Insularities: Anglo- and Asia-centrism in tourism☆

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ABSTRACT

The universalist discourse of Anglo-centric research in tourism has been criticised for being inward looking. Countering this has been an emergent wave of critical Asian Tourism Studies that offers insights on places, processes and people from an Asian perspective. However, this assertive Asian voice also perpetuates its own insular thought, described here as Asia-centrism. This paper proposes a conceptual schema to advance tourism knowledge that steers clear of centric proclivities, while serving as a guide for future engagement with critical tourism studies. The need for academic activism, the value of culturally sensitive scholarship, the importance of reflexivity and the quest for complex thinking are advocated.

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Introduction

There has been increasing reflexivity in and rethinking of tourism scholarship since the late 1990s and early 2000s. Orthodox tourism thought that once served as universal models have been questioned. An early proponent was Alneng (2002: 126) who wrote of the stranglehold on tourism studies by a "European-centered cartography" compassed on an "autocentric picture of itself as the expression of a universal certainty". According to Alneng et al., many of the foundations on which tourism analyses were premised view the tourist as western (often male) and tourist flows as moving in a west-east, north-south direction, with the developing world serving as an exotic, unchanging and subservient Other. The late 2000s and 2010s continued to witness similar reflexive interrogations in the form of edited books and agenda-setting commentaries (e.g. Ooi, 2019; Winter et al., 2009), accompanied by the emergence of critical Asian Tourism Studies characterised by a burgeoning continental viewpoint and growing methodological confidence (e.g. Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Porananond & King, 2014).

As much as the critiques on Anglo-centrism (also Euro-centrism and Anglo-western-centrism) and the emergence of Other research have tried to recalibrate tourism scholarship, the impossibilities of reconciling knowledge across cultural and continental divides persist. One only needs to ask: how far has Anglo-American research incorporated subaltern insights and methodologies to date; or how has Other research contributed to a well-balanced agenda without academic jingoism of its own? Insularities exist on multiple fronts and are the consequence of ethnocentrism and intellectual parochialism. This paper argues that insularities and centric-biases pervade both orthodox tourism scholarship and critical Asian studies. These intellectual blind-spots are often unintentional and unrecognised, but we need to be alert to them. Being sensitive to the causes and effects of insularities is the first step in alertness raising. Beyond this, we also need a conceptual guide to navigate us through research that is academically balanced and culturally open to different perspectives and viewpoints.

For any researcher traversing the culturally-loaded fields of Anglo-western scholarship and Asian Tourism Studies, reflexivity is also essential. Hence, as much as Anglo-centric insularities are critiqued, another question to ask is whether the emergent Asian voice might not also have its own inward-looking perspectives. Are the assertive voices of the Asian Other, particularly with the dawning of the so-called "Asian century" (Sin et al., in press), drowning other voices to the detriment of true academic advancement? Are Alneng's (2002: 126) "ethnocentric blinders of modernity" being replaced by new ethnocentric blinders of post-modernity and post-colonialism? If so, how can we envision a way out of these insular impasses?

In the next section, the critical chorus against Anglo-centric blind-spots is abstracted. The discussion is somewhat truncated because such critiques are already well rehearsed. The discussion is thus confined to the sources and effects of centric thinking, and refers readers to further critiques that achieve the same. Following this, critical Asian Tourism Studies is introduced; here I highlight its confrontations with Anglo-centrism but argue that it also perpetuates insularities and its own form of centrism. The final and substantive section proposes a conceptual schema to advance critical tourism studies that steers clear of insularities and centric proclivities. Drawn from Asian Tourism Studies and other critical approaches in western and non-western thought, this route-map guides decentring efforts in scholarship. Towards this end, the framework advocates for the need for academic activism, the value of culturally-sensitive scholarship, the importance of reflexivity and a quest for complex thinking.

A number of active verbs anchor the three sections of this paper, hinting at the action required to advance critical tourism scholarship. They are: (a) *critiquing* Anglo-centrism for its extant insularities; (b) *identifying* confrontations in Asian Tourism Studies, but also showing how insularities are *reasserted* via Asia-centrism; and (c) *proposing* a conceptual guide for critical research that *transcends* insularities. The Conclusion reflects on the conceptual schema, and how its propositions and call to action may be 'brought together' in a collaborative critical project.

Critiquing insularities: Anglo-centrism in tourism studies

Ethnocentrism refers to the "promotion of the interests of one's own ethnic and cultural groups and a corresponding demotion of those of other groups" (Tribe, 2006: 370). This is evident when a dominant group speaks on behalf of another, more eloquently it is claimed than the Other group can ever do on its own. It is easy to confuse the speaker with the spoken-for such that the former may come to represent the "author, authority… the colonizer" (Hooks, 1990, cited in Tribe, 2006: 370). Such centrist tendencies pervade not only orthodox scholarship but also emergent works that purport an Other perspective. The sources of Anglo-centrist views are critiqued in this section before we look across the continental divide in the next, and work towards a decentring project in the final.

At the outset, we should note that tourism scholarship is not the only field to encounter Anglo-centricities and calls to overcome them. This is also a challenge in emotion research (Wierzbicka, 2009), literary studies (Prior, 2018) and linguistics and cognitive sciences (Levisen, 2019; Share, 2008). In the field of linguistics, Levisen (2019): 4) identifies three forms of Anglocentrisms: (a) conceptual Anglocentrism in which Anglo semantic concepts are imposed on "non-Anglo conceptual words and worlds"; (b) terminological Anglocentrism in which English folk terminology is given official status within a particular field; and (c) methodological Anglocentrism concerning the design of cross-linguistic research. While this typology may not apply to tourism scholarship wholesale, it usefully alerts us to the manifold occurrences of centric thinking that influence the way academics (in tourism and beyond) conceptualise phenomena, name events and undertake field work.

