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**Landscaping the Power Matrix: Inventing and
Manufacturing Chineseness through Landscape
Performing Arts**

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool. The research described here was conducted under the supervision of Professor Sara Cohen and Doctor Freya Jarman at the Department of Music. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Committee on Research Ethics at the University of Liverpool. I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed by me, is based on my work, and is, to the best of my knowledge, original except where acknowledgements and references are made to previous work. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or is being concurrently submitted for a degree, diploma, or qualifications at any other institution.

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Abstract

Landscape Performing Arts (LPA) is a series of large-scale performances that burgeons in China. The performances use natural scenery in open-air theatres, coupled with spectacular visual and audio effects from modern stage technologies. They employ hundreds of local amateur performers who display their culture and history through music and choreography to domestic and international tourists. LPA highlights the traditional Chinese philosophy of “harmony between humans and nature”. Following the first 2003 performance *Impression Liu Sanjie*, LPA became a colossal industry involving hundreds of LPA, each having a distinctly regional flavour. More recently, the LPA format has been exported to Vietnam and Malaysia.

Drawing on Mitchell’s conceptualisation of “landscape and power”, which considers landscape as a verb and a central instrument of cultural force in the creation of national identities, this thesis will investigate the emergence and development of LPA and aims to discover a new power dynamic shaped by the landscape in China and beyond. It explores how the power of the Chinese landscape in the new form of theatre has been wielded to reinforce the political dominance of the party-state. The research findings show that both the mobility and immobility of landscape have transited LPA from local to national and then to transnational contexts, weaving a “landscape matrix” for domestic governance. I argue that LPA enables the state’s centralised power to become dispersed throughout the landscape, creating a sensorial practice that disciplines and governs the subject’s perception and body under rather natural conditions. As a natural power, the landscape in LPA naturalises the ideological tensions of the developing cultural tourism industry, resolving the dichotomy between the promotion of cultural diversity and a controlled united Chineseness.

The research involved a combination of ethnographic research, textual analysis, and

three case studies enabling in-depth examination of specific aspects of LPA. It fills the academic gap by contributing to the breadth of knowledge concerning this important art genre. Moreover, by locating LPA in the context of Chineseness and the sublime, the thesis enriches the theoretical framework for analysing art in relation to landscape and power while also contributing new insights into the construction of Chineseness through performing arts.

Keywords: landscape performing arts, sublime, spectacle, Chineseness, ethnic tourism, state-minority relations, soft power

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Time flies by in the blink of an eye! The end can be a new beginning; I wish you all the best of luck.

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Introduction

Landscape Performing Arts (LPA) are daily, live tourist-oriented shows, fixed in the locality and using natural scenery in open-air performances. They utilise hundreds of native performers, predominantly non-professional local residents, using music and choreography to display aspects of their local traditions, folk customs, and cultural heritage. LPAs are created on a large scale with substantial financial investment and use state-of-the-art stage technology for spectacular audio and visual effects. The first LPA, *Impression Liu Sanjie*, was initiated in 1998 and premiered in 2003. *Impression Liu Sanjie* uses over 600 performers, predominantly non-professional, who generally are local farmers and fishermen. They have their related work during the day; their evening employment is performing in the LPA spectacle.

The unique art form and voracious marketing strategy are highly successful, generating peripheral tourism industries in the locality. Consequently, LPA has become a cultural tourism phenomenon as well as a fast-growing art form, with over a hundred LPAs produced in China over nearly two decades. According to statistics from the National Tourism Administration, LPA has become a colossal industry, contributing more than a hundred billion RMB (ten billion pounds) of value in China (Zou, 2016); an additional hundred regional projects are planned or under construction. This trend is due to the Chinese government's encouragement for localities to undertake an industrial transformation, upgrade through developing the cultural tourism industry, and create a political economy in less developed regions. We also need to consider a report from the Chinese Communist Party's 17th National Party Congress in 2007; this emphasised the importance of "soft power"¹, noting that

¹ "This concept has provided the starting point for many western commentaries about China and it has been argued that it is even more influential inside China, where: 'soft power has become one of the most frequently used phrases among political leaders, leading academics, and journalists' (Li 2009: 1). Nye's account, derived from his work on international relations, has the great merit of seeing cultural activities not as some separate field of human activity but as an aspect of power." (Sparks, 2015, pp.27)

“Culture is an increasingly important source of national cohesion and creativity, while also being a factor in overall national strength” (Li and Keane, 2011, p.24).

LPA's success has given rise to “visual mountain-water aesthetics” performed on a specially designed theatrical stage called a *shanshui juchang*, or “mountain-water theatre”. Producers and the media emphasise Chineseness that incorporates China's Chinese philosophy of nature, labelling LPA as “Harmony between Humans and Nature”, “A Masterpiece of Cooperation between Nature and Humans”, “Narrating the Chinese Story in Mountain-water”, and “Chinese Invention”. LPA has highlighted landscape as a genre and dominant aesthetic due to its prevalence in Chinese culture and art. Furthermore, regarding the philosophical conceptualisation of nature and harmony, landscapes have historically influenced Chinese identity and culture, as highlighted by Chinese landscape paintings, which explore temporality, the affect of the past, and nostalgic longing. Therefore, LPA involves both contemporary and traditional culture and cultural practices.

Since the 1990s, China has become increasingly industrialised, accumulating wealth and power under Deng Xiaoping's philosophy: “Hide our capabilities and bide our time; never claim leadership” (韜光養晦 決不當頭) (Chen and Wang, 2011). This contrasts Xi Jinping's approach of exerting China's cultural, capital, and political strength globally. When Xi took office in 2012, a new era dawned as the country began pursuing the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”. Fulfilling the “China Dream” meant unifying China's 56 Chinese ethnic groups. Now that China is more prominent on the global stage than ever, the government endlessly produces policies to overcome the political challenges of globalisation. These challenges initiated a domestic movement to nurture cultural nationalism with “Cultural Confidence” and the “Full Revival of Traditional Culture” (全面復興傳統文化). Thus, China is experiencing a “renaissance” of traditional culture under the Chinese Communist Party's guidance to reinforce national identity.

Through the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Xi Jinping Administration has drawn a grand blueprint that “asserts a version of China’s global power through media branding” (Kokas, 2017, p. 4). As a result, China wields global influence and challenges the world order with hopes of leading globalisation (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Keane (2016) argued that “China’s outbound trade can be seen as being ‘official’ and propagandist, as these products often align with the government’s brand image”, echoing Xi Jinping’s 2013 declaration that “increasing national cultural soft power is related to the realisation of the China Dream” (p. 27). These efforts have all disclosed that “the cultural and creative industries in China are not just for commercial gain, they are also part of an ideological project that promotes nationalist pride at home” (Keane, 2006) and “soft power” abroad (Garner, 2015; Hartig, 2016). During this era, LPA certainly conforms to the narrative of a cultural and political “Chineseness”, strategically promoting Chinese national identity domestically and Chinese cultural influence overseas in accord with political contemporaneity.

“Power” and “landscape” are interdependent terms. We can discover power in the landscape as it is a source of natural power; conversely, we can also observe and decipher how the landscape is utilised by power. In contemporary China, the landscape contains the code of economic value and cultural governance which can be decoded and reinterpreted. This thesis displaces the Chinese landscape (*shanshui*) genre from its centrality in art and traditional descriptions of mountain water, thus, offering an account of landscapes as a medium of representation that is ultimately rebranded in LPA. Therefore, the research reopens the question of how “landscape” is manifested as a form of power in China, but this time by considering it a performing art genre. Given that LPA is a complex phenomenon, the amalgamation of “landscape” and “power” provides an overarching theoretical anchor that allows this research to open an investigation touching on the related concepts of Chineseness and the sublime.

I begin by defining simply what I mean by the title's terms: landscape, power, and matrix, and introduce two other key concepts: Chineseness and sublime. First, the landscape. A landscape can incorporate romance, magnificence, a natural disaster, and even a battlefield. It can be read as the sublime, the pastoral, the nationalist, each of which betrays subtle political nuances. A landscape contains a variety of ideological representations so that any description of its appearance must also logically be "thickened" (in Geertzian terms) into an interpretation of its meaning (Baker and Biger, 1992). If we regard culture as a text to be read and interpreted, then both the natural landscape and the built environment are part of that text and, like any other text, can also be read at multiple levels of meaning.² Mitchell (1994) changes "landscape" from a noun to a verb and considers landscape not simply as an object to be seen or a text to be read but as an instrument of cultural force - a central tool in the invention of national and social identities.

Underpinning Mitchell's study, Andrews (1999) compared the ways landscape is employed: as an accessory or backdrop, as a chief subject, or as a construction, a "theatre" in which humans act and enjoy seeing themselves act. If this theatre is "imagined" in the landscape, then LPA as an art form has morphed the imagination into a reality. Landscape not only acts as a backdrop, stage, or scene in LPA but also contains an ideological discipline. Several studies on Chinese cultural propaganda have recognised Chinese mountain water as part of national identity construction and cohesive ideological works rather than a movement or a whim. According to Walton (1999), the proliferation of academies in Southern Song China has traditionally been associated with the rise and spread of neo-Confucian doctrines, giving the natural landscape a decipherable cultural meaning (p. 23).

² For a now classic statement of this, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), chap. 1.

Landscape (*shanshui*), as a cultural form promoted by the government's policymakers, is associated with power and its implementation, which in this thesis directly constitutes a more focused and conclusive term - landscape matrix. At this point, I will define "matrix". According to the Cambridge and Oxford Dictionaries, "matrix" (from the Latin term for "womb") in social science means something (such as a situation or a set of conditions) in which something else develops; it forms the complex social wires in which people live. The matrix is a pattern of lines and spaces. These wires interlink and interconnect to form a social system and the cultural or political environment in which an event or ideology is born, develops, and grows. To visualise the matrix in this research, we can consider the mathematical matrix in which a rectangular array or table of numbers, symbols, or expressions, are arranged in rows and columns, representing a property of a mathematical object. Notwithstanding the complex meaning of "matrix" in different disciplines, all definitions imply systematic and interlinked phenomena. I will employ the term to elaborate on the impact of LPA in the national environment, where the power generated in LPA through the landscape strengthens a sense of connectedness in cultural geography.

In short, the landscape matrix in this thesis is a landscape-generated domain accompanied by the power of sympathetic vibrations that keep the subject under control within the party-state's political framework. The matrix is both real and virtual. It is virtual because it is an intrusion into subconsciousness; it is real because of the site-specific theatres in the nation's landscape. The landscape matrix in LPA works on a hierarchy and network model under the umbrella of Chineseness. Chineseness in this thesis has a multifaceted meaning (as a cultural identity and political and economic practice), including traditional and modern Chineseness. Traditional Chineseness is regarded as traditional Chinese culture in terms of aesthetics and philosophy but also constructs a cultural identity in the hands of the state. Modern Chineseness refers to contemporary Chinese society governed by the Chinese

authorities and their recent ideological development of social and economic contemporaneity. Therefore, the landscape matrix in the context of Chineseness relates to the cultural hegemony; it is a power deployed in a cultural sense for political discipline that then serves the state's apparatus within the political economy's mechanics. Such political power in LPA echoes what Zukin (2011) has elaborated on regarding the economic and cultural landscape related to Disney World:

In political philosophy, the landscapes of power are the features of the built environment that perform political functions, including establishing the hegemony of a governing entity or an ideological creed in a particular territory and cultivating a sense of pride in place in residents of a territory (p. 3).

In this thesis, the state's power includes the ability to construct events given or delegated to elites. Power can be explicitly normalising and strategically regulating or can subtly restrict the various fields of possibilities. It is neither a one-off and a violent form of oppression and punishment nor simply propaganda and persuasion. It can enact a protracted campaign by invading and driving cognitions to form docile bodies. The authoritarian state utilises its indisputable power to promote an aesthetic that enhances its political philosophy; it claims both the uniqueness and the originality of culture and aesthetics. Thus, an aesthetic norm or visual regime through the *shanshui* concept is mythically conceived and constantly utilised for the cultivation of cultural identity and nationalism.

The intersection between power and landscape in the aesthetic context leads to another critical theme in the thesis: the sublime. Through LPA, the natural landscape becomes an instrument for the promotion of Chineseness. To appreciate the

effectiveness of this instrument and deconstruct its political implications, landscape and power must be understood in relation to the sublime. I appropriate Wang Ban's "aesthetic experience" that describes the Chinese sublime as an ideology aestheticised. The installation of aesthetics comes from the top-down, but eventually, it becomes a truism that penetrates people's daily lives. Wang (1997) reports that the need to fashion a form of subjectivity in the face of the overwhelming exigencies of history has been approached in ways that intimately involve the bodily, sensuous, and emotional dimensions of the individual's lived experience (p. 125). This approach has much to do with a person's preference and taste for what is beautiful and sublime.

Featured in the title of this thesis, "inventing" and "manufacturing" are two terms that interact with the matrix drawn by the power of landscape. The inventing is related to LPA as an artistic production claimed to be a "Chinese invention", but it also indicates the modern reinvention of national identity. Manufacturing can be defined as the making of articles by physical labour or machinery, especially on a large scale. It also brings material into a form fit for use.³ Manufactured LPAs have developed into a nationwide industrial network; the skilful weaving of a matrix via LPAs rests firmly upon the rapid proliferation of LPA productions. Furthermore, considering LPA as what Garoian and Gaudelius (2004) called "manufacture of spectacle" enables this thesis to politicise LPA through the concept of "spectacle". According to Garoian and Gaudelius, "given its mass appeal, the power of spectacle culture captivating visual stimulus overwhelms and arrests our bodies' attention and in doing so inscribes it with the self-validating ideology of commodifying culture" (2004, p. 5). In LPA, the idea of *shanshui* with its visual components of the natural scenes and the awe-inspiring logic of the spectacle. The affect and omission LPA create directly links to state politics in terms of policy and ideology, which thus allows this research to articulate a critique of LPAs' limits, and their favoured status and treatment.

³ The definition is from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

The thesis takes a trajectory of the way in which politics has meshed with culture and aesthetics. This cultural-political framework will unearth a never-celebratory reality in which powerholders exploit LPA for identity promotion and perception governance in developing a political economy between control and mobilisation, dominance and submission. Therefore, I will also investigate the following questions: What attention to LPA says about these power relationships and the cultural dynamics that the landscape has shaped in China and beyond? How is LPA as an art form produced and imagined as Chinese? Why is this Chinese significant, and for what purposes? How has it travelled from the local to the national and international dimensions to recalibrate China's nation brand and enhance diplomatic relations? Accordingly, the questions elaborate on the relationships between ethnic minorities and the state (governing imperatives and unconscious desires) in a national context and the relationships between countries (hegemonic and anti-hegemonic) in the transnational setting.

Notably, the thesis is not merely about how the Chinese landscape has served the purposes of nationalism, propaganda, the ideology of unity, economics, and diplomacy as conceived by the centralised state. It is also about how the landscape in LPA has been repositioned in a more dispersive power structure that remoulds the individual's perceptions and bodily experiences. This interrogation is of particular importance currently as the Chinese government is exerting a greater influence over the cultural and spiritual lives of the populace. Politics in this thesis is still about power. This power is both cultural and economical, both publicly and inconspicuously; it finds its culmination through the implant of discipline that then becomes active in the internal sphere of the individual's body, thoughts, feelings, and even tastes. This view may alert us to the symbolic, "emotive", and bodily means of imagining a national community and a collective identity in the fifty-six ethnic minorities that are designated by the party-state as China continues its global rise.

Here, I will provide the general structure of the thesis. Considering that LPA, as an art genre, is central, the thesis will prioritise the chapters which paint a clear picture of LPA's essential elements and backdrop. Afterwards, the organising principle of this study will follow the axis of time and spatial dimensions, to narrate the developmental process of LPA. The remaining chapters are constructed around three case studies: *Impression Liu Sanjie*, which represents the local dimension; *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*, representing the national dimension; and *Hoi An Memories*, which illustrate the international dimension. A chapter-by-chapter outline will be detailed below.

Chapter 1 The Literature Review is structured around key themes related to performing arts, state-minority relations, Chineseness, and globalisation. I also review relevant scholarship concerning internal Orientalism, self-Orientalism, and Chinese cultural nationalism, since they are all related to Chineseness. In order to theorise LPA, I review the theories related to landscape and power as they serve as theoretical threads woven into the power-relations narrative to amplify this dynamic Chineseness. I will introduce Mitchell's notion of landscape and power, and then engage with Michel Foucault who critiques "power", and theorists such as Ingold and Massey, who explore the theme of "landscape". The theoretical foundation likewise engages in dialogue with the works of Kant, Burke, and Wang Ban, as well as Harsha Ram and other contemporary critics on the sublime and spectacle, since they are related to the all-important theme of landscape.

Chapter 2 The Methodology explains the two main methodological approaches: (1) ethnography, including interviews and observation, and (2) textual analysis of the chosen case studies. These ethnographic and analytical methods enable in-depth exploration of how LPA has developed and how its content is constructed. Furthermore, I will critique the utility of the research methods employed.

Chapter 3 utilises the “sublime” as conceptualised by Kant to classify LPA as a type of spectacle. It demonstrates how Chinese artists mobilise the power of landscape to present a new theatrical version of *shanshui* painting. This, in turn, helps explain the construction of a landscape matrix for cultural governance and ideological work, including coordinating sentiments, manipulating attention, and disciplining the Chinese audience’s national identity. At the same time, this chapter focuses on LPA’s genre, form, and thematic content, analysing it within the setting of transcultural flows.

Chapter 4 offers Ingold’s thoughts about the landscape’s temporality. The immobility of landscape will be leveraged to facilitate the analysis of why LPA is claimed as a Chinese invention and how the Chinese elites employ the landscape to promote cultural pride and consolidate the landscape matrix. My critique originates within the broad context of the state’s nationalistic program to promote cultural confidence through inventive Chineseness. I provide Li Zehou’s thoughts about the Chinese sublime, employing it as a theoretical instrument to deconstruct this Chinese invention and expose the misguided discourse and nationalistic propaganda created to justify and promote LPA. Eventually, I will engage with Burke’s notion of the sublime to critique the nationalism embodied in the Chinese invention statement.

Chapter 5 investigates the context in which the first LPA, *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS), emerged. Decoding its content, this chapter examines how the Liu Sanjie legend was adapted from a Mao-era film and turned into a live landscape performing art to reflect the political contemporaneity of the post-Mao era. Again, treating this LPA as a spectacle, this chapter will analyse how landscape power sublimates a Zhuang ethnic legend. I will politicise this idea by introducing Wang Ban’s “sublime figure” critique, which is anchored in the analysis of the Han elites’ radical reinvention of Liu Sanjie.

Chapter 6 further investigates ILS, shifting to the wider industrial phenomenon and examining the locality where ILS generates an industrial ecology. I investigate how the locality is marketed, performed, and trained for ILS. Employing Massey's theory of landscape, this chapter introduces the notion of "landscape mobility" to consider landscapes and places as "events" where both the state elites and ethnic minorities jointly make a cultural, political, and economic claim. Then, through a Foucauldian lens, I examine how the landscape matrix functions in the realm of the body. I also assess state power and problematise the state-minority relationship in the landscape by questioning what is gained and lost within this touristic economy.

Chapter 7 investigates how the LPA has been elevated into a Chinese national phenomenon. It explores how government and private capital play a role in the nationalisation of LPAs within the cultural tourism industry. Focusing on the utilitarian approach to landscape in the political economy, I will address landscape's role in weaving an economic matrix that serves to reduce regional disparity and promote united Chineseness in the economy. Later, the chapter presents a case study on *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*, an event staged at the G20 Summit. It demonstrates how this LPA was promoted as a national brand, which is once again linked to the nationalistic agenda. I unearth the ideologies within the aesthetic enterprise by interpreting the "Chinese magnificence" exhibited by this national brand. More specifically, by returning to Wang Ban's analytical theory of the Chinese sublime, I demonstrate the motifs of grandeur in the Chinese landscape as a form of aesthetic emotionality.

Chapter 8 considers the mobility of the Chinese landscape and anchors LPA as a soft power in the realm of diplomacy. It examines how the landscape has empowered Chinese elites to make transnational LPA. This chapter also presents a case study: *Hoi An Memories*, a Chinese-Vietnamese co-produced LPA based on Vietnamese culture. The chapter appropriates Harsha Ram's concept of the "imperial sublime" to analyse

how the foreign LPAs act as cultural capital embroiled in this process of domestic perception governance to fortify the landscape matrix. Ultimately, I critique LPA's situation in the transnational context and evaluate its potential global trend.

The thesis concludes by comparing the findings from the three case studies that have been presented and reflecting on their implications for the landscape matrix. These concluding pages also enlarge the picture of LPA by reflecting on the broader implications of China's creative industry. Finally, I will highlight the significance and implications of my findings and consider the limitations of this work and potential future research prospects.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature concerning performing arts, state-minority relations, Chineseness, and globalisation, which give thematic breadth to the thesis. In terms of the depth of the thesis, this literature review engages more intensely with theoretical concepts relating to landscape, power, and the sublime, which serve as analytical tools.

1.1 Performing Arts

Holdsworth (2014), in his book *Theatre and National Identity*, explores how playwrights, directors, and performance artists have re-worked or re-staged a performance or theatrical form, exploring concepts and questions around nationalism and national identity. Theatrical performing art often bears the imprint of a nation's characteristics and is considered one of the essential cultural empowerments in manufacturing a national identity. For example, Peking opera can be linked to Chinese national branding. Shakespeare's dramas are rooted in the English identity. Flamenco was promoted in Spain by Franco's dictatorship, not specifically as the autonomous community of Andalusia's cultural icon, but as a pan-Spanish cultural feature. While opera may often be associated with Italy, it also represents a shared European identity. Surely then, performing arts representing a nation, or a place, are not limited in form, style, or distinguishing artistry. An art quarter filled with theatres can also be linked with constructing a place's identity; the West End of London, for instance, is a must-visit place in many tourists' itineraries.

1.1.1 Chineseness in Chinese Performing Arts

During the Cultural Revolution, both private capitalist ventures and cultures and traditions considered to be opposing Communism were erased. The privately-owned portions of enterprises disappeared; all enterprises were placed under state ownership (Wang, 2016). The theatre was a vital entertainment venue where state political ideology dominated, serving as a tool for government propaganda spreading ideas such as class war. Other forms of traditional performing arts were banned, the eight revolutionary operas (樣板戲) being a rare exception (Lois, 1972); these operas were considered revolutionary in terms of thematic and musical features (Lu, 2004). They dominated the stage at this time, leading to the joke that “eight hundred million people watched eight shows” (Clark, 2008). As noted by Tung and Mackerras (1987), “No country believes more deeply in the power of drama” or uses drama more frequently “...in ideological feuds, political purges, and mass campaigns” than China (p. 1).

Hui (2007) states that Chinese theatre became entangled with a complex web of power, both at home and abroad. The cultural critique couched in theatrical symbols of “the Chinese nation” could be used by the government to serve the dictates of cultural nationalism. Nowadays, traditional or “ancient costume” drama has replaced the “eight revolutionary operas” style and thus ushered in greater variety, but the political content remains significant (Yao, 1980). Indeed, the government strongly supports the staged performing arts as elements of soft power while displaying Chineseness in performance, both domestically and non-domestically. For example, the Chinese government funded the China National Peking Opera Companies UK tour (Wu, 2018). Since this is so, it can be considered a cultural promotion of Chineseness. With China commercialising its cultural industries, state-owned music and theatre troupes are encouraged to create stage productions that could be exported globally to further China’s soft power.

China is actively promoting its national culture, building a national image to attract global citizens who contribute to GDP; thus, LPA can be counted domestically and internationally as soft power. The *New York Times* reported on an LPA in Henan province, writing: “The government wants China to be seen in a new light (not as the old nation of Mao suits, or a new generation of migrant factory workers) so that the country can market its rich cultural heritage, and preserve some of its vanishing traditions” (Barboza, 2008). Chineseness manifests abundantly in the domain of the performing arts: Gao Xingjian states that taking *xieyi*⁴ (寫意) as an example of aesthetic Chineseness, which also has inextricable interaction with Chinese philosophy and aesthetic origin in Chan Buddhism, so is uniquely Chinese, being employed in Chinese theatre contrasting with Western realism (寫實) (Quah, 2004). Barne (2009) argued that the Chinese government manipulated cultural nationalist artists through the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games, which utilised a meaningful representation of regenerating traditional culture and was “created under Party fiat” (pp. 64). Lee and Yoon (2017) found that the Beijing 2008 opening ceremony emphasised the unified identity of Chineseness while extolling the official image of the nation’s one collective identity. By comparing with The London Olympics in 2012, Lee and Yoon stated that this could be related to the ascent of a different type of nationalism: Beijing’s Olympic Opening Ceremony appeared representative of Sinocentric Chinese nationalism. However, the London 2012 equivalent, up to a point, highlighted civic-based multicultural nationalism.

Chineseness is interpreted as Chinese cultural characteristics by He (2012), who focuses on Zhang Yimou’s version of Puccini’s opera *Turandot*, to demonstrate how Zhang Yimou re-implanted Chinese cultural characteristics as a means of resisting or subverting Western Orientalism. Zhou (2017) analyses how Chinese aesthetic *yijing* (a unique charm of the poetic state) as Chineseness is fully displayed by Zhang Yimou in his *Impression* series. The Chinese government often uses a Western operatic format

⁴ *Xieyi* is a concept of Chinese traditional painting. It is also often called *xieyi* splash-ink which is to paint unrealistically. *Xieyi* in the theatrical context is equivalent to abstract, imagistic or suggestive (Quah, 2004).

to promote traditional Chinese culture. Chinese traditional performing arts are considered too old-fashioned to cater for the taste of contemporary Chinese; the tradition is often displayed in a Western format to show a “world way of portraying Chinese culture” or an “international language” to tell China’s story (Zhang, 2008). This policy change is also evident in the Chinese government’s willingness to use opera to promote traditional Chinese culture as an antidote to Westernisation (Sun, 2009).

Ethnic minority performing art is a crucial media that conveys political intention to enhance ethnic groups’ Chinese national identity. For example, in the opening ceremony of the Fifth Chinese Ethnic Minorities Art Performance, the state media reported this festival with the rousing propaganda theme, “the ethnic groups in China are as intimate as a family, so to build the China Dream with one heart” (中華民族一家親 同心共築中國夢) (Qu, 2016). Han and minority dance, as modes of ethnic performance, are categorised together as a new genre, “Chinese folk dance” (Wilcox, 2016). For this reason, ethnic performing arts are one of the subsets within a large set of Chinese performing arts that is defined broadly. Many minority songs and performing arts, which Chinese listeners immediately identify with a particular minority, contain some words in the language of the minority. Such songs are performed to accompany the minority’s traditional dances (Mackerras, 1996). These features are intended to communicate ethnic diversity along with equality and solidarity, at once conforming to and spreading the official line: minorities are equals, having the right to be culturally different (Baranovitch, 2001). Such ethnic minority performance is often bound to the tourism market to fulfil what Urry (1990) has called the “tourist gaze”.

1.1.2 Tourism Performing arts and Invented Tradition

While the industrial combination between performing arts and tourism has existed for long in the West, it is still a relatively new thing in China. Today, China's tourist theatres have become more numerous than in any other country; incomplete statistics have shown over two hundred tourism performances on different scales in China so far.⁵ In China, many local theatres suffer a deficit and depend on government subsidies mainly due to the lack of theatrical consumption habits among modern Chinese people. However, many new theatres have been established as part of tourism projects. They believe that theatre can be converted into a tourist attraction by relying on tourism, and tourists from outside the locality can be converted into audiences. Many scholars have conducted tourism and theatre research in the West, examining performing arts as a localities' place branding (Getz, 1991; Chacko and Schaffer, 1993; Gilbert and Lizotte, 1998; Hughes, 2000; Guetzkow, 2002). However, Mackerras (2011) interjects that performing arts and tourism have not been a leading topic for Western scholars who labour on culture and tourism. By focusing on two articles (Li, 2007; Bi, 2007) in Chinese, Mackerras has discovered how popular the combination between theatre and tourism in China has become due to the general concept of cultural tourism.

There is a term called Tourism Performing Arts (TPA, 旅游演艺), or Tourism Performance, that is very popular in China (Zheng, 2018). In English academic writing, TPA is only used by Chinese scholars who introduced this as a category of theatrical performing art. Zheng (2018) uses the term TPA to study its contribution to development in urban and rural communities. A definition of TPA coined by Zheng is to attract tourists' viewing and participation in various programs, ceremonies and shows held in tourist destinations. Li, Zhang, and Lu (2005) consider that tourism performance mixes classic stage performances and other art forms, native cultures, governmental and nongovernmental activities, and festivals. They note that these

⁵ See: <http://www.leadingir.com/datacenter/view/1785.html>

types of performance are becoming integral to the entertainment and cultural industry, having a substantial potential for creative development. Lim and Bendle (2012) explore arts tourism in Seoul; they refer to this kind of performance as “tourist-orientated performing arts” (pp. 667).

Edensor (2001) calls these sorts of performing arts displayed through tourism “Performing Tourism” or “Staging Tourism”. It is noticeable that the native landscape is an essential element to be displayed in TPA. LPA is an embodiment of this “Chinese Style Tourism”, as it is a form of TPA displayed in the landscape. Stanley (1998) defines what is known as “Chinese Style Tourism” which weaves together a mix of landscape, architecture, and performance to create an experience for the visitors. Nyiri (2006) remarks that for Chinese tourists, “landscape is experienced not so much for ‘its own’ sake as it is a sign for a set of cultural references” (p.68). Song and Cheung (2010) give a general introduction to the past problems of the Chinese cultural tourism industry and the relative rareness of cultural events for tourists in the early stages of the tourism industry in China. They mention a Chinese saying which sums up the typical holidaymaker’s itinerary, “daytime activity for tourists is visiting temples, nighttime activity is sleeping” (p.665). Recently, with exponential growth in the tourism industry, the amount and variety of tourism activities have dramatically increased. Pearce (2008) finds that tourism entertainment can initiate an economy in the evening by marketing aimed at tourists, enhancing the tourist experience and improving competitiveness within the local tourism market. Theatrical performance has become a significant tourist attraction in China (Xu, 1998), and the number of cities presenting theatrical performances to visitors is growing. Almost every major city in China now stages theatrical productions following the success of ILS (Zhuge and Cui, 2005).

Ma (2014), Hughes (2000), and Colbert (2002) researched tourism performance in China; their approach focuses on markets and the management of marketing for

entertainment and performance to discuss the relationships between artistic entertainment and tourism. Ma (2014) proposes that China's tourism art performance industry provides cultural opportunities in society, attaining financial success while ultimately creating spiritual enlightenment and a positive entertainment experience. Wang (2008) finds that ILS increased the gross domestic product (GDP) of Yangshuo County by more than 10% and increased the length of stay of tourists in the locality by eight hours per person. Likewise, a research collaboration on ILS, conducted by four researchers in tourism, examines the motivation to view the performance. They find that if theatrical performances are to introduce more educational, cultural information, or activities, they will be more welcomed (Huang *et al.*, 2012). Song and Cheung (2010) indicate that the goal of the theatrical performance of a given destination is to enhance the local tourism industry though the stakeholders are concerned only with profitability.

Mackerras (2011) examines ethnic minority performance in the tourism market, considering that the concept of cultural tourism initiated by the government also serves the purpose of promoting cultural diversity.

Some of these tourist performances have nationalistic aspects glorifying some portion of Chinese history and/or culture, vitalising ethnic identities and cultures that are threatened, giving them some commercial encouragement for survival and finance for the training of professionals (Mackerras, 2011).

Qiao, Chen and Kim (2009) focus on an LPA named *Zen Music Shaolin Grand Ceremony*; they note that traditional cultural resources to develop tourism products heighten the local population's confidence in its history and culture. Hence, we can see that local and international tourists can provide a deeper understanding of the

country's history and culture through traditional cultural tourism productions (Zeppel and Hall, 1990; McCannell, 1989).

It is intriguing to know that many theoretical discussions within cultural tourism can have an inextricable link to the concept of "Invented Tradition", as TPA displays cultural tradition and heritage to imagine a community (both local and national). The phenomenon is apparent in the modern development of the nation, and nationalism, ultimately creating a national identity promoting national unity and legitimising tradition or cultural practices (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The revival of tradition (including ethnic culture and religion) is indeed encouraged by state recognition and government propaganda efforts. The authorities can use Hobsbawm's Invented Tradition to shore up the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), which is highly relevant to the concept of the nation, nationalism, national symbols, and histories. Therefore, governments try to present something timeless, legitimate, old, and powerful. Beiner (2007) proposes and defines the "reinvention of tradition", asserting that,

Invention entails assemblage, supplementation, and rearrangement of cultural practices so that traditions can be preserved, invented, and reconstructed...Reinvention of tradition signifies a creative process involving renewal, reinterpretation and revision (p.272).

If tradition can be invented and heritage can be exploited, performing arts can be created for daily, commercial, and political use. Therefore, Mathew Cohen's notion of "Inventing performing arts" unsurprisingly emerged based on the concept of "Invented Tradition". Here, Cohen (2016) explains inventing performing arts as a field of activity that is aesthetic or entertaining rather than ritualistic or "magical" in

orientation (p. 15). A further development from “invented tradition” is “staged authenticity” (MacCannell, 1973) in the context of ethnic tourism. MacCannell states, “to the degree that this packaging alters the nature of the product, the authenticity sought by the visitor becomes ‘staged authenticity’ provided by the touree” (1973, p. 596). Any cultural production can serve one of two essential functions:

It may add to the weight of modern civilisation by sanctifying an original as being a model worthy of copy, or it may establish a new direction, break new grounds, or otherwise contribute to the progress of modernity by presenting new combinations of cultural elements (MacCannell, 1976, p.81).

The display of “authentic” culture for tourists is also referred to as *yuanshengtai* (原生态) tourism in China. Since the new millennium, Rees (2016) observes that China has been on a quest for original cultures (*yuanshengtai*), which exist in ethnic areas; *yuanshengtai* indicates the pure state of culture charms urban populations. *Yuanshengtai* song and dance highlight a significant demand, or even nostalgia for originality, co-evolved with industrialisation and modernisation (Xiao and Li, 2015). According to Du (2015), Chinese media⁶ mainly traces the origins of the term *yuanshengtai* to ILS made in 2003. In this sense, LPA can be considered a “staged authenticity” as it is staged and marketed to display local authentic characteristics to tourists. Another concept related to “staged authenticity” has been described as a “cultural performance” (Sherlock, 2001; Giddens, 1991; Jackson, 1996). Salazar (2005) believes that through the implicated representation embedded and intermingled with local culture, cultural performance helps construct, folklorise, and ethnicise local authenticity and character. Zhu (2012) researched tourism performances, including an LPA named *Impression Lijiang*.

⁶ Available at: <http://pecrc.kluniv.edu.cn/info/1006/1074.htm> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2019].

Cultural performance is the presentation, perception, and interpretation of local cultures and is a key component of international tourism. As such, it plays a part in rebuilding place-bound identity. Meanwhile, ritual performance may still preserve a “performative experience of authenticity”, even if performed “just for fun” for a tourist audience (p. 302).

This section has shown Chinese performing arts and related existing scholarship. They provide the theoretical foundations which help determine the nature of LPA as a kind of tourism performance or “staged authenticity” while also locating LPA within the scope of cultural nationalism.

1.2 Power and State-minority Relations

Since the first LPA *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS) originated in Yangshuo, an ethnic minority locality, government policy has shifted toward the cultural commodification of ethnic minorities. Therefore, at this point, I will review state-minority relations and theories of power and human geography.

The term “Chinese Nation” was coined at the beginning of the 20th century and was advocated by Sun Yat-sen, who founded the Nationalist Party, which was eventually banished to Taiwan by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Zedong. The CCP inherited the systematic notion of the “Chinese Nation” but launched “The Massive Ethnic Classification Movement” (民族識別) from the 1950s onward. In terms of ethnic-minority development, China practices a form of so-called “regional autonomy”, a practice that involves the creation of a variety of Ethnic Minority

Autonomous Regions. These areas have a high concentration of ethnic minorities (Wu, 2012). According to Keyes (2002), over four hundred potential groups are identified based on regional distinctions; in turn, they are reduced to the officially recognised 56 ethnic groups, mainly using language to distinguish the Han majority from the 55 others.

The ethnic classification resulted in the creation of ethnic minority groups out of the wide variety of cultural variants in China (Yang, 2008), which established a linear and hierarchical framework primarily based on Joseph Stalin's definition of the nation. Stalin concluded, "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Habib, 1975). *Shaoshu minzu* was translated originally as "ethnic minorities" and sometimes as "nationalities"⁷, but more recently solely as "ethnic groups" (Bilik, 2000). Some scholars are even more precise and use the neologism *zuqun* (族群) to unambiguously refer to ethnicity when *minzu* is needed to refer to nationality (Bulag, 2010). Care was taken that none of the *minzu* "would be construed as a people who could make claims to a separate nationhood; all *minzu* were considered to be integral to the nation of China" (Keyes, 2002, pp. 1183). How can one country have 56 ethnic groups and, in the meantime, stay harmoniously integrated? The book *How the Communist Party of China Manages the Issue of Nationality* is issued by Chinese scholars who follow the government ideology. However, the text fails to offer a comprehensive answer to the above question, though it begins by introducing the government's guiding principle for building a harmonious and unified nationality:

⁷ In early PRC documents, such as the 1982 constitution, (En.people.cn, 1982) the word ethnicity "*minzu*" was translated as "nationality".

A harmonious socialist society is a society that is full of vitality as well as one that enjoys unity and concord. We must do everything possible to promote harmony in relations among political parties, ethnic groups...and consolidate the great unity of the people of all our ethnicities of the Chinese nation all over the world. We must fully respect and understand the differences in ethnicities' traditions, language, culture, customs, and psychological identity...We cannot ignore their existence or change them by force. We need to actively create the conditions to decrease and eliminate the disparities in the development level of ethnic groups (Hao, 2015).

Since adopting the Reform and Opening Up Policy (a programme of economic reform also known as Socialism with Chinese characteristics), developing socialist ethnic relations of equality, unity, and mutual aid has been an essential aspect of the government's national work. This harmony between ethnic groups and the State can happen within the official state-controlled media, newspapers, performing arts, TV series, films, and other types of entertainment. However, the cases of Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet have shown Beijing's zero-tolerance policy towards any potential or existing separatism. The CCP consistently considers secessionism to be a potential danger to the regime's stability and has been promoting national unity at any price, stressing that "there is no tiny issue in ethnicity" (民族問題無小事) (Lu, 2010). This pursuit of harmony within society, and national unity, sacrifices human rights though the CCP believes it is an acceptable pathway to regime stability. Sautman (2014) claims:

Separatism in China is often framed positively by the West, on the assumption that Tibetans and Uyghurs want self-determination,⁸ and that even Han dissidents would rather their country break up than have continued CCP rule.⁹ In China, separatism is framed negatively as “splittism” (分裂主義) or “local nationalism” (地方民族主義) though many Chinese officials, similar to their Western counterparts, view Chinese minority rights as potentially separatist (pp. 179).

Some ethnic minorities in China are pacifist, quaint and non-confrontational (such as Zhuang, Dong, and Miao ethnic minority) rather than antagonistic to the Chinese state, as others are, such as the Tibetan, Mongolian and Uyghur people (Wu, 2016). The debate has gained currency because of the expansion of global capitalism and the subsequent rise in ethnic conflict and violence (Olzak, 2010) that pose a problem for national, social, and political unity (Tyson and Wu, 2016). Though ethnic populations represent a small part of China’s population, accounting for only 9.4% of the nation in 2005 (NBSC, 2009), their unique cultural characteristics and strategic geographical positions make them politically, socially, and economically important for China’s transformation (Wu, 2014).

1.2.1 Ethnic Minority Cultural Representation

Presently, ethnic minorities’ cultural self-representation is allowed in China, but it is expected to conform to the Communist Party’s ideal. As Baranovitch (2003) points out, “Chinese ethnic minorities themselves are passive and voiceless, and minority representation is still overseen by the state” (pp. 361). State sovereignty over ethnic

⁸ “*A Sympathetic Hearing*,” Newsweek, 14 April 2010 (“Tibetans want self-determination”).

⁹ For example, hundreds of prominent German politicians and writers gave a standing ovation to Liao Yiwu, a self-exiled Chinese writer, who in accepting the 2012 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, stated that China was “this inhuman empire with bloody hands, at the root of so much suffering in the world, this infinitely large pile of rubbish [that] must break apart (muss auseinanderbrechen)”.

minority representation has been given the following name: Orthodox Minority Representation. Baranovitch (2001) takes the famed song *The Sun in the Grassland* as an example and suggests that it sends a varied message regarding the amount of autonomy, or otherness, that the Mongolian people are encouraged to show under the new socialist system. Despite tolerance for ethnic diversity, with the celebration of alterity implied by the vistas of horses and grassland (a stereotypical Mongolian scene) being positively depicted at the start of the song, the remainder hints at certain limits to otherness.

As the state's control waned in the post-Mao era, minority people and the Han majority were able to challenge orthodox minority representations (Baranovitch, 2001). Former research has clearly shown some state tolerance of minority self-representations on the proviso that minority cultural activities do not lean toward political separatism. McCarthy (2014) draws a momentous conclusion in her book *Communist Multiculturalism*: “minority members’ promotion of their culture is to a large extent a way of asserting citizenship rather than a way of establishing dissent” (p. 248). She challenges those theories of nation, and ethnicity, that progress toward establishing cultural diversity as a threat to internal cohesion. Barry Sautman (2014) has further claimed that such an attitude represents the state's effort to “depoliticise” minorities by treating them as cultural groups having individual but not collective rights.

Gladney's work concentrates on the monolithic utility of ethnic images by the Han-dominated state and producers of popular culture. Gladney and Schein labelled them as “Oriental Orientalism” and “internal Orientalism” (Gladney 1994; Schein, 1997). Both these terms are based on Said's concept of “Orientalism” and are applied to how ethnic minorities are depicted under Chinese internal colonialism. They observe that the Han-dominated Chinese state tended to portray its ethnic minorities as feminine, backward, superstitious, and needing masculine Han guidance (Bulag,

2012; Brownell, 2002). Gladney (1998) suggests the major difference between the minorities and Han is that the former are “marked” in a cultural sense, while the Han are “unmarked” or “normal” (p. 102). He states that “[t]he Han, as representatives of ‘higher’ forms of civilisation were clearly more evolved and were to lead the way for minorities to follow” (pp. 100). Schein (1996) took a similar line: it was minority women, more so than minority men who bore the burden of China’s internal Orientalism. It readily generates the assumption that dancing minorities are sexualised feminine images solely for the enjoyment of heterosexual Han spectators.

Staged dances of minorities have often been viewed in contemporary Chinese cultural studies as examples demonstrating internal Orientalism. Gladney’s example of internal Orientalism involving minority dancers is drawn from the 1991 *China Central Television* (CCTV) New Year’s Gala. He argues that during this performance, only minority entertainers wore “colourful [ethnic] costumes”, while “[n]onminority entertainers and hosts exclusively wore Western-style suits and dresses” (Gladney, 1991, p.648). However, Gladney failed to clarify whether the performers are literally ethnic minorities or not, as it is not rare in China to see that performers dressed in ethnic minorities costumes and singing ethnic minorities songs are Han Chinese. The Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 is a prominent case: one of the sections has been exposed as fake since the children representing the country’s 56 ethnic groups were all Han Chinese (Spencer, 2019). Wilcox (2016) challenges the accusation of internal Orientalism by doing a historical examination of state-sponsored minority dance in the early PRC. She suggests that internal Orientalism may not be a reliable explanation for minority dance. Instead of portraying minorities as primitive, exotic, and erotic, early PRC dance showed minorities as examples of cultural sophistication, politeness, and respectability. As Wilcox (2016) notes:

Rather than envisioning a developmental hierarchy between the Han and minority dance, national performing arts institutions established during this period constructed the Han and minority dance as parallel modes of ethnic performance categorised together as a new genre: Chinese folk dance (pp.363).

Former researchers show the agency of China's non-Han peoples in representing their ethnic identity which has been honed in local contexts. Brownell (2002) and Schein and Litzinger (2000) have taken issue with Gladney's analysis. They show that ethnic peoples are not passively used by Han producers of culture; they are participants performing the popular representation of themselves. Du (2015) researched *yuanshengtai* music, which refers to folk, ethnic and "authentic" music; she examined Han elites' invention of the neologism *yuanshengtai*, and ethnic Naxi elites' adaptations in producing their own ethnic image. She argues that "*yuanshengtai* is useful in reconciling the new needs of ethnic diversity and the fundamental political agenda of national unity" (pp. 562). Zhao and Postiglione (2010) observe that "China's ideal of multiculturalism and minority representation are an exercise of power for political control, which is achieved by 'dominant and legitimate language' (Bourdieu, 1991) in the state-controlled media" (pp.320).

1.2.2 Unity in Diversity and Multiculturalism

The various LPA's expanding throughout the Chinese nation can be considered multiethnic projects as they are based upon local and regional ethnic cultures. Therefore, this subsection introduces the Chinese version of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism has a side effect: it can cause separatist forces that may have the potential to tear up national unity. The current government strategy is to carefully

embrace cultural diversity while intensely reinforcing national unity. It is called Chinese Socialist Multiculturalism by Wen Jin (2012). Furthermore, it is found in the prominent Chinese sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong's theory, "Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese People" (Fei, 1981, 1988, p. 167). Fei's theory represents China as having 56 ethnic minorities that are integrated into the Chinese nation, which plays the role of the integrating force. The Han ethnic majority is positioned at the core of a family of nations integrating the Chinese nation throughout history. He later uses the phrase "Diversity within Integration" to further demonstrate this formula (Fei, 2015, p.77), which is the Chinese nation's pattern of unity in diversity (Zhao, 2011) promoted as the state's ideology to solve the problem of China's internal ethnicity. On the CCP's official website, the state-funded intellectuals Lin, Yang, and Gao (2015) reveal the nation's strategy of balancing national unity and ethnic identity:

For China, a multi-ethnic state, the relationship between state national identity and ethnic identity is unity in diversity...to accelerate economic construction, improving people's living conditions is undoubtedly a good means for national unity... However, if the issue of ideology is not dealt with, national separatism can show an upward trend along with economic growth and living standard improvements...To respect and be inclusive of diversity...can dispel the misgivings of vulnerable ethnic minorities about cultural assimilation. However, in the meantime, we must commit to strengthening unity.¹⁰

The above comments accord with Yuen-Siu (2010), who believes that China's multiculturalism is characterised by Confucian dominated values promoted through government endeavours for maintaining its *ronghe* (intermingling) approach with an

¹⁰ See: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2015/0609/c143844-27124036.html>

ethnic minority policy focused on economic development. Mackerras (1996) reveals the tension between Chinese national integration and multi-ethnic identity. One marked trend is that the blended forces of urbanisation, industrialisation, and the exposure to international markets and cultural products (a process which Mackerras sums up as “modernisation”) reduces the character of minority culture and promotes integration with China. Millward (1997) points out that if Mackerras is correct, then there is an irony here: undergoing “modernisation” (more fashionably called “globalisation”) is equivalent to Sinicisation.

1.2.3 “Placeness”, Landscape, and Ethnic Tourism

Since LPA is a by-product of Chinese cultural and ethnic tourism, this subsection will show the context of Chinese ethnic tourism as a mechanism that makes LPA manifest, considering that ethnic minority tourism is an indispensable component in the Chinese cultural tourism industry. This subsection will also introduce the term “placeness” and its relationship to tourism by linking it with theories in human geography, clarifying the relationship between landscape and placeness.

In human geography, Massey (2006) links place and landscape to open a narrative of the mobility and varied temporalities of a particular landscape, reflecting on a range of issues revolving around the different kinds of “grounding” that appeal in political and socio-cultural life. While Massey (1991) has argued for the importance of place, her position accords with those arguing against essentialised or static notions; places do not have single identities but multiple ones. They are not frozen in time; they are ongoing processes. To bring landscapes alive, Massey proposes the idea of “physical space being alive” to dynamise place and landscape and emphasise how vital landscape is in the lives in which we live. Like almost everything to do with place, the sense of landscape shifts across enormous scales - from direct experiences of locality to an appreciation of the entire nation (Massey, 1991). Surprisingly, the idea of the sense of place as connectedness or togetherness is getting reinforcement from the

research of neuroscientists.

Massey's perspective presents a conceptualisation of landscape and place that can be considered as "events" to form "a space for agonistic negotiation. The political should be recognised as including negotiation within that realm that goes by the name of nature" (p. 20). Linking Massey's idea, which considers landscapes and places as "events" both literally and metaphorically, with my ethnographic interviews, reveals the characteristics and the terms of events when the state-elites-ethnic minority triad jointly make a political and economic claim on the ethnic places through LPA. In addition to Massey, this thesis engages with Mitchell's notion of landscape, which locates landscape within the context of power. Mitchell (2002) argues that landscape circulates as a medium of exchange between the human and the natural or that it is "a natural scene mediated by culture". Landscape is a site of visual appropriation, a focus for identity formation. In *Landscape and Power*, he argues that landscape is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package (p. 5). For Mitchell,

Landscape does not merely represent natural sites but creates a system of "circulating sites" associated with the dissonant class interests of burgeoning tourism, nationalism, and imperialism, a system that reflects back, in turn, on the very conditions of political representativity in the public sphere. At a minimum, we need to explore the possibility that the representation of a landscape is not only a matter of internal politics and national or class ideology but also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism (p. 8-9).

In Mitchell's view, the landscape does not merely signify or symbolise power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions. He supposes that landscape as a cultural medium has a double role with respect to ideology:

It naturalises a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site...it has to trace the process by which landscape effaces its own readability and naturalises itself and must understand that process in relation to what might be called "the natural histories" of its own beholders. What we have done and are doing to our environment, what the environment in turn does to us, how we naturalise what we do to each other, and how these "doings" are enacted in the media of representation (p. 2).

In agreement with Mitchell, Martin Powers (1998) assumes that the landscape is a site for negotiating cultural hegemony; it would be ripe for appropriation by an imperial regime concerned to offer a symbol of universal order in a post-feudal society. Landscape in Powers' theory permits at least three related avenues of rhetorical mobility:

(1) It offers an ostensibly “neutral” symbolic space within which ambiguous and contested constructs of social order may be negotiated; (2) it naturalises those constructions in ways that make such negotiations possible; (3) by offering a space undominated by aristocratic insignia, landscape enables an appeal to universal values binding different classes. Of course, universal values could serve as a ground for imperial pretensions (p. 18).

Rapoport (1985) states that “placeness” occurs when a locality becomes functionally, culturally, and aesthetically meaningful. According to Motloch (2001),

It is an affective response to a specific setting and the perceptual and associational meanings imparted through perception and cognition. Perceived placeness is affected by the physical characteristics of the setting, and the individual’s anticipated place, intended behaviour, trait (preference) levels, value system, and experience stored in the mind (p.245).

Project design should stimulate the cognition of place and be spacious enough to allow viewers to attribute both individual and cultural meaning (Rapoport, 1985 and 1977; Alexander, 1965). Shim and Santos (2014) look at whether shopping complicities in Seoul are symbolic of placeness; as a consequence, they conclude shopping complexes that “serve to negotiate the contemporary dynamics creating placelessness and constructing placeness in urban tourism” (pp. 3). Lew (2017) argues that place-making can be associated with a series of different actions that then create a

“sense of place”, which is a phrase also referred to by Tuan (1976) that is useful in the research of touristic destinations (Lew, 2017; Urry and Larsen, 2011). *The Image of the City* (Lynch K.,1960) and *Place and Placelessness* (Relph E.,1976) are pioneering literatures in tourism research. Relph looks into the meaning of place in terms of “place as identity”. The converse of placeness is placelessness which refers to “an environment lacking significant places and the attitude of a lack of attachment to a place caused by the homogenising effects of modernity” (Rogers, Castree and Kitchin, 2013, p.375) and “signifies the loss of local meaning and placeness” (Shim and Santos, 2014, p. 2). Similarly, Cohen (1993) declares that there has been “a focus upon global processes of homogenisation or diversification; and the fears or resistances they provoke, also, the conditions of fragmentation, placelessness and timelessness they give rise to” (p. 314).

Urry (1990, 2011), with his concept of the “tourist gaze”, argues that placeness is (re)produced through performances; it cannot just be considered as a natural feature that contributes to identity construction but is a resource that can be employed and commercialised in the culture industry globally. The archaeologist Denis Byrne (2008) discusses the methods communities use for heritage as a part of the “work” that fortifies their bond to places and each other. This “work” is what Appadurai (1996) called the “production of locality”. Molnar (2010) enhanced the term by calling it “The Cultural Production of Locality”, which demonstrates how “the controversial idea of ‘tradition’ was employed as the main localising strategy in response to intense internationalisation” (p.44). In this thesis, the concepts concerned with a cultural locality are within “local placeness” (地方性). This local placeness is a local cultural characteristic extracted by capital and political factors to promote a cultural brand for the locality. It manifests in LPA, where placeness is performed musically and visually by commercially-driven forces; thus, tourism and performing art are combined in the landscape.

In Chinese cultural studies, placeness is researched from the perspectives of culture and politics in local or regional placeness and national Chineseness. Lan (2007) points out the contradiction between local placeness and Chineseness by arguing that the quest for a culturally united China is almost a paradox, considering the nation and culture's long and complex spatial and temporal history. When Lin (2018) was considering Taiwanese-ness as an independent placeness from Chineseness, she stated that "in relation to the political dimension, official and popular discourses have impacted on the formation of placeness" (p.91). She explains that to create a pan-national but Sino-centric Chinese identity, the intentional efforts the Chinese government has made in some entertainment productions highlights "One China" as a unified sense of Chineseness. Furthermore, Chen (2016) demonstrated how Liu Sanjie, as a cultural icon representing local and regional placeness (地方性), was integrated the national character to represent nationhood (國家性) under the guidance of the art policy in the Mao-era.

1.2.4 Theorising Power: Commodification and Politicisation in Ethnic Tourism

Commodification and politicisation are important topics in the ethnic tourism industry of China. Many worldwide debates circling ethnic tourism focus on the impact on ethnic groups, especially concerning whether selling reinvented ethnic identities is empowering or impoverishing (Du, 2015; Xie, 2003; Tilley, 1997).

Chinese ethnic minority's cultural heritage is "promoted as an investment opportunity" (Lim, 2015), while commodification is done via representing, packaging, and selling, including song and dance performances (Cohen, 2016). Displays of ethnic cultures are "interactive, theatrical, multi-sensory and accommodating of audiences" (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Such shows are a business model for developing ethnic regions (Wu, 2014). The concept of ethnic tourism continues the trend of "Commodification of Ethnicity" (Lee, 1992) or "Marketing Ethnicity" (Burton, 2000; Belasco, 2001).

Focusing on Longxing, a place in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, as a case study, Wu (2016) explains that tourism is “instructing” the locals to sell their “otherness” as a commodity. Wu also describes the commercial scene in Longxing:

Tourism is now the socioeconomic magnet for the region, attracting people to come and work as shopkeepers, vegetable vendors, and hotel staff. Migrants have also returned from cities and are desirous of making a living through “doing tourism” at home (pp. 484).

The commodification of ethnic tourism is interdependent on the politicisation of ethnic tourism in China. Ethnic groups are suspended between the contrary processes of “de-ethnisation” and “re-ethnisation”. For example, Lim (2015) argued that,

The rigid boundaries between the various minzu imposed by the authorities became more permeable by processes instigated by tourism. Thus, a tourism-induced revival of a minzu “ethno-religion” might “draw into its ambit other minzu ... contributing to its de-ethnisation”.

Lim hence sees tourism development as a factor in the “de-minzuization” of the minzu ethnic regime. Bringing infrastructure and entrepreneurs into remote regions has a transforming effect on the local economy. It exposes ethnic people to modernising influences, slowly destroying the integrity of their cultures by integrating minorities into the mainstream (Cohen, 2016). However, scholars (Sassen-Koob, 1979; Olzak, 1983; Chai, 1996) have argued that ethnic people are undergoing a process of re-ethnisation, since ethnic tourism can indeed generate a centrifugal force from the

state. According to Wu (2014), such developments are strengthening the ethnic consciousness of the members of ethnic groups, creating a sense of otherness for external observers. This leads to a form of regionalism that distinguishes placeness based on regional ethnicity, contrary to the wider integrative and socio-economic ideology of the State tourism policy in ethnic minority areas (Abrahams, 2014). In the discussion of the Tibetan communities in Shangrila, northwestern Yunnan, Kolås (2008) acknowledges the positive role of tourism by stating that “tourism is not just a business where tourists use (or abuse) the commodified Tibetan, but more importantly, a stage where locals can act out their own visions of Tibetan identity” (Kolås 2008, p. 120). Kim (2013) critically considers the political implications of ethnic tourism by arguing:

The citizen status of ethnic minorities in China was lowered after they were assigned ethnic tourism as a task for modernisation by the Deng Xiaoping government because ethnic tourism...highlighted their backwardness and dependence. Thus, it obstructed them from participating in advancement as mainstream citizens (p. 215).

Other Chinese scholars such as Zhang and Dong (2009) and Wang (2010) argue that the Chinese government, since the Deng Xiaoping era, have believed that economic development is the solution to the problem of ethnic inequality and will, over time, lead to ethnic de-differentiation (Xia, 1995). Therefore, both commodification and politicisation of ethnic tourism promote the nation to the world stage in service to the national goals of modernisation and “socialism” (Su and Teo, 2008). More importantly, Cohen’s study (2015) has shown,

The authorities of the post-communist states sought to mould the ethnic cultures selectively to adapt them to the demands of ethnic tourism by such means as exotisation, spectacularisation to stress their Otherness, while sterilising them of any separatist nationalist aspirations (pp. 11).

With the concept of “Unity in Diversity” (Zhu, 2012) “the nationwide commodification of culture and ethnicity has seen a controlled renaissance of ethnic cultural flowering” (Abrahams, 2014, pp. 40) within a solid Chineseness in the post-Mao era.

Tracing the emergence and development of LPA and documenting the tactics and strategies of the CCP’s power, this thesis entails an assessment of this power through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault (1998) challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups through “episodic” or “sovereign” acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. According to him, “disciplinary power” characterises how the relations of inequality and oppression in modern western societies are (re)produced through the psychological complex. Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power is less interested in the level of the state or authoritarian government. As a dispersive power, it is not a top-down structure as described by Marx. However, it still can be appropriated by this thesis to explain the ruling philosophy of the authoritarian Chinese government. Foucauldian theory has been tuned and applied in many Chinese studies exploring the construction and implementation of a state ideology that forms disciplinary bodies (Chen and Wang, 2019; Zhang, Brown, and O’Brien, 2018; Zhao, 2020). To construct docile subjects, the disciplinary institutions, exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, must constantly observe and record the bodies they control and ensure the internalisation of

the disciplinary individuality. Modern China has enriched the theory of disciplinary power and has empowered it as the country intimately linked with the mass surveillance issue. Though the power in China originates from above, it has permeated every corner of contemporary society and become dispersed and pervasive to achieve a dual control in disciplining mind and body.

To analyse LPA in ethnic minority regions through its official narrative and economic force, I also employ Foucault's (1994) "pastoral power". Pastoral power neither abandons the central role of discipline nor the discursive construction of a population into docile bodies. Foucault focuses on a "notion of government" whereby power figures itself as caring for a population. Therefore, Foucault considers pastoral power as: "the idea of a pastor-sovereign ...a judge-shepherd of the human flock" (p. 70). Furthermore, this concept regards "government understood as an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and what happens to them (p. 71)". This becomes clear when we analyse the overlap between welfare and security. Pastoral power works through these combined aspects: the use of police and other disciplinary institutions and "the formation of individuals who can normally be relied upon to impose an appropriate rule on their own behaviour". The aims of pastoral power are not altruistic and concerned with a population's well-being but invoke the power that a stable society has in relation to others. Police and policy aim to create a state which can compete with others and create an internal "wealth-tranquility-happiness". Zhang (2018) summarises that the purpose of pastoral power, despite the apparent humanitarian discourse of concern for a population's welfare, is ultimately the state's stability and economic and military strength (p. 789).

Barry Hindess evaluates pastoral power thus: "the government aims to promote the well-being of its subjects by detailed and comprehensive regulation of their behaviour.....Pastoral power, as Foucault presents it, is concerned more with the

welfare of its subjects than with their liberty”. Zhang (2018) has appropriated “pastoral power” to interpret the official narrative in Xinjiang. He considers that “pastoral power” seems only partially applicable to Xinjiang.¹¹ Characteristics of pastoral power, such as the shepherd’s power, “are exercised not so much over a fixed territory as over a multitude in the movement toward a goal”. Therefore, Foucault’s concepts provide a rigorous searchlight to explore the legitimation of power.

Rowe, Xiong, and Tuomeiciren (2020) researched dance pedagogy in China through a Foucauldian lens. They concluded that the dance pedagogy allows the state to conduct discipline in three ways, which Foucault describes as (1) hierarchical and pan-optic supervision of people within a learning environment, (2) clearly defined standards that seek to homogenise behaviour, (3) the processes of examination that can reinforce behavioural standards. Dance education also involves extensive physical and emotional abuse and exclusion by teachers towards students (Xiong, 2009). Such practices are reported in similar critiques of authoritarian dance pedagogies in Europe and North America (Green, 1999). The dance teaching practices might be considered a European pedagogic legacy passed on via the Soviet Union, which helped establish China’s dance pedagogics (Deng and Yang, 2012). Authoritarian pedagogies also draw on the influence of Confucianism, which positioned the teacher as an authoritative source of knowledge in the classroom (Biggs and Watkins, 1996). Foucault (1977) proposes that within everything that we learn and teach, power and knowledge cannot be separated. Concerning dance pedagogy, this includes how physical bodies are “disciplined” to become docile or submissive to particular knowledge regimes (Green, 1999). This discipline consists of what an individual learns and how they learn it, suggesting that an authoritarian dance knowledge system is maintained by an authoritarian dance pedagogic system and vice versa (Warburton, 2008).

¹¹ Zhang notes that “pastoral power” seems only partially applicable to Xinjiang (territory is very much at stake, although there are certainly the twin goals of development and stability). The aim is not a rigorous close reading of Foucault but to explore patterns in the legitimation of power, to which Foucault’s concept offers itself as a valuable searchlight (p. 790).

