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Theatrical performance in the tourism industry: An Importance-Satisfaction Analysis

Abstract

Theatrical performances have been developed quickly in many tourism destinations in China; however, little research has been focused on this important area. This study examined tourists' perceptions towards *The Romance of the Song Dynasty*, one of the most successful performances targeted at tourists in China. Using Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (ISA), this study revealed that the most important and satisfied attributes by tourists were primarily associated with the *core service* attributes (i.e., performing art), whereas the most unimportant and dissatisfied attributes by tourists were mainly associated with the *peripheral service* attributes (i.e., venue environment, service, and tourist management). Both theoretical and practical contributions were provided in this study.

Keywords: theatrical performance, tourist perception, perceived importance, satisfaction, *core service*, *peripheral service*, Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (ISA), China

Introduction

Theatrical performances have developed quickly within China's tourism industry. The booming of theatrical performance is due to the large number of tourists arrivals captured by tourism destinations, as well as the innovative collaboration between the tourism and cultural industries encouraged by the Chinese Government (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2009). The arts industry and the tourism industry enjoy a complementary relationship, and are mutually beneficial (Hughes, 2002; Mackerras, 2011). Specifically, the arts create attractions for tourism, while tourism supplies extra audiences for the arts (Hughes, 2002). In China, the theatrical performance is a creation of the tourism and cultural industries in China. Theatrical performance targets travellers. Many theatrical performances take place in famous tourist attractions, and these cultural performances are central to the development of the local tourism industry, such as Lijiang, Yunnan Province, South-western China (Zhu, 2012). Here, three of the most important forms of performances, *Naxi Ancient Music*, *the Impression of Lijiang*, and *Naxi Marriage Courtyard*, produce and represent various images of Naxi culture and ethnicity and have become the most popular tourist attractions of Lijiang (Zhu, 2012).

Generally, performing arts in the cultural industry include plays, musicals, opera, ballet, orchestral concerts, singers, comedians, dancers, and rock and pop concerts (Hughes, 2000). In China, theatrical performance incorporates many types of art styles, such as dancing, acrobatics, folk songs, sword fights, and horse riding (Song & Cheung, 2010b). The essence

of theatrical performances in China is to show Chinese culture to both domestic and international travellers through incorporating a variety of arts. Table 1 shows the basic information of key large-scale theatrical performances in China, including name, cultural/ethnic origin, performance style, content, and venue. Of these, four theatrical performances should be noted. The first theatrical performance in China's tourism industry, *The Tang Dynasty Show*, was showcased as a dinner performance to foreign politicians at Xi'an in 1988. One of the most innovative theatrical performances, *The Impression of Liusanjie*, was the first to be staged outdoors in a natural environment, rather than in an indoor traditional theatre. In addition, *The Legend of Kung Fu*, one product designed for those western tourists who are fascinated by Chinese Kung Fu, as many foreigners are interested in Chinese culture, such as Kung Fu, martial arts, and so on. Furthermore, one of the most successful performances targeted at tourists, *The Romance of the Song Dynasty*, is the leading performance in China's tourism industry.

(Table 1 here)

The current knowledge about the performing arts in the tourism industry has been mainly focused on visitor perspective of the performance (e.g., Qiao, Chen, & Kim, 2009; Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2010b; Woosnam, McElroy, & Van Winkle, 2009). However, there is a limited understanding of the tourist perception of the importance of the theatrical performance attributes. In addition, no studies have been found on the analysis of the gap between tourist perceived importance of, and satisfaction with, the theatrical performance in

China. In doing so, the purpose of this study was to obtain in-depth description of customers' perception of the theatrical performance (performing arts), with a particular focus on perceived importance of and satisfaction with the theatrical performance attributes. The study used *The Romance of the Song Dynasty* as a case. The objectives of this study were to:

- 1) Identify tourists' perceived importance of theatrical performance attributes, and rank the theatrical performance attributes based on the perceived importance level;
- 2) Examine tourists' satisfaction with theatrical performance attributes, and rank the theatrical performance attributes based on the satisfaction level; and
- 3) Explore the gaps between tourists' perceived importance of and satisfaction with these performance attributes.

Literature review

The theatrical performance in the tourism context is a new area, and limited studies have been published in this area. The root of the theatrical performance literature relies on the theatre and performing arts theories. Therefore, this study reviewed the theatre and performing arts literature in both tourism and non-tourism the literature. This study also reviewed articles on service quality, with a particular focus on the service quality in the performing arts. In addition, the importance-satisfaction analysis is briefly introduced in the literature review.

Theatre and tourism

Theatre, from a broad perspective, includes plays, dance, opera, and musical theatre (Smith, 2014). It has a considerable impact on the local economy, both in terms of direct spending on goods and services, and in terms of visitor spending (Mitchell, 1993; Shellard, 2004). Taking the UK as an example, theatre has a huge economic impact, with around £2.6 billion generated annually (Smith, 2014). Taking London as an example, in 2012/2013, more than 22 million people attended London theatre performances, and London theatre took £618.5 million at the box office (Smith, 2014). More specifically, the economic impact of West End theatre is £1.5 billion (Shellard, 2004).

