Credibility of a Creative Image
The Singaporean Approach
Ooi, Can-Seng

Document Version
Final published version

Publication date:
2008

License
CC BY-NC-ND

CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Creativity at Work:

Credibility of a Creative Image: The Singaporean Approach

By Can-Seng Ooi

January 2008

Copenhagen
Business School
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

imagine.. 造

Abstract

Singapore has embarked on an ambitious program to make the city-state into a significant player in the global creative economy. The country is being re-branded as a creative city. The government agrees that in the creative economy, the environment must be conducive to experimentation and innovation. As a result, more social and political spaces have been opened up to spur Singapore's fledging creative economy and also to signal that the nation has become more transparent and tolerant. The authorities, however, still limit the freedom of public expression on political, ethnic and religious issues. The current state of ethnic-religious harmony and political status quo is to be preserved. Singapore remains a soft-authoritarian state. Can such a country then be branded as a place conducive to creativity and innovation? This paper shows how the Singaporean government: 1) introduces and implements a set of comprehensive policies to develop the creative economy; 2) brands and re-images the city-state as an exciting creative nation; 3) communicates the new creative vision and eventually engineers local acceptance of the creative economy; and 4) promotes the image of an open society and yet maintain tight social and political control. The re-making and re-imaging of Singapore are two sides of the same coin.

Keywords

Author

Can-Seng Ooi is Associate professor in the Department of International Economics and Management (INT) and member of Imagine.. Creative Industries Research Centre, Copenhagen www.ooi.dk
He may be reached by e-mail at ooi@cbs.dk

Credibility of a Creative Image: The Singaporean Approach

Singapore is being promoted with a new image – to be a funky and creative city. The idea of a creative environment often conjures up spaces of experimentation and innovation, with elements of quirkiness, untidiness and unpredictability. In such an environment, people are free to make choices and try new things. There is a level of diversity, excitement and spunkiness. People push ideas and redefine boundaries. As a result, a creative environment is often related to a democratic space. Unlike a totalitarian regime, a democratic society allows people the room to experiment, to disagree with the status quo and to express their thoughts freely. To Richard Florida (2003), for example, San Francisco was an attractive place for the cultivation of creativity and innovation because of the city's open-minded and tolerant heterogeneous population; creative people will flock to places that allow them the spaces to think, express and create. Singapore however is not a democratic country. Can then Singapore re-make and re-brand itself as a creative city?

According to the popular World Competitiveness Report rankings by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), out of 55 countries, Singapore was ranked the second most competitive economy in 2007. The United States was the most competitive (IMD, 2007). In the 2007 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Singapore was perceived as the fourth least corrupt country in the world, out of 180 (Transparency International, 2007). Singapore has the indications of a stable economic environment, where the rule of law is well regarded.

On the other hand, in the Reporters Without Borders's Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007, Singapore was ranked "141" out of 169, one notch better than Afghanistan but one notch worse than Sudan (Reporters without Borders, 2007). In the 2007 Freedom House report on political freedom, Singapore was found to be "partially free". Scoring between "1" and "7", with "1" for the most free, Singapore scored "5" for political rights and "4" for civil liberty, the same as Uganda and Lebanon. The status of the media in Singapore was rated as "not free" (Freedom House, 2007). Singapore did not fare better with the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy; Singapore was ranked "84" out of 167 countries (Kekic, 2006).

There seems to be a discrepancy between two set of images of Singapore: One suggest that Singapore is a well-functioning modern economy; the other that it is also a "soft-authoritarian" (Chua, 1995) regime. How can innovations and entrepreneurship bloom under un-democratic circumstances? Who can push the social and political limits in an authoritarian regime? To what extent can creative and fresh ideas be allowed to flourish? Scholars such as Chua (1995), George (2000) and Ooi (2007) observed that the relationship between democracy and economic growth is not necessarily correlated. Many East Asian economies, including China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore show that democratic development and economic development need not run in the same direction. A favorable business environment requires a stable social and

political situation, transparent and efficient legal regime, effectiveness in protecting intellectual property rights, business-friendly policies, and a disciplined workforce, among other things. As will be elaborated later, the Singapore case shows how democratic practices can be selectively fine-tuned to the needs of the economy.

Singapore has embarked on an ambitious program to make the city-state a significant player in the global creative economy. The Singaporean authorities agree that in the creative economy, the environment must be conducive for experimentation. Within a regime that allows only limited freedom of expression, can such a program work? And can such a society be branded and re-imaged as a creative nation? This is a challenge for Singapore. This is also the theme of this paper.

The Place Branding Challenges for a Straight-laced yet Creative Singapore

Cities and countries are branding themselves. These places want the world to be familiar and also have a positive and coherent image of them. They do so for several reasons, including to sell more products, attract investments, woo talented workers and draw in tourists (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001; Olins, 2002). As with any commercial marketing campaign, the authenticity and credibility of the brand images are frequently being questioned (Anholt, 2006; Silver, 1993). It is expected that a place brand should also offer accurate images of the place. This is difficult because the various tasks of place branding are embedded in the commercial agenda of the branding campaign.
One purpose of branding a place is to shape the public image of the location (Kleppe, Iversen and Stensaker, 2002; McCleary and Whitney, 1994; Richards, 1992). Explicitly, a branding campaign is part of the "image modification process" (Andersen, Prentice and Guerin, 1997: 463). A place brand is not expected to communicate a complete picture but aim to create positive images in the minds of audiences.