In terms of the cultural governance that has been crucial to China's ideology, the CCP has skillfully deployed various symbolic resources to pursue political goals. However, persuasion, especially in the politically polarising cyberspace, is inefficient and potentially counterproductive in discourse management (King *et al.*, 2017). Holbig (2018) reminds us to examine both persuasive and non-persuasive parts of ideology, focusing on not only beliefs but also perceptual, emotional, and behavioural aspects, especially under the background of reideologisation, which has reached an even higher level under the governance of Xi Jinping. In this thesis, I dissect ideology culturally and politically as essential agents of the dispersive power structure. However, Foucault sometimes refrained from using the word "ideology" because it is commonly understood as a governmental technique of forcefully imbuing ideas. Therefore, Chen and Wang (2016) remind us that the Foucauldian theories require us to rethink ideology in China's context from a broader perspective.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault theorises the docile body as a malleable object on which disciplinary force is acted, a node in the complex field in which power is organised and arranged. For the body to be disciplined in this way, it must be receptive and accept the powers that work on it. Then, the docile body is "something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body the machine required can be constructed" (p. 135). Foucault describes this body and casts it as unformed and willing to be shaped: it is pliable and capable of being "manipulated, shaped, trained" (p. 136). Hence, training venues and schools as examples of the state's ideological apparatuses convey fabricated knowledge and discipline students, shaping docile subjectivities. Within these institutions, Foucault considers that bodies are made to respond to signals that are implicit and yet tightly organised through the networks of relations that maintain order. Foucault notes that the "docile bodies" are ideal for the modern industrial age's new economics, politics, and warfare. There is a "political anatomy" and a 'mechanics of power' that "defined how one may have a hold over

others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (p. 138).

Foucault reminds us that the most dangerous power is not the power wielded coercively by dominant external forces: it is the dispersed and intangible power that is internalised by its subjects. Foucault also suggests that the knowledge produced is not necessarily a truism. It is an embodiment of social power that features oppression and manipulation. To define normal and abnormal, beautiful and ugly, high and low, is also a dictate of power. The framework of Foucault's disciplinary power is a power circulation system: power creates and produces knowledge; this knowledge then helps power justify social discipline; the discipline regulates people into manifesting docile bodies that sustain the operation of society. The docile bodies reconsolidate the knowledge from the powerful, strengthening and supporting the dominant mechanisms and discourses of power. This system forms a closed loop that seems perfect; "The Eye of Power" and its surveillance are dispersed throughout society and its disciplined minds and bodies.

1.3 Chineseness, Landscape, and Sublime

The notion of Chineseness generally appears within three main domains: Chineseness of people, Chineseness of culture, and Chineseness of politics. In terms of Chineseness of culture, Yao (2012) mentions that "Chineseness can be used in the discussion of Chinese culture, or to refer to the condition of being Chinese cultural contextual relevant and has never been a clear definition for the term" (p. 112). Therefore, this research refers to Chineseness in both the political and the cultural domain; it can be understood as the interface between Chinese culture and Chinese producers, directors, and artists who exploit cultural and ethnic Chineseness defined

by the state to make LPA productions in the political contemporaneity.

There have been continuous and sometimes controversial debates around Chineseness in the age of global modernity. The debates have centred upon its presentation through to its interpretation; and range through discourses on Chinese culture and Chineseness in a variety of art forms and locations, including film (Chu, 2012; Chow, 1995; Lu, Qi, and Fan, 2014), literature and translation (Chow, 1998a; Cheung, 2011), contemporary arts (Marsden, 2015), performing arts (Quah, 2004; Lee and Yoon, 2017) and music (Lau, 2015; Fung, 2008). Scholars have demonstrated that in the realm of the arts, Chineseness is marketable (Gao, 2015; Fung, 2007), and performing arts that display a sense of Chineseness are no exception. In this section, Chineseness will be reviewed with theories relating to Chinese cultural nationalism; I also cover the concepts of self-Orientalism and the sublime as they are linked by the theme of cultural Chineseness.

1.3.1 Ethnic and Problematic Chineseness

The discourse of Chineseness is often initiated with the issue of ethnicity, building upon the point that the Han are an undefined categorical “Self” understood through contrast to minority “Others”. However, Baranovitch (2001) and Yan and Santos (2009) mention that ethnic minorities have been turning from other to self as China’s minorities began to define Chineseness not in opposition to but as part of the Chinese self; their “otherness” now makes minority cultures suitable for representing authentic Chineseness. For example, Clark (1987) focuses on film production during the revolutionary period. He notes that “paradoxically, a very effective way to make films with a distinct ‘Chinese’ style was to relocate to the most ‘foreign’ cultural areas in the nation; unlike steel mills and wheat fields, these ethnic minorities’ areas offered an instant ‘national style’.” (p. 101) Therefore, it is the ethnic areas that now project authentic Chineseness, which is deemed pure and natural.

However, Chun (1996) draws attention to the fact that the ethnic minorities within China's national borders caused problems in reconciling notions of ethnicity within the national identity. He points out that "minorities along China's frontier may have been ethnically autonomous, but, culturally, they belonged to a single Sinocentric universe, who in Chinese eyes, at least, 'came to be transformed' (lai-hua)" (1996, p. 125). The restless partnership between ethnic consciousness and national culture has significantly been engendered by the paradox that culture so often draws upon ethnic traditions as a source for its legitimacy while also transcending the "primordial sentiments" associated with those same traditions (Chun, 2017). This is very much so in cases with historically known minority groups which have been undergoing a long process of Sinicisation (Wu, 1990). There is also a controversial viewpoint - "no more China after Yashan Battle of 1279"¹² - which has gained widespread adulation in the media and attracted scholars' attention (Ikenberry *et al.*, 2015). The pursuit of a culturally united China - absolutist aspects of Chineseness - is paradoxical, given the country and culture's long and complex temporal and spatial history (Lan, 2007).

At this point, the whole concept of Chineseness appears subject to overwhelming accusations and questioning. He Chengzhou (2012) comments that the concept of Chineseness resists a clear-cut definition; ambiguity is its defining feature. Chun (1996) passionately wrote an article with the antagonistic title "Fuck Chineseness" to criticise its ambiguousness by demonstrating the problematic universal definition of "Chineseness". Chun points out the politicisation of cultural Chineseness by stating that:

On the mainland, one can find essentially the same degree of obsession with the promotion of a national consciousness constructed on a synonymity between the same kinds of

¹² When the Song dynasty army was finally annihilated by a Mongol army mostly staffed by the Han-Chinese. Mongolians as an invading dynasty replaced the Song dynasty built up by the Han people. What Ironically is that today's Inner Mongolian has to have a Chinese identity.

cultural ingredients, namely ethnicity, language, and history, but with significant nuances. While icons such as the panda and the Great Wall serve to epitomise in superficial terms China's uniqueness and the existence of potentially strong rallying points for collective solidarity, the continual politicisation of culture reflects, more importantly, the relevance of abstract formulations of identity to state formation and national survival as a whole (p.117).

Ethnic Chineseness has been constantly challenged in Chun's paper. He considers that "it is difficult to distinguish the various dimensions of political orthodoxy, social value, and life routine, all of which serve to engender Chineseness" (p.117). Ultimately, Chow (1998) considers that the idea of Chineseness as "a monolithic given bound ultimately to mainland China" is a problem. Chineseness, which is taken for granted, is still untheorised. Tu (1991) argues that "the Middle Kingdom syndrome" has made it difficult for the Chinese leadership to abandon its superior sense of being at the centre of its own historical imagination. Therefore, "Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora construct creative new versions of Chineseness, but which are seen as peripheral" (Chen, 2018, p. 31). Tu (1991) invented the term "cultural China" to define the notion of peripheries setting the cultural agenda for the centre and contributing to Chineseness in "cultural China". Tu challenges this centre-periphery relationship while aiming to de-centre the insight of Chineseness by proposing "symbolic universes" of cultural China. Chineseness is also criticised by Chun (1996) as advocating pan-national fundamentalism (p. 133), regardless of the differences evident in each society.

Frederick Lau (2008) suggests any understanding of the meaning of Chineseness requires historicisation and contextualisation. It also allows us to see how Chineseness

has been reshaped in response to social and political changes. The political Chineseness is also reflected dynamically since different Chinese Communist leaders have different political tactics to govern China, emphasising different aspects of Chineseness. For instance, Chairman Mao represents the Chineseness of Class Struggle, Deng Xiaoping represents the “Reformed Opening-up” Chineseness, and Xi Jinping represents the Chineseness of the China Dream. In the post-Mao era, ethnic culture is always placed by officials within the framework of contemporaneity to reinforce ethnic groups’ Chinese national identity while encouraging their diverse ethnic culture. For example, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Inner Mongol Autonomous Region, the officials held “China Dream: The Art of Grassland, Chinese Painting Exhibition”. The official comment on this event is that,

The paintings not only embody the regional cultural diversity of the Chinese nation, but they also embody contemporaneity...this exhibition presents ethnic groups’ solidarity in the great era of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation... (Xu, 2017, p. 1).

In the case of LPA, both the notion of ethnic placeness and Chineseness (or representation of Chinese culture through performance) is important. Clearly, these performances are created by the joint forces between “capital venture”, artists, cultural elites’ national identity, and also government support. Chineseness, together with ethnic placeness, becomes a brand to promote tourism and local development. These two elements are linked to the idea of the nation-state, be it “imagined” or real. It is a kind of “cultural nationalism” too. Therefore, the following subsection will focus on Chineseness in the nationalistic context.

1.3.2 Chineseness in Nationalism

Anderson (1983) discusses nationalism and defines the nation as an imagined community: nations are both socially constructed and imagined. He muses that “within this community, people share a set of collective memories, values, and a cultural heritage; furthermore, national identity may be objectified or expressed in terms of institutions, customs, practices, rituals, artistic and literary products” (p. 16-50). Yoshino (1998) points out that there is “secondary nationalism” (p. 13), a type of nationalism which strives to preserve and enhance national identity to avoid ethnic separatism without paying attention to national identity development. This contrasts with “primary” or original nationalism which is concerned with the creation of identity (Gladney, 1998).

Appadurai (1996) notes that no indisputable version or understanding of nationalism is accepted universally and covers all contexts. One person’s imagined community may become another’s prison. Hence, ethnic issues in China, such as Tibet and Xinjiang, can be a challenge for the central government. The word “nationalism” has two meanings in Chinese: *minzu zhuyi* (literally “theory of the ethnic group” relating to the race) and *guojia zhuyi* (literally “theory of the political nation” relating to the country) (Li, 2007). Given the complexities of the term “nationalism”, “cultural nationalism” in this study is defined as the ideological movement that aims at reviving the traditional culture of China and making it the basis of national identity building. Traditional culture in this research can be understood in this way: LPA is a newly invented performing art but based on traditional culture, or a traditional style of performing arts made contemporary with modern stage technology. There are many types of Chinese nationalism; the next will discuss the other types of Chinese nationalism.

The neologism “official nationalism” was introduced by Seton-Watson (1977) to highlight that the leaders of powerful nations in the nineteenth century believed that it was their role to impose their nationality on all subjects while pulling these people upward into their own superior culture. Hayward (2009) argued that the phrase “official nationalism” refers to “a conception of nationalism that highlights the centrality of the state, so it is a concept of the nation-state defined by government elites” (pp.19-20). Many scholars argue that China’s official nationalism underlines the unity of the Chinese people (Zeng and Sparks, 2019). With the CCP gradually divorcing from the initial impetus of revolutionary ideals and likewise less hostile to global capitalism since the reform and opening-up policy at the end of the 1970s, they started to promote national culture, stoking nationalistic sentiment to consolidate the regime, whilst remaining against national secessionism. Liu Kang says that “The current Chinese communist government is more a product of nationalism than a product of an ideology like Marxism and Communism” (Zeng, 2015, p.177). Under this circumstance, any grouping considered to be anti-CCP is elevated by the CCP to the status of being against the Chinese nation.

Nationalism is highly exploitable and profitable. Hutchinson and Smith (1994) suggest that nationalism is one of the modern world’s most powerful forces, which goes some ways to explain why the Chinese government has, on occasion, resorted to extreme measures to provoke the Chinese people’s nationalism and patriotism. As a result, Chinese nationalism has experienced upheaval as government propaganda is continuously and intentionally whipping up nationalistic sentiments. For example, the nationalist action film *Wolf Warrior* carries a strong sense of Chinese militancy, “anyone who offends China will be killed, no matter how far the target is”. This film was a blockbuster whose box office ranking endorsed it as the No.1 Chinese film in history (BBC News, 2019). The Communist Party encourages filmmakers to produce mass propaganda nationwide to manipulate nationalism. Another example is the TV program *Amazing China* which projected the image of a muscular China that has

achieved a significant leap in this golden age under Xi Jinping. The central authorities have made this program compulsory viewing for official and many unofficial organisations.

Darr (2011) states that official nationalism shown by state policy strives to “preserve China’s territorial integrity” (p.20). As an extension to communist ideology, nationalism is regarded as integral to social consciousness, and an outlet for venting negative emotion, believing it makes people more amenable to the state and party (Li, 2019). Yu (2014) suggests that populist nationalists disseminate an embellished variant of history that portrays imperial China as superior and benevolent to other cultures. History is utilised as a foundation for national pride, aimed at stabilising the state through the inclusion of the public. China’s popular nationalism is often an inculcated result of official nationalism, when the ideology’s control through the media is returning to its climax, making popular nationalism in accord with state nationalism. As a result, we have seen many “spectacles” made by Chinese civilians such as smashing Chinese-owned Japanese branded cars during the anti-Japanese protest in 2012. Hong Kong protestors were encircled by Chinese students waving Chinese flags with the slogan “One Nation One China” and also singing their national anthem in Trafalgar Square during August 2019.¹³ Similar events occurred in Edinburgh, Melbourne, Vancouver, Toronto, Liverpool, and other places with a population of Chinese students.

“Anti-West” is also a dominant theme in Chinese cultural nationalism, especially anti-US sentiments, as reported in many academic discourses. Chow (1995) points out that in modern China under the Communist regime, a foreign coloniser was lacking yet “the sentiment of opposition” has been constantly present and directed towards developing Chinese cultural nationalism. In the field of mass communication, cultural nationalists state: “the dominance of Western culture in international cultural

¹³ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFenfcoRMZY>

exchanges was threatening the cultures of developing countries, such as China” (Zhao, 1997, pp. 735). Li and Liu Kang (1996) two influential scholars in China reason that the rise of anti-West nationalism is linked to the belief that “Western countries are wholeheartedly intent on turning China into a country like India and Mexico” (pp. 8). Chinese cultural nationalists in this century share a common theme in their discussions: upholding traditional culture in contemporary Chinese political and cultural life while resisting the incursion of Western ideology. Therefore, the “East vs. West” dichotomy is the most prominent characteristic of the nationalistic framework (Qin, 2011). The history of when China was half-colonised by Western imperialists gives an impetus to a national emotion with a sense of victimhood in China which is phrased as “speaking bitterness” by Farquhar and Berry (2004). LPA meshes within an anti-West context since LPA inventors have a strong national sentiment, determined against the American cultural invasion, as is shown by a director of LPA, Wang Chao (this will be explicitly examined in Chapter 4).

Neo-Confucianism usually refers to a metaphysical philosophy that blended ideas of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism prevailing during the Song dynasty. This is consistent with LPA, as the top practitioners in this industry such as Mei Shuaiyuan place LPA within the Confucian ideology: Harmony between Humans and Nature. Min and Galikowski claim that “the Confucian tradition has been revived by the authorities as an important cultural source from which a new national identity can be constructed” (2001, p.160). Guan Shijie (1996), director of the International and Intercultural Communication Program at Beijing University, even states that “the time has come for the West to learn from the East, the Confucian concept of universal harmony will be dominant during the next century” (p. 4). “The conviction that the unique culture associated with the nation constitutes the basis of national identity” (Makeham, 2008, p. 9) is one of the most important themes in contemporary Chinese Confucian discourse. Makeham states:

The idea that Confucianism constitutes a form of cultural expression integral to Chinese identity was pervasive among the discourse about Confucianism in contemporary China and covers a wide spectrum of participants academic and official, mainland and overseas-based (2008, p.9).

Li (2019) states that with this strong colour of Confucian ideology in Chinese nationalism, Taiwan (ese) and Hong Kong (ese) are seen as “sons and daughters” by the Chinese authority. Some behaviours by Taiwanese and Hong Kongese against China are considered dissonant with being filial to the mother (land) China. For example, Chinese students in Edinburgh sarcastically sang the following songs to protesting Hong Kong students, *Mom is the Best in the World* and *Listen to Mother’s Words*.¹⁴ In Melbourne, Chinese student protestors scornfully shouted to Hong Kong students *Call Me Father*.¹⁵ This Confucius ideology within Chinese nationalism can not only be used against Hong Kong and Taiwan by the Chinese government but also in Chinese ethnic minorities’ regions, Han regions, in fact, the entire population of 1.4 billion Chinese. They are all the country’s ‘children’ who cannot live without their “Mom” or “Dad” in the official ideology.

Some explanations have provided convincing arguments regarding the centrality of cultural identity in the building of cultural nationalism. Meissner (1999) comments that the government’s funding for large-scale research activities, and programs, aimed at developing neo-Confucianism in China was part of the Chinese government’s deployment of Confucianism as “an instrument to counter Western influence” (p. 18). Some scholars ascribe the rise of cultural nationalism to the development of global capitalism. For example, Arif Dirlik (1995) argues that the rise of Confucianism in

¹⁴ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_11JNSfElw

¹⁵ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ICjCvz3YRM>

China is used against global capitalism, because Confucianism has served as an “ideology to correspond to its apparently new, de-centered structure” (p. 237). Meanwhile, when Chineseness as a cultural entity faces globalisation the Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong (2015) proposes “Cultural Self-awareness” to restore and promote Chinese culture and identity in the global era. While Fei believes that cultural identity promotion needs to be based on the Confucian ideology of “Harmony in Diversity”, it is adopted by the Chinese authorities as internal governance for dealing with Chinese ethnic relations, and also as an external diplomatic ideology.¹⁶ In order to force cultural opposition to the West, Fei also compares China’s Confucian value of “Harmony between Humans and Nature” to its Western opposite “Man versus Nature”. This antagonism between God and man mentioned by Fei (2015) refers to the effects of Western culture, which though being scientifically and technologically advanced, results in global wars and conflicts, having what he calls “egoistic value” (p. 74).

Further to Edward Said’s construction of Orientalism, scholars have also coined a new notion: self-Orientalism (Kondo, 1997; Dirlik, 1996) or “autoexoticism” (Savigliano, 1995; Iwabuchi 1994). Theorists of self-Orientalism suggest that “Orientalism is not simply the autonomous creation of the West, but rather that the Orient itself participates in its construction, reinforcement and circulation” (Dirlik, 1996; Ong 1998; Zhang 2006; Arnold *et al.*, 2018, p. 20). Although self-Orientalism may be seen as self-empowerment, its self-destructive effects have been widely observed in consolidating Western hegemony, tending to normalise the hegemony of orientalist representations (Dirlik, 1996; Nishi, 2005). Self-Orientalism suggests that Oriental people consider themselves within the terms imposed by Western Orientalism, and represent themselves as Orientalism represents them (Chow 1995; Dirlik 1996; Huisman, 2011). They exploit Orientalist views with the goal of turning the self into a cultural ‘Other’ (Iwabuchi, 1994). However, a further developed view from Lee (2005) asserts that “when Orientals recognize and assert themselves within the conceptions

¹⁶ See: <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/channel11/10/20000724/157469.html>

of Orientalism, it apparently functions at times to bolster resistance to Western colonialism” (p. 58).

Here, I put the discourse of Orientalism and self-Orientalism within the framework of nationalism, specifically because the demarcation of Orientalism, self-Orientalism, and nationalism often overlaps, interacting while being mutually ambiguous. According to Michelle Yeh (2000), “China’s fundamental differences, emphasised in nationalism, are always already framed in the Western term Orientalism” (p. 270). Lee (2005) also addresses:

Nationalism, based on Orientalism, appears anti-hegemonic in relation to Western colonialism, but may function as another hegemonic discourse within domestic politics. While nationalism is often claimed to stand in opposition to Westernisation, it nonetheless entails Orientalism. Orientalism can be fused with nationalism as a form of self-Orientalism. However, self-Orientalism can be also further combined with cultural nationalism. The result is an ambivalent, complex relationship between nationalist discourse and Orientalism. (p. 60-62).

Indeed, if Orientalism involves the West as the dominant, and it is the West that asserts the power; self-Orientalism or self-exoticism suggests this power relationship is self-imposed and self-created by the Orient. The notion of orientalism or exoticism involves a consumer who is in a position of power and the consumed. The exotification of oneself for the consumption of another may be considered distasteful to some. However, Dirlik (1996) points to “the contemporary self-Orientalisation of Asian intellectuals, which is a manifestation not of powerlessness but newly-acquired

power” (pp.96). Hence, self-Orientalism still assumes the West as the dominant culture, but it can lead to a hegemonic cultural nationalism. This refers to the idea that following a sustained period of Western domination, post-colonial societies may reject all things Western and embrace an Eastern culturalism that may be identified in essentialist terms (Nishi, 2005).

When the notion of self-Orientalism is raised in a Chinese context, Zhang Yimou is one of the main targets (Wang, 1997; Havis 1995). His films were criticised for misrepresenting Chinese culture and serving or “satisfying Western Orientalism” (Lee, 2005). There have been plenty of critical discussions about Zhang catering for the political ideology of the Chinese government, and his particular interpretation of Chineseness (Ma, 2010; Larson, 2012). Whether or not Zhang consciously constructs this self-Orientalism in his films, it is truthful to state that this otherness-alleged Chineseness has its genesis through China’s relationship and cultural exchange with the West. This may be illustrated through global commodification of culture and nations that translate exoticised representations to the regalia of national identity, being consistently promoted as symbolic of the country as it strives to straddle between “authentic” and “exotic” (Savigliano, 1995).

In terms of visualising China, Zhang Yimou did not only limit himself in his films but also touches the domain of live staged performing arts such as opera and LPA. The production of locality (Appadurai, 1996) was embodied in audial and visual touristic LPA, the Chinese style of music, the classical and traditional folk dances, and the stage setting which is reinforced with Chinese characteristics. The self-Orientalising strategy might share similarities with Zhang Yimou’s LPA work; however, they are shows with a strong sense of Chineseness, transmitted to mainly Chinese-speaking audiences via China’s tourism market without targeting the Western market. The *Impression* series is not designed to cater for international or Western audiences, it is designed to fulfill domestic demand; the Chineseness in LPA is mostly for domestic

consumption. However, an exception occurred: *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*; this was designed to entertain international statesmen at the 2016 G20 Summit, in Hangzhou, I will explore this event as a case study in Chapter 7.

Western orientalists often from a Western perspective, use “feminized” to portray China’s cultural position, but they neglect the Chinese elites’ perspective. Lee (2005) states that Said’s critique of Orientalism focuses on Orientalism in the West, it neglects Orientalism among Orientals. In Fox’s view (1992), this historical instance demonstrates “the possibility that Orientals, once Orientalised by Western domination could use Orientalism itself against that domination”. Therefore, Fox critically argues that Said’s Orientalism fails to see that “such counter-hegemonic discourse and action could arise” (pp. 146). In fact, the self-promotion of Chinese tradition, from a Chinese viewpoint, is a dignified thing to do (sometimes it can be “masculine” instead of “feminized”), but uniformly considered by Westerners as changeless, nostalgic, mythical, and feminised. Therefore, it is expedient to highlight that the nucleus of this argument is dependent upon the relationship between nationalism and self-Orientalism, which I discuss further in Chapter 7.

To understand LPA’s Chineseness, it is crucial to consider Zhang’s political and artistic biography, inasmuch as his own potent power to speak for the LPA industry. Zhang’s early works take the form of social allegory favoured by Western tastes and have earned him many international awards. For example, the films, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, and others, critically portray Chinese people in the face of hardships and adversity and explore the social problems of poverty and ignorance (Zhang, 2010, Gateward, 2001; Tu, 2005). Yet, his later mainstream international hits “favoured aestheticism” where visual effects are blended with cultural elements (Gateward, 2001), leading to accusations by Wang (2011) of selling out to pure entertainment over art. This is especially the case with Zhang’s costume films (*guzhuang dianying*) which have ignored the negative elements of Chinese culture in favour of presenting a

positive image of Chinese national, classical, and traditional culture that conveys a Chineseness favoured by the government. Realism is far less emphasised in his later films and is often absent, thus making them more cinematographic and no longer concerned with social problems (Zhang, 2010).

One of the main characteristics of Zhang's later films is that the form far outweighs the content; the image is visually and aesthetically beautiful and spectacular, though the plot is weak. Chen (2004) holds a critical opinion about their style. He states that they are distanced from historical reality and also lack plot and character development. Exploiting colour is Zhang's strong point; he frequently utilises large-scale scenes, such as having huge crowds of figurants, to give the audience a visual impact. This is seen in *Hero*, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, and *The Great Wall*. Barboza (2018) comments, "Zhang's *Curse of the Golden Flower* seems to be almost entirely concerned with supersizing cinema. It attempts to overwhelm the audience with the most massive sets in Chinese film history; and with an impressive number of extras in its crowd scenes". More importantly, Zhang is skilful in utilising a cornucopia of Chinese elements such as drums, lanterns, pagodas, and folk customs. However, some traditional folk customs displayed in his films are invented, which is called by Radha (2018) "inventing rituals".

Larson (2017) states that Zhang's approach "can express a highly stylised and crafted aesthetics" (p. 1). The features of the later films bear the characteristic imprint of Zhang Yimou, which is consistent with the style of his LPA *Impression* series¹⁷, as I will show when I interpret the LPA production ILS in Chapter 5. The Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, directed by Zhang Yimou, provided a vision of modernity in a Chinese style, yet it is married to modern technology (Dyer, 2009). It has dazzling displays of light and colour, along with the magical effect that thousands of performers working in perfect harmony can produce (Barboza, 2018). Therefore,

¹⁷ *Impression* series is a brand of LPA, associated with Zhang Yimou who has made eight LPA productions.

when it comes to the form of his staged theatrical work, it can be easily reasoned that there is a kinship between the Olympic spectacle and the *Impression* series. For example, multitudes of performers, unison movements of choreography, and the application of Chinese cultural elements and stage technology reflect the artistic Chineseness of Zhang Yimou's artistic imprint.

The government has authorised Zhang to produce many significant and famed national events. He has successfully fulfilled those “national tasks” and as such, has artistically represented China on the world stage being involved in directing the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and the G20 opening ceremony in Hangzhou 2016. Other national domestic events he was charged with include the SCO summit (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), and the 70th Anniversary of China gala which occurred in Beijing. These successful national and international events made Zhang into a “national brand”; he never declines to shoulder the responsibility for large cultural events on behalf of the government. Therefore, Chinese netizens call him “The Imperial Adviser” (國師) in a sarcastic way. Chen (2008) comments that “the government made him a cultural hero of China”¹⁸; another prevailing title made for Zhang Yimou by the public is “cultural ambassador” (Xu, 2007, p.37).

Undoubtedly, Zhang Yimou increasingly acts as a cultural representative who projects Chineseness in both domestic China and overseas. Zhang's role and his later artworks are criticised for being “too much involved in politics”, as he represents Chineseness to the West (Chow, 1995). Furthermore, *The Great Wall*, co-produced with Hollywood in 2016, is criticised for having a “strong political complexion” (Daly, 2017; Kokas, 2019). As a government-designated director and a Chinese cultural ambassador projecting Chineseness globally, Zhang Yimou is inevitably drawn into the circle of politics. For example, Zhang Yimou, at an award ceremony of the Taiwan Golden

¹⁸ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/sports/olympics/08guru.html>

Horse Awards, made this statement, “I can see so many young film directors’ works which represent the hope of China’s film industry”.¹⁹ Interestingly, in front of Taiwanese filmmakers, he referred to China’s film industry by labelling the Taiwanese with Chineseness. Therefore, Zhang clearly knows what type of expression is politically correct.

1.3.3 Chineseness in Tradition and Sublime

In the post-Mao era, the state has rediscovered and reconstructed cultural traditions, which have, in turn, swayed discussions of national identity. Since the 1980s, the velocity of globalisation and the transformative force of its modernising influences have posed a threat to the sustainability of Chinese traditions as Western culture has been interjected into Chinese cities and brought about their internationalisation. Presently in China, much of what bears the label “traditional” is no longer an everyday reality but a transformed panoply of both tangible and intangible culture through economic culturalism. In the era of Xi Jinping, the recent political agenda “Fully Revive Traditional Culture” has shown the practice of promoting official cultural nationalism through reviving traditional culture. Suppose the nation is a product of “invented tradition”. In that case, Xi is trying to unite China in an ideologically cohesive sense through invented traditional culture, which embodies many forms of cultural products and media.

A theoretical discussion about China’s cultural tradition in the contemporary age can be found in Chow’s research. Chow (2013) discussed her visits to a Chinatown in America, where the architecture is often punctuated with details of ancient gateways, temples, dragons, lanterns, and other stereotypical “Chinese” objects, even though they do not mirror anything in present-day China, offering instead “a simulacrum, and an artificial construct” of the country (p.100). Chow considers that the issue of

¹⁹ See: <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-46287774>

cultural temporality implies yielding an affect of melancholy, referred to by Chow as the “affect of pastness”. This aesthetic contributes to an experience that makes spectators feel that “some cultures are standing frozen in time, in contrast to the action-filled dynamism of the contemporary environment that revolves around them on the outside” (Chow 2013, p. 101)

Stereotypical “Chinese” objects do not always align with what Chow (2013) professes: “they do not mirror anything in present-day China”. Tradition forms a continuous line flowing to the present. The architecture, whether “artificially” constructed, genuine, or restored in China, is crossing through time to negotiate the contemporary and become a part of China’s present. If there is an absolute watershed between tradition and the contemporary, then it is to be expected that tradition is experiencing a large-scale adaption in China by blending with contemporary elements. Some traditions are adapted considerably well to engage with the modern narrative; therefore, there is not always a dichotomy between tradition and the present. Sometimes, they can co-exist magnificently.

To go further, Chao (2019) has criticized Chinese tradition utilised in Chinese contemporary art and national branding. Utilizing tradition as a resource in the contemporary Chinese context is never and ever a novel phenomenon. However, Chao goes straight to the heart of the matter by questioning - what does it mean when an artistic imagination has been constrained to engage emphatically with history and traditions but to disengage with the present moment? Chao has revealed an inconvenient truth for most Chinese. Her comment about being “a stultifying continuum” is what the Chinese are proud of since the country’s “splendid” pastness and tradition are tightly linked with its presentness by the Chinese government. Given that the Chinese elites assert LPA as a Chinese invention, Chapter 4 is grounded in theories of tradition and invention to critique this assertion.

Cassell (1993) notes that “past time is incorporated into present practices, such that the horizon of the future curves back to intersect with what went before” (p. 298); “Tradition sustains trust in the continuity of past, present, and future, and connects such trust to routinized social practices” (p. 105). Similarly, Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1994) mention that “Tradition involves an orientation to the past, but it also serves to organise the future” (p. 62). Traditions, as Toelken (1996) argues, are not static; they constantly adapt past practices to new circumstances. Each element of tradition “is open to acceptance, modification, or rejection” (Shils 1981, 45). The tradition can provide the fount of artistic imagination, but it is sometimes necessary to step outside of tradition because “tradition not only serves as a symbol of continuity; it delineates the legitimate limits of creativity and innovation and is the major criterion of their legitimacy” (Eisenstadt 1969, 454).

Only twenty years ago, “regenerating traditional Chinese culture” was debated by a small group of Chinese intellectuals (Qin, 2011). Within ten years of this century, cultural nationalism had rapidly arisen as a very potent ideological trend in contemporary China, finding the most robust support among the middle classes (Xiao 2008, pp.327). Currently, the “Fully Revived Traditional Culture”, as an agenda initiated by Xi Jinping’s government, is officially supported. Governmental intellectuals and cultural elites appointed by the central government promote the slogan “Cultural Confidence” in all dimensions. For example, a TV reality show, *China Now*, produced an episode named *Cultural Confidence*. It addressed China’s cultural superiority over the West in food, language, cultural inclusivity, and persistence and delivered the idea of “Harmony in Diversity”. The political system is presented as being superior to those of the West; they also assert that “The West should learn from China”²⁰. However, there is no explanation about how this could become universal as a form of soft power and why non-Chinese would accept this kind of Chinese cultural superiority.

²⁰ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z0kOR8KPk4> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2019].

Regarding cultural theories relating to Chinese nature and landscape (*shanshui*), I engage with key texts relating to the Sublime. The concept of landscape and nature has received particular attention in LPA, especially since the genre, theme, and aesthetic are intimately linked to Chineseness. The prominence and significance of landscapes in the Chinese artistic, cultural, and popular imagination mean that the landscape is developed more theoretically and philosophically. It is, after all, a symbol imprinted into the country's collective consciousness. Many scholars have suggested that Daoist stress on how minor the human presence is in the vastness of the cosmos, or Neo-Confucian interest in the principles that underlie all phenomena, natural and social, led to the highly structuralized nature of *shanshui* (Maeda, et al, 1970). Most dictionaries and definitions of *shanshui* assume that the term includes all ancient Chinese paintings with mountain and water images. When Chinese painters work on *shanshui* painting, they do not try to present an image of what they have seen in nature but what they have thought about nature (Siren, 1956). *Shanshui* painting goes against the standard definition of what a painting is; it is not an open window for the viewer's eye but is more like a vehicle of philosophy (Maeda, et al., 1970).

Landscapes of mountains and water are not unique to Chineseness. There are also expressions of the Austro-German sublime; landscape painting became the focus of the Romantic painters; they were the first Western artists to appreciate landscape as a subject and not just a background. According to Bernard (1951),

For Kant, natural objects are to be enjoyed aesthetically rather than used practically by the human object ... we should instead look at the ocean as poets do and attend to "what strikes the eyes". When the ocean becomes tumultuous, we should regard it "as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything" (p. 11).

Edmund Burke describes the sublime in the mid-eighteenth century. He defined the sublime as art or landscape that refers to greatness beyond all possibilities of calculation, measurement, or imitation. Sublime experiences, whether in nature or art, inspire awe, reverence, and an emotional understanding that transcends rational thought, words, or language (Kant and Goldthwait, 1965). Burke and Boulton (1968) note that “For Romantics, the sublime is a meeting of the subjective-internal (emotional) and the objective-external (natural world), allowing emotions to overwhelm rationality as we experience the wonder of creation”. Burke (2008) argues that sublimity and beauty are mutually exclusive.

The dichotomy is antithetical in the same degree as light and darkness. Light may accentuate beauty, but either great light or darkness, i. e., the absence of light, is sublime to the extent that it can annihilate vision of the object in question. What is dark, uncertain, and confused moves the imagination to awe and a degree of horror, thus sublimity may evoke horror (p.166).

Kant would likely argue that our cognitive ability to imagine the unimaginable is itself sublime. Emerson (1982) illustrates how the landscape was interpreted for spiritual purposes demonstrating when he is the subject with his individualism overwhelmed:

Standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of nature (p. 39).

In considering nationalism, Kant (2008) would doubtless also comment on its enormity and bestow upon nationalism the sublime of a “formless object” (p. 78). Burke creates a model of nation based on a relationship with masculinity and sublimity; he clarifies the authority the sublime has over the beautiful, with the sublime, like nationalism, demanding “admiration, reverence and respect” (Burke, 2008, p.53). Burke’s adjectives such as “immensity, power, magnitude, grandeur and elegance”, which all represent sublimity, are all relics used by the eighteenth-century middle classes to write and shape our nation-state (Trevor-Roper, 2013, p.117). Different scholars interpret the sublime with slightly different meanings. For Kant, natural objects are to be enjoyed aesthetically rather than used practically by human subjects. When we call the sight of the ocean sublime, Kant reminds us that

We should brush aside the practical knowledge of it as a “vast kingdom of aquatic creatures, or as the great source of those vapours that fill the air with clouds for the benefit of the land” We should instead look at the ocean as poets do, and attend merely to “what strikes the eye”. When the ocean becomes tumultuous, we should regard it “as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything” (Kant and Bernard, p. 111).

“Sublime” is a loaded and versatile term. Since its first application in rhetoric and drama in ancient Greece, it has become an essential concept in philosophical

aesthetics, literary theory, and art history (Doran, 2017). The “sublime” can be cleaved into sublimity (literature and arts) and sublimation (chemistry and psychology). Sublimity is closest to the aesthetic concept; sublimation refers to a physical change of state that directly describes a solid’s transformation into its gaseous state. In Chinese literature, sublime (升華) often goes with “theme” (主題), which means to elevate and speculate an object into a higher state; this is observed in literature or poetry. According to Wang (1997), the modern idea of the aesthetic stems from Western aesthetics. Since its initial reception in China, Western concepts of aesthetics have occupied a prominent place in various ideological discourses; Chinese thinkers and writers appropriate them to deal with ethical, social, and political issues.

If, in Kant, nature is a scene for the subject to contemplate and play out its drama of transcendence, for Li Zehou (1981), who interprets the Chinese sublime, it is a scene for active and transformative human action and enterprise. A scene that Li depicts as sublime is characteristic of socialist China: a gigantic construction site lit up as if in broad daylight by electric lights, where tens of thousands of workers are hard at work in the landscape. Such scenes, he states, can often invoke a sense of sublimity. Though there are similarities between Kant and Li in their emphasis on the human subjects, there is a significant difference between them. Though Kant and Li have given humans a place in the sublime, Li enables natural objects to reveal the striving of humans as they conquer external nature. He depicts the aesthetic feeling aroused by the sublime object by embracing the images of landscape and nature; however, against these natural phenomena, he places the collective labour and struggles for human beings’ existence and cultural achievements. These achievements encompass heroic actions and artistic genius with their creative endeavours, such as magnificent “symphonies”. These collective achievements give us a feeling of sublime satisfaction. Li places a higher value on human and artistic endeavour than he does on the landscape as the source of the sublime.

The beauty of nature and its effect on our emotions can be expressed and sublimated through abstraction, metaphor, and personification. Over the past two thousand years, monarchs in China have tried to emulate the power and magnificence of mountains, rivers, and seas for their self-empowerment as the magnificent imperial subject, the divine son of heaven. The landscape was poeticised to give a sense of the sublime in dynastic China, exemplified by Cao Cao (曹操), a poet, statesman, and warlord during the Three Kingdoms. Cao Cao spent his life striving for the grand unification of the Central Plain(s) (中原) to establish his Middle Kingdom. His poem, *The Sea*, was composed after he conquered the north and overlooked Stony Hill; here, he stood facing the magnificent landscape and sea in wonderment:

I come to see the boundless ocean...
Grass on grass, lush far and night,
Autumn winds blow drear and bleak,
Monstrous billows surge up high...

The CCP utilises this poem in their textbooks for middle school. Their interpretation is that “the poet delineated the motherland’s grandness and beauty and borrowed the majestic sea to express his great ideal and lofty aspirations for unifying China”. Suppose this poem was composed by Cao Cao as a political “sublime”. In that case, the CCP exploits this sublime to serve patriotic education - a sublime of patriotism or statism that encourages a sense of reunification of the country. Readers may pay homage to the immensity of the landscape in the poem; in Wang Ban’s words, “they quickly identify with the vastness of nature and appropriates its magnificence for the empowerment of subjectivity and self-aggrandisement” (1997, p. 189). The unification of China in the dynastic era was the monarch’s dream, but it has become the significant cause and wish of the ordinary Chinese people who often struggle to meet their necessities regarding eating, clothing, and shelter.

Research in the West has associated the landscape with the sublime in the context of nationalism (Olwig, 2015; Dock, 2002). In China, the landscape with its sense of belonging is linked with Chinese nationalism, especially at this particular junction in contemporary Chinese history. Images of Chinese landscape are among the widespread expressions of cultural nationalism in the modern age; this is expressed in a famous saying, “what amazing landscape there is in our country” (祖國大好河山). The phrase is promoted in media (both official and unofficial) to nurture a sense of pride and territorial belonging. It has also become the favoured expression of the Chinese tourists that they frequently post on their social media. This nationalism expressed through the landscape becomes more evident and acute in Galwan Valley, where Chinese and Indian troops often engage in violent skirmishes along the Sino-Indian border. Recently, the Chinese soldiers wrote on the cliff in Chinese “大好河山 寸土不讓” (not one inch of our land will we surrender), which was also videoed and posted on Weibo.

Chinese *shanshui* as a cultural construction is a tool of cultural superiority - an aesthetic uniqueness articulated in cultural essentialism, as Martin and McNeill (1998) claim that

The geographic claim that landscape is a uniquely western European art falls to pieces in the face of the overwhelming richness and antiquity of Chinese landscape painting. The Chinese tradition has a double importance in this context. Not only does it subvert any claims for the uniquely modern or Western lineage of landscape, Chinese landscape played a crucial role in the elaboration of English landscape aesthetics.

To reassert this claim, Mitchell (1994) notes that

The intrusion of Chinese traditions into the landscape discourse I have been describing is worth pondering further, for it raises fundamental questions about the Eurocentric bias of that discourse and its myths of origin. Two facts about Chinese landscape bear special emphasis: one is that it flourished most notably at the height of Chinese imperial power and began to decline in the eighteenth century as China became itself the object of English fascination and appropriation at the moment when England was beginning to experience itself as an imperial power (p. 8-9).

Thus, the landscape is understood by Mitchell as the historical “invention” of a new visual and pictorial medium that is placed within the framework of cultural hegemony and imperialism. Historically, landscape painting engaged with politics, particularly in the Song Dynasty, when landscape painting underwent unprecedented development; it addressed the greatness of nature and the insignificance of humans in conformity with the Confucian ideology of “The Doctrine of the Mean” (中庸). Painters often observed and delineated nature with such an ideology to create landscape paintings with a sense of hierarchy, discipline, and order that reinforced the political aesthetic. Song Dynasty politicians often deployed emotionality with their political stance in landscape paintings, namely “abandon oneself to nature” (寄情山水). Powers (1998), in *When is a landscape like a body*, introduces Guo Xi, a painter in the Song Dynasty who utilises the pine and scholar comparison. Guo recasts the shape of the wilderness to suit the ideological needs of the court:

A great mountain is grand like a lord of all the other mountains. These should be arranged hierarchically, such that ridges and mounds, woods and gullies will be placed near or far, large or small in relation to this grand lord. Its significant figure should be like that of a great lord, dignified and facing south like an emperor, with all the nobility hastening to his court, yet without a haughty or capricious disposition. Tall pines stand apart - a model for all the other trees. They should be arranged hierarchically, such that the vines and creepers, plants and trees will rise up or be supported, will lean or depend upon this leader and teacher. Its disposition should be like that of a Confucian gentleman... (p. 19)

The Chinese principle of *shanshui* has been endorsed as a distinct cultural Chineseness by the government; it differentiates Chinese culture from Western culture and serves to legitimise cultural essentialism in governance. Many Chinese scholars who have a sense of cultural pride consciously or unconsciously fall into this political trap and strive to find nuances that give a greater specificity between the Western sublime and Chinese *shanshui*. Hu Xiaoyan (2019) makes a comparison between classical Chinese aesthetics and Kant's aesthetics. She stresses that,

The uniqueness of the Chinese aesthetic tradition beyond the aesthetic universality imposed by the lens of Kant. Even though it might be claimed that sensibilities are stressed over rationality in the classical Chinese artistic tradition. The detached mental state cultivated through Daoist or Chan Buddhist meditation and experienced in artistic practice helps artists restore a balanced human nature.

I regard the sublime in LPA as a form of political practice or discipline - a tendency to oppress rather than just a concept. The “sublime” for Wang Ban (1997) became an analytical tool to explain irrational and manic phenomena during the Cultural Revolution, which he titled “aesthetic experience”. According to Wang,

The sublime is a political ambivalent category corresponding to a similar ambivalence in the category of the aesthetic. As a “humanising” discourse on private feelings, perception, bodily sensations rooted in the libidinal dimension of the individual, the aesthetic offers emancipatory alternatives to an oppressive political structure. But because it attends to the psychic depths of the individual, the state is employing it to anchor its power and law all the more securely in the sensibilities of its subjects. The aesthetic should be printed in our brains, dissolved in our blood, and materialised in our actions. This captures the dream state of any hegemonic power (p. 11).

The aesthetic sublime that rises from LPA performances can positively help to imagine an independent modern state, rising from the hardship of domestic strife and foreign aggression, while the negative effect of the entanglement between aesthetics and politics is to consolidate the established power of the authoritarian regime. To deconstruct the aesthetic sublime utilized by the state, Wang Ban (2008) regards aesthetic experience in 20th century China as part of political mobilisation, asserting that “With glorious fanfares and passionate flourishes, the culture’s artistic and literary visions depict the individual who embarks on a revolutionary career. Through trials and errors, the initiate ascends to the lofty position of the subject of history” (p. 124). Employing a movie from the Cultural Revolution as a case, Wang suggests that

the sublime has been an aesthetic symbol governed by political ideology to serve a grand narrative and suppressive polity; therefore, aesthetic beauty related to politics needs to be debunked. The sublime “allied with politics are the aesthetic features that add flesh and blood to ideology aestheticised” (Wang, 1997, p. 126). Understood in this way, politics in the context of Wang Ban’s notion of the sublime is taking over the aesthetic business of building images, constructing identities, erecting symbolic structures, and creating an emotional ambience.

In LPA’s case, I place this sublime concept in the theoretical realm of power and landscape, simultaneously serving as a method of engagement and a determining feature for thinking about politics and aesthetics. The power of landscape through LPA links directly with a strong affective appeal to the audience’s unconscious. Perception of the sublime regime can be seen as a sphere of the bodily, and what can be perceived by the senses instead of rationality and cognition. This theoretical application of the sublime eventually led us to see how the centralised state rebrands *shanshui* to propel the viewing subject out of the imaginary realm and sublimate audiences into their symbolic discipline and order.

Utilising the sublime effect, the landscape associated with the sublime can turn a landscape-based production into a spectacle. Audiences observing the beauty and majesty of the landscape experience the sublime, which becomes part of a theatrical spectacle. The spectacle (films, art, theatre, Disneyland, fireworks, disasters even, etc.) also creates sublime moments through visual images, sounds, and dances that captivate our senses and overwhelm our intellect. Redmond (2017) notes that the spectacle works to commodify the viewing experience, creating a gazing pattern that is driven by the mechanics of the event moment, by the theme-park-ride aesthetic. Theatrically, the spectacle is ranked last in importance among the other components such as the plot, character, thought, diction, and music (Heller, 1982). In critical theory, scholars appropriate “spectacle” to denounce the modern media phenomena.

Debord (1992) was one of the initiators of the concept of the spectacle. His *The Society of the Spectacle* critiques contemporary consumer culture and commodity fetishism, dealing with issues such as class alienation, cultural homogenisation, and mass media. Magnusson and Zalloua (2016) highlight that

Spectacle robs citizens of their autonomy, transforming them into mere spectators, into docile bodies - depoliticised, alienated (from self and community), and passive individuals. We at once affirm the primacy of the visual (the “monopoly of appearance”, as Debord put it) (p. 5).

For Magnusson and Zalloua (2016), making an event a spectacle arguably naturalises it, depriving the event of its otherness and strangeness (since the event presents itself, at least initially, as an object of wonder, something that exceeds the observer’s horizon of expectations or intelligibility) (p. 6). In Magnusson and Zalloua’s understanding, the move “from event to spectacle” might be said to hinge on the move from curiosity (not spectacular) to mastery (spectacular show), from uncontrolled experiences to dominant and hegemonic sensations. Their opinion echoes with Siegfried Kracauer (1995), who conceptualised the spectacle of visual culture as “the mass ornament”.

The ratio that gives rise to the ornament (spectacle) is strong enough to invoke the mass and to expunge all life from the figures constituting it. It is the rational and empty form of the cult, devoid of any explicit meaning, that appears in the mass ornament (p. 84).

Thus, for Kracauer, as the visual culture spectacle assembles its constituent and component performers and spectators, it silences and disregards their personal, individual values and thereby only desires the good of the mass ornament. Henry (2006) underlines the nefarious pedagogical aim of the spectacle; he emphasises its role in the reproduction of social reality:

The main pedagogical function of the spectacle is to promote consent (though it has also functioned coercively), integrate populations into dominant systems of power, heighten fear, and operate as a mode of social reproduction largely through the educational force of the broader culture (p. 28).

In short, the notion of sublime and spectacle help the thesis to demonstrate the visual effects of LPA and articulate a much-needed critique of LPA's limits and favoured status.

1.4 Globalisation and Chineseness in the Globalised World

While Chineseness is fluid in geography, it is steered and distorted by politics. Therefore, Lin (2018) reminds us that when investigating Chineseness, it is important to understand what is happening in the political dimensions, whether at a macro, micro, national or regional level. Political agendas and motivations sway the authorisation of Chineseness, which is evident in all the locations. As a result, it is worth observing how Chineseness exerts its influence in the world.

Synchronous with the integration of China into global capitalism, the PRC's policies that direct cultural products have also played a significant part in the renegotiation of

Chineseness (Lin, 2018). Scholars of globalisation often say that “the global is local”, though an answer to how the local can also be the global is often lacking. “Chineseness can be both local and global” (He, 2012, p.549), and “is already the sign of a cross-cultural commodity fetish-ism” (Chu, 2014, p.28). “As the commodity form expands into new cultural contexts around the world”, Oakes (2000) notes, “capitalists have recognised the importance of appropriating local cultural practices and products into their repertoire of marketing images” (p.672). Assessing the impact of globalisation on Chinese culture, Wang (2004) advised that

If we face the challenge critically and try to develop our national culture in a broader international context, we will most probably highlight the Chinese national and cultural identity and make it known to the international community (p.13).

He (2012) revealed that the representation of Chineseness can be affected by globalisation independent of national ideology while still attracting strong support from the government, both institutionally and economically. Therefore, some kind of “conspiracy” can occur between culture, capital, and ideology, knitted into a complex network of ethnicity and nationalism (Song, 2006). China’s regional paradigm also claims to represent Chineseness in the utility of its national and global interests (He, 2012). Tim Oakes (2000) places Chineseness between local placeness and the international context:

Promoting Chineseness as a unique feature of regional culture serves to connect localities to broader networks of power that include the national scale of the PRC, the supranational scale of “Greater China”, and the global scale of transnational

capital. In certain local situations, claiming Chineseness has become an apt choice and a strategic move for acquiring resources and power (p.549).

According to Ang (2013), the absolute identity of Chineseness is reinforced, not diminished. In “From Modernity to Chineseness”, Zhang *et al.* (1994) are critical of Western-style modernity embraced by China that underwent several paradigm shifts from 1840 to 1990. Hence, through the impact of marketisation, globalisation, mass media, consumerism and the rise of the middle classes, China has experienced multitudinous social and cultural transformations. In response to this, a new model of knowledge has come into being, explaining what He (2012) considers the “exclusive” meaning of Chineseness “the new model of knowledge emphasising both cultural diversity and unique Chinese experience, universal values, and Chinese subjectivity” (pp. 548). However, Xu (1998) warns that “the nativist blueprint for Chineseness reflects a dangerous dream of a new cultural hegemony disguised as a struggle for cultural independence and counteraction against the old Western hegemony” (pp. 220). Chow (1998) suggests that:

Chineseness challenges the stereotypical representation of China against the systematic exclusiveness of many hegemonic Western practices. The ethnic supplement occurs as a struggle for access to representation while at the same time contesting the conventional simplicity and stereotyping of ethnic subjects as such... yet it exhibits unnecessary hostility and mistrust toward everything Western and an obsession with Chineseness (p.4).

The access problem is typical of what she calls “the logic of the wound”, which causes hostility and mistrust and the danger of invoking “Sinocentrism”. Chow refers

to modern and contemporary Chinese history threatened by Western imperialism; Chinese nationalism has asserted a pure and essential “Chineseness”.

In Chapter 8, this thesis addresses the impact of cultural and political globalisation, which focuses on trans-cultural cooperation between China and Vietnam. Giddens (1990) advocates that globalisation can be defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations, whereby more and more places across the world have been drawn into a global system, thus leading to ‘time-space compression’ ” (p.64). The cultural industries are no exception; they seek to maximise profit by seeking expansion in the global arena. However, censorship and governmental intervention in Asia are often unavoidable. For example, when China produces cultural products for international markets such as Vietnam, “the operations of such transnational networks and their political implications have to be taken into account” (Lin, 2018, p.16).

The central point of discord in theories of cultural globalisation is between homogenisation and heterogenisation (Appadurai, 1996). There is no lack of organisations and people who then start to value their own “tradition” and, in doing so, hope to reverse globalisation; this is “Deglobalisation” (Balsa-Barreiro, 2020). Meyer and Geschiere (1999) believe that this uniformisation places an accent on cultural differences through the “awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows, as well determined efforts affirming the old and constructing new boundaries” (pp.602). Hall and Rath (2006) highlight the relationship between localisation and globalisation. They state that a place branding that portrays a high quality of life and identity manifests in processes of reassertion of the local in response to the abundant changes brought by the global. Roland Robertson (1995) argues that the globalisation of culture is also the global glocalisation of culture, including the creation and interlinking of localisation.

Globalisation has entangled itself in a traditional realist challenge and its associated

principle of power in the name of national interest (Datta, 2012). Globalisation is a double-edged sword, not only making the Chinese government alert to cultural invasion from the West but also providing opportunities. When the open-door policy deepened in the 1990s, China began multiple discursive campaigns to bolster its socioeconomic transitions. Such campaigns included “Getting on track with the world” (與世界接軌) and “Creating a global brand” (打造國際品牌) for accelerating globalisation and raising mass consumption (Xiao and Li, 2015). New cultural performances act as reflexive representations of Chinese culture to the world and as a resistance to the dominant global media (Zhu, 2012). China has managed to build its cultural capital and pursue what Joseph Nye (2010) has termed soft power. Wang (2011) believes that this soft power highlights a need and motivation to connect with the global market, while China is also actively pursuing the improvement of its global image to spread influence across the globe.

Crane (2002) illuminated cultural globalisation models involving concepts in cultural and media imperialism which are seen to be leading toward a cultural homogenisation and cultural flows that function as a bi-directional stream hybridising cultures. Sparks (2016) notes that “the concept of soft power is not the only way in which the relationship between the economic, military, and cultural powers of a state can be considered; the concept of cultural imperialism considers the same issues” (p.27-28). Occasionally, it is suggested that the over-aggressive promotion of soft power could result in China being accused of cultural imperialism (Li, 2009, p.4). Some US journalists and scholars are keen to express their paranoia at the “rise of China” (Landler 2012; Friedberg 2012). Nye (2010a, 2010b, 2012) is absolute in his view that whatever challenges it may offer, China is not seriously challenging US soft power due to its internal authoritarian policies. However, Nye left a point hanging there without further thought: if China’s soft power is not competitive with the US, how about other countries in Europe, and South Asia, whose capability to resist Chinese soft power’s invasion is less assured.

Hesmondhalgh (1998) believes cultural imperialism is embedded in industrial practices. Disney's musicals are often labelled as new imperialism or cultural hegemony (Di Giovanni, 2016). Some scholars investigate the ubiquity of Disney's products and consumerism on a nationwide scale, along with cultural homogenisation (Wasko *et al.*, 2001), declining citizenship rights, faltering democracy (Giroux, 1999, pp. 87), and diminishing state sovereignty (Zukin, 1991, p. 230), related to the presumed alliance between state and capitalists (Salcedo, 2003; Foglesong, 1999). In referring to these practices, scholars have used different terms: "Disneyzone" (Sorkin, 1992), "Disneyfication" (Jonathan & Lauren, 2014; Warren, 1994), and "Disneyisation" (Bryman, 1999) to point out Disney's near universality and its overbearing presence in social and cultural landscapes. I mention this as LPA's transnational expansion is following in the footsteps of Disney by constructing theme parks and a theatre brand. Linking LPA with Disneyfication provides a springboard triggering a discussion about the Chinese version of cultural imperialism and its homogenisation, not just in terms of place branding but also in theatrical performing arts.

It is argued that China and the developing world are subject to US cultural imperialism (Sparks, 2015). China is very alert to the cultural invasion of Disney and other American companies; therefore, in Chinese academia, the USA is often described as a cultural thief or initiator of cultural hegemony imposing cultural values. Zhang (2007) states, "panda belongs to China, kungfu belongs to China, but the anime *Kung Fu Panda* does not belong to China". Indeed, Chinese elites often take action to resist this phenomenon by producing Chinese animations. For example, the Chinese cartoon film *Ne Zha*, which is based on a Chinese mythological figure, was released at the same time in China as *The Lion King* (Mendelson, 2019). *Ne Zha* was a phenomenal blockbuster, the box office revenues easily exceeding *The Lion King*'s in the Chinese cinema market, ranking it as the second-highest-grossing Chinese film

after *Wolf Warrior II*. Notably, on release in the UK and the USA, it was “the second-highest-grossing non-English language film of all time”.²¹

Globalisation has profoundly influenced the cultural industries; transnational performing art companies now actively participate in global cultural flows. As a tourism product, Zhang Yimou’s *Impression* series directly arises from the growing importance of Chinese culture as a new soft power and creative economy in global entertainment and tourism markets (Zhu, 2012). Keane (2011) states that the *Impression* series appeals to international consumers by using essential images that link the product with stereotypical images of Chinese culture, offering the lure of the exotic location. He Chengzhou (2012) criticizes Zhang Yimou’s *Impression* series production as “McTheatre”, a term first coined by Rebellato (2009) and developed from the term “McWorld” (Sine, 1999). He Chengzhou explains that “because all performances share not only the same score and script but also similar sets, costumes, and so on, which guarantee that all the productions are to a large extent identical; they are operated on similar principles” (pp. 559). Such McTheatre is criticised as detrimental to the art of performance by Rebellato (2009): “many of the usual virtues of theatre are diminished: its liveliness, the uniqueness of each performance, its immediacy, its ability to respond to place and time” (p.41).

LPA as McTheatre cannot be divorced from cultural imperialism as its theatrical form, and business model have become standardised. The concept and pattern have recently been propagated in South Asia as a glocalised production, and Chinese soft power. I will present this novel phenomenon in Chapter 8. Exploring Vietnameseness and Chineseness, I employ internationalness, “the state or condition of being international”, which is synonymous with internationality. In the Chinese context, internationalness (國際性) or international style (國際範) links with and is standardised by internationalisation. The environment in China is such that people

²¹ See: <http://english.entgroup.cn/boxoffice/cn/daily/?date=08%20/19%20/2019>

will seek and advocate an international standard, or internationalisation; it is considered a higher standard than the domestic. Consequently, many producers and artists adapt local cultural elements to meet modern Chinese people's tastes, but with features marketable in an international setting.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the theoretical foundations of the thesis I employ to investigate LPA. Themes of performing arts, state-minority relations, Chineseness, and globalisation widen the scope of the thesis. To deepen these themes with theoretical discourse, I apply “landscape and power” to demonstrate the power dynamics of Chineseness in a local, national, and global context. Additionally, cultural theories relating to the sublime will serve as an analytical tool to aid in interpreting LPA's cultural Chineseness enacted emotionally, aesthetically, and bodily. The interplay of theories and concepts leads me to generate original and solid theoretical positions. LPA is a complex phenomenon. Therefore, concatenating “power” and “landscape” as a theoretical anchor allows the research to open a broad investigation of LPA and touch on nationalism, political economy, cultural geography, and cultural diplomacy issues.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology employed in this research; it involves a combination of ethnographic research methods and textual (content) analysis. In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the first method that focuses on ethnography and demonstrate my engagement within the Chinese performing arts industries. The second section will present the method I utilised in the content analysis. In discussing both methods, this chapter will highlight the ethical issues encountered; furthermore, full ethics approval was sought and gained from The University of Liverpool.

2.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is defined by Willis and Trondman (2002) as “a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, which includes the writing up of the encounters involved” (pp. 394). According to O’Reilly (2005), the main methods of ethnographic research are participant observation and interviews. The most distinctive aspect of ethnography is fieldwork; this involves the researcher spending time in the field to observe, participate, and endeavour to understand ways of life from a local perspective. Madden (2010) has noted that “talking with people, being with people, and observing people are not divisible ethnographic actions; the total of all these actions creates participant observation in its broadest sense” (p.77).

Ethnography, as related to media production, links to a specific place and time, giving a perspective into the process of production (Ganti, 2002). This thesis utilises both observation and interviews as ethnographic methods of research. Kruger (2009) mentioned that “in order to understand the individual and group creativity, expression, and experience that lies at the heart of the performing arts, ethnography is a

particularly suitable tool, allowing us both to study and reach our own understandings while gathering those of the people involved and situating them within their broader social and cultural contexts” (p. 1). Given the complex nature of the fast-changing ecologies of the live theatre sector, including economic, cultural, and social factors as well as national and local policies, I have found what Holt (2010) calls “new research strategies” helpful when studying live performance. By taking “the idea of the concert as media experience” and capturing the “presence in the here and now”, ethnographically derived knowledge among audiences and producers becomes necessary for grounding theorisations of media and performance (Holt, 2010, p.256). I divide the ethnography in this research into two aspects: ethnography in the LPA professional industry and ethnography in the local place, i.e. Yangshuo, in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. I have done this because there are differences in interpretation between the creative team and the local grassroots populace.

Using my ethnographic approach, I collected data (offline and online) from the 16th of February 2018 to the 31st of March 2019. Table 1 and Table 2 below contain my interviews, including the number of research participants, the types of consent I obtained, and the gatekeepers who granted access to venues.

	China			UK
Time Frame	16 th of February 2018 - 31 st of March 2019			
Total Number of Participants	58			
Methods of Interview	Face to Face (Offline)			WeChat
Number of LPA insider interviewees	9			8
Number of Interviewees in Yangshuo	16 th of February - 29 th of March 2018			
	Direct Stakeholders	Peripheral Stakeholders	Non-stakeholders	
	11	20	10	

Table 1. Fieldwork Key Details and Schedule

Table 2 details the institutions or individuals who acted as gatekeepers to ensure the anonymity of individuals is preserved.

	China			
Cities	Yangshuo	Nanjing	Pingyao	Beijing
Timeline	16 th of February -29 th of Mar 2018	22 nd -24 th of March 2018	20 th -22 nd of Oct 2018	20 th -23 rd of Nov 2018
Gatekeepers	The Theatre of <i>Impression Liu Sanjie</i>	Reveries of the Porcelain Tower Theatre	Encore Pingyao Theatre	Dingsheng Cultural Investment Company
	Zhang Yimou Art School	The Local Restaurant		China Cultural Tourism Expo
	The Local Restaurants			
	Homestay			

Table 2. Gatekeepers and Time Schedule in China

2.1.1 Ethnography in the LPA Professional Industry

Hodkinson (2005) aptly suggests that being on the inside “may enhance the quality and effectiveness of qualitative interviews” (p.15). Therefore, it is worthwhile to mention my personal experience within the Chinese performing arts industry. Given my background, I have defined my role in this industry as: “In-between an insider and outsider”.

