

# A nostalgic Peranakan journey in Melaka: Duo-ethnographic conversations between a Nyonya and Baba

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## ABSTRACT

A UNESCO World Heritage Listed historic city, Melaka embodies a vibrant multi-ethnic Asian heritage, straits-colonial legacy and cultural landscape that has been attracting tourists from within Asia and the wider world. In particular, Melaka is renowned for its rich Peranakan (Straits Chinese) cultural heritage and history. This work presents the divergent narratives of two Peranakan Chinese on a nostalgic, ancestral tourism journey in Melaka. Specifically, it explores the dimensions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora in cultural heritage tourism, framed within the affecting gaze of cultural, diasporic and reminiscent lenses through which we consume tourism experiences. Through our tourism lived experience and duo-ethnographic conversations, we explore our shared Southeast Asian ancestry, reflect on past traditions and question representations of our Peranakan Chinese heritage within four main themes: (1) reflective nostalgia, (2) the imagined past, (3) objective authenticity, and (4) existential authenticity.

## 1. Introduction

*“In our blood, bone and brain, we carry the memories of a thousand beings. We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves”.*

(V.S. Naipaul, 1994).

As we sat on old *koiptiam* (coffeeshop) stools in a century-old Peranakan (Straits Chinese) shop house in the heritage listed old town of Melaka and sipping *kopi peng* (iced coffee), we reminisced and shared narratives of our childhood days. The above quote by V.S. Naipaul expresses the poignant, yet invigorating heritage tourism experience of ancestral tourists like us, who are exploring and rediscovering our Peranakan roots and shared Southeast Asian heritage. Like many other visitors to historical cultural heritage sites such as Melaka, we are driven by our quest for nostalgia and authenticity. However, unlike the typical heritage tourist, we are also motivated by the desire to reconnect with our ancestral cultural roots and homelands; triggering powerful sentiments and reflections about our Asian self-identity and collective histories. This intimate relationship between ancestral tourists and ancestral cultural homelands can complicate conventional notions of authenticity and dimensions of the tourist experience, due to the correspondent interactions of perceived ancestral connections, place attachment and imaginings of the past (Bryce, Murdy, &

Alexander, 2017; Tan & Abu Bakar, 2018). Thus, whilst acknowledging that authenticity is a vital part of such heritage tourism experiences (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), we also concede that perceived authenticity is socially constructed and relative; a “dynamic, fluid, negotiated and creative process...(that changes)...with the context and individual perspectives” of the visitors and tourism experiences (Yang & Wall, 2009, p.236). As Bryce et al. (2017) suggest, in today’s pluralistic social world, it is important to recognize different approaches to authentication. This study explores the notions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora within the context of heritage tourism at a World Heritage Site. Specifically, it focuses on the lived experiences of ancestral tourists within the Southeast Asian context. From an Asian cultural heritage and ancestral tourism perspective, the specificity of ethnic and geographical focus matters since there can be compelling differences in perceptions, meanings, connections between Asian and Western tourists in their relationship with the destination.

A UNESCO World Heritage historic city in the Straits of Malacca, Melaka embodies a rich living multi-cultural heritage dating back to the 15th century (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018). It is also renowned for its vibrant Peranakan heritage and is home to the oldest population of Peranakans (Koh, 2013; Teoh, 2015). The Peranakan (derived from the Malay word *anak*, meaning child; i.e., local-born) ethnology stems from the intermarriages between foreign traders and local women in the Malay Archipelago, forming a unique hybrid

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identity expressed in their fused cultural traditions, language, religion, fashion, foodways, social etiquette, architecture and material culture (e.g., jewellery, porcelain, embroidery and beadwork) (Henderson, 2003; Rudolph, 1998; Teoh, 2015). Whilst there is a rich diversity in Peranakan populations found throughout Southeast Asia (e.g., Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines), the majority can trace their origins to the former Straits Settlements (Melaka, Penang and Singapore). Of these, the Peranakan Chinese (or Straits Chinese) make up the most prominent group (Koh, 2013; Tan, Ngah, & Lim Abdullah, 2015). Other notable Peranakan Communities in the region include the Peranakan Indians (e.g., The Chitty in Melaka) and Jawi Peranakans (Indian and Malay origins) (Koh, 2013; Teoh, 2015). Through the process of acculturation and creolization, the Straits Chinese communities adopted an identity distinct from their Chinese and Malay ancestry, but integrating selected cultural and identity markers of each. The Peranakan Chinese women are commonly called *Nyonya*, and the men, *Baba* (Choo, 2004; Tan et al., 2015).

The ethno-cultural heritage of the Peranakans embodies a multifaceted history and collective identity that has evolved and reconstituted itself over the centuries, shaped by social, political and economic conditions of the time (Rudolph, 1998). Their multi-racial origins, shifting ethnic affiliations and recurrent reinventions of identity have generated substantial debates with regards to what actually constitutes the Peranakan identity (Lam, 2017; Montsion & Parasram, 2018; Teoh, 2015). Whilst this intricate and enigmatic ancestry may have long complicated academic discourse about the Peranakan identity, from a tourism and destination branding perspective, the ethno-cultural richness of the Peranakans offer strong images and visual representations through which ethnic culture can be promoted (Henderson, 2003). This connection between ethnicity, cultural heritage and tourism not only facilitates the advocacy and conservation of indigenous or minority cultures, it also creates strong emotive and memorable heritage tourism experiences in heritage-listed cultural enclaves. Within the heritage tourism market, such consumption of the ancestral homeland by ancestral tourists provide the opportunity to re-engage with individual or collective ancestry and their historico-spatial dimensions of the place (Bryce et al., 2017). In this regard, notions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora become key foundations negotiated in such forms of heritage tourism (Berliner, 2012; Zhu, 2012).

While there have been significant research and discourse on the notions of nostalgia, authenticity and the tourist gaze within the context of cultural, heritage and ethnic tourism (e.g., Bai, 2007; Bryant, 2015; Bryce et al., 2017; Urry, 1992; Yang & Wall, 2009), research on Peranakan tourism is still nascent (Henderson, 2003; Montsion & Parasram, 2018; Rudolph, 1998; Shaw & Ismail, 2006; Teoh, 2015) and there has been limited attention given to the nostalgic tourism journeys of Peranakans to their ancestral homelands in Southeast Asia. As mentioned, whilst there are various Peranakan groups in Southeast Asia, this work focuses on the ancestral tourism lived experience from the Straits Chinese perspective due to the prominence of the Peranakan Chinese and their presence in Melaka and the former Straits Settlements. Moreover, both authors' genealogy stem from the same ethnic cultural reference and Peranakan Chinese ancestry. Furthermore, there is burgeoning interest in the Peranakan culture and engagement with Peranakan representations in recent years, sparked by impetuses such as the highly acclaimed Singapore Chinese TV series *The Little Nyonya*, increasing popularity of Peranakan cuisine and material culture, and prevalence of Peranakan-themed events (Lam, 2017; Montsion & Parasram, 2018; Teoh, 2015). Finally, whilst this work may be framed within the Melaka and Peranakan Chinese context, its observations can be applied to other Asian diasporas and destinations; as well as other forms of heritage or ethnic tourism in which tourists visit destinations with ancestral links. As Tan and Abu Bakar (2018) suggest, these forms of tourism that link *identity* and *tourism* incorporate elements of nostalgia, homecoming and ancestral connections.