As a form of ethnocentrism, Anglo-centrism is founded on "the idea that Europe or the Global North constitutes the universe" (Wijesinghe & Mura, 2018: 100), an idea that first emerged during the Renaissance and was propelled during the industrial revolution and subsequent colonisation of the east. Representing an unquestioned superiority of European advancement and an acceptance of Judeo-Christian sense of history (Hollinshead, 1992), its effects on the dominated subject – their knowledge, language, social systems – were often deleterious. Non-European lands were seen as "stagnant" and its people "had no values to progress towards modern advancements", and so it was the coloniser who should speak for and on behalf of them (Wijesinghe & Mura, 2018: 100).

In tourism studies, intellectual colonialism (or neocolonialism) is the outcome of Anglo-centric academic superiority. A number of reasons account for this superiority, the first being the early emergence of Tourism Studies in the west, beginning with two tourism degree programmes in the 1960s in the U.K. (Airey, 2015). With the subsequent proliferation of more tourism institutions and journals in England and Europe, tourism scholarship came to be defined "by 'Eurocentric standards' and 'universal theories and philosophies' emanating from metropolitan centres" (Wijesinghe & Mura, 2018: 98). With the education systems in many countries following Anglo-Saxon models and top Asian students being sent to elite overseas universities, "Western educational and scholarly values" dominated academia and intellectual practices throughout Asia (Mura & Sharif, 2015: 841). Academic rules imposed by the Global North subjected the developing South to borrowed philosophies, methodologies, language and ways of creating knowledge. In tourism scholarship, academic liberalism resonant with "intellectual, metropolitan, Judaeo-Christian, Western, middle and upper class" values (Tribe, 2006: 374) came to be the dominant ideology by which knowledge was and continues to be shaped, regulated and disseminated.

Critiques of Anglo-centric ideology surfaced in the late 1990s/2000s through different strands, one of which came to be known as *Critical Tourism Studies* (CTS). Premised on the application of social-cultural theory in tourism, the goal was to uncover issues of power, discourse and representation in tourism, deploying Critical Theory as a means to do so (Ateljevic et al., 2007, 2011). Critical Theory is concerned with power relations and social justice, and seeks to "expose whose interest are served and the exercise of power and the influence of ideology in the research situation and the research itself" (Tribe, 2007: 30). Resultantly, "conventional ways of knowing tourism, doing tourism research, and relating to tourism stakeholders" were challenged

(Higgins-Desbiolles & Whyte, 2014: 90), with the goal of transforming the way people act in and perceive the world, and ultimately to improve tourism production and consumption for all.[1]

Both a cause and effect of academic neocolonialism is the unquestioned diffusion of western thought. Concepts disseminated from the west and applied *en masse* to the non-western world include the 'beach', 'tourist gaze', 'package tours' and 'backpackers' (Winter, 2009), as well as ideas on 'mass tourism', 'sustainability' and 'virtual tourism' (Boluk et al., 2019; Wijesinghe & Mura, 2018). Despite originating in specific spatio-temporal contexts in the west, these ideas became conceptual templates through replication and knowledge diffusion. Edensor (1998), cited in Teo, 2009: 50) was one of the earliest to caution on mimesis when he warned that tourism studies "highlight certain practices and subjects in particular (Western) settings and generalize about them to produce meta-theories about tourism and tourists". Winter (2009: 316) further noted that interpretations on tourism through a "tool-bag of theories conceived and re-conceived in the socio-cultural particularities of Euro-American societies" give rise to cultural, racial and academic biases. The pervasive use of English as an academic lingua franca was also acknowledged, facilitating the diffusion of ideas that are necessarily shaped by linguistic conventions and vocabularic limits.

Running parallel to universalist discourse is the compulsion to diffuse knowledge in a manner that explains the world from metropolitan-tinted perspectives. A number of concepts have been identified in the preceding paragraph but we should further enquire what compelled their spread across the intellectual universe and the dangers of unthinking diffusion. Hazbun (2010) offers an insight through a postcolonial interpretation on Mediterranean coastal tourism. The idea of the beach as a domestic tourist destination emerged in late 18th Century Britain, a product of western modernisation in transport, industrialisation and work-leisure regimentation. Similar conceptions of the beach in France, Spain and Italy compelled tourism modelling that encouraged a "standardization of a generic form of Mediterranean beach tourism [as] defined by northern European tastes, economic interests" (Hazbun, 2010: 208). Subsequent studies subscribed to this model, using it as a template to predict development, manage negative impacts and explain away deviations.

Hazbun (2010: 218) views diffusion logic as a "master narrative defined by a European-centered cartography" that is blind to the local and transnational forces that shape tourism. Applied to the Other side of the Mediterranean – Tunisia and Morocco (Africa) – beach tourism bears similar yet different characteristics. Islamic ethos and values seldom influence modern tourism theories, Hazbun argues, even though Islamism has a tradition of venerating travel. Diffusion theory disregards "geopolitical contexts and the political implications of the spread of practices from metropoles to postcolonial societies", and assumes all tourism formations as "simply 'exported' into regions devoid of their own indigenous local practices" (Hazbun, 2010: 205). Viewed as deviations or counter-examples, non-western practices are discredited as legitimate sources that offer a "more complex, rigorous, and heterogeneous understanding" of the world (Alneng, 2002: 130). It is these heterogeneous and non-conforming realities in Asia that we now turn our attention to.