I trained in singing, acting, and choreography, ultimately gaining a bachelor’s degree in Musicology at the China West Normal University. While studying at the University,

I went to the Enshi Tujia Autonomous Region, which is populated by a significant ethnic minority, to record and experience their folk songs. Over the past ten years, I have watched around 20 different LPAs all over China. The first LPA I watched was *Xiyi Zhi Dali* (希夷之大理). This LPA is located in Dali, a touristic city with a diverse ethnic minority demographic. In 2012, I visited Yangshuo, a town city in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in China; that trip was for a long-anticipated LPA named *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS). I spoke with a native taxi driver on the way to the theatre; he informed me that his son performs in ILS, and his wife sells fast food outside the ILS theatre. The whole family earns a living directly or indirectly from ILS. In addition, locals like this family are not a few. It intrigued me very much.

Before starting my PhD, I had already gained experience and established multiple contacts as an insider in the LPA industry. A significant connection is the Shanshui Cultural Industry Company (SCIC), a dominant company producing LPA in China, directed by the founder of LPA, Mei Shuaiyuan. In addition, I was invited to be an adviser by Mr. Zhang Jianfeng, the performance director of an LPA named *Dreaming in Hometown* (夢裏老家), staged in Wuyuan, Jiangxi province. I participated in the final amendments of this performance, composing a review titled “Your Iron Heart Will Melt”, which was published on the theatre’s official website²². In addition, I was invited to review another LPA project: *The Love Story of a Woodman and a Fairy Fox*. The review article I composed was published on the official website²³.

I have attended many conferences in China relating to the cultural tourism industry; I also joined an online WeChat platform titled: “The Chinese Cultural Tourism Industry Micro-Summit”. This platform provides networking opportunities for over 300 industry professionals from the cultural tourism field. My network in the field of the arts has granted me access to some of the senior practitioners in the LPA industry,

²² Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/OoGGbDp4NqIUaDQiEMXFsg>

²³ Available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/xBniG12ZDjTb4jMVQUliMw>

such as Mei Shuaiyuan (the founder of LPA), Mei Hong (a renowned producer in the LPA industry), Zhang Xiao (the music director of SCIC), Lili (the choreography director of SCIC), Jiang Ying (a board member of SCIC), and numerous other power brokers in the field. The WeChat platform has allowed me continual access to a plethora of industry information and people. For example, the interviews with Mei Shuaiyuan were only possible as I was granted special access to undertake this research. He stated: I do not usually accept academic interviews; however, I will make an exception for you.

Through my involvement within the LPA industry, I have built up dependable sources to furnish a deeper and more detailed investigation. Thus, I could interpret the art content of LPA and furnish a textual analysis as an industry professional and audience member. Hodkinson (2005) aptly suggests that being on the inside “may enhance the quality and effectiveness of qualitative interviews” (p.15). Having insider status helped promote a calm, welcoming interview environment that heightened the interviewees’ willingness to share information they would have otherwise been reluctant to disclose to outsiders. Mackerras (2011) indicates that in terms of a tourism performance study, it can be challenging to differentiate between non-tourists and tourists in an audience without doing surveys. However, through understanding the nature of LPA as an insider and directly inquiring with my associate Wang Jiaxian, the manager in ILS, I discovered that 100% of the audiences of ILS are tourists.

Given that I have predominantly been resident in the UK since this PhD was conceived in April 2016, the following question arises: am I qualified enough to be an industry insider? The answer is debatable as it cannot be a simple yes or a no. A long-term engagement in the field as an insider is not necessarily a qualification for a bird’s-eye view of the industry. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) affirmed that there are both benefits and drawbacks to be considered when referencing the insider versus outsider status of the researcher. On the one hand, an insider assessment may present issues

concerned with the undue sway of the researcher's perspective; on the other hand, being an outsider does not guarantee immunity to the wiles of a personal perspective. Adler (1987) points out that researchers who examine issues from every angle suggest that in this "ultimate existential dual role", they might struggle with conflicting roles if they find themselves caught between "loyalty tugs" and "behavioural claims" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 70). Asselin (2003) points out that role confusion can abound as the researcher responds to participants or analyses the data from a perspective other than the one of the researcher. Asselin further draws attention to the fact that role confusion can happen in a study with an increased risk factor the more familiar the researcher is with either the participants or the research setting. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) conclude that "as a qualitative researcher, they do not think being an insider makes them a better or worse researcher: it just makes a different type of researcher" (pp. 56).

Anthropologists have written about the importance of "making the familiar strange" (Mannay, 2010), which is, somewhat paradoxically, a dissociation beyond physical distance. Residing in the UK has given me a physical distance from the LPA industry, leaving the space to operate between being an outsider and an insider. I have referred in the acknowledgements to my associates in the industry; therefore, to what extent can I be sure that my work has the necessary critical distance? What safeguards ensure my assessment of LPA lacks bias from my proximity to the industry? In designing this methodology and diligently employing a deep understanding of the theories presented by ethnographers, I have placed myself in a unique and impartial position. There is a concern that the responses I gain via interview will have elements of state propaganda to a greater or lesser degree. Mindfulness of my academic role and responsibility equipped with my critical thinking can ensure a critical distance. Furthermore, treating the raw data to contemporary theory serve as bulwarks against being swayed too closely by the perspectives of state propaganda or, indeed, the industry elites.

I integrated WeChat into the methodology to enhance the ethnographic reach of the research. WeChat has been approved as a reliable platform for undertaking research of this nature by The University of Liverpool Ethics Governance. WeChat is a Chinese online social platform that has offered me a privileged gaze into this industry and has permitted me to engage with contacts who work in this area. I not only discuss with them, but I can also observe what they have posted on the Moments function of WeChat (a real-time update equivalent to posts on Facebook). The interviewees often post their work-related lives and opinions about LPA, delivering valuable news related to the cultural and tourist industries. Kuang (2018) notes that all the user's WeChat friends can access information from a WeChat user that is posted on WeChat Moments. Hence, it is a one-to-many information diffusion. The WeChat Moments function is primarily private so that only the user who has accepted a friend request from another user can see the moments they have posted. Given the physical and geographical distance between myself and China, WeChat has been instrumental in providing updates and further developments on recent events within the industry.

Since many interviewees and contacts are located in China, WeChat was an invaluable tool for conducting online interviews via instant messaging, voice calls and the ability to set up private chat groups with relevant individuals. It is also noteworthy that WeChat users can register an official account which enables them to push feeds to subscribers and interact with them. For example, SCIC has its official account for public relations. Many journalists reporting on the performing arts and cultural tourism have their own WeChat accounts. I receive updates regarding events and news through their accounts on WeChat.

It is stated that in-depth interviews seek to gain an understanding of social phenomena via the opinions, thoughts, and experiences of individuals employed in a certain field

or engaged in an issue of interest (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This is why I chose to conduct interviews as insights gained this way are invaluable. Given that this thesis researches the constructed Chineseness and cultural nationalism in LPA, nationalistic elements are not necessarily constantly prevalent in the drama's script or the performance's content on the stage. We must never neglect what the artistic creators say off the stage, as what they express is also a part of LPA's narrative. Interviews with the LPA industry insiders are one of the most effective methods driving me to pursue the answers to this research's questions.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured and informal. Montano (2013) suggests that "the more informal the interview, the more relaxed the interviewee, and thus, the greater the potential for discussion of themes that would not be forthcoming during a formal structured style of interview" (pp.118). A review of the available literature drew me to Saturation Sampling as a method. In Saturation Sampling, the sample is deemed sufficiently large when additional interviews yield only small additions in terms of new information. Likewise, Teeter *et al.* (2016) observe in their discussions on the appropriate sample size for semi-structured interviews that the range is from a handful to less than 20. For this reason, the interviews targeted 17 professionals in the LPA industry, such as the initiator Mei Shuaiyuan, the artists and managers, media experts, and other practitioners of LPA. After interpreting and collating the data, I selected 13 interviews to be used in this research.

I conducted offline and online interviews using my network within the LPA industry. Interviews online have characteristics which face-to-face interviews do not have; however, they serve more as a supplement; they cannot substitute for face-to-face interviews. Stewart and Williams (2005) consider online interviews to be a separate research approach. In this thesis, I chose to develop the ideas of Stewart and Williams by using the online interviews as a separate research method and as an enhancement of the face-to-face interviews. Salmons (2014) highlights that "an online interview is

an online research method conducted using computer-mediated communication” (p.1). In online interviews, researchers may decide on a deliberate (or “non-random”) pool of respondents using individuals who provide insight on a theme (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). There are many reasons why online interviews are an appropriate and valuable methodological tool in this research, “the use of online interviews as opposed to onsite interviews provides the researcher with opportunities to carry out interviews with a very geographically dispersed population”²⁴(O’Connor, 2019, p. 2; Hanna, 2012). In asynchronous interviews, the time lag can also be beneficial, giving researchers more time to develop follow-up questions (Bolderston, 2012). Researchers can study the chat history and use the interviewees’ responses to compose the subsequent questions (Salmons, 2010).

There are, however, possible drawbacks to online interviews. Scholars such as Mann and Stewart (2005) question how effective they are compared with face-to-face interviews. For example, online interviews may make it hard to build a good rapport and trust between researcher and participant in a digitally mediated research relationship. I found the issue of trust and rapport often did not apply to my research due to my previous industrial experience. Most of the interviewees interviewed through WeChat had professional contact with me before my PhD study. Hence, conducting online interviews was not a significant challenge; it proved to be a very efficient means of gaining information.

I questioned some interviewees from the top levels of the LPA Industry face to face, in situ; furthermore, they agreed to be contacted later through WeChat if necessary. A prominent advantage of employing WeChat as an interview medium is that interviewees can answer my questions at leisure. For example, I asked Min Rui, who has directed many LPAs (including the Vietnamese LPA *Hoi An Memories*), a lengthy and detailed question through WeChat. After two days, he responded: “I am busy

²⁴ Available at: <http://www.restore.ac.uk/orm/interviews/intprint3.pdf>

these days; can I answer this question in a few days?” On WeChat, people can communicate in four media formats: text message, voice message, video call, and voice call. The four means of communication allow interviews to conform to the subjects’ needs, and it helps them feel more comfortable with the format. As an automated function, data is preserved on WeChat; however, I take screenshots and file them in case of data loss and for increased data security. Moreover, the interviewee consent form can be dispatched through WeChat, and the interviewees sign and return it at leisure. All documents relating to the ethics approval have been included in the appendix.

I was invited by Zhang Xiao, the chief music director in SCIC, to advise on SCIC’s LPA production in Nanjing named *Reveries of the Porcelain Tower*. It was here that I had the chance to conduct a face-to-face interview with Mei Shuaiyuan. Zhang Rensheng, the scriptwriter, accepted my interview in Nanjing as he supervised the LPA. Other key personnel were interviewed face to face in Pingyao, and Beijing when I attended industry conferences.

The interviews with the LPA industry leaders, both offline and online, included five types of questions: (1) General questions regarding the cultural content of LPA, especially concerning the case studies of ILS and *Hoi An Memories*. (2) Questions about the assertion that LPA is a Chinese Invention. (3) Questions regarding promotional efforts and cooperation with other companies and agents in commodifying and marketing LPA. (4) Questions about the elites’ views on various aspects of the LPA industry. For example, how do they engage with the government agenda and combine capital with cultural policy to produce and develop LPA in China? (5) Questions about how the Chinese production team collaborates with Vietnamese artists and capital to make their Vietnamese LPA.

Generally, the interviews with the members of the LPA industry ran smoothly;

however, there were moments when difficulties arose that hindered progress. There was an instance where an interviewee requested that I do not publish the information that he/she had provided. The information conveyed was sensitive; the interviewee stated, “this can only stay in the chat, do not put it in the research”. In cases like this, the safeguards of the ethics procedures were invoked and offered the interviewee guaranteed protection. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are in Appendix 1 and 2.

2.1.2 Ethnography in One Particular Locality

In addition to interviewing the production team, I surveyed the local grass-root industries. Ethnography was applied in Yangshuo in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, to investigate how ILS operated in the local area. I examined its use as a cultural brand for marketing the region, how the local markets perform, and how the locals perceive this branding. I chose to focus research efforts on Yangshuo as the first LPA, ILS, resides in this cultural region. In addition, the ongoing successes of ILS, its growth, revenue, and development provide a structural role model for the LPA industry. There is no doubt that ILS’s prominence to Yangshuo and China’s LPA cultural tourism industry is of great significance to the local population and the local district. Some LPA insiders believe that ILS is outstanding in their field as it initiated the development of the cultural tourism industry.

Through my professional experiences in this industry, I understood that the local populace had been quite resistant and dissatisfied with the presented content when ILS was created. Likewise, many audiences of tourists have also experienced this dissatisfaction after witnessing performances. Nevertheless, tickets are sold night after night. I found this astonishing and raised the following question: why does the content of ILS cause such controversy? Furthermore, how is ILS such a commercial success? The marketing strategy is undoubtedly the “chief culprit”. This extraordinarily successful marketing strategy was initially developed simultaneously with ILS and

subsequently became the standard marketing format for LPA in general. I will delve further into these themes in Chapter 6.

Theatre manager Wang Jiaxian is one of my associates, and initially, Wang was introduced to me by Cui Junchao, the marketing manager of the SCIC. Wang Jiaxian was quite pleased to offer support when I conducted the field study in Yangshuo. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest, “knowing who has the power to open up access means they are considered by others to have the authority to grant access, which is an important sociological insight” (p. 56). Doing ethnographic fieldwork with my professional and social network saved an abundance of time as I did not need to seek approval from top executives via slow bureaucratic channels. Those gatekeepers themselves provided me with direct access to the ILS theatre. Wang Jiaxian, generously offered VIP tickets, allowing me to watch ILS five times during the fieldwork.

Van Mannen (1988) proposes that “fieldworkers will make the psychological transference from ‘they’ to ‘we’” (p. 36). Though the fieldwork was conducted in my home country, China is vast with considerable cultural and ethnic diversity. I often question whether I am qualified to call myself “we” in Yangshuo, though I have visited the place multiple times since 2012. Yangshuo is a commercialised tourist locality, where Mandarin is spoken with a distinctly southern accent, but I found no difficulty communicating with them. The ethnic minorities are “Hanised”; thus, I found nothing uncomfortable culturally. While conducting the fieldwork, I stayed in Yangshuo over a month (from the 16th of February to the 29th of March 2018) to perform observations and interviews. To gain experience with the local ethnic populace, I opted to stay at various homestays (民宿) similar to Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the UK. One of the homestays I resided at was one hundred meters from the ILS theatre. The hosts knew I had come to do research; consequently, they kindly invited their associates to dinner as participants in my group interviews.

2.1.2.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the primary methods that I applied when examining the local scene related to ILS. Seale supposed (2004) that

Participant observation, ethnography, and fieldwork are all used interchangeably...they can all mean spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing, thinking, and saying. It is designed to see how they understand their world (p. 206).

Zhu (2016) uses several tourism performances as case studies when conducting an ethnographic observation in Lijiang, which provides a paradigm for my research. Through participant observation of local experiences and attitudes toward tourism development in Lijiang, Zhu was able to interpret the data from the perspectives of the local host and global tourists by attending various cultural performances. Zhu's research approach gave me proved a great inspiration, and it was valuable in developing my core methodology.

Considering the overlap between applying ethnography to the production level and its local divisions, it is worth noting that a distinction can be formulated between insider ethnography and participant observation. Montano (2013) indicates that an insider can, on occasion, utilise an ethnographic methodology that is not of a participatory nature, while an outsider can engage in participant observation within the limits of the method. On the one hand, participating in many LPA manufacturing operations as an art consultant before my PhD journey makes me an insider. On the other hand, I took the role of an outsider when I "inhabited" Yangshuo and the ILS theatre to gather information for content analysis. Furthermore, I observed the industries generated by ILS in the region. I observed and recorded the characteristic marketing strategy and

the working lives of the local people. I viewed ILS as a community social practice that is also a commercial and cultural event; it has a significant role in local people's daily lives. The Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form for Observation in the ILS theatre are attached in Appendix 3 and 4.

2.1.2.2 Interviews in the locality

The interviews, coupled with observation of the local tourist industry, and people, provide the evidence for the essential question concerning how local people engage their local brand by performing, marketing, and their perception of ILS.

For the local fieldwork, I targeted the local people whom I had categorised previously as direct stakeholders, peripheral stakeholders (Jones *et al.*, 2015), and non-stakeholders. The direct stakeholders were the employees of ILS; these included performers, managers, and the staff working in the Zhang Yimou Arts School. The interviewee category of peripheral stakeholders contains persons further removed from the performance but who indirectly benefit from ILS; the category contains restaurateurs, travel agents, hotels, street stalls, and taxi drivers. The final category of non-stakeholders are the people who are not in the ILS-related industries; they are the residents who do not benefit, whether directly or indirectly. I chose to split the interviews into these three categories as I desired to receive a complete record from various social perspectives. However, it is worth being aware that ILS as a place branding has contributed significantly to Yangshuo in terms of magnifying Yangshuo's reputation, economy, employment, and cultural atmosphere. In this sense, people doing business are also potential stakeholders in many ways.

As displayed in Table 3 below, there were 41 interviewees involved in this process. The interviews lasted from 10 minutes to over 1 hour, depending on the interviewees' willingness to share their experience and knowledge. After coding, 17 interviewees' responses were considered valuable and selected for use in this research. The

interviewees in Yangshuo were selected via three approaches: personal contact, random sampling, and a snowball sampling technique (Bryman and Bell, 2011). These approaches are well suited to Yangshuo town and the industries generated by ILS.

Time Frame	The 16th of February 2018 -16 th of March 2018 25 th of March - 29 th of March 2018		
Number of Interviewees in Yangshuo	Direct Stakeholders 11	Peripheral Stakeholders 20	Non- Stakeholders 10

Table 3. Fieldwork Key Details and Schedule in Yangshuo

The questions for the local interviews in Yangshuo were: (1) Questions to the theatre management regarding statistics, marketing strategy, and promotional efforts, especially regarding the cooperation with other private businesses such as travel agents, hoteliers, and restaurateurs in commodifying and marketing this landscape spectacle. (2) Questions about the background of the Zhang Yimou Arts School (a school established to train performers for ILS). Questions also specifically focus on the performers’ cultivation, training, and operational conditions. (3) Questions to the direct and peripheral stakeholders regarding the benefits they gain from ILS. These probe how significant the performance is to local people culturally and financially and what motivates them to become a stakeholder. (4) Questions to local interviewees focusing on how they perceive ILS as a local brand in terms of likability, content, authenticity, and cultural representation.

However, care must be taken when interviewing theatre staff. I interviewed a security guard accompanied by the manager Wang Jiaxian. In the ILS theatre, he was too shy or nervous about presenting reasonable answers. Wang then reprimanded him, “you do not have other business to do apart from working in the theatre? You have an orchard to manage, right? Just tell the truth”. Wang Jiaxian also requested that three

performers take part in my interviews. However, the tone of their replies made me suspicious that they were answering diplomatically. A portion of participants, such as a friend of Wang Jiaxian, who was doing the business as a tourist agent, answered my questions about the audience's satisfaction positively, without confessing the facts about the audiences' dissatisfaction. This instance suggests that having access through and with a gatekeeper is a double-edged sword, a phenomenon mentioned by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Fetterman (2010),

Though gatekeepers may provide an initial connection through which more connections can be made, it happens that in some cases the gatekeepers can be more concerned with the representation of the communities, causing problems for the ethnographer.

Therefore, I ceased conducting interviews in the theatre with the manager's assistance, preferring to select and interview unassisted outside the theatre. I then began interviewing the local people who work in the industries ILS generated. I strove to engage with people and gain their trust by consuming the goods or food they were selling on the streets or in restaurants and stores. This method was of mutual benefit. Interviews in the field flowed smoothly; however, there were some instances where this method failed to breach the resistance some locals had. Those potential participants ignored my requests for interviews. I recall a person who was a habitual loafer sitting on the street in the town. At the beginning of the interview, he was engaged and trying to seek a profit from me by saying: "I can sell you the ticket of ILS." However, discovering my role as a researcher, he became upset and stated, "it is a bad show; I cannot get a beneficial share!" It was an isolated occurrence, and I gained ample material from other sellers close to the theatre. Considering the impecunious status of many, I understand that their primary instinct was to concentrate on earning enough income to provide for themselves and their families.

A further impediment I encountered was due to some of the local people's varying levels of education; their ability to express themselves was sometimes limited. For example, terms with a distinct academic meaning, such as "place branding", could confuse. In such instances, I had to re-phrase or elucidate precisely what I was enquiring about to avoid misleading data sets. Interviewees were assured of their anonymity in advance. Several people were apprehensive about giving identifiable details and expressed worries about their privacy, asserting, "I can cooperate, but no personal information like contact detail or name will be given." I obtained full formal consent (see Appendix 2) from each interviewee before conducting the interviews.

2.2 Textual Analysis

The concept of "open texts" (Eco, 1984) proposes that literary texts are open to later interpretations which can further instigate a variety of other works. It has become a central notion for literary critics since the 1970s. Instead of being obsessed with whether a text is faithful to its predecessor, critics are primarily concerned with how future texts inform and reflect the socio-political, cultural, technological, and aesthetical changes, and the interactions among them.

There are three LPA employed as case studies, which respectively are: ILS, *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*, and *Hoi An Memories*. They represent and bear witness to the development of LPA from one locality as it grew to a national and ultimately an international phenomenon. ILS, in Yangshuo, represents local branding; *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou* performed for the G20 Summit, represents both local and national branding; *Hoi An Memories* signifies the first LPA franchised to a foreign country. In evaluating these LPA and the different elements they have demonstrated, I also discuss broader stylistic issues within LPA. Engaging with these inter-objective

comparative materials, it is possible to understand LPA as a trend at a particular time and relate it to its political-cultural field. However, only relying on content analysis without enriching this with interviews would be too subjective and risk misinterpreting the artists' or creators' intention. Therefore, textual analysis in this research is amalgamated with interviews with the LPA artists.

Alter (1981) states that a semiotic approach to theatre as an immersive artistic experience simultaneously gives two categories of signs to its two modes of expression: text and performance (pp. 113). Considered as a text, it is a series of verbal signs generally being in the form of plays, which are linguistic but also literary as well as cultural. As a performance, it offers a plethora of indications which, along with words, include body language, costumes, sets, lights, colours, props, and intonations, each belonging to a semiotic system. These are summarised as staging signs involving common theatrical and cultural codes (Alter, 1981). In China, a socialist state governed by a one-party ideology, the song and dance gala (歌舞晚會) has always been utilised by the government to present national solidarity and harmony and to eulogise the party's achievements. Therefore, textual analysis of Chinese performing arts, as encouraged by the official government, is often focused on the content analysis of the song, choreography, or the concept of the performance. At the same time, the lyrics, which may incorporate propaganda, are a focal point. The musical elements presented in these three cases are one of the key points I will be subjected to analysis.

The content analysis of ILS elucidates how local cultural placeness, along with the historic legend Liu Sanjie has been re-constructed in ILS to reflect the state's political contemporaneity. Furthermore, I analyse how Zhang Yimou's artistic imprint is presented within the show and how Han elites created this traditional cultural heritage production to cater to modern tastes. I categorise the textual content into both visual and audio content. For the visual aspect, I will analyse the stagecraft, choreography,

and so forth. For the audio aspect, I will present some background music samples, songs, and lyrics for analysis. These primarily demonstrate how ethnic music traditions are utilised, manufactured, and developed by Han Chinese contemporary musicians in ILS.

For the second case study, *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*, I will base my analysis on a video accessed on YouTube. I chose this LPA as a case study since this was the first LPA to be manufactured as a Chinese national branding in an international setting when China hosted the G20 Summit. *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou* is a gala concert that has a mixed format, comprising several forms of performing art such as symphony orchestra, chorus, solo singing, choreographed dance, traditional Chinese opera, and ballet. By analysing the musical programme, I endeavour to illuminate how local cultural placeness, Chineseness, and internationalness have been blended to represent this Chinese brand in an international milieu.

The Vietnamese LPA, *Hoi An Memories*, characterises LPA's development in the transnational dimension; it will be the last case study I analyse in terms of textual analysis. *Hoi An Memories* is a glocalised LPA production developed in accord with LPA's standardised format. Chineseness and Vietnameseness as cultural contents will be discussed in detail. Interviews with the Chinese production team compound the content analysis. I consider how internationality is exploited by Chinese artists when making a foreign LPA within the context of transnational cooperation. The textual analysis of *Hoi An Memories* will be based on WeChat interviews with the Chinese artists and combined with an analysis of the video, and script, provided by the SCIC. Authorisation for employing the video is displayed in Appendix 5.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research methods I have applied when conducting this research: ethnography and textual analysis. The ethnography focuses on two areas: the interviews of the top production-level personnel in the LPA industry in China, and an ethnographic study in one locality, Yangshuo, in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. This division permits me to look at this industry at both the top and the grassroots level. My direct, intense, and focused participation within the industry gives me a robust basis for research and analysis. Being an art consultant in this industry has inspired and developed my ethnographic research in many ways, including dissolving boundaries, generating theories, and directing me toward exploring academic territories. Additionally, I am conscious of the requirement to maintain a critical distance, whether my role is as an insider or an outsider. Being a responsible and neutral academic researcher, I engage with theories and provide a rigorous critique, analysis, and assessment throughout the writing of the thesis. The approach helps me recognise the methodology's advantages, disadvantages, and possibilities through ongoing reflexivity.

Chapter 3

Restaging the Landscape Painting: LPA's Theatrical Artistry

Since the early 20th century, China has embraced Western-style theatrical forms, which have become mainstream. Though Chinese theatre has exerted slight influence in the West, the impact of Western theatre on China has been highly significant; thus, modern Chinese drama owes a great deal to European varieties (Mackerras, 1975). Sun (2009) states that Western drama is regarded in China as more progressive than traditional Chinese opera, which is perceived as a historic relic. Therefore, Western performing art forms were adapted into contemporary Chinese theatre by interweaving Chinese and Western performing cultures (He, 2011). For example, the song-drama (歌劇) appeared in 1919, and it is officially called “Chinese New Opera” - a Western opera form which the Chinese have grafted onto their own culture and refer to as “Narrating Chinese Culture in a Western Way”²⁵. The early twentieth century also saw the beginnings of spoken drama, termed *huaju* in Chinese, imported from the West through Japan (Mackerras, 2005). Even the revolutionary plays (樣板戲) of the CCP show a Western influence to a marked degree (Mackerras, 1975). Likewise, dance drama (舞劇) is an imported art that began to take shape in China during the 1930s. It eventually became an independent and complete Chinese national dance form. The items I have introduced above are named the “newly written historical dramas” (新編歷史劇) (Liu, 2016).

²⁵ See the news about Chinese new opera *Marco Polo*, available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ca75-0Qsphas5RFp9I7KEg>

After the Cultural Revolution, the theatre was not as politically constrained as it had been, although a degree of censorship remained (Mackerras, 2005). The forms of Chinese performing arts were allowed to enter a diversified development, unlike the singular format of revolutionary plays contemporary with the Cultural Revolution. Since the 1980s, historical, mythological, folk literature, ethnic minority, and contemporary themes have been considered suitable subjects for theatrical productions (Gantner, 1982). In the 1990s, when nationalism began replacing Marxism/Leninism in ideological terms, the authorities unsurprisingly desired to see Chinese identity revived through traditional culture in this opening-up policy modern era. Mackerras (2005) states that performing arts can represent the Chinese people, the state, or both. Currently, the theatrical elites are making Chinese stage works based on Western theatrical production techniques while rediscovering Chinese cultural elements with which to characterise the nation.

Since *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS) in 2003, LPA has burgeoned as an art form that appeals to a wide range of audiences. Its production patterns are shaped by socioeconomic trends, artistic innovations, the development of the mass tourism market, and developments in stage technology. The LPA designers introduce Western theatrical technologies while retaining what they consider to be the quintessential LPA mountain water (*shanshui*) aesthetic. LPA productions occur in many of China's most iconic tourist spots and in a special kind of mountain water theatre (山水劇場). State landscape policies are not just articulated through the official discourse and organisers' claims; they are there in the visual components of the scenes themselves, which need to be fully addressed and positioned as an art or theatrical form. Landscape forms the heart of LPA as a performing art genre where the spectacularisation of the landscape and the visuality of assembled bodies are employed to tremendous effect. This chapter explores how LPA is defined and how LPA developed in terms of theatrical style, cultural themes, and technology, forming LPA's theatrical Chineseness. At last, by engaging with the concept of the "spectacle", I will dissect the genre while voicing

the broader implications and significance of LPA as a theatrical form.

3.1 Defining LPA: Landscape, Generation, and Theatrical Form

In defining LPA, Mei Shuaiyuan stated: “since I am the founder of LPA, I am the most qualified person to define LPA” (Personal Communication, 03/23/2018). He then goes on to define LPA in relation to his theory: the place, the culture, and the people, which translates as the mountain, the water, and the people (此山 此水 此人).

It needs to be based on the place, the culture, and the people. The People here more often imply a cultural context and cultural humanity. Folk customs, emotion, art, and a state of life in their locality all belong to the scope of the people, so not any sort of outdoor performance can be regarded as an LPA. *Shaolin Zen Musical Ceremony* is a typical case representing our core concept because the Shaolin Temple is the sacred cradle of the Zen religion. It is equivalent to, you can imagine, Jews performing in front of the Wailing Wall, which is a sacred place for them. It can be “the place, the culture, and the people”. The landscape, the culture, and the people are all rooted in this land rather than being moved here.

Mei Shuaiyuan then theorises about the link between the landscape, people, and culture by linking with the reality of China’s cultural diversity.

Why are the Zhuang ethnic minority people’s eyes sunken? In

South China, the sun is intense; therefore, part of their eyebrows needs to stand out like shells to cover their eyes. Their appearance embodies their local ecological environment, but culture does so even more as it germinates in specific environments, so it has local variations. China has many cultural environments, as it is a big country with grasslands, deserts, and central plains. I regard the fruits of this land as materials for LPA. We pick these fruits, repackage them, and then place them back into the landscape to integrate them into nature. With LPA, nature does half, and humans do half. In ILS, the landscape is there during the day, but at night, it is illuminated and becomes a landscape theatre (Personal Communication, 03/23/2018).

From his perspective, “the place, the culture, and the people” use local people to perform their own culture within their local landscape. However, this is not strictly the case as Mei has created a historical LPA: *The Burning of the Imperial Palace*. It is housed in a newly built theme park called the New Imperial Palace, replicating the Imperial Palace in Beijing. Furthermore, the location of this LPA Imperial Palace is in Hengdian, Zhejiang province, not Beijing. I raised this point to Mei as it seems to conflict with his principle of the place, the culture, and the people; he replied:

I differentiate LPA in this way: *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* is not technically LPA; it is LPA-to-be. This sort of performing art has its value, though it just copies the old Imperial Palace in Beijing. If this performance plays among the original ruins in Beijing, then it is precious. But I cannot do this as it is a cultural relic, so nobody can do anything there.

Aesthetically speaking, genuine LPA has no more than ten productions.

I was intrigued by his claim that “genuine LPA has no more than ten productions”. Factually, Mei’s LPA currently totals over twenty. So I enquired about the definition of a genuine LPA:

Some of my works are genuine LPA, which we have just defined. ILS is a genuine LPA; its stage is the actual river, the backdrop is a real mountain, and there is no discernable stage. Another type of landscape performance performs on an observable stage built among the natural landscape. Some places have not got the natural assets ILS has, so we put a designed stage permanently in nature. This stage typically applies many feats of mechanical engineering. *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire* is one such example of an LPA; its fixed central stage rotates, the natural landscape serving as a backdrop.

“Genuine LPA” involves locals performing their culture while the props are discreetly blended in nature; there are minimal theatrical technologies. ILS is a classic example (Figure 1).



Figure 1: ILS with the river as a stage

In Mei Shuaiyuan’s opinion, there is an essential difference between “nature as a stage” and “a stage built in nature”. Figures 2 and 3 below, which show the stage of *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire*, illustrate this difference.



Figure 2: The mechanical stage of *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire* (daytime)



Figure 3: *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire* (evening)

To summarise, to manifest “the place, the culture, and the people”, LPA must employ locals to perform their culture. Additionally, theatres must utilise the minimum number of theatrical constructions to limit the impact on the natural environment. Based on this definition, I will next review how LPA has evolved through different generations as a theatrical form, constructing a narrative of theatrical Chineseness in the globalised era.

3.1.1 Landscape *Xieyi* Theatre

With the first generation of LPA, Zhang Yimou, Wang Chaoge and Mei Shuaiyuan worked together to produce a *xieyi*²⁶ style of LPA as a cultural Chineseness; this is LPA’s original form. The *xieyi* style of LPA, as developed by the *Impression* series, portrays the local culture abstractly with no discernable storyline. Mei Shuaiyuan reinforces this abstractness of *xieyi* ideology in the first generation of LPA:

²⁶ *Xieyi* is a concept of Chinese traditional painting. It is also often called *xieyi* splash-ink which is to paint unrealistically. *Xieyi* in the theatrical context is equivalent to abstract, imagistic or suggestive (Quah, 2004).

It is represented by *Impression Liu Sanjie* and *Shaolin Zen Music Ritual*; it displays local culture and customs within the natural landscape in a *xieyi* way without narrative or storytelling (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

It is a performance of local culture's symbolisation that seeks to give an "impression". It relies on visual and auditory encounters to convey a poetic flavour. Li (2003) states that Zhang Yimou intended to present it more poetically, engineering it to acquire a sense of *xieyi*. Zhou (2017) has stated:

In the *Impression* series, the director (Zhang Yimou) has found an appropriate platform for the creative treatment of *xieyi*. The very brand "Impression" suggests its poetic and sporadic nature, its affinities with lyric verse. Zhang's live landscape performances utilise *xieyi* as a major principle in terms of the mountain-water, the general mood, and the blending of subjective and objective (pp. 96-97).

The director Wang Chaoge gives a similar account:

In the *Impression* series, we seek a sense of *xieyi*, like Chinese mountain-water painting. One brushstroke is a mountain, one brushstroke is water, and one brushstroke is people. There is no plot or dramatic conflict. It is just singing and dancing displayed in the landscape.²⁷ *Impression* series is *xieyi*. It follows the abstract style using the landscape and local cultural symbolism; we do not dig into the culture profoundly,

²⁷ See the interview of Wang Chaoge, available at: <http://www.hqrw.com.cn/2013/0315/3638.shtml>

so we do not make it in detail.²⁸ In the landscape, we explore the relationship between humans and nature.²⁹

Wang echoes Mei Shuaiyuan's notion of "The place, the culture, and the people" in the "landscape" (*shanshui*). The newly declared form of theatre has certain implications as it connects with Chinese cultural contexts, philosophy, mountain-water painting, and, ultimately, cultural nationalism. Furthermore, Han (1978) notes that while Chinese landscape painting may not faithfully reproduce real images, it is based on real impressions (p. 19). It is necessary to clarify that *xieyi* as a concept within traditional Chinese painting is not a new application in theatre productions manifesting Chineseness. Quah (2004) points out that *xieyi* as a style of drama was formed during the beginning of the 20th century. Furthermore, after the Cultural Revolution, Chinese artist Gao Xingjian blended *xieyi* with Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* by using the painted face masks of Peking Opera as opposed to a Western, realistic style performance

3.1.2 Landscape Musical

The second generation of LPA has been gradually developing since 2009, when the first landscape musical, *The Love Story of a Woodman and a Fairy Fox*, was launched. This performance has a well-defined story in a spectacular setting and differs significantly from the first generation's *xieyi* style. Mei Shuaiyuan pointed out the following:

²⁸ See the interview of Wang Chaoge, available at: <http://ent.sina.com.cn/j/2013-02-19/11503859300.shtml>

²⁹ See the interview of Wang Chaoge, available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4c4072610101bbpz.html

The second generation is represented by the musical *The Love Story of a Woodman and a Fairy Fox*, which is a milestone in the development of LPA. Due to the large scale of the outdoor landscape, how can you emotionally touch the audience with the plot when they cannot see the actors' facial expressions? Let us imagine that when the fox cries, we make artificial waterfalls in the valley to give the effect that nature in its entirety is crying. When the woodcutter reunites with the fairy fox, the whole valley becomes illuminated and open. We express and put human emotions into the expressions of nature, thus integrating human emotion into nature (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

Accordingly, the second generation captures the audience's attention and emotions with a well-defined plot. It integrates the intensity of the performers' emotions into the theatrical scene and into nature, retaining the Chinese cultural tradition of narrating a human's relationship with nature. Musical theatre is a form of western theatrical performance that includes acting, dance, songs, and spoken dialogue. These acted out stories with songs essential to the plot are often referred to as musicals (Kenrick, 2017). *The Love Story of a Woodman and a Fairy Fox* appropriates the Western musical form but is staged outdoors. This landscape musical embeds the people within the landscape; they become a part of the landscape. The musicality of the landscape is visually packaged, performed, and emotionally reinforced by the stage effects. The people are perceived as the music in the landscape. It is, first and foremost, a painterly mountain-water style of expression - more of a movement - dance event. Though Mei calls it a musical, this is a problematic designation as a musical should have live vocals from the performers; however, the songs and music in this LPA are from recordings.

The content of this LPA is from a Chinese traditional folk legend, The Love Story of a Woodcutter and his Fox Wife, adapted ³⁰ from a local dramatic style known as the Hunan flower drum opera. It involves local *Sangzhi folksongs* (桑植民歌) performed by a background chorus (see Figure 4) who stand to the side of the stage and are attired in the costume of the local Tujia ethnic minority.

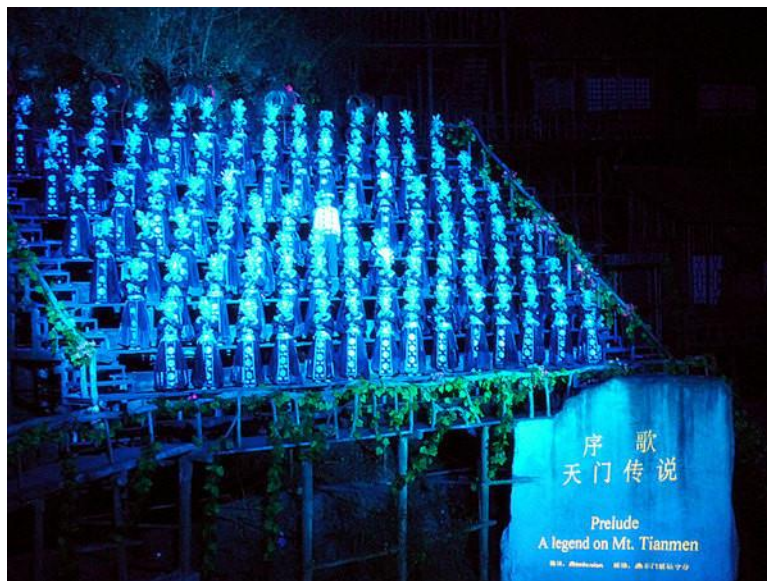


Figure 4: The chorus of local people dressed in Tujia minority clothes

The music was composed by the famous contemporary Chinese musician Tan Dun and is a hybrid of traditional Chinese music styles and Western orchestral instrumentation. It narrates a liaison between the two main characters, the fairy fox and the woodcutter, who eventually become romantically entangled after suffering hardship and danger. To make convincing special effects, this musical uses many covert machines and an LED mobile screen. Figure 5 below gives some idea of the effect these modern technologies create.

³⁰ The flower-drum opera or *Huaguxi* is a form of Chinese opera originating in Hunan province. Other provinces, such as Hubei, Anhui, Henan, Shanxi, also have *Huaguxi*. It is known in China for its earthy quality and is often referred to as the “spicy” form of Chinese opera (Chen, 1995, pp. 129).



Figure 5: *The Love Story of a Woodcutter and a Fairy Fox*

3.1.4 Landscape Stage Play (Spoken Drama)

Here I consider a different type of LPA that uses spoken drama - the landscape stage play. A play is a form of literature written by a playwright who presents a dialogue between characters and that is intended for theatrical performance rather than solely reading (Kirby, 1974). Spoken drama (話劇) is the Chinese term that describes the modern Western-style theatre imported early in the twentieth century (Yu, 2013). The landscape stage play has spoken dialogue between the actors in the performance. It differs from the landscape musical in that there is no singing and the music adds occasional emphasis to heighten dramatic effect.

The first landscape stage play is *Zhuge Liang*. Zhuge Liang (AD 181-234) was a statesman, strategist, and prime minister of the Kingdom of Shu at the time of the Three Kingdoms. He became an icon of resourcefulness and wisdom in Chinese folklore and a leading character in a historical novel. His landscape spoken drama resides in Xiangyang (Hubei province), where he once lived. The play is divided into three acts that recount the three famous events related to Zhuge Liang. Like the

previous LPA, it relies on modern multimedia technologies and the local landscape (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: The stage of *Zhuge Liang*

3.1.5 Landscape Dance Drama

The next evolutionary step in LPA was the landscape in dance drama. Dance drama (舞劇) started to grow in popularity in the 1930s in China. In a nutshell, it can be considered a hybrid of Western ballet and Chinese classical and folk dance (Kennedy, 2011; Luo, 2011).

I have chosen *A Song of Everlasting Sorrow* as an example of landscapes in dance drama. The name of this performance comes from a famous Chinese poem³¹. Faithful to the poem, this landscape dance drama is a romantic tragedy about the lady consort Yang Guifei and Emperor Xuanzong. The LPA version locates where the historical story from the poem occurred. It uses the Huaqing Palace Relic Site and Mount Li as backgrounds (see Figure 7).

³¹ The poem *A Song of Everlasting Sorrow* was composed by Bai Juyi (AD 772–846) a renowned Chinese poet and Tang dynasty imperial official.



Figure 7: *A Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

The landscape dance drama in its pure form presents a choreographed narrative instead of a vocal script or dialogue. The choreographed traditional dance is, however, combined with background music. The music and dance invoke classical styles, such as *tangyuewu*³²(唐樂舞), and fuse with Shaanxi traditional folk drama elements like *qinqiang* opera and *Shaanxi wanwanqiang*³³. These elements locate the LPA stylistically within the Tang dynasty but with an ambience of the Shaanxi style. This LPA is heavily enhanced by stage technologies: the sea of fire³⁴, YAG solid laser³⁵, water curtain³⁶, high-pressure water blast³⁷, jet fireworks, LED screen, and stage elevation equipment (see Figure 8).

³² *Tangyuewu* is a dance style from the Tang dynasty. Its choreography shows a grand atmosphere with luxuriously designed dressing, which signifies the Tang dynasty's great prosperity.

³³ *Qinqiang* opera (秦腔) and *Shaanxi wanwanqiang* (陝西碗碗腔) is a type of local opera in Shaanxi province.

³⁴ Sea of fire technology is from America. The flame is from a gas burner and can be regulated to comply with the requirements of the scene.

³⁵ YAG solid laser device uses a helium lamp and YAG laser to produce the green lights.

³⁶ Water curtain is a fountain effect made by water pumps.

³⁷ High-pressure water blasting device is set up in the pond on the stage making a controllable fountain effect.



Figure 8: *A Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

3.2 LPA's Themes

This section presents an assortment of LPA themes to examine how local culture is rediscovered and utilised to construct a diverse cultural Chineseness. Through native cultural characteristics, the production companies connect the local places' landscape to tangible or intangible heritages such as traditions, histories, historical sites, or even architecture to yield themes for LPA. The following discussion summarises and illustrates these LPA themes via examples.

3.2.1 Folk Culture and Custom Theme

Impression West Lake is a folk-themed LPA located in Hangzhou city, Zhejiang province, and it is here that the famous historical attraction West Lake is located. Hangzhou is one of the Han people's historic, economic, and cultural settlements. West Lake is a cultural and geographic icon with a rich heritage of Han folk legends such as *The Legend of the White Snake* and *The Butterfly Lovers*³⁸; both have been

³⁸ *The Butterfly Lovers* is a Chinese legend of a tragic love story of a pair of lovers, Liang Shanbo (梁山伯) and Zhu Yingtai (祝英台). The story has been submitted as a formal application to the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on the legend at UNESCO, submitted in 2006 through the Chinese

presented in several major Chinese operas, films, and television series.

Hangzhou is famous for its rainy climate; hence, *Impression West Lake* has rainfall as a conceptual theme and relies on an erectable technological device that creates drizzle effect (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The erectable giant mechanical device to create the effect of the drizzle of West Lake

This show does not have a defined storyline. It showcases the legendary figures of West Lake by using abstract imagery with Zhang Yimou's artistic imprint and his characteristic colour themes to recreate the poetic state of *yijing*³⁹ (意境) (Zhou, 2017). The stage and location of this LPA were used at the opening ceremony of the G20 in 2016, which I will be presenting as a case study in Chapter 7.

Ministry of Culture.

³⁹ *Yijing* represents a quintessential ingredient of Chinese traditional aesthetics which has similarity with *xieyi*. It is a time-honored practice to use external objects to evoke spiritual states of mind (Li 1983).

3.2.2 Red (Communist) Classics and Patriotism Theme

The red culture (紅色文化) and communist patriotic themes have not only flooded into Chinese theatre, books, songs, films, and TV series, but they have also infiltrated LPA. Due to the CCP's political ideology, the communist revolution and Chairman Mao are linked with the destiny of the nation-state and nationalism in the media. Utz and Lau (2013) indicate that red culture, described as a sort of “spirit of revolution”, disseminates messages of patriotism. It is also called “Red Classics” (紅色經典) (Gong, 2017) and sings the praises of the CCP's monumental achievement of liberating the nation. The LPA named *Jinggangshan* (see Figure 10) is likewise a case representing the red culture theme. It is staged at the first Chinese Communist Revolutionary base, now called the National Patriotism Education Base, on Jinggang Mountain in Jinggangshan city, a mountain city in Jiangxi province listed as a national tourist attraction. It is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese Red Army (the predecessor of the People's Liberation Army) and is also one of the “cradles of the Chinese revolution”. The show uses the *red song*⁴⁰ and local folk songs as the musical background. It adopts a huge-crowd strategy⁴¹ and uses communist flags as stage props to portray the red army's growth from evolving out of virtually nothing to becoming a potent revolutionary force.

⁴⁰ Red song in general refers to the political song in mainland China eulogising CCP.

⁴¹ Huge-crowd strategy(人海戰術) is a characteristic of LPA as it employs many performers to make a majestic effect. Nowadays, it has been a satiric term which is used to criticise the less-artistic Chinese performing arts that rely on large numbers of human resources to make an effect. It is also called group calisthenics which according to Zhou (2017) is a signature style of Zhang Yimou's *Impression* series.



Figure 10: *Jinggangshan*

Another patriotism-themed LPA is related to the First Opium War. The Chinese government is obsessed with regurgitating China's humiliation during the First Opium War to fulfil its ambition of igniting nationalism and cultivating patriotic fervour. At this time, the Imperial Palace (圓明園) was burned to the ground by Western invaders. The burning provides rich material for films, and it is a textbook case for rousing Chinese nationalism. Chow (1998) refers to this as the “logic of the wound”; Farquhar and Berry (2004) evaluate it as “speaking bitterness”.

Furthermore, when Notre Dame de Paris burned in 2019, much of the world was immersed in sadness. However, in China, the emotion was not necessarily so; social media highlighted celebratory shouts of “bravo” as some Chinese managed to directly relate Notre Dame to the burning of The Imperial Palace. *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* is the LPA that portrays this historical event. China was an agricultural civilisation which encountered the invading forces and was ultimately overwhelmed by the superior weaponry of the West. The palace was ruthlessly looted and burned to the ground forcing the Chinese emperor to sign unfavourable treaties. The investor for

this LPA states through government media that “the fall of Imperial Palace is an everlasting pain in Chinese people’s hearts; as Chinese, we never forget this humiliating history”.⁴²



Figure 11: *The Burning of the Imperial Palace*



Figure 12: *Burning of the Imperial Palace*

⁴² Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2017-02/15/c_129479683.htm [Accessed 29 Nov. 2019].

This LPA is staged in a theme park called the New Imperial Palace, located in Hengdian, Zhejiang province, not Beijing. This exception makes the definition of LPA dubious with respect to the concept of cultural placeness. As mentioned before, the case of *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* is flagged by Mei Shuaiyuan as an LPA-to-be that is his exception to the LPA principle. Nevertheless, the *Burning of the Imperial Palace* promotes a sense of place that is integral and moveable. As its purpose is to strengthen nationalist sentiment, the idea might be that this historical tragedy is a national hurt, so moveability is justified.

3.2.3 Religious Theme

Religious traditions and cultures still provide a significant tangible and intangible influence in China. Many religious sites are still famous pilgrim and tourist destinations, so it is not surprising that LPA producers have adopted religious themes for their landscape shows. The *Shaolin Zen Music Ritual* (see Figure 12) is the first religious LPA. It employs 600 performers, including the local villagers and Kung Fu monks of Dengfeng county, Henan province. It is the home of the Shaolin Temple and the birthplace of Zen Buddhism⁴³. The temple is the most famous Chinese temple, not only because of its long history and its role in Chinese Buddhism, but also because of its martial arts, or Wushu Zen (Qiao, Chen, and Kim, 2009). The profound Chinese Zen culture displayed includes *zazen*⁴⁴ and *shaolin kung-fu* accompanied by Zen Buddhism-themed music composed by the Chinese composer Tan Dun. The producer Mei Shuaiyuan describes the sense of Zen in this performance: Sitting on the meditation cushion made of grass and listening to Zen music in nature can let the audiences renounce desire and experience the Zen Buddhist mood and meditation (quoted in Qiu, 2007).

⁴³ Zen Buddhism is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China during the Tang dynasty, known as the Chan School (禪宗) and later developed into various schools. It was strongly influenced by Taoist philosophy, especially Neo-Daoist thought, and developed as a distinct school of Chinese Buddhism (Wang, 2017).

⁴⁴ Zazen is a meditative discipline that is typically the primary practice of the Zen Buddhist tradition.



Figure 12: *Shaolin Zen Music Ritual*

3.2.4 Royal Dynastic Theme

Royal dynastic themes are common in LPA; dynastic culture is an indispensable part of China's historical tradition and a significant part of Chinese cultural identity. There are still many old palaces and ancient buildings in China; furthermore, many pseudo-classic style palaces are being built as visitor attractions. I introduce a royal dynastic-themed LPA, *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire*, below.

Chengde Mountain Resort is a large complex of imperial palaces and gardens built during the Qing dynasty, and it is situated in the city of Chengde in Hebei province, China. It once served as the emperors' summer retreat for avoiding the intense summer heat while dealing with state affairs. The producers and artists take advantage of the native natural and cultural geographical features to create *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire* (see Figure 13) with its imperial theme. It mobilises two hundred warhorses and one thousand performers to glorify the magnificent and generous royal scene. It comprehensively exhibits historical characters and humanistic sentiments during the golden age of the Qing dynasty under the governance of the Kangxi emperor; it displays his life and his contribution to the development of Chinese

civilisation through ethnic and national integration.



Figure 13: *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire*

3.2.5 Contemporary Theme

Only two contemporary-themed LPA have been produced; both are in Hainan province. The first of these, and the example I present, is *Impression Hainan* (see Figures 14 and 15), located in Haikou, a coastal city.

Hainan is a tropical island predominantly developed for tourism and lacking traditional cultural resources. Hence, sea surfing and chilling out by the beach are the prominent themes of this event; it features scenes of people enjoying the beach, wearing bikinis, relaxing, or rejoicing with wild excitement. This modern theme conveys a hedonistic mentality of enjoying the beach and forgetting all worries; Wang Chaoge states:

Impression Hainan is a unique LPA; people perform on the sands, then suddenly, the emergence of water makes the show's imagery. In form, it is a new expression of modern "language" that is romantic and surreal. It makes it different from the other *Impression* series (quoted in Zhang, 2011).



Figure 14: *Impression Hainan*



Figure 15: *Impression Hainan*

3.3 LPA As a Spectacle: Drawing the Immersive Landscape Painting

Technological developments enhance the spectators' experience; the audiences' participation with LPA is becoming increasingly innovative. *Impression Dahongpao* is a revolution in the viewing mode of LPA: The auditorium can be rotated three hundred and sixty degrees (see Figure 16 and 17). As Wang Chaoge states:

The landscape theatre is restricted by the natural terrain, and since the landscape cannot spin itself, we make the audience spin. In *Impression Dahongpao*, we made a new and unique viewing mode. The auditorium containing nearly two thousand seats is driven by a machine that gives the spectators a sweeping view of the local mountain landscapes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See: <https://ent.sina.cn/xiju/wudao/2010-01-24/detail-iavxeaf7751550.d.html?from=wap>



Figure 16: The 360-degree rotating auditorium of *Impression Dahongpao*



Figure 17: The 360-degree rotating auditorium of *Impression Dahongpao*

With the ongoing technological development of LPA, the stage and auditorium further break the limitations of space by becoming more mobile and immersive. An LPA named *Dream of Tao* continues the development of technology and audience participation. The official website labels this as a “large-scale multimedia LPA” and the “the first audience parade mode of LPA”. The audiences have a mobile interactive

experience adapted from Western “immersive theatre”. The mountainside converts into the “theatre”, and it is covered by over 4,600 lights, making this an extremely large-scale LPA (see Figure 18).



Figure 18: A scenic spot converted into the immersive outdoor theatre

This Tao-themed LPA occurs in the cradle of Taoism, Mount Longhu; it is partly performed on the hills and partly on the river’s shore. Thus, the spectators begin to watch the performance by walking in the open field, as shown in Figure 19 and Figure 20; they then travel by boat for the remainder of the performance, drifting down the river while immersed in Taoist ideology - peripateticism (逍遙).



Figure 19: Spectators walking while watching the parading performers

The natural cliffs form a natural screen for 3D projections that project many Taoist cultural symbols and are claimed to be the world's largest cliff projections. Figure 59 gives an impression of the scale and grandeur of this performance.



Figure 20: The projection on the cliffs in *Dream of Tao* (audience boats in the foreground)

The viewing mode of LPA has evolved from the traditional fixed auditorium format to a rotating format, giving audiences the freedom to move through a fixed performance moves stagecraft to a higher plane. Whatever the blend of western forms and

technology in LPA, they highlight the quintessential cultural Chineseness that serves as the dominant theme.

Culture and globalisation go hand in hand, and theatres are no exception from the transcultural flow. Theatres have shared a multitude of cultures with their audiences over centuries, whether through dance, acting, or music. McTheatre, as a concept, is undoubtedly an outcome of globalisation and the resulting interconnection of world cultures (Rebellato 2010). Barrett and Fellin (2016) consider that transcultural flows have resulted in the take-up, exchange, appropriation, and refashioning of cultural productions and practices that can generate transcultural realities. Iwabuch (2009) has observed that,

Globalisation led by the West (more specifically America) brings a “peculiar form of homogenization”. However, cultural productions are becoming more standardised through diversification, and more diverse through standardisation (Iwabuch, 2009, p. 28).

LPA leads to a triad of content, production, and format. Between the ethnic locality and the Chinese nation, the content needs to be of a local ethnic nature, but the production needs to be Chinese. Following a similar logic and employing a wider geographical lens between the local and the global, LPA production is immobile as it is fixed in the landscape. However, the LPA format is mobile, which permits LPA to bloom beyond China and initiate a “glocal” version of LPA. Recently, the LPA format has been franchised to the South Asian nations of Malaysia and Vietnam. We can liken LPA to Disneyfication, as LPA as an art form may negatively affect other performing arts genres in China due to its market domination and government backing. It is birthed from the political concept of cultural diversity (cultural heterisation), yet

it advances into a circle of formative homogenisation, being a reproducible model like Disneyland. LPA's issues of content, production, and format may lead us away from the absolute discourses of cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation. It poses a more complex view of diversity in a global cultural market where the ethnic local, national, and international are entangled.

Western theatre has strongly influenced Chinese theatre for nearly a century, and Chinese traditional theatre has lost its appeal and become marginalised in this lopsided transcultural flow. It hampers the Xi administration's agenda regarding the resurgence of traditional culture and cultural confidence. Traditional Chinese theatre needs a boost, and the interplay between landscape and technology provides the sensational and spectacular effects necessary to reinvigorate these withered traditions. Chinese theatre creates a new narrative in this political context; Mei Shuaiyuan calls it "narrating Chinese culture in a Chinese way in the landscape". It is an exclusive assertion aimed at claiming back cultural power through the characteristic Chinese "landscape" and resisting the uneven transcultural flows from the West. It equates to cultural pride, self-confidence, and a homegrown brand. Even though the special effects - including the rotating auditorium and stage made by Western technology - are expected in modern theatre, the deployment of *shanshui* has granted Chinese elites the power to elevate their Chinese elements to principal status. This results in an eventual dilution or marginalisation of these Western elements, which, in the producer's opinion, are now nothing more than adornments that enrich the dynamics of Chinese tradition. Fung (2016) reasons that,

Cultural globalisation might bring the influence of content and values that are contradictory to the state's ideology, thereby curbing the pace of nation branding. Thus, the state is caught in a dilemma in which it purports to strengthen its cultural industries commercially while intending to retain its political control (p. 306).

However, in the case of LPA, irrespective of transcultural flows from the West to China, the state wields the Chinese landscape as an instrument to filter, assimilate, and selectively absorb what the party-state considers valuable. Stopping external cultural flows that impede alleged core values of “Chinese characteristics” is paramount. Dynastic, folk, and religious themes involve the concept of *shanshui*; each shines brilliantly in the landscape, stabilising and securing a traditional visual regime. The CCP's ideology seeks to promote feudal Chinese tradition to discipline subjects and reorient Chinese people to a more centralised and premodern polity. Even the “Red Classics” are woven into the *shanshui* concept, doubling down on the CCP's strategy of cultural arbitration. Yang (2014) and Zhao (2016) have observed that there is a “Maoist revival” occurring based on centralisation, mass campaigns, manipulation of public expression, and “rectification” of the mind.

With plush ceremonies from China's history, the royal and dynastic LPA themes are considered an expression of “Chinese magnificence”, another form of Chineseness. They present a grandeur, a centrality of dynastic perception; they evoke the splendour of imperial power and a narrative of gargantuan pretence. Li and Liu (1987) have documented the considerable interest in the majesty and grandeur that marks classical Chinese aesthetics, particularly when these relate to the vast sway and spectacular array of political rule. Masses of performers acting as one, singing as one, dancing as one, while sprinting in precise, flawless formations are characteristic of LPA. However, the vast landscape requires large numbers of performers to fill the stage,

which to some extent, explains why a collective image that articulates a mechanical and synchronous rhythmicity is needed.

Though large-scale events to promote a collective identity are not the sole prerogative of authoritarian regimes, states like China and North Korea⁴⁶ implement them more thoroughly. LPA's awe-inspiring display is reminiscent of a military parade, striking a collective and authoritative note. The regulated and controlled landscape within the vision of a harmonious society is harnessed within the context of economic growth. In this sense, LPA allows the CCP to showcase the national spirit; it is an opportunity to perform to the nation and underscore LPA's national branding potential and appeal. Though being framed as a transcultural production, LPA is a statement that development is not through Western liberal means but rather the Confucian ideology as the party-state interprets it.

LPA artists are not only theatrical artists but also Chinese landscape "painters". In order to present LPA in the style of a *shanshui* painting, Chinese artists regard landscape as their canvas. They draw upon it the local intangible cultural material from tradition's colourful palette. Their technology makes the landscape appear vibrant, literally animating their mountain water paintings. Clark (1949) declared this:

Landscape was the raw material waiting to be processed by the artist. In the conversion of landscape into artwork a perceptual process has already begun whereby that material is prepared as an appropriate subject for the painter or photographer, or simply for absorption as a gratifying aesthetic experience. The heart of the matter is man's changing relationship with nature (p. 127).

⁴⁶ The Grand Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance Arirang in North Korea is a case in point.

Prefaced by music and choreography, the deployment of human figures in the landscape is stamped with *shanshui*. The borderline between painting and performance becomes blurred and fused into one temporal space. Una Chaudhuri (2002) has mentioned the imaginative relationship between landscape painting and theatrical performance:

The development of landscape painting and perspective led to the placing of performance within a frame...turning audiences into viewers by spatially subdividing the stage and the auditorium.⁴⁷

However, tasking LPA with developing the tourism industry, the state elites have morphed the landscape into a symbol that has become imprinted in the country's collective consciousness. Regardless of the dichotomy between the mythical ideals of the landscape's pristine nature and the country's abundant urban pollution, the unifying *shanshui* concept transforms LPA into a national symbol accompanied by ethnic, historical, economic, religious, and geographical complexities. Massey (1991) states it this way:

The sense of landscape shifts across enormous scales from direct experiences of a locality to an appreciation of the entire nation. It gives a sense of place and landscape as a phenomenological bridge and as a neurological bridge between placeness and state, between "self" and world.

Benediktsson and Lund (2011) note that landscapes are in constant motion, taking on new shapes and forms. Jackson (2002) understands the landscape as a "mode of

⁴⁷ According to Rogers (2012), this distanced "way of seeing" (Cosgrove 1984) also underpinned Cosgrove and Daniel's (1989) description of geographical fieldwork as theatre, with different staging and viewing perspectives being used as a means through which to collect information.

journeying” (p. 31) which allows us to comprehend a multitude of fluid landscapes within a regulated framework. The mobility and connectedness of the metaphysical landscape, grounded by LPA, permit the state to recruit the scattered outlying localities, both culturally and geographically, forming a landscape matrix that disciplines the national identity. In a concrete sense, the country is transformed into a series of mountain water paintings. It is a sublime experience for viewers to see a giant *shanshui* painting audio-visually vitalised and transfixed in the landscape. Clark (1949) notes that “landscape in art tells us, or asks us to think about where we belong” (p. 9). Audiences consume the show in different localities; they conceive themselves as belonging to the harmonious *shanshui* of fifty-six nationalities, notwithstanding the differences in religion, class and culture. Therefore, the *shanshui* may influence China’s multicultural realities; to a certain degree, LPA is a whitewash that paints out cultural diversity in the interests of harmonious integration. Walton (1998), from a historical perspective, informs that,

Landscape, a symbol of Chinese culture, was a place where the contesting power of philosophical systems in Song China was negotiated and where the location of sacred space in formerly Buddhist and Daoist settings by Neo-Confucians was a direct result of their political identity and success (p. 27).

