

By Sin Harnng Luh

★ Commentary | Singapore

## Commentary: Passion Made Possible, a tagline that targets Chinese tourists

29 Sep 2017 07:54AM  
(Updated: 02 Oct 2017 07:21AM)

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A deeper look at the Singapore Tourism Board's new slogan reveals that the target audience may be Chinese, says Sin Harnng Luh.



Tourists shield themselves with umbrellas on a hot day at the Merlion Park in Singapore on Jun 21, 2017. (Photo: REUTERS/Edgar Su)

SINGAPORE: A few weeks ago, I wrote about Singapore's [new tourism tagline](#), *Passion Made Possible*, and questioned who the target of the tagline was and how visiting Singapore can allow tourists to realise their passion.

While I've argued that the slogan possibly targets Singaporeans given the national pride it seems to instill, a closer inspection of the slogan in recent days has led to an interesting discovery.

The VisitSingapore website allows one to customise your view and click on different supposed origins, such as Australia, Philippines, Japan and Germany.

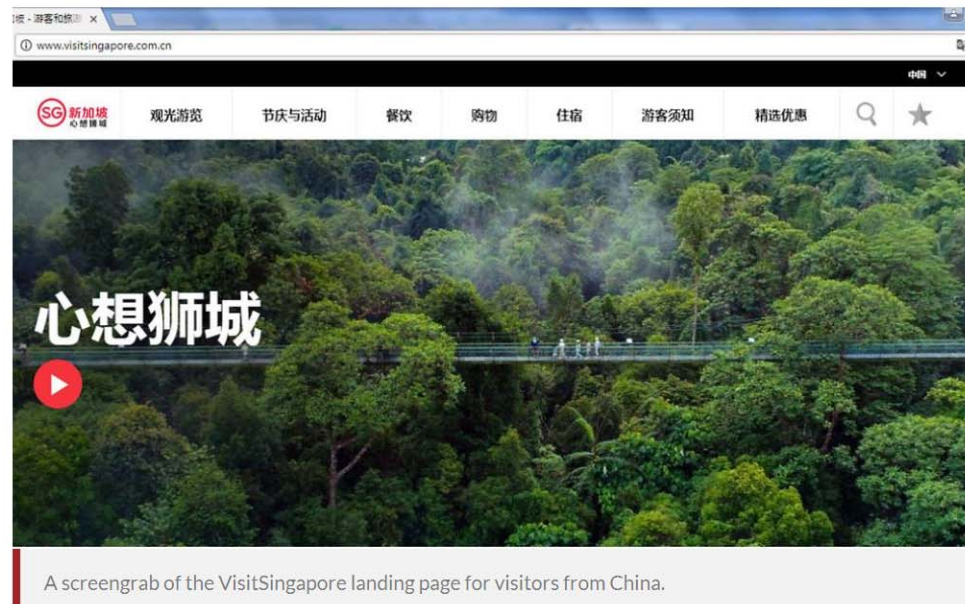
Each landing page then reflects a translation of the website's contents into the predominant language used in each market, while the English words "*Passion Made Possible*" remains on the top banner framing the webpage.

However, this was not the case on the page catering to visitors from China.

Instead, in place of the English slogan are four words in mandarin *xin xiang shi cheng*, loosely translated as one's heart is thinking of the Lion City.

There's a nice ring around it. Sounding almost poetic, the beauty of this Chinese slogan is that it plays on a similar sounding, well-known Chinese idiom of the same homophones. The idiom is a commonly heard greeting that expresses hope that what one's heart desires will come true.

In other words, the tourism slogan suggests Chinese visitors will find their passion made possible in Singapore.



A screengrab of the VisitSingapore landing page for visitors from China.

Through a clever play of words, the slogan also fulfills what all previous destination branding by the Singapore Tourism Board has always featured – it incorporates the word Singapore, known as the Lion City, into the slogan.

The original Chinese idiom emphasises passion and interests made possible as long as you put your heart into it, while the new slogan created adds a touristic marketing spin to highlight a deep-seated longing and desire in one’s heart to visit or come back to the Lion City.

Very well played indeed.

But it begs the question – which came first? Was the Chinese slogan a coincidentally poetic translation of Passion Made Possible or did the Chinese slogan come first and was then clumsily translated into English?



Chinese tourists wait in a line at a Lotte duty free shop in Seoul. China continues to lead international outbound tourism with Chinese tourists spending 12% more in 2016 compared to 2015 (Photo: REUTERS/Kim Hong-Ji)

### SOME 23 PER CENT OF VISITORS UNDERSTAND

A look at Singapore’s international visitor arrival statistics suggest that perhaps the latter is not unimaginable.

