesses were attracted here. Particularly for Indian retailers, Little India offers a natural catchment as it is a "recognised Indian community space" (Siddique and Shotam, 1990, p. 129). It is in this spirit that the merchant at Alamkara told me:

> Orchard Road is Westernised but Serangoon Road is Indian. My goods are from India and shoppers know they can come to Little India to get Indian things.

In interrogating the role of tourism further, two questions were asked of the shopkeepers: the importance of tourism as *the* deciding factor for locating in Little India and the proportion of tourists *vis-a-vis* Singaporeans patronising their respective outlets. In the former, an overwhelming 43.9 per cent revealed that tourism was of 'no importance at all' and another 14.6 per cent considered tourism as 'not very important'. Only 24.4 per cent regarded tourism as 'very important' and 14.6 per cent as 'quite important'. Little India, in the eyes of these shop-holders, is a specialised Indian centre and its reputation as an exotic tourist attraction is subordinate to this. Tourists are attracted to Little India because of its unpretentious local flavour and any unauthentic staging is bound to be inimical to the whole cultural experience.

This brings us to the second point, which is the small proportion of tourist patrons *vis-a-vis* Singaporean clients. Of the 41 merchants interviewed, 41.5 per cent revealed that their tourist clientèle comprised less than

one-quarter of the market share, while 12.2 per cent revealed that they received no tourists whatsoever. Local patrons clearly outnumbered tourist clients. Hence, even ostensibly tourist-geared outlets have begun supplementing their wares as a means of attracting locals. As R. Murali of V. K. K. and Sons, a shop which sells saris admitted,

> we should not depend only on tourists because their purchasing power will decrease with a stronger Singapore dollar—so, we are now trying to stock [household] products for Singaporeans as well.

Similarly, Marian Das, proprietor of the shop Yogams, was initially attracted to Little India because of its reputation as an attraction. However, she confided that her shop attracts 70–80 per cent of Singaporeans instead and she has turned from selling handicrafts to handphones and pagers.

Rather than a site of conflict, Little India is primarily a local retail centre and plays a secondary role as a tourist attraction. These roles are not mutually exclusive since tourists are attracted to the area because of the "cultural exoticism of the local population and its artefacts" (van den Berge and Keyes, 1984, p. 345) whereas locals go there to shop and eat. According to my survey, 72.2 per cent of tourists came to sightsee and 26.6 per cent came for shopping/eating. This contrasts with 62.0 per cent of Singaporean visitors who came to shop/dine and only 15.5 per cent for sightseeing. Little India's multiplicity of functions illustrates what Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990, p. 90) have referred to as a "multifunctional urban space" catering to the "multimotivated user".

Although Little India's shops are geared towards Singaporeans, a distinction must be drawn between two sub-groups: local visitors *to* the site and local residents *of* the site. While both groups are Singaporeans, their needs are quite different. Residents living in Little India visit the shops mainly for household items, groceries and sundry goods, whereas local Indian visitors residing elsewhere flock to the area for specialty items like saris, religious paraphernalia and Indian spices. It may be argued that Little India's shops benefit outsider visitors far more than they do insider residents. In asking tourists, local visitors and residents to respond to the statement 'the shops and restaurants in the conservation area cater to my needs and interests', 56.3 per cent of local visitors and 45.6 per cent of tourists either agreed or strongly agreed, compared to only 26.4 per cent of residents. Conversely, 31.5 per cent of residents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, as opposed to only 15.2 per cent of tourists and 8.5 per cent of local visitors.

Urban redevelopment has turned Little India into a visitor-oriented district with shops and restaurants catering to a culture of consumption. The URA maintains that tenancy and rents in the conserved shophouses must be determined by free-market forces, and any financially viable enterprise is welcomed to the site. This has engendered a situation where merchants specialising in high-turnover goods have set up shop, while less lucrative enterprises—such as those selling household items and groceries—are gradually phased out. The Little India Arcade (or LIA) in particular suffers from this problem because rents here are extremely high and many traditional activities have moved elsewhere. Local visitors and tourists are the main patrons of LIA, whereas residents are repelled by the loss of shops/services which once catered to their everyday needs. As one resident lamented:

> All this upgrading benefits tourists and only a few Singaporeans. Conservation creates a pleasant place to visit and look at, but behind the scenes we [the residents] are the ones paying for the high rents and expensive goods. Tourists come only once and buy just a few things—they don't suffer like us.

