IJAPS, Vol. 11, Supplement 1, 83–101, 2015

THE ASIAN WAVE AND CRITICAL TOURISM SCHOLARSHIP

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ABSTRACT

With more people visiting Asia and more Asians travelling around the world, the implications for new tourism research are increasingly acknowledged. Nuanced understanding on Asia and Asian tourism is necessary if we are to have an accurate assessment of contemporary tourism trends taking place in this part of the world and also beyond. Towards this end, Western conceptualisations of tourism and claims of universality are being challenged by alternative indigenous insights. This paper considers two approaches through which these anti-orthodox perspectives have been framed: (a) the post-colonial approach that re-configures traditional western templates for Asian tourism; and (b) the geography-matters perspective that emphasises the importance of locality in mediating allegedly global forms of development. Key literature is reviewed and distinct contributions are highlighted as part of an agenda to articulate a critical scholarship on Southeast Asian tourism.

Keywords: Tourism in Asia, Southeast Asia, ethno-centrism, post-colonial, critical tourism

INTRODUCTION

With more Asians travelling in their homeland (domestic tourism), within their backyard (regional tourism) and further afield (international tourism) for leisure, business and other discretionary purposes, the implications for new tourism developments and academic research in the non-western world are promising. With the Chinese market surpassing all others in tourist expenditures for the first time in 2012 (followed not too far behind by Japan), the emergent Asian wave should be acknowledged and implications for new and critical tourism discourse considered (Winter 2009; Cohen and Cohen 2014). Orthodox understandings of tourism framed by Anglo-American concepts, examples and knowledge claims are increasingly called into question (Winter et al. 2009). Claims of universality based on Western

precepts have also been met with charges of ethno-centrism, and calls for greater diversity of knowledge on contemporary tourists, tourism development and landscape outcomes.

The concurrent critique of orthodox Western thought and the emergence of non-Western tourists present tantalising possibilities to re-think age old understandings of tourism. This paper hopes to spark further thought on this critical and timely matter across four sections. First, it considers the extent of an emergent Asian tourism wave and the dominance of Southeast Asia as both destination and tourist generator in the 2010s. Statistics on Asian tourism are provided to substantiate these claims. Next, the notion of "Asia on tour" is seriously considered, demanding a nuanced appreciation of its contextual effects and characteristics, as well as its differences from (but also similarities to) western antecedents (Winter et al. 2009). Towards this end, a critical Asian/Southeast Asian tourism scholarship is articulated to serve as a rallying call to acknowledge the regional turn. This constitutes the second section of the paper. While Critical Tourism Studies (CTS) have gained more or less a foothold in mainstream tourism discourse (see Gale 2012; Bianchi 2012), the notion of a critical Asian/Southeast Asian tourism scholarship is a relatively new enterprise, and constitutes the agenda of this discussion.

While the literature on Asian/Southeast Asian tourism is rich, most of the works are detailed and isolated empirical studies rather than critical and consolidated accounts that "Asianise the field" (King and Porananond 2014: 6). Instead of an exhaustive literature review, two key approaches are outlined to identify seminal works in critical regional tourism. Towards this end, the third section of the paper introduces a *post-colonial* approach that deconstructs orthodox perspectives of tourism based on indigenous Asian experiences. This is followed by a *geography-matters* approach which highlights the significance of local/geographic context. Rather than a holistic review, the two-fold discussion showcases productive avenues in critical tourism scholarship on a rapidly emerging world region. In the conclusion, a research agenda customised to Asian/Southeast Asian tourism is re-articulated illuminating, hopefully, a direction that Asianist tourism scholars can further advance.

AN EMERGENT TOURISM WAVE

Regular pronouncements of an economically ascendant Asia are often accompanied by equally regular accounts of different crises that threaten growth. Indeed, tourism development in Asia is intimately tied to its

economic fortunes as well as its misfortunes. As with the vagaries of economic change, Asia's tourism is beset with multiple starts and stops over the years. The 1991 Gulf War, for example, dulled the glowing tourist arrival growth rates of 9.2 percent in the 1980s in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Hitchcock et al. 2009a). The Southeast Asian economic crisis of 1997 (accompanied by local political incidents and environmental haze), epidemics such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in East Asia (2002/2003) and H1N1 (2008), as well as terrorist attacks, tourist kidnappings and political demonstrations in places as varied as Kuta, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Jakarta and Manila in the 2000s/2010s further dampened economic growth and tourism development (for a comprehensive overview of Southeast Asian tourism till the late 2000s, see Hitchcock et al. 2009a).