However, religious belief is considered a potential threat by the atheistic CCP; Joske (2009) has stated that the CCP’s ideological work on indigenous religions highlights the contradiction between promotion and control. By appropriating religious philosophy for landscape-based entertainment, the state promotes a safe tradition that inscribes audiences’ minds and bodies with a regulated national identity; it creates self-disciplined docile bodies. Benediktsson and Lund (2011) have remarked that “visual perception of landscape happens through a bodily engagement that involves all senses” (p. 7). Following their logic, Dijk (2012) coined the phrase “body as

landscape”: the tangible extension of the theatrical landscape metaphor to embodied spectatorial experience.

Through theatrical technology, LPA enhances the interaction between the landscape and the audience. In an immersive experience, sensorial design has the biggest impact; it initiates audiences’ bodily engagement. LPA’s participatory and interactive ritual infuses the audiences with *shanshui*, flooding them with a “pure, calm, and happy” vision of China. Therefore, LPA conforms to the party’s ideological framework for manipulating emotional propensities. *Dream of Tao*, for instance, provides a dreamland with its illuminated nocturnal carnival parade that promotes the concepts of “relaxation” and “healing” (治愈). In *Impression Dahongpao*, perhaps because the directors believed the “happy Chinese” message was not explicit enough, the performers proclaim to the audience, “Have you let annoyance go?” (你放下了嗎). In short, discipline coordinates with the landscape and becomes artfully implanted in the audiences’ perceptions and bodily experiences, exerting a subtle influence on the subject’s identity and character. It is gentle, persuasive, immersive, entertaining, and steeped in the mountain water ambience.

LPA adopts the societal mindset’s internal discipline that marks the gentle persuasion of positive psychology and behaviours. The audiences’ minds are purified, and they are encouraged to share delight in their humbling experience in the landscape. LPA neither disciplines the audience’s subjectivity to burden massive social responsibility nor depicts a utopian future that requires sacrifice. Instead, it informs audiences that, for their own benefit, they are experiencing a touristic utopia in which they can escape their urban livelihoods, provided their thoughts evade discussions of social, political, or financial exploitation. I have experienced this sense of harmony when observing LPA. The emotion was invoked most strongly at the impressive *Shaolin Zen Musical Ceremony*. The tranquillity of night’s dark mantle in the auditorium was gently torn; the Zen music began its balmy reverberation throughout the valley, gently building to

a crescendo, not only of sound but of light, as the illuminating landscape struck the eyes. At that moment, I experienced a meditative calm, a spirituality, a harmony woven intricately into the fabric of this magnificent open-air performance.

The world undoubtedly needs more precious peace and harmony. However, it is no secret that the government uses the concept of a “Harmonious Society” to justify the suppression of dissent and the tight control of information in China. We might raise the question of whether the people need such psychological “treatment” and behave harmoniously when living in a totalitarian state. An illusionary harmony is harmful even for an authoritative regime; it suffocates differences and dissent that could be valuable. People must eventually differentiate the crucial reality of daily life from the dreamlike matrix constructed on the landscape. The audiences must return to their polluted urban places and re-engage with their grinding existence with its stress and exploitation at the hands of politics and capitalism.

The following analysis will engage with the notion of “sublime” and “spectacle” to explore spectacularised displays of LPA. The sublime is often related to the spectacle (Deleuze and Guittari, 1987 and Redmond, 2017); they produce visual images, sounds, and movements that are so powerful that they captivate our senses and overwhelm our intellect and rational faculty. LPA is an entertainment characterised by strong visual and auditory stimuli conveying a poetic mountain-water flavour and punctuated by state-of-the-art special effects. Hughes (2012) emphasises the stimulating effects and tableaux, which are named “sensation scenes”; sensation aesthetics are one of the domains of the theatre. The awe-inspiring logic of the LPA spectacle can be analysed and dissected to isolate the political and artistic content.

When tourists visit the mountain-water scenes of rural China, they inevitably experience the sublime; the beauty and majesty of the scene (perception and bodily experiences) overwhelm their rational thinking (mind and intellect). Behind the stage,

the archetypal Chinese landscape provides an enduring majesty. The precipitous slopes lush with vegetation clinging to the thin crumbling regolith yield a sense of eternity and a temporality projecting a delicate and mortal fragility. Such a sublime effect diverts people's attention and covers up the intractable local status quo; local issues metamorphose into an entertainment carousel. We can refer to LPA theme parks as "Impressionland" - essentially a type of (immersive) "theme park ride" of culture. LPA becomes a means of turning communities into "theme parks" by night; it is justified to state that nocturnally, the whole of China becomes a theme park on a grand scale.

The landscape allows LPA to complete - what Magnusson and Zalloua (2016) have called - the transformation from "event" or issue to a spectacle. The non-narrative LPAs have deprived the audiences' intellectual faculty of stimulation or controversial topics. Magnusson and Zalloua (2016) note that "the event of the spectacle is, strictly speaking, as much created as recorded" (p. 5).

Through its abstraction and dehistoricisation of events, spectacle breeds mystification; however, a spectacle not only deceives or bewitches citizens, deforming their vision of things but also weakens them. Spectacle is an exertion of social power; it does violence to human actors just as much as the discipline of the production line does (Magnusson and Zalloua, 2016, p.5).

LPA as a spectacle disseminates mass tourism-mediated images of cultural experience in a locality where the truths, realities, and meanings are often hidden. It becomes a simplified, formatted show for public leisure and the captivation of the tourist gaze. LPA, as family entertainment, has avoided highlighting the social issues of China. The importance of theatre in unveiling social and political issues should not be

underestimated, especially when people's spiritual world is gradually being devoured by this materially oriented society and people are becoming insouciant towards democratic participation and showing unprecedented political indifference. Cohen (2016), referring to Asian theatre, declares the following:

Some of the more adventurous practitioners mixed imported forms with local cultural expressions exploring topical issues of note. The novel forms of entertainment, such as spoken drama in the 1920s, became a vehicle for exploring social issues (p. 7).

Place-based or site-specific work is also created in relation to the living communities of those places; "this sense of responsiveness is often not harmonious as performances may expose contested political and social issues or reveal new understandings of place" (Rogers, 2012). Presently, people are in dire need of more staged artworks designed to invoke their introspection. If a place or nation desires to step forward, it needs something more than just spectacle. LPA's success aligns with the government's goals, and its producers happily champion state policies. The acquiescence of the producers is understandable; if new and emerging art forms collided with the policies of the state by exploring social problems or doling out criticism of the government, they would be pushed into obscurity. I elaborated on the above issues for Zhang Xiao; he responded:

How can you examine social and political problems in the landscape? That is nonsense (Personal Communication, 13/03/2019).

However, this does not mean that social issues cannot be broadcast in landscape theatre. *Our Town* is a play staged at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in London, and I observed it in 2019. This meta-theatrical play tells the story of the fictional American small town of Grover's Corners through the everyday lives of its citizens. It is full of profound dialogue that explores the concerns related to the characters' individual lives. It focuses on social and community concerns, with one enlightening question remaining: "Do any human beings ever realise life as they live it? Every, every, minute?" Theatre critic Dominic Cavendish (2019) comments that "it won't change your life, but it may make you think about it".⁴⁸ Edward Albee states that it is "a superbly written, gloriously observed, tough, and breathtaking statement of what it is to be alive".⁴⁹

Considering that LPA is a show located in the rural, it may be pertinent here to consider another topical issue lacking in current Chinese mentation and discourse: the environment. It is difficult to predict whether LPA will inspire people to think about how to preserve these beautiful scenes, but LPA's content lacks enlightening or direct engagement with environmental issues, i.e. how and why nature and ecological systems are abused. Although many LPA theatres are designed and operated to have minimal impact on the environment, there is no intention to arouse audiences' environmental awareness or champion a sense of ecological responsibility. LPA's return to nature is driven by economics. The mountains and the landscape are appropriated for tourism development at the cost of environmental degradation since the colossal number of tourists flocking into the rural areas negatively impacts the environment. The development of infrastructure often utilises virgin land, which places stress on natural resources and the ecosystem.

LPA has fulfilled its task by achieving a Distinction under political examination, but

⁴⁸ See:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/town-review-open-air-theatre-regents-park-breezy-revival-20th/>

⁴⁹ See: <https://openairtheatre.com/production/our-town>

as an art form, it gets a Fail for social onus. LPA may appear apolitical as it avoids touching political and social issues, but this “depoliticisation” is highly political as it makes a grand narrative for governance and reveals the state’s insistence on creating harmonious ethnic relationships to ward off separatist fervours and tensions. LPA has become yet another stage show, like an extravagant song and dance gala (歌舞晚會), eulogising the nation by putting a good face on the state of affairs in China under the CCP.

Conclusion

The state elites and artists have constructed an animated *shanshui* “painting” in the physical landscape. Local culture is stamped with the *shanshui* logo for processing and manufacturing, becoming a voluminous production distributed countrywide. Landscape harnessed for the *shanshui* cultural ideology allows the state to connect scattered landforms and form a landscape matrix to promote ideological, geographical, and cultural integration. The matrix has elevated the power and reach of the state’s ideological work. It is associated with perceptual and bodily experience, including coordinating sentiments, cultivating national identity, and diverting attention from controversial social issues.

Chinese tourists experience different local cultural themes residing in a monolithic re-conceptualised *shanshui* culture striving to project a Chinese national imaginary marketed as an “authentic” identity. The elaboration of these dreamy scenes provides viewers visual pleasure, allowing them to enjoy a “positive” sensual and aesthetic delight dictated by political doctrines. The various cultural themes of LPA (both tradition-based and modern) placed into the landscape jointly internalise harmony and discipline into the audiences’ minds and bodies for political expediency and ideological imperatives. The cultural placeness of LPA is immersed in the format of theatrical globalisation, which enhances LPA’s theatrical Chineseness. The

appropriation of Western elements does not emphatically deconstruct Chinese tradition, but these elements are absorbed and exploited by the Chinese landscape to empower the so-called “Chinese characteristics”. LPA has addressed how cultural forms move, change, and re-form to fashion disciplined new identities in diverse contexts. Considering transcultural flows, LPA has exhibited dynamic forms of encounter and complex processes involving the participation of heterogeneous local, homogeneous national, and selective or censored foreign resources.

LPA as an art form works on the levels of affect, sublime, and spectacle; it is not an intellectual encounter. Given the superficial and leisurely nature of visual entertainment within the form of theme parks, local issues can be potentially dissolved or distracted by a dissipated spectacle, becoming something amusing and playful at the expense of contemplation. If the sensations evoked by spectacle serve as a technology of linkage, correspondence, and imagination, in short, a mechanism of the ruling, then LPA simply symbolises a time of national peace, order, grandness, and power that the CCP promotes as the sublime via large-scale events elegantly enforcing and legitimising the centralised power of the state. LPA as a spectacle just becomes another staged “sublime” corresponding to the magnificent political show, therefore, the landscape is entwined with the stable regime in the format of mass discipline.

Chapter 4

“Chinese Invention”: Sublimating and Performing the Arts of Nationalism

For decades, Chinese radicals and some liberal-minded intellectuals held “Chineseness” responsible for China’s backwardness and a hindrance to political modernisation. Their tactic for national salvation was anti-traditionalism. They were convinced China would not become great unless it reformed or Chinese tradition is abandoned. Nevertheless, nowadays, one often hears remarks in China that Chineseness is the key to China’s economic triumph and an invaluable source of soft power. This interest in traditional Chinese culture will probably last with China’s economic development and soaring national confidence given China’s rise.

Flaring nationalism is not new, but in Xi’s era, the top-down model for instigating nationalism has been developed and deployed more relentlessly. In promoting cultural nationalism, Chinese officials have been keen on using *The Four Great Inventions* from Ancient China (papermaking, printing, gunpowder, and the compass) to promote Chinese cultural pride. An example of the extreme lengths to which the nationalistic promotion of these Four Inventions follows: Zheng Wenfeng, a lecturer at a Chinese university, unadvisedly criticised “The Four Great Inventions” with the statement “The Four Great Inventions were not world-leading, and there was no real innovation in the dynastic eras of China”.⁵⁰ As a result, Zheng’s lectureship was suspended for two years as his criticism was inconsistent with Xi Jinping’s “mainstream theme” political ideology of promoting cultural confidence.

⁵⁰ See the news, available at:
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/professor-suspended-for-saying-chinese-history-is-overrated-nq8s3s5z7>

Recently, Chinese officials have imprudently announced China's "four new great inventions": high-speed train, online shopping, mobile payment, and bike-sharing.⁵¹ However, the BBC correctly stated that "China did not invent any of these technologies, but it has led the way in their wide-scale implementation" (Jakhar, 2018). Emphasising "invention" has become popular in China, a nation desperate to promote its creative potential to give the impression of being a "rising power". Li (2017) indicates that transforming "from made in China, to created in China" is a government strategy to market China as creative and trustworthy, thus positioning China as an innovative global leader.

In the article, *From Made in China to Created in China*, Keane (2007) mentions that the concepts of "creating" (創) and "ideas" (意) have an overt emphasis on art and imagination. He states that "China is rapidly developing its creative industries and implementing policies to generate value and investment" (p. 292). According to Kalkidan (2019),

Invention is the creation of a new idea or concept. Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity, invention, and innovation are all interrelated and necessary for growth to occur.

In Chinese linguistics, "invention" and "creation" are often jointly referred to as "inventive creativity" (創造發明). The slogan "Created in China" occurs in performing art. After ILS began, the founders, Mei Shuaiyuan and Wang Chaoge claimed LPA's Chineseness by nationalistically calling it a Chinese invention.⁵² LPA

⁵¹ See the news "*Four New Great Inventions: Annotating China, Enlightening the World*", available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2017-08/11/c_1121468680.htm [Accessed 15 Apr. 2019].

⁵² In 2012, Mei Shuaiyuan published his book named *Chinese-style Fantasy Landscape: Mei Shuaiyuan and Impression Liu Sanjie*. In this book, Mei referred *New York Times*' article "Chinese Extravaganza Uses Valley as Backdrop" (Barboza, 2019) as an endorsement to state LPA as a Chinese invention. In this book, Mei's editor

is also considered a new form of performing art by Chinese media, academics, and practitioners in the cultural tourism industries. The government media⁵³ actively supports this assertion and promotes discourses about LPA at a national level.

Statements about LPA being a Chinese invention can be challenged since there are numerous spectacles based on the landscape concept that occurred globally long before ILS. Even circles of scholars in China state that LPA originated from Western landscape opera⁵⁴. According to Zou (2016), landscape opera was prompted by the slogan “operas homecoming”, initiated by Western investors and opera producers who wanted famous operas back in their hometowns. Therefore, many operas were performed outdoors at the location where the operatic plot was based, for example, *Madame Butterfly* (Japanese story performed in Japan), *Turandot* (Chinese story performed in Beijing), and *Aida* (Egyptian story performed in Egypt). Nevertheless, Robert K. Sarlos (1964) mentions an opera on the lake in Barcelona called *Angelica, vincitrice di Alcina* in the Baroque era. Numerous open-air theatres emerged well before ILS, such as The St. Louis Municipal Opera Theatre (commonly known as The Muny), which uses an amphitheatre in St. Louis for performances. According to the archives, in 1916, a grassy area between two oak trees on the present site of The Muny was chosen for a production of *As You Like It* with a local cast of “1,000 St. Louis folk dancers and folk singers”.⁵⁵

Other examples in the West include the Bregenz Festival, also known as the *Opera on the Lake*, which has been presenting various musical and theatrical events at the main venue containing a floating stage before a 7,000-seat open-air amphitheatre since

ambitiously translates “Chinese Extravaganza” into simplified Chinese: 中國式山水狂想.

⁵³ See the CCTV news, available at:

<http://jingji.cctv.com/2017/11/10/ARTIfg0dMaWsoMYc81oTz6uP171110.shtml> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2019].

<http://app.ceweekly.cn/?app=article&controller=article&action=show&contentid=209111> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2019].

⁵⁴ Zhang Yimou calls it “spectacle opera” (實景歌劇) when he directed outdoor *Turandot* in Taiwan.

⁵⁵ See The Muny official website, available at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060413175911/http://www.muny.org/history.html> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2019].

1946.⁵⁶ *Son et lumière* is a type of spectacle presented at an outdoor venue; according to the official website, the first *Son et lumière* was performed in 1952.⁵⁷ *Son et lumière* has lighting effects projected onto the façade of a building or ruin, accompanied by recorded or live narration and music to dramatise a place's history. The world is full of various festivals and performances intended, at least in part, to exploit the environment and attract visitors. In this chapter, I move the sublime discourse into the realm of nationalism that encircles the claim of "Chinese invention", which enriches the analysis of the landscape matrix. I place the concept of the "Chinese sublime" in the context of the Chinese cultural landscape to treat the sublime as a form of effect and sentiment expressed in worship, admiration, and veneration of the country's cultural legacy. This chapter's key line of inquiry focuses on what this Chinese invention assertion reveals and, more significantly, what it obfuscates. It identifies and deconstructs the propaganda and the surrounding discourse created to advance LPA.

4.1 Traditional Chineseness As a Philosophical Theory and Aesthetic

Considering that Chineseness is constructed through art "as a dynamic convergence between philosophised aesthetic and historical/cultural context" (Lau, 2005, p. 30), this section will examine LPA's Chineseness through the lens of traditional philosophy and aesthetics. Chinese cultural elements, philosophy, and aesthetics are applied by Chinese cultural elites and the state to legitimatise a strategic Chineseness that provides the authorising foundation of their self-exoticism. Yao (2012) concurs that,

⁵⁶ See Turnevicius, L. (2017). Bregenz Festival. *Opera Canada*, 58(2).

⁵⁷ See Son et Lumiere official website, available at: <https://www.sonetlumiere.tech/> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2019].

Political/Philosophical Chineseness refers to the ideology of Chinese people, their ideas, and ways of thinking that generate from today's Chinese social-environmental impact as a whole. It is the inner factor that allows us to observe the difference and specificity of Chinese culture (p. 114).

Though there were many performing arts based on the concept of outdoor theatre before ILS, Mei Shuaiyuan still believes they are different from LPA on account of philosophical Chineseness:

This performing pattern can only exist in Chinese wisdom; westerners would just build a theatre. We do not spend money building a theatre; nature itself is the theatre. I found this creativity had a traditional theoretical basis. When “the place, the culture, and the people” are united, it is called “harmony between humans and nature”, originally a Chinese Confucian philosophy. There is a fundamental difference between Chinese and Western thinking. Western people pay more attention to high technology for creating stage effects. Their science technologies are well-developed; therefore, they use technological means to express their art (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

Mei is utilising Chinese philosophy as a means of differentiating cultures and endorsing LPA's Chineseness. As mentioned in the Literature Review, Fei Xiaotong asserts that Chinese philosophy emphasises harmony between humans and nature, while Western philosophy does not; Western dualism led to the opposition of man and nature, man conquering nature being the ideal (Tang, Li, and McLean, 2004). Given

this, Mei Shuaiyuan continues to draw a line between China and the West by connecting LPA with the aesthetic of Chinese traditional *xieyi shanshui* (mountain water) painting:

As Chinese, we embrace nature more. Our old scholars' mountain-water paintings (especially the scholars of the Song Dynasty) contain what the scholars and sages said about the "abandonment to mountain water" that is their ideal and aesthetic. This mountain-water is not a physical mountain and water; it is people's internal emotions, a personal subjective perception, and an exploration into the state of harmony between humans and nature. That is why traditional Chinese painting's *xieyi* is the opposite of Western realism landscape painting.

Therefore, LPA has its source rooted in Chinese cultural origins and has developed within a traditional Chinese cultural context that comes down in one continuous line. I do not know whether Western foreigners can understand this cultural context; they often like and feel very surprised when they watch LPA. Many audiences for ILS are foreigners, and it is as if Europeans also worship nature (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

However, this is indeed a misguided opinion when we think about the country's recent economic growth and urbanisation versus its environmental record. As I mentioned in the former chapter, this return to the traditions and ideals of the country's pristine nature disengages with the present economic developments that have brought China considerable environmental destruction. The official media CCTV highlights that

“LPA is a Chinese invention and creation of modern culture”⁵⁸. If anything, LPA is a traditional production decked in commercial packaging; it borrows from the ancient ideas of *shanshui* and the harmony between humans and nature. The question is why this cultural demarcation matters, given that LPA applies technology that is not from China; accordingly, Mei answers:

Applying high technology to an LPA is just a way of improving the effects; it is an abandonment of the mountain water that is the core concept of LPA (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

Mei emphasises the mountain water concept and downplays technology’s application, although it enhances LPA’s novelty and popularity. Moreover, he has a conservative ideology regarding the cultural exchange and aesthetic differences between China and the West. If culture is so exclusive, it is ironic that he wears Western clothes and orders coffee when he is interviewed. It is also noteworthy that Mei adapts the Western musicals format for his landscape performances while promoting them as a “Chinese invention”. The paeon of the Chinese aesthetic is confirmed by Zhang Rensheng, a scriptwriter in Mei’s LPA production team; he elaborates on the importance of the mountain water concept in reinforcing LPA’s Chineseness:

There were indeed similar landscape performances in the West, but the difference is that our LPA ideology is harmony between humans and nature. Harmony between humans and nature is from the philosophical level; abandonment to mountain-water was a Chinese scholars’ tradition from both fine arts and literature. They have a distant origin and a long

⁵⁸ See CCTV’s economic news, available at:
<http://jingji.cctv.com/2017/11/10/ARTIfg0dMaWsoMYc81oTz6uP171110.shtml>

development. In a sense, it has formed a relationship between humans and mountain water. The aesthetic of painting between China and the West has significant differences not only in technique and material but also in aesthetics. You as a Chinese can barely accept the aesthetic of modern arts in the Pompidou Center (Personal Communication, 22/03/2018).

Like Mei, Zhang Rensheng considers that the Chinese aesthetics flowing in Chinese people's blood makes modern Western aesthetic tastes unpalatable to the Chinese. This cultural "otherness" is essentialist and accentuates an orthodox genealogy to legitimatise LPA's abstract conception of Chineseness in the form of cultural aesthetics. This effort to construct an aesthetic Chineseness echoes Chao (2019), who argued that "aesthetics, pastness, and nation branding are conjoined, to question the shared visibility that obscures a timelier and inventive imaginary of the country" (p. 321). The Chineseness expounded here is a regression to tradition; Zhang Rensheng and Mei Shuaiyuan have selectively used the aesthetic of Chinese art in a particular historical period to seek a primordial Chineseness aligned with Western Orientalist discourses regarding a stereotype of China.

4.2 Cultural Timelessness: Temporality of Landscape

Based on the data provided above, I now transit to the issue of cultural timelessness and consider LPA as a nation-branding exercise. By theoretically investigating the issues of tradition and invention, I will critique how problematic the affirmation of Chinese invention can be.

Physical landscapes have cultural significance; there is an issue of "temporality of landscape" (Ingold, 1993) or what Sharif (2019) has called "landscape of time and

immobility”, which can be employed to reveal the temporal politics behind Chinese landscapes: a sense of timelessness, the eternal stream of inspiration for the Chinese heart and soul. Thus, LPA can be considered a theatre of tradition and pastness enacted through the language of *shanshui*. Landscape and place are frequently read through history and the past and through time-embeddedness (Cloke and Jones, 2001). Ingold (1993) writes, “To perceive the landscape is, therefore, to carry out an act of remembrance ... (to engage) perceptually with an environment ... pregnant with the past” (pp.152-3). Massey (2006) highlights that:

History and the past are crucial to the understanding of place and landscape, but a more lively imagination of an intertwining of trajectories which also has a future which must be addressed would serve to counter the impression, so often left, that the present is some kind of achieved terminus (p. 4).

However, when this focus is applied to the human/nonhuman divide to which Hinchliffe’s (2003) viewpoints, “the past” can too easily be reduced to human memory. And this, again, is to instate confinement, this time of the temporal. Metaphorically, landscape functions as cement, a sense of territory, to paste native history, legend, tradition, and culture into placeness. Due to the immobile mechanism of landscape, it is predictable that the Chinese landscape is transformed into a political culture to negotiate the country’s temporality. Chao (2019) considers that the “deployment of a politics of time” and “cultural timelessness” is meant to “mobilise China’s dynastic past and its traditional arts to enhance the present” (p. 321).

Regarding that nature celebrated in Chinese *shanshui* paintings and gardens, which are abstract inventions (Tan, 2016), the CCP, claiming LPA as a Chinese invention, strives to establish a continuous cultural line from dynastic times. Therefore, this “new invention” is firmly positioned among the inventions of ancient China by the

CCP. Such quiescent-ness, permanence, and immobility are implicitly symbolic of the stability of the state and, thus, the durability of the CCP. To elaborate on how the temporality of the landscape is embodied in LPA, we need to focus on why it is necessary for Mei *et al.* to claim the genre as a Chinese invention. The answer is predictable; he explains,

We Chinese have not invented new things for centuries, but more inventions will appear from now on (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

The inventions Mei refers to are not only the artistic inventions of LPA but also those of science, technology, and business. With Chinese landscape and philosophy as a Chinese civilisational essence and cultural gene, LPA has didactic ambitions from this past as a form of tradition presented to witness China's present rise and wish it an inventive future. Therefore, past, present, and future issues of temporality are all crystallised in the Chinese invention statement that has shown Mei's desire and confidence, and maybe even his anxiety. He insinuates that the emergence of LPA as an invention is significant in this "great era", complying with Xi Jinping's dictates concerning the promotion of traditional culture: "No origin, no future; where there is inheritance, there is innovation" (Zhang, 2019). Mei emphatically states that,

I suppose that the West has been walking along another path, but it cannot be denied that humans are from nature. In the present era, Americans must return to nature. Mankind sometimes seems very powerful, even destroying nature, but mankind is weak. Westerners have realised the law of nature through their scientific methods. However, Zhuangzi⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Chinese Taoist philosopher in the fourth century BC.

explained: Tao is the origin of heaven and earth; everything is within it. This ideology is terrific. Chinese believe we are just a part of nature, so we do not need to study nature. It is reasonable that Chinese technology was not developed; the Chinese were engaged with literature and artistic thinking; LPA is a consequence of this Chinese cultural context. Nevertheless, The West and The East are not incommunicable as humans are the same in physical structure. Westerners over-emphasised the human factor above nature (Personal Communication, 03/23/2018).

By comparing China's ancient past with modern Western culture, Mei's stereotypical view of China and the West still repeats the platitude - the Chinese mind is more poetic than the Western scientific mind. However, Chinese cultural values and ideology have a universal value to Mei, which American cultural ideology can return to and embrace. It aligns with current Chinese governmental propaganda of China's Rise and the China Dream, which depicts China as a "great" and "responsible" world power dominating in terms of culture. Xi Jinping, on many occasions, endorses harmony between humans and nature, which is "a wisdom for the world from China" (Cao, 2015), i.e., a superior vision of Chineseness broadcast to the world by the state. As a state-designated producer, Mei can sensitively deduce from which direction the political wind is blowing. Mei's statement is full of President Xi's catchphrases, such as "great era", "community of shared future for mankind", and "cultural confidence". For example, Mei declares:

Nowadays, our thinking is more open and filled with innovative spirit, not second to Westerners...This is the era belonging to China, a powerful country...with the help of our cultural prosperity and cultural confidence (quoted in Ding, 2017).

Mobilising tradition to create an art form does not necessarily deserve derision. It can be stated that there is hardly ever a new artistic invention; new inventions are often built upon older inventions or traditions. Fischer-Lichte (2009) suggests that hybridity and the interweaving of culture have arguably always been characteristic of a nation's arts. Cohen (2016) points out that "Much of the creative invention of the period involved the hybridising of old and new, foreign and local" (p. 9). Ricoeur (2006) adds: "The problem is not simply to repeat the past, but rather to take root in it in order to ceaselessly invent" (p. 51). While temporality's trinity of past, present, and future is raised, the focus in creating LPA is still on the past. The traditional cultural material and the landscape are already there. Chinese artists only combine them and brand them; thus, new elements within LPA are scarce. To make art by essentially reproducing tradition hints at a glaring lack of artistic creativity. Hence, LPA's mobilising of tradition and the past allows a convenient production; the so-called invention is a reproduction with artistic embellishments. Perhaps a better description of the methodology of LPA is that of a large-scale cultural adaptation. Chow (2013) uses this "affect of pastness" to suggest a form of geographical-temporal politics that classifies non-Western cultures when comparing them to the West and modernity through a temporal status "of lagging and needing to catch up" (p.101). It is not merely about China wanting to use tradition to differentiate itself but about a lagging presentness that is close to the pastness.

LPA has disclosed that instead of creating a modern national brand, China passionately tracks back to the traditions that originated in dynastic times. These points are in accord with the trend that China's soft power and cultural nationalism search for legitimisation from traditional culture and seek to build upon past glory. The further back through time this past can be traced, the more China can be imagined as a cohesive whole. Nation-branding emphasises the need for a country to distinguish itself visually and rhetorically against competitors, which is often expressed through

cultural heritage (Fan, 2006, p. 9). Reversely, it also runs the risk of unintentionally evoking the spectre of Orientalism that condemns it to dwell at a standstill, suggesting a denial of passing time (Chao, 2019, p. 334). Such motionlessness of culture runs counter to the surge of invention.

What does it mean when an artistic imagination has been constrained to engage emphatically with history and traditions but to disengage with the present moment? The combination, a modern and progressive national image, plus national distinction, therefore, is one of the issues that China must negotiate, if not master, for its national brand (Chao, 2019, p.333).

Tradition, present, and future are not always compatible; tradition often becomes a stumbling block, preventing the nation's present from progressing to the future and new possibilities. If LPA repeats traditions or stages authenticity in the landscape loaded with Western stage technology, it is never mentioned what spirit or ethos China needs in this "great era" of China to facilitate ground-breaking invention. O'Connor (2012) notes that China's embrace of the creative industries is by no means a break from the past, although it creates challenges in promoting a sector so clearly based on the ideology of creativity.

China's trajectory from an imitative low-value economy to an innovative high-value economy is impossible without removing rigid censorship and instituting "enlightenment values" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 108).

Political recuperation and control are well known to obstruct creative minds (Chao, 2019; Gladston, 2014; De Nigris, 2016). Furthermore, the prevailing copyright and censorship issues also conspire to inhibit national creativity. Goxe and Dimitris (2012) generalise that the notion of Chinese values based on Confucianism serving indigenous innovation is mere rhetoric; the notion serves political agendas, but has little to do with innovation itself (p. 153). A chain of inventive ideas does not flow from overwhelming propaganda nor the assertion of blind faith. It is not that the authoritarian state never has a creative or artistic breakthrough. However, if China wants to transform into a world-leading inventive nation, it has to double down on cultural, social, and political reform strategies. Many Chinese artists obsessively trace what cultural historian Claire Holt (1967, p. 3) considers “strands of continuities” from the prehistoric period to the present, looking for signs of ancestor worship and national symbols in the most contemporary of expressions. Relying on tradition as a material to make artwork can be lucrative and inspirational, even if the topic is assigned by the government; however, the heavy hand of government in some instances can cripple the artistic imagination. Chao (2019) mentions,

A heavy-handed instrumentalisation of the country’s history and traditions obfuscates images of a contemporary China that is actively pursuing and nurturing attributes such as creativity, innovation, and originality in its creative industries and beyond (p. 336).

Cohen (2016) utilises the word “inventing” in theatre to echo the trope of the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and problematise the construction of “the performing arts” as a cross-cultural field. The topic of “invention” in the context of LPA serves to create a static national image for an imagined

community; without a determinate break from tradition, LPA is simply the resurrection of tradition, or at most, the “reinvention of tradition” (Beiner, 2007) to imagine nationhood. By analysing China’s situation and considering tradition’s political instrumentalisation, an invention with less reliance on tradition but a more modern and progressive national image would be closer to the spirit of “invention”.

4.3 Chinese Invention as a Sublime for Chinese Cultural Nationalism

In deconstructing the Chinese invention assertion, I will utilise the Chinese sublime as an analytical tool. As detailed in the Literature Review, Li Zehou (1981) stresses the sublime in human cultural achievements by dividing it into two categories: the sublime in humankind’s practical activity and the sublime in nature. He states that:

In human beings’ socio-historical activities, we find sublime images of great men and heroes in natural objects who readily sacrifice themselves for the nation or state and well-being of their fellow humans and who embody the most admirable personality traits and highest moral principles (p. 77).

Thus, the sublime derives from practical human activities, and almost all of Li’s examples are of cultural constructions initiated by enterprising human beings. Following this thread, LPA claimed as a Chinese invention is an example of the sublime of cultural nationalism and achievement in the imagined “landscape”. Mei Shuaiyuan has stated:

Landscape Performing Arts results from the artists releasing their sentiments in a space (landscape). However, if this personal sentiment is related to the nation-state, it is first grade...⁶⁰

Kant claims, “We call that sublime which is absolutely great; the effect of sublime experiences often inspires awe and reverence and an emotional understanding that transcends rational thought” (Ken and Goldthwait, 1965). As an aesthetical comprehension, the sublime is not a consciousness of a greater unit; it is the notion of absolute greatness (Clewis, 2009). The feeling of greatness is portrayed as a moment of sublime that can be utilised to link pride, or admiration, with nationalistic sentiment and project the country’s greatness. It is also true that the sublime aesthetics, delineated by Schiller and Paul de Man (1983), is the popularisation of a philosophy that belongs to culture and the state (p. 52). Wang Ban (1997) in his *Sublime Figure of History* has highlighted that the Schillerian brand of the sublime was privileged in Chinese aesthetic discourses.

The application of the Chinese sublime to LPA has revealed that this alleged “Chinese invention” has transformed the individual victories of the LPA artists into a triumph for the state, which makes LPA an aesthetic ideology serving the state. It is essentially a sublime of the collective, which is less prone to experiencing the awe of self-empowerment. Evidently, this collectivism as an ideological aesthetic does not resonate with the Western model of democracy, freedom, individualism, and self-determination. The aesthetic sublime obscures the boundaries of the controlled collective. It creates a fantasy that collectivistic Chineseness can produce great inventions that lead China to fight or defeat Western individualism. The intended consequence of this cultural determinism is the ongoing erasure of individuals as political entities and their repositioning within the collective. The Chinese invention assertion dressed as a nationalistic sublime establishes the supremacy of national

⁶⁰ See Mei Shuaiyuan’s Weibo posted in 2015: <https://weibo.com/n/%E6%A2%85%E5%B8%85%E5%85%83>

collectivism and the creative force of the collective at the expense of individual creativity. The deeper the collective icon penetrates, the more the tangible sense of individuality shrinks. Wang Ban (1997) avers,

The Chinese sublime is the altruistic commitment to collective goals and saintly self-sacrifice held up by the party state's ideological discourse (p. 191).

The Chinese invention statement attached to the Chinese cultural landscape is misguided, though it gives a sense of the sublime. It leads the elites to overrate the power of Chinese culture and neglect the fact that Western technology enables viewing at night. The mountains and waters have always been there and enjoyed by tourists, but it was not until the LPA - enabled by technology - that they became prominent. Furthermore, the nationalistic sublime spreads the fallacy that the cultural heights that the sages achieved in the past are unsurpassable for contemporary people. The divinising of tradition by the sublime disregards that many feudal traditional values run counter to modern values. It leads to the misconception that obsolescent traditions have the power to guide the modernised world.

The repeated articulation of superior Chinese characteristics based on the exceptionalism of the cultural landscape signals the superiority of polity. It indirectly promotes a fatalism whereby China is destiny-bound to the authoritarian system that normalises the CCP's everlasting control. The sublime legitimises an alternative socio-political, cultural, and economic model to develop the creative industry. The Chinese invention assertion seeks to create a sensational media impact to mislead and govern the perception among the populace that China is becoming a creative country through its powerful cultural landscape. Hence, the sublime produced by the majestic

shanshui concept creates a nationalistic fervour that overwhelms rationality and obscures the reality of China's invention predicament. It is also a counterargument against the necessity and urgency of reforming the cultural and political system as the country transforms from an industrialised manufacturing economy to a creative economy.

Mei Shuaiyuan's position of not assuming Western cultural superiority is essential here. His declaration implies that China (Chinese culture) is superior; thus, he promotes a hegemonic cultural nationalism. It has been common for China's national branding to employ its traditions and past. However, it is not until recently that we see cultural elites actively make a "newly-invented art form" that relentlessly places China in a more culturally hegemonic position. How this cultural nationalism and hegemony is embodied in LPA will be further elaborated by considering the statements of Wang Chaoge, a co-founder of LPA. If Mei Shuaiyuan asserts LPA as a Chinese invention with an ethnocentric tone, Wang Chaoge, executive director of the *Impression* series, presents LPA with a more fervent and aggressive nationalism. Wang Chaoge bears the media title of "most innovative stage director in China".

She maintains a high media profile and is the self-declared "top-grossing director" since her touristic theatrical productions, including the *Impression* series, are ceaselessly performed daily throughout the nation. Wang is inextricably linked with the Chinese government; she was invited in 1995 by the CCP to direct the play *Chinese National Spirit* in the Great Hall of the People. Wang's stage productions predominantly take advantage of nationally and locally induced cultural pride without negativity, promoting a eulogising sentimentality. For example, her tourist theatrical production *Encore Pingyao* compliments Pingyao people's morality and integrity emotively. *Impression National Music*, on the other hand, rouses people's awareness of the loss of national traditional music and urges the Chinese to preserve their Chinese musical traditions.

Wang, a strong cultural nationalist, once charged only one Chinese yuan (equivalent to 10 UK pence) for directing *Impression National Music*, stating that “it is a cultural obligation to pass on Chinese national music” (quoted in Feng, 2013). After Zhang Yimou stepped back from producing LPA, Wang Chaoge took over his role and continued producing LPA productions. She enthusiastically believes LPA is a Chinese invention, as shown below:

I have created a form of performing art. Some people invented ballet and some invented Peking Opera, but we invented LPA a unique Chinese original art form and a great invention (quoted in Zhang, 2011). We asked many people in the world and found that there was no performance like *Impression Liu Sanjie*, which is fixed between the mountain and water. It is about not only using the landscape as the backdrop but also performing the landscape (quoted in Liu, 2008).

In the following statement, Wang Chaoge’s declarations reflect her strong cultural nationalism, mainly when she compares LPA with American productions:

American films invade China with dazzling technology and superstars, implying a sense that America can save the world. Some of Disney’s productions show how they define the values of beauty and ugliness, right or wrong, and good or bad (quoted in Zhang, 2016). I say China is lucky to have Wang Chaoge, otherwise, we would be occupied by Western musicals! The conservatories of music in China have musicals as a department; dancing colleges have departments of

musicals. They all do musicals. Is it Chinese culture? ... I do not want foreigners always to tell us the aesthetic and game rules. We Chinese had our aesthetic which was *daxiang wuxing*⁶¹ and *xieyi*. Various Chinese ideologies nowadays are less significant; our aesthetic has been invaded. We must do our Chinese things to express our own emotions and aesthetics. I will let my kid and my kid's kids know that Chinese is the best (quoted in Yan, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, Wang's anxiety about losing Chinese culture and aesthetics fires her motivation as a Chinese artist and cultural elite in LPA. Wang's cultural nationalism resides at the intersection between China and the world. One simply needs to remember her orchestral work *Encore National Music*, performed in the USA by The Chinese National Orchestra:

We took *Encore National Music* to the Kennedy Arts Center in the USA. After the show was performed several times, their manager and staff bowed and paid their respects to us. They told me that "the poster of the performance will be hung up permanently on the honour wall. We hung it not because a little stick and strings can make a wonderful sound; it is because this performance is advanced art and at an international level". I was proud that I was contending against them by using the best show in the world to fight. I won! (quoted in Yan, 2017)

Her dramatic statements clarify that by embracing traditional Chinese culture and touting cultural differences, LPA as an invention is a shield against American cultural

⁶¹ *Daxiang wuxing* is a sort of aesthetic conception proposed by Laozi, the founder of Taoism, which advocates natural and non-artificial beauty.

invasion. The Chinese employ discourses of victor and victim to interpret the cultural conflicts between the USA and China; from this comes an enhanced consciousness of nationality, which is depicted as “the logic of the wound” by Rey Chow (1998, p.4). Seton-Watson (1977) hold a similar opinion: Chinese nationalism was partly a creation of Western imperialism. Though Wang Chaoge is now Mei Shuaiyuan’s competitor in the LPA field, they both utilise self-exoticising strategies to produce their works. The language of Wang Chaoge’s hyper-nationalism is more aggressive than Mei Shuaiyuan’s, but they both have a superior tone which is alienating and provocative. It is a language of nationalism that is considered distasteful and dangerous.

There is a subtle irony here; Wang Chaoge’s vocalising against Western hegemony makes her hegemonic. Rather than asserting China’s position positively, she causes both East and West to recognise and reinforce their otherness. LPA itself is nothing more than an audio-visual spectacle, but it relentlessly bonds the nation; it is debatable whether creating a theatrical production is necessary to articulate forms of national representation or embodiment. Newly created performing arts expressing artists’ individual visions and interests which are not driven by nationalistic leanings or nation-specific attributes can still achieve commercial success. However, LPA is the dominant force that “accentuates identifications with the national contexts, as references are made to national particularities” (Chao, 2019, p. 329), akin to the Beijing Olympic Games opening ceremony being employed to present the nation’s cultural merits.

Nationalism, when superimposed on Burke’s sublime, informs us that beauty and the sublime are in diametrical opposition. We can see that the uncertainty of the nation-state, as a sort of terror, or as something “dark, uncertain, and confused” can manifest as the antithesis of light and beauty (Burke, 1756 [2009], p.23). Hanfling (1998) reiterates this:

For Burke, the sublime is vast, rugged, and even dangerous. The sublime challenges the assumption that beauty is a necessary condition of good art. It inspires awe, excites ideas of pain and danger, and can be solid and massive (p.44).

Wang Ban (1997), in agreement with Burke, asserts that “it is a characteristic of the sublime that there is a moment that may be sinister, threatening, or dangerous; that tends to throw the apprehending subject off balance” (p.188). Similarly, nationalism can evoke these sublime feelings of awe and danger that confound reason. There may be accompanying feelings of elation, admiration, or reverence; it can instigate a sense of awe produced by national ascendancy. Application of Burke’s sublime by Welsby (2019) has shown that:

Nationalism can simultaneously be seen as both a horror and an envisaged beauty: terrifying in its unimaginable boundlessness, and beautiful in knowing that nationalism is little more than a myth or a fiction.

In a similar vein, LPA has shown that nationalism, when beautified, transforms the majestic landscape into an art form. However, it is wise to exercise caution since commandeering this art form for nationalistic envision could be dangerous. Wang Chaoge’s assertion of the invention has an antagonistic nature and a swashbuckling mentality of dominance. Her nationalistic speeches are too numerous to enumerate in this chapter. However, it is no secret that hyper-nationalism constantly floods social media and is accepted by jingoistic Chinese nationalists (referred to as “Wolf Warriors” and “Little Pink”). One may jeer at such seemingly farfetched nationalistic statements, but this is the central ideology the CCP is currently promoting behind the Great

Firewall. Anti-West nationalism is prominently embodied in The Great Translation Movement⁶², which has exposed the Chinese state media's reaction toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Pro-Russia propaganda spreads its own version of the news that blames Ukraine for the bombings and atrocities perpetrated by Russian forces against civilians resulting in Chinese national sentiments of supporting Russia and condemning the West.

On the one hand, such statements as “Chinese culture is the best” denote a cultural superiority that elevates China to the summit of a worldwide civilisation. On the other hand, this hyper-susceptible mentality could be considered to show a lack of confidence. This nationalistic sublime, wanting in rational thought, sensitises the nation and invokes a fragility, unable to withstand criticism and questioning; it could potentially precipitate dissension and conflict. Consequently, internal contradictions are scorned by the population, and their venom is directed toward the state's external enemies. It is no well-known that this irrationality reinforces the difficulties of separating national interests from the interests of the CCP. The implications of aggressive nationalism should not be underestimated as it is not only dangerous to China, but also to the world. Belligerent Chinese national pride has drawn broad academic interest. Zhao (2021), observing Chinese nationalism, has noted that it has transitioned from affirmative to assertive and then from assertive to combative.

By producing xenophobia toward ruthless and exploitative foreign powers, this state-led nationalism could lead China to overestimate its strengths and misjudge how far it can push other countries (p. 157).

⁶² The Great Translation Movement is an online anti-war movement launched during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It seeks to document perceived pro-Russian, anti-American, anti-Japanese, antisemitic and anti-Western sentiment, as well as racially discriminatory sentiments in China. See: Timothy (2022) *The Volunteer Movement Enraging China*, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/05/great-translation-movement-china-censorship-firewall/629914/>

A cultural landscape can either constrain the nation or emancipate it from psychological rigidity. A narrow understanding of the cultural landscape brings about less ideological freedom than broad-minded thinking. Mitchell (2002) has elaborated that,

Landscape is territorial; its photographs function by refusing to formulate the land in the most readily available terms, by blocking habitual routes of imaginative access, which can be understood as something like pictorialized “No Trespassing” signs (p. 200).

Hyper-nationalism aroused by the emotionality of the sublime from the landscape not only burdens the nation with a narrow-minded narcissism but also generates a strong sense of territorial protection. Zhao (2021)⁶³ reports that,

Treating the United States, Japan, India, Southeast Asian countries, and other Chinese neighbours with full disdain, state-led popular nationalists have supported the state taking coercive foreign policies, including using force to safeguard state sovereignty and territorial integrity (p. 152).

The territorial issues with India and the South China Sea, and the claims to Taiwan

⁶³ One survey conducted by Zhao in 2017 revealed that most Chinese urban residents were supportive of the government using force to take back the disputed Diaoyu islands from Japan, even though such an action risked a potential war with the United States. Another survey in 2018 confirmed hawkish attitudes among the Chinese people, who endorsed greater reliance on military strength, supported greater spending on national defence, and approved of sending troops to reclaim disputed islands in the East and the South China Sea.

and Hongkong, have also gathered the support of state-led popular nationalism, which makes the world anxious to see how far China's current state-led popular nationalism may push the nation toward violent conflicts. Presently, an unfortunate outcome of this nationalistic confidence and anti-Americanism is the vigorous assertion of the "China model" and the rejection of universal values. If the Chinese elites are reluctant to acknowledge Western influence or learn from the West, they should at least temper their cultural superciliousness and realise that China must optimise its political, social, and cultural system if the country is to transform into an inventive nation. They must also be fully aware that assertive behaviour has put China's economic and political development on a risky track in the international arena instead of peaceful coexistence, which may jeopardise China's continued ascendance.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the landscape as an intangible cultural power that creates a nationalistic sublime, which serves as a theoretical anchor to deconstruct the assertions that LPA is a Chinese invention. According to Wang (1997), an acquisition of national identity is indeed a sublimation process. This discourse of Chinese invention is built around a regressive form of tradition and advances a hegemonic Chinese cultural nationalism. The CCP places itself at the head of this Chinese sublime by presenting it as a cultural evolution: a constantly advancing state culture, fluid enough to embrace all ethnicities, vibrant enough to be constantly innovated without loss of Chineseness or cultural purity. The sublime concept forges an unbroken link to the depths of Chinese history that is constantly flowering anew under the arbitration of the CCP.

On the one hand, the sublime emotionality of Chinese invention does not reinforce individual experience; it centres and unifies the loose contingency of individual experiences and the heterogeneity of subject-positions in the interests of total control.

On the other hand, it cultivates aggressive individual and collective voices recruited for the national interest while resisting foreign forces, despite the risk of creating ideological maniacs. The subject faithfully believes that without following the path confirming the worldview of universal values, China can still transform into a creative nation, given its powerful cultural landscape. The emotion-driven sublime on the cultural landscape is employed to rationalise something irrational. The alleged “Chinese invention” is essentially a sublime displayed as a strength and characteristic promising a national and collective renaissance.

The top-down agenda places Chinese creativity under tight ideological control. No matter how grandiloquent the description of China’s ancient past and tradition is, it still lacks an explanation of how a glorious past can save the nation’s present and future creativity from the restraint of tradition. Thus, the political instrumentalisation of “Chineseness” has become an obstacle, a shield, and a trumpet. If LPA is a spectacle disguising social issues, then the Chinese invention assertion is another form of “spectacle” to redouble the sensational effect masking China’s inventive reality fettered by the country’s political system. The LPA deployed in the landscape weaves a power matrix through a *shanshui* painting that regulates national identity. The nationalist sublime this Chinese invention evokes imposes a brushstroke of thick and heavy ideology on the landscape, further stabilising the landscape matrix.

Chapter 5

Reconstructing the Legend in the Landscape: from the Class Struggle of Liu Sanjie to Impression Liu Sanjie

Liu Sanjie is a typical Chinese legendary figure, adapted from folk custom and transformed during many historical and political stages. By comparing the musical film Liu Sanjie with the landscape performing art *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS), this chapter explores how Liu Sanjie is extracted from the Mao-era movie, then is reconstructed in the ILS to be in accord with contemporaneity (時代性). In the film, made during the 1960s, Liu Sanjie was promoted as a heroine fighting against the privileged classes, but in the ILS, her class struggle has been erased and only a harmonious and abstract legend remains. Her ethnicity is promoted by Han elites as not exclusive Zhuang but shared equally with Han, Miao, and Dong ethnicity in both a real and an imagined landscape to propagate a sense of ethnic harmony and unified Chineseness. Her transformation from a physical character, full of a rebelling spirit, to an abstract and disembodied “sense of harmony”, is a radical reinterpretation of a Chinese historical legend. Utilising a term from Wang Ban (1997), “the sublime figure of history”, which refers to an ideology aestheticised by the party-state for securing its governance, this paper refers to the bold artistic treatment of Liu Sanjie for cultural exploitation as “Liu Sanjie’s sublime”. Arguably, ILS transits Liu Sanjie from class revolution to art revolution in response to political requirements.

5.1 From A Legendary Liu Sanjie to A Class Struggle Liu Sanjie

ILS is based on the musical film *Liu Sanjie*. Here the background of the legendary Liu Sanjie is reviewed with emphasis on how this regional folk legend was adapted for political use in the 1960s musical film, which was based on the Communist ideology of class struggle.

Liu Sanjie, a regional folk legend from the south of China, has many oral traditions. There is no authoritative version of her story as the mists of time have obscured her origins. We do not know her birthplace, death, social standing, ethnic identity, or even whether she ever existed. Many places in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guangdong, Hunan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces have their local versions of her legend. Even her name tends to vary in both spoken and written traditions, such as Liu Sanmei, Liu Sanniang, and Liu Sangu (Chen, 2016; Ding, 1960). What does appear to be consistent in all the versions is that Liu Sanjie is a female figure highly skilled at singing. In modern times, Liu Sanjie is seen as a Zhuang ethnic minority legend by the masses, the Chinese government (Wang, 2009), and even Chinese academics (Ping, 2009; Li, 2009; Xiang and Bachimon, 2018).

The artistic format of *Liu Sanjie* was adapted from folk oral legend into written texts, stage works, and eventually modern cinema. Liu Sanjie's adaption reflects both political and social demands and has emerged from three historical contexts: feudal society (before 1912); the era of the Republic (1912-1949); and the communist era (post-1949), in which the legend of Liu Sanjie has been shaped to meet the requirements of specific epochal and political circumstances. When the CCP was battling for power, it was strongly influenced by the Yan'an policies⁶⁴ on arts and

⁶⁴ Mao's 'Talks at the Yan'an forum on literature and art', from 1942, emphasize that "the life of the people is always a mine of the raw materials for literature and art - they provide literature and art with an inexhaustible source, their only source." (Mao, 1996) This policy ensured that folk culture was recognized and integrated into national mainstream culture. The culture of Zhuang song fairs, often repressed by Confucian culture and government officials, was no longer dismissed as heresy, and was transformed by the state to become the setting for Liu Sanjie leading the villagers' struggle against the landlord class (Chen, 2016).

literature. Therefore, writers connected with the Party consciously incorporated and adapted the folk legends and songs of Liu Sanjie to re-narrate the folk-legend as a heroine involved in class struggle against the landlords (Mcdougall, 1984). For example, staged song dramas related to Liu Sanjie were created during the early stages of the People's Republic of China to propagate the ideology of class opposition.

In the 1960s, Liu Sanjie's class struggle narrative was adapted from live operatic performance to a silver screen musical. To emphasise the Communist concept of class struggle, the musical film portrays Liu Sanjie as the ethnic Zhuang leader of class struggle, standing against Mo, the villainous landlord. Liu Sanjie is portrayed as a clever and brave Zhuang ethnic minority singer who helps poor people vent their anger against the landlord classes by singing mountain songs. These mountain songs carry messages about oppression by the landlord class and capture the innermost thoughts and feelings of the landless classes. Believing that singing mountain songs causes public unrest, Mo bans singing and closes off the mountains; this triggers the scene where Liu Sanjie engages in a singing contest with Mo and his associates. Liu Sanjie easily defeats the team of landlord Mo. She is arrested by him but eventually rescued by her lover, A Niu, and a band of stouthearted peasants. Class opposition in the film is forcefully embodied in the spoken dialogue and the songs'. For instance, Liu Sanjie insults landlord Mo by singing:

He does not plant the sesame but drinks its oil

He does not tend the mulberry but wears silk

He quenches his thirst on the blood and sweat of the poor

He is the bandit chief...

The landlord's heart is more poisonous than a snake

The fishes in the pond die if he washes his hands in it

The trees on the hill wilt when he passes by...

The concept of this musical film came from Chinese national artists. According to Chen Yunqian (2016), Zhuang ethnic culture in this film was interpreted and represented by Han elites and was made consistent with Chinese national and Han beauty aesthetics. The film absorbs local Zhuang ethnic cultural traditions, such as throwing an embroidered ball and folksong fairs which reflect the culture of the Guangxi Zhuang ethnic people. However, the scriptwriter deliberately obscures Mo's ethnic identity (Chen, 2016). This overshadows inter-ethnic cultural tensions, allowing the local peasants to ignore ethnic identity. Instead, their class identity is awakened, and they stand together against their common enemy, the ruling classes.

Liu Sanjie's image was completely absorbed by the Chinese state's narrative. This local ethnic legend has been transcended to become a Chinese national symbol whose leading structure was based on communist notions of class opposition and class struggle. Liu Sanjie is a prime example of the classic technique of incorporating and adapting localised cultural resources to serve as state ideological propaganda (Chen, 2016, pp. 148-150).

Liu Sanjie's reinvention in the film reflects the political requirement, as the political propaganda suggests,

The artistic image of Liu Sanjie reflects the sentiments and aspirations of the masses, and working people, in a specific historical period...it is the ideal incarnation of the masses and working people, resisting feudal rule and class exploitation (Ge, 1960).

The film enjoyed great popularity in Asian nations, receiving the prestigious title of the “best mountain-song film”. It was shot in Yangshuo, a place with the most charming scenery in Guangxi. Whatever her real name, ethnicity, or social class, wherever she was born and died, Yangshuo has undoubtedly been the place that has benefited the most from Liu Sanjie branding. For example, a scene from the film is shot underneath a giant banyan tree in Yangshuo; the tree has become a popular tourist attraction for Liu Sanjie’s fans, who consider it a pilgrimage to visit the tree. In 2003, ILS premiered in Yangshuo. The performance reclaimed Liu Sanjie as a Guangxi regional symbol, bringing further social, cultural, and economic benefits to Yangshuo.

5.2 Harmonious Liu Sanjie in ILS

During the Cultural Revolution in China, “considerably less tolerance for minority autonomy and the difference was allowed, with its accompanying campaigns such as class struggle, and struggle against local nationalism” (Baranovitch, 2001, p. 365). When the Cultural Revolution ended, and China entered the post-Mao era, a reform and opening-up policy were orchestrated by Deng Xiaoping. After the Third Plenary Session in 1978, the government’s main agenda for state minorities focused on economic development. At this time, class struggle, a core concept of Maoist ideology, was downplayed. In Hu Jintao’s era, cultural development was consistent with building up a “harmonious society”; the concept pushed by the government at this time was named “de-classing”⁶⁵ (Wang, 2017).

With the encouragement of the commercial development of ethnic minorities’ culture, rediscovering ethnic characteristics for the tourism market has become a trend in both

⁶⁵ Wang (2017) claims that after 20 years of reform, the CCP’s official ideology replaced class struggle with the concept of a Harmonious Society, this process is called by Chinese academics “De-class” (去階級化).

the official media and popular culture (Du, 2015). Minority cadres in government contribute to the planning of tourism, whereas others are engaged in private enterprises like the development of local handicrafts, performing arts, and other products for the tourist market (Kolas, 2011). Clearly, tourism can be a profitable source of development and income in the undeveloped regions of China. Therefore, minority culture as a primordial stereotype is transformed and placed into modern packaging. Ethnic performing arts were artistically processed by Han elites and eventually staged as an entertaining production that caters for contemporary audiences' tastes.

ILS has emerged against this rapidly changing socio-political canvas. It was initiated in 1998 but was finished and premiered in 2003. The project was launched by Mei Shuaiyuan, a Han elite dramatist who was a member of the Guangxi Political Consultative Conference, the chief manager of the Guangxi Zhuang Drama Troupe, and also the Vice Director Candidate of Guangxi Agency for Cultural Affairs. Mei's idea was to place a performing art in an outdoor landscape using Guangxi's famous cultural icon, Liu Sanjie. Possessing grants from the Guangxi government, and later injection of private capital, Mei invited the Han elite artists Zhang Yimou, Wang Chaoge, and Fan Yue to be co-directors.

ILS is a mountain-song-themed outdoor performing art characterised by being fixed in the locality and presenting daily performances for tourists. It occupies 1.654 square kilometres upon the Li River and, as a backdrop, uses 12 mountains illuminated by lights (see Figure 21). ILS fuses Liu Sanjie as a cultural icon with ethnic music, local customs, and traditions which abstractly present the local people's "authentic" rural life, complete with scenes of fishing, singing, marriage ceremonies, and so forth. According to Wu (2010), it is a musical and visual feast; its visionary technique is an interpretation of cultural symbols in the form of an artistic performance. A characteristic of the show is that it uses 600 permanent performers; 450 of them local

peasants⁶⁶ (農民) and fishermen (漁民), who have their respective employment during the day, yet they perform in ILS during the evening. More distinctive than the participation of local peasants is Zhang Yimou's directing, which carries his artistic imprint. The show contains seven main phases, using different colours as themes. These divide the scenes of the performance and are typical of Zhang Yimou in that colour is exploited as part of the narrative. His artistic style makes use of large-scale scenes, such as huge crowds, for visual impact (Sheppard, 2010; Chen, 2004).



Figure 21: The natural stage illumined by lights

5.2.1 The Placeness of Yangshuo: Ethnicity, Tourism, and Culture

ILS is staged in the midst of the Yangshuo landscape, near Guilin city in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of Southern China. Considering that ILS is made of local ethnic and cultural characteristics and is promoted by the locality as a place branding, a quick detour is needed here to introduce the characteristics of Yangshuo in terms of its ethnic groups, cultural distinctiveness, and tourism.

Guangxi has 12 ethnic groups. The Zhuang ethnic minority group is the original ethnic group in Guangxi.⁶⁷ It remains the second-largest ethnic population with over

⁶⁶ 'Peasant' is a special identity and class in China, and a derogatory term.

⁶⁷ State multiculturalism is grounded in the political construction of ethnicity. Although around 400 groups applied for registration as a nationality in the ethnic identification initiated in the early 1950s, only 55 minority groups (Han as a majority is excluded) are recognized based on the criteria formed by Stalin in 1913. A prominent example is ethnic Zhuang, a product of political engineering (Kaup, 2000).

15 million people, 33% of the total population. However, those of Han descent and immigrant Han people are in the majority at 61% (Kaup, 2000). There are also Dong, Miao, Yao, and other state-designated ethnic minorities, though they comprise only a small proportion of the Guangxi population. In Yangshuo town, Han people make up the majority at around 88% of the population. The rest of the town's people are nearly all Zhuang (Yangshuo Annals Commission, 1988). Like most of China's ethnic minorities, the minorities in Guangxi have been assimilated into Han culture, meaning they have been "modernized" (Dabringhaus, 2018). Compared with Tibetans and Uyghurs, the Zhuang people and other ethnic minorities in the Guangxi Autonomous Region are more integrated and assimilated into Chineseness.

Aside from the icon Liu Sanjie, mountain songs have been popular since dynastic times in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and have become part of people's lives (McCormick and White, 2011). "In the process of the construction of the Zhuang as a southern Chinese nationality, various local song genres were generalised, and simplified, to become identified as Zhuang mountain songs" (Lu, 2018, p.2). Currently, fewer young people know how to sing in the traditional mountain style, even when they attend the song fairs (歌圩), a type of folk festival (McCormick and White, 2011). The Zhuang are famous for delighting in song, and the Chinese state promotes the area as an "ocean of singing". Yangshuo boasts sugarloaf mountains; "Guilin's scenery is the best in the world, and Yangshuo's scenery is the best in Guilin". On the one hand, landscape painters and poets have immortalised Yangshuo's sugarloaf mountains and imprinted its scenery on the country's collective consciousness (Taunay, 2008). On the other hand, according to Abrahams (2014), "for most Chinese tour groups, the local natural landscapes are part of the spectacle which they come to experience: they are consumed as exotic images" (p.49). Guilin is also an important gateway to China, and many Westerners, fond of the landscape of Yangshuo, choose to live there (Qiu, 2007). Nowadays, Yangshuo has become an internationally famous travel destination, and tourism has become the dominant

industry.

5.2.2 Analysis of the ILS

As previously indicated, Liu Sanjie was promoted as a heroine who incited class struggle in the Mao-era film. However, in ILS, she becomes an abstract character; her story is stripped of detail to emphasise a harmonious image, an impression. There is a quotation from Zhang Yimou on the covers of the CD and DVD of ILS:

ILS not only arouses people's past recollections from the film *Liu Sanjie* which they are familiar with. It also has something new to live up to with reference to the contemporary audience's beauty aesthetic. It is a combination of tradition and modernity (Xian, 2009).

Liu Sanjie has been modernised to cater for the tastes of a modern audience, retaining only a little of the traditional Liu Sanjie from the film. Xiang and Bachimon (2018) stated:

The show has only superficial links with the 1961 film or the story of Liu Sanjie. It is rather, at best, a loose and cavalier reinterpretation of the film; the creative team has chosen a selection of stereotypes that emphasise some of the "cultural" symbols of Guangxi. This impressionistic approach no doubt explains why the show was not called *The Story of Liu Sanjie* (pp.11).