A second related purpose of place branding is to re-image and frame the location selectively and aesthetically. As a cohering force, the brand draws people's attention to positive images of the place. There are many aspects of the place – e.g. organized crime, unemployment and high cost of living – that are ignored because they are not considered attractive or interesting by the branding authorities. Branding inadvertently frames and packages the place into a relatively well-defined and commercially attractive product, which focuses on images, attractions and activities that are considered significant and relevant to the brand values (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994).

A third function of branding a place is to create an image of the location that stands out in the global place-product market. Inherently, the brand asserts the place's uniqueness. Places in wanting to attract investments, talented workers and tourists are becoming more globalized and alike in their offerings and infrastructure (Lanfant, 1995; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004; Richards and Wilson, 2007; Teo and Li, 2003). The assertion of place uniqueness has become

an institutionalized global practice for celebrating place identity (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). A brand inevitably becomes a visionary exercise for the place branding authorities to imagine and reflect on how different they are different from others. The crystallized public image is also often introduced to the native population for it to recognize itself (Lanfant, 1995; Leonard, 1997; Oakes, 1993).

The last purpose of place branding, as highlighted here, is to shape people's experiences of the location by first shaping their perceptions. The brand story provides a framework for locals and foreigners to imagine. For example, in tourism, studies have shown that people approach a foreign place with their own pre-visit interpretations, and this process enriches their experiences (Moscardo, 1996; Prentice and Andersen, 2007; Waller and Lea, 1999). Accurate or otherwise preconceived ideas and pre-visit images will not only form the bases for outsiders to understand the place but will also form the bases for a more engaged and experiential consumption of place products. The brand helps foreigners to develop a coherent, consistent and meaningful sense of place, and offers a "brand experience" (Olins, 2000: 56).

Knowing the purposes and power, the Singaporean government has always made use of public relations and branding to sell Singapore to the world (e.g. see Jin, Pang, and Cameron, 2006; Ooi, 2004; Woodier, 2006). Located one degree north of the equator, Singapore is an island city-state with a population of only 4.5 million. It has no natural resources, and is only 700 square kilometers in size. Since its independence in 1965, the Singaporean government has taken an active role in transforming and ensuring the health of the national economy (Low and Johnston, 2001). Although the Singaporean economy is doing well and is the wealthiest in the region, the government is steering the economy away from its manufacturing and electronic bases and towards the financial services, telecommunications, life sciences, tourism and the creative industries. The island-state is now recognized as one of the most active in pursuing the creative economy in Asia (Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2005). The future shape of the Singaporean economy will be, according to the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA, formerly Ministry of Information and the Arts or MITA, 2000: 31):

> In the knowledge age, our success will depend on our ability to absorb, process and synthesize knowledge through constant value innovation. Creativity will move into the centre of our economic life because it is a critical component of a nation's ability to remain competitive. Economic prosperity for advanced, developed nations will depend not so much on the ability to make things, but more on the ability to generate ideas that can then be sold to the world. This means that originality and entrepreneurship will be increasingly prized.

Singapore is not alone in pursuing the creative industries. Countries around the world are re-imaging and branding themselves as global creative centers (e.g. see Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998; Dahms, 1995; Hutton, 2003; Jayne, 2004;

Tallon and Bromley, 2004). Singapore is already known to have a stable legal, political, economic, technological and social environment that is attractive to businesses. Industrial relations are controlled and harmonious (see Koh and Ooi, 2000; Mauzy and Milne, 2002). Tough punishments for seemingly minor uncivil behavior – e.g. jay-walking, spitting and not flushing public toilets after use – indicate the authorities' tendencies to micro-manage Singaporeans' everyday life. With the ruling party controlling 82 of the 84 parliamentary seats, and a mass media pliant towards the government, political freedom is restricted (Chua, 1995; George, 2000; Gomez, 2006; Lydgate, 2003; Ooi, 1998). Singapore is also often seen as a sterile cultural 'desert' (Kawasaki, 2004: 22). The authorities acknowledge that Singapore is inadequate in offering cultural activities to draw highly skilled foreign workers to work in the city-state (Lee, 2007; Peh, 2006; Tan, 2003; Wong, 2002; Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2005). The Economist Intelligence Unit found that Singapore ranks behind Asian competitors Tokyo and Hong Kong as a sought-after place for expatriates because of its dearth of cultural activities (Burton, 2002). The re-imaging and branding of Singapore as a creative city aims to change the world's mind about the country, present Singapore as an attractive location for new opportunities, assert a new creative Singapore identity and get people to experience the new vibrant city.
Still, the staid image of Singapore is overwhelming. For instance, Member of Parliament Chan Soo Sen lamented (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007):

> The Singaporean brand name is known to be good but it is very rarely known to be 'cool'. And yet, in the next [stage of economic] development, being 'cool' is important in justifying greater returns for our goods and services.[…] In order to make the Singapore economy continue to grow, we need to create a "cool" Singapore image. […] We need to reinvent ourselves, we need to change, we need to be able to come to terms with our own feelings and able to express it confidently. We must be able to accept other people's viewpoints and values even if we do not quite agree with them. We must accept that there must be a certain amount of untidiness even chaos because, like what the Asian sage says, 'pure water will produce no fish', ie, 'qing shui wu yu'.