While we cannot anticipate future problems, the tourism industry has proven to be resilient through the decades, rebounding in economically buoyant times. Current trends suggest a possible re-emergence of Asian tourism in the 2010s along three optimistic trajectories. First, the *annual growth rate of inbound tourist arrivals* shows that while Europe still commands the largest international visitor share, the rate of growth in Asia surpasses other continents. In 2013, a total of 563 million international tourists visited Europe (or 52 percent of the world market) followed by Asia and Pacific nations which received 248 million international visitors or 23 percent share. Despite commanding less than half of Europe's catchment, Asia-Pacific's annual growth is notable. Reflecting its upward trajectory through the 2010s, the annual increase of international tourists in 2013 was 6.2 percent compared to 5.4 percent for Europe and Africa, and 3.2 percent for the Americas (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] 2014: 4). Within Asia-Pacific, the fastest growing sub-region is Southeast Asia (10.5 percent increase in 2013 over the previous year) compared to South Asia (6.1 percent), Oceania (4.7 percent) and Northeast Asia (3.5 percent). Southeast Asia's success is attributed to increasing numbers of Chinese and Indian travellers, and the region's strategic focus on niche markets such as second-home vacationers, medical/health travel, cruise and Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism.

A second evidence of an emergent Asian tourism is its *revenue earning potential*. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), nine out of the top 20 tourism receipt earners in 2013 were from Asia, and the top three earners were Thailand, Hong Kong and Macao. The destinations reported a revenue increase of around 24 percent (Thailand) and 18 percent (Hong Kong and Macao) over the previous year, compared to the fastest growing western countries the U.K. (12 percent) and the U.S.

(11 percent) (UNWTO 2014: 6). Other Asian markets in the top 20 included China, India, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. This rapid expansion took place on the back of increasing domestic and short-haul intra-regional travel. With Asia's middle-class population expected to rise to 1.75 billion in 2020 (Garekar 2014), the early effects are already evident in its burgeoning service sectors. Mainland Chinese visiting Hong Kong and Macao account for the strong performance in these cities. Even in small city-states like Singapore, the hotel and food/beverage sectors are boosted by domestic demand by "staycationers" (Singaporeans vacationing in local hotels). Staycationers first emerged during the 2002/03 SARS crisis when Singaporeans substituted out-of-country travel with stay-at-home vacations (Chang and Teo 2009).

A third trend is the increasingly dominant role of *Asians as travellers*. While most of the outbound markets remain in developed Western nations, 2012 marked the first time that China ranked first in tourist spending. The outbound tourist expenditure of Chinese travellers amounted to an estimated US$110 billion, surpassing both the American and German markets which amounted to about US$83.5 and US$81.5 billion respectively (UNWTO 2014: 13). The other top outbound markets included Germany, U.K., Russia, France, Canada and Japan. Other Asian countries in the top 20 were Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia. While outbound expenditures by Asian countries still pale to the West, the emerging economies of India and Indonesia, and the burgeoning middle-class in Korea, Singapore and Thailand anticipate a future surge. To glean further "insights into the social, cultural and political implications stemming from Asia's transformation from mere host destination into a region of mobile consumers" (Winter et al. 2009: 4), more research on the region is essential.

Beyond quantitative growth, qualitative changes occurring in tourism should also be acknowledged. We should consider, for example, whether today's Asian tourists are replicating patterns and impacts of their non-Asian peers decades earlier, or whether new processes, outcomes and challenges are materialising instead. While the discussions below tends to the latter, we must be mindful not to fall into "the trap of essentializing Asia as somewhere or something that is fundamentally 'different'" (Winter et al. 2009: 8). Such a trap represents a parochial "Asia without the West" position, negating the research strides accomplished by others in the tourism field. In the next section, we explore different Asia-centric perspectives that range from relativist to radical positions. The goal is to develop a critical Asian scholarship reflective of both the qualitative and quantitative components of tourism change, without jettisoning useful concepts and ideas that have developed outside the continent/region.