When asked of her response to the new shops, a British tourist similarly replied:

> They are attractive to tourists and bring in money but I don't know if the locals appreciate them though.

An Indian Singaporean further adds that

> Everything looks so new and Westernised that the 'flavour' of India seems to be missing … efforts must be taken to preserve the Indian touch and cater to the local population.

Fieldwork reveals that specialty shops and Western-owned enterprises have gained a foothold in Little India's core area. For example, The Body Shop has set up a branch on Serangoon Road as have many jewellery outlets, fabric and craft shops geared towards local visitors.[3] A '7–11' convenience store has also opened an outlet at Little India Arcade. Shops supplying mundane household items, groceries and foodstuffs are found mainly at the foot of Zhu Jiao Centre rather than in the conservation zone. Conservation in Little India, therefore, is not unlike what some have observed as a global trend in urban rejuvenation in which

> preservation of the physical remnants of the historical city has superseded attention to the human ecologies that produced and inhabit them (Sorkin, 1992, p. xiv).

While Little India may have escaped the much-dreaded image of a 'tourist trap', it is instead burdened with the image of an 'Indian themed centre' far removed from the practicalities of daily living. The insider–outsider division does not, therefore, exist in the form of the outsider-tourist poised against an insider–Singaporean. Rather, the insider–outsider cleavage pits local residents against local visitors.

The Indian–non-Indian Interaction: Irreconcilable Differences

The insider–outsider dichotomy in Little India may also be dissected along ethnic lines. Two levels of tension exist between Indians and non-Indians. At one level, a strong anti-Chinese sentiment is discerned amongst Indian shopkeepers who consider the Chinese as arrogant upstarts. At another level, the Chinese community harbour a strong anti-Indian feeling towards South-Asian labourers congregating in Little India. These South-Asians are regarded as 'aliens' and 'out of place' in a Singaporean landscape.

Although by name and historical association, Little India is a place of Indian community, increasingly businesses owned by Chinese merchants have emerged. This phenomenon has been boosted by the conservation movement in the 1990s because of the URA's free-market policy. Many Indian merchants, however, take issue with this as they feel that Indians have a natural insider right to the place and non-Indian businesses would, in the words of one shopkeeper, "spoil the character of the place". One shopkeeper even went so far as to say:

> Refurbishment has led to the loss of the old flavour. Well arranged shops are not a reflection of [the old] Little India. … All the shops must be Indian-owned, and the goods should have an Indian flavour. There are just too many Chinese goldsmiths—a taxi driver described it as Little China instead. We must insist on having only Indians here.

As one tourist summed up,

> The new shops must have at least some connection with India, the Indians and their culture.

Many of the newly conserved shophouses have either been bought or rented by Chinese merchants. The block of shop units between Buffalo and Kerbau Roads, for example, comprises a Chinese-owned jewellery outlet, two Chinese fashion accessory shops and The Body Shop. While Indians dominate the pre-conservation shophouses, many Chinese occupy the newly refurbished units presaging a trend of increased non-Indian participation for the future. A good example is the Kerbau Hotel, a 31-room establishment owned by a Chinese businessman which occupies what were once 5 shophouse units comprising Indian groceries. K. T. Ang the manager proudly told me that the hotel is a "definite improvement" over the previous uses because of structural improvements made to the decrepit buildings and increased economic

viability. This view reflects the government's own perception that new retailers will improve the financial and aesthetic status of historic sites. As T. K. Liu then chief executive of URA said, new activities must be encouraged because the

> lifestyle in these old areas is undesirable. The residents are old and poor, the trades are dying and many of the buildings are fire hazards (*The Straits Times*, 29 July 1990).

Many Indians contend that they have a natural insider right to the place and that the government's policy of freely allowing anybody into Little India is misplaced. V. Nathaji of Vishnu Music Centre told me that

> More than half the new shops are owned by Chinese because so long as they can do business here, they are welcomed. Indians can't afford to stay here but we should ideally have only Indians.