Singapore has undergone many branding and re-imaging campaigns. Currently, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) promotes Singapore as 'Uniquely Singapore', the National Parks Board touts Singapore as a 'City in the Garden', the city-state is also known as the 'Lion City', a 'Medical Hub' and 'Education Hub' (Goh, 2006). With a myriad of brands and slogans, the Singaporean government, in September 2006, set up a National Marketing Action Committee to 'guide government agencies in designing marketing campaigns that balance the harder aspects of Singapore, like efficiency and technology, with the nation's softer side, such as lifestyle and innovation' (Goh, 2006).

With the emphasis on the creative economy, the authorities have started re-imaging Singapore as a creative nation. But what is behind the creative city

product that the new image is communicating? Can the brand image portray Singapore in an accurate manner?

Charging Forward: The Place Product behind the New Image

In 2001, the Singapore government set up the Economic Review Committee (ERC), consisting of seven subcommittees, with the aim of remaking Singapore and developing strategies to ensure the continuous economic prosperity of the country. The ERC Sub Committee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) recommended that Singapore moves away from an industrial economy into an innovation-fuelled economy, seeking ways to "fuse arts, business and technology" (ERC-CI, 2002: iii). The city-state must "harness the multi-dimensional creativity of [its] people" for its "new competitive advantage" (ERC-CI, 2002: iii).

The first creative-turn was actually taken after the release of the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts. Consequently, among other things, the National Arts Council was formed in 1991, more support was given to art groups, and schools started offering art programs. The government then started paying more attention to the arts and culture (Chang and Lee, 2003). To further develop the 1989 recommendations, STB (formerly Singapore Tourist Promotion Board or STPB) and MICA, took the initiative to make Singapore into a "Global City for the Arts" in 1995 (Chang, 2000; Ooi, 2002; MITA and STPB, 1995). In that plan, among other things, Singapore will develop its arts trading sector, get world famous artists to perform there and establish the Asian Civilizations Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the National Museum of Singapore. The aim then, and still is, to make Singapore into the art and cultural capital of Southeast Asia (Ooi, 2004).

In 2000, MICA pushed the 1995 initiatives further and envisaged Singapore as a "Renaissance City" (MITA, 2000). Expanding the 2000 Renaissance City report, the 2002 ERC-CI report produces the most ambitious and comprehensive blueprint yet on the creative economy, which includes explicit and specific plans to develop also the media and design sectors. Borrowing from the UK, the Singaporean authorities define the creative cluster as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (ERC-CI, 2002: iii, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2003: 51). Singapore is concentrating on three broadly defined creative sectors (ERC-CI, 2002: iii):

- Arts and Culture: performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, photography, crafts, libraries, museums, galleries, archives, auctions, impresarios, heritage sites, performing arts sites, festivals and arts supporting enterprises
- Design: advertising, architecture, web and software, graphics industrial product, fashion, communications, interior and environmental.

- Media: broadcast (including radio television and cable), digital media (including software and computer services), film and video, recorded music and publishing

The Singaporean authorities are determined to re-image the city-state as a creative center. The brand will also help the authorities attract the necessary investments and workers. To help realize the goals, there is also a set of comprehensive plans to achieve the vision. As alluded before, the re-imaging of Singapore as a creative nation and the re-making of Singapore into a creative center are closely intertwined.

Trumpeting and Realizing the Vision

The Singaporean authorities use an elaborate three-track approach to make Singapore into a creative center while branding Singapore as a new creative center. The first track involves marketing Singapore as a creative hub and generating the appropriate public images. Singapore is to be perceived as a vibrant, creative and efficient place, where creative businesses can function effectively and profitably, and residents lead comfortable and exciting lifestyles. The second track shows the Singaporean government's strong resolve to promote the creative economy through new creative business-friendly policies, and ensuring a politically, economically, socially, technologically and legally stable environment that creative businesses find attractive to function within. Besides good industrial relations, qualified workers are made available, tax incentives are offered and a stable legal framework is being established to protect business interests. The third track involves socially engineering the population and making residents live the creative Singapore image: the authorities cultivate popular acceptance and support for the creative economy, nurture a creative consumer population and train a workforce suitable for the creative economy. These three inter-related tracks will be elaborated next.

Track 1: Telling the World, Convincing the World

In branding and re-imaging the new creative Singapore, the authorities attempt to present a comprehensive brand image that tells a powerful story, so that outsiders can understand the country in a positive light. For example, the authorities argue that Singapore is different from other countries promoting the creative economy because of its East-West combination. The then-Director of Creative Industries Singapore, Baey Yam Keng, said (personal communication 2006):

> The East and West thing is very strong in Singapore. Singapore is based in Asia but because of our colonial days, the way we have connected to the world, the way our education is structured, we are very close to the western world. This is a very nice blend. Creative people like something ethnic, something Chinese, something Japanese and something different. Singapore is where East and West confer.

