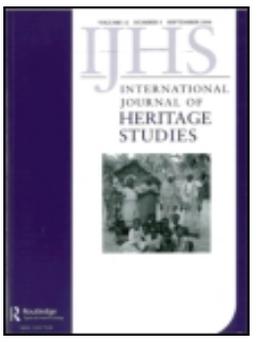

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Conserving Colonial Heritage: Raffles Hotel in Singapore

Joan C. Henderson

Abstract

The paper considers the case of Raffles Hotel in Singapore which has been the subject of a conservation project with a significant element of redevelopment. The circumstances are discussed within the context of heritage tourism in colonial cities and changing approaches to conservation in Singapore. Built colonial heritage exhibits a symbolism which affects how it is presented and interpreted, serving as a tool for nation building and as a tourist attraction. Policies about conservation and use are influenced by these alternative and often contested meanings, while economic imperatives may demand that buildings generate revenue. Raffles Hotel illustrates the difficulties involved in managing and marketing colonial heritage and securing an acceptable balance between commercial and conservation objectives, with possibilities for confusion as a consequence of the combination of restoration, reconstruction and new building techniques employed. The case has a wider relevance which extends to other forms of built heritage around the world and highlights the dilemmas facing those making decisions about how to present the conserved past as a contemporary tourist space.

Key words: Raffles Hotel; Singapore; Conservation; Colonial Heritage; Heritage Tourism; Restoration

This paper is concerned with the relationship between built heritage, conservation and tourism in colonial cities and uses the example of Raffles Hotel in Singapore to explore the issues and conflicts that can arise. Raffles Hotel is a tourist icon and has a history which reflects that of Singapore itself, the most recent event being its reopening in 1991 after work which involved both conservation and extensive refurbishment. The case illustrates the tensions which exist between conservation and commercialisation of heritage, complicated by the circumstances of colonisation whereby buildings acquire symbolic meanings for both residents and visitors. They may be interpreted as representations of the authority and control of the former colonial power, as well as its values, and the source of some contention regarding preservation and use.

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The history of Raffles Hotel is discussed within the context of a shift in attitude to conservation in Singapore, after a review of the literature on heritage and tourism in colonial cities. Reference is also made to the built environment inherited from the British who ruled Singapore for almost 150 years, and its symbolism. The contribution of tourism to the conservation effort is acknowledged, but concerns are also identified about the consequences of allowing tourists to exercise too much influence over the presentation of heritage. Finally, some general conclusions are derived from the particular circumstances of the case about the difficulties of managing the heritage–tourism relationship, the need to secure an appropriate balance between conserving and commercialising sites and tourism as a form of neo-colonisation.

These issues apply to many heritage sites around the world and are not confined to Singapore. Decisions have to be made about what forms of heritage to conserve and how to present them as tourist environments that will be attractive to visitors, and also generate revenue where appropriate, whilst remaining meaningful to residents. The process occurs at sites and in cities around the world and reconciling competing interests continues to be a central challenge for heritage managers.

Heritage and Tourism in Colonial Cities

Ashworth[1] in a recent review of studies of heritage and tourism, notes the growing literature on the subject and alternative approaches adopted. Built heritage tends to be concentrated in cities, hence an emphasis on urban heritage tourism which extends beyond Western cities[2] to include those of Asia.[3] While some commentators see opportunities for harmony and symbiosis, others describe the relationship in more negative terms. Tourism may exploit cultures and their heritage[4] and this is a particular threat in developing countries and former colonies which are now independent.

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1. G.J. Ashworth, 'Heritage, tourism and places: a review', *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, pp. 19–29.

2. G.J. Ashworth & P.J. Larkham (eds) *Building a new heritage: tourism, culture and identity in the new Europe*, London: Routledge, 1994; J. van den Borg, P. Costa & G. Gotti, 'Tourism in European heritage cities', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1996, pp. 306–321; J. Glasson, K. Godfrey & B.Goodey, *Towards visitor impact management: visitor impacts, carrying capacity and management responses in Europe's historic towns and cities*, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 1995; P. Larkham, *Conservation and the cities*, London: Routledge, 1996.

3. C. Cartier, 'Megadevelopments in Malaysia: from heritage landscapes to leisurescapes in Melaka's tourism sector', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1998, pp. 505–632; S.C.H. Cheung, 'The meanings of a heritage trail in Hong Kong', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1999, pp. 570–588; D.J. Timothy & G. Wall, 'Tourist accommodation in an Asian historic city', *Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1995, pp. 63–73; G. Wall, 'Linking heritage and tourism in an Asian city: the case of Yogyakarta, Indonesia', in P. Murphy (ed.) *Quality management in urban tourism*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1997, pp. 137–148.

4. J.E. Tunbridge, 'Whose heritage to conserve? Cross-cultural reflections on political dominance and urban heritage conservation', *Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1984, pp. 171–180.