"ASIANISING THE FIELD": TOWARDS CRITICAL ASIAN TOURISM SCHOLARSHIP

The emergent wave in Asian tourism has implications for how and what we research on. While producing more knowledge on Asian tourism is an appropriate start, what is more important than a mere quantitative increase in research is sensitive scholarship that acknowledges the contextual uniqueness of the phenomenon and appropriate concepts to showcase it. The goal, therefore, is not to discard extant theories and to reinvent the wheel so much as to reassess how knowledge is conceived in the first place and to critically apply and/or create new conceptual lenses to represent this knowledge. Rather than "replication and predictability" that lead to "misguided claims of universality" (Winter et al. 2009: 5), critical scholarship must be context-based and concept-discerning.

We should note at the outset that the notion of being "critical" is in itself a derivative term from CTS. Following the cultural turn in the social sciences which injected culture into predominantly economistic analyses, tourism studies exhibited a similar cultural/critical turn in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Such a turn is anchored on two premises, the first being a challenge to "structuralist" approaches in tourism studies characterised by business-dominated research (i.e., tourism as a dominantly economic system) and the second being a "post-structuralist" embrace of divergent viewpoints where the focus is on socio-cultural issues of power, discourse, symbols, representation and embodiment (Bianchi 2012). In a philosophical sense, CTS is both a rejection of structuralism's economic-determinism and an endorsement of post-structuralism's cultural agenda (Gale 2012). Either way, the point is emphasised that tourism is "complex, negotiated, contingent" and we are thus forced to re-examine tourism concepts and perspectives that are "normalised, legitimised and dominant as a result of their repeated use" (Hannam and Knox 2010: 4).

A complementary way to understand the critical roots of CTS is to consider the influence of critical theory. Without going too much into the background of the Frankfurt School and its Marxian origins, it suffices to say that critical theory espouses a number of key principles, central to which is the need to be critical of power, ideology and discourse (Tribe 2008). Critical theory appreciates that power resides in multiple forms and not just in the hands of the elite. It is also concerned with emancipation through human agency and autonomy, and argues that there is no interest-free knowledge/research including knowledge by critical authors (Tribe 2008). CTS has embodied many of these principles under the banners of ethical/pro-poor/community tourism, critiques on the distribution of

tourism's economic benefits, and the uncovering of rhetorical myths and misconceptions about people and places. The goal according to Ateljevic et al. (2007: 3) is a commitment to "tourism enquiry which is pro-social justice, equality and anti-oppression." Apart from research content, CTS is also sensitive to the ontology and epistemology of knowledge (ways of knowing and their limitations). Such cognisance demands reflexive admission of one's "identity, libido and emotion" as influencing research outcomes (Tribe 2008: 248).

While there exists a number of insightful CTS reviews (from Britton's pioneering call in 1991 to Gibson's tripartite progress reports in 2008, 2009 and 2010, for example), the focus on critical "interest groups" or "areas" is a much smaller project by virtue of their niche characteristics. These interest groups coalesce around shared social or spatial attributes. One such social attribute is sexuality. Critical scholarship on gay/lesbian travel, for example, challenge heteronormativity in tourism studies, identifying a plethora of issues of concern to its advocates (Waitt et al. 2008). Other shared social attributes might include a concern for ethics/responsibility in tourism (Gibson 2010) or business/management matters (Tribe 2008). While the "social" focuses on shared humanistic attributes, the "spatial" is concerned with shared spaces, regions and territories. Such then is critical Asian or Southeast Asian tourism which shares a collective interest on the region and its practical and pedagogical tourism concerns.