The Minister of Information, Communication and the Arts, Lee Boon Yang, also referred to "Singapore's positioning as an open, multicultural society which is able to draw inspiration from our rich and diverse Asian heritage and at the same time link up with other international partners to widen market access and talent base", and claimed that many companies found "Singapore's unique confluence of eastern and western cultures as a key reason for collaborating with Singapore" (Lee, 2005). The confluence of the East and West is considered the unique selling proposition of the creative Singapore brand and product. Building upon that brand message, Singapore wants to demonstrate its modern efficiency and show off its Asian attractions by hosting high profile events. For example, Singapore will host the world's first Formula One night races in September 2008. The races will take place in the central business district; the world will see the spectacular Singapore skyline and Singapore River at night. Earlier high profile events include the 2005 International Olympics Council meeting (London won the honor of hosting the 2012 Olympics then), and the 2006 annual International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meetings. In line with the pursuit of placing Singapore in the global media limelight, Singapore is enhancing its status as a regional hub for the global media industry; MTV, Discovery Channel, HBO and BBC have already made Singapore their regional headquarters. It is hoped that Singapore-centered and Singapore-slanted contents will be promoted in the international media when Singapore is the regional headquarters.

Besides events, Singapore is actively building up a collection of iconic structures to help define the country. The Merlion – a half lion, half fish figure spouting water at the Singapore waterfront – is an icon of the country. Recently, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, with the spiky roofs and therefore make the dome-shaped buildings look like a pair of durians (a thorny tropical fruit), have become a symbol of Singapore. And in the latest move, two spectacular mega complexes housing casinos, conference and entertainment facilities will be built by 2009. With enough publicity, these iconic buildings will define the skylines of Singapore and communicate awesome images of Singapore.

Besides building physical infrastructure, cultural institutions are being established and supported. The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music was set up at the National University of Singapore. Art schools – the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts – have been expanded and their profile increased. Arts festivals and performances have not only become more abundant but have become more accessible; for instance, the Esplanade offers hundreds of free concerts annually, and besides the Singapore Arts Festival and Singapore Film Festival, there are now also individual festivals for Chinese, Malay and Indian arts and cultures. The Singapore Biennale was launched in 2006. Serving as indicators, these myriad of cultural developments will be highlighted and brand Singapore as vibrant and exciting. There are also a number of cultural diplomacy outreach programs to enhance the creative image of Singapore. The Minister in charge of MICA, Lee Boon Yang, said (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007):

> The progress we have made in the arts, culture and library services underscores our emphasis to promote arts and culture in Singapore and to develop our "soft-power". […] "Soft power" will certainly contribute to a Singapore brand.

At the parliamentary sitting, the minister highlighted that MICA is involved in a number of cultural diplomacy programs. These programs include the Singapore Season in London in 2005 and in China in 2007. The showcasing of Singaporean art and artists outside Singapore aims "to promote cultural relations and also reinforce awareness of the arts and creativity in Singapore" (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007). The Minister also mentioned that the first Singapore Biennale in 2006 attracted more than 400 media reports, mostly with glowing comments on the arts in Singapore. He concluded (Singapore Parliament Hansard, 2007):

> I believe that our arts and creative programmes will change the way we look at ourselves and how others perceive us. […] Based on the Country Brand Index released by global branding consultants FutureBrand, […] Singapore was second on the Nightlife/Eating and the Shopping categories and ranked ahead of USA, which is a country that people generally perceive as being 'cool'.

In sum, the creative Singapore brand offers the story that Singapore offers the best of the East and West. And as part of the brand communication strategy, Singapore is constantly propelled into the global limelight through high profile events. Singapore is also accumulating a choice selection of iconic buildings to define the city. Just as importantly, various cultural happenings and programs are accentuated, to show that Singapore is creative and exciting. Endorsements from industry, consultancies, commentators and reviewers are sought after, as they will affirm Singapore's fledging creative economy.

Strategy 2: Dealing with Local Socio-Political Issues

As pointed out earlier, the comprehensive strategy to realize the creative economy in Singapore has entailed loosening many social controls in the country. But some creative expressions, especially in the arts and cultural sector, are still being policed. Unlike creative products such as computer games, industrial design and advertising campaigns, many cultural and artistic expressions are not governed by their commercial sustainability; they are expressions which may make social and political references to Singaporean society. The Singaporean government is wary of such expressions.