International tourism is frequently accused of being a vehicle for neo-colonisation through the perpetuation of inequalities and inequities.[5] Palmer uses the example of the Caribbean to illustrate that tourism there continues to express the ideology of colonialism and inhibits the emergence of a genuine sense of national identity, arguing that it is 'inextricably linked to notions of slavery, racial discrimination and inequality'.[6] The work of Crick,[7] English,[8] and Erisman[9] supports these conclusions about the links between tourism, power, dominance and authority. Such theories frequently make reference to the arguments of Said[10] who has written more generally of Orientalism as an intellectual tradition based on assumptions of European-Atlantic superiority, symbolising the power and domination of the West over the Orient. While writing principally about Orientalism as a system of beliefs applicable especially to the Middle East, many of Said's observations do have a resonance in any discussion of the distribution of power among the parties involved in international tourism.

Colonial societies thus have a potentially 'dissonant heritage'[11] and dealing with it means addressing the question 'whose heritage?' which 'clouds the conservation and marketing of urban heritage in all formerly colonial societies seeking to exploit the tourism markets of their former masters'.[12] Part of this dissonance occurs because heritage requires narration to residents as well as tourists. It can be read as a 'post-colonial dialogue over nationalism . . . about what parts of a colonial history should be upheld for contemporary narratives about national identity, political ideology, and perceived economic imperatives'.[13] Heritage tourism is not, therefore, concerned only with preserving the remains of the past for visitor enjoyment, but

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5. S.G. Britton, 'The political economy of tourism in the Third World', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 9, 1982, pp. 331–358; N. Morgan & A. Pritchard, *Tourism promotion and power: creating images, creating identities*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1998; M. Mowforth & I. Hunt, *Tourism and sustainability: new tourism in the Third World*, London: Routledge, 1998.

6. C. Palmer, 'Tourism and colonialism: the experience of the Bahamas', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1994, pp. 792–811, p. 801.

7. M. Crick, 'Sun, sex, sights, savings and servility: representations of international tourism in the social sciences', *Criticisms, Heresy and Interpretation*, Vol. 1, 1988, pp. 37–76.

8. P. English, *The Great Escape: an examination of north-south tourism*, Ottawa: North-South Institute, 1986.

9. M. Erisman, 'Tourism and cultural dependency in the West Indies', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 10, 1983, pp. 337–361.

10. E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Random House, 1994.

11. J.E. Tunbridge & G.J. Ashworth, *Dissonant heritage: the management of the past as a resource in conflict*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1996.

12. G.J. Ashworth & J.E. Tunbridge, *The tourist-historic city*, London: Belhaven, 1990, p. 55.

13. C. Cartier, 'Conserving the built environment and generating heritage tourism in peninsular Malaysia', *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1996, pp. 45–53, p. 51.

also about contemporary struggles for power and the concept of nationhood. Buildings acquire meanings and associations, often disturbing when seen to symbolise colonial oppression,[14] and these have to be negotiated when making decisions about contemporary forms and functions.[15]

Despite these dilemmas, which are especially contentious within a colonial context, and concerns about excessive commercialisation and commodification,[16] heritage tourism is increasing in popularity[17] and the demand for nostalgic heritage appears particularly strong. Such a trend can be explained by a variety of factors including better education and greater curiosity about heritage, improved access, expansion in leisure time and the need to escape the uncertainties and stresses of the present. Waitt[18] describes the 'fragmentary nature of postmodern society' where 'contemporary experiences are said to lack a sense of depth, originality and place'. Heritage attractions thus have a potentially large and responsive market, but managers also have responsibilities regarding matters of presentation, operation and marketing.

Singapore's Colonial Heritage

The debate about heritage interpretation has a relevance to Singapore, which was established as a trading post for the British East India Company by Stamford Raffles in 1819. The company was seeking safe ports to protect and promote its trade with China and accepted colonialism as a means of furthering trading ambitions.[19] The Dutch, also active in the region, objected to the British presence in Singapore and the territorial dispute between the two was settled by the Treaty of London in 1824. Under the agreement, the Dutch accepted the British occupation of Singapore and pledged not to intervene in the Malay peninsula. Britain was given Malacca and, in exchange, transferred Bencoolen to the Netherlands and accepted Sumatra and other islands south of Singapore as Dutch interests. Singapore was combined with Malacca and Penang to form the Straits Settlements in 1826 governed firstly from India and then as a Crown Colony from London, 'a form of government essentially

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14. A.D. King, *Colonial urban development: culture, social power and environment*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976.

15. A. Southall, 'The impact of imperialism upon urban development in Africa', in V. Turner (ed.) *Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1971; UNESCO, 'The economics of heritage: conference/workshop on the adaptive reuse of historic properties in Asia and the Pacific', 9–17 May 1999, Conference Programme; J. Western, 'Undoing the colonial city?', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 1985, pp. 335–375.

16. R. Hewison, *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline*, London: Methuen, 1987.

17. P. Boniface & P.J. Fowler, *Heritage and tourism in the global village*, London: Routledge, 1993.

18. G. Waitt, 'Consuming heritage: perceived historical authenticity', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2000, pp. 835–862, p. 838.