Thus, this work presents the divergent narratives of a Nyonya

(Eunice, a practicing Peranakan from Singapore) and a Baba (Simon, a diasporic non-practicing Peranakan originally from Malaysia, now living in Australia) following a Peranakan heritage visit to Melaka. Specifically, it explores themes within the dimensions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora in Peranakan heritage tourism, framed around the affecting gaze of cultural, diasporic and reminiscent lenses, through which we consume tourism experiences. Through our duo-ethnographic conversations and reflections, we explore our shared Peranakan Chinese ancestry and discover personal representations of ancestral narratives, cultural heritage and Asian self-identity. The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the role of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora in affecting heritage tourism experiences at a world heritage site in Southeast Asia.
2. Consider the cultural, diasporic and reminiscent impetuses that influence our individual gazes as Asian tourists.
3. Explore our personal Asian heritage and genealogical past through duo-ethnographic conversations, reflections and recollections.
4. Recommend strategies for destination managers to successfully leverage on, and effectively manage Peranakan heritage and ancestral tourism destinations in Southeast Asia.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Evoking the senses: nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora

Nostalgia can be a powerful force that invokes self-identity in positioning cultural heritage. Originating from the Greek root words of *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain or suffering), the term 'nostalgia' was initially used to describe the affliction affecting Swiss Mercenaries employed to fight in distant lands, who yearned for a past memory connected to a place (Hofer, 1934). Such displacement from one's homeland evokes the notion of *heimweh* (homesickness), especially for those forcefully displaced or voluntarily moved away from their land of origins. Nostalgic *heimweh* can hence be a powerful force in defining one's cultural self-identity, constructions of national roots and/or memories of home (Bryce et al., 2017; Niemeyer, 2014). Bryant (2015) further suggests that as human beings, we often practice reflective nostalgia as a construction of our memories of the past, a reflective longing for the past as we move forward in life. Therefore, "nostalgia emerges from the impossibility of return, representing a lost home, lost community, lost innocence" (Bryant, 2015, p.155). However, nostalgic memories of homelands need not always be expressed as an aching reminder of the past or loss. They can also be pleasing recollections. People may cling onto warm nostalgic thoughts or sentimentalities of the past, as they reflect, reconstruct and relive bygone days (Christou, Farmaki, & Evangelou, 2018). For instance, old black and white photographs in the family album may transport one back in time to a bygone era. Similarly, period dramas like *The Little Nyonya* can evoke nostalgia (Montsion & Parasram, 2018; Niemeyer, 2014), as viewers reminisce and reflect upon fond memories of the past.

Whilst literature on nostalgia generally includes notions of loss, sadness and homesickness; within the tourism context, we argue that nostalgia may also be about reconnection with our cultural homelands or places with an ancestral connection. Such rekindling of bonds can evoke nostalgia, since it epitomizes "the forgotten...an innocence or perfection that we acknowledge we no longer remember or know" (Bryant, 2015, p.155). Within the context of this work, we examine the powerful forces of nostalgia in our Asian-centric tourism lived experiences and search for self-identity through cultural heritage travel to our ancestral homelands in Southeast Asia. Following Christou et al. (2018), we posit that seeking nostalgia through the desire to reconnect with our ancestral homeland can have positive outcomes; one of which is to seek authenticity.

MacCannell (1976) discusses authenticity through the lens of tourist

motivations and experiences, wherein being authentic is to be historic, genuine and original. Within the context of the heritage market, perceived authenticity is increasingly a vital constituent in visitors' quest for unique heritage tourism experiences that offer meaningful and *genuine* representations of reality (Budruk, White, Wodrich, & Van Riper, 2008). Similarly, Lu, Chi, and Liu (2015) contend that visitors engaging in heritage tourism are driven by an enthusiastic desire for the authentic. Nonetheless, can there ever be authenticity, especially when looking at artifacts from the past? For instance, whilst viewing an authentic piece of antique in the museum, the visitor's mind is likely imagining the surroundings of the artifact, and henceforth constructing an "authentically imagined past" (Bryce et al., 2017, p. 49). Arguably, it is not uncommon for ancestral tourists to inscribe their own imaginings of the past and/or their apparent connections to it, and project that onto the destination – e.g., an almost romanticized idea of their oral histories and ancestral homeland. Wang (1999) purports that authenticity can be characterized within the ideals of nostalgia or romanticism, whereby, we feel nostalgic about something because we "want to relive them in the form of tourism at least temporarily, empathically, and symbolically" (p.360).

Since authentic heritage tourism encounters can vary between people and cultures, the narrative on authenticity in heritage tourism has thus emphasized discourses exploring the relationship between tourists and their experiences. For many tourists, seeking authenticity arise in different forms. Authenticity in tourism has traditionally been associated with objective (artifacts) and constructed authenticity (Budruk et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2015; MacCannell, 1976). Critiquing the objective and constructed approaches to authenticity, Wang (1999) contends, "that which is judged as inauthentic or staged authenticity by experts, intellectuals, or elite may be experienced as authentic and real from an emic perspective" (p.353). This viewpoint of authenticity adopts an intrapersonal (bodily feelings, self-identity) and interpersonal (social connections) approach; wherein touristic activities are perceived to generate authentic encounters that emerge from existential experiences involving personal and inter-subjective feelings of the individual. This shift in tourism discourse on authenticity towards an emic approach considers the social, emotional and symbolic dimensions of tourist experiences as equally important (Budruk et al., 2008). In this regard, Wang (1999) suggests the notion of existential authenticity, wherein an "existential state of being" activated by tourism activities "can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects" (p.352). Instead, such experiences are personal and relative, as it is centralized upon the relationship between the tourist and tourist activity. For example, migrant Chinese tourists visiting their homeland and the Forbidden City could potentially feel an existentially authentic experience. Within this context, it can be argued that each heritage tourist experience can be considered as authentic, since it is never the same for different individuals – it is as personal and relative as is our imagined past. Thus, authenticity remains a complex and intricate phenomenon, in which identity, meaning, values, nostalgia and history are deeply intertwined (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

When we reminisce, our imagined past seeks authentication. The imagined past in our consciousness, is where "memory, historicity and place are constructed" in the quest for authenticity (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011, p. 202). In this regard, Hobsbawm & Ranger (2012) proposes the notion of 'invented traditions' wherein specific practices, norms of behavior, accepted values and symbolic rituals are inculcated to establish continuity with a historical past. This nostalgic longing and desire to remain connected to the bygone era of a disappearing past in the present, can thus be regarded as an implicit identification with a particular community group, its values or collective memory. Within the context of ancestral tourists and the imagined past, Bryce et al. (2017) suggest that it is important to understand how people in the present desire or conceive the past to be. This quest for authentication, self-conception and ancestral discovery further intensifies, when ancestral linkages are imagined or extant at the destination. Consequently, ancestral tourists

may engage in a process of co-creating authentic moments, contextualized within socially co-constructed activities where they experience a 'we-relationship' that can produce intensely authentic, natural and emotional bonds of intimacy and togetherness (Bryce et al., 2017; Wang, 1999).