There is an inter-relationship between theatre and tourism (Bennett, 2005; Hughes, 1998). In terms of the impact of theatre on tourism, theatre has become an important aspect of tourism destinations. In 2012/2013, there were 241 theatres with more than 110,000 seats in London (Smith, 2014). Due to the variety and spatial concentration, theatre in London has become a tourist attraction (Hughes, 1998). Theatre and the performing arts can have an important and dominant role to play in attracting tourists to some places, such as Nashville (Tennessee, USA), Branson (Missouri, USA), Edinburgh (Scotland), and Salzburg (Austria) (Hughes, 2002; Hughes & Allen, 2010).

Tourism also has a significant impact on theatres. Bennett (2005) explains that the tourist audience is a substantial one for contemporary theatre, particularly as such an audience brings

much needed financial viability to independent theatres. Tourists (domestic and international) are the majority of audiences in Broadway (New York) and West End (London) theatres and, as such, are an invaluable source of revenue enabling theatres to remain open (Hughes, 1998; Hughes & Allen, 2010). According to the paper by Hughes and Allen (2010), 24% of holiday visitors who stay in London attend the theatre, resulting in an estimation of just over 2 million international tourists enjoying a show in the capital every year. Taking West End as an example, 62% of attendances were by people who did not live in London (43% from the rest of the UK and 19% from overseas) in 2012/2013 (Smith, 2014). To the theatre industry, the tourist is an important segment of the overall audience.

Performing arts

Research on the performing arts in the tourism context is a niche area. It has been examined mainly from two perspectives: social and management. The former has examined the authenticity characteristics of theatrical performances presented to tourists (Daniel, 1996; Tian & Bao, 2005; Xie & Lane, 2006). There are some relationships between authenticity and commodification of the performing arts in the tourism industry (Xie, 2003). By examining the relationship between authenticity and commodification of the aboriginal bamboo-beating dance in China, Xie (2003) found that the original ritual meaning of the aboriginal dance has been transformed into celebration. These changes were influenced by four key players: government, tourism businesses, aboriginal communities, and tourists. The performing arts have a social impact on society, and the production of the performing arts is also influenced

by other factors such as globalization and localization (Zhu, 2012). Specifically, Western tourists search for cultural authenticity in China, and Chinese people yearn for exposure to modernity. So, performing arts in China's Lijiang are developed based on the combination of the homogenization of global capital and the heterogenization of local ethnicity (Zhu, 2012).

Another area of examining the performing arts is from a management perspective. Among the studies examining the performing arts in the tourism context, the three-fold classification proposed by Pearce (2008b) can be used as guideline to review the previous studies about performing arts. When studying the performing arts, there are three stakeholders: *the power brokers*, *the performers*, and *the audience*, and these three stakeholders are interlocking contributors to the totality of the performing arts nexus (Pearce, 2008b). The first group is the owners, managers and controllers of performing arts. These are the people who both decide what will be offered and who pay the wages of others from the tourist income. A second group of interests is the performers or talents who enact and embody the themes and presentations which the tourists come to watch. The third focus of interest is the nature and characteristics of audiences. The interest here extends to understanding the demographics of audiences. This section mainly reviews the related theatrical performance studies in the theoretical framework of a three-fold classification for the study of tourism entertainment stakeholders by Pearce (2008b).

The power brokers

Pearce (2008b) defined the power brokers as the organization and company of the theatrical performance. However, the author of this study also included the intermediaries of the theatrical performance (e.g., travel agencies that sell the tickets of theatrical performances) in the category of the power brokers. This one is mainly from the management perspective of the theatrical performance or performing arts. Previous studies presented an exploratory nature of examining the management of the theatrical performance. However, these limited studies are too general and descriptive, and only provide general information about performing arts (Song & Cheung, 2012). For example, Song and Cheung (2012) identified the internal factors which influenced the success of theatrical performances in China's tourism industry: storyline and performing, market positioning and marketing strategy, investment and financial support, operation and management, performing team, outdoor venue, indoor/outdoor stage supporting facilities, continuous improvement, and production team. The external factors were identified as: collaboration between cultural industries and local tourism, government support, privatization, and social and cultural effect. Song and Cheung (2012) found that the majority of the internal factors were related to the management and the power brokers of the theatrical performance, except the performing team. Similarly, Pearce (2008a) analysed the case studies of tourism entertainment to propose several research directions, such as time and intensification of experience, communication problems, audience involvement, themes and story-telling, skilled performance, the evolution of tourism entertainment, commercialism, consumerism and contradictions, and the fame of tourist entertainment. The majority of these issues proposed by Pearce (2008b) were associated to the management of the performing arts in the tourism industry.