19. W.W. Rostow, *The stages of economic growth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

unchanged from 1867 up to the Second World War'.[20] That war and the Japanese occupation of Singapore was a turning point and marked the beginning of the end of British imperial rule; in its aftermath, Singapore was granted a degree of self-government before full independence firstly from Britain and then from the Malaysian Federation in 1965.[21]

British involvement in the destiny of the country is reflected in the urban landscape. The early plan of Raffles[22] set out a town with specific zones for commerce, government, recreation and residence; in the latter, the European area was clearly distinguished from the ethnic communities of Arabs, Chinese and Indians. Jayapal[23] relates the subsequent evolution of the city which was accelerated by the growth in trade and economic prosperity, especially in the late 19th century when Malaya's booming tin and rubber industries provided business for the entrepôt into which Singapore had developed.

Singapore was thus transformed from a fishing village of about 150[24] to one of the busiest ports in the world, the changes in physical appearance being well documented in histories of its architecture.[25] The resulting style incorporated a variety of influences representing 'the sum total of two hundred years of building experience in the East by the settlers and colonizers of India, Indonesia, Penang and Malacca'[26] which has been described as essentially Anglo-Indian.[27] Palladian designs once popular in England arrived in Malaya by way of engineers and architects who had worked in India, with some modifications due to climate and local conditions. These buildings were the 'stones of Empire'[28] constructed to 'tell

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20. C.M. Turnbull, *A history of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, p. 208.

21. J. Baker, *Crossroads: a popular history of Malaysia and Singapore*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1999.

22. J. Crawfurd, *Journal of an embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, London: Henry Colburn, 1828; reprinted 1987, Singapore: Oxford University Press.

23. M. Jayapal, *Old Singapore*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992.

24. W. Bartley, 'The population of Singapore in 1819', in M. Sheppard (ed.) *Singapore: 150 Years*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1982.

25. N. Edwards, *The Singapore house and residential life 1819–1939*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990; M. Gretchen, *Pastel portraits: Singapore's architectural heritage*, Singapore: Singapore Coordinating Committee, 1984; K.L. Lee, *The Singapore house 1819–1942*, Singapore: Times Edns, 1988; G. Liu, *In granite and chinam; the National Monuments of Singapore*, Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996; R. Powell, *Living legacy: Singapore's architectural heritage renewed*, Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1994.

26. J. Beamish & J. Ferguson, *A history of Singapore architecture: the making of a city*, Singapore: G. Brash, 1985, p. 19.

27. P. Gurnstein, *Malaysian architecture heritage survey: a handbook*, Kuala Lumpur: Badan Warisan Malaysia, Heritage of Malaysia Trust, 1985.

28. J. Morris, *Stones of empire: the buildings of the Raj*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

a moral tale. They were monuments of rulers, and a way of life impervious to the riotous and excessive East.'[29] As in India, they served to assert British authority in Singapore[30] where the colonisers organised 'the urban built environment in such a way as to facilitate colonial rule and express colonial aspirations and ideals'.[31]

Such buildings were concentrated in what today is known as the Civic District or historic core, where the pattern envisaged by Raffles is still evident.[32] They include City Hall, Parliament House and the Supreme Court, structures which might be perceived as symbols of domination and contested spaces although now occupied by Singaporean officials. Commercial and social buildings perhaps carry less symbolism than those of government and they have had considerable alterations in use which distance them from their colonial past, but they still recall the colonial era in appearance, often name and sometimes function. Several tell a story of the wealth and privilege of an exclusive elite who led a comfortable life while the majority of immigrants were living in squalor.[33] For example, the Singapore Cricket Club, from which Eurasians were excluded and forced to erect their own facilities nearby, still stands and Raffles Hotel itself was a venue for the privileged few; both are indicative of the divided and unequal society which colonialism engenders.[34]

Despite these sensitivities, the buildings have been recognised for other qualities related to historical understanding and shared experience described later. Their visual appeal also adds 'dignity, constancy and history to the fast-changing city',[35] which makes an interesting contrast to the high-rise skyline of contemporary Singapore. These changing attitudes to the historic built landscape have determined conservation policies in Singapore, discussed in the following section which provides a background to the Raffles Hotel project.

Heritage Conservation in Singapore

After independence, Singapore launched a comprehensive urban planning exercise which was to transform the city and entire island.[36] Rapid urbanisation followed with areas cleared for industrial, commercial and residential purposes. Old buildings were

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29. Beamish & Ferguson, op. cit. (note 26), p. 24.

30. K. Yeang, *The architecture of Malaysia*, Amsterdam/Kuala Lumpur: Pepin Press, 1992.

31. B. Yeoh, *Contesting space: power relations and the urban built environment in colonial Singapore*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 16.

32. N. Edwards & P. Keys, *Singapore: a guide to buildings, streets, places*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1988.

33. O.J. Dale, *Urban planning in Singapore: the transformation of a city*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1999.