The producer Mei Shuaiyuan has revealed his own opinion about the application of the name "Impression" in an interview I conducted:

It is not simply called Liu Sanjie because if it is just named Liu Sanjie then it is local and authentic. If we add “Impression” then we add what we ourselves feel. We do not really want the story or plot of Liu Sanjie; it is our impression that we produce as artists. Liu Sanjie itself is a rustic thing; the merging of “Impression” and “Liu Sanjie” elevates it to high art (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

The introduction of the term “impression”, with all its implications, gives the sense that ILS is a production of Han elites (outsiders) who project their fantasy of Yangshuo and Liu Sanjie. The tone of Mei Shuaiyuan’s response also informs of the relationship between Han elites and ethnic minorities, i.e., that minority culture is a tad rough, and as such, needs to be embellished by the paternalistic Han. This “Impression” brought about by Han domination in minority representation moves forward the trend, since the 1990s, described by some scholars as “internal Orientalism” (Gladney, 1994, 1995). The word “Impression” as part of the title seems to act as a fanfare telling in advance that this Liu Sanjie is something abstract which contrasts with both the film Liu Sanjie and the many stories of the legendary Liu Sanjie. Liu Sanjie’s modern treatment reflects the new political situation in the post-Mao era - the withdrawal of class struggle (de-classing) ideology. This will be further demonstrated in some detail through the analysis of the ILS’s content and interviews later. It will show how Liu Sanjie, as a cultural symbol, has been dismembered, harmonised, and reconstructed with local cultural traditions and multi-ethnic concepts to accommodate the new political agenda of promoting harmony.

In the introductory scene of ILS, Liu Sanjie is represented by the Dong ethnicity, Miao ethnicity, and Han ethnicity, a complex multi-ethnic Liu Sanjie. Six performers

introduce their ethnic characteristics. In Figure 22, two local male peasants in the customary dress of local fishermen, complete with bamboo hats; an ethnic Dong girl, and three Miao girls in their ethnic fashions “show the ethnic harmony of Guangxi” (Li, 2009, p.77).



Figure 22: Han, Dong, and Miao presenters (left to right)

The Dong girl speaks in her Dong language, a young lady who is of Miao ethnicity then translates the speech into Mandarin for the benefit of the audience:

She said her home is in a small village sitting upstream of the Li River...People there like to be singing while climbing the mountain...The songs there are called Dong big songs.

Another Miao girl chips in:

We are of Miao ethnicity...Miao ladies use silver jewellery to decorate themselves...What I am wearing is my Miao silver costume reserved for celebrations and ceremonies...

Why did a performance about Liu Sanjie, a Zhuang ethnic-cultural symbol, include performers from other ethnic minorities? The music composer Zhang Xiao gave me the following explanation:

ILS represents a concept of the big Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There is not only the Zhuang ethnicity in Guangxi but also other ethnic minorities such as the Dong ethnicity who inhabit Sanjiang County and Hechi District within Guangxi (Personal Communication, 03/05/2018).

Therefore, the cultural placeness of ILS has been expanded to cover a larger spatial scale. In this sense, Liu Sanjie is not promoted exclusively as a Zhuang ethnic symbol but is shared by Han, Dong, and Miao people, thus echoing ethnic harmony and national unity.

After brief speeches, a soft screen is raised from the water upon which a short clip of the musical film *Liu Sanjie* is projected, showing Yangshuo's natural landscapes and harmonious scenes of people happily labouring in the fields. When the projection ends, Liu Sanjie, dressed identically to the Liu Sanjie in the film, sails in a wooden boat towards the audience and sings Liu Sanjie's iconic song: *The Mountain Song is like a Spring Stream* (See Figure 23 and 24)⁶⁸. This is a rare appearance of Liu Sanjie

⁶⁸ This song is borrowed from the Caidiao opera *Liu Sanjie*, written by Qiao Yu and composed by Lei Zhenbang.

in person. Therefore, the Zhuang legend Liu Sanjie is presented by a multi-ethnic cast to demonstrate ethnic harmony, devoid of any whiff of class struggle.



Figure 23: Liu Sanjie in the musical film



Figure 24: Liu Sanjie in ILS

The local Han peasants and fishermen give a performance with giant red silk sheets laid out upon the water to represent their fishing nets (see Figure 25). This part of the show is an abstract manifestation of contemporary art that displays symbolism and conceptual themes. This spectacular red scene, full of Zhang Yimou's artistic

It has circulated in China for over half-century. It is now well-known nationally and can be safely classified as a Chinese folksong. The lyrics of the song are as follows: "This mountain song echoes between you and me. Like the spring stream... The mountain song penetrating a thousand waves while passing shoals". The lyrics lack reference to class struggle, making Liu Sanjie's appearance safe and harmless. Therefore, the song could be taken directly from the Caidiao opera and dropped into ILS.

imprint⁶⁹, is performed by over 80 peasants. Zhang Xiao, the music composer, devised this modern means of expressing the local culture:

Using red silk has an implied meaning. It is the mountain songs that make the spring stream red to echo Liu Sanjie's song The Mountain Song is like a Spring Stream. The red silk also represents the fishing nets that for centuries have been cast into the river by local fishermen (Personal Communication, 03/05/2018).



Figure 25: The local Han peasants' performers

The Zhuang ethnicity is utilised in this phase by Zhuang ethnic young people presenting Zhuang mountain songs⁷⁰, in the form of a *duige*⁷¹ performance. In this

⁶⁹ Red is Zhang Yimou's favourite colour and is prominent in his productions. Nowadays, it is widely recognized as Zhang Yimou Red. The colour red is the signature for most of Zhang Yimou's films: *Red Sorghum*, *Judou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *The Story of Qiuju*, and so on. All are sensuous and all are symbolic (Ye, 1999).

⁷⁰ Mountain songs (*shan'ge*) are songs, mostly in free rhythm, sung loudly outdoors. The specific nature of the *shan'ge* genre is shown in several hundred examples collected from written sources and recordings (Zhang and Schaffrath, 1991). The style of singing attributed to Liu Sanjie is common to ethnic groups in many parts of China. In this style of antiphonal singing, two or more singers (often pairs singing against other pairs) 'talking' to each other in songs, mostly as a contest to see which singers out-sing the other side. The Mandarin term for this style of performance is *duige* (antiphonal songs). The most popular songs of this sort in Guangxi are known as *shan'ge* (mountain songs) or Liu Sanjie songs. They are also known as Guangxi *qing'ge* (Guangxi love songs) (Mair, 1994). Zhuang ethnic mountain song is often performed at song fairs (*gexu*), a Zhuang singing festival.

⁷¹ *Duige* is a form of antiphonal singing, which is also referred as mountain song.

performance, a group of girls is shouting the name, A Niu, a character who is Liu Sanjie's lover in the film *Liu Sanjie*. Along with a group of boys, they are all dressed in Zhuang ethnic costumes, singing Zhuang mountain songs (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: Zhuang ethnic minority people singing mountain-song

The daughter of the Li River (a fairy spirit performed by a Zhuang ethnic girl) was specifically invented for this performance by Zhang Yimou. She is clad in a flesh-coloured costume, giving her the appearance of being naked. She dances in a Chinese classical style, woven with modern choreographic elements for theatrical effect (see Figure 27), on a crescent moon floating on the river. This invented daughter of the Li River fully reflects Zhang Yimou's imprint of "inventing rituals" (Radha, 2018).



Figure 27: “The daughter of Li River” dancing on the moon

In the next scene, thirty Zhuang ethnic girls wearing white bathrobes over their flesh-coloured costumes begin to disrobe, exhibiting a tradition of the Zhuang, the custom of bathing before marriage (see Figure 28).



Figure 28: Zhuang girls bathing before marriage

After the bathing scene comes a ritualised marriage ceremony performed by the daughter of the Li River, dressed in Zhuang ethnic costume, who also represents Liu Sanjie. Eventually, a Zhuang bridegroom approaches in a little wooden boat and invites the bride into the boat (see Figure 29). This scene relates to a Zhuang folk custom which is explained by the manager Wang Jiaxian: “many places in Guangxi

are full of rivers and lakes. A long time ago, there were no bridges; brides had to take a boat when they went to get married” (Personal Communication, 20/03/2018).



Figure 29: Zhuang wedding ceremony

The acts above performed by Zhuang ethnic minority are consistent with Gladney’s notion of internal Orientalism as applied to ethnic minority dance and considering that Zhang Yimou, as a Han Chinese director, is portraying minorities as exotic, erotic, and primitive for the entertainment of masculine Han spectators. With the couple drifting far away in the boat, children’s voices can be heard in the distance, crying “Liu Sanjie, Liu Sanjie ...” to summon an abstract and spiritual Liu Sanjie. The official *Impression* website reinforces this concept: “In ILS, you may not see the plot, figure, and the scene you expect; however, what you can see is a series of impressions which are the source from the landscape and people’s life. She came from this land; she is Liu Sanjie”.

In the next phase, the Dong ethnicity plays a prominent part in weaving the narrative of Liu Sanjie. Some 34 Dong ethnic female child performers demonstrate the most culturally representative symbol of the Dong, the Dong big song.⁷² (See Figure 30).

⁷² The big songs are usually sung by a group of same sex singers, and are composed of two vocal parts (one lower and one higher), unaccompanied, and never conducted. The big song genre has been included on UNESCO’s list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. With the rise of ethnic tourism and the heritage industry, big songs have become a symbol of the pan-Dong identity and are performed in different staged contexts, both domestically and internationally (Wu, 2016).

To convey a sense of “authenticity”, they sing in the Dong language without any amplification system or musical accompaniment. The chorus is divided into dual voices that are akin to acapella. This Dong big song performance contains seven songs.⁷³ In this phase, the Dong ethnic culture is museumised in ILS and corralled into being representative of Guangxi’s diverse ethnic culture. When the local people’s lifestyle exhibits through the Dong big songs, it conveys a sense that the Dong ethnic minority group is a considerable ethnicity that has shares in the Zhuang legend of Liu Sanjie located in this imagined community of Guangxi. This arrangement is in line with government policy, which currently strives to show that China is a multi-ethnic nation with an inherent ethnic harmony.



Figure 30: Dong ethnic children singing Dong big songs

Following this, the local fishing lights are displayed on the Li River; the producers regard these lights as a local characteristic. The musical accompaniment is provided by an original song from the film *Liu Sanjie: Bursting with Mountain Songs*. The lyrics of this song have been directly imported from the film *Liu Sanjie*; however, the verses weighted towards class struggle or conflict have been quietly dropped. For example, evocative lines such as “singing without fear of being decapitated...The wicked landlord raised his knife at night” are absent, leaving the desired “impression” of harmony between humans and nature. The lyrics of “Bursting with Mountain

⁷³ The music editor for these songs is from the Dong ethnic group. She has the title “Successor of Dong Big Song” given by the ILS theatre.

Songs” as performed in ILS are presented below:

Flowers atop the mountain make fragrance in the foothills,
Water under the bridge cools the top of the bridge...
It reaches deep into the mountain and the old forests ...
(Lyrics from *Bursting with Mountain Songs*)

The local fishing lights phase is simply an art show of lights fixed on fishing boats. Over a hundred boats rowed by fishermen, equipped with their fishing lights, sail along the river while several children are seen playing on the stage. A herdsman leads a water buffalo towards the children; this creates a dreamlike and harmonious atmosphere that evokes an idyl of childhood (see Figure 31). Though Liu Sanjie is still not a physical presence in this scene, she is abstractly encapsulated as an impression abounding in the sublime of nature.



Figure 31: Fishing lights show

The Miao ethnicity now represents Liu Sanjie, and alone presents the following phase which is dominated by the colour silver. The scene here is of a catwalk show performed by over 200 Miao ethnic women adorned in traditional costumes. The Miao performers are decorated with multiple light-emitting diodes that can be

switched on and off at will to give a potent visuality (see Figure 32). Performers walk hand in hand on the hidden stage that is slightly elevated above the surface of the river in the sinuous form of a lightning bolt. The line of performers is then divided into smaller subgroups by a simple but uniform act of choreography. This is typical of Zhang Yimou's style in its grandness, uniformity, and symmetry⁷⁴. An interpretation of this phase was offered by Zhang Xiao,

Here, we are trying to express that these girls are all Liu Sanjie. Liu Sanjie is a cultural symbol, and as such, is ubiquitous, not just a fixed figure (Personal Communication, 03/05/2018).

In this choreographed walking show, the Miao performers are woven into the vastness of the landscape and add to the construction of the complex, harmonious, and shape-shifting Liu Sanjie. The Zhuang legend of Liu Sanjie is again contextually disseminated and shared among the Miao ethnic group in this imagined community.



Figure 32: Miao costume walking show

In the final phase, *Epilogue: Singing to Nature*, all performers (Han, Zhuang, Dong,

⁷⁴ There are still traces of Zhang Yimou's signature in ILS. The scenes with the synchronised bodies recall the opening ceremonies of the Olympics. Even though Zhang Yimou did not use very much of his signature colour red, his passion for vivid colors is evident throughout his other productions (Qin, 2016).

and Miao) come to the stage to acknowledge the applause from the audience. Peasants from five local Han villages parade, carrying occupied bamboo rafts. Each raft is preceded by a villager carrying their village flag (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Han peasants representing their own villages

Liu Sanjie's song, *Thanks Very Much*, adapted from the film, is sung in unison during this phase. In the film, Liu Sanjie sings this song to express her gratitude to people who have come to learn rebellious mountain songs from her. The original lyrics included a complaint about the ruthless exploitation by the tyrant landlord Mo, so they have a flavour of class division. However, the ILS version of the song's lyrics has been censored. Figure 34 gives an example of verses kept and the verses erased:

Thanks very much

Friends from far and wide

There is no wining and dining

But this mountain-song conveys my love...

~~Good thing in the world which we have no share in~~

~~But the only one thing that we poor can lay claim to is the mountain song~~ } See you again

~~Do not say we are poor~~

The mountain-song can fill up the vast sea...

Figure 34: The altered lyrics of *Thanks Very Much* in ILS

Through censorship of the lyrics, the positive message “see you again” substitutes for the doleful lyrics referencing the poverty of the people. The remaining lyrics in *Thanks Very Much* convey a sense of hospitality and an appreciation for the tourists watching the show. The show ends with a brief documentary trailer projected onto a large screen; it introduces the four pioneers: Zhang Yimou, Wang Chaoge, Fan Yue, and Mei Shuaiyuan (see Figure 35).



Figure 35: Zhang Yimou on the screen

The interaction between the audiences and ethnic performers in this multi-ethnic finale again reinforces the multi-ethnic and harmonious theme of Liu Sanjie. When the performers at the end are immersed in the sound of clapping, and cheering, in this ravishing mountain and water, it seems only “natural” for all parties (local ethnic performers, Chinese tourists, and international visitors) to experience a sense of the imagined community of China when they intermingle in Yangshuo’s sublime landscape.

5.3 Liu Sanjie's Chineseness: The Landscape and State-minority Relations

To discover why Liu Sanjie has undergone such revolutionary reinvention, the issue of Chineseness embedded in state-minority relationships needs to be considered. With the recent global trends of ethnic nationalism, there has been an “awakened” or “strengthened” ethnic consciousness, and in tandem with this, a marked increase in productions showing ethnic cultures in China (Du, 2015). At the same time, tourism has given minorities new opportunities to represent their ethnic identity, leading to a local ethnic nationalism that is still considered a possible source of separatism (Sautman, 2014). Consequently, post-Mao leaders have adopted a new strategy of promoting ethnic and regional diversity in the service of maintaining national unity, partly adapting to local realities (Guo, 2008). Zhuang people and other ethnic minorities in the Guangxi Autonomous Region are more integrated and assimilated into Chineseness than other ethnic groups, such as Mongolian, Uyghurs and Tibetans. However, “a small movement still involved some Zhuang activists asserting themselves in the hope of seceding to form an independent state by proudly asserting their nationality” (Kaup, 2000, p.4).

Ethnic minority songs, and dances, since the end of the last century, have been presented by professionals, not for their own people but for tourists (Mackerras, 1996). However, ILS uses local ethnic minorities as performers; it was rare at the beginning of the 21st century for ethnic minority people to display their ethnicity on such a large scale. In the pre-reform era, minority representations were predominantly political. Even two decades ago, the commodification of ethnic cultures remained limited (Du, 2015). Before the ILS, there was no regular and large-scale event that asserted ethnicity as a selling point. This was quite simply because it was feared that the display of local cultural identity would cause national disintegration (Ryabinin, 2017). The change of viewpoint mirrors the requirements of China's reforms at the turn of

the century. The CCP often uses the term “contemporaneity”⁷⁵ to comment on ethnic cultural and artistic works that are under, or consistent with, the government’s guidance. Liu Sanjie is no exception; the term often appears in the official media reports of work related to the interpretation of Liu Sanjie, suggesting that Liu Sanjie’s re-creation is consistent with current epochal characteristics. The official state-run press agency, *Xinhua News*, has reported that “the landscape of Guilin and Liu Sanjie’s folk songs, coupled with Zhang Yimou and other artists’ creations, endow it with a direct response to contemporaneity” (Deng, 2009). The Party’s official outlet, the *People’s Daily*, commented:

ILS responds to the trend of “contemporaneity” and shows the concentrated reflection of the mutual flourishing and development of Guangxi’s multi-ethnic culture. They are of open, inclusive, progressive Guangxi ethnic groups that feature unity and mutual aid...making contributions to maintain national unity and solidarity, and the social stability of the border area...to build up Guangxi into our model of maintaining national solidarity, model of maintaining unity, and model of maintaining stability which is the lively embodiment of the Chinese nation’s strong cohesion (Wang, 2009).

As exemplified by the propaganda above, the extreme emphasis on ethnic harmony, national unity, and stability consistently appears when analysing the concept of “contemporaneity”. Thus, the term can be viewed as equivalent to the harmonious

⁷⁵ Contemporaneity describes the rationale of the ideology of the CCP which is to “keep pace with the times” (與時俱進) in the drastically changing domestic and global environments. Sun (2005) comments that the ideology of “Two Necessities” for leaders of the CCP, in different generations, has the direct response to contemporaneity...distinguished advancement...and theoretical innovativeness and practicalness. Their interpretation of this ideology is dependent upon the realities that the country and the party face, and the different epochal backgrounds. Also, see: Wang (2019) Contemporaneity of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

relationship between multi-ethnic cultures giving national unity and stability in the socialist-capitalist era.

By participating in the cultural event designed by Han elites, ethnic minorities are professionalised to represent themselves, which mirrors China's "internal Orientalism". This is particularly evident when ILS premiered in 2003; the scene daughter of the Li River I described earlier was acted by a naked Zhuang ethnic girl and thereby sparked overwhelming criticism for being too risqué (Xiao, 2006). As Han Chineseness is the dominant Chineseness, my criticism associates "Chineseness" with a focus on the issue of cultural appropriation. Through monopolising the interpretation of local ethnic culture, Han elites present ethnic culture through their idea of Chineseness as a display for the spectators who are mostly expected to be domestic Han tourists. The modern narrative of Liu Sanjie has to deal with two issues in production and content. Production must be more Han; it must conform to state policies and modern Han aesthetics where ethnic culture is considered reliant on Han elites for improvement. However, content must be contra-Han to be more ethnic, pastoral, poetic, feminine, and harmonious. This trade-off gives just enough difference and exoticness to be ethnic but not enough to seem backward. The local Guangxi culture was therefore reconstructed somewhere in between the modern and the traditional and in between the local and national.

Furthermore, a dominant cultural and aesthetic Chineseness is inscribed into this ethnic-cultural production. The success of ILS as a stage performance indicates a critical habitual turn, from watching films in regular cinemas to the mass consumption of visual and audio outdoor spectacles that have allowed the rise of visual mountain-water aesthetics. Zhang Yimou emphasises this concept in ILS by alleging that, it is simply a show, a show of Yangshuo's landscape, a show of folk customs, and a show of the state of harmony between humans and nature.⁷⁶ Harmony between

⁷⁶ See ILS's official website, available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CJEX5ZT23P1GbsoL7TTLYQ> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019].

humans and nature resonates with the state's ideology of building a harmonious society - the harmonies between humans and nature, between ethnic minorities and the Han-dominated state, and between China and the world all become entwined. As mentioned in the former chapters, by mobilising a quintessential "Chinese" spirit, scene, essence, and tradition of mountain water culture as a safe representational tactic, the creators of ILS attempt to evoke the relationship between this real landscape, and the imagined landscape familiar to every Chinese, and non-Chinese.

The negative effect of this entanglement between aesthetics and politics is to consolidate the established power of an authoritarian regime (Wang and Meng, 2008).

The landscape is linked to state politics in terms of policy and ideology to promote ethnic diversity and add Chinese national characteristics as a means of expressing nationhood. ILS has revealed that the state accepts diversity; however, conditions are attached that ethnic differences are visually displayed in an abstract way, commercialised, and embedded rhetorically. This is a safe manifestation of ethnic identity because it is just reduced to a tourist spectacle. It strikes a balance by obscuring the potential tensions between local ethnic identity and the overarching Chinese national identity. There is just enough difference and exoticism to attract tourists, but not enough to kindle and ignite separatism.. In other words, when this Liu Sanjie is performed by the local ethnic minority people and is consumed by Han Chinese and international tourists, ILS is promoted as not only a Guangxi brand, but also a Chinese national brand. This is witnessed by the Chinese media releasing a news report informing that: "An advertisement (for ILS) has appeared on the Nasdaq's headquarters in Times Square, New York, which exhibits China's mountain-water culture to the world" (Yang, 2013). In this form, ILS can be exploited as a Chinese soft power to increase Chinese cultural pride through the agency of both

the Chinese and the global media.

Criticality could be fitting when considering Zhang Yimou's background as a government-designated director and Chinese cultural ambassador projecting Chineseness globally. This is one reason why he was chosen to produce the "Beijing Olympic extravaganza, presenting a unified Chineseness" (Lee and Yoon, 2017). Zhang Yimou, as a brand image, appears ostentatiously in the performance of ILS not only to increase its value in the tourist market but also to demonstrate a united Chineseness. So it is with Zhang Yimou's signature colour effects, spectacular scenes and uniformity in the performers' movements, which can be deemed very Chinese. The Chineseness of ILS is embodied in its uniform choreography - communist collectivism- the visual impact of numerous people in unison expressing the Confucian ideal of harmony between people and authority is valued by many authoritarian regimes. Lee and Yoon (2017) have compared the Olympic opening ceremonies of Beijing 2008 and London 2012.

Chineseness, as devised by the authorities in Beijing 2008 is a linear and orderly progress, a well-disciplined mass performance and collective self-effacement. Britishness, as reflected in London 2012, is a chaotic expression, a free and individual expression (Lee and Yoon, 2017, pp.964).

Disciplining of troops or bringing minorities into line is evident in such large-scale displays. This is where we locate Chineseness as "stateness", which in turn translates into nationalism. Such magnificent visual impact is also woven into the Liu Sanjie narrative to create the final section focusing on the sublime.

5.4 Universal Spectacle: Liu Sanjie's Sublime

ILS is no more than a “dazzling sound and lighting show; this form of creative technique is of course very reductive and produces an illusion, that of a spirit of place, which in turn produces an instant and ephemeral aesthetic impression” (Xiang and Bachimon, 2018, pp.11-14). It is then no surprise that Zhang Yimou calls ILS “a creation which completely breaks the traditional form” (Li, 2009, p.86). The erasure of the Liu Sanjie’s plot is consistent with Zhang Yimou’s artistic style; he is often criticised for allowing the form to outweigh the contents. According to Chen (2004), his later films are visually, aesthetically beautiful, and spectacular, but the plot is weak. One of the ILS directors Wang Chaoge, who is considered one of the most innovative stage directors in China, stated that:

I request my work be innovative and every minute and second must be overturned (Ding, 2018). ILS is not meant to just follow the style of a traditional performance; I do not want to have something already existing (Hu, 2012).

ILS relies more on music, dance, and song than on acting ability:

When hearing about Liu Sanjie, you must have thought that the performance should have had A Niu and lord Mo; and how evil it was of lord Mo to treat Liu Sanjie so cruelly, and how the love between A Niu and Liu Sanjie is romantic. However, I do not portray the story as a narrative. All you will see is two buffaloes walking around, a group of minority people singing, and the fishers with lights on their fishing boats. There is no bad man, and it is not about the story; it is about a poetic feeling and a gasp in admiration (Zhang, 2016).

It is widely known that when ILS premiered, many local travel agencies tried to boycott the performance and refused to sell tickets. The producer Mei Shuaiyuan admits this and refers directly to the controversy in an interview I conducted:

From the very beginning, the controversy was already there. The audiences expect to see Liu Sanjie and her plot in the film which was made in the 1960s. People said: What the fuck is this? When I invited the local tour agencies to watch it, they said Why do you not use a superstar? Who will pay for a show performed by a flock of peasants? Even the comment from culture and art circles was negative: Where is the story? What is it trying to tell? (Personal Communication, 15/03/2018)

Eventually, the reason for the overwhelmingly negative comments was divulged in Mei's published biography:

Relying on a plot to make a touching story is not originally landscape performance's primary tenet. Chinese audiences tend to have a fixed aesthetic habit and idea that drama must have a developing narrative and some conflict, and a gala must always have a superstar. This formatting and ossification of aesthetics on art are terrible. The innovation of ILS, apart from its art form, is also a revolution for the mentality of appreciating the performing arts. I believe that if ILS was made with a conventional concept with storytelling, or the traditional format of a play, then it perhaps would have failed. Rather than directly telling you something, ILS mainly depends on natural scenery and the charm of performing art itself to let audiences feel and experience by themselves (quoted in Hu, 2012).

The controversy is undoubtedly not merely over artistic choices and issues of adaption - storyline or no storyline, highbrow or lowbrow. There is a critique regarding LPA's inauthentic and shallow engagement with the local ethnic culture. For example, a local tour guide Yang throws light on issues of authenticity:

ILS just provides an image, like the river and the karst landscape, to leave you with an impression. It can only represent Guilin's natural landscape ... and a small piece of the ethnic culture. Once you want more details to understand it further, it cannot satisfy you. How and what can you expect to learn about the local culture in a short moment? The show, lasting only 70 minutes, does not require much patience from the tourists whose time is limited when travelling (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018).

It is a valid critique of the inauthenticity issue, not only in LPA but also in cultural tourism. Nevertheless, "authentic" or "inauthentic" is a controversial duality, and likability is a subjective issue. Some people will enjoy ILS, and some will not; some will believe it is authentic, and some will not. We cannot simply be critical of culture's adaption on the grounds of authenticity. If the "original" is not creatively enhanced somehow, it will cease to be an artistic expression. The whole point is to transform it into something else to create a different experience, to forge a connection with audiences in a new way.

This abstraction of ILS can be viewed from the standpoint of medium-specificity⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ Medium specific can be seen to mean that "the artwork is constituted by the characteristic qualities of the raw material". This would probably include the techniques used to manipulate the materials. "Medium-specificity is based on the distinct materiality of artistic media". As early as 1776 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing "contends that an artwork, in order to be successful, needs to adhere to the specific stylistic properties of its own medium". (Schwartz and Przyblyski, 2009)

The visuality of LPA underpins the superficial aesthetics or presentation rather than the expository narrative. Visuality is art defined by the reinforcement of medium specificity. The show can only deliver an “impression” since ILS is circumstanced within the tourism framework. The tourists on a package tour, often have limited time and limited encounters in terms of gaining the panorama of local culture. The theatre is a vast open-air space and not a regular theatre. The auditorium is remote from the stage; the viewers only see the tiny human figures overwhelmed by the enormous landscape, and it is difficult to see any intimate “details”. The content is somehow inevitably spectacle-driven or dominated by visuality. Therefore, it is not merely a political issue but also an issue over the medium that can lead to a reductionist approach to the cultural object. However, it is only natural to anticipate the plot of Liu Sanjie from the film, but this expectation causes confusion for the ILS audience. An experienced local tour guide Yang informs:

There is a big difference between ILS and the film *Liu Sanjie*. The tourist audiences do not understand it as it is not what they expect from Liu Sanjie. When people mention Liu Sanjie, they first think of the film (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018).

Most of my interviewees were confused. In the minds of the local interviewees I questioned, ILS is considered a “highbrow art” which is not “down to earth”. For example, one of the taxi drivers stated:

I do not understand art, this kind of thing, and one hundred percent of my clients who are tourists said that they are confused about what ILS is trying to show (Personal Communication, 11/03/2018).

One tour guide, Wang, who exclusively leads the Western and South Asian tourists, revealed that:

The positive or negative feedback depends on the national background and the degree of artistic refinement. The international tourists generally give favourable comments. I suggest that ILS itself is an artwork, and artwork needs to be appreciated with cultural and artistic refinement (Personal Communication, 10/03/2018).

The manager Li Xinjie gives his own interpretation for this:

There is an interesting phenomenon: the international tourists' degree of satisfaction is 100%. Local people complained about ILS's theatrical form by saying, "I do not understand it". I explain to them that ILS is a scenery painting. It is just a painting or a poem without telling a story and almost without language. Let us think about it conversely; if we use language to tell a story by adopting the format of a play, the international foreigners will not understand. It is like narrating the story of Guangxi province to people from Shandong province, which they possibly would not even understand. Alternatively, if you narrate a Tibetan story to Han people, perhaps the Han people would not be able to understand. What I mean is that from a marketing perspective, if you localise a cultural production too much, the scope of its acceptance will be narrowed down (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018).

Thus, through Han artists' appropriation of ethnic culture, they manage to universalise ethnic culture through a reductionist approach to the local cultural object. This has been researched by Pearce and Wu (2015) who found that with ILS,

International tourists are generally positive toward the culturally distinctive style of the entertainment. Even despite the challenge of comprehending meanings and the language they were impressed with the grand spectacle, the performances of so many people, and the context (pp.772).

Considering that Liu Sanjie in ILS is a Chinese national elites' monolithic interpretation loosely based on the famous Mao-era film, the local people's concerns have been largely neglected by this tourism-based enterprise. Another local taxi driver, who has some understanding of Zhang Yimou and the apathy of the natives, exclaimed:

You should not expect to understand Zhang Yimou's works; that is his style. ILS makes local ethnic minorities' lives abstract, such as the fishing and fire torch. The scene is grand and beautiful, but if people expect to find a story or play, they would not feel it to be any good. Many foreign people say it is good, but we local people do not feel much about it. (Personal Communication, 14/03/2108)

This is how spectacles work - on the level of affect and not always on the level of logic and understanding (Deleuze, 1987; Redmond 2017). It is important to consider that if we interpret ILS in an inclusively and openly artistic perspective, why must a

show having Liu Sanjie in the title have a Liu Sanjie storyline? To put it in a simple way, ILS is no more than visual entertainment “largely dependent on mountain water, ... letting the audiences feel and experience by themselves” (Mei Shuaiyuan as quoted in Hu, 2012). The re-framing of the peasants, a class identity often associated with raw, barbaric iconology, also deserves consideration. The peasants are orchestrated in the landscape, part of a grand narrative of mountain water, which fulfils the producer’s boldness and creativity. It is evident in Wang Chaoge’s claim that the ILS is “avant-garde art”:

I put peasants on the river and let them perform their own culture; I call this art”⁷⁸ (quoted in Wang, 2015).

This elitist tone degrades the peasant and ethnic performers to objects utilised to make an aesthetic “sublime”. Wang Ban (1997) mobilises the terminology “sublime” to make a satire on China’s aesthetic issues within the ideological framework constructed by the CCP. The phenomenon of Liu Sanjie’s reinterpretation echoes Wang Ban who considers the “sublime figure of history” and explains that:

The sublime embodies the abstract telos of history, feeding the people with daunting and awe-inspiring figures, to legitimise its political rule and ideological hegemony. Thus the party-state needs to recruit faithful subjects to forge a national and political identity (Wang, 1997).

“China’s sublime is typically regarded as masculine - such lofty activities as revolution and nation-building require the feminine to be sublimated” (Kraus, 1999, p.546). Yet, the subject cannot always remain snug within an established identity:

⁷⁸ Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4N_z0iw8k6A&t=414s
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From a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country to a strong industrialised nation-state, the party-state needs subjects unafraid of destroying their old identity to forge a new one, to produce more and more subjects of the state...Aesthetic sublime justifies and legitimises the state (Wang, 1997, pp.191-2).

The mythical figure of Liu Sanjie signifies such a sublime. In Wang's words, the aestheticisation of the CCP's ideology of history is an inevitable and irresistible dialectical progression from communism to socialism with Chinese characteristics. Liu Sanjie's drastic recreation in ILS has directly obscured and hidden the current ethnic issue and re-emerged class contradiction which are factors of instability that can sway the Party's governance. In short, the LPA spectacle creates moments of the sublime in which the visuality dominates and overpowers the intellect, diverting the viewers' attention from these issues. In the ILS theatre, as I recall, the scenes provided a robust visual shock, making the audience shout "whoa" many times. Patriotism and statism may also arise spontaneously in this sublime emotionality as the viewers are led to admire "the amazing landscape of the country" (祖國大好河山). Replacing revolutionary spirit and subjectivity, giving birth to the new man in the new century; in this regard, the emotional dimension of the individual has to be driven or sublimated for a new agenda. This emotional exuberance enthuses the audiences who are now embarking on a new ideological career.

Liu Sanjie, as depicted in ILS, is still conceived within a political framework, though there is no hint of Mao-era class opposition, and there is less political potency than was seen in the 1960s propaganda film version of Liu Sanjie. The class struggle heroine with her rebellious songs has finally been tamed and harmonised in ILS. She has become a spiritual bond in Yangshuo's mountain water scenery where diverse

ethnic groups coexist harmoniously. Without a well-defined plot, she is just an abstract image, a revolutionary interpretation of the revolutionary version of Liu Sanjie. It indicates that the CCP, which once incited class revolution, has transformed into a party that safeguards stability by building a unified, stable, and harmonious society.

This contemporary way of presenting Liu Sanjie can be observed in the film *A Singing Fairy* (literally translated as *Searching for Liu Sanjie*), made in 2010, as a cooperation between a state-owned film enterprise and Guangxi's local government. This romantic film tells a Chinese-American musician named Wei (acted by famous Taiwanese actor Su Youpeng), who went to Guangxi to search for Liu Sanjie. In his pilgrimage, he encounters and falls in love with a tour guide named Tiantian Liu (acted by Chinese mainland actress Huang Shengyi), who leads him to Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong, and Jing ethnic villages in Guangxi to search for his Liu Sanjie. Liu Sanjie never appears but is transformed into displays of ethnic folk customs, singing, and dance traditions performed by these ethnic groups who welcome Wei as a distinguished guest. Again, Liu Sanjie is not a physical figure but is diffused in Guangxi's cultural ecology, ingrained in the multi-ethnic peoples of Guangxi. The government appointed a Taiwanese actor to search for Liu Sanjie also has political connotations: promoting pan-Chineseness to gloss over geopolitical tensions over Taiwan.

None of China's legendary figures (such as Mulan, Monkey King, and Nezha) has been re-invented to the extent that Liu Sanjie has been. The earlier versions of Liu Sanjie (in folk oral transmission, literature, and the Mao-era musical film) at least have a storyline. Liu Sanjie, in ethereal and abstract form in ILS, blends into the sublime landscape, space, and time; it is more revolutionary than any adaptation. Therefore, what ILS has produced, building on Wang Ban's phrase, is Liu Sanjie's sublime; this demonstrates the extravagant political exploitation of culture. Arguably,

the reinvention of Liu Sanjie in ILS has shown Liu Sanjie's transition from class revolution to an "art revolution". I have shown Liu Sanjie's innovative progress from a visible and concrete Liu Sanjie to the abstract, impressionistic, and invisible Liu Sanjie that suits contemporary requirements.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the new version of Liu Sanjie, which has evolved and been adapted to political and socio-economic changes. It serves the state's governance requirements, specifically to facilitate the imagined community through promoting harmony among ethnic groups and a united Chineseness and erase the class struggle discourse. Moreover, ILS is about the spectacularisation of a landscape, not just any landscape, but the quintessentially Chinese landscape. The aesthetics of the landscape serve as a political instrument for moderating ethnic minority differences while retaining its hierarchical structure of internal Orientalism between state-Han elites and ethnic minority groups.

My main criticism has focused on the issue of cultural appropriation. From the musical film *Liu Sanjie* to ILS, state-Han elites continue the trend of domination that manifests as a form of appropriation. This appropriation has re-invented a Zhuang ethnic tradition, Liu Sanjie, between the traditional and modern, the classical and contemporary, and also the local, national, and universal genres. Liu Sanjie has allowed both the nation-state and the ethnic locality to promote their own versions of cultural branding, which is a safe form of ethnic identity. The question remains whether this visual reduction would lead to a reduction of ethnic identity. Prominent ethnic elements are flattened out because the performances are designed to target tourists; hence, there are not many pure ethnic and unadulterated cultural details to be found. By reducing these ethnic identities and ethnic differences into an "emotional"

and visual experience, the effect of the sublime overwhelms the spectators' sense. Their minds and bodies are occupied and consumed by the awe of the spectacle instead of being inspired to question this unified Chineseness.

In ILS, Liu Sanjie sings a song in her boat and wafts gently from the dark of the river towards the audience; then, she appears in the Zhuang wedding ceremony. After that, the lights dim, creating the impression that Liu Sanjie has sublimated, which leads the performers evocatively to call her name into the darkness of the night. She is somewhere in the ethnic Dong big song, and finally, she is somewhere among the hundreds of Miao young ladies. At this juncture, Liu Sanjie represents everybody whether they are Zhuang, Miao, Han, or Dong. ILS projects the impression that Liu Sanjie is an omnipresent presence diffused amongst the landscape and natives. Being rooted in the cultural ecology, she represents a much larger imagined community of Guangxi and China. Liu Sanjie has metamorphosed from the physical figure in the *Liu Sanjie* film to a metaphysical concept dissolved in Guangxi's cultural diversity propagating a united and harmonious Chineseness.

Milking a myth for political purposes and commercial ventures is not unknown in the adaptation of artworks (Macdonald, 2016). It is common for a timeless legend to be adapted to suit the timeliness of the era. What is surprising here is the abstract nature of the adaptation, which is not just a rewrite of the 1960s film. Rather, it compounds bold artistic, ethnic, nationalistic, commercial, and tourist enterprise themes. This is a radical breakthrough not seen with other reinterpreted Chinese historical legends; hence, this chapter refers to Liu Sanjie's sublime that presents through art the cultural exploitation in Chinese politics. Though China is not in the tumultuous era of pan-politicisation as seen under Mao, Liu Sanjie can still be ideologically aestheticised to serve as a "sublime figure of history". Consequently, we see Liu Sanjie as a reinvented tradition transiting from a class revolution to an art revolution, which is demonstrative of China's contemporaneity.

Chapter 6

Empowering Ethnic Theatre Through Tourism: Marketing, Performing and Training in the “Landscape”

After Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, a great assortment of performing arts moved to centre stage and became involved in the initial efforts to develop the Chinese economy. According to Mackerras (2005), the commercialisation resulting from The Opening up Policy took a hold in Chinese theatre, with mixed results (p. 20). Yang (2011) reveals that since 2003, the state-owned performing art theatres began to reform gradually and became market-oriented. Many commercial theatres and performing troupes were established through private funding and then marketed, though most of the country’s theatres were still under socialist public ownership. Furthermore, the box office became far more critical for all theatre companies (Yan, 1998). It became increasingly difficult for troupes under public ownership to survive financially, let alone make a profit, due to the declining audiences (Mackerras, 2005). There were various reasons for the dwindling audience numbers, but the rise of television was undoubtedly a major one. The situation of the professional performing arts field during the new millennium was such that a newly created stage production could often survive within the profession by people offering free tickets to each other, their relatives, and friends. There is hardly any information about the marketisation of theatres available during this time, let alone any long-term business strategy.

Developing a sound strategy is a cornerstone of successful marketing (Reid and Bojanic, 2010); the success of theatrical businesses is no exception. Song and Cheung (2010a) show that tourists in China will not go to a destination solely to attend a

theatre performance. However, the success of many theatrical performances in China is based on the development of a tourist destination that captures large numbers of tourist arrivals, who provide audiences for the performances (Song and Cheung, 2012). Ethnic minority performing art is representative of this trend; Mackerras (2011) notes that ethnic minority performing arts in China moved to the tourism stage in a modernised and organised way to suit Han tourists' taste. The success of the *Impression Liu Sanjie* (ILS) is no less than that of *Liu Sanjie*, the musical film. The commercial success of ILS has proved to be the definitive LPA case as it utilises the tourism market trends. Song and Cheung (2012) indicate that:

Theatre operators should establish good business relationships with travel agencies and tour guides since previous research shows that these partners contribute to the profitability and success of theatrical performances. Tourists will receive strong recommendations for theatrical performances from travel agencies or local tour guides (pp. 164-165).

The relationship between tourism and ILS has been commented on by the founder of LPA, Mei Shuaiyuan; in the interview, he informed that “without tourism, we would not have staged ILS in the first place” (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018). It was confirmed by Wang Jiaxian, the manager of the ILS theatre, that one hundred per cent of the audiences watching ILS are tourists (Personal Communication, 20/03/2018). Therefore, it makes sense that the same performance has been showing for nearly two decades, yet it continues to attract large audiences.

By 2018, according to the statistics from the theatre, ILS had been performed almost 7000 times and attracted over ten million viewers; its total box office generated receipts of over 1.6 billion RMB (£183 million). According to the manager Li Xinjie,

ILS, with 3,600 seats in the auditorium, has been performed almost 7000 times (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018). It is performed once or twice every evening and thrice during the peak tourist season. In February 2016, the ILS broke its record by being performed four times in one single night, from 7 pm to nearly 1 am. It is said to be the most profitable Chinese performance ever and is regarded as a phenomenon by the cultural tourism industry in China (Zhang, 2018; Lin, 2018). ILS was commented on in a business book written by Chen and Fan (2011) and titled: *A Show of Mountain Songs can Make Vast Sums of Money*. ILS has been a well-deserved city brand and a gold-lettered signpost to attract tourists to Yangshuo. So great has its success been that the media refer to the associated cultural business generated from *Impression Liu Sanjie* as the “Zhuang ethnic Disneyland” (Lin, 2004).

Focusing on the business model of ILS, this chapter investigates how ILS generates a tourism market and how the locality of Yangshuo engages with ILS by providing marketing, performing, and training for the show. To analyse and make sense of this process, the chapter draws on theories of landscape and power, particularly the theoretical work of Doreen Massey and Foucault. It uses this work as an analytical tool to critique the state-minority relations at play in ILS.

6.1 Business Model

ILS not only becomes the most profitable live performance in Chinese history but also generates significant wealth for the locality by catalysing the local industries. There is recognition that the unique business model of ILS is key to its great success, mainly because it involves a close relationship with the tourist market. The local community has been turned into an enormous “box office” to retail the show’s tickets; local people also engage with marketing, training, and performing ILS. Therefore, the first section of the chapter considers the significance of ILS to Yangshuo’s tourist industry and how its business model enables commercial success by examining its

interdependent relationship with tourism.

6.1.1 ILS as a Catalyst for Local Economic Growth

Since ILS, the majority of tourists have opted to stay at least one night in Yangshuo. Statements from insiders in the LPA industry are unanimous; the birth of ILS fills an economic gap as there was no nighttime cultural event for tourists. It also creates an employment opportunity and encourages the development of related businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, schools, letting agents, and logistics companies; hence ILS has formed a complete tourism cultural industry chain. A significant number of residents create wealth by running diverse restaurants and hotels around the ILS theatre; some earn over ten thousand yuan throughout the year by renting out telescopes and overcoats outside of the theatre. It is not possible to quantify with any precision how great the value generated by ILS is for employment and the local tourism industry, which explains why there are several different versions of the statistics. However, the impact of ILS on Yangshuo town is evident from the official statistics: these show that the population of Yangshuo is 300,000 and 100,000 (1/3) of local residents rely directly or indirectly on the *Impression* to earn a living. Another data set shows that ILS has increased local employment by creating 4,500 jobs, equating to 5% of Yangshuo's labour force.⁷⁹

The value of land in proximity to the theatre has dramatically increased. In 2003, Yangshuo's tax revenue generated 94 million Chinese yuan, but the following year, when ILS became a ticket selling tourist attraction, the tax revenue jumped to 130 million Chinese yuan, showing a 17.4% increase.⁸⁰ The company Guangwei Wenhua, which owns the ILS theatre, released statistics in a report that reviewed ILS's contribution to local tourism (see Table 4).⁸¹ The report indicated that the number of

⁷⁹ Available at: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8D%B0%E8%B1%A1%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96> [Accessed 7 Mar. 2019].

⁸⁰ Available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_738a54010100pgct.html

⁸¹ This report was presented at the 2014 China Yangshuo Tourism Sustainable Development Forum, available at: http://nb.ifeng.com/a/20180125/6333222_0.shtml

tourists was 2.81 million in 2003, which subsequently increased to 11.7 million in 2013. The total income of Yangshuo's tourism increased from 2.44 hundred million to 6 billion Chinese yuan. In 2015, Yangshuo became the first county town in Guangxi to generate annual tourism revenues of over ten billion Chinese yuan.

Year	Total of Tourists / 10,000	Total Overnight Vistors /10,000	Available Hotel Beds	Tourism Revenue /100 Million ¥
2003	281.8	23.3	6100	2.44
2004	320.2	51.2	10078	4.06
2005	353.5	60.9	12000	6
2006	415	118.7	13800	9.64
2007	516.3	142.7	17000	12
2008	559.1	157	20000	17.5
2009	720	213	25000	24.2
2010	811.3	279.2	30000	31.5
2011	935.6	315.8	40000	38.6
2012	1050	391.7	42000	50.2
2013	1170.8	430	42000	60.5

Table 4: Yangshuo's Tourism Statistics from 2003 to 2013

By analysing the data, we can see that in 2003, the number of visitors who stayed in Yangshuo overnight amounted to 8.26% of the total number of visitors; in the first year of ILS (2004), the proportion increased to 15.99%, and by 2013, the figure rose to 36.75%. This increase in the number of visitors led to a corresponding increase the number of hotel beds, which grew from 6100 in 2003 to 42000 by 2013. During an interview, the theatre manager Li Xinjie explained that:

The reason for these rising figures is quite understandable. Before ILS, tour guides organised the tourists to take a pleasure cruise down the Li River to appreciate the scenery. When arriving in Yangshuo, they would stay there for daytime visiting and eventually come back to Guilin or some other attractive locality by bus before dark. There was no night event to encourage them to stay. Due to the performance, they have reason to stay here overnight; therefore, it was not overstated that 60% of Yangshuo's economy is driven by ILS (Personal Communication, 26/03/2018).

The marketing director of ILS, He Lide, informed the media that:

The problem was that at the time, Yangshuo was a poor place; it was even hard to find a restaurant. Many people would return to Guilin at night after visiting during the day. Later on, I mobilised the local people to run the badly needed restaurants and hotels. The peasants emptied their own houses to rent as hotels. In the third year, the number of hotels met the demand.⁸²

These two senior managers in the ILS theatre, Li Xinjie and He Lide, both attribute the increasing number of visitors to the initiation of ILS. The rationale is that ILS catalyses the night-time economy, contributing to many aspects of Yangshuo's tourism-related industries. It is worth noting that some of these increases can be related to many other factors, so are not solely attributable to ILS. However, it cannot be denied that ILS has been a potent catalyst in boosting Yangshuo's tourism. On

⁸² See the interview of He Lide, available at: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/leadership/msyp1/20120814/000212836345.shtml>

TripAdvisor (see Figure 36), ILS has been crowned as a must-watch performance, ranking No.1 of 30 visitor attractions in terms of popularity.

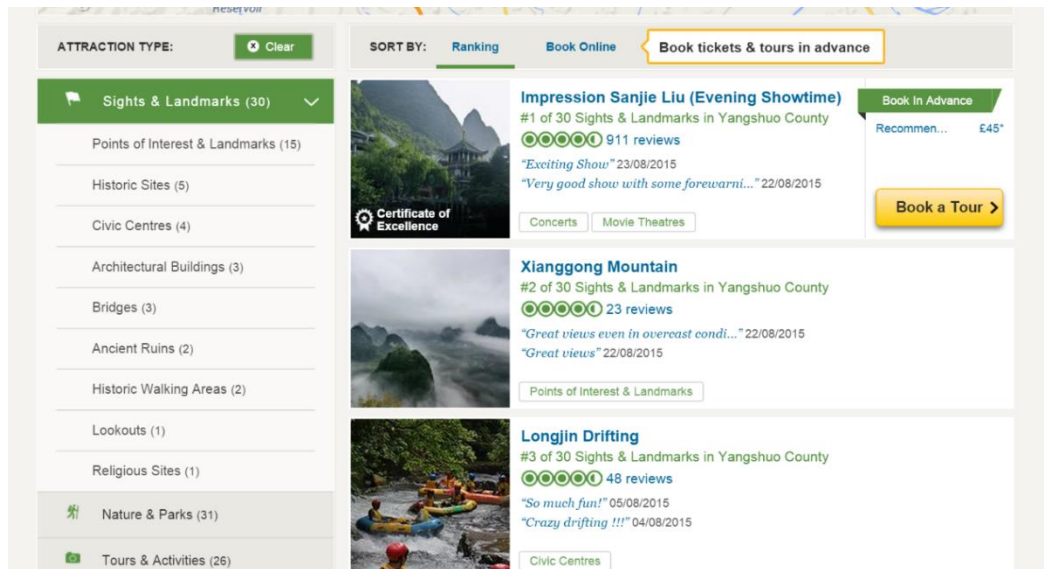


Figure 36: The screenshot of *TripAdvisor*

An interview video filmed in Yangshuo by students of The Huazhong University of Science and Technology shows how the economic ecology and people’s livelihoods were affected during a three-day suspension of ILS due to the Li river flooding the auditorium. A restaurant owner near ILS complained that “there is no business as ILS has stopped”; likewise, a taxi driver stated that his earnings dropped by roughly 200 yuan due to these three days of closure.⁸³ Remarkably, the location of the ILS theatre was originally derelict land but now attracts audiences every night, because of the reputation of ILS as a show and the pleasant scenery. East Street, explicitly built for ILS, accommodates tourist-focused businesses; it is the only ingress and egress route for audiences visiting the theatre. When night falls, the street becomes crowded with cars and coaches stopping to allow tourists to alight; there is a police force specially commissioned to oversee this congested scene and keep things moving along safely (see Figures 37 and 38).

⁸³ Available at: <https://www.mgtv.com/b/1151/105932.html>



Figure 37: The congested East Street



Figure 38: Audiences queuing in front of the gate

The theatre, meanwhile, is prepared for international visitors; for example, the ushers dress in a uniform complete with makeup, speak basic English, and provide a modern standard of service. The theatre is an open-air auditorium, covered by various types of

flora and fauna, most of it occupied by nature (see Figure 39). The architecture within the theatre, such as the Dong ethnic wind-rain bridge and drum tower, convey a local ethnic flavour (see Figure 40). The theatre lights and audio systems placed around the stage area are camouflaged and do not intrude upon the landscape. The theatre has advanced technology to deal with wastewater from the two restrooms so that sewage is not discharged into The Li River but recycled. This helps to minimise the environmental impact of ILS; furthermore, the reclamation of industrial land to house the theatre beautifies the once derelict environment.



Figure 39: The auditorium



Figure 40: Drum-tower and wind-rain bridge in ILS theatre

6.1.2 Mobilising the Locality and Marketing ILS

Ticket distribution is a significant factor in ILS's commercial success. The rationale of the marketing strategy is to motivate the locals to distribute the tickets; thus, people in this community become stakeholders, earning commission from their ticket sales. This illustrates the involvement of local stakeholders in the marketing of ILS, and also of Yangshuo as a tourist destination. He Lide, the senior manager of the ILS theatre, explained his marketing strategy to the online media platform *Sina Finance* in 2012:

I marketed ILS as a commodity. I have created an atmosphere which made all the people believe that this is a destination suitable for tourists. I let the tourist agencies know that ILS is profitable for them, and if tour guides did not recommend ILS, the tourists would not choose them. It is like The Forbidden City in Beijing; if it is absent from the tour plan, tourists will not take the tour. I invited those agencies that were not very profitable to have a cup of tea. I told them the survey we conducted shows that their level of tourist satisfaction was low because they did not take their tourists to watch ILS. My explanation was very detailed, and the tour agencies were convinced.⁸⁴

The leading principle of the marketing strategy for promoting ILS as a must-see event for tourists was to turn the local people and related businesses into stakeholders and ticket agencies. An online investigation in China showed how ILS is heavily reliant on the tourist trade; the statistics indicated that five million tourists every year come to

⁸⁴ See the interview of He Lide, available at:
<http://finance.sina.com.cn/leadership/msypl/20120814/000212836345.shtml>

Yangshuo, and over two million would watch ILS.⁸⁵ Turning tourists into audiences is referred to as the “conversion percentage” (轉化率) by the LPA industry, which adopts this as a measure of the success of its marketing methodology. According to the site manager Wang Jiaxian,

All tour agencies in Guilin and Yangshuo are commissioned to sell the tickets, all home-stays and hotels in Yangshuo likewise. There are around 208 tour agencies in Guilin” (Personal Communication, 06/03/2018).

When visiting Yangshuo, however, I found that the number of ticket sellers exceeded those who had an official cooperative relationship with the theatre, and that there are countless unofficial sellers, including shops, restaurants, taxi drivers, roadside goods sellers, and even the general public on the street. I interviewed Lin, the hostess of a home-stay, regarding her ticket sales and she explained:

We do not directly book the tickets for the consumers in our hotel from the official box office of ILS; we book from a third party. The floor price from the third party is 140 yuan. We sell it at 150 yuan: we earn 10 yuan as a profit. (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018)

I also interviewed a woman who works as a tour guide, while also selling street food and tickets outside the theatre on a part-time basis. She said:

⁸⁵ Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-06/30/c_129102277.htm

There are only two must-visit destinations for tourists in Yangshuo. One is West Street, and the other is ILS. ILS is the most famous show among the *Impression* series all over the nation. Therefore, I recommended they watch it as I earn twenty yuan or thirty yuan from every ticket as a commission (Personal Communication, 08/03/2018).

Another female ticket seller outside the theatre gate was desperately searching for tourists to sell to; her sales pitch was: “you must come to see this just like you must visit The Great Wall when visiting Beijing”. ILS creates the illusion that tourists who have not watched ILS have never been to Yangshuo. Zheng, an owner of a restaurant, recommends that tourists purchase a ticket and watch ILS:

You may not be able to buy a ticket for yourself at this moment, but I can get one to sell to you. Zhang Yimou devised ILS, so it is good to watch. The performing peasants do an outstanding job. The show is very characteristic of this place; they sing the mountain songs very well by the river. I have watched it many times, and it is not bad (Personal Communication, 16/03/2018).

Some stakeholders recommend ILS as a tourist brand for the locality with a deep sense of cultural pride. Their introductory pitch is aimed at persuading tourists to buy tickets and experience local cultural placeness and “authenticity”. The advertising of ILS occupies many public and commercial spaces in Yangshuo. At Guilin Airport, the posters advertising ILS were displayed on the pillars in the arrival hall (see Figure 41). Several newly-arrived tourists consulted the tour adviser at the tour reception. The adviser recommended a tour route, stating: “you can take the boat along The Li River

from Guilin to Yangshuo, then watch ILS”. Furthermore, the ILS posters display throughout Yangshuo, such as in hotels, restaurants, and home-stays (see Figure 42).



Figure 41: The posters on the pillars in Guilin International Airport



Figure 42: Advertising poster for ILS near the door of a restaurant

The audience in ILS comprises individual tourists (10%) and package tourists (90%),

according to the manager Wang Jiaxian. Even though the locals informally sell tickets to individual tourists occupying 10% of the total audience turnover, it is still a considerable market resource to be tapped since the auditorium seats 3600, and the performance plays at least once a day. The tour guide Yang said, “most tourists chose to watch ILS mainly because they just follow the big group tour” (Personal Communication, 07/03/2015). Therefore, tourists on package deals tend to listen to their tour agent’s recommendation, which indeed aligns with the Chinese tourist’s habit of collectivism. Notably, ILS is the only large-scale night event in this small town, so there are no competing options for an evening’s entertainment.

6.1.3 Training for and Performing in ILS

Using local amateur performers has become a defining characteristic of LPA. There are over 750 permanent employees for the whole ILS project; this also includes 600 performers and 150 logistical staff. Of these 600 performers, 400 local farmers and fishermen work on their trade during the day but are then employed in the evenings to perform in the ILS spectacle. Media organisations have conducted many interviews with such performers; these primarily focus on how ILS helps local peasants to alleviate poverty. For example, CCTV filmed a documentary titled *Legend Helps to Eliminate Poverty*, featuring an interview with one performer, Xu Quanfa, who stated:

Zhang Yimou chose me to be the presenter because I can sing mountain-songs. This wage is very considerable; the job does not interrupt my primary work during the day.⁸⁶ In the past, the villagers depended on agriculture and fishing; now, ILS brings stable incomes to us, so we feel confident about the future. The monthly wage from ILS has increased from 800 to 2000 yuan (quoted in Shan, 2018).

⁸⁶ See the interview conducted by CCTV, available at: <http://tv.cctv.com/2018/08/06/VIDEMzdHvUtRVavgY1MuxU8r180806.shtml>

The documentary also featured a peasant performer from a poor family who has likewise gained more income through ILS, which employs him, his wooden boat, fishhawk, and buffalo. He informed the journalist that currently, he earns a wage easily and happily, just rowing his boat around on the river for ILS.⁸⁷ The ILS manager enabled me to conduct my own interviews with three ILS performers and their statements are consistent with the findings of the CCTV documentary. The possibility that they may have rehearsed for the interviews was not discounted: public criticism of employers is seldom wise for any employee. However, I have no reason to believe that they are deceptive about their wage and job satisfaction as their incomes and lives have improved because of ILS. I interviewed a hostess, Lin, who runs a home-stay as a business with her husband; her brother was once one of the peasant performers in ILS, and she stated:

ILS brings us more guests, so we appreciate it. The peasant performer earns at least 30 yuan for every performance. My brother used to be a performer in the red silk scene, but he is retired now. Now his income is only from selling vegetables that he grows. He is idle at night, which is not as good as earning some money from performing in ILS (Personal Communication, 07/03/2018).

The performers' wage is not an insignificant sum for participating in ILS. Mei Shuaiyuan divulges his rationale for training the locals to perform:

⁸⁷ Available at: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8D%B0%E8%B1%A1%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96> [Accessed 7 Mar. 2019].

It is not possible to invite substantial amounts of professional troupes to have a permanent residency. It is not only a problem of logistics but also a problem of cost. So, I established a performing arts school that uses the name of Zhang Yimou. Also, the people who grow up here are rooted in this environment; their performance is their daily life, so only they can perform it authentically (Personal Communication, 15/03/2018).

The decision to use the local peasant performers is pragmatic and embraces finance and “authenticity”. In 2000, the Zhang Yimou Li River Art School opened under the oversight of Guangxi Provincial Agency for Cultural Affairs. Zhang Yimou is the honorary chancellor of this school that nurtures and supplies the student performers. The school brings study and development to kids from local low-income families, and more specifically, it selects children from mountainous areas of Guangxi and the neighbouring provinces. The school’s syllabus follows the national curriculum and provides performance tutoring and part-time employment in the ILS theatre. In combination with the local unprofessional performers, this mutually beneficial mode of school-enterprise is considered a flagship of LPA’s industrialisation.

The school is situated opposite the ILS theatre (see Figure 23), and student performers often appear during the afternoons to practise their dancing skills in the public square outside. I interviewed Hu Qingling, the headmistress of Zhang Yimou Art school, and she stated:

Our education method won the Special Award for Education Reform in Guangxi. The accommodation, food, and tuition is free. We give them over one thousand yuan per month for

their living expenses and guarantee a job in ILS after graduation. If they want to go to university, we support them in doing so. There are 280 students who just meet the number required for performing in ILS. We rely on the funding from ILS, so the school makes sure the human resources are there for the performance. They work hard if they want to achieve a bright future (Personal Communication 17/03/2018).



Figure 43: Zhang Yimou Art School

Over two thousand graduates have relocated to other provinces to work as professional dancers; many have chosen to work in other LPA. The Dong ethnic musician Pan Meihao who teaches Dong big songs at the school, stated:

The ILS students singing Dong big songs are from the Dong ethnic village, Xiaohuangcun, on the border between Guangxi and Guizhou province. As well as studying general knowledge courses, they return to their own ethnic culture by practising their Dong big songs. After graduation, they will be heading back to Xiaohuangcun to do jobs related to tourism; however, some will go to other places to be performers in tourist attractions. They all will do a job related to art.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ See the interview conducted by CCTV, available at: <http://tv.cctv.com/2018/08/06/VIDEMzdHvUtRVavgY1MuxU8r180806.shtml>

So far, therefore, this chapter has demonstrated the impact of ILS on the local economy. The ticket selling system has developed a supply chain, with people becoming sellers at different levels. The marketing strategy and ticket distribution have mobilised the local population, a model adopted by other LPA and now a characteristic of the LPA industry more generally. An informal economy revolves around ILS ticket sales, tour operations, restaurants, and other facilities. The package tourists are in situ; it is common sense and good business practice to use the existing tour operators and locals to market ILS and gain more profit from its substantial audiences. ILS is not contesting or overturning existing tourism models but is developing and reinforcing them. Exploiting domestic tourism opportunities is a sensible and profitable economic strategy: Chinese wealth spent in China reinforces the local and national economy. However, the training school and education elements are a defining feature of the ILS model; the pattern has been reproduced in other provinces and thus forms the template for other LPA projects.

6.2 State, Elites, and Ethnic Minority in Landscape

Having examined the business and economic impact of ILS, it is important to consider how the ILS business model depends on a state-minority relationship. Consequently, this section of the chapter discusses ILS in relation to the state-Han-ethnic minority triad, revealing the politicised nature of both ILS and its business model and the relationship between landscape and power. The cultural geographer Doreen Massey (2006) anchors place and landscape in politics, examining them as sites of tension and negotiation. Her work offers a productive theoretical framework for examining the state-minority relationship that ILS depends on. For ILS, this relationship has evolved into a business relationship, with local and national politics becoming a driving force for business. The town's landscape has been transformed by tourism and ILS, and Yangshuo has become a community that thrives through ILS, and where local people

communicate with outsiders. The state elites adopt a non-confrontational approach to avoid antithetical relationships with the ethnic minorities, enabling them to appropriate these minorities for economic and political gain. The relationship between state elites and ethnic minorities is interdependent and mutually beneficial. This symbiotic relationship was illustrated repeatedly in interviews conducted for this thesis, as shown by the following quote from the local stakeholders. For example, one tour guide informs that:

The local people get many benefits by being involved in this industry generated by ILS. Therefore, we recommend ILS to the tourists so we can earn a little commission and help the tourists to have a rich experience here (Personal Communication, 07/03/2015).