The disdain towards the Chinese retail invasion also extends to what some respondents perceive as a Chinese mindset in government policies. The stereotypical attributes of the industrious and profit-making Chinese are conflated with the state policy of selling shophouses through tender, and conservation is suspiciously regarded as one way in which the government can benefit the majority Chinese at the expense of the minority Indians. Consigning parts of Little India to the bulldozer in the early 1980s because of urban renewal, and the dispossession of merchants through redevelopment in the 1990s reflect a "double bias" (Tunbridge, 1984, p. 172) towards the economically disadvantaged Indians. The government is perceived as unsympathetic towards the true insiders of Little India. Govindasamy, an ex-resident opined:

> Conservation is a government policy, it's not by the Indian people. We didn't ask for it. Singapore is too modern and the government has the forethought to conserve. It's not [the] people's decision, it's the government's decision and we are all obedient to the law.

Echoing a similar view was a resident:

> If you want Little India to be 'old Singapore', don't change anything at all. Once the government takes over, it becomes a failure. Indians should be allowed to do anything they want but within a framework of development.

There is indeed a strong feeling that the government-led conservation programme is of little benefit to Indians.

When the disenchanted Indians were reminded that Chinese merchants were similarly affected by conservation works in Chinatown, they retorted that Singapore is essentially a 'Chinese city' whereas Little India represents an Indian enclave. As one retailer put it,

> When you're a minority in a country, the ethnic area becomes significant to you. Chinatown in Singapore isn't significant but Little India is.

Chinese-owned and Western-styled shops are viewed as inappropriate use of land since they can be easily located anywhere else in the city. In this vein, C. Mallick a fashion designer working in the Little India Arcade reasoned:

> As long as it's an Indian shop, no problem [being in Little India]. But if it's a Chinese restaurant, that's already all over the place and Little India should be for Indians. The Body Shop can go everywhere, so why must they come here?

In a recent study, Begam (1997, p. 71) similarly argued that since Indians are a minority in the country, they have come to regard Little India as a refuge or a "focal point for social relations and community interaction and this in turn reinforces the ethnic identity of the place".

In response to the criticisms, Chinese shopkeepers justify their presence by drawing upon the practicalities of business concerns. Little India, they reason, is after all a

'place of business' and any financially viable enterprise is welcome. The Chinese owner of Merlin Goldsmith concurred:

> Who can afford the rent can come anytime. … It is not true to say only Indians can come in.

While Indian shopkeepers tend to view state policies through racial lenses, Chinese merchants do so on economic grounds. Whether the tenants are Chinese or Indian is unimportant to this latter group. Clearly, the Indians are tied to Little India through affective bonds forged by ethnicity, whereas Chinese entrepreneurs are linked through pragmatic business concerns. In Relph's terminology, the Indians experience a sense of "existential insideness" where "deep and complete identity with a place" is forged through "knowing implicitly that *this* place is where you belong" (Relph, 1976, p. 55; original emphasis). The Chinese on the other hand embody a sense of "existential outsideness" or a feeling of "not belonging", where the environment becomes merely "backgrounds to activities" (Relph, 1976, p. 51).

Although many Indians claim an insider status, the racial contestation process takes on a surprising twist when we interrogate the relationship between Chinese residents and foreign migrant workers from the Indian subcontinent (India, Bangaladesh and Sri Lanka). In this context, the insider–outsider discourse centres around the Chinese 'insiders' living in Little India and the Indian 'outsiders' visiting the place.