34. A. Memmi, *The colonizer and the colonized*, London: Earthscan, 1990.

35. Gretchen, op. cit. (note 25), p. 141.

36. URA, *The Golden Shoe: Building Singapore's Financial District*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1989.

an unproductive use of land which was already in short supply and they were judged incompatible with government notions of modern statehood. There was little support for conservation, which was seen as an obstacle to progress and damaging to government policies of economic growth deemed in the national interest.

There was some recognition of the role of historic landmarks as a link with the past, however, illustrated by the founding of the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) by Act of Parliament in 1970. The Board is charged with gazetting such monuments, which implies a level of protection.[37] The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), responsible for overall planning and development, then started to become more active in conservation and was formally given powers to conserve and protect land and buildings in the 1990 Planning Act.[38] These powers have been executed through the designation of conservation areas and a Conservation Master Plan[39] incorporated into the more comprehensive plan for the country's long-term development.[40] There is also a system of controls and regulations for developers and owners. The result of this activity is forty-four conservation areas covering nearly 6,000 buildings across Singapore, while the PMB has gazetted forty-two buildings. Colonial architecture features prominently, with most examples found in the Civic District.

Several reasons account for this shift in policy, not least popular awareness, as evidenced by the formation of a Heritage Society in 1986. More importantly, there was a growing official acceptance that built heritage had a place even in the most modern of countries, a priority which could be addressed now that the country had achieved many of its economic goals. As the URA states,

> the restoration of our historic areas add variety to our streetscapes and modulate the scale of our urban fabric, creating the visual contrast and excitement within the city while protecting the important reminders and representations of our past. In addition, it adds to the distinctive character and identity of our city, giving it a sense of history and memory of the place.[41]

There were other relevant social and political forces relating to the need for a sense of nationhood in a relatively new country with an ethnically diverse population of Chinese, Malays, Indians and others, occupying a vulnerable geopolitical location between the much larger states of Malaysia and Indonesia with whom relations are often strained. Despite a surface of multicultural harmony, there are signs of racial

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37. MITA Web site, <http://www.gov.sg/mita>, 15 May 2000.

38. R.A. Smith, 'Urban Redevelopment Authority: tourism and heritage conservation in Singapore', in D.H. Hooi (ed.) *Cases in Singapore hospitality and tourism management*, Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1999.

39. URA, *A future with a past: saving our heritage*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1991.

40. URA, *Living the next lap: towards a tropical city of excellence*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1991.

41. URA Web site, <http://www.ura.gov.sg>, 15 May 2000.

tensions and the government is anxious to avoid a repeat of a period of unrest in the 1960s. Heritage and its physical manifestations can be a vehicle for nation building whereby the population is encouraged to accept a shared Singaporean history which transcends ethnic allegiance. As a senior official said in 1986, 'a nation with a memory . . . gives it a sense of cohesion, continuity and identity . . . a sense of common history is what provides the links to hold together a people who come from the four corners of the earth.'[42] There are clearly political rewards to be gained from this use of heritage by the People's Action Party (PAP), which has remained in office since independence.

The promotion of heritage tourism reinforces these objectives as it is a 'powerful force in the construction and maintenance of national identity because it relies upon the historic symbols of the nation as a means of attracting tourists'.[43] Heritage tourism also generates revenue as a marketable commodity, an effect which the pragmatic authorities fully appreciate. Anxiety about a slowdown in visitor arrivals in the 1980s resulted in a review of the country's tourism resources which recognised heritage as a significant visitor attraction. The loss of much of Singapore's built colonial and vernacular heritage in the rush towards modernisation would, therefore, have a damaging impact on tourist numbers.[44] In response, heritage themes were introduced into the new Tourism Product Development Plan[45] and the URA presented plans for a Civic and Cultural District which combined conservation and commercial considerations.[46] The latter was strengthened by the creation of a Museum Planning Area in 1997 with a Museum Precinct set to become a node in the Civic District.

The current strategy of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), devised when it was known as the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB), gives some prominence to heritage, covering the colonial landscape and ethnic enclaves of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam.[47] The Board is now an enthusiastic supporter of conservation and has acted as the lead agency in several initiatives. Tourists can follow a Civic District Trail to 'rediscover the heart of old Singapore . . . covering the colonial period through World War Two to independence'[48] or join Nostalgia/History Tours for

42. URA, 1991, op. cit. (note 39), p. 24.

43. C. Palmer, 'Tourism and symbols of identity', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 20, 1999, pp. 313–321, p. 313.

44. K.C. Wong, *Report of the tourism task force*, Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1984.

45. MTI, *Tourism Product Development Plan*, Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1986.

46. URA, *Master plan for the Civic and Cultural District*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1988.

47. STPB, *Tourism 21 vision of a tourism capital*, Singapore: Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, 1996.

48. National Heritage Board, *Civic District Trail: rediscover the heart of Singapore*, Sydney: ZCARD ASIA PACIFIC, 1999.