Rather than being static and eternal, the landscapes of ILS have consequently become changeable and symbolic of modernisation and progress. Following Massey (2006: 21), it is therefore helpful to think of them as transactions and “events”, both literally and metaphorically:

Such philosophical reflections are one potential outcome of the provocation that is a landscape; another is the reimagining of landscape and places themselves. The reorientation stimulated by the conceptualisation of the rocks as on the move leads even more clearly to an understanding of both place and landscape as events, as happenings, as moments that will be again dispersed.

This relationship between the actual and imagined landscape, and the notion of landscape as event, helps to explain how the landscape can have different meanings for Han, locals, and audiences; each observing it from their own perspective, motivation, and needs. The State and Han see the landscape as their tangible and intangible heritage; for the Han producers, it is an artistic, financial, and political resource, something to be both celebrated and exploited. The local ethnic groups are raised with the landscape, so it is both home and livelihood - a means of making a living by mobilising the landscape as a local resource. The landscape in Yangshuo, therefore, behaves like an intermediary and meeting point for the state-elite-local triad.

In the case of ILS, the locals are certainly not utterly powerless because they have the opportunity to start businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, guided tours and so forth. They can also choose whether to engage or disengage with LPA. However, according to CCP governance, when ILS in Yangshuo was first envisioned as a performance, it was initiated regardless of local opinion. This is also confirmed in the interview with Mei Shuaiyuan. The compulsion of capital has since proved sufficient motivation to facilitate local engagement. The twin forces of economic necessity and the community pressure to engage with ILS are unavoidable aspects of the success of ILS and its marketing strategy. Ultimately, it makes sense for the local populace to engage with this economic matrix to improve their income and neutralise the risk of becoming marginalised in the community.

The ethnic “otherness” marketed on the LPA stage reflects the uniqueness and quaintness of ethnicities as a readily-available commodity. In an environment of competing markets, the ethnic factions have little choice but to use their cultural distinction to survive; there is pressure to project their distinctiveness. This reverberates with Marx’s reference to the “dull compulsion of economic relations”: the need to make a living being sufficient to recruit the required cast for a

performance (Scott, 1990, p. 66). Under the ruling capitalist mechanism, money is a charismatic and forceful incentive to keep people in bondage; even though the locals were initially resistant, they engaged with and began promoting ILS as a local brand. Tian, who runs a rice noodle restaurant, gave a doleful opinion of ILS:

We are not able to understand art, but it is worthwhile to watch it if you are a tourist as every day many tourists watch it; we are doing commission sale if you want to buy a ticket here (Personal Communication, 13/03/2018).

The incomprehensibility of ILS to the locals is a common thread I encountered throughout the field research. There is a tradeoff between internal Orientalism and financial gain. In other words, the discourse of domination is personal financial gain for the local ethnic minorities - the acceptance of the Han elites' domination rests on the financial benefit to the needy in these remote ethnic regions. The compulsion of capital for struggling peasants means that the easy and comfortably paid employment of ILS is a godsend. In facilitating the economic agency of ethnic minorities, the state regards ethnic minority groups as not necessarily victims but as passive beneficiaries of a paternalistic state.

One can see how ILS has completely remoulded the town, with new streets, a theatrical quarter, and even a training school. The state has made an economic and political claim on this locality and transformed the locals' relationship with their mountain and water. Such changes are not always positive. Narrowing the gap in regional economic development between Han urban areas and ethnic rural regions has always been the CCP's agenda, given that the rural-urban disparity engenders inequalities between the ethnic population, jeopardising an untied Chineseness in an economic sense. Evaluating the ideal of celebrating cultural and ethnic diversity for economic gain, many domestic academics, in line with the CCP, claim that China's

internal ethnic issues are resolved; therefore, what China has achieved can be a “successful model for the world” (Pang, 2008; Xu, 1998). Yet such claims are problematic, and Massey’s notion of landscape does not help to illustrate or explain the complex power relations involved. There are multiple sides, tensions, and contradictions in the world of LPA. Consequently, the following sections of the chapter provide further examples of the relationship between LPA and local ethnicity, and turn to Foucauldian theory to develop the analysis of the state-ethnic relations that LPA depends on.

6.3 Chineseness: Cultural and Economic Empowerment

The dichotomy of the state and ethnic minorities is an issue in China’s policy towards local nationalism (regionalism as a form of anti-unity). According to McCarthy (2009),

If cultural revival is an indicator that minorities increasingly identify with non-Chinese collectivities and are organising on the basis of these other identities, the revival may engender challenges to the Chinese state and territorial integrity or maybe a form of proto-separatist behaviour. There is evidence to support this hypothesis: during the 1990s, members of some minzu engaged in violent anti-state activities, and their cultural institutions at times served as bases of organisation (p.5).

Therefore, ethnic minorities’ cultural and religious practices are often banned, as is generally the case with the Uyghur, Tibetan, and Hui people (Cissé, 2018). However, the CCP’s distinctive and rigid classification of ethnic groups has helped encourage

the development of ethnic tourism. It has led to the promotion of attractive images of easily identifiable, “authentic” and unchanging ethnic entities, which tourists can witness (Cohen, 2016). Since China has declared itself a multi-ethnic country, composed of 56 distinct ethnic groups with cultural diversities, the government’s behaviour of promoting local and ethnic diversity through cultural promotion is an almost inevitable process if they are to develop a cultural tourism industry in this era of market-oriented economics. Wu (2012) concurs, stating that the quest for ethnic identity among China’s minorities has become essential for their social and economic development under economic reform.

When Xi Jinping presented his plan for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation - the “second generation’s ethnic policy”, he argued that “the melting pot formula of the West, in particular the U.S.A., presented the solution to ethnic problems” (Elliott, 2005). However, there is no specific elaboration of the complexity surrounding state-ethnic relationships, which is an ever-present issue. Taking the Mongolian ethnic group as an example: in 2020, the CCP drafted a plan to replace the Mongolian language by teaching some subjects only in Mandarin. The policy has sparked fears of cultural assimilation and resulted in the protests initiated by ethnic Mongols. It exposes the trials and tribulations when promoting a united Chineseness in the face of internal cultural and ethnic diversity and, furthermore, the intense pride ethnic groups take in their traditions. President Xi recently inspected Inner Mongolia and observed live performances of Mongolian musical instruments currently promoted by Chinese officials as an intangible cultural heritage. His speech to the so-called successors of “Mongolian intangible cultural heritage” addressed the government’s ideology toward ethnic minorities:

China is a unified multi-ethnic country...Chinese civilisation is rooted in the multi-ethnic soil featuring harmony in diversity and is the only civilisation to continue onwards in the world (quoted in Dai, 2019).

The CCP plans to tenaciously incorporate Mongolian musical heritage into the Chinese national musical heritage and promote a sense of togetherness in a shared time and space. With this articulation, the state allows the development of the ethnic-cultural industry to enhance China's cultural capital contributing to the domestic GDP with a relatively hands-off approach instead of enforcing a restrictive process. It parallels the view that ethnic diversity can indeed act in accordance with wealth generation through the "commodification of ethnicity" (Lee, 1992) or by "marketing ethnicity" (Burton, 2000; Belasco, 2001). LPA abound in the ethnic autonomous regions of China, such as Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. At this juncture, it is worth noting a comment highlighting the complexity of ethnic relations offered by McCarthy (2009),

If we want to understand ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic relations in China, we cannot rely on the study of single groups or single time period; nor can we use the methods and theories of single disciplines (p. 7).

Some ethnic groups might be quaint, non-confrontational and easily represented, but some are not. Discussed below, are LPA productions from Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, which provide examples of the differing approaches to ethnic minorities from the CCP and Han LPA producers. Inner Mongolia has an LPA located in the Hulunbuir grasslands: *The Proud Son of Heaven: Genghis Khan*. Political contemporaneity dictates that official productions within the ethnic minority cultural industry are conveyed as peaceful, praising the state's flourishing age and reinforcing Chinese national unity and identity. However, *The Proud Son of Heaven: Genghis Khan* focuses on Mongolian ethnic characteristics without a scent of propaganda, or

of official mainstream ideology⁸⁹ promoting an ideal Chineseness. It reinforces Mongolian ethnic-cultural pride by displaying images of nomadic civilisation and the mighty Mongolian emperor Genghis Khan: a monarch who still has a lofty status with the Mongolian people. This unadulterated performance of Inner Mongolianess contrasts sharply with the following example from Tibet.

In Lhasa, where Tibetan separatist ideas are strong, there resides an LPA: *Princess Wencheng*, which has an obvious political spin with a powerful message promoting and reinforcing the concept of a unified Chineseness. *Princess Wencheng* sweeps aside historic tensions by promoting the historical Han Princess and her harmonious relationship with Tibet during the Tang dynasty. Historically, *Princess Wencheng* contributed to the cultural exchange between Han and Tibetan people; her story is still known and valued by Tibetan and Chinese alike (Powers, 2004). The local government employs the historical link to portray the China-Tibet relationship as being in absolute harmony. In this sense, it could be regarded as a reflection of Han-Tibet relations whitewashing the tensions between the Chinese state and Tibet. Mei Shuaiyuan states that the government wants to narrate the relationship between Han and Tibetan ethnicities positively through this LPA (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018). Like ILS, *Princess Wencheng* is marketed as an integral part of both the Chinese and the international tourists' itinerary of Tibet. It is a highly successful show with a TripAdvisor rating of five stars. Figure 44 below shows the stage of *Princess Wencheng* located at the foot of a hill. There is an architecturally identical reconstruction of The Potala Palace situated behind the stage.

⁸⁹ Mainstream Theme is a term designed for the direction of propaganda. "Since the 18th National Congress of the CCP, the principal media of the central Party have emphasised propaganda surrounding the spirit of the 18th National Congress, and of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Plenums, explaining the important decisions and work plan of the central Party, reflecting the great experiences and spirit of the people, singing the main theme [of the Party](唱響主旋律), transmitting positive energy (傳播正能量), and energetically stirring the great force of the entire Party, entire nation and all the people toward the realisation of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people" (Bandurski, 2016).



Figure 44: LPA *Princess Wencheng*

Considering LPA's contribution to the locality in terms of employment and peripheral industries, the Tibetan case has shown that LPA can be an experiment of nationalist reinforcement in politically-oriented cases and less-integrated ethnic regions. Like ILS, Princess Wencheng serves as a local employment project, developing a cultural tourism economy with propaganda value for the national ideology. LPA as a multicultural project presents the central government's compromise by encouraging cultural expression; however, the localness must be repackaged and inserted into the national narrative. The Tibetans are encouraged to represent their culture, provided that it is a local and Chinese brand with any separatist intent or resistance negated. The extent of the political mainstream themes loaded into an LPA directly reflects the relationship between the ethnic arena and the state.

President Xi, at the 2014 Central Ethnic Work Conference on Nationality Affairs, rejected the state intellectuals' appeals to terminate the regional autonomy of ethnic minorities; he criticised their ideas for promoting national assimilation.⁹⁰ Indeed, it is pointless to cancel the autonomy system as ethnic minority "autonomy" is not "autonomy" per se; it is an illusion of autonomy, and LPA is the cultural-economic

⁹⁰ See the news from state's media, available at: <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/c100474/201710/1083769.shtml>

instrument that reinforces it. Policies encouraging ethnic diversity that have been designed and implemented by the government rarely meet resistance from the ethnic minorities because being assimilated or unassimilated is not dependent on the ethnic minority people themselves. Loo and Davies (2006) have questioned whether China, with its “complexity, contradictions and enormity”, can create a unified brand image (pp. 199). The state, through a top-down mechanism, takes the easy way out by simply throwing in the tactic of “Unity in Diversity” to wishfully resolve the contradictions of state-minority relations, all without laying stress on the ethnic minority groups’ right to political and cultural self-assertion.

The LPA in Xinjiang may be controversial since many are concerned about human rights issues in Xinjiang, which continue to ferment. The *Thousand-Year Promise to Kunlun* (昆侖之約) is an LPA by Mei Shuaiyuan and his creative team. It is in the format of a landscape musical and staged in the Urumchi countryside. It premiered in 2019 due to the local government’s desperation to present it as a gift for the 70th anniversary of National Day. After a one-year suspension due to Covid-19, it restarted in 2021. Its inspiration draws on ancient Chinese mythology from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海經)⁹¹ and *The Tale of King Mu* (穆天子傳)⁹². The conceptual theme embodies “two spaces with one turbulent road”, narrating the journey of King Mu of Zhou, who endured the arduous voyage to meet the Queen Mother of the West⁹³ on Mount Kunlun (a snow mountain range running through Xinjiang). The current Xinjiang issue is romanticised and “landscaped” by the King Mu of Zhou’s mythical-historical trip. There are no Xinjiang cultural characteristics such as Islamic traditions in this LPA, but according to Zhang Xiao:

⁹¹ *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, also known as Shan Hai Jing, formerly romanized as the Shan-hai Ching, is a Chinese classic text and a compilation of mythic geography and beasts.

⁹² A mythical biography about King Mu of Zhou who was the fifth king of the Zhou dynasty of China.

⁹³ The Queen Mother of the West is a mother goddess in Chinese religion and mythology, also worshipped in neighbouring Asian countries, and attested from ancient times (Elizabeth and Beverly, 2000). The first historical information on her can be traced back to oracle bone inscriptions of the 15th century BCE that record sacrifices to a “Western Mother”. She is later most often associated with Taoism. The growing popularity of the Queen Mother of the West, as well as the beliefs that she was the dispenser of prosperity, longevity, and eternal bliss took place during the Han dynasty, in the 2nd century BCE, when the northern and western parts of China were able to be better known because of the opening of the Silk Road (Victor, 2006).

Though it has nothing to do with that Xinjiang's local folk culture, the recorded myth happened in Mount of Kunlun; it is therefore still the principle of the place, the culture, and the people. We depict Xinjiang before Islamization as Islamic civilisation went to Xinjiang after the Tang Dynasty (Personal Communication, 17/ 01/ 2022).

It is evident that this LPA is a typical show featuring Chinese dynastic traditions and has side-stepped the local cultural elements that contradict the CCP's ideology. The Han artists present Xinjiang prior to the era of Islamization, to reinforce the historical and cultural links between China and Xinjiang. Thereby, the landscape mural permits the CCP to reinforce the consanguineous ownership of Xinjiang.⁹⁴ The more ancient and remote the myth, the more obscured the Sino-Xinjiang relationship. In the LPA, jade⁹⁵ and bronze wares from the Zhou dynasty are employed as magnificent stage displays that contrast with the mysterious and romantic land of mountains and snow. The artefacts and landscape enhance each other's solemnity and beauty, which cover Xinjiang's present trauma, denoting the CCP's cultural and geographical presence above Xinjiang's landscape. The background radiates a red sun⁹⁶ emblematic of the CCP. It overshadows the smaller full moon representing Xinjiang as a satellite orb. The scene reflects the paternalistic power of the CCP (see Figure 45 below).

⁹⁴ In 2003, the Chinese government published a White Paper entitled "History and Development of Xinjiang," which states that "since the Western Han Dynasty (206BC–24AD) [Xinjiang] has been an inseparable part of the multi-ethnic Chinese nation." The paper traces Chinese rule over the region to the present and declares it unbroken. This is the central aspect of government policy on all of the PRC's frontier regions: Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia are now, and have always been, an inalienable part of China.

⁹⁵ Jade is a part of traditional Chinese symbol. Xinjiang nowadays is a place full of jade recourse. Most jade in the Chinese market today is extracted from Xinjiang.

⁹⁶ The sun followed by the moon alludes to the CCP's propaganda: all hearts turn to the Party (一心向陽 一心向黨).



Figure 45: The enormous outdoor stage of *Thousand-Year Promise to Kunlun*

Unsurprisingly, the government’s media apparatus addresses national unity and the *shanshui* concept through the performance.⁹⁷ Using a Chinese historical myth to construct the present discourse for Sino-Xinjiang relations has tactically fixed the Chinese *shanshui* concept onto the local landscape. It denotes that the assimilation of Xinjiang culturally is the CCP’s long-term policy. The educational purpose of this LPA is far-reaching; it conditions the national and international tourists to envision the closeness and unity of China and Xinjiang; thus, it articulates the historic Chinese link to Xinjiang via a tourist-oriented stage spectacle. Compared to ILS, the LPA cases in Tibet and Xinjiang disclose that the less integrated and politically volatile locations are targeted by propaganda that weaves a calculated narrative strengthening the cultural and spatio-political discipline. To reinforce the point, a subtitle from the Xinjiang LPA performance screen is: “To take residence together here in China, to enjoy prosperity together here” (宅茲中國 天下歸心).⁹⁸ These texts all resonate with the same rhetoric, illustrating the point made by Zhang, Brown, and O’Brien (2018) about the CCP’s need to link its discourse of power and control with history:

⁹⁷ Available at: <https://new.qq.com/omn/20190816/20190816A0B6YK00.html?pc>

⁹⁸ The translation above is given by Shanshui company’s official video of this performance, but its literal translation is “throughout the empire all hearts turned to him”. The Chinese phrase “天下” historically was a very imperialist term.

It is only through a dependent relationship with the imperial dynasties previously, and the CCP currently and in the future, that stability and development are possible in Xinjiang (p. 788).

In this sense, the LPA in Xinjiang parallels Foucault's "discourse" as well as being semiotic sequences between and among objects, subjects, and statements. The cases of LPA in ethnic minority regions can be explored further through Foucault's concept of "pastoral power", described by a shepherd-flock analogy, declaring that the "shepherd" has responsibility for and cares for the flock. The shepherd is not only the flock's owner; he is the authority holding the welfare and fate of the flock in his hands. This pastoral power may entail sacrificing some liberty, as Zhang (2018) explains:

The state in a pastoral role legitimates its use of force, as well as emphasising its core role in developing the region out of poverty and into "civilization" (p. 784).

Through this shepherd-sheep relationship, the state self-justifies the sacrifice of liberty to reinforce the Uygur and the Tibetan people's political and economic dependence on the CCP, and simultaneously stymies separatist aspirations. The LPAs in ethnic minority regions are all community-based cultural tourism initiatives; they co-exist with the CCP's ideology bringing prosperity to the pristine landscape. With the narrative of a "messiah", the CCP informs the nation, and the world, how it has reinvented and reinvigorated history, becoming a contemporary analogue of the ancient Chinese dynasties. Zhang (2018) has disclosed that,

While this conceptualisation emphasises the government's good intentions, it simultaneously situates the shepherd in the position of authority to determine what constitutes this wellbeing (p. 789).

The “chosen one” wielding the shepherd's power embraces humanitarian rhetoric that legitimises, normalises, and perpetuates the CCP's domination of political, economic, cultural, and military might. Those ideologically aligned with the state regard it as benevolence; they state that the CCP has allowed the grassroots people to fill their bellies and dress warmly (吃的飽 穿得暖). Power, in this sense, is not merely embodied in normalisation but also in ab-normalisation, since the political assertion in Xinjiang and Tibet is condemned as abnormal and hostile by the CCP and the majority of Chinese citizens.

However, referring to the shepherd-will of the CCP leadership is not sufficient to explain the delicate logic of the regime. Power must be more covert to interfere with subjective cognition and the body. The function of the Chinese authority, as a disciplining entity, is as a linkage that tethers all the ethnic policies together under a logic of specific governance. It prepares the ethnic minority regions to become “civilized” and “modernized”. Economic and political-administrative modernisation are related to the organisation of society and its disciplining to create subjects with a “modernised” mindset.

Tourism development has propelled the ethnic rural area to the process of modernisation. Foucault's (1991) outline of power and the politics of time and temporality discusses how authority is linked directly to time and governance. The control of time is fundamental to disciplinary power. In the case of LPA, the locals' lifestyles become regulated and disciplined; there is work time, performance time, and rest time. It contrasts with the slower pace and relative freedom of their rural lives.

The locals have now become regulated citizens; they have a contemporary routine and bondage that mirrors the routine the city-dwelling audiences are escaping from via LPA. It is subjugation to a disciplinary power applied to their bodies and sense of time; they become “clock-bound” subjects of the modern economy. The increase in working time decreases idle time and reinforces their lack of interest in political issues. Hence, this disciplining and routinising of the locals serves another purpose: a solution to issues of civil unrest in the ethnic regions of China. According to Gobel and Ong (2012),

Social unrest in China’s ethnic fringes often displays separatist agendas; furthermore, they are organised with a tendency to target members of different ethnicities.

The discipline that accompanies LPA has affected the local’s behaviour; according to the ILS theatre manager Wang Jiaxian: “the number of fights and brawls are reduced, and they become more civilised than before as people are now occupied by their own business” (Personal Communication, 06/03/2018). For Foucault, discipline operates by a calculated gaze, not by force. As a method employed to extend the state’s control, the magnitude of LPA, the intense development, and redevelopment in the locality facilitate an increase in police presence and government officials. Discipline and control over the locals are sustained and increased by state-of-the-art surveillance equipment. It initiates an unequal gaze that works directly to mould the bodies and the minds of the surveyed. In Yangshuo, public transport, shops, theatres, hotels, restaurants, and streets are bristling with cameras that leisurely survey and monitor the docility of the assemblage of bodies before them. On the surface, LPA is a regenerator of the local economy. It extends the CCP’s reach into the ethnic rural locality, which since the mid-1980s has been neglected by the government’s focus on modernising the cities. The result resembles what Foucault has described as a

“panoptic-like” surveillance society.⁹⁹

The surveillance enforced disciplinary power that the locals internalise produces docile “inmates” that are loyal government citizens. On an everyday basis, the ethnic minority populace does not actively rebel or dissent, since they have learned that the all-seeing state punishes transgressors. Panoptic surveillance constantly reinforces the fear that the government is watching. Internalisation of disciplinary power teaches the ethnic population to self-regulate. The principle applies to all the LPA in rural ethnic locations; the intensity of surveillance depends on the population’s pliability. Foucault argues that,

If a given institution can normalise disciplinary behaviour, it will be able to guarantee power even in the absence of a figure to assert this power. As individuals learn through their constant interactions with society, normative behaviours gradually begin to shape their interests.

Constructivists such as March (2013) have also discussed how social norms inform an individual’s behaviour and sense of right and wrong. Thus, the social norm and “knowledge” tend to eliminate inappropriate behaviour. Foucault (1977) reiterates that,

The domain of decisions that an individual can make is reduced, only appropriate decisions that are socially normative remain, thus, actors normally choose from this set when making decisions (p. 109).

⁹⁹ Foucault employs the prison environment as an analogy describing his panoptic-like surveillance society, which informs that the surveillance aims to be internalised to produce docile inmates.

It is worth noting that the training of the performers embodies top-down authoritarian teaching strategies. According to Lv (2014), the “authoritarian pedagogic method” spread across China’s tertiary dance programmes; it has an entrenched culture of authoritarian power reinforced by rigid hierarchies. My experience with that method when learning singing and choreography in high school can highlight the teacher-student hierarchy. An ideal student is described as a clean paper (白紙一張) to receive the teacher’s will and knowledge. Relating this to LPA, when a novice LPA performer or staff embarks on the learning process, the norms of the theatre and school and the overarching system of values in the LPA industry, begin to reshape their social and national identity. Their minds and bodies are tamed and are unwilling to step out of line. They follow the rules and locate within the mainstream normative behavioural template and have internalised a set of values - a preordained set of attitudes, etiquette, or beliefs.

The novice learns that actions such as criticising the industry or ideology of the government are inappropriate. Even without a threat of punishment from their supervisors, normative power regulates their activities and inhibits separatist aspirations. Regardless of the presence or absence of a guard-like agent, LPA personnel’s knowledge instilled within the system applies a normative pressure to conform. These ethnic individuals become vital components that reinforce an atmosphere that cognitively stimulates self-discipline among the others. It eliminates the local government’s necessity to intimidate ethnic both dissenting and average non-dissenting ethnic people with force, as knowledge substitutes for force. However, this does not mean that coercive force is completely dismissed in the ethnic region; the coercion is retained for an emergency provision. Particularly in Xinjiang, if necessary, the theatre and the government can use coercive force in their disciplinary endeavours. However, the application of disciplinary power makes coercion a rare occurrence.

I do not consider that LPA alone can modernise the ethnic regions, but as one of the pivotal components for developing tourism, it is undoubtedly a crucial element. Tourism development has accelerated within the turbulent regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. An anonymous interviewee has informed that the resistance in Xinjiang has decreased, giving the government unchecked power to pursue its goal of developing the economy. To oversee development, the governor of Guangdong (an economically developed province), Ma Xingrui, has been charged with managing the revitalisation of Xinjiang. In the long run, these opportunities allow the ethnic minority people to benefit financially from the tourist market (even if the share of the wealth generated is often unequal). The ultimate cost is that the locals internalise the state's interests against their ethnic customs. Therefore, if the LPA model in Xinjiang is successful, the economics of financial benefit internalised by the ethnic people will dilute their local identity. Hanisation will be reinforced and normalised through contact with wealthy Han tourists from the cities that come to view the LPA performance. Thus Xinjiang's LPA serves as an alternate camp for re-education with the assimilation and integration of the ethnic population driven by commerce. LPA is a form of political discipline with an economic label that lacks political rights and cultural determination for ethnic groups. The issue is of a lack of transparency and accountability, with circumscribed conditions of possibility.

6.4 The Landscape with Synchronised Dancing Bodies

Through a Foucauldian lens, this chapter has appropriated “discipline” and “docile body” as analytical terms to deconstruct the power relationships within performing and training, and has considered the landscape as “space”. Foucault (1995) states that the “body is directly involved in a political field, and that power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (p. 25). Foucault's concept of docile

bodies illuminates the sense that bodies must be positioned receptively for the logic of arrangement to act upon them:

Bodily processes and operations... it is the act of controlling how bodies move, the processes they perform, and how they enact them that is referred to as the “modality” through which disciplining works (p. 136).

As mentioned in the former chapter, the synchronised body forms the basis of the incredible displays in LPA; it reminds us of the military parade as a synchronous form of statecraft. The staged synchronicity imposes a kinetic and performative Chinese identity on the ethnic minority; it also trains ethnic bodies to be disciplined, organised, obedient, and docile. Lili, a famed Dong ethnic choreographer in the LPA industry, expressed this Chinese philosophy when she informed that: “When I train people in the field, I can feel what Mr Mei said about harmony between humans and nature; it is great” (Personal Communication, 10/22/2018). Here, I elaborate on this synchronisation theme by placing it within the Chinese aesthetic and philosophical concept of *shanshui*. When Powers (1998) debates traditional *shanshui* painting, he sketches out a body-landscape metaphor. For Powers, *Shanshui* painting exhibits the Confucian hierarchical system of power relations; the features in the painting represent various classes of people. Bodies are immortalised in nature. Their social positions are displayed by the type and position of a feature in nature. Ethnic bodies trained in LPA are infused with this Confucian-Taoist *shanshui*: it facilitates the imposition of the Han Chinese orthodox doctrine and dogma into the heart of ethnic places. Pearson (2006) described a similar concept when he researched the annual Haxey Hood¹⁰⁰ event. The participants feel that the landscape is a “somatic space” constructed through context and action, movement, and feeling (p.157). According to

¹⁰⁰ The Haxey Hood is a traditional event in Haxey, North Lincolnshire, England, the Twelfth Day of Christmas. A large football scrum pushes a leather tube to one of four pubs, where it remains until the following year's game.

Rogers (2012)

This relationship between body and landscape is emphasised in *Body Weather* (McAuley 2006), a performance technique that uses sensory, muscle, and bone exercises to create dance movements. Participants concentrate upon landscape elements through the body. The exercises also explore how the body is “assimilated into the weather” such that atmosphere becomes central to the creation and experience of performance (p. 63).

Through the medium of the ethereal landscape, the deepening of the performers’ harmonious perceptual connection with their bodies reinforces their body coordination. Dance is one of the most well-known and widely practised forms of body awareness.¹⁰¹ The LPA training methodology¹⁰² articulates a Taoist body awareness method involving breathing. The performer must sink their breath (chi) into the *dantian* (lower belly 氣沉丹田). Schipper (1978) elaborates on the Taoist concept of the body:

The human body is the image of a country...like a landscape with mountains, lakes, woods, and shelters. The body conceived as a “country” possesses an administration with a ruler and officials. The heart, or spirit, is considered to be the ruler or king of the body; the other viscera are the officials.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Geography and performance studies both also view landscape as lived, using phenomenology to highlight how “body and environment fold into and co-construct each other through a series of practices and relations” (Wylie 2007, p. 144). Stewart (2010), for instance, has analysed how his dance movements engaged with, and responded to, the shifting landscape of sand, water, tides and air in Morecambe Bay.

¹⁰² When I observed the training and rehearsal of the LPA conducted by Mei Shuaiyuan’s team in Nanjing, Zhang Xiao and Lili specially addressed the importance of *dantian* as a way of breathing. Also, see the media report about how LPA artists train the performers by the Taoist concept, available at: https://fo.ifeng.com/a/20160714/41642463_0.shtml

¹⁰³ The metaphorical relation is also found in medical texts so that *The Yellow Emperor’s Handbook of Internal Medicine*, for example, states that “the heart has the function (kuan) of ruler governing by means of the spirit

Maspero and Kierman (2014) mention that the ruler's body becomes an autonomous "ruling body" homologous to the region it inhabits. The influence exerted by the landscape on the mentality and conduct of its inhabitants is an old theme in China. In imposing these Confucian-Taoist concepts on the ethnic landscape and the local dancing bodies, there is not only a historic and dynastic justification for the authoritarian rule of the party-state but an element of submission that is reminiscent of Foucault's disciplined bodies and the docility produced. Mitchell (2002) states that:

The rise and development of landscape are read as a symptom of the rise and development of capitalism; the "harmony" sought in landscape is read as a compensation for and screening off of the actual violence perpetrated there. Landscape can be a powerful ideological tool because it naturalises that which is cultural and social (p. 7).

Disciplining the ethnic dancing bodies in the landscape and instilling them with powerful Confucian-Taoist *shanshui* harmony naturalises Han domination and crystallises the long-term Han superiority over ethnic minorities. It is not so much a screening of violence as the reinvigoration of historical, philosophical, and cultural concepts in servitude to capitalism. Foucault suggests "power is everywhere", diffused in discourse, knowledge and "regimes of truth" and inscribed into the human body, which equates with the Taoist philosophy that "the great Tao flows everywhere". The state-sanctioned expression of "harmony" becomes dispersed under the skin¹⁰⁴ of the ethnic performers. Discipline, obedience and docility dwell fluidly in their

(shen); the lungs are the transmitting officers giving forth regulations; the liver is the general devising stratagems..." (Schipper, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ This aligns with Schipper (1978) who informs that for the initiated Taoist, however, the influence is reversed in that the Taoist knows how to regulate and harmonise the outer (wai) forces of nature by governing his own body (the inner, nei). This, along with the moral conduct of a country's inhabitants, determines the harmony of nature (p. 357).

stomachs, nerves, bones, and veins, ennobling their perception of the Chinese nation-state in body and landscape. These synchronised bodies in disciplined motion amplify the landscape's majesty and sublimity. In turn, the power of the landscape with its majestic rotating seasons overwhelms ethnic bodies to surreptitiously promote a receptive and other-directed identity through naturalisation and normalisation. The perceptual and bodily experience of the performers becomes sublimated, reinforcing the harmonious state whereby ideological resistance to being a part of the Chinese state is eradicated.

Massey (2006) has informed us that the landscape's ideological overtones (from Heidegger's original formulation) of harmony and authenticity can downplay the sense of tension and disharmony. Though Massey assumes "an essential harmony of rhythms and resonances - a coherence of landscape", she believes "landscapes refuse to be disciplined" (p. 41). However, this analysis has shown that Massey's landscape that "refuses to be disciplined" has in fact been disciplined by LPA. Rather than only featuring a centralised control structure, the state power becomes dispersive by using the power of the landscape. The relationship of the locals to their landscape, and the relationship between the locals and the state, have permanently transformed. Rogers (2014) researches "geographies of the performing arts" by situating performing art in the context of landscape and place, claiming that:

The performing arts reveal the experiential qualities of space and place, they also provide a way to think about their power-laden politics, as performances can reflect contestations around place and identity (p. 60).

Similarly, Warnke (1994) links politics with landscape art, arguing that dominance and subordination can be strengthened, intensified and perpetuated by reference to

natural conditions. Landscape art is a double-edged sword. It can naturalise man by emancipating the self from culture, propelling him into an original state of enlightenment. Conversely, the landscape can imprison man by imposing synthetic values specific to his culture. Foucault (1988), in *Madness and Civilisation*, states that when there is no space for “madness” due to rationality and the norm prevailing, the only paradise left is found in art. However, LPA fails to emancipate the ethnic populace from discipline, and to remove the chains from the cultural mind of subjectivity.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on and combined Foucault’s theoretical frameworks related to power and Massey’s theory of landscape to consider the landscape as a ‘space’ and natural power. LPA has furthered the state’s governance in the ethnic areas by adopting the two-pronged approach of culture and economics. The state, overseeing internal ethnic relations, uses more of the carrot than the stick. LPA in problematic places like Tibet and Xinjiang utilises economic incentives tied to the lure of ethnic pride. From the perspective of ethnic groups, they can derive economic power and benefit from LPA but not separatist sentiment or political power. In this way, LPA has crystallised multiple tensions, most prominently the merging of a performative and conditional ethnic identity, economic agency, and the erasure of political agency.

The state riding the LPA train extends power systematically into the ethnic regions of China. From “pastoral power” through the official narrative at the macro-level to “disciplinary power” via the meticulous regimentation applied to mindset and body at the micro-level. The tourism development of LPA and its related industries has accelerated the process of modernisation in rural localities. Ethnic communities, once neglected, are now exposed to the glare of the pan-optic surveillance state. The presence of LPA informs the ethnic populace that Beijing is an ever-present force: it is

unwise to consider protest, separatism, or criminality, especially in sensitive regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang.

Furthermore, normative power infiltrates the populace in the landscape in accord with the CCP's ideals. The textual and visual paradigm of *shanshui* forces the ethnic localities to imagine the Chinese nation in the landscapes as a naturalised presence. Confucian-Taoist harmony inscribed with a disciplined order via subtle sensorial means manifests in ethnic dance and bodily training. In other words, the state's power is diffused through the landscape and produces disciplined and docile bodies for more accessible governance. The relationship between the ethnic locals and their landscape has changed. The imposition of *shanshui* on the landscape is a declaration of government ownership. For the inhabitants of Xinjiang, the *shanshui* presence in their landscapes forges a physical and ideological "prison".

Chapter 7

Manufacturing LPA as a Chinese National Brand: Sublime in Chinese Magnificence

In its earlier developmental stages, tourism in China suffered from the problem of relying almost exclusively on sightseeing during the daytime. It has been said that the “daytime activity for tourists is visiting temples, nighttime activity is sleeping” (Song and Cheung, 2010a, pp.665). There was a distinct shortage of evening activities. Qiao (2010) observed that as China’s economy developed, there was an increased demand for sightseeing and tourist attractions. Song and Cheung (2012) indicate that tourists are eager to pursue cultural experiences and explore the ethnic culture in different regions of China. Concordantly, the introduction of tourism-oriented large-scale theatrical performances was a strategy that emerged to resolve this situation (Song and Cheung, 2012). Outdoor spectacular tourist performances are a destination product becoming available in China in the past decade (Hou, Yang, and Li, 2010; Zhuge and Cui, 2005). Furthermore, they have proven to be highly appealing to domestic and international tourists (Bai and Ge, 2008; Jiao, 2013; Mo, 2005).

The Chinese tourism market has transformed into one of the world’s most-watched inbound and outbound tourist markets; the statistics indicate that there has been an increase of over fifty per cent compared to the number of trips made within China ten years ago (Han, 2019). Therefore, many sites and objects have been opened to tourists and deliberately exposed to “the tourist gaze” (Urry 2002). Under these circumstances, cultural tourism productions have grown at a phenomenal rate. Thus, it is necessary to consider the cultural policy related to China’s cultural industry. Since 2007, the cultural industries in China have become a national-level priority to accelerate economic

restructuring and have changed the pattern of economic growth. The support tourism receives from central and local governments allows its rapid development to replace heavy industries (Yang, 2011). Culture and tourism have made a strong partnership under the top-down leadership of the Chinese government during two decades of continuous development. Since the new millennium, the cultural tourism industry has been an area of investment with considerable growth potential.

In 2018, The Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Tourism were renamed The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, reinforcing the government's attention to the cultural tourism industry. When debating the cultural tourism industry in China, it is unavoidable to mention LPA since LPA is a typical result of the marriage between culture and tourism. Zhou (2017) states that,

Recently, the tourism industry grew and diversified, which, in due course, led to the introduction of artistic and cultural elements. The potential boost to profit was developed as an expanded policy, expressed in the famous slogan “vitalising economy through theatrical art” (藝術搭台 經濟唱戲).

The success of ILS in Yangshuo in terms of its box office revenue and its boost to the development of local tourism aroused a nationwide “Impression craze” with the support of local governments and private capital investment. Consequently, hundreds of LPA were spawned all over China, each with a distinctly regional flavour. LPA suddenly became a hot topic and attracted overwhelming public attention, especially as the three greatest Chinese film directors,¹⁰⁵ Zhang Yimou, Feng Xiaogang, and Chen

¹⁰⁵ The Three Directors: Zhang Yimou, Feng Xiaogang, and Chen Kaige are public regarded as the three most famous film directors in China by some media in China. Therefore, they were mentioned together by the public with the title The Three Greatest Directors.

Kaige, became involved in the industry. While LPA came to symbolise the cultural and artistic heritage of the local places and the Chinese nation, its development also aspires to be an expression relevant to the country's current economic conditions.

This chapter reviews the nationalisation¹⁰⁶ of LPA to examine how it has been manufactured and developed into a Chinese nationwide phenomenon and brand. Its business model based on LPA's relationship with tourism will be further demonstrated. The leading case study for this chapter is the LPA: *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou*; this was the first LPA to be manufactured as a Chinese national branding in an international setting when China hosted the G20 Summit. Continuing to examine the landscape matrix's effect on united Chineseness, this chapter will firstly explore the landscape's economic value as utilised by LPA in developing the country's cultural industry. Then, I appropriate Wang Ban's notion of the Chinese sublime "aesthetic experience" to consider landscape in EMH as an aesthetic enterprise and emotive symbol for Chineseness.

7.1 LPA as a Concept of the Cultural Tourism Industry

Before reviewing the manufacture and development of LPA, it is vital to introduce the production content providers and the government's role; these are the critical propellers of LPA.

After the success of ILS, the production team parted. Zhang Yimou, Wang Chaoge, and Fan Yue formed a new company: the Impression Creative Company (ICC), which produces the *Impression* series. Mei Shuaiyuan established his own LPA company: The Shanshui Cultural Industry Company (SCIC). Mei's company, to date, has created over 20 LPA events; they are referred to as the *Shanshui* series. In the LPA industry, these

¹⁰⁶ Nationalisation here refers to the action of rendering national in character.

are currently the two leading players. Numerous small players in the LPA field have had varying degrees of success in their landscape ventures. Potential investors believe that this field is highly lucrative and that there is a significant share of profit in LPA for all parties involved. For instance, Huaxia Cultural Tourism Ltd was established by Huaxia Group, a company that produces tower cranes and diversified into producing LPA. Notably, some LPA content providers, tourism management companies, or theatre troupes involved with LPA have transformed into companies limited by shares and floated on the stock market.

Li and Keane (2011) found that the initiation of a cultural industries policy in China reveals top-down development strategies, such as government policies that aim to enhance the local economic, cultural, and social fields. The government, in many cases, provides financial subsidies and other forms of support to the industries (Groenewegen-Lau, 2014). The aim is to contribute to the overall national cultural industry, which can thereby be internationally competitive (Morrow and Li, 2016). When the local media report on their local LPA project, they often title it a “place cultural name-card” (地方文化名片) (Sun and Chio, 2012). Many LPA are given the following grand title by the government “the model base of the Chinese national cultural industry”.

The first category of local government involvement in LPA is “full authority domination”. It includes the initial set-up of the project and canvassing capital from state-owned firms (such as appointing the creative team, proprietorship, and operational rights of the theatre). *Dream of Tao* is an example of a local municipal project that can represent this full authority domination, the manager Ye Zhijun stated:

Our local government offers a subsidy every time the performance runs as it never makes a profit, even when the tickets are sold out. Yingtan's council considers this event as the local people's livelihood project that can bring Yingtan significant benefits. It copies the business model of ILS and hopes to drive the peripheral industries and generate an industrial chain much like ILS does in Yangshuo (Personal Communication, 10/05/2018).

Given that *Dream of Tao* is an immersive LPA that covers an enormous area, it makes the cost of human resources, energy, and maintenance extremely high. As a livelihood project, this LPA is the engine that drives the tourist economy. Therefore, though sustaining a loss due to the high costs, *Dream of Tao* gains financial benefits via the commercial activity of the direct, indirect, and peripheral stakeholders.

The second category of local government involvement is through joint ventures with private enterprises; this is "public and private partnership". According to Ma Zhiping, Wang Chaoge's marketing consultant:

The local state-owned enterprise establishes the subsidiary company to run the theatre and then shares the profits with a private investment company according to a pre-determined ratio. When local governments cannot do tourism well, they cooperate with a private company. Government invests part of the capital and establishes a joint-stock company with private investors. Most LPA projects in China copy this pattern (Personal Communication, 22/10/2018).

Impression Putuo, is an example of public and private partnership. The company that produces *Impression Putuo* is the Zhoushan Putuo Impression Tourism Culture Development Ltd, a joint venture between the Putuo district government and The Impression Creative Company. The joint investors hold thirty per cent and seventy per cent of the stock holdings (Zou, 2016).

The third category of government involvement is “preferential treatments”. Many local governments offer a variety of preferential treatments to assist the LPA projects without getting involved in equity participation or the management of the theatre. In Chengde City, *Golden Age: the Kangxi Empire* is an example of this category of governmental support. The local council lowers the threshold for market access from the outset, allowing investment from various levels and channels, with the sole requirement that investors produce a large-scale LPA. It then designs a preferential policy to give support. In this case, the preferential policy includes eliminating the city council’s registration fee. Then the council provides financial support (which accounts for about two per cent of the annual fiscal expenditure of the city council) to the cultural tourism enterprise. A loan is issued which subsidises fifty per cent of the loan’s interest for three years. Finally, the city council offers the public land for development into an LPA project. The enterprise buys the land cheaply.

At this juncture, I will evaluate LPAs’ touristic and financial impact. In the previous chapter, I discussed how ILS catalyses the development of Yangshuo’s tourism, real estate, hospitality, education, employment, and related industries. It generates a complete industrial chain in the local place. In Wang Chaoge’s opinion:

The *Impression* series can, directly and indirectly, stimulate local employment by involving several hundred thousand people turning a town city into a tourist site; this is the LPA industry. The performance can generate that profound power for the local surroundings. I am proud; culture is not a soft power; it is a hard power (quoted in Ding, 2018).

Furthermore, the manager of the ILS theatre, Wang Jiaxian, stated, “the greatness of ILS is that it has created a new industry for China - a Chinese cultural tourism industry” (Personal Communication, 20/03/2018). LPA is currently receiving attention in Chinese academic circles, especially regarding LPA’s role in the Chinese cultural tourism industry. For example, Zhang (2017) notes that the evening economy project represented by LPA can fill in the blanks of evening consumption, becoming the touristic cities’ standard tourist configuration. There is a saying related to the changes in behaviour LPA has caused: “sightseeing during the day, then a performance in the evening” (Ou, 2011). Mei Shuaiyuan also reviews the significance of LPA on the evening economy:

LPA takes place in the evening, exploiting tourists’ idle time, thus converting them into audiences. The tourists increasingly need evening consumption. With the development of the Chinese economy, the demand for entertainment is getting stronger. Foreigners visiting China also have the habit of watching a performance in the evening...¹⁰⁷

Applying the example of *Impression Dahongpao*, Zou (2016) states that the tourists’

¹⁰⁷ See the interview of Mei Shuaiyuan, available at:
<https://v.qq.com/x/cover/4fumk5i297x14zr/7t2ok0Oljvm.html>

plan in Wuyishan formerly was to do sightseeing during the day, such as cruising through the Jiuqu River and hiking on the Tianyou Peak, then off to bed in the evening. However, the appearance of *Impression Dahongpao* in Wuyishan made the visitors “climb Tianyou Peak and drift on the Jiuqu River in the day, and then attend *Impression Dahongpao* at night”. Wuyi Mountain teems with a famous variety of tea named Dahongpao. Thus, the LPA has a tea culture theme. The mayor of Wuyishan, Zhang Xianjun, comments that *Impression Dahongpao* has had a “Butterfly Effect” on Wuyi’s related industries and fills an entertainment chasm in the evening.¹⁰⁸ *Impression Dahongpao*’s official statistics show that since its premiere in 2010, the tea industry’s total financial output has increased from 800 million RMB in 2010 to 1.6 billion RMB in 2017. The number of private stakeholders in the tea industry has increased from no more than 100 in 2005 to over 4800 in 2017. The mayor of Wuyishan claims that the tea-related tourist industries in Wuyi could not expand at such a phenomenal rate without *Impression Dahongpao*.¹⁰⁹

A defining feature of LPA is that it injects culture into the landscape. Yi Long¹¹⁰, the CEO of the Beijing Midi Music Media Company, shows the necessity of a cultural event within a natural place:

I have visited many natural places in China. My conclusion is “good scenery but boredom”. To overcome this situation, I consider that the cultural elements need to be implanted in the landscape. A large-scale musical event can enhance the local GDP (Personal Communication, 21/11/2018).

When Yi Long, a producer of pop music festivals, is involved in the LPA business, he ignores the Chinese traditional *shanshui* element (the original aim of the landscape

¹⁰⁸ See state media *People.cn*, available at: <http://fj.people.com.cn/n2/2017/0112/c350390-29587178.html>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ I received this from the conference on 21st November 2018 in Beijing when Yi Long gave a speech.

within the Chinese traditional literati ink tradition). His understanding is that nature and landscape are not appreciated on their own but must be enlivened by spectacles. His aim deviates from Mei Shuaiyuan whose works aim to initiate contemplation, peace, and a sense of harmony within the viewers. Mei Shuaiyuan's partner Zhang Rensheng whose criticism of the culture and aesthetic value of an LPA may help clarify this point:

If the producers have a high standard of cultural refinement, they can adapt a cultural tradition and aesthetic well; if not, those LPAs will lose cultural authenticity and traditional values (Personal Communication, 22/03/2018).

Edensor (2001) considers the vitalisation of tourism via cultural events to be “Performing Tourism” or “Staging Tourism”. It is a familiar concept in the West but a relatively novel concept for China, a still-developing country. Mei Shuaiyuan gives his rationale regarding the keenness of local governments to inaugurate LPA projects:

In some remote places in northern China, cultural memories, relics, and heritage are “buried underground” (not fully exploited), so they need to be resurrected in cultural production. For example, Kaifeng's GDP in the Song Dynasty occupied one-third of the world's GDP. Currently, the local people feel no sense of cultural pride. The mayor said he wanted to activate residents' original sense of pride; therefore, the LPA *Prosperous Dongjing in Great Song Dynasty* was produced. When the tourists watch this spectacle, they learn how Kaifeng was once great during the Song Dynasty.

From the central and local government's point of view, LPA can transform a place from reliance on industrial resources to a cultural resource. I consulted with a marketing consultant, Ma Zhiping; she disclosed the following:

Encore Pingyao is Shanxi province's "Key Project", Shanxi province needs to be transformed from relying on coal resources to relying on cultural resources. Other places all over China need to be transformed under the leadership of President Xi. Cultural tourism is regarded as a tertiary industry (Personal Communication, 26/10/2018).

The transformation from heavy industries to the tourist and service industries is a trend observed in the West. Now, it is China's turn to engage in this trend. At this point, I employ the notion of Chineseness to elaborate on this modern phenomenon of LPA. Chineseness in this section refers to "the contemporary society of Mainland China, rather than a broad meaning of being ethnic Chinese related" (Yao, 2012; p. 112). Chun (2017) claims that Chineseness is "a product of its embeddedness in specific entanglements of modernity...and globalisation" (p. 10). For example, the Opening-up policy of Deng Xiaoping, which started China's move from Maoist communism to Western capitalism, facilitated China's development into a modern globalised nation. I use modern Chineseness as a concept to specifically encompass LPA's Chinisation (中國化) or nationalisation in the current climate of China. Modern Chineseness is a strategic aspect of LPA, an expression that is a physical embodying and enacting in a performativity sense, as opposed to only a form of performance. It is a combination of modern economic needs and practices, and national strategies impacted by Western elements, aligning with China's distinctive 21st century socio-economic model. In some respects, LPA is the epitome of Chinese modernity, negotiating the representation of Chineseness under the impact of globalisation and market forces in

modern times. Zhu (2012) believes that,

The emergence of tourism performance as an ethnic tourism activity reflects the transition of contemporary Chinese society; social, political, and cultural conversion in modern China has increased the rhythm of urbanisation, modernisation, and industrialisation in the context of globalisation (p. 315).

Zhang Rensheng, in an interview, similarly stated:

The most characteristic feature of LPA is to use many performers who are unprofessional residents to control the cost. This pattern of performing arts that appeared during this historical period is related to China's stage of economic development (Personal Communication, 22/03/2018).

Min Rui, a director of LPA who was also involved in the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony declares:

LPA is an excellent Chinese "invention" linked with Chinese people's consumption tendencies, economic development, social and political background, and tourism situation. LPA is bound to China's present conditions, so it rises in response to the proper time and conditions. Travelling has become a daily necessity as people are getting rich; other than dining and shopping, they need cultural and spiritual consumption when they go travelling. (Personal Communication, 23/11/2018).

Notably, Mei Shuaiyuan refers to his LPA business model as a “cultural complex”, a characteristic feature employed in defining LPA; he explains that:

LPA being an outdoor performance is influenced by climate and other factors, so it is risky to only rely on selling the performance tickets. I hope every LPA can form a complex where hotels, restaurants, and other matching facilities are present. Together with upstream and downstream industries, this cultural complex generates a chain that can balance the risk (quoted in Zhang, 2013). The performance had better be large-scale, then it can combine with real estate, tourist attractions, education, advertising, and other industries to make LPA just like one of the pearls on a pearl necklace. At the same time, we make other pearls and then string them together to make a closed industrial cycle (Personal Communication, 23/03/2018).

Given that LPA is manufactured nationwide, Zhang Xiao has even referred to the phenomenon as LPA “pop culture” (Personal Communication, 13/03/2019). The growth of LPA is under the jurisdiction of the state’s political economy to develop the regional cultural tourism industry. A question arises: Does LPA work well under political and capital expectations? The LPA phenomenon has drawn many criticisms in China (Huang, 2016). Some criticisms focus on LPA’s homogenisation, using the same format, elements, and the dire quality of some productions (Wu, 2016). For example, Mei Hong judges:

This industry is overflowing with uneven quality and homogeneous productions. Some of them were only performed for three months, then closed. In Xi'an city, sixty tourism theatrical productions once appeared for a period (Personal Communication, 23/11/2018).

A set of statistics released by CCTV in 2018 shows that there are over 300 LPAs in China, but 80% turn in a loss, and 11% can strike a balance between income and expenditure. Only 9% can make a profit (Zhang, 2018). Some critical reports focusing on investors' blindness in investing in LPA and the local governments' desire to pursue their political achievements have shown that taxpayers' money has been wasted.¹¹¹ Some of the LPAs' impact on local tourism development is considerable. However, Wang Chaoge's statement that "LPA can turn a town city into a tourist site" is exaggerated. No successful case testifies that LPA can turn a place not originally a tourist destination into a tourist destination. Many have tried to do so but have failed. *Impression Hainan* in Haikou is a case in point. Haikou is not a tourist destination, so the number of customers every evening was sadly a paltry few. Eventually, this performance was cancelled, and the abandoned theatre was left idly decaying on the beach. One of the practitioners in this industry of cultural tourism, Cui Xingliang, has given his criticism:

Nowadays, LPA is still being flattered as a God, and it is being developed vigorously throughout China. The social benefit LPA can bring is exaggerated; they boast it as a standard configuration and a magical tool for opening up the evening economy (Personal Communication, 09/12/2018).

¹¹¹ Available at: <http://www.pinchain.com/article/89962>

This critique reveals the problems in this industry and that the LPA format does not often achieve the success of ILS. However, one of the dominant reasons LPA attracts private capital is an open secret and an embarrassment to this industry. Unscrupulous investors fly the flag of cultural tourism to gain advantages from the “preferential policies” I discussed earlier in the chapter. Their real intention is to engage in large-scale real estate speculation. The investors claim that they will make an LPA and receive land to do this from the local council at a bargain price. Furthermore, many real estate companies rebrand as cultural industry companies and then list on the Stock Exchange (domestic property companies in China are not allowed to list on the stock market). Even Mei Shuaiyuan states this truth without fear on his company’s official website:

Their purpose of investing in an LPA project is not to make a performance. Their real purpose is to gain much land at a low price. Due to the LPA, a visitor flow rate is generated, increasing the land value. The land then has more financial potential than selling performance tickets.¹¹²

Based on mercantile crassness and malignant motivation, many LPA practitioners’ interest is not promoting local culture or ethnic relations; it is not even related to the commodification of culture. Such chaotic phenomena are not only limited to LPA but also a problem with the development of generic cultural tourism-oriented commercial projects in China. After preferential policies are implemented, there is a lack of government assessment and supervisory mechanisms. Consequently, many LPAs fail after several years or even several months. The CCP and some provincial governments noticed this behaviour and produced a code of conduct. These are now the *National Standard for Chinese Landscape Performance*. The guidelines aim to raise the standard

¹¹² See Shanshui Ceremony Culture Industry Company’s official website, available at: <http://www.shan-shui.com/ArtsNewShow.html?id=13109637>

of the LPA market and enhance the quality of LPA in the hope of leading the LPA industry towards a healthier development. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism then launched a document in 2019 named the “*Instruction About Facilitating the Development of Tourism Performing Arts*”.¹¹³

We can criticise the failure of LPA by drawing on the concept of cultural policy related to place branding. Here, “low-road” policy implies a narrow set of homogenised policy initiatives (Gordon, 1996; Helper, 2009). Malecki (2004) and Ornston (2014) indicate that place branding has the potential to be a “high-road” policy given its utility in business attraction; however, it is also described as a “low-road” approach to local and regional economic development policy as it is not being used efficiently. They also disclose that several gaps in place-branding policy are identified, including dependence on visual identities and narratives and poor communication of the brand information. Hence, low-road policy accounts for many LPA failures directly attributable to local government policy.

LPA is the manufacturing of culture at the local and the national scale within the prevailing trend of economic culturalism. It is branding for places, a homogeneous movement of China’s regional cultural industry, and tourism development, facing a dilemma driven by a highly-centralised government’s mono-political ideology. Pasquinelli (2013) describes that places need to construct their competitive advantage by positioning themselves in a “market of geographies”, an open territorial competition space. However, regional government policy and cultural branding do not always match local conditions. In LPA, there is a herd mentality; local and regional cultural diversity is reduced to homogenised performativity that results from an assimilated regional and national policy. Regardless of the criticism against LPA, its nationalisation campaign has brought LPA from one locality to a trans-local and national context; it provides the conditions for manufacturing a theatrical Chineseness.

¹¹³ Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-03/28/c_1124297626.htm

Ho and Fung (2016) remind us that “top-down cultural policies and capitalist forces in a globalising market come together to shape the Chinese national identity” (p. 106). Broadly conceived, nation-building around the country’s landscape refers to the development of all aspects of a society’s political, social, and economic systems. Mitchell (2002) argues that

Landscape is a body of economic practices that makes an exchange in both the real and represented environment, playing a central role in the formation of social subjects as unreadably “private” identities and determinately public selves figured by regional and national identities (p. 2).

The Chinese landscape is capitalised on by the state and transformed into an economic power on a national scale. The nation-building aspect of the *shanshui* concept is both symbolic and physical. Physically, LPA helps the party-state connect the nation in a way that opens up every locality from a less-developing place into a place with a tourist economy. It shortens the regional disparity economically, fulfilling the landscape matrix’s aims of promoting a united economic Chineseness as opposed to a number of economically disconnected regions. When Nye (1994) explored the role of the sublime as a mythic structure that became linked to an American idea of nationalism, he concluded that,

In keeping with this changing landscape, the expanding marketplace enacted a transition from the celebration of the sublimity of the landscape and a move towards economic development progress as a new symbol of the sublime (p. 5).

It is worth noting that the chaotic nature of LPA development weakens the effect of

the national landscape matrix promoting Chineseness. Nevertheless, like the cultural industry globally, the quality of the product varies. Hence, there are ample LPAs of good quality. Though the government makes an effort to engineer LPA for political expediency, and the capitalist investors often have ulterior motives, it does not necessarily denote that the quality of their LPAs will be inferior. At least those LPAs I have displayed in this thesis operate successfully.

7.2 LPA as a National Brand During the G20 Summit

This section manifests how LPA is converted from place branding to a Chinese national brand and soft power by presenting *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou* (EMH) as a case study. This LPA was designed for the G20 Summit opening ceremony hosted in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province in China's Jiangnan region. Through showing the musical programme and analysing moments and images from EMH, I explain how local cultural placeness, Chineseness, and internationalness assemble to represent this Chinese branding in a broader context.

Hall (1992) has described the “narrative of nation”, which is a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals that stand for the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation (p. 293). Opening and closing ceremonies such as those employed for The Olympic Games have become an advertisement for the hosting nation to promote tourism, investment, commerce, and political philosophy (Hogan, 2003). It can also serve as an agency for national pride beyond the latitude of redefining national identity or ethnic identity (Lee and Yoon, 2017).

Tomlinson and Young (2006) give a pertinent description of a global sporting spectacle as: “an event that has come to involve the majority of the nations of the world, that is

transmitted globally, that foregrounds the sculptured and commodified body, and orchestrates a physical display of the body politic” (p.3). Accordingly, what is presented in an Olympic ceremony must reach a universal audience and be easily covered and interpreted by the media (MacAloon, 1996). Hogan (2009) considers it to be the case that “host nations domesticate the consciously universalist rituals of such ceremonies, and thus are filled with national meanings” (p. 98). Chen *et al.* (2012) similarly state that “the ritual of the opening ceremony represents a concentration of features, qualities, and messages, that combine the local and global, the culturally distinct and universal in a complex production” (pp. 188).

The Chinese government is enthusiastic about hosting international events to develop diplomacy, particularly in Xi Jinping’s era showing China’s new face to the world as a “great power”. Kirton (2016) reveals that “the choice of China as the G20’s 2016 host was a confirmation and consequence of its continuing, compounding leadership; Xi Jinping wished to host and chair the summit, with an ambition to gain a larger voice in international affairs” (p. 99). Hosting the G20 promotes Chinese people’s national pride while externally constructing the appearance of a super-power by manifesting its influential status and promoting China’s achievements. For the opening ceremony of The G20 Summit, Chinese officials commissioned an LPA named *Enduring Memories of Hangzhou* (EMH). EMH is adapted from *Impression West Lake*. The director of *Impression West Lake*, Wang Chaoge, underscores the Chineseness and internationalness of *Impression West Lake* by stating:

I always feel that *Impression West Lake* does not belong to Hangzhou; it belongs to the Chinese nation and even the entire world. It has been a must-see performance for international tourists (quoted in Jiang, 2008).

The production team of EMH was composed of leading Chinese artists under the direction of Zhang Yimou. According to Zhang Yimou,

We make this show based on Impression West Lake; what we see now is a new performance. We only keep the last scene of Impression West Lake which is the enormous mechanical device lifted from the water and the choreography of scooping the water. The rest of the programme is all-new”.¹¹⁴

Unlike the one-off nature of other international opening ceremonies, EMH has become a permanent everyday event for tourists. The media reports of EMH contained slogans such as “Stunning the World”, “Hanzhou’s Shining Golden Brand”, “Chinese brand”, and “Manifesting China’s Cultural Confidence”. Zhang Yimou designed EMH as a live orchestral LPA, played by the Chinese National Symphony Orchestra (see Figure 46).



Figure 46: Chinese National Symphony Orchestra

¹¹⁴ See the interview of Zhang Yimou, available at: <http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/09/02/ARTI10cD1rhxqSqCYVvKt01UZ160902.shtml>

Despite being a symphony concert, its programme comprises many art forms, such as orchestra, chorus, choreographed dance, traditional Chinese opera, and ballet. It uses the local pavilion, bridge, mountain, and trees around the lake as a backdrop to the stage. There is no traditional stage constructed over the water. Instead, the stage is a platform just below the lake's surface. A defining feature of EMH is that it uses professional performers instead of local people. In this LPA, Zhang Yimou presents local and national characteristics and a sense of internationalness. Following the CCP's instructions, the gala embodies "Hangzhou's local characteristics, the charm of Jiangnan Region, Chinese magnificence, and world cosmopolitanism" (Liu, 2016). The producer Sha Xiaolan discloses the political indications from the government:

We combined Hangzhou's local cultural elements, Chinese cultural traditions, and international culture in the most advanced way. We use the most traditional and regional representative music *The Butterfly Lovers* to link modern stage techniques with a beautiful giant Chinese fan raised from the lake. We also use a dance from *Swan Lake*, which is the first time the "swan" ballerinas have danced on a real lake (quoted in Zhao, 2018).

Therefore, this concert's programme discloses the central government's intention to blend cultural Hangzhou-ness into a larger cultural Chineseness and even further into internationalness. In the subsections below, "local", "national", and "international" content are presented in detail.

Local and Regional Placeness

The local ballad *Picking Tea* provides the music representing Hangzhou's local

character as a cultural placeness ¹¹⁵ with an accompanying contemporary choreographed dance performance (see Figure 47).



Figure 47: A large number of dancers performing *Picking Tea*

Next, the *pipa* performance *Moonlit Night on Spring River* represents “the charm of Jiangnan Region”.¹¹⁶ There is a recomposed classical music piece *Moonlight River in Spring* performed by the *pipa* accompanied by orchestra and chorus.¹¹⁷ There then follows a performance named *Beautiful Love Stories* representing Jiangnan regional music, consisting of a vocal performance and a dance performance. It is a famous song from the Yue Opera named *The Butterfly Lovers* performed by two Yue opera artists dressed in traditional costumes (see Figure 48).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ The subtitle of EMH explains: “With its melody based on a local Yue Opera aria, ‘*Picking Tea*’ is a popular Hangzhou ballad. It paints a picture of laughing girls merrily gathering the tea harvest”.

¹¹⁶ The *pipa* is a four-stringed Chinese musical instrument, belonging to the plucked category of instruments. Sometimes called the Chinese lute, the instrument has a pear-shaped wooden body with a varying number of frets ranging from 12 to 26 (Myers, 1992).