Diaspora is often associated with some sort of displacement from one's homeland, whether voluntary or otherwise and refers to groups of "immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community" (Tötölian, 1991, p. 5). Extant literature about displaced diasporas focuses on two predominant themes of diaspora: (1) those who suffer politically motivated forced displacements/exile (Aviv & Shneer, 2005; Peteet, 2007), and (2) those who voluntarily leave their homelands for better opportunities elsewhere (Kuah & Davidson, 2008; Tie & Seaton, 2013). While the former may focus on painful memories of homelands, the latter may regard their homelands with emotional attachments (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2018). Whether displaced by force or voluntarily, however sweet or otherwise, diasporas may yearn for nostalgic memories of their homelands, wherein the emphasis is on cultural identity and the notion of homecoming (Bhandari, 2016; Tie & Seaton, 2013). Kuah and Davidson (2008) contend that for the Chinese diaspora, their yearning for their homelands can cause tensions and conflicts in representing and re-negotiating homecoming memories. Accordingly, diasporas are people with a "shared culture, heritage, faith and/or language over a number of geographical locations through migration from some 'home' location" (Spracklen, 2013, p. 131). Serhan (2008) proposes the notion of 'selective past', wherein displaced Palestinian diaspora communities reclaimed their selective past of what was, in the present. Within this context, ancestral tourists as diasporas, are living a distanced life detached from their cultural homelands and origins of ancestral heritage. Thus, nostalgic yearnings for ancestral homelands is triggered by a quest for self-identity and connection to cultural legacies, as viewed through a person's individually-filtered tourist gaze. These tensions manifested from divergent versions of what constitute the ancestral homeland and notions of authenticity is detected in our dialogues articulated in the later sections.

## 2.2. *Our Peranakan gaze: experiencing through cultural, diasporic and reminiscent lenses*

The tourist gaze is a concept actively debated in contemporary tourism literature and discourse (Maoz, 2006; Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). Urry (1990), applying Foucault's earlier conceptualizations of ocular-centrism, suggests the prevalence of visual consumption in contemporary leisure tourism – i.e., sightseeing activities. As tourists, we seek out pleasurable and memorable experiences, desiring unusual encounters that contrast with our daily lives. This ideology is in line with MacCannell's (1976) discourse regarding the universal quest for the sacred and the authentic; and the normal human condition of a fascination about the lives of others. Urry (1990) contends that as tourists we are "a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other times and other places away from (our) everyday life" (p.8). Therefore, the tourist gaze articulates the contrast between the ordinary (i.e., routine) and the extraordinary (Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). Impressions about the tourist gaze hence center on specific acts of visual stimulation that describe touristic ways of engaging with a place, based around the consumption of the destination's representations, images, tangible semiotics, and visual consumption of landscapes which ratifies its difference from home (Everett, 2008; Huang, King, & Suntutik, 2017). It considers the exoticism of visual stimuli and sensations a site provides, triggering perceptions about its uniqueness and special character (Urry, 1992). Hence, our touristic gaze is "constructed through signs and tourism involve the collection of signs" (Urry, 1990, p.3). It is also socially organized, systemized and institutionalized (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Within the context of this work, the cultural and social markers around us at the heritage site reinforces the reproduced

semiotics, visual representations and emotive responses to the sights being gazed upon and consumed.

While early discourses about the tourist gaze have focused on visual consumption and the relationship between the tourist and the other, subsequent debates began moving away from this rather narrow viewpoint. For example, critics have considered the traditional tourist gaze as being predisposed to the “western, well to do, heterosexual, capitalist, white male” (Maoz, 2006, p.222), and call for a need to move away from misconceptions presenting a generalized universal tourist gaze (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016). Additionally, it is suggested that an ocular-centric approach to viewing tourist experiences ignores the multifaceted dimensions embodied in our complex postmodern tourism system and acts of consumption. Perkins and Thorns (2001) uses the metaphor of the tourist performance (instead of the gaze) to conceptualize the diversity of tourism experiences and activities. This performance approach to understanding tourism is based on the idea that tourists are “doing, rather than just seeing” (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p.199), and that they are not just merely passive audiences, but are also performers within a multi-sensuous, dynamic encounter (Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). This ‘performance turn’ in the tourism gaze rhetoric, highlights the supposition of tourism spaces as themed stages upon which players in the tourism system choreograph and perform tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011) – e.g., tour guides as actors and choreographers who provide interpretations and manage spatial flows at a heritage site. Accordingly, Bryce et al. (2017) suggest that evoking powerful imaginings and emotive cultural signifiers at heritage sites can encourage the tourist to participate in the performance, co-creating authentic experiences that brings realism to an imagined past. Within this context, the nostalgic tourist gaze engages in reminiscence, imaginations and visualization; wherein memories and scenes of the past become superimposed onto sights being consumed in the present.

Urry (2002) subsequently acknowledges that with the globalization of tourism, there is a deviation from a single tourist gaze to the evolution of multiple forms, discourses and embodiments of tourist gazes arising. Stone and Nyaupane (2018) emphasize this need to recognize the different geographical origins, cultural frames and interests of tourists, stating that the tourist gaze is not homogenous, and that culture is a key dimension in heterogeneity. As human beings, we gaze upon the world through socio-culturally tinted lenses, filtered through a bricolage of expectations, desires, ideas, and skills, as well as by nationality, age, gender, social class, education, personal experiences (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Consequently, we must acknowledge the pluralistic representations and tapestries of interpretations by multiple audiences that are manifested in subjective, selective narratives (Bryce et al., 2017; Pearce, Wu, & Osmond, 2013). The act of tourism and cultural heritage consumption therefore becomes an expression of taste and identity– i.e., we select activities and experiences that are congruent to our sense of self, desired identity and self-positioning (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Within this context, we use the analogy of a ‘Prism’ (Fig. 1) to illustrate our tourist gaze as Asian ancestral tourists – reflecting the spectrum of our culturally-, diasporically- and reminiscently-tinted lenses. Hornsby (2005) describes ‘reminiscent’ as the process of reminding oneself of somebody or something from the past that brings pleasure. This process involves recalling past meaningful personal episodes (Webster & Haight, 2002). Therefore, to reminisce is to (re)discover our past in the present, by invoking stored knowledge from previous experiences and learning from the oral histories of our ancestors. For the Peranakan diasporas, the influence of practicing versus non-practicing diasporic conditions further color our ‘prism of gazes’, through which we perceive and experience our ancestral cultural homeland in Southeast Asia, particularly with Melaka’s positionality as the birthplace for all Peranakans (Teoh, 2015). This is evident within the narratives and reflections articulated in our duo-ethnographic conversations in the later sections.