'an overview of the trials and tribulations Singapore faced before it became the economic miracle it is today'.[49]

Alternative strategies for post-colonial societies in dealing with inherited buildings have been identified as renaming, neglecting, removing and using.[50] In Singapore, commitment to heritage conservation has saved much of the remaining built colonial heritage, and the emphasis is now on using and adapting. There is evidence of neglect and removal[51] but these appear to be trends of the past. While there have been some name changes, these indicate new functions rather than ideological considerations and there is little reluctance about naming places and business ventures after Raffles who might be seen as the personification of colonialism. He has given his name to schools, streets, a light railway station, a shopping complex, business class on the national airline, a golf club and marina in addition to Raffles Hotel.

Western[52] also argues that decisions depend on whether the former colonial power is still a threat, a factor unlikely to apply in Singapore which has made remarkable progress since independence to become an economically successful and self-confident nation whose citizens enjoy a high standard of living.[53] The experience of colonisation is not, therefore, a cause of embarrassment, but rather of pride in achievements subsequent and Raffles remembered as the figure who helped to make this possible. The treatment of Raffles makes an interesting contrast to that accorded to other prominent colonial figures, such as Cecil Rhodes.

Overall, governmental and religious institutions tend to have retained their original purposes and physical forms with some exceptions; adaptive reuse, defined as alterations that permit 'old buildings to serve a contemporary function'[54] is more common for commercial buildings. This had earlier been defined as rehabilitation by the URA,[55] where buildings are returned to 'a state of utility which makes possible efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features which are significant to its history, architecture and cultural values'. Adaptive reuse may lead to modifications in either form or function and occasionally both, as in the example of CHIJMES. This is a complex of shops and restaurants in the former Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus School created by the restoration of two National Monuments, the conservation of four buildings, the addition of another and the construction of a sunken courtyard and basement car park. Such radical changes attracted some

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49. STB, *Official guide New Asia Singapore*, Singapore: Singapore Tourism Board, 2000.

50. J. Western, 'Undoing the colonial city?', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 1985, pp. 335–357.

51. Edwards & Keys, op. cit. (note 32); Gretchen, op. cit. (note 25); Powell, op. cit. (note 25).

52. Western, op. cit. (note 50).

53. P. Kotler, S. Jatusripitak & S. Maesincee, *The marketing of nations: a strategic approach to building national wealth*, New York: Free Press, 1997.

54. URA, *Chinatown Historic District*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1995, p. 94.

55. URA, *Objectives, principles and standards for preservation and conservation*, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, 1993, p. 20.

opposition,[56] as has the approach in general,[57] but the site is now a National Monument operated by a private company in circumstances similar to those of Raffles Hotel.

Raffles Hotel: a brief history

Raffles Hotel opened in 1887 with only ten bedrooms housed in a bungalow on Beach Road which then fronted the shore. The hotel flourished and a pair of two-storey wings were built to provide a further twenty-two suites and a billiard room, with the Palm Court Wing erected later. Large-scale redevelopment took place at the end of the century and a new Main Building was completed to replace the old bungalow; this comprised twenty-three new rooms, a dining room, drawing rooms, verandas and a main staircase. Further changes between 1900 and 1915 were the opening of the Bras Basah Wing, which provided twenty suites, and a row of ground-floor shop units, the enlargement of the bar and billiard room and the extension of verandas. The billiard room was converted into extra guest rooms in 1917 and a ballroom constructed in 1921. There were other alterations after this date internally and to the exterior, but these were not on such a scale as previously, with an emphasis on upgrading, redecoration and renovation.[58]

Liu[59] and Sharp[60] recount the changing fortunes of the hotel, the former with extensive visual material drawn from its archives and other collections. From modest beginnings, it acquired an international reputation which attracted tourists and expatriates as well as wealthier Asian customers. Business was adversely affected by external events such as the World Wars and the depression of the 1930s, but it still retained an image of glamour, quality and character which continued to draw the rich and famous until the 1960s. Circumstances then changed, however, as new hotels were built to accommodate increasing visitor numbers, many in the principal shopping area of Orchard Road, which had the conveniences and facilities modern tourists expected. Raffles was perceived as old-fashioned, shabby and uncomfortable in comparison and its financial performance suffered accordingly.

A redevelopment proposal mooted in 1980 showed a realisation of the deteriorating condition of the property and failure of the site to realise its commercial potential. The Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) and Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC), which both had a financial interest in the property and land, announced a plan to restore the historic buildings, purchase the

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56. *The Straits Times*, 'Old girls start petition to preserve dignity of CHIJMES site', 16 June 1990.

57. S. Rajoo, 'Facadism is not conservation!', in C. Hoffmann & S. Lau (eds) *Badan Warisan Malaysia annual report*, Kuala Lumpur: Badan Warisan Malaysia, 1993.

58. URA, *Raffles Hotel preservation guidelines*, Prepared by the Urban Redevelopment Authority for the Preservation of Monuments Board, Vol. 1, Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1997, pp. 22–24.