More than just a collection of works that so happens to be on the region, critical regional tourism celebrates Asian perspectives on concepts, empirical material and pedagogy. Such critical scholarship, the author would argue, range from "relativist" positions to "radical" perspectives. Relativist positions espouse the re-examination of Western precepts and their reconfigurations to suit the Asian context. Instead of derivative research that unthinkingly applies orthodox precepts, it strives for an appreciation of knowledge that adopts and refutes theory, endorsing and challenging pre-existing thought (Winter et al. 2009: 5–6). One might also describe this approach as "revisionist" as it takes accepted frameworks as a starting point and revises them through the lenses of Asian empirics. Hopefully these new insights can help to refine, reinvent and "speak back to" original conceptual standpoints.

A second approach is radical scholarship which goes beyond mere issues/concepts and emphasises the ontology and epistemology of knowledge. It might thus be asked: Can western researchers truly understand/empathise with Asian subjects, cultures and place-based phenomenon? Should Asian scholarship be written only by Asians? More than just giving voice to marginal groups in tourist destinations and

documenting different ways to produce/consume tourism, therefore, the spotlight shifts instead to the voices/viewpoints of local academics and indigenous knowledge creators. This is what King and Porananond (2014) mean by "Asianising the field." In essence, they argue for the need to encourage more Asian scholars to study the emerging phenomenon of Asian tourists/tourism within Asia (as opposed to say, contributing to the already hefty literature on western-Asian interactions or effects on western visitors). While Asian scholars have researched policy plans and tourism management in the region, they also argue that more can be done on "critical issues to do with power and marginality, representation and imaging, and local community involvement" (King and Porananond 2014: 4). Towards this end, Porananond and King's (2014) edited collection on Asian tourism comprises a total of 17 chapters contributed by 21 authors (18 of whom are of Asian ancestry, an impressive count of 85.7 percent). This compares much more favourably to other Asian tourism collections such as Teo et al.'s (2001) *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia* (which has 19 chapters by 23 authors, of which 34.8 percent are Asians); Hitchcock et al.'s (2009b) *Tourism in Southeast Asia* (16 chapters with 18 authors, of which 16.7 percent are Asians) and Winter et al.'s (2009) *Asia on Tour* (23 chapters by 23 authors, comprising 52.5 percent Asians).

The spectrum of critical Asian tourism scholarship—from relativist/revisionist to radical—reveals different approaches to "Asianising the field" (in the broadest sense of the phrase to mean Asian contributions to Asian tourism research). The review to follow proposes and demonstrates two approaches to critical Asian tourism scholarship. Elements of revisionist/relativist tendencies and radicalism are evident in both the post-colonial and geography-matters approaches. As we will see, while some authors argue that it is precisely their Asian/female positionality that helps to reconstruct traditionally Western/male tourism gaze in backpacking (Teo and Leong 2006), others assert more generally that Asian cultural contexts give rise to differences in global tourism outcomes (Han and Graburn 2010a). While no value judgements are passed as to which approach "Asianises the field" better, it is hoped that the viability of critical Asian tourism approaches in shedding new conceptual and empirical light is clearly demonstrated.

A POST-COLONIAL APPROACH TO SOUTHEAST ASIAN TOURISM

The post-colonial project challenges core assumptions in the way knowledge is conceived and codified. In its simplest chronological meaning, post-colonialism is synonymous with post-independence particularly in the 1950/1960s as countries, many in Asia, emerged from colonial rule. In the 1970s, literary critics began exploring the political, linguistic and cultural effects of post-colonialism with specific attention on the "controlling power of representation in colonised societies" and the way discourses "shape and form opinion and policy" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 168). From a literary movement, the term was applied to different fields coalescing as an "ordering critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism" (Slemon 1994: 16). Central to this critique is that a "one size fits all" theory is inadequate in capturing the historical, geographical and sociological particularities of people and places (Thrift, cited in Edensor and Jayne 2012: 1).

