Impressions of China: Zhang Yimou’s outdoor theme productions

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary mediated spectacles used in regional tourism strategies. In recent years there has been growing occurrence of ‘formatted entertainment models’ in China. With this in mind, this thesis explores the ways in which traditional cultural resources are being converted to generate diverse, hybrid commodities. The unique business model of Zhang Yimou, known as the *Impression Series* provides the case study. The thesis examines multilayered representations of products which continuously form, and are formatted, under the logic of the cultural market. The case study highlights the revival of traditional Chinese culture, a new branding of the Chinese national image and rising ‘soft power’.

Primarily, the thesis argues that personal celebrity endorsement is replacing political propaganda heroes in promoting an alternative image of China. Zhang Yimou and *Impression West Lake* function as a dual branding mechanism that combines ‘people marketing’ and ‘place marketing’ for the development of a ‘created in China’ cultural commodity as well as for the generation of positive economic outcomes.

Secondly, the thesis identifies how natural resources linked with a local tourism industry are articulated into cultural products and how this is experienced by visitors. Culture is a core component of China’s ‘soft power.’ Cultural experience’ strategies such as *Impression* combine global marketing and local cultural forces. The thesis argues that a creative
entrepreneur has more advantages in promoting ‘soft power’ than governmental propaganda strategies.

Thirdly, *Impression West Lake* encapsulates the rise of the creative entrepreneur with the help of local government authorities. Even though government cultural policy-makers can facilitate the cultural infrastructure, they ultimately rely on the entrepreneur’s creative vision and understanding of the market.

Finally, based on the study of *Impression West Lake*, the thesis outlines future opportunities for social, cultural and economic reform in China.

**Key Words:**

Soft power, national identity, creative models, cultural resources, creative entrepreneur
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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Beijing Olympics of 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo 2010 have been catalysts for an extraordinary growth in cultural consumption, cultural tourism and arts development. While the Chinese government’s Five-year Economic Development Plans have stressed scientific and technological innovation, a number of scholars (Keane, 2010; Li, 2008; O’Connor and Gu, 2006) have pointed out how the shift from a manufactory economy towards a creative or innovation-based economy is generating new awareness of China’s place in the world. In turn, entrepreneurs, academics and government sectors have collaborated to foster economic outcomes.

Aside from his film output, Zhang Yimou has become a creative entrepreneur sought after by local governments who wish to ‘add creativity’ to existing traditional cultural resources. Indeed, such cultural displays highlight the new branding of Chinese national identity, reflected in the term ‘soft power’ (ruan shili).

*Impression West Lake* is a production under Zhang Yimou’s branding. It is an outdoor theme performance combining traditional music, dance, pop culture and visual displays. It represents the renewal of Chinese culture in regional tourism. It is one of the *Impression Series*, a series of similar but different cultural formats. *Impression West Lake* is performed at West Lake in Hangzhou, China.
Entertainment performance in tourism locations is not a new strategy in China. What is newer is the involvement of film directors. Zhang Yimou launched his *Impression Series* with *Impression Liu Sanjie* in 2003; this is still running in Guizhou. He continued the series with *Impression Lijiang* in 2006 and *Impression West Lake* in 2007. *Impression West Lake* is the third instalment and emphasises Han folk stories, innovative and technical stage effects and the beauty of the Hangzhou urban landscape. The location of the series in different tourism places within China illustrates the formatting of the *Impressions* model into local tourism development strategies. From 2006 to 2010, this format grew rapidly. In addition to *Impression Lijiang*, *Impression Liu Sanjie*, *Impression West Lake*, there is now *Impression Hainan*, and *Impression Da Hong Pao*. Using such formatted business models, the idea has become central to local tourism development plans with support from regional government and private investors.

‘Impression’ aptly captures the characteristics of these productions. The Oxford English Dictionary (2007) provides four definitions of ‘impression’. Firstly, it is ‘the image or feeling a person or thing gives to someone’s mind, as regards its strength or quality’ (OED, 2007, 1341). The live theme performance is an ‘experience’ that draws emotion from audiences. Secondly, impression means ‘a mark left by pressure.’ This corresponds to an experience which leaves a memory such that a person might seek to buy a souvenir or memento. Thirdly, impression is interpreted as a model or a mould that can be replicated. Moreover, Zhang Yimou is an ‘impresario’, a person who arranges performances in theatres. The *Impression Series* reflect Zhang’s cinematic
legacy. Zhang Yimou and his production teams have built a reputation for quality outdoor spectacles. And that reputation has continued; it has attracted international collaboration in content, financial investments from the private sectors and favoured policies from regional governments.