For instance, as reported in the Far Eastern Economic Review, the authorities banned the play Talaq in 2002 by P. Elangovan. The play dealt with rape within an Indian Muslim marriage. The ban came about after some members of the local Indian community protested. P. Elangovan lamented, "It makes a mockery of Singapore's aim to be a Renaissance City" (Webb, 2002). In

the earlier reference to the Political Freedom Index by Freedom House, the report on Singapore referred to Martyn See, a young local film maker. His film, Singapore Rebel was banned in 2006 because it is considered to be "political"; the 30-minute documentary is on Chee Soon Juan, leader of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party. His next documentary – Zahari's Seventeen Years – faced a similar fate in 2007. Zahari, who was a political prisoner of 17 years and was never charged or faced trial, was blatantly critical of the government in the documentary and made strong allegations against leaders of the ruling party. In yet another incident, popular blogger, Mr Brown, was censured by the authorities because he questioned the government in his feature column in the local newspapers, Today (Lee, 2006b; Today, 2006). He pointed out the increasing income gap in the country and ranted about the increase of electricity tariffs and taxi fares immediately after the 2006 general elections. The authorities lambasted him, resulting in him being suspended by Today. Journalistic freedom has its limit in Singapore even though the media industry is aggressively promoted. Such incidences are difficult to fathom for artists, writers and journalists; creative expressions often reflect the embedded social, cultural and political environment. As a consequent, many creative workers exercise self-censorship (Gomez, 2002).

So, creative expressions should not challenge the Singaporean government, tarnish its image or raise sensitive issues that may disturb the ethnic and religious harmony in Singapore (Ooi, 2007). Under present circumstances and despite the branding of Singapore as a creative city, the mechanisms of self-restrain and self-censorship are exercised, especially for artists and commentators on ethnic, religious and political issues. As a consequence, the image of a well-regarded government and of ethnic harmony is advanced and left unchallenged in Singapore. This, one may say, is also part of the desired brand imagery that the authorities want for the country.

Strategy 3: Dealing with a Divisive Issue, Gay Rights and the Tolerant Environment

It is criminal for gay men to engage in sex in Singapore, even if it is consensual. In September 2007, Members of Parliament debated on proposed changes to the Penal Code. The changes were to reflect the new crime situations the country faces; new laws and penalties were introduced, dealing with crimes and threats related to the Internet and mobile telephones. There would also be stiffer penalties for persons who threaten the social harmony in Singapore (Soh, 2007). One of the least controversial changes to the Penal Code was to de-criminalize "unnatural" sexual acts – e.g. oral and anal – for heterosexual persons. The most controversial non-change was to continue criminalizing gay men's sexual activities but with the promise that this law will not be enforced actively (there is no reference to sexual acts between gay women in the Penal Code). The resulting protests from those who want to repeal the discriminating Section 377A were heated. There were also very strong reactions from those who want to keep Section 377A. Earlier in 2003, the then-Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, made a shock revelation in Time magazine (Elegant, 2003). He said

that the Singaporean civil service has started employing professed homosexuals, even to sensitive positions. That seemed to be a turning point for gay rights in Singapore. The announcement was made as part of the effort by the government to attract talent and nurture the creative economy. The change in policy was part of the strategy not to exclude talented foreigners who are gay, and was implemented without fanfare, so as not to draw flakes from more conservative Singaporeans (Elegant, 2003; Nirmala, 2003a; Nirmala, 2003b). In 2007, the prime minister maintained that Singapore is still a conservative society and Singapore needs to (Saad, 2007):

> stay one step behind the frontline of change […] Watch how things work out elsewhere, before making any irrevocable moves. We were right to uphold the family unit when Western countries went for experimental lifestyles in the 1960s. We are right to accommodate homosexuals in our society, but not to encourage activists to champion gay rights the way they do in the West.

The Singaporean Balance: Controlled Creativity

The discussion so far shows how the Singaporean government wants to tell the world that Singapore is a creative hub, where innovation and creativity is bubbling. Singapore offers a unique blend of the best influences from the East and West. State-sponsored policies and regulations will make Singapore attractive for investments in the creative industries. Skilled talented workers are most welcome. The city is open-minded, tolerant and exciting. Increasing numbers of residents in Singapore embrace the creative economy, as they enjoy the vibrant cultural life and appreciate the arts. But how authentic is the creative Singapore brand and image?

To a certain extent, the creative Singapore brand is propped up by actions to realize the creative Singapore vision. Over the years, Singapore has become more relaxed with social policies. The authorities have allowed bar-top dancing, gay bars to flourish and nudity in cinemas. Political criticisms have become more common (Loh, 2006). In 2009, Singapore will house two casinos, a move that was very unpopular with many Singaporeans but promises to be highly lucrative (Ooi, 2005). After the government has allowed the casinos, there is a series of regulations to safeguard Singaporeans from becoming gambling addicts; and those who did, can seek help. Members of Parliament suggested a number of measures, including not allowing automated cash machines near the casinos and limiting the number of visits by Singaporeans. The Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister, Wong Kan Seng, rejected many of the recommendations and said that the government should not be nannies; the regulations should not impinge on people's ability to make their own choices (Lim, 2006b). Personal freedom to gamble is one of the reasons why the government has decided to allow the building of casinos in the country. He also mentioned that with competition, the government cannot err on the side of caution and protect Singaporeans from harm. There are trade-

offs, as the casinos will be important sources of revenue and jobs. Economic imperatives have spurred the loosening up of social and political controls in Singapore.