The performers

Performing arts are played by performers, such as dancers, musicians, or players, so the performers are an important component for performing arts. Previous studies examined the performers from two perspectives: authenticity and management. In terms of authenticity, Wall and Xie (2005) examined the authenticity of performers in the performing arts in the tourism industry. Tian and Bao (2005) also identified that the performers are a factor influencing tourists' evaluation on the authenticity towards a theatrical performance in China's ethnic-inhabited areas. From a management perspective, performers (performing team) were considered an important internal factor contributing to the success of the theatrical performance in China (Song & Cheung, 2012). In addition, factors related to the performers, such as professional performers, good coordination among performers, performers show emotion, and performers show enthusiasm, influenced tourists' satisfaction of the theatrical performance (Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2010b).

The audience

The audience perspective is the dominant area to research performing arts in the tourism context. Barbieri and Mahoney (2010) examined the live-performing arts consumers to identify relationships between their art and tourism behaviours and preferences, and found sporadic, univores and omnivores as three market segments among the audience attending

live performing arts events during one year at a US performing arts centre. The omnivores segment is an interesting segment as it is highly associated with the arts and tourism. Omnivores attend more and a greater variety (e.g., genres, venues, fee and free) of performances, which might due to their higher incomes and education levels. The univores are frequent attendees to live performances but within a narrow variety. The sporadic are infrequent attendees to live performances having a low current and past engagement in cultural activities, maybe due to their young age and low income (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2010). As majority of the studies examined the perception of audiences from a service quality perspective, the next section provides detailed information about the service quality of performing arts.

Service quality of performing arts

A review of service quality in the performing arts could provide a comprehensive understanding of the performing arts. Service quality of theatrical performances has been mainly examined in the non-tourism context. Service quality refers to the actual performance of the entire service as received by the customer during the service delivery against the perceived service and includes aspects of functional and technical quality (Lovelock, 1991). Service quality of performing arts refers to measuring the performance of actual service versus perceived service (Hume & Mort, 2008a). It is well documented and agreed that a performing arts service offering must provide a primary show experience while simultaneously fulfilling the cultural and artistic goals of patrons (Hume & Mort, 2008a).

In terms of measuring the service quality of performing arts, Hume and Mort (2010) found that there are two types of services in the performing arts: *core* and *peripheral* services. The *core* service must also be supported by the many other activities, both *peripheral* and facilitative, that take it to the market (Lovelock, 1991). Hume, Mort, Liesch, and Winzar (2006) examined a list of factors that contribute to the operation of the performing arts. In the performing arts, the *core* service is the show, the actors and the stage setting (Hume et al., 2006). Specifically, it includes: the act (storyline), the actors, and the theatre (e.g., the lighting, stage settings, audio and music) (Hume, 2008b). *Peripheral* services are those services that support and facilitate the *core* offering. These included: ticketing, seating, physical structures of service-scape including décor, amenities, refreshments and outlets, staff including issues of courtesy and capacity, crowd management and signposting, parking and public transport access, cloakroom and promotional material as *peripheral* to or extra to the show (Hume, 2008b; Hume & Mort, 2008b; Hume et al., 2006).

In addition to proposing the *core* and *peripheral* services of performing arts, Hume and her colleagues also used items to measure these two types of services. For example, service quality for *core* services included: “I was happy with the actors, stage and show;” “the show was what I expected;” and “the show was entertaining and professional.” Service quality for *peripheral* services included: “access, parking and transport to the venue was available, convenient and easy to find;” “this venue is well-organised and performs the services right the first time;” and “the behaviours of the staff at this venue makes me feel comfortable and

confident” (Hume, 2008b). By comparing the *core* and *peripheral* services, Hume (2008a) and Hume and Mort (2008a) found that the majority of the participants consider *peripheral* services (e.g., reliability and accessibility of services, contact personnel, and amenities in the venue itself and facilitative services) stronger drivers of repurchase than quality of the show.

In the tourism context, the service quality of theatrical performances has focused mainly on issues of satisfaction. Lim and Bendle (2012) identified three factors influencing tourists’ satisfaction of performing arts in Seoul: 1) Performance: quality of storyline, effectiveness of story delivery, quality of actors’ performance and stage design; 2) Service: reasonableness of ticket price, accessibility of venue location, appropriateness of performance time and professionalism of service staff; and 3) Facilities: modernity of facilities and interior, convenient use and availability, availability and clarity of signs and comfort and cleanliness. Song and Cheung (2010a) identified 34 attributes that affect the level of tourist satisfaction with theatrical performances in China, and grouped them into five factors: stage, performance, venue, service, and tourist-related attributes.

Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (ISA)

Many businesses appreciate Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) for its simplicity and efficacy and because it uses objective data in place of managerial intuition without requiring sophisticated statistical analysis (Farnum & Hall, 2007). The IPA technique is considered an easily understood tool that allows the exploration of different aspects of the marketing mix,

enabling managers to reallocate resources or thinking based on the results identified. IPA has been widely used in various service industries for the purpose of measuring the quality of service encounters. This technique is popular among tourism and hospitality researchers and has been applied to a variety of research settings in the tourism context (Chu & Choi, 2000; Hemmasi, Strong, & Taylor, 1994; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; Oh, 2001). In this study, the Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (ISA) is revised from the IPA. ISA presents a two-by-two matrix of attributes, based on high or low importance and high or low satisfaction (Beldona & Cobanoglu, 2007). There are four quadrants of the ISA, namely: Quadrant I: Concentrate Here, Quadrant II: Keep up the Good Work, Quadrant III: Low Priority and Quadrant IV: Possible Overkill. Consistent with previous studies, the grid line placement in the matrix uses the grand mean for all scores.