Impressionism is a style of painting originating in France from 1870 to 1900. Impressionism produces effects by light and colour rather than by details of form. Similar to the painting Impression, Sunrise by Claude Monet, Impression West Lake evokes light and colour. The historical impression of West Lake is an artistic reference in Zhang Yimou’s production model. Characteristics of Impressionist paintings include movement as a crucial element of human perception and experience and unusual visual angles. Not a painter but a stage director, Zhang Yimou embodies Impressionist features with modern multimedia techniques such as lighting. The music and storytelling also echo impressionism. Impressionism in the storytelling is characterized by suggestion and atmosphere, and eschews the emotional excesses of the romantic era. Closely related to Symbolism, the storytelling of Impression West Lake selects identifiable Chinese content and local folk story themes to convey sensory impressions. The style of impressionism corresponds with Zhang Yimou’s signature cinematic style of simplifying complex cultural resources, expressing visual sensations and repackaging these to a broader audience.

In the Impression Series authentic Chinese cultural resources are central to generating a unique experience. Once modernized, they are capable of broad audience appeal, of
attracting different cultures and producing an entertainment ‘experience’ that benefits tourism, the local economy and national identity.

My thesis will investigate how the renowned Chinese film director Zhang Yimou has turned his attention to converting traditional cultural resources into contemporary mediated spectacles that are used to rejuvenate regional tourism and add economic value. The case study *Impression West Lake* is a unique business model in many respects. The *Impression Series* has become a market benchmark through its attention to copyright and its marketing approach. The marketing strategies include packaging regional celebrities to target varied marketing segments.

By exploring the content, formatting, production and business strategy, I will make some critical observations relating to creative industries development in China. This thesis explores *Impression West Lake* as an experience commodity. I examine how traditional cultural elements provide a core resource for the concept and content. The concept of the *Impression Series* requires a story embedded in the local culture. A secondary purpose of the research is to explore the development of the scenic live-action performance model in enabling leisure opportunities to be integrated into practical business models. This new ‘creative format’ (Moran and Keane 2010) is significant within the Chinese social, political and cultural context. It raises questions about cultural identity, power and national branding. As a unique cultural product *Impression West Lake* in particular represents the reconversion of Chinese culture into modern tourist friendly industries.
Five central questions arise from these observations:

- Why did the renowned Chinese film director Zhang Yimou turn his attention to converting traditional cultural resources into contemporary mediated spectacles?
- How has Zhang managed to exploit a (formatted) business model that can be used in regional tourism development strategies?
- What cultural elements have been selected to add value to the content of the performance?
- To what extent is it possible to identify critical success factors of this experiential cultural good; for instance, how does it target different markets and demographics?
- What is the relationship with cultural branding and soft power in China?

These related questions provide important methodological implications for documenting the development of production and business models. Specifically, how does the production team involve their audiences/consumers? How do they identify the diverse needs of customer segments of different ages, interests and backgrounds? I focus on operations including marketing strategies, core concepts, pricing and profits, and the product value chain.

In addition to the continuing popularity there are critical issues to consider; not only the question of Chinese cultural identity and authenticity, but also important questions including intellectual property and copyright, cultural workers and their employment
conditions, environmental issues and the fundamental tensions between high art and commercial exploitation, the tension between ‘public’ culture and ‘private’ profit, and the sustainability of cultural and creative products. Due to the scale of this Research Master’s thesis, there is insufficient scope to explore these issues in detail. However, because they were raised in many of the journalists’ reports, I have attempted to show how they inform the project. More research should be conducted on these important issues in the future.

Furthermore the case study is particularly useful for predicting the future direction of cultural exports – represented by the slogan ‘Created in China’ (Keane, 2007). The awaking of culture value in the creative industries sector has extended to the concept of ‘created in China’. *Impression West Lake* has transformed from its local origins and has achieved global reach. Finally, the examination of national branding and the pros and cons of thinking about China as a ‘creative economy’ in this thesis provide valuable lessons for policy makers.

The *Impression West Lake* model allows for a development of future applications. Zhang Yimou’s creative production model illustrates how traditional Chinese cultural values constitute the core resources of production. Will this become a model for the emerging Chinese talent pool to follow? Will they replicate or adapt? What are the consequences of Zhang’s cultural entrepreneurship?

The case study shows how the concept of ‘experience’ interacts with ‘creativity’ and
‘soft power’. These topics, as well as cultural nationalism, are related to the research topic but do not constitute the focus of investigation, which is the ‘outdoor theme production’ typified by *Impression West Lake*. In the thesis in the chapter entitled ‘cultural nationalism, cultural branding and Chinese soft power’ I have indicated some relevant literature on this rather large topic. What is more salient to the project is how the growing significance of China’s cultural identity offers opportunities to build new creative and cultural models. China’s own cultural identity associated with emerging ‘soft power’ has influenced cultural products and exports (Keane, 2010). The thesis therefore examines the role of cultural entrepreneurship in shaping the rise of soft power in China. In effect entrepreneurs such as Zhang are ‘soft power prophets’ who propose alternative development strategies.

**Methods and approach**

In this thesis I apply a case study approach (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003), combined with focus groups and a mini survey. My research takes into consideration how Zhang Yimou’s reputation influences the context of production. Through this case study, I investigate Zhang Yimou’s persona and his business model.