At the same time, Singapore is a multi-cultural society. The authorities are careful that ethnic and religious conflicts are not stirred up. The authorities are also particular that their leadership is not undermined. The avenues for expression are to be confined within the space that the authorities can take control. Social and political stability, as defined by the status quo, is of paramount importance to the Singaporean government; there are limits to the freedom of expression in Singapore. These limits are, expectedly, not highlighted while branding Singapore as a creative city. Do these limits discredit the creative Singapore brand and image?

Businesses in the creative industries are not particularly bothered by these limits to social and political expressions. No other countries with Singapore's level of economic development has such drastic controls over political and social expressions, but then, such forms of expressions mean little to the bottom-line of most firms in the creative industries. Social and political commentaries in the arts and culture reach small audiences. It is yet to be proven that the control of social and political expressions will stifle creative expressions in designing tables, animating cartoons or programming software. Singapore may get bad publicity but in many instances, the stable and generally otherwise tolerant environment has been appreciated by investors and foreign workers.

Conclusions

The branding of creative Singapore aims to change the world's mind about Singapore, selectively present Singapore as an attractive palate of traits and possibilities, assert a new creative Singapore identity and get locals and foreigners to experience the new exciting city. In a place re-imaging campaign, it is expected that only the positive aspects of the society is presented, people may thus doubt the credibility of the place brand. Is it possible for a soft authoritarian regime like Singapore to promote the country as creative? The case of Singapore shows that it is still possible although the efficacy of the brand messages may be hampered by negative publicity and undemocratic practices in the country.

Different sections of society have different levels of interest in the freedom of expression. In the various social arenas, there are also different extents that people can talk about issues in Singapore. The Singaporean authorities, like those in many other countries, are trying to tap into the economic potentials of the creative industries. In using similar strategies to promote other industries, Singapore has become a conducive environment for businesses. The social, political, technological, legal and economic circumstances are made right for industry. The authorities are also opening up more social and political spaces because it is considered necessary for the creative economy – to attract foreign workers and to give space for experiments.

These new spaces are also part of the signaling process to show that Singapore has become more open and tolerant. On the other hand, there are still limits to political, ethnic and religious expressions. The authorities want to maintain political stability and ethnic-religious harmony, and do not want to risk the status quo. In other words, while the government wants a more disorderly, vibrant and creative Singapore, it still wants to keep certain types of chaos out. Although not everyone agrees with the authorities, more loosening of controls on critical public expressions of ethnic, religious and political issues is going to be slow because there is no economic incentive to hasten the process. These controls do not seem to be affecting the ability of most creative workers to function.

So to sum up, changes in Singapore are noticed by residents and foreigners. The New York Times observes, "Singapore may be clean, efficient and manicured, but the prosperous island-state knows how to get down and dirty, too" (Kurlantzick, 2007). Time magazine declared on its cover story, "Singapore lightens up: Nanny state? Hardly. Once notorious for tight government control, the city-state is getting competitive, creative, even funky" (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999). Indeed, Singapore is promoting a new image. It is to be a funky and creative city. Increasingly, it is living that image and the image is getting through to the world. People are free to express and experiment, as long as they do not challenge the supposedly vicarious ethnic religious relations in the city-state and take firm steps to challenge the political leadership. Although Singapore is still not a democracy, the image modification process for the city-state is roaring ahead; there may be negative publicity but the issues seems to be of limited concern to foreigners who have invested, visited or settled in Singapore.

References

Andersen, V., Prentice, R., and Guerin, S. (1997) 'Imagery of Denmark among visitors to Danish fine arts exhibitions in Scotland', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 18, No. 7, pp. 453-464.

Anholt, S. (2006) 'The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index: How the world sees the world's cities?', *Place Branding*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 18-31.

Arnold, Wayne (Sept. 17, 2006) 'Singapore deters IMF protesters: Arrests and deportations keep many from reaching Batam', *International Herald Tribune*.

Ashworth, G. J. and Voogd, H. (1994) 'Marketing of tourism places: What are we doing?', in M. Uysal, ed., 'Global Tourist Behavior', International Business Press, New York, pp. 5-19.

Balakrishnan, V. (5 Dec., 2005) 'EDB will earmark S$500 million for the next five years to develop this digital media industry', speech given at Electronic Arts Asia Pacific's Studio", .

Burton, John (Oct. 12, 2002) 'Singapore stages a cultural renaissance', *Financial Times*.

Burton, John and Bhattarai, Binod (Sept. 17, 2006) 'Activists stage rare protest in Singapore', *Financial Times*.

Burton, John and Donnan, Shawn (Sept. 8, 2006) 'IMF and World Bank rebuke Singapore', *Financial Times*.

Chang, T. C. (2000) 'Renaissance Revisited: Singapore as a 'Global City for the Arts'', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 818-831.

Chang, T. C. and Lee, W. K. (2003) 'Renaissance City Singapore: a study of arts spaces', *Area*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 128-141.

Chua, B. H. (1995) 'Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore', Routledge, London.

Crewe, L. and Beaverstock, J. (1998) 'Fashioning the city: Cultures of consumption in contemporary urban spaces', *Geoforum*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 287-308.

Dahms, F. A. (1995) ''Dying villages', 'counterurbanization' and the urban field -- A Canadian perspective', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 21-33.