Re-asserting new insularities: Asian tourism studies

In response to CTS's call to "learn from every knowledge tradition, from Africa, Asia and from indigenous peoples around the world" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007: 25), a groundswell of voices has emerged, with *Asian Tourism Studies* being one. While the critique on Anglo-centrism by CTS has mainly been ideological and theoretically-motivated, the challenge presented by Asian Tourism Studies focuses on the uniqueness, diversity and contingency of cases from Asia (e.g. Teo et al., 2001). The empirical richness of the continent and novel approaches to 'doing tourism' are its *cause celebre*.

Asian Tourism Studies argues for a conceptual re-orientation away from western antecedents and academic orthodoxy. This decentring is evident in co-edited collections (e.g. Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Winter et al., 2009), special issues of journals (e.g. Yang & Ong, 2020 for *Tourism Management Perspectives*; Sin et al., in press for *Tourism Geographies*), and critical commentaries and research notes (e.g. Chang, 2019; Ooi, 2019; Tucker & Zhang, 2016; Winter, 2009).). Asian Tourism Studies is an ever-expanding intellectual universe and the goal here is not to attempt an impossible overview of everything, but to abstract its key confrontations with Anglo-centrism and its potential achievements. Table 1 summarises these confrontations in terms of their: (a) *agenda-setting* ideas; (b) use of select *concepts and approaches*; and (c) illustrative *case studies and reviews*.

Three caveats are lodged at the outset. First, the table is declaredly partial because of the author's own *positionality* (as an urban Southeast Asian scholar with a qualitative bent) and *knowledge* (what he knows but also what lies beyond his realm of awareness). As a way to *start* rather than *close* a conversation, Table 1 offers as a *tour d'horizon* of the Asian Tourism Studies field, inviting readers to add in more references and/or edit its labels. As a work in progress, the categorisations are provisional and non-exhaustive. Secondly the phrase 'potential achievements' in the preceding paragraph is intentional, alluding to shortcomings in the Asian Tourism Studies agenda. Indeed one shortcoming is that the insularities Asian Tourism Studies seeks to combat are reasserted in new formations, and this will be explored later in the paper.

A third caveat relates to the all-encompassing term 'Asian'. One might ask who and what constitutes the adjectival 'Asian' in 'Asian Tourism Research'. Does it include westerners writing about Asia, or Asian researchers working on non-Asian topics (see Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018 for a similar debate)? For the purpose of this study, we refer to Asian Tourism Studies as research on tourism in/about Asia by any academic regardless of nationality or ethnicity.

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[1] The deployment of Critical Theory evidences tourism's engagement with wider intellectual thought. Critical Theory has its roots in Marxian and Hegelian thought, from which emerged the Frankfurt School's critique of modernity and capitalist society, and its pursuit of social emancipation. CTS's conceptual engagement with power, the Other, colonialism, Orientalism and the ontologies and epistemologies of knowledge are all part of an attempt to break away from its narrow focus on empiricism and applied research, to broader issues relating to "power, discourse, representation" (Gale, 2012: 45).

Table 1
Asian Tourism Studies: A work-in-progress list of select literature on confronting and overcoming Anglo-centrism.

Asian tourism studies: *Tour D'horizon* of critical literature (a provisional list)	
(a) Agenda-setting ideas	• Sofield (2000); Teo (2009): knowledge platform • Porananond and King (2014); Mura and Khoo-Lattimore (2018), and Wijesinghe (2020): authorship, reflexivity, methodologies • Chang (2019), Yang & Ong, 2020; Sin et al. (in press): recentring tourism geographies and Critical Asian Tourism Studies
(b) Select concepts and approaches	• Cohen and Cohen (2014): mobility paradigm • Ooi (2019): de-essentialising approach (functional and negotiated culture approaches) • Others: Teo (2009): post-colonialism; Hollinshead (1992, 2007): disidentification and worldmaking
(c) Illustrative case studies and reviews	Case studies • Edensor (1998); Alneng (2002): domestic and international visitors at Taj Mahal and Dalat respectively • Winter (2007)): Angkor • Teo and Leong (2006): Asian backpackers in Khao San Road • Thirumaran (2009): Indian Hindu tourists in Bali Reviews • King (2008, 2015): review of Asian tourism literature • Bao et al. (2014): review of Chinese tourism research • Hollinshead and Suleman (2018)): review and suggestion of 16 research subjects on tourism ontologies

With its emphasis on Asian perspectives and disavowal of imperialist knowledge structures, critical Asian Tourism Studies operates as a form of "academic activism" that sets agendas and charts ways through Anglo-centrism (Wijesinghe et al., 2017: 13). This includes scholarship that asks questions about epistemologies (Sofield, 2000; Teo, 2009), reflexive authorship and methods (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Porananond & King, 2014), as well as advocates for Asian-oriented research agendas (Wijesinghe, 2020; Yang & Ong, 2020). These critical programmes are populated with select concepts and approaches (e.g. Ooi's de-essentialising approach to understand the 'complex' Asian traveller), and illustrative case studies (e.g. Teo and Leong's work on Asian backpackers that debunks western theorisations on backpacking). *En masse* these critical works confront Anglo-centric insularities by disabusing universalisms, and replacing them with modified concepts and approaches that underscore Asian diversity, complexity and contingency.

The effects of Asian Tourism Studies' confrontational strategies should also be enquired. One must ask whether an assertive Asian agenda might not also be complicit in academic neo-colonialism? Is Asia-centrism rearing its head as a compensatory device in 'victim politics'? Just as the west has essentialised the 'Orient' (Orientalism), is Asian Tourism Studies also essentialising western thought (Occidentalism) and hyping its own uniqueness in a self-orientalising manner (Zhang, 2018)? The primeval sources for and characteristics of Asian-centrism are discussed here as: (a) *Asian essentialism and exceptionalism*; and (b) *linearity and intellectual self-colonisation*.