Whilst most discourse on the tourist gaze is from the perspective of visitors ‘gazing in’, local communities and stakeholders may also

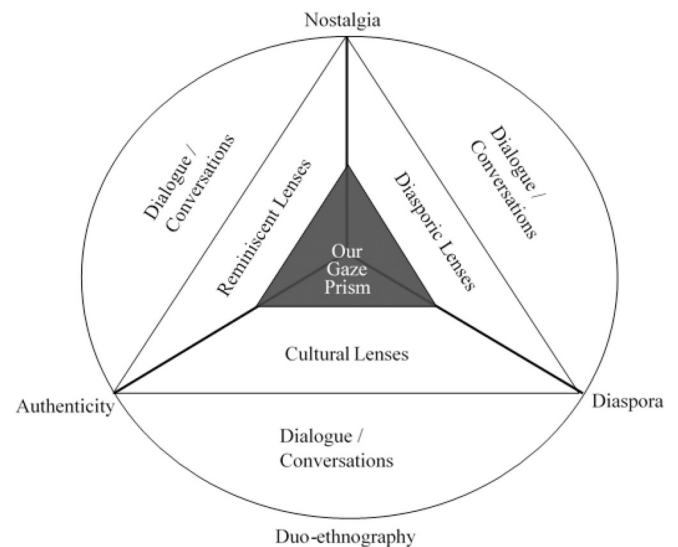


Fig. 1. Duo-ethnography in Cultural Heritage Tourism.

manipulate and reconstruct forms of their cultural markers and ethnicity to strategically capitalize on their heritage and traditions. Maoz (2006) proposes the notion of the ‘mutual gaze’, positing a multi-faceted, two-sided representation whereby both tourists and locals are gazing. By affecting and feeding each other, the mutual gaze in turn influences the way visitors and locals understand, view, conceive and form opinions about each other. As discussed, tourism is socially constructed and performative in nature. Bai’s (2007) study on the Bai ethnic minority showcases how local stakeholders reconstruct and interpret local geographical characteristics, traditional practices and history as a heuristic medium catering to tourists’ quest to experience authentic and meaningful learning journeys. Subsequently, the locals strategically and actively exoticize themselves as ‘ethnic others’, adopting and acting out whatever marketable ethnic form that appeals, and provides a distinctive product and tangible tourism experience. For UNESCO World Heritage Sites and historic cities like Melaka, the synergy between the visual, social and cultural, with time and space is vital. We must be cognizant that since the tourist gaze is socially and spatially constructed, tourism spaces and destinations are contextualized and perceived by tourists subjectively through their individual gazes (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016).

### 2.3. Conceptual framework

Fig. 1 diagrammatically outlines the context of our study and the shared duo-ethnographic journey of discovery. Whilst there can be a myriad of lenses through which we may perceive and document tourism experiences, within the context of this study, we focus the discourse on the Asian ancestral tourism experience at cultural heritage destinations within the trilogy of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora. Correspondingly, our individual existential journeys are juxtaposed through our sentimentalities of the past, perceived authenticity and diasporic sensibilities. As a dynamic and negotiated subjective sphere, our perceptions of authenticity about the toured space and material culture is relative to our existence and is socially constructed (Bryce et al., 2017; Yang & Wall, 2009). During our tourism experience, we respond and gaze through our cultural, diasporic and reminiscence lenses, which in turn, create a kaleidoscope of responses and encounters. We refer to the heart of this intersection as our ‘Gaze Prism’, reflecting the tensions in perspectives and a mosaic of complex dimensions that make us human and Asian. As Huang et al. (2017) suggest, the tourist gaze is forged through a montage of social-culturally constructed meanings and connections that we, as visitors, associate



with the tourism space being visited and experienced. Circumferential to the existential trilogy and gaze prism are our duo-ethnographic dialogues and conversations (discussed in the methodology). By situating ourselves within the circle of duo-ethnography, we explore, negotiate and delve into a rich bricolage of personal and shared reflections. Through the polyvocal and dialogic approach adopted in this collaborative research journey, we celebrate and critique our personal histories, narratives and reflections about our Peranakan Chinese heritage; aided in no small way by a degree of familiarity, trust and bond we share as co-researchers and fellow Peranakans (Breault, 2016; Meier & Geldenhuys, 2017). This process of collaborative inquiry, reflexive sharing and exploration, allows us to unreservedly reflect upon the extant tensions in perspectives from our visit experience, and from there establish (re)constructions of our Peranakan Chinese identities as Nyonyas and Babas.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Duo-ethnography: self-reflexivity and co-construction through dialogue

This work investigates the nostalgic tourism journeys of two Peranakan Chinese, experiencing their ancestral cultural heritage within a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Southeast Asia. As both visitors and researchers, we (Eunice and Simon) feel that this qualitative emic approach to inquiry enables us to engage in in-depth narrative analysis, self-reflection and storytelling. A poststructuralist approach to research, duo-ethnography discards the notion of “a single, fixed, and absolute reality existing independently of human consciousness and imagination”, and instead construct meanings within the process of interpretation (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p.629). It entails a process of compositional inquiry thorough the collegial exploration by two (or more) researchers to uncover diverse social and cultural constructions of oneself; and its layered, intersubjective and paradoxical nature of one's individual identity (Farquhar & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Breault (2016) emphasizes the value of this polyvocal and dialogic approach, as the “voice of each researcher is made explicit throughout the narrative... (and)...that the stories of each participant rest in the juxtaposition to the other” (p.778). This approach is befitting, since perceptions of authenticity in heritage tourism is increasingly regarded as a co-creative or participatory process (Breault, 2016; Bryce et al., 2017).

This work adopts structured duo-ethnography as the research approach, wherein the fieldtrip and visit experience to Melaka was purposefully undertaken, with the intention of exploring Peranakan heritage and ancestral tourism based on nostalgic, authentic and diasporic dimensions. As discussed, since we share the same genealogical heritage, the exploration of our Peranakan Chinese cultural legacies and homeland served as a strong stimulus. Throughout the process of investigating the study phenomenon at the research site (Melaka) in December 2017, we engaged in multiple conversations, sharing our thoughts, recollections and reflections about the visit experience over many cups of *kopi peng*. Beyond our love of *kopi peng* and indulgence in tasty culinary delights, these sessions enabled us to: (1) interrogate our performance as ancestral tourists within the Peranakan heritage tourism setting; (2) practice reflexivity and ensure our voices are present in co-constructing the narratives; (3) negotiate and renegotiate the tensions from our disparate viewpoints juxtaposed against the other; and (4) challenge the universalist notion of a homogenous, collective shared experience (Mair & Frew, 2016; Spencer & Paisley, 2013). In line with the notion of duo-ethnography as “knowledge in transition” (Spencer & Paisley, 2013, p. 706) where fluidity is salient, we acknowledge the limitations that there are many paths to the discovery of knowledge.