Economic and Development Board (EDB) (Jul. 1, 2005) 'Creative license', available at: http://www.edb.gov.sg/edb/sg/en_uk/index/news_room/publications/singapore_investment/singapore_invesdtment7/creative_license.html.

Economic Review Committee - Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) (2002) 'Creative Industries Development Strategy: Propelling Singapore's Creative Economy', ERC, Singapore.

Elegant, S. (July 7, 2003) 'The lion in winter', *Time*.

Elms, Deborah K. (Sept. 30, 2006) 'Let them hear the message of the masses', *International Herald Tribune*.

Florida, R. (2003) 'The Rise of the Creative Class', new edn, Basic Books, New York.

Freedom House (2007) 'Country Report 2007: Singapore', available at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007.

George, C. (2000) 'Singapore the Air-Conditioned Nation', Landmark Books Pte Ltd, Singapore.

Goh, Chin Lian (Sept. 2, 2006) 'Wanted: A single brand for Singapore', *The Straits Times*.

Gomez, J. (2002) 'Internet Politics Surveillance and Intimidation in Singapore' Think Centre, Bangkok and Singapore.

Gomez, J. (2006) 'Restricting free speech: The impact on opposition parties in Singapore', *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 23-2006, pp. 105-131.

Hutton, T. A. (2003) 'Service industries, globalization, and urban restructuring within the Asia-Pacific: new development trajectories and planning responses', *Progress in Planning*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 1-74.

International Institute for Management Development (IMD) 2007, *World Competitiveness Yearbook 2007*, IMD, Lausanne.

Jaffe, E. D. and Nebenzahl, I. D. (2001) 'National Image and Competitive Advantage' Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen.

Jayne, M. (2004) 'Culture that works? Creative industries development in a working-class city', *Capital and Class* No. 84, pp. 199-210.

Jin, Y., Pang, A., and Cameron, G. T. (2006) 'Strategic communication in crisis governance: Singapore management of the SARS crisis', *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 23-2006, pp. 81-104.

Kavaratzis, M. and Ashworth, G. J. (2005) 'City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick?', *tijdschrift voor Economische en Scoial Geografie*, Vol. 96, No. 5, pp. 506-514.

Kawasaki, K. (2004) 'Cultural hegemony of Singapore among ASEAN countries: Globalization and cultural policy', *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, Vol. 13, pp. 22-35.

Kekic, L. (2006) 'The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy', 'The World in 2007', EIU, London.

Kleppe, I. A., Iversen, N. M., and Stensaker, I. G. (2002) 'Country images in marketing strategies: Conceptual issues and an empirical Asian illustration', *Brand Management*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 61-74.

Koh, G. and Ooi, G. L. Koh, Gillian and Ooi, Geok Ling (2000) 'State-Society Relations in Singapore' Oxford University Press, Singapore.

Kurlantzick, Joshua (Dec. 23, 2007) '36 hours in Singapore', *New York Times*.

Lanfant, M.-F. (1995) 'International tourism, internalization and the challenge to identity', in M.-F. Lanfant, J. B. Allcock, and E. M. Bruner, eds., 'International Tourism: Identity and Change', SAGE Publications, London, pp. 24-43.

Lee, B. Y. "Unleashing and Protecting Asian Creativity - Speech given at the Asian Cultural Ministers' Meeting at the 3rd Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum", Asian Cultural Ministers' Meeting at the 3rd Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum, Hong Kong..

Lee, Bryan (Oct. 18, 2006a) 'PM toasts IMF helpers, backs stand on activists', *The Straits Times*.

Lee, T. (2007) 'Towards a 'new equilibrium': The economics and politics of the creative industries in Singapore', *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24-2006, pp. 55-71.

Lee, U-Wen (July 13, 2006b) 'Mr Brown's recent comments 'unjustified'', *Today*.

Leonard, M. (1997) 'Britain ™ Renewing Our Identity' Demos, London.

Lim, Hwee Hua (Oct. 5, 2006a) 'Singapore 2006', *International Herald Tribune*.

Lim, Lydia (Feb. 15, 2006b) 'MPs need to stop playing nanny to Singaporeans', *The Straits Times*.

Loh, Chee Kong (June 1, 2006) 'A keen eye on GE bloggers, but touch gets lighter', *Today*.

Low, L. and Johnston, D. M. Low, Linda and Johnston, Douglas M. (2001) 'Singapore Inc. Public Policy Options in the Third Millenium' Asia Pacific Press, Singapore.

Lydgate, C. (2003) 'Lee's Law: How Singapore Crushes Dissent' Scribe Publications, Australia.

Mauzy, D. K. and Milne, R. S. (2002) 'Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party' Routledge, London.

McCarthy, T. and Ellis, E. (July 19, 1999) 'Singapore Lightens Up', *Time*.

McCleary, K. W. and Whitney, D. L. (1994) 'Projecting Western consumer attitudes toward travel to six Eastern European countries', in M. Uysal, ed., 'Global Tourist Behaviour', International Business Press, New York, pp. 239-256.

Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) 2000, *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore*, MITA, Singapore.

Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) (2003), 'Economic Survey of Singapore First Quarter 2003', MTI, Singapore.