¹¹⁷ According to the subtitle, “the *pipa* performance *Moonlit Night on Spring River* is adapted from the acclaimed ancient musical masterpiece *Xi Yang Xiao Gu*...portraying the beauty of a moonlit night in Jiangnan region”.

¹¹⁸ Yue opera, also known as Shaoxing opera, is the second most popular Chinese opera genre (Haili, 2012). Originating in Shengzhou, Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province so-called Jiangnan region, Yue opera features actresses in male roles as well as femininity in terms of singing, performing, and staging (Jiang, 2009).



Figure 48: Yue opera singing performance

The dance performance is a Chinese classical dance that blends with contemporary choreography accompanied by the *Butterfly Lover's Violin Concerto*¹¹⁹. It is worth mentioning that a giant LED device in the shape of a classical Chinese fan is gradually raised from the water during this dance. (see Figure 49). The application of technology responds to the producer's intention of bringing Chinese traditions into "modernity".

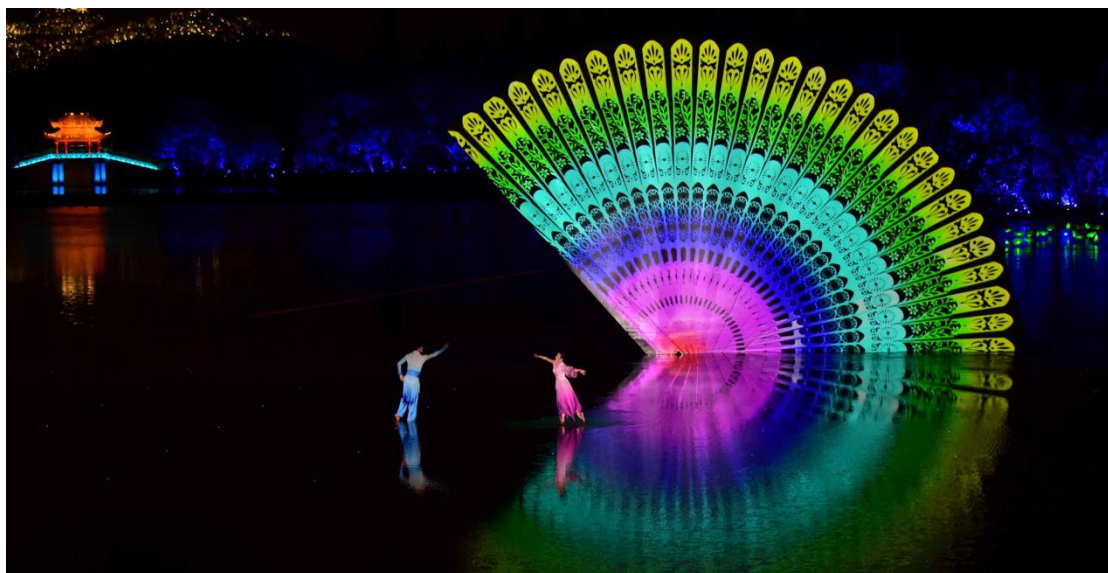


Figure 49: Chinese classical dance with the Chinese fan in the background

¹¹⁹ *The Butterfly Lover's Violin Concerto* is one of the most famous orchestra works of Chinese music. It is an orchestral adaptation of Yue Opera, *the Butterfly Lovers*.

Chineseness

The programme representing “Chinese magnificence” involves two instrumental ensembles: the traditional Chinese *guqin* and a cello playing the Chinese classical music *High Mountain and Flowing Water*¹²⁰. It is accompanied by a choreographed *taiji* performance (another Chinese cultural symbol); the scene is presented below in Figure 50.



Figure 50: *Guqin* and cello performance with taiji performance in the background

Next, the famous Chinese baritone Liao Changyong appears in a duet with a little girl to sing the Chinese patriotic song “Motherland and Me” (see Figure 51). Following this is the song “Unforgettable Jasmine Flower”. The singer is the famous Chinese soprano Lei Jia (see Figure 52) and is an adaption of a famous Chinese national song, “Jasmine Flower”.

¹²⁰ The subtitles show that *High Mountain and Flowing Water* is one of China’s best-loved pieces of ancient music.



Figure 51: Chinese patriotic song “Motherland and Me”



Figure 52: Performance of the “Unforgettable Jasmine Flower”

Chineseness is embodied in the performance and represented by the *xieyi* imagery. According to Zhang Yimou’s partner Sha Xiaolan, “We choose to use the twinkle lights on the trees in a very tasteful way so that it makes the tree have a sense of depth, giving

the effect of *xieyi* painting”.¹²¹ Zhou (2017) commented that “the gala endeavoured to evoke a Chinese poetic and painterly atmosphere (詩情畫意)” (p. 85).

Internationalness

World cosmopolitanism is represented by a ballet piece adapted from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. There follows a Debussy piano piece *Clair De Lune*, played by the Chinese pianist Wu Muye, drifting on a floating stage towards the lake’s centre (see Figure 53).

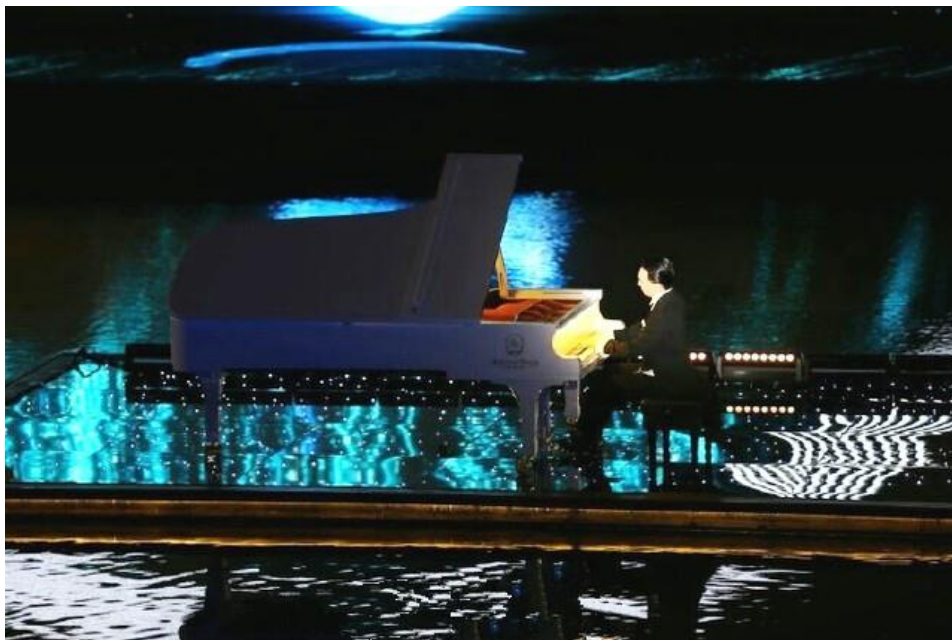


Figure 53: *Clair De Lune* piano performance on the floating stage

Like other LPA, EMH uses modern stage technologies to spectacular effect, especially in the *Swan Lake* scene, where an illusion technique called Pepper’s ghost¹²² (a holographic projection) replicates many identical swan ballerinas (see Figure 54).

¹²¹ See the interview of Sha Xiaolan, available at:

<https://www.hangjia.net.com/app/share/article?id=14730976727520000&type=ios&v=85&shareType=wxsession>

¹²² An illusion based on Pepper’s ghost involving projected images has been featured at music concerts (often erroneously marketed as “holographic”); such setups typically involve custom projection media server software and specialised stretched films (Schein, 2014).



Figure 54: *Swan Lake* with the holographic projection at the rear

The finale is *Ode to Joy*, from *Beethoven's Symphony No. 9*. The choreography is of a modern style; the performers are dressed in modern raincoats and use ladles to scoop water from the lake into the air making a spectacular visual effect. Figure 55 highlights this scene from the performance.



Figure 55: *Ode to Joy* with modern choreography: the dancers scooping water from the lake

Zhang Yimou decodes the internationalness within this symphony concert LPA, stating that:

I choose orchestra as the form because it is graceful and high-grade, and most importantly, it is an “international language”. The G20 is a meeting for world leaders to discuss and resolve worldwide issues. From this perspective, the programme we choose must be classic and needs people’s recognition. The emotion the music conveys is universal; therefore, all masterpieces in music are related to love, solidarity, force, beauty or nature. Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* is used to eulogise human solidarity and force. The emotion and force conveyed by the world-known classical music and Chinese classical music have a common theme belonging to mankind. We can see many Chinese cultural elements, but these are grafted on to international culture because we want people to understand the show. I cannot choose something very Chinese as foreigners will not understand...¹²³

Though it may be problematic to presume that 19th-century orchestral music is an “international language” or universal sense, Zhang Yimou is searching for a universal emotion between Chinese traditional music and Western classical music by staging them together harmoniously. Selecting the Anthem of Europe, *Ode to Joy*, which carries a socialist collectiveness and solidarity message, comfortably engages with Xi Jinping’s international slogan: “community with a shared future for mankind”. Thus,

¹²³ See the interview of Zhang Yimou, available at: <http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/09/02/ARTI10cD1rhxqSqCYVkt01UZ160902.shtml>

EMH represents a political ideology serving as a cultural expression that disseminates Chinese values and ideals to reinforce the country's global image and credibility. Zhang Yimou presents a nationalist identity as a Chinese artist winning glory for his motherland. Observing China and the world as two separate objects, he expresses his patriotism:

Artists should feel a responsibility to tell Chinese culture to the world. We often felt that it was not an individual thing when we accepted this assignment. It is Chinese soft power and China's brand that we are making.¹²⁴

EMH, as a national brand, emphasises Chineseness and internationalness instead of being promoted as Hanzhou's cultural placeness. Local, Chinese, and Western elements blend to create this national brand, echoing cosmopolitanism as the local media emphasises: "Hangzhou is connecting with the world" (Liu, 2016). To a certain extent, local placeness, Chineseness, and internationalness are reconcilable and negotiable. On the one hand, the boundary between local placeness, Chineseness, and Internationalness becomes blurred, and a continuum between these three emerges instead of a dichotomy. On the other hand, to strengthen Chinese identity and patriotism, the central government takes great pains to promote a united Chineseness. For example, on this international occasion, they place a patriotic propaganda song in the itinerary, *My Motherland and I*, which has the following verses, "Never will my motherland and I be apart...I will sing for every mountain and every river". In such propaganda-oriented national branding lies the problem of China's national brand; Anholt (2007) and Kaneva (2011) have noted that:

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Governments have been heavily criticised for misuse of place branding, particularly when focusing on logos and slogans to whitewash local issues in an attempt to create a positive image.

EMH relies on cultural codes to represent China, much as other nations rely on their cultural codes to represent themselves. It is to be expected that music is composed in traditional pentatonic scales, and an emphasis on visual images like the Chinese umbrella, fan, folk costume, and architecture is prominent in EMH. Accordingly, EMH embodies the features of self-Orientalism and Chineseness that reconfirm and reinforce Western Orientalist perceptions. Yan and Santos (2009) assert:

The selective promotion of specific Chinese traditions cleverly weaved throughout indigenisation ultimately promotes an essentialised, harmonious, and world-embracing picture of Chinese culture.

Zhang Yimou has shown great admiration for Western classical music. By searching for a universality between Chinese traditional music and Western classical music, he addresses “mankind’s common theme” in the music programme. Therefore, EMH is more than a product based on self-Orientalism to create an “otherness” to the West. It mobilises a dialectics embracing the unity of opposites between China and the West.

Given that the original *Swan Lake*’s choreography is partly synchronised, Zhang Yimou resourcefully appropriated the ballet and grafted it onto the Chinese landscape, thereby projecting a harmony in shared difference and shared similarities as an approach to the global community. Chinese landscape here is not shown with exclusiveness but in an inclusive manner, whereby the Western “swan” can

momentarily find a place to inhabit. *The Swan Lake* scene in EMH is also a technological triumph. Presenting the swan ballerinas dancing upon the surface of Hangzhou's West Lake is indeed innovative; the Pepper's ghost projection technique utilised for the holographic projections gave a surreal, almost haunting effect. However, it reveals a more hegemonic or narcissistic statement: the scene is a triumph of Chinese creativity and Chinese cultural power. By commandeering *Swan Lake*, and Pepper's ghost from the West, and subjecting them to Chinese innovation, China is saying: this is yours; look what happens when we take it from you and make it ours. Thus, China is claiming a cultural superiority not only by cultural otherness but also by appropriating and enhancing Western culture and applying artistic and technological innovation. In this G20 performance, Western elements have intercommunity with Chinese culture. They become absorbed and exploited to empower EMH with an internationalness that entertains the G20 leaders and facilitates international dialogue.

7.3 Landscape, the Sublime, and Chinese Magnificence

The landscape is ideologically aestheticised as an emblem of state power. The dispersal of power through the landscape manifests as events, symbols, magnificent rituals, and mythologies. EMH achieves two things in one stroke: internationally, EMH is flaunting power, showing a highly disciplined state; perhaps some may find this intimidating. It has a flavour of a cultural-military parade exhibiting the CCP's autocratic command. Domestically, EMH is a strategy to evoke a rosy fantasy of China's past, whipping up a measured frenzy of national pride and statism that can lend enduring legitimacy to the CCP and the social reforms it has facilitated. The Chinese state strives to create an imperial scene that aligns with their dynastic phantasy of world nations paying homage to the Imperial Court (萬國來朝). The sublime word "grand" or "magnificence" is related to big (大) and great power (大國). It can be deemed a spatial metaphor; according to Wang Ban (1997), "it is here

stretched to mean the absolute ethico-political power is considered unnamable” (p. 63). Burke associated the sublime with kingly majesty, which bears uncanny similarities with the Chinese dynastic concept.¹²⁵ The centuries-old *shanshui* provides the energy and force for magnificence in the context of EMH. It could fashion obedient but enthusiastic and vigorous individuals for the program of strengthening the nation-state.

Debunking the grand image that the state creates, Wang Ban (1997) seeks to delineate ways the political can masquerade as an aesthetic discourse. The sublime and aesthetics become the feedstock from which politics transforms into what he calls an “aesthetic experience”. Wang investigates the brands of politics that have prevailed in twentieth-century China: politics couched in an aesthetic vocabulary subsequently rendered to yield an aesthetic experience. These investigations resurrect the question of how aesthetic manifestations in art, literature and public life have become intricately bound up with prevalent ideologies and existing relations of power.¹²⁶ To situate Wang Ban’s “sublime” in this Chinese magnificence created by EMH, I glance at the “aesthetic experience” that embraces the daily life of an individual and a community, which Wang considers analogous to the experience of art.

Aesthetic experience is about our perceptual, sensory, sensuous, emotional, and bodily experiences...When we have an intensified perception of certain cultural forms or settings, certain rhythms or tenors of behaviour, certain textures of living; when we enjoy great pleasure or even ecstasy in these forms, feel a heightened sensibility and consciousness,

¹²⁵ *Da* has a political dimension, as indicated in another passage in the *Mencius* that quotes Confucius in praise of the legendary kings of Yao and Shun: “Great (大) indeed was Yao as a sovereign (Wang, 1997). It is only Heaven that is great, and only Yao corresponds to it. How vast was his virtue! The people could find no name for it! Princely indeed was Shun! How majestic was he, having possession of the kingdom”. (p. 62)

¹²⁶ Wang (1997) states: the aesthetic here is whatever impinges on the intimately sensory and sensual strata of people’s existence; it is our psychic and bodily conditions and the symbolic forms expressing them. In this broad sense, the aesthetic is an existential category, part of life, something lived and experienced at the ends of one’s nerves and tasted on the tip of one’s tongue (p. 7).

undergo an enrichment of the self's sensory and bodily capacities, we may be said to have an aesthetic experience. Suddenly we are experiencing normally inartistic life as if it were a work of art (p. 6).

Wang Ban further defines the aesthetic experience: “although nurtured by the culture into unconscious habits, unthinking reflexes, and expectations, this experience actively animated cultural forms with a sense of the agreeable, the beautiful, the sublime, or the ugly” (p. 7). Thus, LPA as a cultural event is a stage for aestheticised politics that becomes a large-scale ritualisation and theatricalisation of daily life. The synchronised discipline of the nation in the landscape invigorates what Wang described as the “intrinsic life as if it were a work of art”, a living *shanshui* that belies a political agenda.

One simply needs to remember Zhang Yimou's production of the gala for the 70th Anniversary of The People's Republic of China. It perhaps can be exemplified to embody this sublime experience explicitly. The fireworks and performances presented the 56 ethnic groups in unison and consolidated by the CCP to present the facade of a “united, epochal, and flourishing” nation. The overwhelming explosion of the sensory stimulus the authorities described as “nationwide jubilation” (舉國同慶). It was an ocean with roaring but regular waves; the sensory and nervous pressure building to be overpowering and all-consuming. The individual became submerged in the surging, crowded, sensorial sea of sound and vision. It was uplifting and empowering. Overlooking the landscape of Tian'anmen Square, each individual sublimated, each ego flooded with cheers, and strengthened by the magnitude and dynamics of the ecstatic crowd. The officially choreographed setting and proceedings were ceremonial, meticulously timed, regulated, and methodical. The dynamic moving scene with synchronised bodies displayed a sublime infinity and unboundedness that reinforced a sense of invincible power. A Twitter user from the West commented on the video of

the celebration: “only China can offer this kind of spectacle”. This comment was then circulated on the Chinese social media platform Weibo. A Chinese user posts:

Yes, we Chinese are awesome. That is so spectacular...we love our motherland. Do you Westerners have ample people to be performers? This is China’s amazement and “niubility” (中國就是這麼厲害 這麼牛).

In the West, such scenes of regulated, mechanical discipline can be unattractive or dull since they lack individuality; thereby, the Western mind prizes individual creativity over and above the automated collective. Conversely, for the Chinese, highly disciplined, obedient, machine-like assembled bodies create a sense of honour, delight, or even a beautiful pleasure to indulge in without termination. This is indeed an ideology aestheticized. Power is not only wielded to deprive the subject of emotionality, but it sometimes finds its acme through driving emotion. The individual automatically submits to a state of sublime emotionality - a collective unconsciousness that the state taps into. Since the security of the centralised state depends on total compliance, the politics of forging national and political identity is here denoted in the aesthetic of the sublime. Wang Ban explains:

The party-state is an aesthetic state. Aesthetics in general and the sublime in particular justify and legitimate the state. In this way, politics becomes aestheticised...the seamless blending of the private and collective. Politics so conceived does not go outside its own territory to borrow from the aesthetic; rather, it is “instituted and constituted” in and as the massive attraction of totalitarian rule (p. 192).

Therefore, politics takes over the aesthetics of building national images, constructing identities, erecting symbolic structures, and creating an emotional ambience. In patriotic art production sponsored by the party-state, sensory pleasure has meaning only when it effectively leading to an ideology. Applied to the case of EMH, this aesthetic may now conjure up the spectacle of “mass rallies” but relocated to the landscape with a redoubled effort to produce a spectacular, exhilarating, awe-inspiring scene with an audio-visual shock and cultural magnificence. It is not enough for the potentate alone on the spectator’s stand to enjoy his extravagant visual feast; the whole nation must be mobilised, revelling in jubilation with the theatrics broadcast on television. In other words, the state’s magnificence is implanted into the psychic stratum of the masses, reflected in the resounding bodily applause of the people. The EMH extravaganza becomes part of the party’s narrative of “serving the people” (為人民服務); a wanton luxury that borrows the garb of a humbling narrative. It is not hard to imagine that the nationalistic audiences, glued to their TV screens, almost feel themselves participants seated among the G20 world leaders.

It was not just a spectacle on Chinese TV; social media amplified and disseminated the event. The posts and reposts on Weibo raged for days, if not weeks. Thus, nationalism is hammered deeper into the population’s perception. It is an expression of the aesthetic experience: politics has manufactured an aestheticised collective cast in its image. The Chinese sublime enables us to question the separateness of “high-brow” art and “dirty” politics. It accounts for the enduring question regarding the relationship between the individual and the state, and the individual and society. Žizek (1993) reinforces these sublime sentiments by approaching this aesthetically oriented ideology as the emotive character of ritualistic practice.¹²⁷ He informs us that the bonds linking members of a national or ethnic community always forge a shared relationship toward an enjoyment structured by emotion and fantasy:

¹²⁷ Žizek (1993) thematizes the Kantian notion of the sublime in order to liken ideology to the experience of something that is absolutely powerful and vast beyond all perception and objective intelligibility.

One can enjoy the nation as yourself; it is not only the grand National Cause that gives rise to the ritualistic performance and enjoyable effect but also the very effects of enjoyment that help project in the collective mind an imaginary prior cause (p. 200).

The Literature Review has mentioned the China-Hongkong student conflict I witnessed in Liverpool, explaining how this sublime serves patriotic action. The “spectacle” of this conflict between calm Hong Kong students and rowdy mainland Chinese students resulted in the Hong Kongese receiving the profanities and denouncements of the Chinese students. The Chinese students are reincarnations of the authoritarian regime oppressing Hongkong. This patriotic fervour (家國情懷) is internalized and deeply ingrained, forming an active part of the subject’s personality. Furthermore, it shows how this obstinate emotionality drives bodies to act irrationally. Bodies and minds are annexed from the mundane and inflamed to embrace the celebration and reinforcement of CCP leadership. Lacoue-Labarthe (1990) claims:

Politics is “instituted and constituted” in and as a work of art. This conception of the aesthetic-political nexus alerts us to many neglected and disconcerting questions, such as the massive attraction of totalitarian rule, the rallying power of the leader, the emotional effects of ideologically blatant art, and the willing sacrifice and loyalty of millions of individuals to the political regimes that victimise them (pp. 97-98).

Lacoue-Labarthe (1990) has alerted us to a less simple-minded yet possibly more sinister occurrence: the link between the aesthetic and the political in a stream of

thought in the West. Bringing this to bear on Nazism which utilised the Oberammergau Passion Play for its political agenda, he argues that politics, especially totalitarian politics, does not simply appropriate art for propaganda purposes. For him, there is a form of politics that is a form of art; “the sublime is a masculine mode which is authoritative, distant, inspiring awe, respect, and admiration” (p. 104). This sublime effect is not unique to China, though China, as a one-party state, understandably strives to maximise its grandeur. Wang Ban (1997) has reported that: “anything worthy of the name ‘aesthetic experience’ has in one way or another been infected with politics...Politics has also been turned into aesthetic experience on such a massive scale that it becomes a veritable cultural practice” (p. 6). In this light, LPA is appropriated as an aesthetic experience and political activity; it constitutes the aesthetic self-expression of the state and provides the audiences with a representation of what they are and what grounds them.

Wang (1997) points out that theatre as a form of art sponsored by an authoritarian state has often led to frequent criticism as it blatantly spreads a political ideology. Thus, people contend that such political art is not worth a second glance with a snort of contempt. However, this can engender a dismissive view of the powerful and growing phenomenon of LPA as it genuinely becomes a popular commodity; there are hundreds of LPA performed in China utilising the hot trends of the tourism market. Audiences watching the magnificent spectacle imagine a cultural heritage of great splendour that their ancestors have bequeathed; and a shared community giving the impression of an all-powerful state embracing the China Dream. If we accept or deny this, it is of no consequence as it feeds nationalistic and patriotic fervour regardless.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the nationalisation of LPA through the prism of the cultural industry. LPA has taken a giant leap into the national dimension, propelled by a top-down state-driven initiative to develop the political economy. LPA's development and transformation into a trans-local and Chinese national phenomenon are consistent with China being under an economic transition from primary (heavy) industries to tertiary (cultural) industries. The Chinese landscape is imbued with capitalist values; it has empowered LPA, which is essential in solving unbalanced regional development to build a united Chineseness in an integrated tourist economy.

EMH illustrates how LPA is promoted as a Chinese cultural brand that crosses local, national, and international boundaries. LPA can be constructed with local-ness, national-ness, and international-ness to suit different occasions, contexts, and political requirements. The landscape's inclusiveness and encompassing nature can bear the weight of the co-existence of Chinese and Western culture without appearing alien to either. Eventually, it creates a balance between promoting LPA, on the one hand, as a national brand with Chinese characteristics, and on the other hand, with Western cultural elements and internationalness.

The landscape and its sublime aesthetics require further sublimation for political functionality. Theoretically, I place Wang Ban's Chinese sublime into perspective and deconstruct the so-called Chinese magnificence triggered by the landscape. The politico-emotional pleasure in the cultural landscape is denoted incisively and vividly in the audio-visual experience offered by EMH. As a national brand, EMH transforms individuals into patriotic and nationalistic subjects. The visual impact from the natural landscape and its "emotional" appeal allow LPA to function as an influential pawn in the state's construction of mass political culture, manufacturing an identical political instinct. The politics of forging a national and political identity resides in the

aesthetics of the sublime and produces more agreeable subjects of the state. It explains millions of individuals' voluntary emotive and bodily celebration for collective causes that benefit state interests. The subject's affections are coerced into the Chinese magnificence as a manifestation of state power; the landscape provides a meeting space for the visual politics of staging China. This sense of community, sharing, and mass emotionality is nationhood's ultimate projection and reinforcement. The landscape in EMH has been reinvented, redecorated and performed as a CCP cavalcade of Chinese magnificence, strengthening the "landscape matrix".

Chapter 8

Chineseness Over the Boundary: Constructing Hoi An Memories in a Vietnamese Landscape

This chapter highlights the power of landscape through the lens of cultural diplomacy and transnational cooperation. It demonstrates how LPA is politicised to increase China's soft power by extending its hand overseas and aligning with China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Incorporating the concept of landscape into the "imperial sublime" notion, I analyse how LPA, as China's cultural capital overseas, is embroiled in perception governance in domestic China, further solidifying the landscape matrix. The case study focuses on the Vietnamese LPA, *Hoi An Memories*, to demonstrate how Chineseness and Vietnameseness are reconciled in the fraught cooperation between Chinese and Vietnamese artists. I also present the Malaysian LPA, *Impression Melaka*, as a complementary case study that addresses LPA's international expansion.

Unlike many other parts of the world, cultural co-production strategies between Southeast Asia and East Asia are a relatively new phenomenon, particularly co-productions between China and Vietnam. The first foreign LPA, *Hoi An Memories* (HAM), was made through Sino-Vietnam cooperation. It premiered in Vietnam in March 2018, formally marking LPA's international expansion, and followed the same business model that had triumphed in China. From a diplomatic perspective, HAM was highly recommended by the Chinese Embassy in Vietnam, which had hoped to put this project on the agenda of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference. Keane (2016) noticed that China's cultural outbound trade could be considered "official" and propagandist; the products often align with the government's brand image. Peng and Keane (2019) state that "co-productions

between China and other nations have a diplomatic function, which implies a more conventional understanding of soft power” (p. 904). Therefore, it correlates directly with Xi Jinping’s 2013 declaration that “increasing national cultural soft power is related to the realisation of the Chinese Dream” (Keane, 2016, p. 27). The BRI is a crucial component of President Xi’s “China Dream”, leading to China’s rise from national humiliation (Callahan, 2013; Nordin, 2016; Ferdinand, 2016). Though the BRI is a mega-infrastructure project focused more on economics than culture, Chajdas (2018) states that it is a strategic and selective revival of traditional Chinese cultural history and pride; it fosters new forms of rigorous national ambition.

Hillary Clinton, when she was secretary of state, accused the BRI of being a neo-colonialist project;¹²⁸ furthermore, academia has devoted much attention to issues related to neo-colonialism and imperialism (Lim, 2015; Xing, 2017; Li, 2018; Sidaway and Woon, 2017; Deych, 2018). Zhang, Alon, and Lattemann (2018) believe that the BRI is an attempt to change the rules of globalisation. However, it is undeniable from a geopolitical standpoint that the BRI is helping China gain more influence globally (Di Lan and Vu, 2019). China’s enthusiastic promotion of Chinese culture overseas reinforces Xi’s declaration of a new era. Consequently, the Chinese media is awash with related slogans like “spreading the Chinese voice” (傳播中國聲音), “telling the Chinese story well” (講好中國故事), and “Chinese culture going abroad” (中國文化走出去). The LPA elites also advocate for such ideological slogans; LPA further highlights the Chinese government’s determination to gain an influential status in the global arena through soft power.

Historically, Vietnam has been under the rule of various Chinese dynasties and was part of the Chinese Empire for over a thousand years. “There is no country more similar to China than Vietnam, and there is no country more similar to Vietnam than

¹²⁸ There were some overwhelmingly accusing voices from the West (notably Hillary Clinton when she was Secretary of State) saying that, in reality, the BRI has already turned into a Chinese neo-colonialist project. This viewpoint was elaborated on and developed by many journalistic media (Kleven, 2019).

China” (Womack, 2010, p. 10). They both share a Sinitic cultural background and are currently ruled by communist parties that came to power through rural revolutions and are committed to market-based economic reforms, China since 1978 and Vietnam since 1986. Their economic re-orientations have led to rapid development. Despite Vietnam and China’s shared Communist heritage, they have frequently warred in the past (Di Lan and Vu, 2019). Their last hostility ended in 1991, and their interaction has developed since 1999. Both nations have strived to foster a peaceful relationship; neither government mentions the history of their conflict. Though the relationship between China and Vietnam is considered normalised, it is still not friendly (Womack, 2006). This disparity remains because centuries of conquest by China’s imperial predecessors have made Vietnam deeply suspicious of Chinese attempts to dominate them (Forbes and Henley, 2011). Consequently, “the Chinese disparaged the Vietnamese as unreliable; while the Vietnamese were alert to Chinese malevolent inscrutability and bullying” (Saxer and Zhang, 2017, p. 211). Womack (2006) further elaborates on this fragile relationship by concluding that:

Vietnam’s attitudes were not simply the residual effects of previous hostility. The issues were the peacetime problems of border trade, bridges, and rail connections. Vietnam tended to be overly sensitive to China’s actions, while China tended to be insensitive to the effects of its policies on Vietnam (p. 11).

Womack (2010) also informs that China and Vietnam face a sharp increase in global economic uncertainty; they must adjust their development strategies. The adjustment requires rethinking regional institutions and bilateral relationships. Due to geopolitical factors, Russia, America, India, and Japan have enhanced their cooperation with Vietnam to counterbalance China. By maintaining a “hedging posture” (Di Lan and Vu, 2019), Vietnam benefits from being noncommittal, which helps explain Vietnam’s

rapid development in recent years. However, recent friction over the issue of the South China Sea has highlighted the sensitive and fragile nature of Sino-Vietnamese relations. China's increasingly assertive foreign policy and escalating territorial disputes in the South China Sea have pushed the United States and Vietnam closer together (Hai, 2017). Di Lan and Vu (2019) believe that the BRI is a crucial factor in Sino-Vietnamese relations that may decide Vietnam's ultimate attitude towards China.

HAM, a transnational cultural and commercial LPA collaboration between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, has developed during the *South China Sea* disputes. The sensitive Sino-Vietnam relationship means that the production of HAM has not been smooth sailing, which Mei Shuaiyuan¹²⁹ has acknowledged:

The negotiation process was relatively tricky. I was hesitant to begin due to the thorny issue of the South China Sea. Nevertheless, later, it was pretty unexpected that President Xi talked very well with the Vietnamese leader during the APEC conference, which was like having our project endorsed. The resolution of the conflict between China and Vietnam is advantageous to the BRI, given that Hoi An is a core BRI region. In the ancient times of the Maritime Silk Road, Chinese business departed from China, and their first stop was Hoi An (Personal Communication, 21/11/2018).

8.1 Vietnameseess Versus Chineseness in LPA Format

Hoi An, a city on Vietnam's central coast, is known for its well-preserved ancient town intersected by canals. The city's diverse cultural history is reflected in its

¹²⁹ I received this from the conference on 21st November 2018 in Beijing when Mei Shuaiyuan gave a speech.

architecture: Chinese shophouses and temples, colourful French colonial buildings, ornate Vietnamese tube houses, and the iconic Japanese Covered Bridge and pagoda (Pham, 2019). Nowadays, Hoi An is a prominent world tourist destination welcoming more than 3.3 million visitors in 2018 (including nearly two million foreigners)¹³⁰. HAM is a collaboration between the Chinese company SCIC and the Vietnamese GAMI Investment Company. It represents the biggest modern cultural-economic co-production between mainland China and Vietnam. HAM gives daily performances that attract domestic and international tourists. It is located within the Impression Theme Park tourist complex designed in the Chinese “Impressionland” format.

HAM presents Vietnamese traditions and customs. It comprises five acts that display over 400 years of history representing Hoi An’s grace and prosperity as a world port. The stage is adorned with architecture and trees; a giant sailing boat is displayed left of the stage, the river visible behind it (see Figure 56).



Figure 56: An aerial view of the show

¹³⁰ See online data, available at: <https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/travel/211426/hoi-an-faces-tourism-challenges.html> [Accessed 30 Jul. 2019].

In the typical Chinese domestic LPA style, the show utilises spectacular large-scale scenes and over 500 Vietnamese performers accompanied by modern multimedia technologies. The show is not a narrative play and does not adopt a storytelling format. Like ILS, it is a musical and visual feast filled with choreography displaying the local culture through symbolism. The show begins with a young Vietnamese lady in an enlarged loom to the left of the stage; she uses poetry to introduce weaving as the performance's thematic image. She speaks Vietnamese; however, there are Vietnamese and English subtitles at the front of the stage. In the background, ladies introduce the traditional Vietnamese *ao dai*¹³¹ costumed walking show (see Figure 57).



Figure 57: Vietnamese performer weaving fabrics

The music director, Zhang Xiao, explains the rationale behind the choice of a loom as the core image:

¹³¹ Ao dai is a traditional Vietnamese costume; its style is influenced by Confucian dress norms.

We believe that textiles are one of the representations of human synchronized. Vietnam has a textile tradition passed on for a thousand years. It is representative of Oriental synchronized; weaving represents a state of life. The ancient weaving machine can weave a state of life which is Vietnam itself (Personal Communication, 13/03/2019).

The first act is named *Life* and is symbolic of the prehistoric origins of Vietnam. It portrays ancient scenes of local people's lives, such as farming, fishing, founding the city, and birthing the next generation. A scene from this act is presented in Figure 58.



Figure 58: Vietnamese ancient life and labour to build their homeland

The second act, *The Ancient Kingdom*, represents historical Vietnam. It concerns a wedding ceremony from the ancient Cham Pa Kingdom of Vietnam, displaying a scene of magnificence as the king of Cham Pa marries Huyen Tran, a historic princess of the Tran Dynasty (see Figure 59). Many of Cham Pa Kingdom's ancient architecture and temples have survived and are listed as World Heritage Sites. This dynastic heritage makes Hoi An particularly amenable to the conventional methodology of LPA construction; the extravagance of the royal scene allows for LPA's signature display of synchronized masses.



Figure 59: The King of Chẵm Pa marries Princess Huyen Tran

The third act is titled *The Lantern and Sea*. It elaborates on cultural Vietnameseeness by featuring a dramatic scene of dance that interprets *The Legend of the Waiting Statue*, whereby a woman turns to stone while longing for her husband to return from the sea. As the Chinese choreography director Lili explains,

The *Legend of the Waiting Statue* portrays a historical fact rather than a specific story. At that time, a sailor going to sea may not come back in ten years or even twenty years; he may have been killed at sea. The lanterns symbolise numerous nights when women were waiting for their husbands. It portrays many women and men in this unenviable situation (Personal Communication, 09/03/2019).

The ghostlike *ao dai* choreography in the background projects an image of disembodied life departing this realm, accompanied by the distant glow of the Vietnamese lanterns. The foreground justifies the ghostly background performance, as the returning husband discovers that his waiting wife is eternally petrified (see Figure 60).



Figure 60: Drama dance *Legend of the Waiting Statue*

The fourth act, *Harbour*, displays Hoi An's later development as a port city when merchants from all over the world docked here, introducing their diverse cultures. The performers' attire shows Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish fashion from various historical periods. The nationalities interact warmly and harmoniously, forming a "global village" (see Figure 61). At the front of the stage, rows of Vietnamese ladies play the *dan bau*, a traditional Vietnamese instrument (see Figure 62).



Figure 61: Cultural exchange between Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Westerners



Figure 62: The performance of the Vietnamese musical instrument *dan bau*

The *dan bau* combines with other instruments, such as the Chinese *erhu*, Japanese *chiba*, Western accordion, and Spanish guitar, leading to a display of flamenco dancing. Lili describes the reasoning behind this scene: “We use the harbour as representative of convergence, to demonstrate an ideology of world fusion (harmony)” (Personal Communication, 09/03/2019).

The fifth act, *Today*, is a display of modern Vietnamese culture. Many ladies take to the stage on bicycles. Curiously, the bicycles are present due to the budget constraints of the Vietnamese funder; the creative team initially intended to use motorcycles. The finale is a synchronised *ao dai* costumed dance and walking show (Figure 63).



Figure 63: Performers riding their bicycles and performing *ao dai* choreography

In this scene, a curving road illuminates. The lights mimic silk threads, re-emphasising the overarching theme of weaving (Figure 64). It is not hard to consider that those threads that form the road are pregnant with symbolic meaning. On the one hand, they are the bonds that reunite these former allies and bond their future friendship. On the other hand, those illuminated threads could be interpreted as representing China's ancient silk road, which alludes to a sense of Vietnam being bound to the contemporary new silk road (BRI). In interpreting the Vietnamese-ness displayed here, Lili elaborates on the use of *ao dai*'s walking show and the bicycles:

The bicycle represents Vietnamese traffic; it also shows the country's modernisation. This act portrays Vietnam walking towards the contemporary; therefore, the walking show throughout the performance represents "time-travelling" through Vietnam's history. In the first act, a baby is born in the primitive age; the mother transplants rice seedlings while the father fishes and builds their home. The town grows throughout the ages until finally, in the present, bicycles emerge (Personal Communication, 09/03/2019).



Figure 64: String lights laid on the ground to reinforce the weaving theme

Mei Shuaiyuan's concept of "the place, the culture, and the people" as the standard LPA model predominates in this performance. Vietnam's local culture performed magnificently, employing many performers, and stage technologies display LPA's homogeneous imprint and style. The symbolism, grandness, and uniformity are the idiomatic means LPA employs. The Chinese artists assume dominance over the Vietnamese artists when exercising creativity. However, the Vietnamese entrepreneur John Nguyen is the sole investor in HAM; thus, the Vietnamese are not powerless pawns as the production is by mutual agreement. The Vietnamese side often asserts

resistance to the Chinese producers' dominance; they are sensitive to the imprint of Chinese culture on the performance and themselves. The delicacy of the situation is demonstrated firsthand by the Chinese director Min Rui:

The Vietnamese do the fundamental basic tasks; we do the upper tier of creation. Maybe it is my unfounded feeling, but when you ask the Vietnamese to be cooperative, they say no in many ways. When Zhang Xiao's music was not yet produced, we used Chinese music as a temporary replacement to train the performers. They said, "Please turn it off; you can use Vietnamese music, symphony orchestra, or American music, but do not use Chinese music" (Personal Communication, 20/03/2019).

It is no surprise that the Vietnamese are wary of Chinese culture infiltrating their LPA. The concept of harmony between humans and nature, peddled as cultural capital by the CCP, is woven into the structure of this Vietnamese LPA. Mei Shuaiyuan has stressed foreign LPA's Chinese originality:

In the creation of foreign LPA, just the story is from a foreign country. Harmony between humans and nature is still the ideology when we make foreign LPA. We expect to portray Vietnamese culture in line with Chinese thinking. Most importantly, Chinese culture emphasises blending and completeness that is non-invasive. "Narrating Chinese stories in the mountain water with Chinese thinking" is the slogan we use in China. Once we go abroad, we narrate the World story in the (foreign) landscape.¹³²

¹³² See *Impression Liu Sanjie* official website: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/PGXJI0ExcqI23V10s-1d7w>

Though Mei underscores the non-invasiveness of Chineseness, his ideology of “portraying Vietnamese culture in Chinese thinking” is clearly invasive. Mei’s statement reveals cultural and business ambition combined with his desire to instigate a cultural Chineseness worldwide. The choreographer Lili presented evidence of Vietnamese resistance when asked, “Is there an ideology of harmony between humans and nature in Vietnam?” Lili professed:

I think they have it in their heart, but they have not brought it up yet. Harmony between humans and nature is deeply ingrained in Chinese thinking. For example, when we designed the clothes for the Princess, they saw the auspicious clouds on the clothes, and they resisted, saying, “that symbol is from China, not Vietnam”. The Princess we portray lived one thousand years ago. At that time, Vietnam was just China. Eventually, we removed the ear of wheat on the hairpin as a compromise. They do not want something Chinese, but they cannot avoid it because Chinese culture is too influential.

The interviews above display the Vietnamese’s simmering resentment that forms this section’s nucleus. An artefact need only be perceived as Chinese for the Vietnamese to reject it, even if it is now a traditional element of Vietnamese culture. Cooperation between the Chinese and Vietnamese parties is a tumultuous process in which they struggle for compromise.

8.2 Internationalness: Universal Conceptuality, Audibility, and Visuality

This section demonstrates how native Vietnamese culture is wrapped around Chineseness and then presented as “international” - or, as the Chinese director, Min Rui, stated, “The core content is native, but expressed in an international form” (Personal Communication, 20/03/2019). This idea again points to the problematic boundary between content and production. The content must be Vietnamese, but the production must be internationally accepted. I analyse the concept, music, and choreography to show how China and Vietnam are both searching for internationalness as a possible solution to the Sino-Vietnamese tensions.

Though Chinese elites have insisted that LPA and its cultural Chineseness present “harmony between humans and nature”, Mei seeks to universalise Confucian ideology and reinforce cultural similarities as a shared Asian-ness or internationalness. Historically, Chineseness entwines with Asianness; many Asian countries in the Chinese sphere of influence, including Vietnam, have pan-Confucian values. Today, Confucian harmony between humans and nature still exists in Vietnam’s cultural ecology (Culas, 2019). From a purely cultural, historical, and political viewpoint, the approach and philosophy of harmony are Chinese characteristics. However, there is a conscious or unconscious longing in urban dwellers worldwide for a reconnection, a harmony, with the natural world that the tourist industry profitably exploits. Environmentalists consider ecotourism a critical endeavour and a prime example of this longing for nature. Therefore, harmony between humans and nature can be understood literally as a universal concept or an internationalness.

Unlike contentious domestic issues of identity, the world’s environmental breakdowns evoke universal concern and require broader collective mindsets that transcend national politics and boundaries (Chao and Kompatsiaris, 2020, p. 12)

Ironically, China, a heavily polluted country, is advertising harmony between humans and nature as uniquely Chinese and is preaching this harmony to Vietnam at a time when environmental issues have gained some traction with the recent emergence of environmental activism. In transitioning to a global manufacturer and a global polluter, there is a growing need for Vietnam to embrace harmony between humans and nature.

Mei Shuaiyuan asserted that “Hoi An is a historical international port at the cultural confluence between East and West. Thus, the performance portrays the co-mingling of cultures”.¹³³ Flagging the theme of cultural confluence as Hoi An’s cultural placeness, HAM promotes the message of a “global village”. Mei Shuaiyuan explained how he introduced the emotion of internationalness as the conceptual theme of HAM:

We lock in a conceptual theme which is nostalgic homesickness. The Vietnamese producer John Nguyen deeply agreed with us. In Hoi An, the homesickness is mankind’s shared emotion which is universal. It is not only Vietnamese but also Chinese, European, and Japanese homesickness. The script does not directly talk about homesickness. The emotion surreptitiously sinks into every scene, such as the melody of the old folk song and the ancient town with the receding lights.¹³⁴

Nostalgia has been recognised as a universal emotion by Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003): “People are nostalgic about old ways of life, and they want to relive them in the form of tourism...nostalgia is a universal catchword for looking back” (p. 705). MacCannell (1979) believes nostalgia can be staged in a “tourism cultural production,

¹³³ See the news from *People.cn*, available at: <http://gx.people.com.cn/n2/2018/0326/c179430-31384270.html> [Accessed 30 Jul. 2019].

¹³⁴ Ibid.

and nostalgic collective memory reconstructs the past to serve the needs of the present” (p. 4). Chinese producers and artists are teasing out a cultural universality or international sense presented to the globalised world. At this point, we can see the producers’ deep understanding of themes. As an international tourism venue, HAM must be exotic (Oriental); more importantly, it must be global to touch the audience’s emotions. Thus, the encapsulation of homesickness and nostalgia displaces politics, otherness, and the boundaries of space and time, creating a sense of shared humanity. Ultimately, this births the first Chinese-produced, globalised Vietnamese cultural production that resonates with national and international audiences.

The Western influence is evident in HAM’s musical style. Chinese composer Zhang Xiao adopted the Hollywood film music style to give a discernable internationalness to the score.

Vietnamese musicians composed the Vietnamese music for HAM based on their traditional music by utilising Vietnamese instruments. I reconstructed and rearranged the instruments, striving to retain their authenticity as much as possible. The international style I used gave the flavour of Western dramas and musicals, which brought out Vietnamese music’s grace and beauty. I aimed for an aesthetic similar to that of Hollywood films (Personal Communication, 17/03/2019).

Zhang Xiao then explained his rationale for native music expressed internationally:

It is the international way for people who do not comprehend the local language to understand what the music conveys. The music can serve as an international “language” when local folk music has been “interpreted” and presented in an international musical format. I applied Western orchestral music. Folk music must be polished by Western forms’ logic and texture to give folk music an international feel (Personal Communication, 17/03/2019).

Zhang Xiao is inadvertently acknowledging that globalisation equals Westernisation, more specifically, Americanisation. Constructing the international feeling of HAM, he assumes that the style of Hollywood film music has superiority as a recognisable commodity. Lee (2005) asserts that Hollywood films (and musicals) are assumed to possess “universality”. Zhang Xiao’s musical internationalness concentrates on the marketability of Vietnamese music, but it dilutes the musical “authenticity”.

Western influences prevail in HAM’s choreography. The director of choreography, Lili, injects internationalness into the performance by choreographing a mixture of modern and Vietnamese dance elements. She remarks that:

The Vietnamese producer John Nguyen¹³⁵ asked us to make an international style of performance that still looks very Vietnamese, so we just tailored it to fit an international aesthetic. When I created the dance steps for *ao dai*’s walking show, the Vietnamese performers said: “No, this is not Vietnamese” (they believed it to be Chinese), but fortunately, a Vietnamese female dance director, Nguyen, said, “Yes, this

¹³⁵ John Nguyen is the Vietnamese investor who initiates this Vietnamese LPA project by inviting the Chinese creative team.

is very Vietnamese as well”, which then made them cooperate. She has seen the world; she studied in Russia; thus, her sight is more internationalised and inclusive; she could accept it quickly. Otherwise, we would not be able to carry on smoothly (Personal Communication, 14/03/2019).

The underlying Chinese-Vietnamese tensions once again have surfaced. The critical point to take away from this is how internationalness is an aid to conflict resolution. Rebranding Vietnamese culture in an international way dissolves the resistance to Chineseness. I asked Lili: “Can it be said that they sometimes could not differentiate what is Vietnamese, Chinese, and international?” She replied that:

It is unnecessary to make a clear distinction between those three. It is because of everyone’s conservative thinking about what is Vietnamese, Chinese, or international. We should accept these different viewpoints first and then change them. The approach can make us merge; it is more of a negotiation than an order when we rehearse. There is a skill in extracting the local culture to merge their forms with international aesthetics. We need to make the Vietnamese regard the product as their own, although we have designed it with our Chinese thinking. The final production balances contradictions, which is interesting, as we are searching for an international sense.

In terms of the choreography design of the *ao dai* walking show, Lili describes it introspectively:

Initially, we felt distraught as they did not accept our interpretation of their *ao dai* walking. It was our fault as we were impatient. We must let them understand that it is their culture; I should not be selfish, given that our taste is still very Chinese despite merging with the Vietnamese concepts we create. We should think to ourselves, is it Vietnamese? Is our *ao dai* their *ao dai*? For example, we initially talked about breathing and the harmony between humans and nature, but they did not understand. We had put these concepts into every breathing dance movement¹³⁶; they eventually got it (Personal Communication, 14/03/2019).

The interview divulges that the Chinese creation teams constantly and earnestly made explanations and excuses to dispel Vietnamese misgivings about the encroachment of Chineseness. Resolving this tension requires mutual understanding, soul searching, and negotiation to reach a workable compromise. I questioned Lili about how this international strategy is implemented in the choreography:

We consider that international aesthetics in the contemporary age are analogous to the rhythm of a heartbeat. For example, the Cham Pa soldiers' walking dance has a sense of zero gravity; we found it great to combine the Cham Pa dance with the sense of zero gravity. It gives the tempo of the zero-gravity walking as |X X XX X | X X X XX |. There is no such thing in Vietnamese traditional dance as zero gravity, though it is fundamental training for international modern dance.

¹³⁶ Breathing dance movement here is technically referred to a dance technique involving controlling the tempo with breathing.

The music and choreography's internationality has a global appeal by adding modern rhythm sensations, emotions, and visual impact. International taste and openness are critical here. The "language" of the performance is more international art than Chineseness or Vietnameseness. It quenches the Vietnam team's resistance, sidestepping the cultural and political tensions between China and Vietnam. Vietnameseness evades Chineseness, thus, exalting Vietnameseness to an international standard. This case study offers a lens for examining the intertwining of tradition and modernity, the local and the foreign, and the national and the transnational. National identity's purposeful ambiguity has facilitated a cultural exchange in the landscape, place, and performative space of globalised Hoi An.

8.3 Transnational Continuity: Power, Landscape, and the Imperial Sublime

Intriguingly, HAM's premiere coincided with the arrival of the US aircraft carrier *Carl Vinson* at the port of Danang. *Carl Vinson* embodies the complex relationship between Vietnam and China regarding the South China Sea conflict.¹³⁷ To elaborate on this encounter, Mei Shuaiyuan connected HAM and *Carl Vinson* in the article "Carl Vinson and Vietnam Memories: A Special Interpretation on Two Sorts of Screaming". It was published on his company website and later withdrawn permanently. I summarise the key points below:

Carl Vinson is visiting Danang ... You can imagine the shock and scream when Vietnamese civilians look at this steel monster. Interestingly, an LPA is now premiering and made by collaboration between China and Vietnam in Hoi An, just 20 minutes from Danang. Numerous people scream and

¹³⁷ See news in *Deutsche Welle*, available at: <https://www.dw.com/zh/战后首次美核驱动航母停泊越南岷港/a-42831263> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2019].

constantly applaud in the theatre. I think the Vietnamese can never imagine their cultural elements presented in such a form. *Carl Vinson* is a weapon for war and massacre, essentially a tool of death. While HAM narrates human coexistence, harmony, and love ... those gorgeous ladies wearing *ao dai* and elegantly walking symbolise human beauty and goodness. HAM is another type of “aircraft carrier”; the power she emits can subvert *Carl Vinson*. She bears the weight of our peace and dream. Now I can comprehend the meaning of soft power...¹³⁸

Mei strives to exert his cultural and creative domination, while conversely, the USA is broadcasting its military domination. Though both soft power and hard power are forms of domination, Mei seeks to beautify and “landscape” his cultural power; there is an allegation of cultural domination here that places a contrast between the aggression of the US and the “peaceful rise” of China. The choice is to join the West and be dominated by its aggressive hard power, or alternately, embrace the Chinese spirit of harmony. Chinese soft power, according to Mei, is in ideological opposition to American hard power and repulses the United States on the “battlefield” of Vietnam, where two superpowers rival each other. Mei closes his controversial *Carl Vinson* post with a claim to understand soft power. The post’s speedy deletion presents a different story: The exaltation of China and criticism of Vietnam’s ally are diplomatically clumsy. Adding to the contentious issues regarding the South China Sea, we begin to understand why traces of Chinese involvement, such as the Chinese artists’ names and Chinese language subtitles, were removed by the Vietnamese for the premiere of HAM. The Vietnamese website for HAM introduces the performance as “A large-scale art program for Vietnam currently being developed by reputable experts in the country, and staged by the world’s top specialist, the father of Landscape

¹³⁸ Shan-shui.com, 2018

Performance”.¹³⁹ However, there is no mention of the name or nationality of the “mysterious” father of Landscape Performance.

The promotional trailer for HAM was displayed on a giant screen in Times Square, New York City. This advertisement stated that “more than 300 international news outlets reported that HAM is a ‘global phenomenon’ and ‘the pride of Vietnam’ ”.¹⁴⁰ The British news agency Reuters commented that it is “the most beautiful show in the world” in their article “Amazing *Hoi An Memories*”; the article recognises HAM’s contribution to boosting local tourism by attracting national and international tourists.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, none of these forms of media mentions the involvement of a Chinese LPA company. In stark contrast, this Reuters article was adapted for native Chinese consumption by the Chinese online newspaper *China Daily*, which subsequently added the following:

Hoi An Memories is reported by the English media Reuters...LPA gives Hoi An a new cultural card, bridging Sino-Vietnamese cultural cooperation. HAM interprets Hoi An, Vietnamese historical culture, and national spirit, which improves Hoi An’s cultural value...It bears witness to the strength and feasibility of this Chinese export. LPA tells the world that the Chinese way can be used to narrate their stories, especially in BRI countries...¹⁴²

¹³⁹ See *Hoi An Memories* official website, available at:

<https://hoianimpression.vn/en/discover/ky-uc-hoi-an-chuong-trinh-bieu-dien-nghe-thuat-thuc-canh-43.html>

¹⁴⁰ See the trailer of *Hoi An Memories*, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDb_zg86UFA [Accessed 30 Jul. 2019].

¹⁴¹ See the news from Reuters titled: “Amazing ‘*Hoi An Memories*’ Show Used as an Example to Help Boost Vietnam’s Visitor Numbers”, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/brandfeatures/venture-capital/article?id=92515> [Accessed 30 Jul. 2019].

¹⁴² See the news from *Chinadaily*, available at:

<http://ex.chinadaily.com.cn/exchange/partners/82/rss/channel/cn/columns/vyuatu/stories/WS5cdb7eaaa310e7f8b157cc44.html> [Accessed 30 Jul. 2019].

The Chinese media presents unabashed CCP propaganda, repositioning the report from Reuters as a Western endorsement of HAM. It promotes Chinese cultural confidence and national pride by emphasising LPA's Chinese originality. China projects a glorious Chineseness reinforced by Vietnam's alleged dependence on China for socio-economic improvements and cultural enhancements. A politicised statement in the *People's Daily*, a Chinese state-controlled newspaper, goes further with its nationalist rhetoric:

The founder of LPA, Mei Shuaiyuan...took a “paintbrush” to Vietnam using Chinese-style magnificent “painting materials” to portray a Vietnamese old port's history and memory. It is the first time Chinese design, full of “mountain water” flavour, goes abroad to fuse into another nation's landscape (quoted in Zhou and Xu, 2018).

Accentuating that LPA is a Chinese cultural and intellectual export of a contemporary version of *shanshui*, the bombast portrays Mei Shuaiyuan as a “decorator” refitting and sprucing up run-down old Vietnam. The Chinese media's interpretation of HAM proves that the resource of mountain water is a safe representational tactic to flag the Chinese national image in the global market and strengthen Chinese cultural nationalism domestically. Mei Shuaiyuan enthusiastically supports the landscape idea that connects Chineseness and Vietnameseness:

China and Vietnam share a similar cultural background; the two nations live like neighbours who have engaged mutually since ancient times.¹⁴³ The geographical landscapes between China and Vietnam are interlinked as they are and have always been connected by a continuous “stream” of shared culture and heritage (一衣帶水 文脈相通). Both nations have a close resemblance in terms of the natural landscape. We are neighbouring countries that are closely related and mutually dependent (唇齒相依).¹⁴⁴

The exploration of how localities are interconnected in this loose cultural geography can be a point of focus to generate cross-border dialogues. In this light, Iwabuchi (2017) proposed “trans-East Asia as a method”. Thus, the code of the landscape, as real and imagined, once more provides a space for the transaction, exchange, and negotiation between China and Vietnam in geographical and cultural aspects. Landscape in Mitchell’s theory (1994) permits avenues of rhetorical mobility:

Landscape offers an ostensibly “neutral” symbolic space that is a site for negotiating cultural hegemony. Landscape enables an appeal to universal values that naturalise domination. Of course, universal values could serve as a ground for imperial pretensions (p. 18).

With HAM, the Chinese artists have employed their *shanshui* culture as an imperial power. They ride this immaterial and formless landscape over the wind and the waves,

¹⁴³ See the news from the official website of Shanshui Ceremony Culture Industry Company, available at: <http://www.shan-shui.com/ArtsNewShow.html?id=24202888>

¹⁴⁴ See the news published in SCIC’s official website, available at: <http://www.shan-shui.com/ArtsNewShow.html?id=24202888>

breaking through their national border to promote LPA abroad. The mobility of the Chinese landscape enables LPA to travel through space and time to engage with Vietnamese elements. Thus, HAM merges the Chinese spectral landscape with Vietnam's physical landscape. China and Vietnam have launched a power dialogue surrounding their respective cultural landscapes. In other words, the landscape is locked in a struggle that is being debated and lobbied by two nations. It has become a battleground without bloodshed: China and Vietnam pitted against each other diplomatically to balance Chinese hegemony with Vietnamese counter-hegemony. HAM has become a war trophy in this soft power battlefield. However, Vietnam has successfully harnessed China's cultural capital and championed its anti-hegemonic tactic, preventing Vietnam from being further invaded and dominated by the Chinese landscape. It elaborates the assertion of Martin Powers (1998) that landscape is an ideal medium for subverting the reigning hegemonic discourse.

Though Chinese artists emphatically strived to build a bridge of cooperation with the Vietnamese to make HAM a joint project and pacifier of the tensions between opposing nations, HAM has partly failed in its objective. Unsurprisingly, that fact is overlooked by the Chinese media lurking behind the Great Firewall. With great relish and national bombast, they claim that HAM is a tremendous Chinese success story internationally. It is portrayed as a magnificent show of Chinese cultural power and superiority, carrying Chinese artistic creativity abroad. The pivotal point to be taken from this clash of cultures is that the Vietnamese have "stolen" this soft power from China. They have successfully transformed this Chinese creativity into their Vietnamese soft power and cultural brand by appropriating HAM. The Chinese team is concealed in the background; they are powerless to claim their stake and, with it, China's share of glory that should have arisen from this joint Sino-Vietnamese project. The revelation that Vietnam has managed to annex HAM bodes ill for the future international development of LPA, and it calls into question LPA's utility as a soft power and national brand.

The state continues to strategise LPA and bond it strongly to China's soft power. Mei Shuaiyuan's SCIC is listed in the CCP's prestigious *State Cultural Export Key Enterprises 2019-2020*.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, with government funding, the Chinese Academy of BRI researched LPA. The results are published in *Chinese Large-scale Landscape Performing Arts: Developmental Theory and Practice* (Zou, 2016), which is currently considered the handbook for LPA expansion overseas. *Impression Melaka* is a transnational LPA explicitly related to the BRI. The show's initiation contract was signed in the presence of Xi Jinping and the Malaysian Prime Minister; the founding of *Impression Melaka* also celebrates the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China. A Malaysian-Chinese businessman provided the funding; the project runs smoothly because Sino-Malaysia relations are friendlier than Sino-Vietnam relations. Hence, Wang Chaoge, as director and producer, has absolute power over Melaka's cultural placeness and how much Chineseness resides in the show.

Impression Melaka portrays Melaka's local culture and history through sophisticated multimedia and stage technologies. The similarity between HAM and *Impression Melaka* is their promotion of internationalness. The production places Malaysian indigenous culture within an international and cosmopolitan aesthetic framework. The official marketing materials of *Impression Melaka* reinforce the point by advertising it as "an international yet local creation".¹⁴⁶ The LPA emphasises the themes of multi-national diversity and cultural exchange; it pursues a "universal emotion" highlighted by diverse ethnic groups existing harmoniously in their shared land. One scene portrays the story of Peranakans (descendants of Chinese immigrants) in Melaka; it shows how Chinese people came to Melaka to do business and become residents. The performance's content is more political than HAM, having a scene

¹⁴⁵ See the list of *State Cultural Export Key Enterprises 2019-2020*, available at: <https://www.fltrp.com/c/2019-08-13/491846.shtml>

¹⁴⁶ See the trailer of *Impression Melaka*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOhRtfcUN8>

taken directly from Chinese history, depicting the Chinese Ming Dynasty treasure voyages that resonate strongly with the BRI.¹⁴⁷ Given this, *Impression Melaka* is described by the Chinese state media as *Wang Chaoge's Impression Melaka: Narrating a Chinese Story on the World Stage*, thus allowing Wang Chaoge to insert her Chinese narratives to reinforce Chineseness.¹⁴⁸ By implanting Chinese culture and selective narratives from Chinese history into this mega-event, the confirmed intent is to cultivate Sino-Malaysian relations. Wang Chaoge stated:

Since President Xi made the BRI into a national initiative, I considered the seven voyages of our famous explorer Zheng He (鄭和); he visited Melaka five times. The route Zheng He travelled was along the Maritime Silk Road; it is one of China's two historic Silk Roads. *Impression Melaka* represents our two nations' friendship and our civilisation's communication with other civilisations. It is the motivation for making this production.¹⁴⁹

Impression Melaka makes “smile” a theme that aligns with the harmonious narrative the Chinese government is constructing. Wang Chaoge asserts:

¹⁴⁷ The Ming treasure voyages were the seven maritime expeditions by Ming China's treasure fleet between 1405 and 1433. The Chinese *expeditionary* fleet conducted by Zheng He, a Chinese official, was heavily militarised and carried great amounts of treasures, which served to project Chinese power and wealth to the known world. Therefore, in contemporary China, this historical event about Zheng He's Treasure Voyages is used to cultivate Chinese pride.

¹⁴⁸ See the state media conducted interview of Wang Chaoge, available at: <http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2013/1117/c172318-23567630.html>

¹⁴⁹ See the state media conducted the interview of Wang Chaoge, available at: http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20180702/16363251_0.shtml

People who always carry a smile in Malaka are mild and kind-hearted. Different races, including Malaysian, Chinese, Indian, and Dutch people, live together harmoniously, like a family. Harmony is the most precious thing in the world. For this reason, “smile” is the theme throughout the performance (quoted in Zhang, 2016).

It is natural to suspect that *Impression Melaka* is the export of a Chinese version of harmony that reinforces the geopolitical aspect of BRI. Wang Chaoge’s cultural nationalism thus becomes more elevated. She professes:

How can we, as this ethnic Chinese race...speaking this Chinese language, export our brand and make foreigners feel proud when they use our products? It is not only about making good material and quality; it is the respect they show to our nation and the culture behind the brand (Zhang, 2016).