Following the field trip in Melaka and on-site conversations, we collated our individual self-reflective narratives (during and following the visit experience); and thereafter engaged in multiple dialogic communications (face-to-face and via skype) over a period of six

months. Our conversations were in English and colloquialism (non-English terms are highlighted in *italics*). The narratives presented are edited for flow and readability. The inclusion of colloquial terms is important, as these capture and reflect the meaningful semiotic richness and subtle nuances (Spencer & Paisley, 2013), representative of conversations between two Peranakan Chinese. We also used photographs taken during the visit to trigger memories and initiate further discussions. This freedom to reminisce and collaboratively reflect in a non-judgmental manner, is reflective of the trust and openness required for successful duo-ethnography (Mair & Frew, 2016). The back-and-forth movement and production of knowledge and evolving perceptual awareness is grounded in Meier and Geldenhuys' (2017) approach for the dialogical process of engagement and meaning making. To ensure the richness of the data and clear expression of individual voices, we endeavored to make meaning of not only our own, but also the other's perspective. Through our duo-ethnographic conversations, we explore our shared Southeast Asian ancestry and personal representations of our Peranakan Chinese oral histories, heritage and meanings, allowing our differences and subjectivities of voice and identity to emerge. These conversations are deliberately left unscripted and organic, allowing for rich, profound discussions (Spencer & Paisley, 2013). Our dialogues and self-reflexivity allow us, as Asian ancestral tourists and researchers (with a shared Peranakan genealogy), to engage in a collaborative, co-creative space and dialectic to productively visualize new meaningful potentialities for ourselves and the wider Peranakan community.

#### 3.2. Research setting

For the purpose of this study, we undertook cultural-heritage tourism experiences and activities around Melaka over four days in December 2017. As discussed, this visit experience and work is planned as a duo-ethnographic study, undertaken to explore our shared Peranakan Chinese heritage and ancestral cultural homeland based on the dimensions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora. With the focus on Peranakan heritage tourism, a predominant amount of time was spent at: (1) the UNESCO World Heritage listed historic city of Melaka, (2) Porto Historia, and two heritage Peranakan-styled hotels: (3) Hotel Puri and (4) Kapitan Kongs Hotel. Melaka showcases the cultural landscapes, aesthetics and historical chronology portraying the former Straits Settlements and offers a rich historical narrative reflecting its past as a powerful trading hub between east and west (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018). Straddling the Malacca River (Fig. 2), Melaka's old historic quarter is a labyrinth of conservation buildings and structures characterizing Chinese, Portuguese, English and Dutch architectural styles. Melaka is also home to a vibrant Peranakan heritage; which has been vigorously revitalized in recent years due the “faddish revival of all things Peranakan” (Lam, 2017) and acclaimed television dramas like *The Little Nyonya*, which was partly filmed in Melaka and featured several prominent historical Peranakan houses (including Hotel Puri).

The first heritage hotel property in this study, Hotel Puri, is located in Melaka's old city. Built in 1822, the beautifully restored Peranakan House has an illustrious Straits Chinese legacy and its ambience is reminiscent of life in a traditional Peranakan Chinese ancestral home (Hotel Puri, 2015). The second heritage hotel in this study, Kapitan Kongs Hotel is a new boutique property constructed in a Peranakan heritage and retro-classic design (Kapitan Kongs Hotel, 2018). It is located in Porto Historia, a new 1.9-ha commercial complex located about two kilometers from Melaka city center. Its development objective conforms to the government's aim to preserve the architectural heritage and cultural landscape of old Melaka as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (The Star, 2012).

### 4. Findings and discussion

Adopting duo-ethnography, this section presents key discoveries



Fig. 2. Melaka Old Town (Photo by Eunice Tan, 2017).

**Table 1**  
Main Themes.

Dimension 1: Nostalgia	
Reflective Nostalgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Feelings of <i>Heimweh</i> that trigger a desire to reconnect with our cultural homeland(s)</li> <li>■ (Re)Constructions of self-identity through immersion with the culture of our ancestors</li> </ul>
The Imagined Past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Seeking authenticity through our imaginations of 'what was'</li> <li>■ Co-constructions of cultural heritage through our immersions with cultural landscapes, architecture and material culture</li> </ul>
Dimension 2: Authenticity	
Objective Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recognizing constructed authenticity within the toured space</li> <li>■ Distinguishing staged authenticity in heritage tourism experiences</li> </ul>
Existential Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Co-creating authentic moments through our duo-ethnographic dialogues</li> <li>■ Co-constructing authenticity through our social activities and emotional bonding</li> </ul>

interpreted through our multi-dialogic processes. Our polyvocal dialogues enable us to engage in thoughtful, compelling and transformative conversations to understand the topic under investigation (Breault, 2016). Based on the literature and our duo-ethnographic conversations, four main themes are derived: (1) reflective nostalgia, (2) the imagined past, (3) objective authenticity, and (4) existential authenticity (Table 1). Each theme is depicted as conversation threads articulating a particular theme within the dialogue. The conversations are structured and adjusted around the two key dimensions of nostalgia and authenticity for flow and clarity. As Sawyer and Liggett (2012) suggests, thematic editing and re-organization offers a more concise prose summarizing our critical reflections.

The focus on authenticity and nostalgia in this work is motivated by debates surrounding the touristic experience and how we perceive cultural heritage. Concurrently, as lead actors within the duo-ethnographic dialogues, we experience and determine different ideals of authenticity and nostalgia due to our individual diasporic/non-diasporic dispositions. As illustrated in Fig. 1, the overarching juxtapositions of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora is a strong theme influencing our identity (as Asians and Peranakans) and make us who are, vis-à-vis the imagined past as we reflect upon the past and present. Through the process of co-constructing conversations, we (1) explore our differences arising due to individually-tinted lenses coloring our gaze prisms, (2) reconcile, and thereafter find similarities through our shared cultural bonds and Southeast Asian heritage, and (3) develop a

'we-relationship' through shared narratives and socially co-constructed activities.

4.1. Trip down memory lane: reflective nostalgia and the imagined past

A visit to one's ancestral homeland evokes nostalgic memories of 'what was'. We reminisce our imagined past, as if a piece of heirloom buried deep inside the recesses of our memories, resurfaces as we take a trip down memory lane. We practice Bryant's (2015) notion of reflective nostalgia as a construction of our cultural self-identity. In this case, we reflect upon our 'Peranakaness' by confronting *heimweh* (homesickness) through reconnecting with our ancestral cultural homeland (homecoming) (Christou et al., 2018). In doing so, we are confronted with tensions between the imagined past and the present.

Simon: *Being here (at Hotel Puri) brings back many fond memories of my childhood... Look at those antique rosewood furniture and mother-of-pearl inlaid chairs! It's been a long time since I last sat on this type of chair.*

Eunice: (Laughs) *I have these same chairs in my house! I inherited it from my parents, who inherited it from my grandparents...my parents' living room is still furnished like this!*

Simon: *Well, you are lucky! (Happily settling into one of the chairs) Sitting on this chair feels authentic... plus, look at the mosaic tiles and large hanging mirrors! I feel like I'm transported back to the Peranakan*

*Era...feels so grand. I feel emotionally connected to this grand era.*

*Eunice: I guess since I grew up in homes (parents' and grandparents') with this type of hard wooden antique furniture (albeit on a much smaller, humbler scale!) I could not wait to have soft comfy sofas in my own home! I still have some antique furniture as they are family heirlooms – but I consider them more as adornments and for their emotive value reflecting my heritage.*

*Simon: You have a point there...at my hotel too (Kapitan Kongsi Hotel), when I saw the marble inlaid lounge chairs, mother-of-pearl inlaid mirror and courtyard garden stone stools, it also brought back fond memories of my childhood.*