Tourism's engagement with post-colonialism is a relatively recent project focused on sites of tourism encounters and touristic representations of place (Hall and Tucker 2004). The main achievements have been in two areas: first, critiques of tourism as ongoing forms of domination and control in destination sites ("tourism as neo-colonialism") and second, the opportunities afforded by tourism to local residents and business operators in subverting representations and creating "new hybrid spaces of being and becoming" ("post-colonial tourism potentials") (Keen and Tucker 2012: 97). The latter emphasis on subversion has been called "critical post-colonialism," defined as "a critical perspective that draws attention to the discursive aspects of power and control present in 'First World' (Western/European) representations of, and interest in the developing counties, also referred to as the 'Third World'" (Tucker and Akama 2009: 513). Critical post-colonialism is not too different from critical Asian tourism as earlier sketched with its "continuing consideration of the specifics of particular places," emphasis on the colonised Other subverting dominant discourses, and the exposure of myths in tourism representations of "exotic" non-Western worlds (Keen and Tucker 2012: 99).

A good example of critical post-colonialism in Asian tourism is evident in the literature on Southeast Asian backpacking. The empirical focus on the region is not an accident as Southeast Asia is a recognised forerunner of larger-scale backpacking tourism and has been marketed as "the primary backpacker destination in the world" (Paris et al. 2014: 1). Post-colonial analyses focus on cross-cultural issues, revealing the

differences between Western and Asian backpacking cultures. An emblematic work is Teo and Leong's (2006) piece on backpacking in Bangkok's Khao San Road based on Leong's (2004) beguilingly titled thesis *Unpacking and Repacking Backpacking*. More than just semantics, the pun underscores the need to unpack Western assumptions of backpacking/backpackers, and to repack concepts to suit contemporary Asian conditions (where Asians are increasingly the backpackers themselves). The traditional view of the western drifter who shuns mass tourism and technology, and who pursues alternative services and local exotica (Cohen 1973) may be accurate in a particular time-space, but cannot be accepted as a universal, immanent truth.

Adopting a post-colonial framework, Teo and Leong (2006) argue that Bangkok's backpacking mecca Khao San Road is a *farang* (foreign, white) site where Western travellers live out their culture-specific fantasies of drinking, bargaining, braiding hair and eating *phat thai*. Interviews with Western and Asian travellers, coupled with insights from local business operators reveal a distinct bias towards the Western male who is perceived as richer, more willing to spend, less likely to bargain and hence "easier to cheat." Onsite research also revealed that Asian backpackers consider themselves as "outsiders," preferring to stay at Khao San's back alleys and periphery where better bargains are to be found. A Korean backpacker opined: "I may be Asian travelling in Southeast Asia but I feel so strangely out of place here. Like a foreigner… the Caucasians here, I bet they feel very much at home because… this place is totally made for them" (Teo and Leong 2006: 122). Not just a racialised landscape, Khao San is also a gendered site where Asian female backpackers—the two authors self-identified—feel doubly excluded for being neither white nor male. Many female Asian travellers acknowledged their vulnerability and marginality in Khao San; those travelling solo were even unfairly perceived as loose and immoral.

Grounded, ethnographic research is necessary if essentialisms are to be unpacked. We should note that the term "Asian backpacker" is, in itself, also an essentialism because there is no universal Asian traveller as much as there is no one backpacker archetype. The challenge of critical post-colonialism is to therefore unpack received knowledge and to repack new knowledge that is sensitive to difference, even *within and across* the Asian market. Teo and Leong (2006), for example, acknowledge that Japanese and Korean backpackers have higher purchasing power compared to Malaysian and Singaporean travellers who are more insistent on bargaining. Indeed, the Japanese may be described as more aligned with Western backpackers than other Asian groups. On the differences between Asian and Australian

backpackers (and within the Asian sub-group too), Paris et al. (2014) uncovered seven axes of divergence. These pertain to gender and age profiles, spending habits, the effect of distance on backpacking routes, use of technology, socialising behaviours and attitudes towards "partying, drinking and sex." They argue that for backpacking to be sustainable in the future, traditionally western-oriented enclaves replete with hedonistic amenities and "exotic" dining need to be reconfigured to cater to a segmented Asian market that prefers familiar food, structured experiences and online reservation systems. Further sub-specialisations might also be undertaken to cater to even more customised needs.