Each Sunday from late afternoon until evening, South-Asian labourers mainly employed in construction sites and other manual jobs in Singapore gather on their only free day in Little India to meet with friends, shop and visit the temples. A modest estimate places the migrant crowd at 5000–10 000, spread throughout Little India but mostly concentrated in open spaces and outside the public housing flats. Many of the Chinese residents interviewed complained that the Indian workers present a major problem. Racist overtones were rife as respondents spoke about their fears for personal safety although there has been no documented evidence of burglary. The recurrent theme of the 'Indian threat' extended to complaints that the workers blocked public access paths and contributed to crowded car parks and buses. One respondent even complained that she "can't stand the smell of too many Indians" and the migrant workers were making themselves "too much at home" in Serangoon Road. Such feelings of annoyance spring from the residents' belief that public housing estates, while in Little India, are essentially private properties and the South-Asian labourers, Indians though they may be, are 'outsiders' in the landscape. While the workers are free to congregate in 'Indian spaces' such as the temples, LIA or open grounds, they should not intrude upon the 'common spaces' of local residence. The noise and occasional litter further accentuate the perception of the 'Indian nuisance'. Since early 1996, the police have been chasing away crowds from the foot of public flats each Sunday afternoon and, in mid 1997, barricades were erected in select areas. According to Lieutenant Chua, with whom I spoke, the mini garden at the foot of Zhu Jiao Centre has been declared off-limits to everybody—Indians and non-Indians alike—because of the need to ensure orderly behaviour while not explicitly discriminating against the Indians. "What can I do but to follow orders, and to chase away everyone?" asked Chua, as he ushered away the mingling crowds.

Indignation towards the South-Asian crowd was also vented in the English press. Writers to *The Straits Times* spoke about how they have become a 'minority' in their own country and how their Chinese relatives refuse to visit them on Sundays (*The Straits Times*, 28 July and 2 August 1997). Yap Eng Kwang, a resident of Zhu Jiao Centre said:

> They [my relatives] complained that there are too many foreign workers sitting around the staircase. Some are drunk and my relatives feel uncomfortable walking near them. The situation is better now with them out of the block. But still the noise is unbearable. I just wish they would go

> somewhere else (*The Straits Times*, 4 August 1997).

Another writer to the paper further complained:

> I think tougher measures and new initiatives are needed to alleviate the situation in Little India. … There are too many of these workers in Little India. … The workers have not spared a thought for other people who use the area too. They gather in groups and chat, and litter the place (*The Straits Times*, 19 July 1998).

He suggested that more police be sent to patrol the area and control pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Indignation towards the South-Asian crowd was not shared by the Indian merchants I spoke with. Although shop-owners do not directly benefit from the migrant presence, there is a general sympathy nonetheless towards their plight as foreign workers. Unlike the Chinese, Little India they believe is home to *all* Indians and this includes Singaporean Indians and Indian tourists as well as labourers from the Indian sub-continent. Some even reason that their frenzied presence contributes to a mood reminiscent of India itself. As Velle of Ayurvedic Remedies opined, since the government requires Indian workers in the construction industry, it must provide a "place of convenience" for them to congregate and feel a sense of emotional attachment. Little India creates an opportunity for these foreigners to feel welcomed in an alien land. Not only do the migrant workers get their only chance to meet with friends each week in Little India, they also come here to collect their mail (sent to their agents since they do not have a permanent address in Singapore) and remit funds back home through their agents. An Indian writer to the press further explained that the workers only have one day off for the whole week and "they will go to a place they are more familiar with and which they can identify as their own" (*The Straits Times*, 22 July 1997). Little India thus serves as their home away from home, but it is precisely this sense of homeliness which is being challenged by the Chinese residents who consider Little India *their* true home.

To close this section, the fluidity of the insider–outsider boundary is re-emphasised. Indeed, who constitutes an insider and who represents the outsider is open to negotiation. On the one hand, we witness the tension between insider–Indian merchants and outsider–Chinese retailers. Yet on the other hand, we encounter the ironical twist presented by the insider–Chinese residents in conflict with the outsider–Indian migrants. Claims to insider status are interpreted differently by different groups: while Indian merchants and labourers are tied to the landscape through bonds forged by ethnicity, the Chinese merchants are linked through business concerns while Chinese residents are attached through property rights. Although Chinese merchants are generally considered outsiders, even this is open to contest. Many Indian tourists patronise Chinese-owned shops and in turn, many Chinese entrepreneurs have gradually acquired a working knowledge of Tamil and other Indian tongues (Begam, 1997). Little India is therefore a contested landscape between different ethnic groups laying claims to it, reinterpreting insider rights and redefining outsider groups differently.