*Eunice: Yes, I loved the large four-poster Peranakan wedding bed in the lobby...but I guess I didn't feel as reminiscent as I did at Hotel Puri, since I am aware it (Kapitan Kongsi Hotel) is newly constructed.*

*Simon: But for me, even though I realize that the building and furniture are just replicas, it seems so authentic to me...as I'm imagining how it was like back in the olden days at my grandmother's house.*

The above exchange highlights the mitigating influence of nostalgia and diaspora on perceived authenticity. Our feelings of *heimweh* are triggered by a desire to reconnect with our cultural ancestry. As modern Peranakan Chinese, our reflective nostalgia is a consequence of personal memories and constructions of our past (Bryant, 2015). Our individual pathways and life stories shape the contrasting reflective yearnings (or lack of!) for the past and relive bygone days as we move forward in life. Thus, notions of authenticity, space and time, is subjective and not always accurate due to the process(s) of reconstructions/commodification and visitors' perceptions regarding the forms of life being represented (Urry, 1992; Zhu, 2012). Further, we explored these emotional bonds through evoking our imagined past and reminiscence that seeks authenticity in our desire to socially reconnect with our ancestral homelands. We framed this within the context of our individualized Peranakan gazes and diasporic/non-diasporic lenses. As Peranakan Chinese living away from the homeland, we are living a distanced life detached from the origins of our ancestral heritage. Within the context of our Peranakan Chinese heritage and ancestral tourism experience, we examine the role of our nostalgic yearnings for our ancestral past, triggered by the quest for self-identity and cultural legacies, viewed through our individually-filtered tourist gazes.

Concurrently, the diasporic tourist gaze intrinsically imagines what their homeland might be; often within the constructs of an imagined space between their mythical homelands and adopted lands; wherein the nostalgic collective memories of the past create a “contested, cultural and political” diasporic space in which “individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure” (Brah, 1997, p. 210). In this instance, for Simon, it was a journey of homecoming as a form of pilgrimage back to his Malaysian roots and ancestral homeland, whilst for Eunice, it was a pleasant trip down a more recent memory of Singaporean childhood and family legacies. Nonetheless, whether the artifacts were indeed original or not, we were transported into an imagined space depicting the life and times of our Peranakan Chinese ancestors. This in turn shapes our constructions of cultural self-identity.

*Simon: Despite staying in a newly built Peranakan heritage building at Porta Historia, I felt a sense of homecoming. When I arrived at my hotel, I was greeted by a female hotel receptionist wearing the Nyonya Kebaya, (traditional ethnic outfit of the Nyonyas) which reminds me of my grandmother, mother and aunts who wore the kebaya as part of their daily attire.*

*Eunice: Yes, I also noticed the purposeful wearing of bright and beautiful kebaya by service staff and shopkeepers to attract tourists and reinforce the image that their shop is 'authentic', because 'real Peranakans' are serving them! .... However, growing up in a somewhat Peranakan household, I know that these types of kebaya worn by service providers*

*aren't always worn on a daily basis. Bibiks (older Nyonyas) like my Ahmah (Paternal grandmother) have different types of kebaya for home, casual outings and formal occasions. Of course, for modern Nyonyas like myself, I only wear my kebaya during formal family occasions...it just isn't practical daily wear in today's world.*

*Simon: Same here! I wear batik shirts (commonly worn by Babas) whenever I'm back in Malaysia, like the one that I'm wearing now...it helps me self-identify as a Baba. Normally I don't wear batik shirts in Australia unless it's for cultural or more formal events.*

*Eunice: I agree...for me, it's more about practicality. In fact, I once declared to my parents (as I struggle into my car in a beautiful but unyielding and tight fitting kebaya) that “obviously Bibiks didn't drive!”...and proceeded to drive to the event with my sarong hitched unglamorously up to my knees so I can drive properly....I'm sure Ahmah will shake her head in disapproval if she were alive to see that!*

*Simon: (laughs) Although the kebaya evokes an image of elegance, as worn by the air-stewardess of several Asian airlines...batik shirt is less expensive than the kebaya!...as costume or uniform, it's a tangible compass.*

*Eunice: Yes! They are trying to 'tangibilize the intangibles'!... in this case, through the use of ethnic attire and accessories as cultural markers.*

*Simon: (Examining the photograph of the hotel receptionist) True... the kebaya is a cultural marker yet it can be cultural appropriation.*

*Eunice: ....talking of ethnic attire (points out the uniform to Simon) ...do you see the seams along her kebaya? Well, whilst in a pricy Peranakan boutique in Melaka, my mother had exclaimed in hush tones, “Wah! So expensive, and not even authentic!” When queried, she pointed to the seams and declared that it is not a good quality kebaya unless they have Ketok along the seams! (Ketok Lobang – from Malay, meaning to pierce holes, referring to the sewing technique producing delicate ‘punch hole’ seams). Mummy declares, “Without the Ketok, bluff (fake) one”!*

Eunice's mother's apparent aghast about the authenticity of the kebaya is understandable for the older generations, who believe in following traditional techniques and craftsmanship. Moreover, our discussions about ethnic representations, cultural identity and the appropriateness of occasion to wear kebaya highlight the notion of purposeful exoticism in tourism to create perceived authenticity and appeal. As Bai (2007) observes, this is not an uncommon phenomenon, and minority or indigenous cultures can often purposefully exoticize themselves as the ethnic ‘Others’. In doing so, they strategically reconstruct and interpret selected facets of their culture, traditions and folklore for tourism consumption and feed tourists' desire for the authentic. In doing so, local stakeholders and tourism players conscientiously adopt and/or act out specific salable ethnic forms materialistically appealing to the tourists.

In fact, some traditionalists argue that, the inappropriate and faddish revival of Peranakan clothing in modern spinoffs diminishes the soul of a centuries-old and proud cultural heritage (Lam, 2017). Within the context of cultural appropriation in tourism, authentic cultural traits and ethnically distinctive cultural markers have become something to be proud of, honored and shared. In this instance, tourism suppliers feature distinctive material culture to ‘tangibilize the intangibles’, in order to reflect authentic moments for visitors. Through the process of co-construction, ethnic clothing augments our quest and search for cultural self-identity and heritage. Moreover, as ancestral tourists we seek authentication and connectedness with our imagined past, Asian heritage and ancestral culture. Through our prism of gazes, we may perceive varying experiences as authentic or otherwise, since our notions of authenticity are personally driven and relative to our imagined past.

