The Singapore Pavilion at Expo2000
National Ideological Positioning
Through Architectural Semantics

by

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Abstract

The Expo2000 recently held in Hanover, Germany, is part of a long tradition: since the 19th century, World Expositions have been organised to bring together people and nations and provide a platform for the display of their knowledge, technology, products and culture.

In Expositions, the primary function of the pavilion [its conventional use or its most direct and elementary meaning] becomes subservient to the secondary function, which is its related meanings, based on cultural conventions and mental and semantic associations. The Exposition is an extreme example whereby the symbolic value of architecture tends to be exaggerated.

In the face of growing globalisation and revolutionary advances in travel and communication, each nation which partakes in the Exposition searches for an image which will differentiate it from the other and aims to secure for itself, a unique mode of representation.

“New Asia – Singapore: So Easy to Enjoy”
The official slogan for the Singapore Pavilion in EXPO2000

This dissertation will examine the semantic apparatus of the Singapore pavilion in Expo2000 and the role it plays in ideological positioning of our nation on the global platform. The hypothesis is based on the premise that the Singapore Tourism Board has employed the pavilion as a vehicle for the marketing and commodification of a national image with special attention to Singapore as an exotic tourist destination. The pavilion is employed as a political and business tool, arising from the desire to commodify culture and provide an accessible image that would aid in the ease of public consumption.

There is a dialectical uncertainty between the choice of representation of Singapore as a modern, cosmopolitan nation or an “Oriental City” in the Asiatic region. Singapore is not presented to the world as an extension to the familiar European or Western World, but is marketed as the exotic Other. The Separateness and the myth of the Other is perpetuated as a means to an end. Hence, this dissertation also puts forth and examines the hypothesis that the concept of Self-Orientalisation is evident in the choice of national representation in a World Exposition.

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