User–Planner Dynamics: Ties That (Un)Bind

While the previous sections looked at conflicts from the micro-level of ethnicity and market profiles, here we turn to the macro-level of users and planners of Little India. Differences arise between these two groups who embody divergent ideologies on the way urban space ought to be used. On the one hand, urban planners and policy-makers relate to the landscape from a functionalist perspective as outsiders. Relph described this as a sense of "objective outsideness" in which planners "separate themselves emotionally" from the places they are planning and work according to "the principles of logic, reason, and efficiency" (Relph, 1976,

p. 52). This is contrasted to the general public or users of the landscape who typically have far more localised concerns as insiders for their home, community and neighbourhood.

Since the government gazetted Little India as an historic district in 1989, many new merchants have begun occupying 'old' shophouses. Adaptive reuse is considered an integral element of the government's vision of redevelopment and an inevitable part of social and economic progress. According to the URA,

> Whilst we cannot preserve lifestyles, we can at least preserve the buildings which convey a sense of the time, without being a drain on the taxpayer (*The Straits Times*, 23 October 1991).

In exploring the relationship between planners and users of Little India, we shall focus specifically on users' attitudes towards the government's adaptive reuse scheme.

Surprisingly, a large proportion of respondents endorsed the government's policy of accommodating new retail activities in old shophouses (Table 2). This is the case for residents of Little India, the retailers themselves and Singaporeans visiting the site, with the sole exception being tourists. A number of reasons were provided to support the government's policy, the most important being 'improvement to business' and the feeling that urban change is 'an inevitable part of progress' (Table 3). Historic sentimentality should not stand in the way of progress as the marketing manager of Batu Pahat Goldsmith explained:

> It [bringing in new retailers to old shophouses] is not a matter of whether it's a good or bad idea. There is no choice at all!

Table 2. Respondents' attitudes towards new retail outlets occupying conserved shophouses and historic buildings (percentages)

Do you think it is a good idea for new shops and activities to occupy conserved shophouses and historic buildings?	Retailers ($n = 41$)	Residents ($n = 76$)	Tourists ($n = 79$)	Local visitors ($n = 71$)	Average
Yes	56.1	56.6	34.2	45.1	48.0
No	36.6	26.3	51.9	39.4	38.6
Mixed opinions	2.4	3.9	3.8	0.0	2.5
No opinion	4.9	13.2	10.1	15.5	10.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Main reasons why respondents approved of new retail outlets occupying conserved shophouses (percentages)

Retailers ($n = 23$)	Residents ($n = 43$)	Tourists ($n = 27$)	Local visitors ($n = 32$)
Adds novelty to the site (34.6)	Convenience (40.8)	Improves business in the area (33.3)	Improves business in the area (45.1)
Inevitable part of progress (19.2)	Improves business in the area (18.4)	Puts old buildings to good use (25.9)	Convenience (18.2)
Improves business in the area (15.4)	Adds novelty to the site (18.4)	Inevitable part of progress (11.1)	Adds novelty to the site (15.2)
Attract tourists (11.5)	Inevitable part of progress (8.2)	Convenience (11.1)	Inevitable part of progress (12.1)

> Provision shops cannot afford the high rents. After spending so much money on renovation, how can the small Indian provision shops afford to stay here? So, while the façade of the buildings may be Indian, the inside has to be all changed.

The owner of GGS Publications, Books and Stationery made a similar observation:

> Singapore is moving all the time, we can't go back to the past. … Our Indian identity cannot be lost just because of changes in building styles; infrastructure doesn't affect our identity, and places don't give us our identity. If Isetan [a modern Japanese department store] comes to Little India, why not? Little India is after all a place of business.

In welcoming new enterprises, Indian merchants were not advocating the presence of more Chinese retailers in the historic site. Instead, they saw adaptive reuse as an opportunity for greater Indian participation in Little India.

Many local respondents felt that new retailers will rejuvenate Serangoon Road and attract more customers. While old shops may be 'authentic', they only cater to a small and ageing clientèle. New enterprises, on the other hand, have a greater drawing power and their presence will endow Little India with a blend of modernity and traditional charm. For example, the presence of The Body Shop in a conserved shophouse was praised as adding to Little India's 'international flavour', 'new appeal' and 'modern touch'. Such a view accords with the URA's stated goal of ensuring a "creative mix" of new and old activities that would evoke the "gaiety and richness of old Little India" (*The Straits Times*, 28 March 1991).