Methodology

Drawing upon the previous literature, such as Hede, Jago, and Deery (2004), Song and Cheung (2010a), and Tian and Bao (2005), the current study generated 49 theatrical performance attributes. In order to design a precise questionnaire with suitable attributes for the large-scale quantitative survey, the 49 attributes implemented a screening method. That is, 35 participants from different walks of life were asked to rate the importance of these 49 attributes based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being “Very unimportant” and 7 being “Very important.” These participants included: 1) six academics, from three universities in China, who had an intimate knowledge of China’s tourism industry; 2) 12 industry practitioners,

from eight travel agencies in China, who had ample experiences of itinerary design for theatrical performances in China; and 3) 17 tourists attending a performance of *the Romance of the Song Dynasty*. Both e-mail and on-site surveys were conducted. Then, a rank of these attributes was generated (Please see Table 2). After consulting with a scholar who is familiar with China's theatrical performance industry, it was suggested that important items with a mean value higher than 5.50 should be included in the questionnaire. Finally, 31 attributes were included in the main survey. The questionnaire included: the participants' demographic backgrounds, and the perceived importance and satisfaction levels of the 31 attributes. The perceived importance and satisfaction level were measured using a 7-point Likert scale.

(Table 2 here)

The Romance of the Song Dynasty is a large-scale performance in Hangzhou, the capital and largest city of Zhejiang Province in Eastern China. Its marketing slogan "Give us one night, and we'll give you one thousand years" indicates that this performance aims to lead the audiences back thousands of years to explore the culture and history of Hangzhou, China. The uniqueness of this show is that it demonstrates Hangzhou's history by combining the music, dancing, and acrobatic art with high technology (Song Dynasty Town, 2015).

The main survey was conducted at the tourist attraction of Song Dynasty Town, where *the Romance of the Song Dynasty* is played. Song Dynasty Town is China's first and largest theme park featuring the Song Dynasty civilization (A.D.960-1279). *The Romance of the*

Song Dynasty has been selected as a case study for two reasons. First, according to the website of Song Dynasty Town (2015), it is one of the most famous theatrical performances in China, and also one of the “Top three famous shows in the world,” together with *Moulin Rouge* in Paris, and *O Show* in Las Vegas. Second, it is the world’s largest theatrical performance, with the highest audience numbers and highest frequency of staging per annum. Specifically, *the Romance of the Song Dynasty* has attracted 50 million visitors since 2000 (Song Dynasty Town, 2015).

The data were collected in August, the peak season for Song Dynasty Town. In the peak season, the show performs three times a day, 14:00-15:00, 18:00-19:00, and 19:20-20:20, so these performances could increase the possibility of surveying tourists after they watch the show, and gather a diverse sample. However, in the low season, the show performs at night, from 19:20 to 20:20. Therefore, data was collected in the peak season. In addition, as the study targeted travellers who watched the show, data were collected from 15:30 to 21:00.

Tourists who were relaxing at the exit of the Grand Theatre, and Central Square were targeted for this study. Tourists who were waiting for their dinners at Fanlou Restaurant, and Sun’s Family Restaurant were also targeted. These four sites were all in Song Dynasty Town. A researcher and three assistants first asked the travellers a question “Have you watched *The Romance of the Song Dynasty*?” to screen for suitable participants. If they had watched the show, they were asked whether they would like to undertake a survey about the show. When participants finished the questionnaire, they returned the completed surveys either to the

researcher, research assistants, or the ticketing office at the attraction. Altogether 500 questionnaires were distributed, and the final useable data amounted to 303 questionnaires. The usable rate was high at 60.6%. Previously, Pearce (2008a) stated that it is difficult to collect quality data because tourists are eager to leave after watching a show. However, in this study, tourists were involved in other activities (e.g., sightseeing in the attraction) or had dinner at the Song Dynasty Town, which contributed to the high response rate of the data collection.

Results and discussion

Two thirds of the 303 respondents were female. The respondents were relatively young with half (49.5%) falling into the 19-29 age category. Single and married respondents shared almost a similar percentage. Around 26.2% of respondents were clerk/white-collar workers, followed by “other” with 21.7% and students 20.3%. The participants were well educated with 38.8% having a university or postgraduate degree, and 31.4% an associate diploma. 22% of respondents had a monthly income of RMB 2,001-3,000, and nearly 22% of respondents had an income of RMB 1,001-2,000.