It is this attention to socio-cultural context and difference that also characterise other works on Asian backpacking. Literature on Chinese backpackers in Tibet and Yunnan (Lim 2009; Shepherd 2009), as well as Western travellers in Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Hampton 1998; Muzaini 2006) further the post-colonial spirit of critical engagement. The appropriateness of Western frames in understanding non-Western backpacking (both Asian backpackers and backpacking in Asian locales) is questioned across different time-spaces. Lim (2009) for example presents backpackers with distinct Chinese characteristics—highly urbanised, upwardly-mobile, educated travellers with a penchant for domestic travel and web-based networking. In a society where civil society in the traditional sense is lagging, popular backpacking groups organised around the internet have emerged as counters to the state's preference for institutionalised travel. Indeed, while the form and content of backpacking reveal similarities and variations around the world (including with the West), it is the "cultural and national specificities" that make backpacking distinct across different countries, regions and communities (Lim 2009: 301).

Teo (2009: 46) asserts, "As many of the countries in Southeast Asia were former European colonies, uncovering Western enthnocentism and self-orientalising tendencies in tourism practices constitute important agendas." It is the unpacking and repacking agenda of post-colonialism that helps to highlight new trends in tourism and uncovers alternative ways of "doing old tourism." Backpacking is but one example, and other phenomena in Asia are equally worthy of investigation. For example, the proliferation of budget airlines and new airports in Asia have created new transport and tourism geographies that might differ from western aviation and tourist mobilities (Kaur 2012). Similarly the emergence of long-stay Japanese tourists in Malaysia has created a second-home phenomenon that is distinct from European and American antecedents because of differences in Malaysian home ownership policies and the specificities of Japanese demands (Ono 2010). Recent research also reveal novel phenomena such as

the rise of "home cooking schools" in Bali where locals convert their domiciles into culinary and cultural environments to court food enthusiasts (Bell 2014), and the use of blogs by female Chinese travellers to capture their experiences and assert their identities which are denied them in the non-virtual world (Zhang and Hitchcock 2014). Critical Asian scholarship must thus be attentive to broader tourism trends and concepts, but also be aware of their contextual uses and cultural specificities in particular locales. Reconfiguring "old" concepts and/or devising new ones represent a post-colonial project to expose essentialist frameworks and better understand tourism "truths."

A GEOGRAPHY-MATTERS PERSPECTIVE ON TOURISM

While post-colonialism questions the appropriateness of Western tourism concepts and in framing the Asian situation, the geography-matters approach emphasises the significance of local/geographic context. "Geography"—synonymous here with "place" or "locality"—offers a way to explain tourism outcomes, differences and similarities across sites. Therefore, how and why tourism develops in a particular manner (along with its impacts) depends on *where* it develops. Best practices in eco-tourism or dark tourism will thus be translated differently in different geographic locales because place-based factors—local state policies, community needs and interests, role of labour force and unions, or even local climates, histories, resources, etc.—all affect development plans and outcomes in their unique configurations.

The geography-matters approach was inspired by the Locality Concept advanced by economic geographers studying the differential effects of de-industrialisation across European cities in the 1970/1980s (Cooke 1989). Its emphasis on local agency and spatial variability has resonated across disciplinary boundaries. The acknowledgement of locality provides a way for tourism scholars, regardless of discipline, to focus attention on the power of local (as opposed to external) actors in subverting, negotiating or abetting tourism development. Anthropologists interested in global-local interactions also find affinity with this perspective. Anthropological studies on "glocalisation" and ethnic tourism in East Asia, for example, highlight people's active role in "reconstructing their locality, ethnicity and nationality in tourism development" (Han and Graburn 2010a: 12; see the collection of essays in Han and Graburn, 2010b). Appropriately, the term glocalisation has a very down-to-earth origin, beginning with the idea of *dochakuka* (global localisation in Japanese) referring to "a way of adapting farming

techniques to local conditions and indigenous species" (Han and Graburn 2010a: 12). In the 1980s, the term evolved into a marketing strategy by Japanese corporations referring to the influence of local factors on global level activities.