Asian essentialism and exceptionalism

One concern about Asian Tourism Studies is its replacement of one form of centric thought with another, creating a new divide between the Colonial west and a post-Colonial Asia. In celebrating Asian uniqueness, the temptation is to essentialise Asia as fundamentally different from the west, thus running the risk of creating a "series of distinct, even unique, cultural forms" that ignore the comparability of tourism cases across the world (Winter et al., 2009: 9). If the spirit of CTS is to work towards a hopeful academy marked by inclusion and collaboration, positing a new centre of intellectual thought around Asian particularism is counter-productive. Pitting Asian and western paradigms may splinter the field into two contending factions, creating a division which it is supposed to combat.

In what has been described as a theoretical problem of the local (Massey, cited in Pow, 2012) or Third World intellectuals' problem (Alatas, cited in Zhang, 2018), the temptation to over-privilege local perspectives is a slippery slope to insularity and alternative centrisms. In Asian Urban Studies, beset with its own existential debates on 'universalism vs. exceptionalism', Pow (2012: 61) warns that "exceptional countries can neither draw lessons from other countries nor can other countries draw lessons from them". As with Urban Studies, over-emphasising exceptionalism in Asian tourism runs the risk of shifting from one form of essentialism to another, creating new identity politics as a result.

Zhang (2018: 123) highlights a particular challenge faced by Chinese tourism scholars occupying an "ambivalent situation… caught in that [they] can neither be fully global nor fully local". By over-hyping local uniqueness, the similarities between China and the rest of the world will be overlooked. But neither can Chinese scholars be entirely outward-looking because of institutional and political constraints, and the demands for nation-building and national pride. Well-intentioned decolonising projects that try to "subvert the binary of the colonizing/colonized" usually end up "with the old story" (Zhang, 2018: 126).

This "old story" of insularity and parochialism already permeates contemporary Chinese scholarship. Bao et al.'s (2014) review of Chinese tourism research by ethnic Chinese working/living in China and elsewhere present a glimpse into 30 years of literature.

The review concludes that Chinese research is "inward looking" (175), preoccupied with "naïve empiricism" focused on "summaries and simple explanations… with no philosophical positions or hypothesis in the research" (179). This insularity – perhaps the beginnings of a form of Sino-centrism – is attributed to funding institutions (often government agencies and private corporations) that demand empirically-rich local materials for development and nation-building purposes. The inability to engage international audiences and global philosophical debates, either because of language deficiency or a lack of academic confidence is another reason. Unfortunately locally useful empirical research uninformed by broader theory has limited global currency.[2]

Asian tourism studies' linearity and intellectual self-colonisation

A close (minded) relative of insularity is linearity. Critical Asian Tourism Studies treads the same terrain as Anglo-centric research with its own linear thinking. Linear thought-lines are simplistic and dichotomising, and some hypothetical examples include:

• All Anglo-centric thinking on Asian tourism is misguided, and what is needed is more Asian tourism research by Asians.
• Western scholars support Anglo-centrism, while Asian researchers support critical Asian Tourism Studies.
• Critical Asian Tourism Studies requires dismantling of colonial academic structures, in order to start afresh.

Linear thinking is simplistic and denies the possibility that Asian researchers might also contribute to Anglo-centrism, or that western writers were the earliest critics of Anglo-centrism. In place of linearity, the complexity of 'cross-over' scholarship should be lauded. What is meant by 'cross-over' is that we cannot presuppose all Asians to be blindly supporting Asian Tourism Studies, or all western scholars as relentlessly perpetuating the (neo-)colonial echo. Rather than a simplistic linear approach, a more sophisticated approach is required to appreciate the complexity of tourism and tourism knowledge creation (after Hollinshead, 1992).

Indeed Asian scholars have supported Anglo-centrism through their avocation of western-aligned ideologies. This is evidenced by Asian scholars, having been schooled in western institutions, returning to their home countries and sharing imported methods, publication strategies and ideas without contextualisation of local needs (Huang et al., 2014). By blindly following institutional best practices in a quest for improved global ranking, "Asians colonise other Asians and discipline each other, most of the time privileging the colonisers' way of knowledge" (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018: 13). In the field of qualitative research, Hollinshead and Suleman (2018: 32) similarly recognise that Asian researchers "educated by Western gatekeepers" are often the very ones who impose "Eurocentric visions of research activity and Western modes of research design to/across Asia".

Beyond the individual, academic gatekeepers such as institutions and 'bean-counting' assessment panels also engage in citation privileging and bibliometric comparisons, and look to international university rankings published by western institutions to get ahead in the global knowledge race. Writing in local languages and publishing in local or regional journals are often regarded as injurious to one's career (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018). Under such institutional pressures, nobody can help but want 'to be western' as western best practices are regarded the best means by which one's ideas "enter the global marketplace and be reproduced and circulated" (Hall, 2013, cited in Chambers & Buzinde, 2015: 10).

It remains an intellectual irony that criticisms of Anglo-centrism first emerged from *within* the western academy. Cohen and Cohen (2015) cited John Towner as one of the earliest to flag the issue in 1995; we had earlier noted similar calls by Edensor (1998), Alneng (2002), Winter (2007) and 2009) and King (2015). It was King, a British geographer, who first remarked that the critical turn in Asian tourism had "come primarily from Western social scientists or social scientists in Western institutions"; he went on to name Winter, E. Cohen and S. Cohen, and Alneng as early proponents (King, 2015: 518). More Asians have since taken up the call from the late 2000s (e.g. Chang, Khoo-Lattimore, Ooi, Teo, Wijesinghe, Zhang etc. Some of these authors have been publishing since the 1990s, but their works have only recently been recognised as 'critical' attesting to the possible hitherto marginalisation of Asian scholars).