Morgan, N. and Pritchard, A. (2004) 'Meeting the Destination Branding Challenge', in N. Morgan, A. Pritchard, and R. Pride, eds., 'Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition', 2nd edn, Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, London, pp. 59-78.

Moscardo, G. (1996) 'Mindful visitors : Heritage and tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 376-397.

Nirmala, M. (July 23, 2003a) 'Gay backlash.', *The Straits Times*.

Nirmala, M. (July 4, 2003b) 'Govt more open to employing gays now', *The Straits Times*.

Oakes, T. S. (1993) 'The cultural space of modernity: Ethnic tourism and place identity in China', *Society and Space*, Vol. 11, pp. 47-66.

Olins, W. (2000) 'How brands are taking over the corporation', in M. Schultz, M. J. Hatch, and M. H. Larsen, eds., 'The Expressive Organization', Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 51-65.

Olins, W. (2002) 'Branding the nation - the historical context', *Brand Management*, Vol. 9, No. 4-5, pp. 241-248.

Ooi, C.-S. (1998) 'Singapore', in W. Sachsenröder and U. E. Frings, eds., 'Political Party Systems and Democratic Development in East and Southeast Asia, Volume 1: Southeast Asia', Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 343-402.

Ooi, C.-S. (2007) 'The creative industries and tourism in Singapore', in G. Richards and J. Wilson, eds., 'Tourism, Creativity and Development', Routledge, London, pp. 240-251.

Ooi, C.-S. (2004) 'Brand Singapore: The hub of New Asia', in N. Morgan, A. Pritchard, and R. Pride, eds., 'Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition', Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, London, pp. 242-262.

Ooi, C.-S. (2005) 'Sate-civil society relations and tourism: Singaporeanizing tourists, touristifying Singapore', *Sojourn - Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 249-272.

Ooi, C.-S. (2002) 'Cultural Tourism and Tourism Cultures: The Business of Mediating Experiences in Copenhagen and Singapore' Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen.

Peh, Shing Huei (Aug. 19, 2006) 'Lively city means more tourists and jobs: MM – Wholesome and orderly place is no longer good enough or a new Singapore', *The Straits Times*.

Prentice, R. and Andersen, V. (2007) 'Interpreting heritage essentialisms: Familiarity and felt history', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 661-676.

Reporters without Borders (2007) 'Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007', available at: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=11715.

Richards, B. (1992) 'How To Market Tourist Attractions, Festivals and Special Events' Longman, Essex.

Richards, G. and Wilson, J. Richards, Greg and Wilson, Julie (2007) 'Tourism, Creativity and Development' Routlege, London.

Saad, Imelda (Oct. 23, 2007) 'PM Lee: Why Singapore must 'leave Section 377A alone', *The Straits Times*.

Silver, I. (1993) 'Marketing authenticity in third world countries', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 302-318.

Singapore Biennale 2006. (2006) 'About SB2006', available at: http://www.singaporebiennale.org/2006/about.html

MITA and STPB (1995) 'Singapore, Global City for the Arts', MITA and STPB, Singapore.

Singapore Parliament Hansard (2004), *Singapore Parliament Hansard, Vol. 77, Session 1,* Singapore Parliament, Singapore.

Singapore Parliament Hansard (2007), *Singapore Parliament Hansard, Vol. 82, Session 1*, Singapore Parliament, Singapore.

Soh, Natalie (Sept. 18, 2007) 'Big changes to Penal Code to reflect crime's changing nature', *The Straits Times*.

Tallon, A. R. and Bromley, R. D. F. (2004) 'Exploring the attractions of city centre living: evidence and policy implications in British cities', *Geoforum*, Vol. 35, No. 6, pp. 771-787.

Tan, K. P. (2003) 'Sexing up Singapore', *International Journal of Cutlural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 403-423.

Teo, P. and Li, L. H. (2003) 'Global and local interactions in tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 287-306.

Today (July 10, 2006) 'Ensuring standard of national debate; Constructive dialogue needed, mainstream media not an Internet chatroom: Minister', *Today*.

Transparency International (2007) 'TI Corruption perception index'.

Waller, J. and Lea, S. E. G. (1999) 'Seeking the real Spain? Authenticity in Motivation', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 110-129.

Webb, S. (2002) 'The renaissance starts here?', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 165, No. 40, p. 56.

Wong, Douglas (Dec. 13, 2002) 'Singapore paints rosy employment picture', *Financial Times*.

Woodier, J. (2006) 'Securing Singapore / managing perceptions: From shooting the messenger to dodging the question', *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 23-2006, pp. 57-80.

Yusuf, S. and Nabeshima, K. (2005) 'Creative industries in East Asia', *Cities*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 109-122.

Working Papers List:

www.cbs.dk/creativeencounters

#1   **Making Scents of Smell:**
Manufacturing Incense in Japan

By: Brian Moeran
June 2007

#2   **From Participant Observation to Observant Participation:**
Anthropology, Fieldwork and Organizational Ethnography

By: Brian Moeran
July 2007

#3   **Creative Encounters in the Film Industry:**
Content, Cost, Chance, and Collection

By: Mark Lorenzen
August 2007