59. G. Liu, *Raffles Hotel*, Singapore: Landmark Books, 1992.

60. I. Sharp, *There is only one Raffles: the story of a grand hotel*, Singapore: Souvenir Press, 1981.

surrounding ground and erect a thirty-two-storey hotel with 774 rooms. The idea was, however, abandoned as a result of a surplus of hotel rooms and a slowing down in arrivals in the mid–1980s, when Singapore appeared to be entering a stage of maturity as a destination.

Despite its difficulties, the hotel was awarded the status of National Monument in 1987, such a designation being based on three criteria. These require that a building (a) be 'representative of vernacular or classical architecture and testimony of the aspirations of Singapore's multi-racial population', (b) be of importance in 'exhibiting particular aesthetic, creative and technical qualities in design and construction of late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial architecture', and (c) contribute to 'depicting cultural, economic and social life of Singaporeans in a particular period of Singapore's culture'.[61] While there may be some question over the extent to which Raffles Hotel met the second part of the first criterion and all of the third criterion, the award confirmed its role as a tourist attraction in whose future the tourism authorities had a stake.

Action was clearly necessary to avert further decline and ultimate closure, and there were demands from within and outside for measures to protect the hotel and help it recover its position. In the words of a Tourist Board report:

> Raffles Hotel is quite possibly more famous than Singapore itself . . . What was once one of the world's great hotels is now a wasting asset, not providing the impact on visitors that its name implies. The irony is that the bones of the original building and its gracious spaces are still there, but they have been clogged with gross and unthinking additions and misused spaces in order to provide some semblance of quick fit economic viability . . . It is still possible to return it to its former splendour and make it the national treasure it should be—the Crown Jewel of the visitor industry in Singapore.[62]

The statement reveals the combination of motives which prompted the project, seeing the hotel as an asset to be exploited for economic gain and an historic building worthy of preservation and restoration to its earlier condition. This dual perspective underlines conservation policies in Singapore, and it was a combination of commercial necessity and conservation pressures which acted together as a catalyst in the closure of Raffles and its redevelopment.

The Redevelopment of Raffles

The strong commercial orientation of the scheme is suggested by the pattern of hotel ownership and management. A partnership of owners was formed in which a majority shareholder was a wholly owned subsidiary of DBS Land, one of Singapore's largest property, hotel and healthcare groups. The OCBC and another 100 shareholders held the remaining stake. A new management company was also set up and has since become the hotel and resort arm of DBS Land. The bankers participated in early

61. URA, 1997, op. cit. (note 58), p. 3.

62. MTI, op. cit. (note 45), p. 37.

Figure 1. Raffles Hotel front façade. [Courtesy of Raffles Hotel.]

negotiations amongst the interested parties alongside government officials, hoteliers, architects and designers. Those financing the project would have had considerable authority and be seeking an adequate return on investment; in such circumstances, decisions are likely to be made as much on commercial as conservation grounds.

This tension between conservation and development has been acknowledged by the then chief executive of the management company speaking on the topic of heritage hotels in general. He describes having to maintain 'a delicate balancing act'. Also necessary is 'the creation of totally new tourism space, within the project site, to accommodate the requirements of today's travellers and to make the project viable . . . to create additional revenue flows through existing space without negatively impacting or over-commercialising the original structures and spaces'.[63] The high costs of prime real-estate sites makes it even more essential to generate income.

The project was led by an executive director co-ordinating a team of fifteen consultants, including one for restoration, who decided that the hotel should be returned to what it had been in 1915. This year was chosen as the benchmark because the 'series of major additions and alterations since then had significantly altered the architectural and spatial character of the hotel'.[64] Sources of information were the original plans, architect drawings, old photographs, postcards and other memorabilia. To achieve the goal, the 1920 ballroom had to be removed and replaced, the bar and billiard room re-created and the timber staircase repaired. In addition to such major structural alterations, attention was given to details like decorative plaster work and marble floor tiles. There was also a new wing built to house shops, restaurants, the ballroom and Jubilee Hall; the latter is a Victorian-style theatre which seats 400. At the

63. R. Helfer, *Branding the Grand Heritage Hotel product*, Singapore: Global Tourism Conference, 1995.

64. URA, 1997, op. cit. (note 58), p. 25.

Figure 2. Raffles Hotel museum. [Courtesy of Raffles Hotel.]

Figure 3. Raffles Hotel lobby. [Courtesy of Raffles Hotel.]

Figure 4. Raffles Hotel Long Bar. [Courtesy of Raffles Hotel.]

same time, the facilities expected of a luxury hotel were put in place, lifts and escalators installed, an underground car park constructed and the gardens were doubled in area and landscaped.

Raffles reopened after two years at the end of 1991, although the development was not fully completed until early 1992 when it filled almost the entire city block. The hotel site now has ninety-six standard and eight Grand Hotel suites, thirteen restaurants and bars, over sixty shops, a museum, a Culinary Academy, gardens and function rooms. It employs 800 staff. On opening, it claimed to fill the three roles of 'international landmark, grand historic hotel and exciting social venue'.[65] The prices of accommodation range from S$650 (£250) for a Courtyard Suite to S$4,000 (£1,500) for a Grand Suite.[66] The entire site was re-gazetted as a National Monument in 1995.