A good case in point is the development of theme parks. As tourism environments par-excellence, theme parks are a quintessentially western concept that first appeared as funfairs, pleasure gardens and world expositions in Europe in the late 19th century before they were commercialised as gated amusement sites in the 1950s. American conglomerates such as Disney and Universal Studios prototyped the modern self-sufficient park concept as we know it today, integrating on-site amusement with retail merchandising, entertainment, hotels, convention centres, cruises, etc. Rolled out as a global business concept with the establishment of Tokyo Disneyland in 1983, theme parks today range from international franchises to wholly-owned entities, family businesses and local/regional conglomerates.

In a wide-ranging study of Southeast Asian theme parks, Teo and Yeoh (2001) argue that local agency is evident in different ways. Many of the earliest theme parks in the region were large-scale and costly, and were co-owned/co-funded by national governments. Parks like Taman Mini Indonesia Indah or Sarawak Cultural Village thus fulfilled socio-political and ideological roles with themes like national unity and multi-culturalism evident in their programmes, activities, marketing collaterals and architecture. Depending on community need and government agenda, theme parks were designed in very specific yet different ways. In the case of privately owned theme parks, Teo and Yeoh (2001) revealed that most were owned by local or regionally-based tycoons who were extremely proud of their cultural heritage and sensitive to the needs of their local and regional clienteles. Culinary preferences, religious and linguistic considerations were all incorporated into the planning and management of the parks. Local patrons making use of theme parks also do so in accordance with their own leisure needs and personal interests, converting the parks into highly familiar and familial environments. The authors concluded that while Southeast Asian parks "may appear to be commercially viable and internationally appealing, and akin to the universal Disney product, they also communicate and respond to the various impulses of what is often construed as 'local'" (Teo and Yeoh 2001: 138; see Matusitz 2011 and Choi 2012 for a similar argument on Hong Kong Disneyland)

Geography in the form of local weather or religion also exerts considerable influence in international-franchised theme parks. A recent study of Universal Studios, for example, revealed fundamental differences

across its American, Japanese and Singapore branches. Heavy rains and tropical humidity explain the architectural distinctiveness of the Singapore park, characterised by its multi-storey weather shades and alfresco air-conditioning vents. The dominance of Islamic visitors in Singapore (local Muslim population, and Indonesian and Malaysian tourists) also led to the development of prayer rooms and *halal*-certified eateries (Pang 2013). Universal Studio's Corporate Social Responsibility programme is also highly customised to its location. Appropriately called "Volunteers on Location," it identifies specific local community concerns such as non-profit organisations in Los Angeles and handicapped youths in Singapore (Chang and Pang 2014).

Tourism outcomes are the mediations of external/global and indigenous/local processes. Rather than polar opposites, the scales are necessary counterpoints in the dialectical transformation of places and products. Attention on the local should therefore not be overshadowed by the global, and for that matter vice versa. In the theme park examples above, geography was interpreted as "locality." There exist other geographical factors of course, for example the place of origin of tourists. Indeed, all forms of tourism knowledge and perspectives depend very much on the tourists under scrutiny—*where* they come from and *who* they are. Tourism concepts and phenomenon take on different shades of meaning depending on who we study and talk to.

Increasingly much attention has been given to domestic tourism as an example of "local variability." In Southeast Asia, this phenomenon is as varied as the different countries under study. While some countries such as Indonesia promote domestic tourism for nationalistic and political reasons, others like Vietnam encounter resistance by local enterprises precisely because of the unfamiliarity with the phenomenon (Erb 2009; Gillen 2009). While domestic travel has led to economic benefits for local hoteliers and tribal communities in Northern Thailand (Evrard and Leepreecha 2009), the effects are far less optimistic in smaller countries like Laos where cost-saving and economical modes of travel are emphasised (Carroll 2009). Across the region, domestic tourism takes on distinct characteristics, variable meanings and diverse outcomes. Geographic origins also affect the way tourism impacts are represented and interpreted. Thirumaran (2009) demonstrates, for example, that the commonly held "cultural commoditisation" thesis about Balinese dances is framed by dominant Western touristic imagination. By shifting the focus to Indian Hindu tourists instead, a portrait of "cultural affinity" and shared heritage emerges. Interviews with Balinese dancers revealed that dancers and Asian Hindu tourists often exchange ideas about religion and dance styles; they even

refer to one another as "brothers" and "sisters." Indeed, geography is central to grounded field work and embodied research, and a necessary means to "get at" the very heart of Asian tourism knowledge and understanding.