In contrast to the views expressed above, tourists were opposed to the presence of new shop-holders because of their contrived atmosphere and the fear that Little India would become 'just another modern shopping district'. Unlike the three groups of Singaporeans who endorsed the government's adaptive reuse policy, the tourists possessed a far more romanticised image of Little India arguing that its allure and charm come from its being 'authentically old'. To be confronted with modern shops like Watsons (a pharmacy), AIBI Power Rider (which stocks gym equipment) and '7–11' is thus a rude shock and tremendous let-down. Said a British tourist:

> The Body Shop looks out of place and it was the first thing we noticed. We were expecting something with an Indian theme.

Further infiltration of modern outlets would erase whatever distinctiveness the area might have to offer. This fear was expressed by an Australian visitor:

> The whole island is full of new shops; some areas should be preserved to retail the history of Singapore and to teach the younger generations about the different cultures. With the way Singapore is developing at the moment, the whole island is going to be one big McDonalds drive-through.

Unlike 'insider' residents and local visitors who have been indoctrinated by the Singapore government's urban redevelopment rhetoric, 'outsider' tourists have a more romantic image of what Little India is and should be. Adaptive reuse is interpreted by the latter as 'cultural destruction'.

The Body Shop provides an apposite rallying-point to illustrate the divergence in insider–outsider attitudes towards place. Those in support of new outlets point to the glamour and high profile the shop bestowed on Little India. Those opposed feel it exemplified a classic case of the commercialising influence of tourism and the resultant loss of Indian identity. This accords with Relph's (1976, p. 109) view that

> The landscape[s] of tourism … are consequences of the activities of big business, for they are invariably made up of products and reflect the needs dictated by such business even when they have not been constructed directly by them.

However, therein lies an intriguing irony. Of the few Singaporeans who spoke disparagingly of new enterprises, many nonetheless approved of The Body Shop. Some felt that an ecologically friendly shop was far less intrusive than McDonalds or Burger King, while others pointed out that the shop employed Indian workers or that it stocked Indian cosmetics and beauty products (which it did not). In the opinion of one, the trademark green colour of The Body Shop blended nicely with the green hues of the surrounding shophouses. R. Selvarajoo of Alarmkara even went so far as to say:

> For The Body Shop to come here, it's proof that Indians have become more sophisticated. This is a historic milestone for Little India to have such a famous shop.

Local respondents considered The Body Shop a welcome addition and symbolic coming-of-age for Little India. Through this strategy of appropriation, respondents had in effect mitigated the impact that a modern non-Indian big business would otherwise have had on the cultural identity of the area. Even if their views were based on factual errors, such a strategy serves as a means for insiders to cope with state policies and adapt to the inevitability of urban change. Once appropriated, The Body Shop took on a new, less-threatening meaning.

The planner–user relationship is therefore marked by a local–tourist divide. Divergent opinions arise from the claims that insider and outsider groups invest in Little India. Residents and local visitors welcomed the presence of new activities because they will rejuvenate the historic district and make Little India more 'fashionable'. Retailers are far more concerned with business opportunities and welcome new enterprises in the hope of increasing their own clientèle base. In contrast, tourists come to Little India to sightsee and to make contact with "a different reality" (van den Berge and Keyes, 1984, p. 345). Modern Western outlets are inimical to the whole experience of cultural voyeurism and their make-believe journey into the heart of exotic India.

This divergence between Singaporeans and foreigners points to a fundamental difference in insider–outsider ideology. I argue that Singaporeans, the 'insiders', have been largely and successfully persuaded by the government, planning authorities and the state-owned media of the necessity for urban and cultural change. Indeed, ever since the URA introduced its conservation masterplan in 1986 and its specific conservation manuals for historic areas in 1988, one could argue that Singaporeans have been indoctrinated on the importance of creating 'self-sustaining' historic areas where cultural vibrancy and economic viability must be reconciled (URA, undated). Supporting the national conservation programme is depicted as supporting a worthy national cause, and the government is championed as custodian of the people's heritage. A decade of such reasoning through the press, government documents, seminars and public exhibitions has obviously proved successful. Kong and Yeoh (1994, p. 253, emphasis added) concur that Singaporeans today believe heritage to be a

> communal resource to be conserved, *even though* the land on which it sits may be private or corporate possession, and as such, would be best managed by an enlightened government who would be best placed to steer a course through conflicting interests.