Akin to HAM, *Impression Melaka* is promoted by the Chinese media as the saviour of Melaka.¹⁵⁰ For example, *Xinhuanet.com* released the report *BRI Lets Melaka See the Reviving Light* (Zhang and Yu, 2017). It emphasises the role of *Impression Melaka* in developing the locality. In this power hierarchy propagated by the Chinese media, China provides creativity for Vietnam and Malaysia, implying that these two developing countries are dependent on China, which “educates” them to represent their images and national spirit. The Chinese media indicates that Chinese national elites paternalistically rebrand both nations’ cultures through their “Chinese invention”. Mei Shuaiyuan states that,

¹⁵⁰ See the report from *people.com.cn*, available at: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2018-07/14/content_1867829.htm [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

In HAM, the Vietnamese girls wearing *ao dai* are walking through time and space. They are as gentle as water and symbolise human kindness and beauty (quoted in Yi, 2018).

Utilising the image of Vietnamese girls wearing *ao dai* costumes as representative of Vietnam implies that Vietnam is seen as feminine by the masculine Chinese creative team. It is similar to Japanese representations of Asian cultures: Kikuchi (2004) uses the term “Oriental Orientalism” to designate Japan’s Orientalising of other Asian cultures. Kondo (1997) highlights Japan’s androcentric Orientalist representations of other Asian countries, such as Thailand and Bali, which are constructed as feminine and inferior. The gender politics of male colonisers who have conquered the feminine produce the discourse of colonial dominance. Furthermore, “internal Orientalism”, coined by Gladney (1994), denotes Chinese Orientalism directed at minority groups within China. Notably, the Chinese elites employ the same tone of superiority from a position of dominance when producing South Asian nations’ cultural branding. Therefore, the “internal Orientalism” perpetuated by LPA now breaks through the limitations of Chinese territory and thus propels a hegemonic Chineseness in a larger context.

Having described the concepts “Oriental Orientalism” and “internal Orientalism”, here, I coin the term “relaying Orientalism” to describe and define the transnational expansion of LPA. Relaying Orientalism is evidenced in the hegemonic approach to foreign LPA and the double standards of this transnational commercial behaviour. It builds a national boundary through media propaganda in China, thereby obscuring the national border by promoting internationalism to expand LPA’s territory. Therefore, in the national and transnational context, relaying Orientalism reveals LPA as both a limiting and liberating device annotating a hegemonic and ambiguous Chineseness.

Scholars have paid much attention to the invasion of Disneyland; however, in East Asia, China is exerting influence with “Impressionland”. Transnational LPA cases have shown that this “Impressionland” format is undergoing exportation and facilitates other countries’ local cultural productions and nation branding. It is a novel phenomenon, though still in its infancy. Keane (2016) and other scholars critically disclose the reality of China’s outbound trade:

What is lacking in these cultural export products are entertainment and commercial values that will sell these creative products in the international markets (Um, 2019, pp. 27).

LPA provides an exception, as TripAdvisor has rated HAM with five stars. A Taiwanese self-media vlog was filmed at the Hoi An Impression Theme Park and posted on YouTube. The vlogger highly recommended this event by rating HAM five stars and stating, “I wonder who made this creation; it is really brilliant”. In the comments below the video, Chinese viewers answered that “it is Zhang Yimou’s *Impression*”.¹⁵¹ *Impression Melaka* has a TripAdvisor rating of four stars, the majority of comments being excellent to very good. The application of technology strongly impressed a Youtuber, who commented after watching the show: “I did not know China has such technology ...”¹⁵² Thus, China, which once struggled with internationalisation, now claims to be a force of cultural internationalisation and creator of other countries’ national brands; it is placing “glocal” at the centre of large-scale thinking. The irony here is that Chinese cultural industry companies appropriate internationalisation by developing and using Western stage technologies to increase China’s power while chanting the mantra: “Chinese Invention”.

¹⁵¹ See the vlog on YouTube, [online] available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX1W6Iy8-i0&t=876s> [Accessed 26 Jul. 2019].

¹⁵² See the vlog on YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Rhx5bIrxk>

Chinese-staged productions like Chinese new opera¹⁵³ are made by Chinese artists using the “western way to narrate a Chinese story” or the “world way to narrate Chinese culture”,¹⁵⁴ implying submission to Western dominance in the hierarchical frame of Orientalism and self-Orientalism. However, LPA reverses that trend: Mei Shuaiyuan’s statement “narrating the world story in Chinese thinking” asserts cultural power and hegemony. It highlighted the export of Chinese originality and the associated LPA industry pattern that emits an odour of cultural imperialism, particularly in Vietnam, a country dominated by China for centuries. The political agenda informs these assertions, yet they, in turn, have advanced a political inspiration. We are witnessing Chinese theatre’s development that refracts a political age of shifting cultural policy and an unprecedented investment in cultural exportation. The Chinese company Shaanxi Tourism Group’s landscape performance, *Marco Polo*, is planned in Italy.¹⁵⁵ Mei Shuaiyuan also declares this:

I am also making overseas arrangements with Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore (quoted in Pu, 2010). In the next few years, LPA will be orchestrated in Italy and Greece. In no more than five years, the overseas market will occupy over 70 per cent of our company’s business ... To internationalise LPA is a vital aim (quoted in Wen, 2016).

Assuming that Mei Shuaiyuan’s ambitions are realised, the resulting globalisation coveted by LPA may lead to the homogenisation of performing arts in nations that

¹⁵³ Chinese new opera is made by Chinese artists who adopt western opera format and orchestra and add Chinese culture and story. This is often referred to as “using the Western way to narrate a Chinese story”.

¹⁵⁴ See the news about the Chinese new opera *Marco Polo*, available at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ca75-0Qsphas5RFp9I7KEg>

¹⁵⁵ The company advocates the BRI by propagating the viewpoint that “collaborating with countries along the BRI route is good for exporting Chinese Tourism Performing Arts”, available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_7pMnYFplBKaznXNExH6hg? [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

accept LPA. It has occurred with domestic LPA. It happened with HAM, where the local culture and history have become abbreviated, polished with spectacle, and performed in an hour. Referencing this with cultural globalisation and capitalist-driven marketisation in the tourist industry, Fiat (1995) raises a pertinent point:

Culture in this context is maintained primarily through commodification and simulation. This marketisation of cultural identity raises the income and the means to participate in the global market for those groups able to respond appropriately while condemning cultures that do not market themselves well to cultural anonymity and eventual destruction (Costa and Bamossy, p. 5).

Zhang Xiao (music director) admits that some locals feel HAM is too gigantic and consistent with Chinese magnificence. Hence, it is not culturally relevant to Hoi An, a small town in a small country (Personal Communication, 13/03/2019). Zhang Xiao offered the following regarding cultural imperialism and the internationalness of HAM:

Indigenous culture's internationalisation must be at a small cost of sacrificing authenticity. Cultural invasion is a false concept. If we refuse the so-called "cultural invasion", we would still be in the Neolithic Age. It is an issue that not only Vietnam needs to negotiate but China as well. China has opened its gate for forty years; we participate in developing global culture and will be the impellers of cultural globalisation (Personal Communication, 17/03/2019).

Zhang Xiao's point is that globalisation unavoidably causes cultural assimilation and the sacrifice of local authenticity. With LPA, there is a risk that what is displayed represents culture as decided by China's state-designated artists and their politics, which forge diplomatic and economic bonds¹⁵⁶. Peng and Keane (2019) argue that "a co-production with countries under the cultural template of the BRI might present new opportunities to blend China's stories into a narrative of shared prosperity" (p. 904). Gong (2020) shares his concerns, pointing out that:

With the "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy, promoted by the USA as a geopolitical response to China's growing influence through the BRI in Asia and beyond, Beijing has integrated economic statecraft and soft power into the strategies for strengthening relations in this region, so intensifying China's regional geopolitical competition to encourage regional states to be neutral or less supportive of the FOIP (p. 29).

The CCP leverages cultural capital, projecting its concept of imperialist glory based on the pathological overemphasis of the role and impact of Chinese culture on the world stage. Trapped behind the Great Firewall, the international adventures of LPA, the dominance of Chinese culture, and the flawless governance of the CCP are all myths that can be perpetuated and protected and are thus in agreement with Roy (2020) and Callahan (2015), Chinese soft power projected abroad becomes powerful domestic propaganda that instils national pride, thus ensuring continuing support for, and the ongoing glory of, the Chinese government. Though I reported earlier that

¹⁵⁶ The BRI promoted via the government's refrain of 'win-win' for all parties has generated suspicions, doubts, and anxieties" (Eder and Mardell, 2018; Makocki, 2016; Chao, 2019).

Vietnam does not credit Chinese artists, HAM still provides a solid case for China's domestic propaganda, which claims to add Vietnam to its cultural empire. At this juncture, I introduce the "imperial sublime"¹⁵⁷ described by Ram (2006).

The imperial sublime encapsulates the ideological style of Russian literature, which always and unflinchingly describes noble, solemn, and grandiose matters. It represents the Russian Empire's high status, which established a dominant tradition of political poetry with the imperial state as its central theme.

Applying the concept of the imperial sublime to Chinese cultural imperialism, the two transnational LPAs are artworks that enhance the sense of Chinese cultural superiority. The media welds HAM to the imperial sublime, aiming to provoke the usual emotions of pomp, pride, and imagined glories that swell within the imperialists' collective psyche. The sensational pomp and grandeur predispose the general public to mistake this exceptional case for a triumph of normality. It dominates intellect and conceals the uncomfortable truth that the popularity of Chinese cultural productions is of limited appeal internationally. The people as subjects, if not of a feudal ruler, now idolise the country's cultural landscape, which they believe has expanded throughout the earth through the new Silk Road - BRI.¹⁵⁸ They now embrace the glory of being Chinese in the new Chinese Empire celebrated under the banner of the authoritarian regime. The landscape, which projects the imperialist impression, fortifies the landscape matrix regarding perception governance. In this instance, the construction

¹⁵⁷ Ram focused on literary themes that were concurrent with the evolution of Russian poetry between 1730-1840. He investigates the relationship between the writer and the state. Imperial sublime is the aesthetics of the imperial ideology that became embedded in a wide range of national issues. Russian writers at that time feel sublime to place autocratic Russia as heaven.

¹⁵⁸ The Ancient Silk Road nowadays is instrumentalised by CCP to promote national pride. See Carmen (2021) *Nationalism in Contemporary China: The New Silk Road*, available at: <https://www.ipsa.org/wc/panel/nationalism-contemporary-china-new-silk-road>

of the matrix relies on endorsement from outside the country to enhance the CCP's power. Mitchell (1994) reminds us of the sinister nature of the landscape where cultural imperialism is hidden:

The landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the dreamwork of imperialism unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both Utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance (p. 10).

Landscape understood as a concept or representational practice does not necessarily declare its relation to imperialism directly. Furthermore, the imperial landscape is not a “one-way” phenomenon but a complicated process of exchange, mutual transformation, and ambivalence.¹⁵⁹ Landscape in LPA as a cultural concept is an instrument of imperial overstretch. As an ideological hallucination, the landscapes of foreign LPA pragmatically register as an imperial power and a manifestation of that power in the Chinese psyche. To assess this imperial sublime, we need to review Mei Shuaiyuan's comment once again:

LPA results from the artists releasing their sentiments in a space (landscape). However, if this personal sentiment is related to the nation-state, it is first grade. If this emotionality can affect all mankind, it is ultra-greatness.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Mitchell writes that imperialism is clearly not a simple, single, or homogeneous phenomenon but the name of a complex system of cultural, political, and economic expansion and domination that varies with the specificity of places, peoples, and historical moment. It is a process conducted simultaneously at concrete levels of violence, expropriation, collaboration, and coercion, and at a variety of symbolic or representational levels whose relation to the concrete is rarely mimetic or transparent (p. 9).

¹⁶⁰ See Mei Shuaiyuan's Weibo posted in 2015: <https://weibo.com/n/%E6%A2%85%E5%B8%85%E5%85%83>

Mei's "nationalist sublime" has morphed into an "imperial sublime". This imperial sublime from the Chinese cultural landscape as a form of emotionality surpasses rationality, driving the nation to be overconfident about its culture in the international market. Referring back to HAM as a reconciliation project in Vietnam, the failure of LPA as a soft power will have set alarm bells ringing in Beijing, especially among the Chinese elites. Mei has five production contracts for LPA in Vietnam, yet only HAM exists to date. The Vietnamese are painfully aware of their country's history as a tributary to Chinese empires. Mei's reinforcement of that fact via his *Carl Vinson* statement underscores that imperial sentiment is out of place and reinforces tensions. The imperial mentality may cause other countries to reject LPA and hinder its international progression.

Vietnamese and Malaysian LPAs represent a milestone, as creative teams have begun to explore international markets. The two instances of foreign LPA merely provide evidence of how China can culturally influence Vietnam and Malaysia and how LPA has moved beyond China. Zhang Xiao raised an issue:

We have no way to enter Europe because of the different paths between East and West; our way of thinking is opposite to theirs. It can only happen in Southeast Asia: a radiating region of Chinese civilisation. Many countries' histories and civilisations in this region have historical and cultural links with China (Personal Communication, 13/03/2019).

Zhang Xiao regards LPA's global development to be geographically limited. Western performing arts productions (both indoor and outdoor) have matured and diversified

within a well-established system. How could Chinese cultural industry companies gain a foothold in Western domestic entertainment markets? Many Chinese cultural productions narrowly, if not aggressively, are based on Chinese characteristics rather than universal ones. Therefore, the Chineseness in LPA's soft power must resonate with global audiences; it must be both Chinese and universal, embracing internationalness as an intermediary. The mass spectacle of disciplined bodies displaying mechanical regularity may be too reminiscent of authoritarianism and state control for Western taste. The narrow Chineseness in LPA falls into a catch-22 situation. If LPA for the Western market must abandon the unity of the masses and embrace individual leading characters in a format familiar to Western minds, then its very Chineseness is displaced. However, the BRI should provide the most significant growth area for LPA. BRI nations lacking in tourism potential may welcome the income from LPA and become the testing grounds for the soft power potential of LPA. The national and international significance of LPA is reinforced by Zhang Xiao:

The West often stereotypes the Chinese as good at math or running restaurants. Then suddenly, they wonder how the Chinese have gone abroad to make stage productions and even touch other nations' cultures; this is a Chinese cultural invasion. "It is outrageous that Chinks can do cultural invasion"! (Personal Communication, 16/06/2019)

Zhang Xiao reinforces LPA's significance to China but admits that exported Chineseness generates great suspicion. The expansion of LPA is an aspiration of the state. However, the aspiration falters upon touching the reality in the international arena. At this point, soft power and nation branding combine; Aronczyk (2019) informs:

The political approach sees nation branding, at its worst, as an augmented form of propaganda, and, at best, an inoffensive way of building and managing reputation by promoting a country's culture, history, and geography instead of a chauvinistic or antagonistic form.

Branding nations can be counterproductive; it might create mistrust and prejudice in efforts to win the hearts of others (MacDonald, 2011). In an era of nationalism and globalisation confluence, branding competition can quickly become “the continuation of warfare by other means” (Volcic and Andrejevic, 2011, p. 599). Considering the functionality of the national brand, LPA as a soft power could play a significant role in mitigating the hostile reception of China's hard power. Chao (2019) believes that “a spotlight on culture and art is also a strategy of deflection, nonprovocative events publicise a kinder and gentler side of the nation that can mitigate the negative views which are a consequence of its current global rise” (p. 330). If harmony is LPA's cultural foundation, the imperialist assertions of Chinese elites, reported in China's domestic media, deviate from the country's mantra of “a human community with a shared future”. When pushing forward transnational LPA projects, Chinese elites wave the internationalist banner, but when courting domestic media, they create a cultural barrier by endorsing cultural nationalism. Such antinomy evokes double standards and mirrors a sophisticated egoism and the pitfalls for branding LPA.

A survey conducted in Vietnam by the Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) in 2019 shows that over 60.7% of Vietnamese maintain that China is a revisionist country intending to influence Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). More than half (58.7%) believe the BRI will bring ASEAN member states into China's orbit (Tang *et al.*, 2019). CCP diplomacy, in its early stages, emphasised “seeking common points while reserving difference” (求同存異) and later addressed “harmony in diversity” (和而不同).

However, the fundamental difference between China and other countries, in terms of ideology, often makes common points pointless and harmony dubious. If China wants to be more integrated into the international arena, the government might be advised to deal with the difference instead of “reserving the difference”. It will fare better by holding universal values in governing domestically and building harmonious relationships with other nations.

Conclusion

The amalgamation of cultural elements in HAM shows us that the border among Vietnamese, Chineseness, and internationalness is blurred. HAM, therefore, highlights how the transnational LPA permits ambiguity. Not pinning this performance down to a particular identity is a route for facilitating cultural exchange, a unique meeting space in this landscape. The inclusion of cultural elements to express the identities of both nations comes not from saying that “something is ours”; rather, it shows people something that is theirs. HAM comes from exploring common ground - a shared cultural landscape where that which is ours might also be that which is yours. Combining these diverse cultural elements with internationalness creates a shared global aesthetic that is a marketable resource for Vietnam, a source that initiates emotions of national pride in both nations simultaneously.

The transnational LPAs have provided early signs of an internationalisation strategy. LPA may never become internationalised due to its multiple limitations, which include its cultural appeal and political ideology. However, LPA has undoubtedly made the first step and is making headway in its quest for rapid expansion. Transnational LPA, as the state’s trumpet, desires to gain a firm foothold in the international creative industries and extend the landscape matrix beyond China. Though HAM represents Vietnam’s appropriation of Chinese soft power, the Chinese elites endorse it as the crowning glory of Chineseness in Southeast Asia. It has

enabled the Chinese state to create an imperialist blueprint for domestic perceptions of governance assisted by their media organs.

By fabricating a national imperialist consciousness, the core of their discourse creates the blind belief that the sovereign government can shepherd the people into restoring China's past honour. The unabashed embrace of an imperial sublime creates a sense of national awe and cultural reinvigoration. It has carried the Chinese state and the LPA elites far from reality diplomatically, culturally, and politically. The landscape matrix, now infused with the imperial sublime, has made its final stroke on the *shanshui* canvas of the landscape.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the emergence and development of a new theatrical genre: landscape performing art (LPA). I have explored how the CCP deploys power by mobilising the landscape to create, manufacture, and operate LPA to develop the tourist economy and enhance ideological control. The landscape is utilised as a form of soft power for internal rule and external communication, but eventually, both are used systematically for internal governance. The landscape thus provides a venue for negotiating power between state and ethnic levels and between national and transnational levels to promote a united Chineseness. This research is, therefore, centrally concerned with LPA's status as a Chinese art form claimed as "Chinese" by the state, where the definition of "Chineseness" has to do with "unity in diversity". Thus, it has particular inward-facing implications for local identity and is pitched as "Chinese" in outward-facing global contexts. LPA, within local, national, and transnational contexts, asserts power; it has weaved a sensorial dimension - the landscape matrix - that naturalises ideological control. Though LPA is started and developed from a top-down approach, it rides the power of landscape to eventually become a more dispersive power governing the subjects at the perceptual and bodily levels. The landscape manifested in LPA solves the dichotomy between promoting cultural diversity and a regulated Chineseness in the developing tourist economy. With the landscape providing natural energy, the party-state disciplines the subject naturally without much effort.

The state activates the landscape's timeliness and spatiality to implement ideological hegemony through LPA. In terms of time, the landscape is, on the one hand, temporal; on the other, it is eternal. In terms of space, the landscape is, on the one hand, mobile; on the other, it is immobile. From domestic ethnic issues and Chinese cultural nationalism from the local and national levels to LPA's global ambitions, it demonstrates the scope of the landscape matrix. The landscape, in the context of LPA,

is both exclusive and inclusive; it is also narrow and broad. It is exclusive and narrow because the state employs its immobility to claim the uniqueness of Chineseness. It operates within the foreclosing discourse of diversity and harmony, producing a monolithic, mythical, and self-Orientalist representation of the ethnic locals. It is inclusive and broad because its feature of universality and movability allows the state to expand LPA's territory and spread its cultural hegemony beyond China. By detecting strategic dominance within the landscape matrix system, the thesis suggests that LPA's content and aesthetic form, its function for the political economy, and its other attributes articulate a dominant message that creates a sensate experience inserting different perceptual orientations and temporalities. LPA opens up a dominant political space for negotiation and engagement through a more concealed and nuanced channel.

Whether the CCP decides that legitimacy should come from cultural nationalism or economic performance, the official ideology adapts to the changing domestic and international environment, "providing normative justification, defining proper ends, and mobilising subordinates' consent" (Holbig, 2013, p. 61). In the service of ethnic harmony, LPA is a very calculated instrument used to promote unity, empowerment, and cultural nationalism. To parallel traditional *shanshui* painting as a form of imperial power featuring discipline, social order, and hierarchy, the state aims to revitalise the *shanshui* painting in the 21st century through LPA, which serves as one of the prerequisites reinforcing a more centralised political and cultural system. Invigorated by the power of the landscape, LPA has allowed the party-state to establish a landscape empire. It is twinned with the recent movement "fully revitalising traditional culture" initiated by Xi's administration. Chinese identity is reinforced and infiltrated by the political discipline of the CCP in all regions of the nation.

The concept of sublime placed in the realm with "power" and "landscape" to LPA

serves as a method of theoretical engagement and a determining feature to simultaneously think about politics, culture, and aesthetics. LPA borrows power from the landscape to build a sense of the sublime on a multi-dimensional level: emotional manipulation, cultivation of national identity, diversion of attention via spectacle, aesthetic norm-setting of ideology, and bodily discipline. More specifically, the landscape evokes the sublime through the aesthetic modelling of the individual's senses, sensibility, body, thinking, taste, and emotion in culturally regulated functions, which is pressed into the service of the national cult. Thus, "politics" here refers to the landscape projects of fashioning a viable form of self, a workable image, and a well-rounded subject in China's political new era with its rise in the global setting. LPA mobilises the nationalistic masses of the state, sustaining the image of a unified self-revived by traditional culture and strengthened by the grand narrative of the China Dream. Therefore, the landscape matrix functions as a form of power embedded in the symbolic activities and perceptual patterns that generate meaning and evolve culture. To remain indestructible, this matrix system can optimise and update itself.

Landscape Matrix Version 1.0: Landscape Painting and Spectacle

Cultural elites and artists transfer the virtual *shanshui* painting onto the natural landscape, encapsulating the diverse local cultures into a *shanshui* painting to deploy the whole nation as one narrative of *shanshui*. LPA epitomises the incorporation of placeness into a singular united national force. Traditional themes and the *shanshui* concept synergise to generate a landscape matrix. It is not difficult to visualise this landscape matrix on a map of China as a series of scattered dots; each dot is intersected by lines that generate a multi-dimensional grid.

The landscape has transformed LPA into a spectacle, display or exhibition invoking awe and wonder. It creates a moment of sublime "awe and reverence and an emotional understanding that transcends rational thought" (Kant and Goldthwait,

1965). It is not an intellectual encounter but rather underscores the primacy of the bodily experience. The sublime working on affect levels can be converted into political appropriation that overlay local issues. In the case of ILS, the ethnic Zhuang legend is diffused through the eternal landscape, finishing Liu Sanjie's radical sublimation to promote a united Chineseness. She is an abstraction of the local, reinforcing the national; ascending, she becomes an immortal, a ubiquitous cultural ecology inhabiting the landscape. ILS is a striking case demonstrating the CCP's political determination to overwhelmingly and ruthlessly renovate ethnic art and legend. LPA inevitably reduces ethnic identity as ethnic characteristics are condensed into an audio-visual entertainment experience. The "awe" effect from a moment of the sublime leads to abstraction and an absence of dialogue; it pre-empts, diminishes, and deflects discussions on ethnic issues. In other words, the tourists' attention and bodies are fully engaged; the visuality dominates and overpowers the intellect to prevent the spectators from questioning this unified Chineseness.

The concept of the sublime helps us understand LPA's visually spectacular effect with its weak content and plot, i.e. Zhang Yimou's style in which "the form far outweighs the content". A critique of Wang Ban's theory of the Chinese sublime allows us to interpret LPA as an "emotionality" to envision an independent modern state. Nyiri (2006) remarks that, for Chinese tourists, "landscape is experienced not so much for its own sake as it is a sign for a set of cultural references". Domestic tourists flow into the ethnic rural place surrounded by natural scenes to experience beautiful and majestic landscapes, transfixed in adoration of their country's landscape, reinforcing the nationalist sentiment "What amazing landscape is in our country". Such emotional stimulation may lead to cultural and geographical patriotism. Spurred by modern technology, the landscape has emitted power to provide an immersive ambience. Along with traditional themes such as religion and dynasties, the landscape imperceptibly internalises the discipline to audiences, conditioning their bodies and purifying their minds gently and naturally to promote a harmonious, jubilant, and

positive mentality. Therefore, a large *shanshui* painting visualised through LPA not just effectively diverts attention from sensitive issues via spectacle but also emotional management for political discipline.

Landscape Matrix Version 2.0: Nationalism and Inventive Chineseness

LPA artists borrow from global theatrical flows to revolutionise the traditional theatre form. However, cultural globalisation must not imperil the state ideology but instead empower “Chinese characteristics”. The CCP’s strategy of taking advantage of transcultural flows has rescued and enriched Chinese traditions while exploiting the Chinese landscape as a force of cultural counter-infiltration. Regardless of how much Western cultural flow and cultural globalisation have drifted to China, the landscape’s power can stabilise such influences by absorption, adaption, and appropriation. The powerful narrative displayed in the Chinese landscape acts as an antidote to Western cultural aggression and hegemony.

The temporality and immobility of the landscape evoke a sense of cultural timelessness to narrate the country’s past, present and future, “obscuring a more timely and inventive imaginary of the country” (Chao, p. 322). The Chinese invention assertion becomes a venue to grant a power certifying that Chineseness does not hamper China’s progress, creativity, and success. It thus serves as both trumpet and shield, stimulating national pride and reinforcing the doctrines of the government, propagandising and bolstering the cultural and creative superiority of the centralised regime. It is part of the developing idea that the CCP, as custodians of the ancient past, is a continuation of dynastic China and wields its socialist version of cultural “authenticity” with “prosperous” inventive ability.

Chinese elites’ nationalistic vision is an experience of the sublime that drives the LPA elites to boldly and optimistically draw a conclusion - Chinese invention. By sanctifying Chinese traditions and leveraging the power of the Chinese landscape, the

Chinese invention assertion strives to rationalise something irrational by creating an emotional ambience and sensational effect. It glosses over China's dilemma of the invention and obscures the rationale of the political, cultural, and social environment providing the precondition for cultivating invention. By provocatively making a national demarcation, the landscape matrix utilises external enemies to create both real and fictional antagonism across the separated spaces, deflecting its internal contradictions. It aims to govern the subject's perception: China can become an inventive nation resisting the Western cultural invasion due to its prominent cultural landscape under the current centralised polity. Chinese exceptionalism embedded in the triumphant declaration here erases the necessity and urgency of political reform. It legitimises the "China model", normalising China's political science to develop the creative industry with an alternative spin to the West.

The sublime subjectivity is valorised in the Chinese invention claim. It does not constitute superman individuals but centres and unifies the loose contingency of individual experience and heterogeneity of subject-positions in the interests of the control and development of the creative economy. Furthermore, it encourages aggressive individual and collective voices for the national interest to resist foreign forces. Suppose LPA is a spectacle working on both perceptually and bodily levels. In that case, the Chinese invention assertion is a media spectacle that spectacularises the event and tilts the subject's perception toward nationalist empathies. It is an upgrade to the landscape matrix where hegemonic sensations are fabricated in order to cultivate more self-strengthening and blind self-confident subjects to believe in the inventive future.

Landscape Matrix Version 3.0: Discipline and Body Training

The local landscape has been heavily marketed and branded theatrically, becoming a local and national treasure where state elites and locals jointly make a political, cultural, and economic claim through LPA. To borrow Massey's notion of landscape

as an “event”, we can see that these landscapes are not immobile and everlasting but have become a modern reiteration of progress. The relationship between the local and the landscape has altered. However, the research considers that this alteration is negative since ethnic minority groups are still considered to be passive beneficiaries. This state-ethnic relationship in the landscape is examined through Foucauldian theories of power. The research discloses that although LPA does not execute a force of coercion, the CCP has adopted an ideological toolset with propaganda, economic inducements, and disciplinary training in body and mind.

Firstly, I have adopted Foucault’s pastoral power to deconstruct the official propaganda embedded in the LPAs of the ethnic minority regions. With the economic carrot, the government exploits LPA to draw a narrative of the pastor-shepherd relationship. According to Foucault, government can be understood “as an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and for what happens to them” (p. 26). The utilisation of pastoral power aims at stabilising the regime and legitimising its military and economic might, all from “concern” for the welfare of the populace. In LPA, the government borrows the grab of being concerned with the welfare of its subjects; it dresses itself up as a benevolent power. Due to the benefit LPA brings, the Chinese authorities construct a rhetorical narrative that the betterment of the ethnic populace is a worthy exchange for political rights. The pastor-shepherd thereby chains ethnic minority subjects to dependency on the state. LPA facilitates the locals’ internalisation of the state’s economic interests by bringing the ethnic localities financial benefits and fostering a sense of gratitude and belonging to the patriarchal state. It is a political discipline but simply given an economic label that is symptomatic of a Chineseness that involves normalising state-ethnic minority relationships. This Chineseness circumscribes conditions of possibility as any political deviance is not allowed.

Foucault's pastoral power does not abandon themes of discipline or the discursive construction of a population into pliant and docile bodies. Compliance initiated by propaganda and economic force can be transitory and insecure. Therefore, state power is constantly reinforced through discipline, producing self-disciplined ethnic minds and bodies. The state stamps its authority on the local landscape through theatres, schools, and other venues. Viewing LPAs in the locality through a Foucauldian lens, I suggest that such power is constructed, institutionalised and maintained by all involved due to the discourses that pervade the LPA industry and system. The training schools, theatre, and other tourist venues are all sites for instilling disciplinary power. The accompanying state surveillance system produces a "panoptic" society, ensuring that the locals are self-disciplined to behave in the state-dictated way and leads the members of society to accept the hierarchy in the normative template.

With its magnificent show of disciplined bodies, the LPA performing format emphasises the machine-like obedient collective. The LPA model of assembled synchronous bodies as a form of human capital is analogous to militarised discipline applied to all localities hosting an LPA. It is a large-scale, nationwide obedience training that nibbles away at ethnic people and deprives them of resistance. The concept of mountain water as LPA's signature is visually enacted and realised; it is also bodily manifested in the performance with its Confucian values. When the Chinese philosophical method is employed to train the ethnic dancing bodies in the landscape, their bodies blend into the harmonious landscape and merge into one; the functionality of the discipline in the landscape manifests here. Rogers (2012) states that, "Landscapes are conceptualised as sensory environments, paralleling geographical literatures that view landscape as an emergent process constructed and understood through kinaesthetic motion" (p. 77). With the natural power of the spring breeze and delicate rain, the training and education in the landscape dissolve ideological tension: state harmony is embedded in choreographed ethnic bodies in a naturalised approach.

To ensure the stability of the landscape matrix system, the authorities entrust the local landscape with limited privileges. The landscape provides a cornucopia which generates prospects and hope as positive forces for the locals. The human body infused with bioenergy is amplified by the landscape; bodies are considered a resource to be mobilised and, in turn, a supply of energy for the landscape matrix. Foucault's disciplinary power ensures that the body operates securely and more efficiently in the modern political framework. Though Foucault tries to avoid using the term "exploitation" to differentiate his "power" from Marx's, it is unavoidable that exploitation exists in any capitalist society. LPA, distilled from the landscape's power, subtly naturalises and shapes ethnic people's subjectivity. It produces docile minds and bodies that internalise the state's interests as their own.

Landscape Matrix Version 4.0: Economic and Emotive Appeal

The Chinese landscape in LPA is subjugated and expropriated to achieve political economy, which helps the party-state build up one "nation" by economically shortening regional disparity. LPA fulfils the landscape matrix's aims of promoting a united economic entity as opposed to some economically disconnected regions. However, it is worth mentioning that the matrix is not impeccable when considering the generic symptoms in LPA's nationwide industry. Capitalists' ulterior motives and mercantile crassness guided by the government's monocultural policy have caused LPA's blind expansion and are significant factors in LPAs' failures. It, therefore, has constrained the matrix's power, considering that many LPA producers leverage LPA as a pretence for acquiring subsidised land and indulgence in property speculation with little interest in promoting local culture or ethnic relations.

Nevertheless, those failures of LPA do not impede its nationalisation process (民族化進程) and national brand status. EMH's promotion promoted as a national brand in the G20 setting represents a milestone in LPA's development. Below the exhibition of patriotic impulsion is an aesthetic current of clandestine political discourse that rouses,

focuses, and guides the audience. The party's magnificence is presented in disguise, lavishing pomp and wonder on the native audience swollen with pride for the motherland. The party-state is no longer an external landscape or theatrical spectacle. It is a synergy pounding through the people's blood, muscles, and bones. The nation becomes an energy source and emotional tenure flooding the mind and appropriating the body for political purposes. In this regard, politics borrows the garb of landscape as a form of aesthetics, shrouding itself to become an emotive form of art and symbolic activity.

Instead of rehearsing dull political indoctrination, EMH has solicited an imaginary and emotional identification with the "ideal" landscape drawn from the depository of traditional icons of Chinese culture. Grafted on a Western orchestra, this national brand recovers the lost vitality of Chinese culture, fashioning a robust national contemporary mainland Chinese identity, shaping the collective unconscious and ensuring a unified subjectivity. There is a smooth transition from *shanshui* to global China, rapidly culminating in the divine state as the crystallisation and apotheosis of the country's image. Eagleton (1990) observes that,

In bourgeois aesthetics, the sublime, no less than the beautiful, serves the ideological purpose of forming a subject in the phallic law of social order. The beautiful centres the "subject in an imaginary relation to a pliable, purposive reality", thereby granting it a sense of its inner coherence.

The sublime "disciplines and chastises the subject", recalling it traumatically and violently to a higher law, which is found to be inscribed in its very being (p. 98). Wang Ban (1997) points out that the sublime functions to recall the subject to a lofty sense of its historical mission as the maker and motor of history (p. 338). Thus, the centralised state rebrands *shanshui* through LPA to propel the viewing subject out of

the imaginary realm and sublimate audiences into their symbolic discipline and order. The state apparatus must recruit faithful subjects by mustering emotion to legitimise political rule and ideological hegemony. In this way, the spectacle and great momentum of the visual display become associated with the “tyranny” through the landscape giving ideology a natural, personal and human face. This reminds us that Chinese magnificence embedded in EMH is not just a harmless enjoyment; it can also be dangerous - a tool to seduce and dull the mind and establish power over others.

Landscape Matrix Version 5.0: the Imperial Sublime

Chinese artists have harnessed the natural power of their national landscape to equip LPA for overseas expansion. The universality of the landscape has ensured LPA’s mobility to the transnational context. That is to say that the landscape becomes a space of visualisation to witness LPA traversing its national border and asserting its power overseas. The Chinese landscape is embroiled in governing perception in domestic China; in the meantime, it establishes a diplomatic channel and serves as an intangible resource for image-making overseas.

Foreign LPAs project an imperialist impression of China; the Chinese elites are trying to exert cultural and creative domination in Southeast Asia. The reality of Sino-Vietnam tension resulted in Vietnam’s disallowing the Chinese creative team from claiming credit. Though HAM as a soft power does not fulfil the CCP’s desired effect for diplomacy, it still provides a solid case for the Chinese government to draw a grand narrative and establish a discourse of cultural imperialism. The party-state wields the triumph of transnational LPAs through the domestic media organ propagating these LPAs as exports of the Chinese mountain water concept; in effect, they create an imperial sublime. It aims to influence the subject’s perception that the powerful state can shepherd every individual to restore the country’s past imperial glory in the regional and global sphere. Then LPA is hailed as a “Chinese invention” in modern times, with *shanshui* as a cultural hallmark that has gone abroad. It is

significant and celebratory for the CCP's claimed cultural superiority and fledging imperialist mentality.

It is evident that today due to traditionalism, China's elites or the general public's feudalistic thinking and imperialist perception have been bolstered (Carrai, 2021) to levels unprecedented since the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶¹ Hegemonic and expansive imperialism reflects the state's aspirations. There is a sensorial engagement that is reconfiguring the political. The political strategy creates an imperial sublime through media spectacles that overpower the intellect, which glosses over the reality of the Chinese soft power's dilemma: its political ideology and cultural values contradict universal values and cause suspicion, resistance, and tension. Nevertheless, the transnational LPA has manifested that the landscape matrix not only absorbs nutrients from the domestic landscape to optimise itself but also from the exoteric landscape to reinforce its impenetrable shield. Foreign LPAs allow the landscape matrix to accomplish its ultimate upgrade.

Summary

In transforming individuals into patriotic, nationalistic, and imperialistic subjects, LPA has enjoyed an advantage over other cultural forms and institutions; it has a high status and political privileges as an art form and national brand. Its visual impact from the sublime of the natural landscape, its emotional appeal, and its social, economic, and geographical reach function as a pawn in the state's mass political culture, manufacturing an identical political instinct in the form of enjoyment. In short, LPA has reproduced subjects of the state effectively in a large dimension.

Behind the visual stimulation, LPA brings a feast of political philosophy - ideology

¹⁶¹ See the recent video on YouTube filmed during Shanghai lockdown. An officer held no fear to say to the people as if he were the king: you are my subject! (你是我的臣民). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/MAACvFolEfU>

aestheticised. The landscape, serving as a code sequence, constitutes the matrix system that connects reality with virtuality and intuition with physicality. It supplies the impetus for LPA and constitutes an interactive system where the different localities are the individual components. It is a bridge for connecting the country's past to the present and future in the sense of time and also for connecting spaces geographically. In this artistic enjoyment and creation process, the senses are slowly stripped of their physically contingent character. They become trained, cultivated, and to use a word that sounds uncomfortable or inauspicious - "programmed".

Significance, Limitations, and Future Research Prospects

This research yields a scholarly contribution to understanding a new cultural phenomenon, landscape performing arts (LPA). Applied to the ethnographic method, it provides an overview of LPA's emergence and development by discussing its cultural, economic, and political components from artistic conception to local deployment and onward to national and transnational implementation. Moreover, interacting with landscape and power theoretically with regard to the concept of the sublime and Chineseness, the thesis has examined a mythically conceived and constantly invisible power which I have called the "landscape matrix". It thereby expands the theoretical scope of "landscape and power" research.

Chineseness, particularly the version manifested in LPA, is an "inventive, expansive and hegemonic" cultural manifestation and a form of soft power complementing China's current global rise. In this particular political era, the party-state is more concerned with people's social, cultural, and spiritual lives; its ideology requires invading the inner depths of individuals. Therefore, this thesis has analysed how the political masquerades in the landscape matrix as an aesthetic experience and discourse; and how it has blended them into a realm of sensation, perception, body, image and myth. The implications of this understanding of the LPA complex are far-reaching.

Hopefully, the project can impact and contribute more generally to China studies. However, some limitations are inherent in the methodology and scope of this research, as demonstrated below.

Sharing a cultural background with the research subject and the people involved facilitated easy access to and research on LPA. However, I had to be constantly mindful of my proximity to the industry and Chinese identity to maintain scientific objectivity and critical distance. This included accounting for the unavoidable stream of propaganda in China which is one of the toughest challenges for any researcher. The interviewees' responses occasionally aligned with government censorship, and sometimes, at the interviewees' request, interview material was withdrawn and destroyed. Accessing the ILS theatre via industry elites may have skewed the answers to research questions: Do employees interrogated in the workplace feel free to answer questions honestly, or do they feel bound to answer in accord with company policy?

Since LPA has been researched as a political instrument, ideally, the local interviews should have had an element of political enquiry. A deeper insight into LPA's engagement with local ethnic cultures could have provided a more comprehensive analysis of the power relationships between the state and locals. However, such overtly political enquiries perturb the local populace and stymie attempts at data harvesting. Therefore, my intellectual knowledge, reinforced with theories, concepts, and existing scholarship, under the analysis of critical thinking, can serve to articulate those omitted ideas as well as form a shield against one-sided views. However, it is worth noting that the contextual framework for the thesis is wide-ranging, consisting of the multiple concepts, theories, and arguments from others which may predispose the thesis to be unable to avoid the potential danger of reductionism.

In this work, the perceptions of Chineseness in LPA are based on interviews with producers, artists, and experts. However, ethnographic research into the audience's

perceptions is absent. Therefore, it would be ideal if future ethnographic research focused on the domestic audience's perspective, thereby doubly ensuring the validation of my theoretical discovery. Future research should consider ethnographic fieldwork on the LPAs in Tibet and Xinjiang, given that Tibetans and Uyghurs are more resistant to Chinese nationality than the ethnic minority groups involved with ILS. In addition, the results from the field research on ILS cannot speak directly for other LPAs, as other LPAs get a higher audience satisfaction. *Impression Dahongpao* in Fujian province, as mentioned in Chapter 7, is a case in point; it constantly gains high ratings on the online platform Qunar Travel.

Due to time and geographical constraints, my research on the transnational LPAs lacked direct field observation; the interviews and performance were viewed remotely. Future research needs to gather data at the theatres to overcome the limitations of my method. Considering that it is still too early to judge whether LPA can be a global phenomenon and following on with the developmental trend of LPA overseas, it is worth researching how LPA enters Western countries. The dominant question is how the Chineseness and internationalness of LPA will be recalibrated for Western audiences and what that recalibration will entail. Considering the BRI is drawing great attention, future research should investigate how LPA influences the diplomatic processes and China's economic developments in the nations signed onto the BRI.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet for Interview (English)



Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Information Sheet for Interview

I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD research which I am doing under the supervision of The University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. I hope that when you read the information that follows; you will feel that your participation will be highly appreciated. However, should you feel you do not want to be a part of this research, you are under no obligation to do so as it is voluntary. Thank you for reading about my research.

1. Title of Study

Inventing and Manufacturing Chineseness through Landscape Performing Arts

2. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to combine performing arts with tourism: exploring the interdependent relationship between tourism and Chinese large-scale landscape performing arts (CLPA). It also explores the reason why CLPA is a popular field today by examining its marketing strategy, and also the Chinese governments' and venture capital's tandem involvement.

3. Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen as one of the participants for this research as you are in the population of the selected group. Since the interview will target interviewees who are stakeholders of the landscape performance. For example, they are the pioneers of CLPA, theatre managers, promoters, travel agencies, performers, and also experts such as academics, media specialists, and other related personnel within the CLPA industry. Furthermore: the interviewees also include local residents who have no direct connection with the local landscape performance.

4. Do you have to take part?

This participation is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at anytime without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

5. What will happen if you take part?

Basically my research involves asking performers, producers, local people and management personnel about the content and effect of the landscape performance. From the responses given it is hoped that the commercial and cultural effect of the performance can be analyzed. It is part of a PhD project being undertaken at the University of Liverpool. The method for data collection via interview will be audio recording. So your participation will not only be greatly appreciated, but also of academic interest to researchers in a wide range of disciplines globally. Please read the information sheet and consent form provided; and sign the consent form if you wish to participate. The audio recording will be stored on the University of Liverpool database; and only used for academic research directly related to this PhD Thesis, and as such will not be used for any other purpose. Should you choose to participate

and as such will not be used for any other purpose. Should you choose to participate as a named interviewee you will take no responsibility for your responses. As this research study involves a process of data collection via semi-structured interview, you will be asked questions relating to the research topic.

6. Expenses and / or payments

There are no financial rewards for participating.

7. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no risks involved in this study

8. Are there any benefits in taking part?

You get to give your opinions and share your culture.

9. What if you are unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy or feel you need to make a complaint there are two avenues of redress. Initially you can contact myself at: hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk Second contact is the supervisor sara@liverpool.ac.uk and only if she cannot solve the issues, you should contact the Research Ethics Governance Officer at: ethics@liv.ac.uk. Remember to quote the study title and my name (Quan Liu) for identification purposes. Also explain in detail your complaint.

10. Will your participation be kept confidential?

Data for the interview will be collected by photography, voice recording, field notes. It will be securely stored in line with university policy. Your identifiable information will probably be given for the academic purpose if you choose the option of identification. The data will only be used for this study so only myself and my supervisory team at the university will have access. The data will be stored until the final publication of the PhD Thesis; then all collected data will be deleted.

11. What will happen to the results of the study?

The PhD upon publication will be accessible to the public; the participants in this work will not be identifiable, unless they have given consent.

12. What will happen if you want to stop taking part?

If you decide you no longer want to participate, the procedure will end and all information that you have given will be destroyed. Information that is given before the decision to withdraw may be used, but only with your consent. The participation can be either anonymous or recognizable, so it depends on your choice. However; if you choose to be anonymous, results may be used once you have chosen this option.

13. Who can you contact if you have further questions?

My contact details are as follows:

Phone No.: +4407729285596

Email: RLAU58@gmail.com

Address: School of the Arts, University of Liverpool, 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom

Appendix 1.1 Participant Information Sheet for Interview

(Simplified Chinese)

中文版

伦理标准研究委员会

采访参与者资料单

我想邀请您参与我的博士研究，此研究是在英国利物浦大学的监督和指导下去进行的。当您准备开始阅读以下信息时，您的参与就已经被给予无比的感谢。然而，此参与纯属自愿，您可以无义务地自由选择参与或拒绝参与。感谢阅读我的研究信息！

1. 研究题目

通过山水实景演出发明与生产中国性

2. 此研究目的是什么？

此研究的目的是结合演艺与旅游，深度探究中国大型实景演出与旅游业唇齿相依的共生关系。而且，通过调查它的营销策略，政府介入和资本运作，这项研究还要分析大型实景演出这个新兴的演出种类和行业在中国为何如此的受欢迎。

3. 为什么您被选择参与这项研究？

您被选入参与此研究是因为您属于被选入的调查受众群体范围内。由于此调查问卷旨在调查那些实景演出的利益相关者，例如：实景演出的开创者，剧院管理者，推广者，旅游中介，表演者，以及业内大咖、媒体、专家和业界同仁等，此外还包括与实景演出无关的当地人。

4. 您必须要参加吗？

此参与纯属自愿，参与者可以不需给予任何理由和解释拒绝参与或者随时撤销，并无需承担任何风险。

5. 如果您选择参与的话，接下来会发生什么？

大体来说，我的研究会问及表演者，制作人，当地人还有管理者关于和实景演出的问题，比如制作、内容及此演出的意义和影响等。希望通过被采访者的回应中获知实景演出对当地商业和文化的影响。这是我博士课题中研究的一部分。此采访通过录音的方式来完成的信息采集。因此，您的参与不仅会受到真诚的感谢，还会为世界学术研究领域做出贡献。如愿意参与研究，请阅读信息表和同意表并且签字。音频录音将被储存作为学术研究的数据备份，除此之外，不会被利用在其他意图上。而且，考虑到学术用途，此采访将可能采用实名制。由于此研究属于半建构的信息采集，您将被问及的是与研究相关的问题。我们可以现在进行采访或者安排其他您方便的时间。

6. 花费和支付

此参与没有经济上的报酬。

Version 2.18

Date: 08/06/2017

3

此参与没有经济上的报酬。

7. 参与有风险吗？

此参与纯属学术研究，无任何风险

8. 此参与有什么好处或者利益吗？

您给予的观点是对学术的贡献，而且是一次分享文化的好机会。

9. 您如果有任何不高兴或者有其它问题怎么办？

如果您有任何问题不满意或者想咨询投诉，请联系我的邮箱 hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk，第二联系人是导师 sara@liverpool.ac.uk，如果导师解决不了问题，您可以通过邮件联系利物浦大学的伦理研究部门的工作人员：ethics@liv.ac.uk。请记得提供我的姓名（刘全）作为认证检索。

10. 您的参与将会是匿名吗？

参与可匿名也可署名。如果您希望的话，您的参与将会是匿名，而且您的身份信息也会被高度保护。数据将会由利物浦大学保存，只有我和我的导师可以获取数据，直到我的论文研究提交至学业结束。电子数据将被删除，文件也将被粉碎处理。

11. 您的参与对研究会带来哪些结果？

博士研究成果会向公众开放并发表，参与者信息将不会被透露除非他们给予同意。

12. 如果您想终止参与，会发生什么？

如果您决定不再参与，采访程序将被终止。如果您希望的话，关于您提供的所有的采访信息将被删除或撤销。采访全程可选择匿名，也可选择署名，这完全取决于您的个人选择。

13. 如果您有其他问题，可以联系谁？

我的联系方式：

电话: +4407729285596

邮箱: RLAU58@gmail.com

地址: School of the Arts, University of Liverpool, 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom

Appendix 2 Participant Consent Form for Interview (English)



Title of Research Project: Inventing and Manufacturing Chineseness through Lanscape Performing Arts

Researcher(s): Quan Liu

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [08/06/2017] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation for the interview is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and should I choose to no longer participate, I can also request the destruction of that information.
4. I agree to take part in the above study as an interviewee.
5. The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please tick the box below if you would like to receive a copy.
6. I understand that I have the option to be anonymous or recognizable, in ticking this box I agree to be recognizable
7. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in the research project named above and no other without my consent.
8. I understand and agree that my participation may be audio recorded. Furthermore: I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the research project named above and none other.
9. I understand and agree that what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs.
10. I understand that my responses will be published, so I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my responses.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

Postgraduate Student Researcher
 Name: Quan Liu
 Work Address: SOTA, 19 Abercromby Square, University of Liverpool, The UK, L69 7ZG
 Work Telephone: +4407729285596
 Work Email: hsgliu4@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 2.1 Participant Consent Form for Interview (Simplified Chinese)



中文版
伦理标准研究委员会
采访参与者同意表

研究项目标题:

通過山水實景演出發明與生產中國性

研究者:

刘全

请签字

1. 我确认我已经读了并且读懂此信息表, 我有过机会和时间思考上述的内容, 提问问题并且提问的问题已经得到满意的解答

2. 关于这个采访, 我理解我的参与是自愿的, 而且在任何时候, 我可以不给予任何理由、在我的权益不被侵犯的条件下自由地选择退出。此外, 如果我不想回答问题, 我可以自由地自觉回答

3. 我明白在数据保护的系统之下, 我可以在任何时候有权力接触我提供的信息, 我也可以要求提出删除这些信息。因此, 我在这一项打勾表示同意被署名

4. 我同意参与上述提及到的研究

5. 您递交的信息数据将作为一份报告被发表, 如收到一份复制备份, 请在方框里打勾

6. 我理解我的回答的机密性将被保护或者根据我的决定来被删除并且我被给予选择匿名或署名的权利

7. 我同意我提供的信息数据可以被利用到上述提到的学术研究中, 但没有我的允许不能

被其他项目利用

8. 我理解和同意我的参与将被录音。而且, 我了解和同意这些资料可以被

利用到上述提到的学术研究中去, 但没有我的允许不能被其他项目所使用

9. 你理解在给予允许使用自己的名字情况下, 将来自己的名字可能在研究中被提及, 在这种情况下, 作为研究的一部分, 如果你理解和同意你的回答将在报告、出版物和其它研究输出中被使用, 以便为了识别任何你已经做出贡献的项目, 请打勾

10. 我理解并同意我给出的数据将被发表, 所以我给予研究组成员允许并获取我给出的数据

_____	_____	_____
参与者姓名	日期	签名
_____	_____	_____
同意人姓名	日期	签名
_____	_____	_____
调研人	日期	签名

博士研究生

姓名: 刘全

工作地址: SOTA, 19 Abercromby Square, University of
Liverpool, The UK, L69 7ZG

工作电话: +4407729285596

工作邮箱: hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet for Observation (English)



Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Information Sheet for Observation in the theatre

I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD research which I am doing under the supervision of The University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. I hope that when you read the information that follows; you will feel that your participation will be highly appreciated. However, should you feel you do not want to be a part of this research, you are under no obligation to do so as it is voluntary. I hope I can get your permission to enter the theatre to do the observation. Thank you for reading about my research.

1. Title of Study

Inventing and Manufacturing Chineseness through Landscape Performing Arts

2. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to combine performing arts with tourism: exploring the interdependent relationship between tourism and Chinese large-scale landscape performing arts (CLPA). It also explores the reason why CLPA is a popular field today by examining its marketing strategy, and also the Chinese governments' and venture capital's tandem involvement.

3. Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen as one of the participants for this research as I have to get your permission to enter the theatre to do the observation. Since the researcher is observing the content of the performance, performers' mentality and their working state, and will also be staying in the local environment to examine the situation with the local stakeholders' cooperation with landscape performing arts. Hoping get the image of, the content of the performances convey or how local culture is adapted in the landscape performances, and to what extent locals are relying on the new-invented cultural products. Therefore, you are among them.

4. Do you have to take part?

This participation is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at anytime without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

5. What will happen if you take part?

Basically my research involves observing performance, audiences, performers and local stakeholders, about the content and the local environment within theatre of landscape performance. It is part of a PhD project being undertaken at the University of Liverpool. The method for data collection of observation is taking notes, pictures and filming. So your permission will not only be greatly appreciated, but also of academic interest to researchers in a wide range of disciplines globally. Please read the information sheet and consent form provided; and sign the consent form if you wish to give permission. The data collected by note will be stored as the database only for academic research, will not be used in any other purposes. Besides, if you like, the observation will be all anonymous and you will not take any responsibility for

like, the observation will be all anonymous and you will not take any responsibility for it. You do not need to response anything, however, you can check the notes, pictures and video which I made, if you do not like it or feel uncomfortable, you can ask me to delete. If you change your mind, please notify me in advance.

6. Expenses and / or payments

There are no financial rewards for participating.

7. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no risks involved in this study

8. Are there any benefits in taking part?

You get to give your opinions and share your culture.

9. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy or feel you need to make a complaint there are two avenues of redress. Initially you can contact myself at: hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk Second contact is the supervisor sara@liverpool.ac.uk and only if she cannot solve the issues, you should contact the Research Ethics Governance Officer at: ethics@liv.ac.uk. Remember to quote the study title and my name (Quan Liu) for identification purposes. Also explain in detail your complaint.

10. Will my participation be kept confidential?

It will be securely stored in line with university policy. The data you give will be anonymized; and information I have observed will be highly confidential if you wish. The data will only be used for this study so only myself and my supervisory team at the university will have access. The data will be stored until the final publication of the PhD Thesis; then all collected data will be deleted.

11. What will happen to the results of the study?

The PhD upon publication will be accessible to the public; the participants in this work will not be identifiable, unless they have given consent.

12. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If you decide you no longer want to participate, the procedure will end and all information that you have given will be destroyed. Information that is given before the decision to withdraw may be used, but only with your consent.

13. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

My contact details are as follows:

Phone No.: +4407729285596

Email: RLAU58@gmail.com

Address: School of the Arts, University of Liverpool, 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom

Appendix 3.1 Participant Information Sheet for Observation (Simplified Chinese)

中文版

伦理标准研究委员会

参与者资料单

我想邀请您参与我的博士研究，此研究是在英国利物浦大学的监督和指导下进行的。当您准备开始阅读以下信息时，您的参与就已经被给予无比的感谢。然而，此参与纯属自愿，您可以无义务地自由选择参与或拒绝参与。感谢阅读我的研究信息！

1. 研究题目

通過山水實景演出來發明與生產中國性

2. 此研究目的是什么？

此研究的目的是结合演艺与旅游，深度探究中国大型实景演出与旅游业唇齿相依的共生关系。而且，通过调查它的营销策略，政府介入和资本运作，这项研究还要分析大型实景演出这个新兴的演出种类和行业在中国为何如此的受欢迎。

3. 为什么您被选择参与这项研究？

您被选入参与此研究是因为我需要获得您的运气。由于此观察旨在纪录实景演出的内容，演员的工作环境等。

4. 您必须要参加吗？

此参与纯属自愿，参与者可以不需给予任何理由和解释拒绝参与或者随时撤销，并无需承担任何风险。

5. 如果您选择参与的话，接下来会发生什么？

大体来说，我将观察的对象主要是实景演出的内容，表演者，当地人还有管理者，比如剧院的演出环境等。希望通过观察得知实景演出对当地商业和文化的影响。这是我博士课题中研究的一部分。此观察通过笔记，拍照或摄影的方式来完成的信息采集。因此，您的参与不仅会受到真诚的感谢，还会为世界学术研究领域做出贡献。如允许我进入剧场进行观察，请阅读信息表和同意表并且签字。收集的资料将被储存作为学术研究的数据备份，除此之外，不会被利用在其他意图上。而且，此观察可以全程匿名，您不会对此负有任何责任。此观察过程将全程保持匿名。

6. 花费和支付

此参与没有经济上的报酬。

7. 参与有风险吗？

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Date: 08/06/2017

此参与纯属学术研究，无任何风险

8. 此参与有什么好处或者利益吗？

您给予的观点是对学术的贡献，而且是一次分享文化的好机会。

9. 您如果有任何不高兴或者有其它问题怎么办？

如果您有任何问题不满意或者想咨询投诉，请联系我的邮箱 hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk, 第二联系人是导师 sara@liverpool.ac.uk，如果导师解决不了问题，您可以通过邮件联系利物浦大学的伦理研究部门的工作人员：ethics@liv.ac.uk。请记得提供我的姓名（刘全）作为认证检索。

10. 您的参与将会是匿名吗？

您的参与将会是匿名，而且您的身份信息也会被高度保护。数据将会由利物浦大学保存，只有我和我的导师可以获取数据，直到我的论文研究提交至学业结束。电子数据将被删除，文件也将被粉碎处理。

11. 您的参与对研究会带来哪些结果？

博士研究成果会向公众开放并发表，参与者信息将不会被透露除非他们给予同意。

12. 如果您想终止参与，会发生什么？

如果您决定不再参与，采访程序将被终止。如果新希望的话，关于您提供的所有的采访信息将被删除或撤销。

13. 如果您有其他问题，可以联系谁？

我的联系方式：

电话: +4407729285596

邮箱: RLAU58@gmail.com

地址: School of the Arts, University of Liverpool, 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom

Appendix 4 Participant Consent Form for Observation

(English)



Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR OBSERVATION

Title of Research Project: Inventing and Manufacturing Chineseness through Lanscape Performing Arts

Researcher(s): Quan Liu

Please initial box

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [08/06/2017] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>2. I understand that my participation for the observation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for checking the data that Mr. Quan Liu has got, and should I choose to no longer participate, I can also request the destruction of that information.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>4. I agree to give Mr. Quan Liu permission to get access to the theatre to do the observation and let him observe the content of the performance, performers' mentality and their working state.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>5. The information that Mr. Quan Liu has collected will be published as a report; please tick the box below if you would like to receive a copy.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>6. I agree for the data collected from Mr. Quan Liu's observation to be used in the research project named above and no other without my consent.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>7. I understand and agree that Quan will may be record the audio and/or video and/or make the note. Furthermore: I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the research project named above and none other.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>8. I understand that the observation remains anonymous and agree that what Quan Liu has observed as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/>
<input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <p>9. I understand that I give permission for members of the research team to have access to the data.</p> | <input style="width: 40px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |



Participant Name	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

Postgraduate Student Researcher

Name: Quan Liu
Work Address: SOTA, 19 Abercromby Square, University of
Liverpool, The UK, L69 7ZG
Work Telephone: +4407729285596
Work Email: hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 4.1 Participant Consent Form for Observation (Simplified Chinese)



中文版

伦理标准研究委员会

接受观察参与者同意表

研究项目标题:

通過山水實景演出發明與生產中國性

研究者:

刘全

请签字

1. 我确认我已经读了并且读懂此信息表，我有过机会和时间思考上述的内容，提问问题并且提问的问题已经得到满意的解答。
2. 我理解我的参与是自愿的，而且在任何时候，我可以不给予任何理由、在我的权益不被侵犯的条件下自由地选择退出。此外，如果我不想回答问题，我可以自由地自觉回答。
3. 我明白在数据保护的系统之下，我可以在任何时候有权力接触我提供的信息，我也可以要求提出删除这些信息
4. 我同意并允许刘全先生进入剧场进行观察调研，包括观察演出，演员后场等等。
5. 您递交的信息将作为一份报告被发表，如收到一份复制备份，请在方框里打勾
6. 我同意我提供的数据可以被利用到上述提到的学术研究中，但没有我的允许不能被其他项目利用
7. 我理解和同意我的参与将被记笔记，录音或者录影。而且，我了解和同意这些资料可以被利用到上述提到的学术研究中去，但没有我的允许不能被其他项目所利用
8. 此观察是在匿名的情况下进行的，在这种情况下，作为研究的一部分，如果你理解和同意刘全先生所观察的或者写下的将在报告、出版物和其它研究输出中被使用，以便为了识别任何你已经做出贡献的项目，请打勾
9. 我明白我的回应除了用于学术研究以外将被严格保密，我只给予研究团队的成员允许获取数据。

参与者姓名

日期

签名

3

Version 2.18

Date: 08/06/2017



同意人姓名 日期 签名

调研人 日期 签名

博士研究生
姓名: 刘全
工作地址: SOTA, 19 Abercromby Square, University of

Liverpool, The UK, L69 7ZG
工作电话: +4407729285596
工作邮箱: hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 5 Authorisation from Scenery Culture Industry Company for the Academic Use of Videos



Scenery Culture Industry Ltd.
8-2-1601, Baoli Oriental Centre,
129, Chaoyang District,
Beijing, China, 100025
T:+86-(0)10-8458 5550(669)
W:<http://www.shan-shui.com/>

山水盛典視頻授權學術使用批准

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被授權人：劉全及代表機構利物浦大學音樂學院（School of Music, University of Liverpool）

立合約人于 2020 年 2 月 24 日約定由授權人將其擁有著作產權被授權人使用，雙方所訂之授權範圍及其它約定悉明定如下：

1. 授權範圍

所授權利性質：非獨家授權，僅用於學術研究（無任何商業利益用途）

所授權利內容：劉全僅得以影音播放和學術研究方式（演出內容分析）使用授權著作

2. 授權使用著作：《會安記憶》視頻

3. 授權使用範圍

地區：	英國
學術範圍：	學術論文《Chineseness? Inventing and Manufacturing Touristic Landscape Performing Arts (LPA) Extravaganza in the Mountain Water》，期刊發表，學術論壇及講演
使用形式：	視頻內容分析和播放
播放範圍：	學術活動

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地址：中国北京市朝阳区八里庄北里 129 号院保利东方中心 8 号楼 B 座 16 层 邮编 100025
電話：010-84585550/85918600
郵箱：info@shan-shui.com

簽字蓋章：



被授權人：劉全
地址：80-82 Bedford St S, Liverpool L7 7BT

電話：+4407729285596
郵箱：hsqliu4@liverpool.ac.uk

簽字蓋章：

Handwritten signature