ASIAN AGENDA AHEAD

In an overview of tourism geography, Butler (2004) identified three temporal phases in research each marked by distinct themes and emphases. The "descriptive era" (pre-1950s) is characterised by highly descriptive and empirical works; often these works were subsumed within economic and urban geography as tourism geography was not recognised as a distinct sub-discipline. This was followed by the "thematic era" (1950 to early 1980s) marked by attempts to link tourism to wider disciplinary agendas. Positivism was at its peak and research was characterised by statistical works capturing the movements of travellers, locations of amenities and urban land uses, etc. "Model making" led to tourism models depicting evolution of destination sites and spatial morphologies of resorts and urban areas. From the 1980s onwards, the "era of diversity" was characterised by the study of different tourism forms such as eco- and heritage tourism in the 1980s, and subsequently other niche-fields such as medical-tourists. A "critical geography of tourism" also emerged during this time as researchers sought to realise the practical value of their work particularly in the areas of community empowerment and advocacy, urban regeneration and sustainable development.

Although Butler did not explicitly state so, the diversity era that he spoke about complements well with our present focus on and agenda for Asian tourism. Beginning with the acknowledgement of Anglo-American centrism in scholarship, critical Asian tourism is concerned not just with regional empirics but about making a difference in scholarship. Be it a relativist or radical approach to "Asianise the field" (King and Porananond 2014), the diversity of Asian identities, perspectives and contributions are fore-grounded in tourism scholarship. Diversity has led to the rethinking of commonly-held Western concepts and mind sets. The literature review above is not meant to be exhaustive but offers two approaches by which the spirit of diversity is demonstrated and exercised. Some might criticise the post-colonial and geography-matters approaches as "not exactly fresh"—the locality concept and "geography matters" came to academic prominence in the 1980s and in tourism analyses in the 1990s, while post-colonial thought was first invoked in tourism studies in the mid-2000s (e.g., Hall and Tucker 2004). What, however, remains fresh and relevant today is their advocacy

platform particularly in the 2010s as Asian tourism ramps up. Their theoretical premise on unpacking and repacking normative viewpoints, and the acknowledgement of an Asian "difference" (where indeed there is difference) calls for nuanced and culture-specific research. In many cases, Asian authorship has also been highlighted to reflect the CTS spirit of reflexivity and embodiment in knowledge creation.

Cohen and Cohen (2014) classified Asia as an important emerging region in world tourism. "Emerging" is an appropriate term as it underscores the ongoing quantitative surge in Asian tourism (notwithstanding the political demonstrations in Bangkok and Hong Kong of 2014, and the unfortunate dual Malaysian Airlines incidents in 2014[1]) and accompanying qualitative changes in tourist motivations, behaviours and impacts. The diversity of indigenous voices working on and writing about Asian tourism and its re-conceptualisations (e.g., Winter et al. 2009; Porananond and King 2014) is also part of this emerging phenomenon and agenda that we should conscientiously nurture and celebrate. Only then will the anticipated Asian tourism wave be understood on its own terms rather than under the gaze of Western eyes.

NOTES

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1 Anti-government protests took place in Bangkok in November 2013 and May 2014 leading ultimately to a *coup d'etat* and declaration of martial law in May. Tourist arrivals for 2014 were 24.8 million, a decline of 6.7 percent compared to 2013. Also in 2014, pro-democracy activists belonging to the Hong Kong Federation of Students organised "Occupy" demonstrations in four locations between September and December. Despite this, tourist arrivals (which include Mainland Chinese visitors) increased by 12 percent over 2013. As for Malaysia, two incidents involving Malaysian Airlines—the missing MH370 aircraft in March and MH17 which was shot down over Ukraine in September—caused great international concern. Despite this, tourist arrivals to Malaysia stood at 22.8 million in 2014, an increase of 9.6 percent from the previous year.

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