*Simon: (pointing to the ornate windows in the century-old*



Peranakan shophouse) *Oh look at that window and the door frame! It's so typical of Peranakan architecture. The intricate wooden carving is so appealing. The traditional roof tops and front of house makes me feel as if I'm back 'home'...it gives me the feeling of homecoming, as these old shophouses were once residences.*

Eunice: *That's true...the dedication that they put into recreating the ornate and gaudy designs loved by the Peranakans is a wonderful example of preserving...or recreating...the cultural markers and townscapes of a historic old town.*

Simon: *But it's rather odd that I can't imagine how it really was here, back in the early Peranakan times with horse carriages and coolies pulling rickshaws. Things must have been different then.... I suppose our imagined past exists only to a certain time! (laughs).*

Eunice: *You are right!...for me, I remember accompanying Ahmah to her friend's house to play Chap Ji Ki (from Hokkien – meaning twelve cards – a popular card game loved by Bibiks). That Bibik's house had a doorway just like that! I can almost visualize standing by the window peering out into the streets as Ahmah and her friends played, gossiped and ate Nyonya snacks.*

Simon: (looking out towards the old street) *Yes... I too can almost visualize the sights, sounds and smells of yesteryear.....just like the street scene from The Little Nyonya!*

When we choose sites or sights to gaze upon, there is often the associated anticipation that accompanies it – e.g., through daydreaming, fantasy, shared narratives, past encounters; developed and sustained via a range of non-touristy triggers and activities, such as literature, film, TV and other media content, which construct and reinforce our individual gazes (Urry, 1990). Tan and Abu Bakar (2016) discusses this influence of the tourism space and material culture in the tourist gaze, positing that tourism spaces are not merely just physical settings and locations – instead, these spatial settings are socially- and culturally-constructed creations, framed within our imagined past and subjective nuances of reality.

Simon: *Isn't it nice that this old cup and saucer is still being used in this place? (at Hotel Kapitan Kongsi) I used to drink kopi with condensed milk in this sort of cup. My mother used to make a big pot of kopi in the morning. We'd drink kopi instead of water throughout the day. Just the smell of the kopi awakens my memory of how things were in the olden days. I remember having kopi, half-boiled egg and toasted bread with kaya (coconut egg jam) for breakfast.*

Eunice: *We still drink with these cups in some kopitiam in Singapore! (laughs) ...yes I love the local breakfasts too. It's very comforting. In my Pohpoh's (maternal grandmother) house, she had a large pot of strong-brewed oolong tea sitting in an insulated rattan basket (instead of coffee)!*

Simon: *I also love those Nyonya Kueh (Peranakan confectionary). I cannot have enough of them. I have nostalgic feelings of home whenever I see such Noynya Kueh. When I bite into them, memories of my childhood days flood my mind.*

Eunice: *I do too! Whilst I can easily buy Nyonya Kueh in Singapore, every time I eat them, I have fond memories of Ahmah and my childhood...and sweet memories of me hiding under Ahmah's chair (behind her sarong!) sneakily stuffing myself with kueh kapek (crispy egg rolls).*

Although our memories that triggered the conversation started with objective authenticity, our imagined past and nostalgic musings led us to co-constructions of material culture. Through that imagined past, we are temporarily reliving nostalgic moments of the past. This practice of reflective nostalgia prompts acts of 'we-togetherness' and emotional bonding as fellow (food-loving) Peranakan Chinese. Consequently, we were co-constructing existential authenticity through reminiscence.

#### 4.2. Notions of authenticity: objective and existential moments

Authenticity is a significant theme in cultural heritage tourism. As heritage tourists, we seek authentic moments within tourism spaces and experiences that provide credible and genuine constructions and/or representations of cultural heritage (Zhu, 2012). However, Yang and Wall (2009) suggest that our perceptions of authenticity are an imaginative and negotiated process, where judgments are contextualized and fluctuate depending the individual. As cultural heritage tourists, we evaluate authenticity through cultural markers and interactions within the physical and social environments. The commodification and packaging of ethnic culture for objective tourism consumption is prevalent, wherein nuances of the past are recreated in the present, in order to stage authentic moments for visitors in memorable and appealing packages. Nevertheless, not all visitors may experience the encounter in the same way. We witnessed this paradox of contrasting viewpoints about authenticity multiple times, during our shared tourism journey in Melaka and duo-ethnographic dialogues.

Simon: *Even though Porto Historia appears to be rather staged, I still feel as if I'm in the middle of Melaka town, albeit a small section of it. The buildings look new here, but I guess it's the nostalgic ambience of the Peranakan heritage-styled buildings, architecture and furniture of that period that evokes a sense of place.*

Eunice: *I'm sorry, but whilst I agree it's a beautiful development, I find it all quite contrived and artificial– these aren't original Peranakan shophouses – they're newly-created constructions.*

Simon: *I see your point, nevertheless, for me, it's not about the oldness or newness of the place, rather it is my connection with the imagined past and its newly constructed version of the past....it's like a fresh perspective of the past.*

Eunice: *Yes, but it's unlike those in the old town – like Hotel Puri –restored from an actual ancestral Peranakan home from the 1800s. You can almost sense its history through the ages.*

Eunice's narratives support the critique concerning the objective authenticity of Porto Historia. Nevertheless, its positive contributions of nostalgic heritage to the area have won the hearts of locals and visitors alike. It seeks to replicate Melaka's historic past, with due diligence made to feature the multi-cultural architecture of Melaka's early days. This focus on packaging antiquity delivers true Melakan values of cultural significance and history, enabling an immersive journey of constructed authenticity into the toured space. Hence for Simon, his fresh perspective of the past did add value to constructing authentic moments for him as a visitor.

Conversely, existential authenticity can be felt through social and sensory experiences that trigger nostalgic moments. As Wang (1999) suggests, existential authenticity is the subjective outcome of doing tourism activities; not with the authenticity of the toured object. It is personal and relative, influenced by the tourist's perceptions of the site and their emotive connections to their own heritage (Yi, Lin, Jin, & Luo, 2017). Similarly, our duo-ethnographic conversations evoke distinctions of existential authenticity and states of being. Therefore, within the context of this study, we are both co-creating and co-constructing authentic moments, by sharing emotional bonds through our shared Peranakan Chinese heritage and social activities in Melaka. One such social activity that we particularly enjoyed, was exploring our Peranakan Chinese culinary heritage. In many Asian cultures, particularly the Chinese, the consumption of food is both a sensory and social activity – beyond nutrition, there are symbolic meanings and dimensions related to food and gastronomic activities (Pearce et al., 2013). Sensory experiences of local cuisines and foodways can create symbolic connections with people, places, stories, histories, memories, feelings, and moments in time (Chan, 2010; Choo, 2004). After all, as sensory beings, we are constantly interpreting such signs and relational connections



around us.