In total, the project cost S$160 million (£60 million) and company reports claimed that the hotel became profitable after one year's operation. The manager explained the success as a combination of luck, the strategy of promoting the facilities as a destination for Singapore residents, and timing.[67] From modest beginnings in 1965, when Singapore became an independent republic, the tourism industry experienced significant growth and arrivals exceeded one million in 1975. Expansion continued in the 1980s, although at a declining rate, and five million visitors were recorded in 1990 with continued upward movement predicted.[68] Raffles thus reopened when tourism and the economy were very buoyant and was able to take advantage of these trends.

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65. Liu, op. cit. (note 59), p. 191.

66. Raffles Web site, <http://www.raffles.com>, 20 May 2000.

67. M. Ng, 'Re-inventor of Raffles', *Asia Magazine*, 1–3 May 1998.

68. N. Cockerell, Singapore. *International Tourism Reports Number 1*, London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 1994.

Figure 5. Raffles Hotel swimming pool. [*Courtesy of Raffles Hotel.*]

The pattern of international tourism arrivals has since been adversely affected by the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s which led to a decline from the peak of over seven million in the middle of the decade and a postponement of the official target of ten million arrivals by the new millennium; however, recovery now appears underway with a return to pre-crisis growth levels.[69]

Discussion

Raffles Hotel provides an illustration of the difficulties of the relationship between heritage and tourism and the struggle to reconcile conservation and commerce at historic sites. In many ways, it can be judged a successful project which effectively combines restoration, reconstruction and new additions. The result is visually impressive, adds character to an area of predominantly modern buildings and has won awards from the Singapore Institute of Architects and the URA. The URA noted that all the historically significant features of Raffles Hotel had been restored in accordance with its three principles of preservation and conservation; these are maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair.[70] Additional work was also well integrated in terms of height, scale, the rhythm of solids and voids and roof details.[71]

There is also no doubt about its appeal to tourists, and it continues to feature extensively in promotion material as a representation of Singapore. Although the market for accommodation may be limited by cost, the shopping arcades, restaurants and grounds are always busy with sightseers. Tourism has saved the property, which might otherwise have disappeared, and it is now a facility for both

69. Travel Business Analyst, Asia, *Travel Measurements*, July 2000.

70. URA, 1993, op. cit. (note 55).

71. URA, 1997, op. cit. (note 58).

tourists and residents, the latter reported to contribute about 65% of hotel restaurant income.[72] Recognition of success by the travel industry is confirmed by the numerous accolades received since reopening.

Nevertheless, the buildings might be criticised for offering as authentic that which is fake. Powell[73] writes of 'additions which are indistinguishable from the original. It is difficult to know when one is in the Raffles Hotel which existed prior to restoration, and what is a replication of the original. Does this distort history?' Such questions of authenticity and integrity in tourism have generated considerable interest[74] since MacCannell[75] identified the concept of staged authenticity. Wang[76] describes the three forms of: objective authenticity applying to that which is original, constructive authenticity projected on to objects by tourists and the tourism industry and existential authenticity derived from the tourist experience. Constructive and existential authenticity are increasingly dominant and the notion of actual or objective authenticity has begun to disappear in a post-modern world of tourism that centres on images, simulacra and idealised representations. Authenticity is no longer fixed, but the subject of negotiation[77] and constant reinterpretation. Issues about agency also arise[78] and loss of local control, although Adams[79] claims that residents may assert some influence against the power of international tourism.

Another concern is the priority allocated to making an historic property pay, and the manner in which the past is exploited in the hotel's marketing, souvenirs on sale and museum. Raffles Hotel is presented in the context of colonial society and its values, and nostalgia for this era is constantly evoked, especially the 1920s and 1930s which are generally accepted as its heyday. Connections with literary figures like Somerset Maugham are emphasised, such personalities clearly belonging to a Western and not an Asian culture. A very partial view of history is thus

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72. Ng, op. cit. (note 67).

73. Powell, op. cit. (note 25), p. 27.

74. E. Cohen, 'Rethinking the sociology of tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 6, 1979, pp. 18–35; P.L. Pearce & G. Moscardo, 'The concept of authenticity in tourist experiences', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22, 1986, pp. 121–132; T. Selwyn, *The tourist image: myth and myth making in tourism*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1996.

75. D. MacCannell, 'Staged authenticity: arrangements of social space in tourist settings', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 1973, pp. 589–603.

76. N. Wang, 'Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1999, pp. 349–370.

77. Waitt, op. cit. (note 18) p. 838.

78. E.M. Bruner, 'Abraham Lincoln as authentic reproduction: a critique of postmodernism', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 96, 1994, pp. 397–425.