The Singaporean ideology of 'rationalism', 'pragmatism' and 'economic growth' has therefore moulded a distinctively Singaporean mindset (Tamney, 1995). On the other hand, foreigners and tourists have been far less subjected to state rhetoric, and their anti-government opinions inevitably reflect an unmediated 'outsider' perspective.

Conclusion

Employing Relph's (1976) concept of insideness–outsideness, this paper has focused on the conflicts and negotiations between three different groups in Singapore's Little India. They include tourists and locals,

Indians and non-Indians, and users and planners of the landscape. It has been argued that landscape contestation is a highly dynamic process comprising many insider–outsider factions and diverse insider–outsider relationships. Drawing together the main findings of the paper in this conclusion, some thoughts on territorial struggles are aired, and the implications for further urban and tourism research are sketched.

First, the paper argues that insider–outsider boundaries are never predetermined and who constitutes an insider and who is regarded an outsider are always open to negotiation. At the heart of this insider–outsider debate are the rules by which people in a shared locale define an 'insider'. As Cresswell (1996, 1997) reminds us and the case of Little India bears out, insider–outsider identities are highly fluid because 'insideness' is defined in different ways. For example, Chinese residents see property rights as legitimate grounds to stake their claim to place. Chinese merchants do so on the basis of their economic investment in Little India, while the Indian community (broadly embracing retailers, migrant workers and residents) regards ethnicity as the all-important bond to landscape.

This argument on the subjectivity of insider identities resonates with ongoing debates on 'public sphere' and 'citizenship rights' as they pertain to multicultural and multifunctional cities (Mitchell, 1997). Short (1996) explains that global economic restructuring has given rise to a 'new urban order', and research must contend with the multiple ways of seeing, interpreting and reclaiming cities by different communities. No longer is it sufficient to talk about people's 'sense of place' in cities (Lynch, 1960); research should go 'beyond sense of place' (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam, 1994) to understand multiple and contesting 'senses of place' (Massey, 1993; Massey and Jess, 1995). It is precisely these senses of place which help us to appreciate how landscapes evolve and what their future might be. As Jess and Massey (1995, p. 139) point out, the future of any place

> rests very much on whose interpretation of the place wins out. In a sense each side is laying a claim to how the place should be thought of, how it should be represented.

The study of Little India adds to this literature on differing claims to space by discussing the problems and outcomes of multiple senses of place in a multicultural and multifunctional city.

Secondly, the insider–outsider analytical lens has been focused on different groups of people, revealing in the process that insider and outsider identities are fluid and non-permanent. Hence, depending on where the analytical lens falls, one could be classified an insider or an outsider, or both simultaneously. The case of Singaporean visitors to Little India is most revealing. Viewed from the tourist–local lens, these visitors are 'outsiders' because it is their retail needs which are prioritised by the conservation programme often to the detriment of Little India's residents. It is they (and not the tourists) that residents feel most discriminated against. On the other hand, Singaporean visitors to Little India may also be described as 'insiders' because it is they (and not the tourists once again) that the government has successfully indoctrinated with the necessity of urban adpative reuse. However, when viewed through the lens of ethnic relations, local visitors, many of whom are Indians, assume the position of 'outsiders' yet again. This is because, while they endorse adaptive reuse, they feel marginalised by the government's 'colour-blind' policy of reallocating shophouses according to economic viability. These Indians feel that Little India is being infiltrated by too many Chinese retailers who are increasingly challenging the Indian 'natural insider' rights to the place.