Ranking of Levels of Perceived Importance and Satisfaction

Table 3 shows the ranking of levels of perceived importance and satisfaction in terms of the theatrical performance attributes. The five most important attributes were: *Good coordination*

among performers, Stage decoration, Performers show emotion, Music and songs, and Safety and security of the venue, and the five most satisfactory attributes for the tourists were: Lighting, Background scenery or screen, Water and a waterfall on the stage, Good coordination among performers, and Stage decoration. However, tourists also perceived some attributes as having low importance and low satisfaction. The five most unimportant attributes were: *Interpretation and introduction by the host, Behaviour of other audience members, Suitable duration of the performance, Suitable audience number in the venue, and Comfortable seating,* whereas the five most unsatisfactory attributes were: *Behaviour of other audience members, Vision of the performance, Suitable audience number in the venue, Friendly staff, and Clean air.*

(Table 3 here)

In this study, the most important and satisfactory attributes were related to the *core* service attributes, referring to performing arts, and the less important and unsatisfactory attributes were associated with the *peripheral* attributes, such as venue, service, and tourist management (# indicates performing arts attributes in Table 3). The findings are similar with previous studies stating that audiences normally place the *core* services as important, and delivering a high quality show experience could offer a value for money experience to audiences (Hume & Mort, 2008a). However, previous studies found that *peripheral* service attributes are also an important determinant of customer satisfaction in performing arts in theatres (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996), and in some cases, satisfaction in respect to peripheral

services is more important than satisfaction with *core* services (Hume, 2008a; Hume & Mort, 2008a). Therefore, the theatre operators should focus on both the *core* and *peripheral* service items.

Gaps between Levels of Perceived Importance and Satisfaction

The results of a paired samples t-test revealed that 20 out of 31 attributes had statistically significant differences between the perceived importance and the satisfaction level of the theatrical performance attributes (see Table 3). Generally, the mean values of tourist perceived importance of theatrical performance attributes ranged from 5.93 to 6.50, higher than the equivalent scores for tourist satisfaction levels, which ranged from 5.18 to 6.43. As shown in Table 3, two attributes were ranked with higher satisfaction levels compared with the tourists' perceived importance mean ratings ($t < 0$), and 18 attributes had higher perceived importance mean values than satisfaction means ($t > 0$).

Although overall the tourist satisfaction level was slightly lower than the perceived importance level, tourists had significantly higher levels of satisfaction than of importance means in the case of *Water and a waterfall on the stage* and *Costumes*, indicating that the theatrical performance was effective with respect to these two performing art attributes. In this case, the theatre operator should maintain the quality of these two attributes without the need to deploy further resources.

Travellers had a higher perceived importance level than the satisfaction level in terms of 18 attributes. Of these 18 attributes, six were related to the performing art (i.e., *Good coordination among performers, Stage decoration, Performers show emotion, Performance is special and unique, Content of the performance, and Suitable duration of the performance*), six were on the venue environment (i.e., *Safety and security of the venue, Cleanliness of the venue, Clean air, Vision of the performance, Moderate temperature in the venue, and Comfortable seating*). The remaining attributes were about service and tourist management (i.e., *Friendly staff, Staff who are willing to help, Service quality of the staff, Competent staff, Value for money of the price charged, and Behaviour of other audience members*). It should be noted that the gap between the perceived importance level and the satisfaction level only provided exploratory information about the theatrical performance attributes; however, an ISA could provide detailed information about the relationship between the perceived importance level and the satisfaction level. The following section illustrates the details.

Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (ISA)

Four quadrants are constructed based on the mean scores of the Importance and Satisfaction ratings (Chu & Choi, 2000; Hemmasi et al., 1994). In this study, the mean value for the importance level was 6.26, and the mean value for the satisfaction level was 6.07 (See Table 3). Therefore, four quadrants were generated based on 6.26 and 6.07. Figure 1 presents these 31 attributes which are plotted into four quadrants respectively based on the ISA. Quadrant I: Concentrate Here represented those areas that the tourists perceived as particularly important,

while their satisfaction level was fairly low. Three attributes were captured in Quadrant I.

Quadrant II - Keep up the Good Work illustrated those attributes in which the tourists had a high satisfaction level, and which they perceived as very important. 11 out of the 31 attributes fell into this quadrant. Quadrant III: Low Priority identified those items which tourists perceived as satisfactory, and which they perceived as less important compared with the other attributes. This quadrant contained 12 items. Quadrant IV: Possible Overkill represented those areas in which tourists had a high satisfaction level, whereas they did not perceive these attributes as being as important as other attributes. The five attributes fell into this quadrant.