The belated recognition of Asian scholars raises the spectre of the westerner operating as an academic innovator, with the Asian researcher as the follower. In *Can Asians Think?*, Mahbubani (1998) asks the same question about the politics of Asian thought leadership and what it takes for an Asian scholar to innovate a trend. While Asian Tourism Studies is not exclusive to any particular ethnic or continental group, more should definitely be done to recognise and encourage indigenous participation and the Asianisation of research (King & Porananond, 2014). What this project entails will be explored in the next section.

Transcending insularities: A conceptual schema

The insularities and parochialisms of Anglo-centric and Asian Tourism Studies research are obvious. What is less obvious is a way forward that steers clear of centric inclinations while respecting the complexity of tourism phenomena. Thus far, the sources and effects of insularities have been discussed; in this section, a conceptual schema is proposed as a guide for future engagement with critical tourism study. This schema combats insularities by embracing confrontational strategies in Asian Tourism Studies and

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[2] In what Pow (2012) describes as Chinese exceptionalism in Urban Studies, unique socio-political context accounts for exceptional urban forms and expressions. In particular, the role of a developmental state and the *hukou* system (a household registration system preventing non-urban residents from migrating to city without approval) are highlighted. In tourism, exceptional practices have also been highlighted in the ways Chinese tourists travel around the world (Arlt, 2008) and organise backpacking tours (Ong & du Cros, 2012). An over-emphasis on exceptionalism lies at the core of centrism. Assertions of and concerns over Sino-centrism certainly merit careful academic attention. I thank one reviewer for highlighting this point.

Other non-western approaches, along with the best practices of orthodox thought. The route ahead is premised on four propositions: (a) the importance of privileging *academic activism over analytical nativism*; (b) a vigilance towards *reflexivity* in methods and knowledge creation; (c) the value of '*scholarship*' ahead of being '*Asian*'; and (d) an appreciation for *complexity over linearity* (Fig. 1). Collaboratively, the propositions sketch a portrait of what a non-centrist, non-insular academic approach looks like. The discussion here nuances this portrait but also warns of the limits that obstruct inclusive knowledge-making and how they might be overcome.

Asian academic activism, not nativism

To defuse insular thinking, an important first step is to privilege *academic activism over analytical nativism*. Analytical nativism may be defined as a rejection of extant knowledge through a wholesale dismantling of Anglo-centric contributions (Winter, 2007). Academic activism on the other hand identifies "factors and structures controlling knowledge production and dissemination and raise[s] the need for decolonization of knowledge" (Wijesinghe et al., 2017: 13). Decolonisation does not demand radical overhauls, but calls instead for a careful sifting of concepts, methods and philosophies to check for applicability and stereotypes, and where necessary to "adjust and fine-tune, swerve and nudge" (Winter, 2009: 321).

While nativism calls for paradigm shifts, academic activism advocates respect for intellectual heritage. A good example is how one might approach 'classical' tourism concepts. That some seminal ideas from western scholarship – for example, authenticity and tourist gaze – have stood the test of time, says something about conceptual durability. Does it benefit anybody to discard these concepts simply because of their western provenance? In critiquing insularity, we should also be sensitive to 'seminality' – i.e. the value of seminal ideas, their genesis in particular spatio-historical contexts, and their adaptability across space and time. To use a hackneyed metaphor, new tourism knowledge stands on the shoulders of modified ones, not on the ashes of discarded ideas. The tourist gaze offers a fine example, advancing from a western-inspired conception in Urry's (1990) original work, to today's variegated uses that take into consideration local context and cultural nuance. The Tourist Gaze 3.0 (Urry & Larsen, 2011), for example, incorporates notions of embodiment and personalisation to 'complexify' gaze constructions. Other permutations like 'harmony gaze' has been applied to Chinese visitors at scenic sites (Li, 2008), while the 'mutual gaze' helpfully advices how Israeli tourists and Indian locals look on each other with mutual curiosity (Maoz, 2006).

Rather than a paradigm shift at the epistemological level, what is recommended instead are shifts at the theoretical or conceptual level. If we understand paradigms to refer to a foundational set of principles to guide inquiry, a nativist response would entail dismantling and replacing one paradigm, the western one, with an Asian one. This is an untenable proposition. For paradigms to operate, they must be culture-blind and acceptable to all. Creating two competing paradigms of thought will only lead to further academic divisions and dichotomies, "two incommensurable 'forms of life'... ironically reproducing the very Orientalist attitude which it seems to be contesting" (Cohen & Cohen, 2015: 161).

The *modus operandi* in research has been to adapt or modify extant concepts, rather than to invent new ones. In addition to familiar concepts like tourist gaze and authenticity, more sophisticated ones relating to mobilities, performativity and actor-network theory have also been adapted (King, 2015). Cohen and Cohen (2015), in particular, suggested that the mobility concept offers a compelling alternative to Anglo-centric interpretations on travel. With attention on *emic* perspectives and a more nuanced acknowledgement of historical, familial, religious and other culturally-ingrained motivations for travel, differential mobilities between the 'West and the Rest' may be highlighted. Thirumaran's (2009) study of Indian Hindu tourists in Bali, for example, also adapts cultural commoditisation theory to explain tourist-host relations. In recognising the propinquity between overseas Hindu tourists and local Hindu hosts, he argues that 'cultural affinity' offers a more sensitive account to explain the guest-host relationship.

The perpetual tension between academic activism and nativism requires creative negotiation. The temptation towards nativism is often propelled by academic ambition and a quest for theoretical innovation. On the other hand, activism demands a more sensitive understanding of context and research circumstance. If the goal is to compare tourism across spaces, conceptual adaptation rather than conceptual overhaul is called for. Scholars also need to be reflexive of their goals, case study and above all their positionality. It is to these identity issues that we now turn to.