In 2016, Singapore received 2.9 million visitors from China. China made up almost 18 per cent of all visitor arrivals in Singapore for that year, and was only surpassed very slightly by Indonesia, which also made up almost 18 per cent of all visitor arrivals.

Chinese tourists were also the top spenders in Singapore, having spent a total of S\$3.5 billion in Singapore in 2016, as compared to the next highest spenders, Indonesian tourists at S\$2.7 billion.

If one were to include visitors from Hong Kong and Taiwan, 23 per cent of all visitors to Singapore in 2016 can be assumed to understand the Chinese slogan.

In 2010 when the last tourism slogan, YourSingapore, was launched, Singapore only received 1.2 million visitors from China.

While arrival numbers have been steadily rising across visitors from different geographic origins, in a short span of six years, the number of Chinese visitors have more than doubled to 2.9 million in 2016.

The new, well-thought and nuanced Chinese slogan seems to reflect the immense importance that the Chinese tourism market represents to Singapore.

It highlights a turn in our tourism marketing and policies that were already set in place in the last tourism branding exercise YourSingapore. With a Chinese slogan *chong xin fa xian*, loosely translated as begin your discovery from Singapore, the last tagline played on another similarly sounding, well-known Chinese idiom, which describes a person discovering something anew.

What then does such a shift mean to Singapore?

Singapore's past tourism campaigns have typically focused on our multi-cultural background and ethnic diversity to attract tourists.

This suggests that Singapore's past target audience were tourists from a different ethnic and geographical background, who were thought to be interested in learning about what it means to be Asian and Singaporean.

Instant Asia Singapore (1964), Surprising Singapore (1984) and New Asia Singapore (1995) all reflect such calculations.

Yet this position becomes moot when the majority of tourists come from countries closer to Singapore like China and Indonesia, who would be familiar with our culture. Such tourists should presumably know full well how to be Asian, and do not need to visit Singapore to learn about this.



Singapore is the top Asia Pacific holiday destination for travellers from China, noted a Hotels.com survey released in July. (Photo: TODAY/Roslan Rahman)

#### CATERING TO CHINESE TOURISTS

What then is the Chinese tourist looking for in Singapore when on holiday? Conventional wisdom and stereotypes tell us that this must be shopping.

Indeed, it is now not uncommon to find promotional banners written entirely in Chinese in major retail malls catering to tourists.

One particular poster I saw displayed in Vivocity made it clear as day on who their target audience was: It was written entirely in Chinese, it listed the price of an item in Chinese yuan and contrasted this to the much cheaper price of the same item here in-store.

Payment methods like WePay and Alipay widely used in China but rarely used by Singapore residents are now increasingly found in retail shops and restaurants across our island.

One also begins to wonder – in the drive to turn Singapore into a cashless society – could catering to the shopping needs of Chinese tourists that have come to expect cashless payments be one of the major push factors?

The push to harness the great economic value and opportunities of the growth of Chinese outbound international tourism, however, comes with its potential costs and risks. To earn the tourist dollar, do we unconsciously open ourselves up to greater vulnerabilities in our foreign policy?

In March this year, as a retaliation for the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence system in Korea, the Chinese authorities put a ban on tour packages to Korea, and 3,400 Chinese tourists refused to disembark their cruise ship at Jeju Island.

News of this made headlines around the world, as Seoul's shopping district of Myeongdong was said to be significantly less crowded, and Koreans involved in the tourism industry and retail sectors catering to tourists worried about the impact on their livelihoods.

Would the same be at threat here one day?



Perhaps it would be prudent to understand that the tourist dollar, be it from China or elsewhere, will always be volatile and fickle in its own ways, and is highly sensitive to political and economic changes worldwide regardless. And greater economic interdependence is not something Singapore can afford to run away from.

And yet, at the crux of the rise of the Chinese tourist, in between the vast opportunities this presents and the power Chinese tourists wield in the world, is perhaps an interesting development that those of us living in countries like Singapore that have recently joined the ranks of advanced nations will surely appreciate.

Some months ago, I was speaking to a Swedish journalist who was writing a piece on the rise of the Asian tourist.

He brought up the example of how it was reported in the BBC that Chinese tourists were turning up in bus loads in English villages to loiter around and take photos of people's yards and gardens.

He asked me what I thought of this behaviour and commented that what Chinese tourists did seemed very strange to him.

I told him that I was in fact secretly glad that Chinese tourists were doing just that. For years, tourists from western countries came to Asia, peered into people's houses, took photos, all without question or shame, because they were "interested in their culture".



**Source:** *Channel NewsAsia Online*  
**Date:** 29 September 2017

Now, with the tables turned, Asians are no longer the only subjects in tourism destinations to be looked at and photographed.

Instead, Asians are becoming tourists in developed countries, who are taking an “interest in their cultures” too.

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*Source: CNA/sl*