(Figure 1 here)

By connecting the theatrical performance attributes with the *core* and *peripheral* services, Figure 1 shows that the attributes in Quadrants I and III were mainly about the *peripheral* services, and the attributes in Quadrants II and IV were mainly about the *core* services. The results show that tourists were not highly satisfied with the *peripheral* service attributes, and tourists were highly satisfied with the *core* service attributes. In addition, the results show that not all of the *core* service attributes were very important, and not all of the *peripheral* service attributes were regarded as unimportant. In fact, tourists perceived three *peripheral* attributes (i.e., *Safety and security*, *Cleanliness*, and *Value for money*) as particularly important, showing that tourists valued these basic attributes for theatrical performance. These three attributes were related to venue and service management. In this study, *Safety and security* was considered one of the most important attributes. This item is related to

venue safety situations and tourist personal safety issues. Suggestions include announcements of safety and security information pre-performance, and crowd control by more security staff. *Cleanliness of the venue* could be resolved by reminding audiences that eating or drinking is not allowed in the theatre. In addition, more cleaners could be utilised to clean the venue. *Value for money of the price charged* was the most important in this category, though tourists were less satisfied with *Value for money of the price charged*. One reason could be the high ticket price, as *The Romance of the Song Dynasty* charge is from RMB 240 to RMB 300 in 2015. Theatre operators should adjust the prices on the basis of tourist evaluations.

This study found that tourists perceived three attributes in Quadrant I as vitally important and 12 attributes in Quadrant III as less important. As tourists were highly satisfied with these *core* service attributes (i.e., performing arts), no additional resources and efforts should be invested in the performing arts, but maintaining intrinsic qualities (such as the standard of the performers, the storylines, and the stage designs) could surpass arts-core tourists' expectations and create excitement among arts-peripheral tourists (Lim & Bendle, 2012).

This study also found that tourists were less satisfied with a list of less-important attributes in quadrant III. In this quadrant, the issues were mainly about the venue, service, and tourist management. Dissatisfaction with venue facilities, such as the air conditioning system, and seating, could be attributable to the 15 year-long run of *The Romance of the Song Dynasty*. The readjustment of the venue facilities could follow tourist suggestions and feedback. Other attributes related to the services provided by staff (e.g., *Friendly staff*, *Staff who are willing to*

help, Service quality of the staff, and Competent staff). Although performing arts is the main attraction, services also play an important role in enhancing tourist satisfaction. Improving the amenities and services at theatres could lift the impression levels among audiences (Lim & Bendle, 2012). Service training to guest-contact employees could improve their skills in creating tourist satisfaction. Incentive and performance appraisal programs can be used to encourage employees' outstanding service performance. In this study, *Behaviour of other audience members* was the most unsatisfactory attribute due to noise and standing up of other tourists. For tourist management perspective, notices and announcements could be used to remind the audience to refrain from some bad practices (e.g., standing up, taking pictures, and video recording in the performance).

To sum up, it seems that the theatrical performance has spent a lot of resources on the performing arts themselves, rather than on the service quality, which is consistent with previous studies that the theatrical performance in China is excellent in on-stage performance, but lacks in the venue facilities and the quality of front-of-house service (Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2012). Extra resources should be invested in improving the venue situation and the service quality of the staff members.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study contributes to tourist perceptions of theatrical performance in the tourism industry.

This study: 1) identified tourists' perceived importance of theatrical performance attributes,

and ranked the theatrical performance attributes based on the perceived importance level; 2) examined tourists' satisfaction with theatrical performance attributes, and rank the theatrical performance attributes based on the satisfaction level; and 3) explored the gaps between tourists' perceived importance of, and satisfaction with, these performance attributes. These three research objectives were achieved by examining *The Romance of the Song Dynasty* in Hangzhou, China. In addition, this study examined the *core* and *peripheral* services in China's performing arts context. From a theoretical perspective, this study could contribute to the performing arts in the context of the festival, event, and tourism industry.

This study also has made a practical contribution to the tourism industry. Performing arts managers need to understand their markets and customers (current and potential) as well as the needs of customers. The ISA has been proved to be a powerful and effective tool to industry practitioners, as it divides a list of attributes into four identifiable quadrants, the analysis of which helps theatre operators better understand tourist evaluation towards the theatrical performance attributes. Theatre managers need to pay attention to the attributes that they feel are most beneficial to them and most important to tourists' experience overall. Discussion presented in this study could assist theatre operators in understanding tourist perceptions, and then in maintaining their strengths and overcoming weaknesses in the long run. As tourists were satisfied with the *core* services and less satisfied with the *peripheral* services, theatre operators need to maintain the high quality *core* services, and improve the service standard for the *peripheral* services. Performing arts managers must refine the service concept, the service marketing direction and the market positioning strategy as being

essential components of the service product strategy for the performing arts. This service strategy must include focus on the *peripheral* aspects of the entire service experience. Such a suggestion could also benefit the tourism authorities and other operators of attractions in China.

The conclusions are limited by the fact that the data were only collected at one of the most famous theatrical performances in Hangzhou, China. The findings may not be directly applicable to theatrical performances elsewhere. In the future, similar studies could be conducted in other theatrical performances in China to test the measurement of tourist perceptions. Then, reliable theories can be developed based on the examination of a variety of theatrical performances in China. In addition, this exploratory study examined the *core* and *peripheral* service attributes in the theatrical performance context, further studies could be conducted to examine the consequences of tourists' perceptions towards the *core* and *peripheral* service attributes, which could be valuable for both academia and industry practitioners.