Authorial reflexivity over objectivity

A second way to combat insularity is to heighten awareness on authorial reflexivity, and accept that no knowledge or intellectual pursuit can ever be entirely objective. The critical tourism researcher must acknowledge their particular 'standpoint' – country, culture, gender, linguistic and religious affinities etc. – and how this might influence knowledge output and interpretation (Humberstone, 2004, cited in Tribe, 2006). Towards this end, the notions of 'contaminations' and 'entanglements' are helpful. In Asian Tourism Studies, nobody can be entirely 'non-western' by virtue of the fact that everybody's academic knowledge, methods and practices are 'contaminated' with influences, forces and pressures from everywhere and every time (Zhang, 2018). Research positionalities are inevitably 'entangled' with local and foreign cultures, experiences, biases and predilections (Harris et al., 2007; Wijesinghe, 2020). It is impossible therefore to escape from or wish away western influence, and neither should we want to. A wiser option instead is to eschew isolation and local romanticism, while being open to learning from others. Inclusive, emancipatory and critical Asian scholarship should not foreclose Anglo-centric traditions but embrace and (re)evaluate them in a non-oppressive environment of intellectual exchange and dialogue.
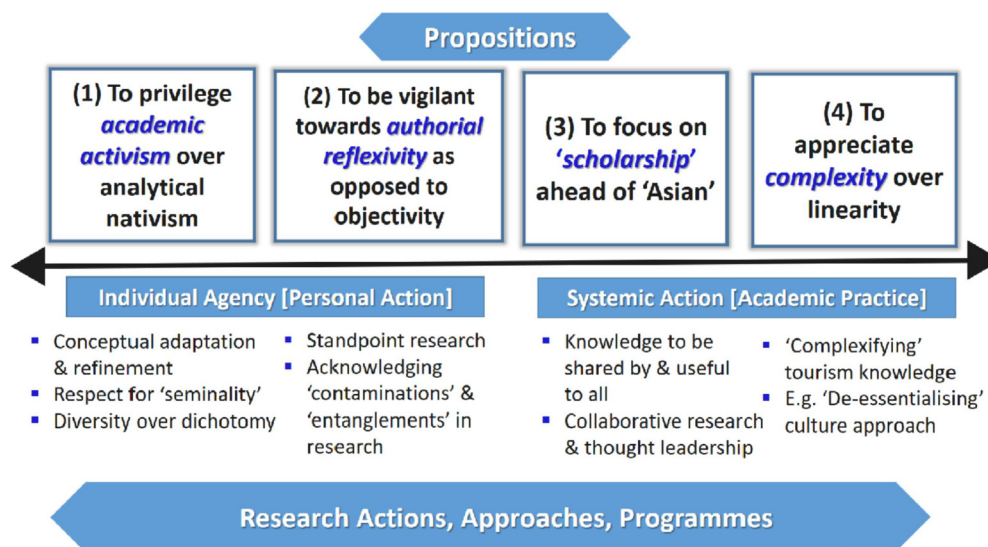
Fig. 1. Conceptual schema to de-centre insular thinking (Critical Asian Tourism Studies).

One way to be reflexive is to constantly ask questions like 'who is an Asian researcher?' and 'am I adopting an Asian perspective?' These questions were asked of contributors in Mura and Khoo-Lattimore's (2018) co-edited collection. Comprising 15 chapters, the co-editors introduced the contributors as "Asians, who live in Asia or outside Asia… non-Asians, who also live in Asia or outside Asia", as well as writers who are sensitive to "the term 'Asia' and/or their relationships with 'Asianness'… claiming/assuming an Asian identity or an identity associated to Asia" (12). Asian research is defined by the editors as "work produced about 'Asia', conducted in Asia and/or on Asia/Asians from Asians/non-Asians" (14). The contributors were advised to write with "an 'Asian perspective', which should question Western paradigms but not necessarily neglect them" (14). Rather than dichotomise Asia and the west, all the contributors acknowledge the multiple influences of their having lived, worked in and experienced "the 'two worlds' (Asia and the West)" (14), and bringing this to bear in their research.

Instead of an 'Asia-only' or 'Asia-first' attitude, reflexivity acknowledges the partiality of knowledge, the knowledge creation process and knowledge creators. In a conference attended by Zhang, a Chinese student had asked her how he could be "non-Western and do non-Western research" (Zhang, 2018: 132). The answer is that nobody can truly escape from any external influences. Instead of a "decolonizing approach" that essentialises the "binaries of the colonizer/colonized and the local/global", a reflexive approach urges a postcolonial mentality that questions whether reflexivity in China or Asia is necessarily different from the west (Zhang, 2018: 132). By acknowledging the contaminated diversities that every researcher embodies, not only can we be more reflexive but also more appreciative of the similarities and differences between Asian and non-Asian researchers, and their collective approaches towards critical scholarship.

Being reflexive requires constant scholarly vigilance. Despite a researcher's best intentions, we might not always be aware of our personal and cultural biases. More than just a statement declaring one's research standpoint and entanglements therefore, reflexivity demands a constant practice of interrogating one's assumptions and questioning one's positionality. Such a reflexive posture is necessary if we are to overcome insularity.

'Scholarship' ahead of being 'Asian'

While academic activism and authorial reflexivity entail individual effort at combating insularities, a more systemic proposition for Asian tourism scholarship is to focus on '*scholarship*' ahead of being '*Asian*' (Ooi, 2019). Excessive trumpeting of the Asian way, Ooi (2019: 20) argues, is the basis of cultural relativism, which leads down a "regressive" and "dangerous" path towards intellectual xenophobia. The spirit of true scholarship is to share ideas rather than to espouse a culturally trenchant viewpoint. In expressing the importance of an Asian perspective, Mahbubani (1998) maintains that good ideas and solutions must be useful to one's community and culture, but also to other communities as well. While indigenous solutions may be good, they are considerably enriched if fused with insights from other civilisations, ensuring a "two-way learning process and idea exchange" (Mahbubani, 1998: 130). In tourism, emphasising 'scholarship ahead of being Asian' means that knowledge must be advanced for *all*, bringing together the best of *all* worlds in a thoughtful approach underscored by academic collaboration and ideological balance.