Why is an understanding of the multiple positionalities of people important to urban studies? Simply, as the restructuring of global economies has led to the reorganisation of capital, labour and people, cities become the stage upon which we can best witness the renegotiation of local identities and borders. As a multifunctional landscape in the global

city of Singapore, Little India offers an example of a locality shaped simultaneously by global forces (of tourism, commercialism and post-modern urban change) and local pressures (the assertions of Indian identities and cultural heritage). The multiple positions of people in Little India epitomise a widespread renegotiation of what it means to be 'local', 'insider' and 'in place' in cities around the world. These are the questions that will and must continue to inform research on global cities where increasingly alternative lifestyles, ethnicities, classes and genders collide (Croucher, 1997; Kirby and Hay, 1997; Mitchell, 1997).

Thirdly, this paper has also shown that insider–outsider relationships take disparate forms. The relationship between tourists and locals in Little India, for example, is seen as complementary, as is the relationship between local users and planners of the landscape. At the same time, spatial conflicts persist in the forms of territorial tensions between Indian and Chinese merchants, and between Chinese residents and Indian migrant workers. Hence, while it is exciting to view the city as a contested battlefield, the Little India case supports Staeheli and Thompson's (1997) view of cities as places of conflicts as much as of co-existence between different people. And where conflicts do occur, Domosh (1998) reminds us that they need not be combatory clashes but can be subtle 'everyday' acts of transgression. In Little India, unsensational tactics—such as complaints in the press about migrant workers—have had results, as exemplified by more stringent policing of streets and crowds. This example of "micropolitics" (Domosh, 1998, p. 223) underlines the need to undertake more research on mundane, polite and even obscure ways of contesting and contributing to urban change. It also urges a more moderate view of cities as places of both conflict and negotiation.

A final area to which this paper hopes to have contributed is the field of tourism studies. Although Little India is one of Singapore's most popular attractions, it has been argued that it is not enough to examine the landscape from the tourist–local perspective alone. To do so would be to obscure other significant dimensions that impact urban tourist sites, such as ethnic relations and planner–user dynamics. This attempt at widening the tourism analysis is a response to calls for a more 'critical geography of tourism' (see Britton, 1991) which attempts to move tourism geography research beyond its narrow concerns with tourist spatial flows, impacts and patterns. In the case of cities, Britton (1991) argues that tourism analyses can throw light on critical issues like urban restructuring and economic change. As contemporary cities increasingly turn to tourism as a means of sustaining their economies, rejuvenating landscapes and attracting capital (Law, 1993), more critical accounts of the role of tourism are needed. Indeed, tourism studies can contribute much to ongoing debates on urban ethnic politics (Tunbridge, 1984), post-modernism (Squire, 1994) and globalisation (Oakes, 1993; Cater, 1995; Chang, 1999). The investigation of Little India as a contested landscape takes up this challenge of broadening tourism analyses and in so doing contributes to a more critical urban geography of tourism.

Little India represents many things to many people. It is a popular tourist attraction, a retail centre for Indians, a social centre for migrant workers and a residential site for different ethnic groups. As a contested landscape, different interest-groups conflict, negotiate and complement each other and the tourist–local relationship is one component of a much larger struggle over place. Critical accounts of tourism landscapes must focus on the wider scenario in which the tourist–local relationship is set and, similarly, future analyses of spatial struggles must explore the multifaceted nature of insider–outsider interactions as they relate to the urban setting.

Notes

1. The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) was renamed in 1997 as Singapore Tourism Board (STB). In this paper, the term STPB is used because all the publications that were referred to and all fieldwork con-

ducted were undertaken before the name change.

2. Prior to 1989, the Rent Control Act prevented land-owners in the central area from increasing rents arbitrarily. This Act was enacted by the colonial government prior to Singapore's independence in 1965 in order to prevent unscrupulous landlords from exploiting their tenants. With the designation of Chinatown, Little India and other ethnic neighbourhoods as Historic Districts, the government lifted the Act in 1989 in order to encourage new retail activities there. This led to many landlords deciding to refurbish their shophouses and increase their rents. Many traditional retailers and residents who could not afford the newly increased rents were displaced by new retail land uses. In Little India, this process of urban conservation has led to a relative decline in traditional Indian retailers and an increase in new outlets, some of which are owned by non-Indians.
3. By late 1997, however, The Body Shop was replaced by a goldsmith outlet.

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