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Table 1: List of selected large-scale theatrical performances in China

Year founded	Name	Cultural/ethnic origin	Performance style and content	Venue
1988	<i>The Tang Dynasty Show</i>	Historical	Dancing, and traditional musical instruments	Tang Dynasty Theatre Restaurant, Xi'an
2000	<i>The Romance of the Song Dynasty</i>	Hangzhou	Acrobatics, singing, and dancing, supported by high-technology shows	Song Dynasty Town Theatre, Hangzhou
2001	<i>Amazing Xiangxi</i>	Ethnic minority of Tujia and Miao	Acrobatics, singing, and dancing	Xiangxi Theatre, Zhangjiajie
2004	<i>The Impression of Liusanjie</i>	Guilin, and ethnic minority of Zhuang	Singing and dancing, supported by high-technology shows	Lijiang Outdoor Theatre, Guilin
2004	<i>The Legend of Kung Fu</i>	Kung Fu	Martial arts, acrobatics, and dancing	Red Theatre, Beijing
2004	<i>The Night of West Lake</i>	Hangzhou	Dancing, acrobatics, traditional musical instruments, and local opera	Dong Po Theatre, Hangzhou
2006	<i>The Impression of Lijiang</i>	Ethnic minority of Naxi	Singing and dancing	Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Outdoor Theatre, Lijiang
2006	<i>The Song of Eternal Sorrow</i>	Historical	Dancing, supported by high-technology shows	Huaqing Pool Outdoor Theatre, Xi'an
2007	<i>Tea Show</i>	Tea-Zen tradition	Dancing, acrobatics, and martial arts, supported by high-technology shows	OTC East Theatre, Shenzhen
2007	<i>Zen Music Shaolin Grand Ceremony</i>	Zen, and Kung Fu	Martial arts, Zen song, and dancing	Mount Song Outdoor Theatre, Dengfeng

Source: Revised from Song and Cheung (2012).

Table 2: Selected attributes by academics and industry practitioners

Attributes	Ranking	Mean*
5.Performers show emotion	1	6.65
12.Stage decoration	2	6.61
9.Music and songs	3	6.41
17.Punctual start of performance	3	6.41
28.Friendly staff	5	6.39
24. Behaviour of other audience members	5	6.39
1. Content of the performance	7	6.33
18.Cleanliness of the venue	7	6.33
23.Safety and security of the venue	7	6.33
2. Performance is special and unique	10	6.29
16.Lighting	11	6.28
26.Service quality of the staff	11	6.28
13.Background scenery or screen	13	6.22
29.Staff who are willing to help	13	6.22
3.Atmosphere of the performance	15	6.17
19.Comfortable seating	15	6.17
20.Vision of the performance	15	6.17
22.Moderate temperature in the venue	18	6.06
31. Value for money of the price charged	18	6.06
21.Clean air	20	5.94
25.Suitable audience number in the venue	20	5.94
30.Competent staff	20	5.94
27.Suitable duration of the performance	23	5.89
8.Dancing	24	5.82
7.Good coordination among performers	25	5.81
10.Loud sounds	26	5.69
14.Scale of the stage	27	5.67
11. Interpretation and introduction by the host	28	5.65
6.Professional performers	28	5.65
15.Water and a waterfall on the stage	30	5.61
4.Costumes of the performers	30	5.61

Note: *: mean values ≥ 5.50 are included.

Table 3: Gaps between perceived importance and satisfaction levels

Attributes	Importance		Satisfaction		t-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
7.Good coordination among performers #	6.50	.779	6.38	.834	2.373	.018*
12.Stage decoration #	6.47	.786	6.37	.904	2.079	.039*
5.Performers show emotion #	6.46	.816	6.32	.848	2.419	.016*
9.Music and songs #	6.44	.831	6.34	.912	1.838	.067
23.Safety and security of the venue	6.43	.833	6.00	1.135	7.294	.000**
16.Lighting #	6.41	.880	6.43	.874	-.424	.672
31. Value for money of the price charged	6.38	.959	6.04	1.218	5.326	.000**
2. Performance is special and unique #	6.40	.942	6.27	.896	2.851	.005**
13.Background scenery or screen #	6.40	.899	6.39	.905	.258	.797
17.Punctual start of performance #	6.36	1.008	6.36	.935	.059	.953
1. Content of the performance #	6.35	.874	6.21	.953	2.755	.006**
3.Atmosphere of the performance #	6.34	.989	6.32	.950	.323	.747
6.Professional performers #	6.29	.972	6.32	.861	-.620	.536
18.Cleanliness of the venue	6.27	.956	6.05	1.058	3.565	.000**
21.Clean air	6.25	.936	5.77	1.278	6.808	.000**
8.Dancing #	6.25	.916	6.29	.929	-.651	.516
20.Vision of the performance #	6.25	.999	5.65	1.366	7.746	.000**
22.Moderate temperature in the venue	6.24	.926	5.79	1.346	6.236	.000**
10.Loud sounds #	6.21	1.008	6.13	1.119	1.266	.207
14.Scale of the stage #	6.20	1.031	6.26	.993	-.927	.355
28.Friendly staff	6.19	.966	5.77	1.213	7.005	.000**
15.Water and a waterfall on the stage #	6.19	1.134	6.39	.962	-3.133	.002**
29.Staff who are willing to help	6.17	1.043	5.84	1.189	5.678	.000**
4.Costumes #	6.16	.985	6.28	.886	-2.209	.028*
26.Service quality of the staff	6.15	.972	5.87	1.158	4.474	.000**
30.Competent staff	6.15	1.051	5.86	1.160	5.124	.000**
19.Comfortable seating	6.12	1.092	5.84	1.242	3.974	.000**
25.Suitable audience number in the venue	6.08	.988	5.69	3.888	1.712	.088
27.Suitable duration of the performance #	6.03	1.156	5.81	1.238	3.272	.001**
24. Behaviour of other audience members	5.95	1.304	5.18	1.657	8.384	.000**
11. Interpretation and introduction by the host	5.93	1.119	6.01	1.110	-1.192	.234
MEAN VALUE OF ALL ATTRIBUTES	6.26		6.07			