Focusing on Chinese tourism scholarship, Huang et al. (2014)) identified four ways in which Asian-western collaborations have productively taken place. They include: (a) collaborations between Chinese graduate students and their western supervisors; (b) increasing number of tourism conferences in China attended by non-Chinese participants; (c) Chinese scholars trained in western universities and returning home with new approaches, which they share with colleagues and students; and (d) co-publications by Asian and western authors offering "different cultural stances and perspectives" (Huang et al., 2014: 382). Rather

than dichotomising Asia and the west, many tourism scholars today work in "international environments, whether in another country or locally collaborating with colleagues from different places" (Ooi, 2019: 20), rendering porous the Asia-west divide.

A helpful example of thinking across cultural divides is Amoamo's (2011) work on dispelling essentialisms in Maori tourism. On the academic front, she encourages the use of post-colonial concepts of 'hybridity' and 'third space' to counter essentialist approaches that label locals as exotic or passive. On an applied level, she shows how Maori entrepreneurs defy the 'passive exotic' trope through "strategic essentialism" (to use Spivak's term, Amoamo, 2011: 1260). Stereotypical tourist views are deployed as the Maoris work through their identity-formation process, renewing a "sense of value and integrity of their pre-colonial cultures" as a result (Amoamo, 2011: 1260). Tourism entrepreneurs thus play on "'cross-over' cultural mixes" such as hybrid Maori cuisines, traditional Maori art mixed with graffiti, and heritage trails combining Maori and *Pakeha* (white) histories that "suit local context and visitor demands" (1268). Hybridisation offers a way for Maori agency to "challenge the previous implications of the essentialised colonial Other" (1268); such a form of "successful postcolonial resistance" (1268) can similarly be envisioned in a critically inclusive Asian Tourism Studies.

Prioritising 'scholarship ahead of being Asian' does not mean one has to deny or downplay one's Asian identity in order to be centred and balanced. What it means, however, is that one's cultural heritage should not be privileged over scholarly integrity. Knowledge creation is an exercise involving decisions on what to embrace and what to modify or discard. The challenge to balance culturally unique viewpoints with borrowed insights demands both intellectual integrity and cultural humility. In a special-issue of *Tourism Geographies* on "Recentering Tourism Geographies in the 'Asian Century'", Sin, Mostafanezhad and Cheer argue that recentring scholarship entails reorienting in some ways and disrupting discourses in other ways. This involves a "balancing act between a strict anti-essentialism and an openness to accommodate diverse ways of knowing", a project that is inevitably "beset with hegemony and counter-hegemony" (Sin et al., in press). Acknowledging that all knowledge is culturally inflected and that the ultimate goal is to create knowledge that is useful to *all cultures* – this must be kept uppermost in mind when pursuing critical tourism scholarship.

Complexity over linearity

The dangers of linear, essentialist thinking have been highlighted, and the merits of complexity extolled. Although there is beauty in simplicity (as the popular saying goes), there is greater nuance in complexity. Tourism phenomena, along with their ontologies, epistemologies and discourses are complex matters deserving deep thought. The challenge, however, is how to make complex thinking accessible, usable and *easy* to apply in research. Obvious irony aside, it should be pointed out that many ideas, practices and perspectives expressed in this paper already manifest complex thinking. For example, Amoamo's (2011) call for hybridity to comprehend Maori tourism; Thirumaran's (2009) thesis on cultural affinity; and various works on researcher reflexivity (e.g. Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Zhang, 2018) all illustrate how to proceed in complex but thoughtful ways. Other ways to 'complexify' tourism scholarship involves applying post-colonial viewpoints (Teo & Leong, 2006), grafting Critical Theory into analyses (Tribe, 2008) and substituting mono-directional diffusion models with a circulation approach that is sensitive to local/global and past/present forces in tourism (Hazbun, 2010).

Critical tourism research 'problematises' an issue and 'complexifies' knowledge. The goal is to recognise that tourism phenomena and critical research – with their politics of knowledge creation and dissemination, and issues of power, discourse and representation – are complex matters which cannot be explained through the broad brushstrokes of simplification, stereotyping, dichotomising, essentialising and linear thinking. Complex matters require complex thinking. One way forward in complex thinking has been offered by Ooi's (2019) call for a de-essentialising approach. CTS has seen waves of similar approaches, for example the call to 'decolonialise' knowledge (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015) and 'disidentify' concepts (Hollinshead, 1992). Indeed the overuse of terms like 'rethinking', 'revisiting', 'reframing' and 'unpacking' in Asian Tourism Studies has become a trope (Chang, 2019). However, the critical intent remains consistent – to counter intellectual centrism by disavowing uncritical use of concepts that are blind to local circumstances and situational contexts.

Ooi (2019) argues that an "essential culture approach" views Other cultures in static, easy-to-identify forms. This approach represents "attempts by researchers to make sense of other cultures, organizing the diversity into deep-rooted and enduring dimensions and other similar elements" (Ooi, 2019: 15). Examples of essentialisms include statements like: 'Asian tourists like to travel in groups', 'Chinese tourists are rowdy' or 'backpackers always search for authenticity'. Essentialist views prescribe "a set of lenses to perpetuate a western-gaze on the rest of the world" (Ooi, 2019: 20). As part of the "de-essentialising" project, he proposed the "functional" and "negotiated" culture approaches which view people, places and practices in far more complex forms. Citing examples on Chinese backpackers and outbound Singaporean travellers, he demonstrates that by embracing cultural complexities – viz. understanding local socio-political contexts, offering local insights, interviewing local stakeholders etc. – a more profound negotiated understanding on tourism may be derived. By scrutinising and rejecting inappropriately imposed concepts, and by legitimising relevant local opinions, it is possible to formulate "an other way of thinking, being and knowing about tourism" (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015: 3).