Simon: (During a Peranakan Chinese dinner at Hotel Kapitan Kongs) *Oh this food tastes so delicious, it's so authentic! The ayam pongteh (chicken and potatoes stewed in bean paste) is delicious. I also like this chap chye (mixed vegetable stew)...it's one of my mother's favourite dishes. She used to cook it quite often.*

Eunice: *Yes, I agree! These dishes remind me of Ahmah's cooking and the family's love for her culinary genius. Even today, decades after her passing, all of us still fondly talk about Ahmah's signature dishes at every family gathering! Although my mother and aunts have inherited her 'secret recipes' and cook some of them on special occasions, we still hanker for Ahmah's cooking.*

Simon: *Yes, me too. Every time I visit Melaka, I must eat Nyonya food. In Australia, there are Nyonya restaurants too. I crave for any sort of Nyonya food, I can't tell the difference.*

Eunice: (laughs) *Not my parents! Yesterday, while having lunch at a quaint little Peranakan restaurant in the old town, mum and dad (whilst enjoying the home-styled Nyonya cooking) commented that whilst delicious, it's still not truly 'authentic' like what they are used to....In fact, they had declared on numerous occasions "...in Singapore, we cook like this....!" I had to remind them that each region had their own versions of Nyonya food, reflecting each community's unique adaptation to local tastes and ingredients.*

Simon: *I am sure that there are subtle regional taste differences but I won't be able to tell (laughs). I am sure many Peranakans will say that the best Peranakan food is served in their home!*

Food is a significant sensory tool enabling us to 'taste' a culture. Through the processes of culinary hybridization and localization, we witness the construction of unique ethno-cultural representations of collective identities via foodways (Tan et al., 2015). There is a deep connection between our sensory triggers and memory – food provides the basis from which we may (1) imagine places, communities, identities and time, (2) reminisce about, or indulge in nostalgic yearnings of childhoods and homelands, and (3) (re)connect with self and place (Choo, 2004). As Chan (2010) observes, our culinary heritage and food memories affirm our subjective relationships between past and present; reflecting the roots-imagining movement of collective consciousness. Particularly for diasporic identities, it creates imaginary (re) constructions of the past and nostalgic reminiscences of home. Within the context of our study, the Peranakan Chinese way of life and its cuisine are considered the most appealing features of Peranakan tourism, particularly if situated at a cultural heritage-listed site. The hybridity and creolization of cross-cultural flavors, ingredients and cooking styles in Peranakan Chinese cuisine and foodways, has led to the emergence of a unique culinary heritage that we proudly call our own.

## 5. Conclusions

This work challenges the status quo in tourism research, with an in-depth investigation of Southeast Asian cultural heritage research seen through the innovative lens of nascent duo-ethnography. Through our gaze prism, a bricolage of human consciousness and imaginations of the past, we reminisce and construct meanings through the trilogy of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora, which in turn affects our individual visitor experience(s) within a heritage tourism site. Consequently, this work adopts a duo-ethnographic approach with the aim of exploring our personal Asian heritage and genealogical past as fellow Peranakan Chinese and co-researchers. This approach allows us to engage in multiple conversations, reflections and recollections of our ancestral heritage and tourism experiences from a Southeast Asian viewpoint. Discarding notions of a single, fixed absolute reality, our diverse narratives are juxtaposed and co-constructed for meanings via our own

individualized interpretations. This participatory process ultimately results in a polyvocality of perceptions about authenticity, along with notions of our imaged past in the present. From a destination management perspective, such compositional inquiry provides rich narratives and observations, from which destination managers at heritage sites, can utilize to better understand visitors' suppositions about nostalgia and authenticity.

The observations from this study highlight the need to acknowledge and adapt to multiple perspectives and subjectivities within the social phenomena being investigated in heritage tourism. Hence, we posit that duo-ethnographic inquiry adds value by (1) offering destination managers useful market insights about their targeted heritage tourist segment(s), and (2) contributing valuable scholarship through re-conceptualizing notions of nostalgia and authenticity in Peranakan heritage tourism. This work provides originality in its collaborative process, which facilitates the co-construction and re-conceptualizations about nostalgia and authenticity. Through our polyvocal duo-ethnographic conversations, our Peranakan Chinese cultural heritage is questioned through the interrogation of nostalgia and perceived authenticity framed within our individual gaze prisms.

We recommend three strategies that destination managers can consider to better leverage on opportunities presented by the revitalized interest in Peranakan culture at heritage sites in Southeast Asia. Firstly, we suggest that whilst aesthetically-driven marketing campaigns have traditionally been appealing, destination managers must move beyond mere aesthetics and campaigns that over-commodify traditional cultural heritage as trendy tourism products for sale. We assert that, beyond visual stimulation and the ocular-centric collection of sights, heritage destination managers must also provide opportunities for mindful and emotive tourism experiences that educate and connect ancestral tourists to their homelands. As discussed, the performance approach to tourism advocates a participatory and co-creative tactic for crafting authentic tourist experiences. Consequently, visitors are able to experience meaningful we-relationships and togetherness with people and places at the destination, spatially and temporally. Particularly for historical World Heritage Sites like Melaka, the synergy between the visual, social and cultural, with time and space is essential.

Secondly, we suggest moving away from narrow destination representations that emphasize a predominance on material culture and physicality of icons. Tourism managers can leverage on the destination's unique culinary heritage, cuisines and traditional foodways as instruments for the consumption of intangible cultural heritage. Particularly within the context of the Asian diaspora, food is central to building friendships, relationships and kinships. We 'taste' culture through indulging in traditional Peranakan foods (e.g., *ayam pongteh* and *Nyonya kueh*) at the heritage site. These distinctive edible experiences can trigger nostalgic moments and recollections of the past. Whilst this work focuses on encounters with traditional Peranakan Chinese cuisine and heritage, its implications can be applicable to other traditional cultures and indigenous foodways. Hence, destination managers must synergize the linkages between: (1) what we *eat* – i.e., the cuisine being consumed (2) what we *hear* – i.e., the stories being told and interpretation provided, and (3) what we *feel* – i.e., the memories being evoked. This creates a more sensory experience within the visitor's gastronomic journey.

Thirdly, we recommend that destination managers maximize existentially authentic moments for visitors. We posit that tensions can arise amongst ancestral tourists, because their imagined past is often preconceived, influenced by the romanticized narratives and imagery that they have been exposed to, or collected prior to their visit. However, this perception of *what was* may not always be the reality of *what is*. Therefore, destination managers need to balance the need to portray authentic representation(s) whilst simultaneously gratifying the ancestral tourists' version(s) of home. Thus, whilst advocating the need to educate and inform, we must not do so at the expense of undermining their imaginings of the ancestral homelands. This is a delicate challenge

for the destination manager, and can be resolved through effective interpretive programs and site management. Within the context of existential and objective authenticity, the destination's material culture and heritage settings provide objective authenticity, whilst existential authenticity is shaped by story-telling and emotional connection. It is through the amalgamation of these two authenticity combinations that deep and meaningful ancestral tourism experiences are crafted.

We acknowledge that as a duo-ethnography, there are limitations presented within this work. While we have strongly advocated and defended the use of this nascent approach to inquiry, we acknowledge that it is not meant to be a generalization of all Nyonya and Baba tourists across all Peranakan-centric tourism destinations in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it contributes to a value-laden understanding of Asian cultural heritage tourism in Southeast Asia, particularly within the subjective nuances of the Asian diaspora. To preserve the legacy of vulnerable ethnic minorities, it is necessary to synergize the notions of nostalgia and authenticity within the toured space. To safeguard the integrity of a heritage site, destination managers must avoid the excessive thematization and over-commodification of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. We posit that Asian cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, if effectively managed and positioned, can provide potent tourism experiences for visitors, and become economically and socially beneficial to local stakeholders. Local traditions, cultural markers and societal traits can potentially become new resources for the rejuvenation and (re)construction of ethnic identities and its peoples. To that effect, we propose future research within the interconnected realms of nostalgia, authenticity and diaspora in Asian cultural heritage and ancestral tourism that interrogates the viewpoints from the perspective of the visitor.

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