Note: *: $p < .05$; **: $p < .01$; the five attributes with highest ranking were labelled as bold and italic; the five attributes with lowest ranking were underlined with bold; # indicates the core services.

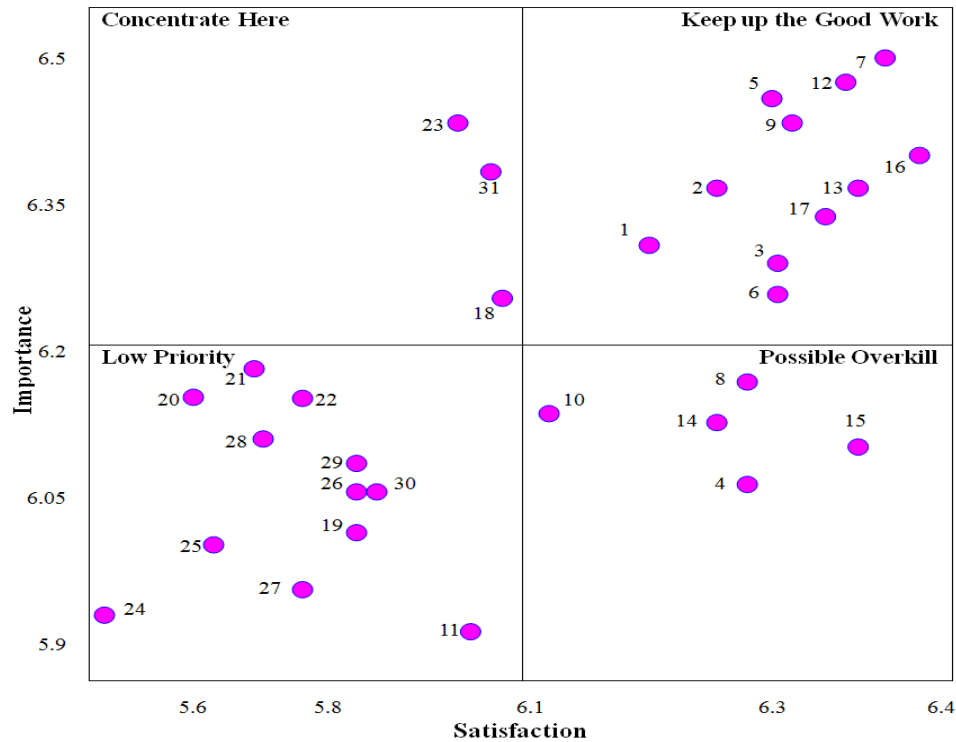


Figure 1: Importance-Satisfaction Analysis of theatrical performance attributes

Concentrate Here:	Keep up the good work:
23. Safety and security of the venue	1. Content of the performance
18. Cleanliness of the venue	2. Performance is special and unique
31. Value for money of the price charged	3. Atmosphere of the performance
<u>(Mainly peripheral services)</u>	5. Performers show emotion
	6. Professional performers
Low Priority:	7. Good coordination among performers
11. Interpretation and introduction by the host	9. Music and songs
19. Comfortable seating	12. Stage decoration
20. Vision of the performance	13. Background scenery or screen
21. Clean air	16. Lighting
22. Moderate temperature in the venue	17. Punctual start of performance
24. Behaviour of other audience members	<u>(Mainly core services)</u>
25. Suitable audience number in the venue	
26. Service quality of the staff	Possible overkill:
27. Suitable duration of the performance	4. Costumes
28. Friendly staff	8. Dancing
29. Staff who are willing to help	10. Loud sounds
30. Competent staff	14. Scale of the stage
<u>(Mainly peripheral services)</u>	15. Water and a waterfall on the stage
	<u>(Mainly core services)</u>