Not only in Asia, the de-essentialising project also resonates in African and Arab tourism (Hazbun, 2010), Native American tourism (Hollinshead, 1992), First Nation Canadian tourism (Grimwood et al., 2019), as well as Maori (Amoamo, 2011) and critical Australian Aborigine studies (Jacobsen, 2020). As Jacobsen affirms in the "Aboriginalization of tourism inquiry", it is as important to encourage indigenous researchers to speak their truths on tourism as it is to get non-indigenous academics to "reflect deeply on the residues of colonialism coursing through their own discourse and praxis" (2020: 53). Nurturing Aboriginal leadership and championing "genuine research reciprocity" involves theoretical work, applied research, and "culturally grounded hybrid

knowledge" (54). Critical scholars who espouse reflexivity, mutual respect and an embracement of complexities, must recognise that all forms of knowledge creation is culturally inflected and necessarily impartial. Stepping outside one's politics, culture and even personal biases is undoubtedly the most challenging endeavour any scholar will have to undertake.

Conclusion: 'Bringing it together'

Different insularities in tourism studies have been explored – extant insularity in Anglo-centric thought and emergent insularities in Asian studies. The best way forward in critical tourism scholarship is to amalgamate different viewpoints, compare and contrast across cases, and to appreciate tourism as a comparative relational field. Towards this end, a decentring schema was proposed, embracing insights and strategies from different bodies of thought, to serve as a forward-looking guide for future enquiry (Fig. 1).

Collectively, the four propositions paint a portrait of what a non-centrist, non-insular academic approach looks like. They advocate diversity over dichotomy, reflexivity over objectivity, collaboration in place of competition, and complexity as a way beyond linearity. Critical scholarship combats stereotypes, essentialisms and universalisms; it also embraces inclusiveness over exclusiveness and insularity. The conceptual ensemble also advices on research actions ranging from individual agency (personal action undertaken by a researcher) to systemic action (collective practice by the academy). By 'bringing it together', we see how different critical activities and programmes can work either independently or in tandem with each other in a collaborative project.

The study has also identified limits to inclusive, non-centrist knowledge creation. The perpetual tensions between academic activism and nativism are noted, as is the need for scholars to stay vigilant by constantly questioning their own assumptions and positionality while undertaking research. Knowledge creation is also recognised to be a politically charged and culturally inflected exercise, and researchers must be able and willing to step beyond their political, cultural and personal comfort zones to undertake critical enquiries.

Understanding how other disciplines encounter and overcome insularities is also helpful in tourism scholarship. In Urban Studies, for example, existential tensions between 'universalism and exceptionalism' and 'first world and developing cities' exist, running the risk of fracturing the discipline into different "country-specific and even region-specific mini-theories" (Pow, 2012: 61). In its own recentring exercise, a relational comparative approach has been proposed which theorises cities as "dynamic aggregations of social relations and interactions... entangled with processes in other places at varying scales" (Ward, 2010 cited in Edensor & Jayne, 2012: 6). Cities are networked in a myriad web of influences, all of which shape urban form and processes. Under this approach, western-originated theories are regarded not so much as a "diagnostic template" but a "resource in aiding understanding" of urban processes (Edensor & Jayne, 2012: 8). As with cities, tourism places may also be understood as assembling ideas and practices from everywhere and every time, thereby manifesting similarities, differences and complexities across the globe. The comparative relational approach in Urban Studies certainly deserves further thought and nuanced application in critical tourism scholarship.

Also deserving further thought is how the decentring schema in Fig. 1 might fit with other existing critical programmes. Rather than displace or compete, the schema is supposed to complement critical projects such as Hollinshead and Suleman's proposal of 16 research areas to "catalyse further/richer/deeper/more relevant qualitative inquiry into ontological subjects on and across the [Asian] continent" (2018: 32). While their proposal advices on research subjects, issues and problems, the conceptual schema in this study emphasises sensitivity towards methods and approaches. While this study has mainly advised on non-centric, non-insular research, no attention was given to guide readers on how they might be reflexive in knowledge consumption, or how reviewers can be non-centric in their refereeing process. In other words, the decentring schema proposed in Fig. 1 is not supposed to work in isolation but in tandem with other critical plans of action.

Identity politics permeates the tourism academia. I thus close this discussion with a note on the politics of representation and the (in)ability to speak. In regard to CTS's endeavour to be a hopeful academy, Higgins-Desbiolles and Whyte (2013) had asked whether local communities ever wish to be 'hoped-for'. This raises the question of "who can hope for whom?" (2013: 429). The same may also be asked of Asian Tourism Studies' quest to decentre Anglo-centrism – who are the authors doing this for and why? Is this just a fanciful academic exercise – "merely ways for our brains to amuse themselves" (Shapiro, 2019: 209) – or can critical Asian scholarship really lead to improvements in the lives of people directly affected by tourism? In speaking to Anglo-centrism and Asia-centrism, are scholars "in danger of talking for others or even talking amongst those like ourselves at a complete disconnect from the people at the 'coalface' of tourism's negative impacts" (Higgins-Desbiolles & Whyte, 2013: 432)? What is the goal of tourism studies, critical research, or any type of scholarship for that matter? A truly critical scholar cannot escape these existential questions in his/her pursuit of rigorous, balanced, reflexive and complex research.

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