79. K. Adams, 'Taming traditions: Torajan ethnicity in the age of tourism', in J. Forshee, C. Fink & S. Cate (eds) *Converging interests: traders, travelers and tourists in Southeast Asia*, Berkeley: University of California, 2000.

communicated, supporting Teo and Huang's claim that the building belongs to the heritage of colonial rulers with which there is little identification amongst residents, creating a landscape 'described as elitist and removed from the lived experiences of the locals'.[80] Peleggi[81] sums up the refurbishment as 'a matter of private enterprise . . . astutely marketed as the recovery of a major asset of Singapore's heritage'.

Marketing activity to sell the hotel's facilities and services are part of wider destination promotion efforts which have become critical in the highly competitive international tourism industry.[82] Much attention is devoted to establishing and manipulating image[83] in pursuit of favourable associations which encourage visitation. Commercially, Raffles Hotel possesses the advantage of a strong and recognisable image grounded in nostalgia for the past, and its status as a tourist icon has already been noted.

The value of this high awareness is reflected in the fact that Raffles is now a product to be sold globally. The management company is Singapore's largest limited hotel group with a market capitalisation of S$1.77 billion (£664 million) and responsible for a series of hotels under the Raffles brand which include the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten in Hamburg, the Hotel Le Royal in Phnom Penh and Grand Hotel d'Angkor in Siem Reap (both in Cambodia) and Brown's Hotel in London. All the properties are seen as heritage hotels with a history and distinct personality to be maintained, but also used economically. In the words of the company, they 'represent strategic investments offering a solid platform to extend this master branding as well as enhance geographical spread'.[84]

Another illustration of an historic property becoming a recognisable hotel brand is that of Reid's Palace Hotel in Madeira founded in 1891 and now owned by Orient-Express Hotels. There are also some similarities with the franchising of catering legends such as Harry Ramsden's fish and chip restaurants, modelled on the original Yorkshire restaurant first opened in 1928, now found in Dublin, Hong Kong and Singapore. In addition, branding in tourism is increasingly being applied to destinations as a whole,[85] although the process has attracted criticisms of

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80. P. Teo & S. Huang, 'Tourism and heritage conservation in Singapore', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1995, pp. 589–615, p. 595.

81. M. Peleggi, 'National heritage and global tourism in Thailand', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1996, pp. 432–448, p. 444.

82. G. Ashworth & B. Goodall (eds) *Marketing tourism places*, London: Routledge, 1996; S.V. Ward, *Selling places: the marketing and promotion of towns and cities 1850–2000*, London: Routledge, 1998.

83. K.S. Chon, 'The role of destination image in tourism: an extension', *Tourist Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1992, pp. 2–8; J.D. Hunt, 'Image as a factor in tourism development', *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1975, pp. 1–7.

84. Personal communication, 1997.

85. W.C. Gartner, 'Image formation process', *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1993, pp. 191–215.

attempts to redefine place identity for ideological reasons[86] and the dangers of commodification for tourist consumption.[87]

Conclusion

Much of the colonial built heritage of Singapore survives through conservation efforts fuelled by a combination of political, social and economic motivations in which tourism plays a significant role, but it would appear that this urban landscape is no longer closely associated with British rule. Currently, many buildings are occupied by the Singapore government and represent national authority while others continue to function as religious institutions or are now museums. They have also become commercial opportunities, such as Raffles Hotel and its transformation into a modern leisure/lifestyle attraction designed for tourists and a wider market of residents. It remains rooted in the past and retains a quality of exclusivity, but this is dictated by affordability rather than power relations within colonial society, and public areas are open to all. Together, the buildings are seen as repositories of the country's heritage and landmarks in the story of Singapore's history.

However, the increasingly popular technique of adapting buildings for contemporary usage has generated some confusion about the meanings of conservation and the outcome of implementation. It is important to distinguish between terms and activities such as preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptive reuse or rehabilitation in order to maintain the integrity of the site and avoid misunderstandings about authenticity which can devalue the visitor experience. At the same time, economic imperatives have to be acknowledged and efforts made to render these compatible with conservation interests; this is a major challenge facing all those involved in heritage tourism. Analysis of the case of Singapore, and Raffles Hotel in particular, indicates one possible approach to meeting this challenge, suggesting both its successes and limitations.

Returning finally to the criticisms of tourism as colonisation by another name which perpetuates unequal and inequitable relations, such theories are not necessarily supported by the circumstances of Singapore. Here, colonial heritage has been claimed by government and the resident population and is being employed by them to define and assert national identity, to attract tourists and for pragmatic reasons of practical necessity. The relationship is no longer one of subservience and perhaps has become that of partnership in the global economy and tourism industry. However, further research is necessary into tourist and resident attitudes towards colonial heritage, their experiences of it and its management and marketing to allow a better understanding of these distinctive cultural landscapes.

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86. J. Gnoth, 'Branding tourist destinations', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1998, pp. 758–760; Morgan & Pritchard, op. cit. (note 5).

87. D. Tyler, Y. Guerrier & M. Robertson (eds) *Managing Tourism in Cities*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1998.