I employ secondary resources to introduce Zhang Yimou’s career journey through a review of his work. I utilise production websites, sales and accounting records, magazine articles and marketing research reports. In my research I relied a great deal on
web-based sources primarily because the topic of outdoor theme productions is so new; moreover the details about Hangzhou cultural policy are freely available online. Sources include Impression West Lake box office sales, customer viewership rates, and cost and revenue figures. I include information from newspapers, government statistics, internet and professional bodies. I examined newspapers and trade publications based in China for articles that contain remarkably candid coverage of issues dealing with revenues and interviews with Zhang Yimou and other co-directors. These include Global Times, Xinhua News, The China Daily, The People’s Daily (Renmin Ribao), CCTV (China Central Television), CRI (China Radio International), Hangzhou Municipal Government Official Website, Hangzhou City Travel Committee website, China National Tourism Administration, Caijing Magazine, Netease online news, The New York Times, and The Jakarta Globe, as well as tourism websites.

Other research includes customer comments or complaints on line. The secondary research also consists of articles from international newspapers and magazines that reported on areas of cultural production of Impression West Lake. Information was obtained from Chinese websites and bbs. The online sources provide a range of issues that are discussed in Chapter 4; for example they highlight issues regarding criticism of the eco-friendly production of Impression West Lake. Through the bbs of a cultural worker from Impression West Lake, information was obtained about complaints of low salaries and workplace conditions.

Although it is relatively easy to collect secondary data, I am aware of the limitations.
The sample from the secondary resources used to identify workplace relations issues may be small. The *Impression West Lake* production company self-published information on their official website and marketing distribution website; however, the data there may not be reputable because it concerns self interest and conveys publicity. Therefore, there is some weakness in critical evidence based on the secondary research methods.

The opportunity to gather primary data has been limited by the conditions of my Masters research. However, in order to provide more evidence, I integrated some survey data, which facilitates a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I conducted a focus group questionnaire in order to glean more about the reception by local, domestic and international audiences. I also surveyed 10 audiences of *Impression West Lake*. The questionnaire is reproduced in the appendix section.

The surveys, although limited, reveal the demographic and psychographic characteristic of audiences based on their lifestyle (consumer activates, interests, opinions), age, race, region, income, education and occupations.

**Chapters**

The main body of the thesis is divided into five chapters:
Chapter one introduced Zhang Yimou’s creative journey from his cinematic outputs to his recently choreographing of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The chapter focuses on how Zhang has transformed his directorial work and style in staging outdoor theatrical spectacles such as the Impression Series and provides background about Hangzhou, the location of my case study Impression West Lake. The chapter introduces methods and discusses the importance of the case study.

Chapter two lays out literature review and methodology, in which it defines terms in creative industries, as well as the key concepts of creative entrepreneurs and cultural adaptation.

Chapter three is concerned with an analysis of strategic factors of content/carriage, hardware/software, and producer/consumers. It first provides background of the story, location and adaptation of the Impression West Lake content. Then, it analyses market considerations in celebrity packaging, product value chain, ticket pricing and the ‘cultural experience package’. Drawing aspects from ‘cultural adaptation’, ‘product life cycle’ and ‘creative dream cycle’ theories, together with the analysis of the case study Impression West Lake, the chapter leads to an appraisal of Zhang Yimou’s creative production models.

- Chapter four examines ‘the impression’, which is cultural branding and soft
power. It discusses American’s leading global culture, Japan’s ‘gross national cool’ and the ‘Korean wave’. It focuses on the staging of *Impression West Lake* as a showcase for China’s international image and the harmonization of East Asian culture in the tourism sectors since the Beijing Olympics. It sheds light on the China’s continued modernization drive beyond the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

- Chapter five discusses issues regarding to intellectual property, ownership, labour issues, problems of cultural adaptation and environmental protection.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

In *Impression West Lake* Zhang Yimou is a senior consultant rather than hands-on director. His distinctive commercial and artistic style contributes to the production. Zhang’s creative journey underlies transformations in Chinese society and illustrates globalization and its contradictions. His early works on the form of the social allegory favoured western tastes and earned him many awards, yet his later mainstream international hits ‘favoured aestheticism’ where visual effects blended with cultural elements (Gateward, 2001, 169). The emergence of Zhang’s *Impression Series* can be traced from his background. In this chapter I examine the shift from cinematic works towards stage work and its commercialization, culminating in the *Impression Series*. I explore the achievements of his cinema and analyse criticisms of his work. Finally I discuss how the Hangzhou Municipal government has played a major role in the success of *Impression West Lake*.

1.1 From an international hero to a national hero

Zhang’s unique and consistent visual style is reflected in cinema, stage productions and outdoor spectacles. Chinese culture is the essence and muse of his work. Zhang catapulted Chinese cinema onto the world stage, at once garnering international movie awards and drawing the attention of the domestic censors. With his transition from art cinema to commercial productions in 1994, Zhang’s career reflects the social, economic and political climate shifts in China during the past two decades.

In his early artistic journey, Zhang used China’s society and culture as a means of exploring oppression and human relationships. Another comment by Tu (2005) shows the significance of Chinese cultural assets as an influence on the director: ‘Traditional rituals, traditional beliefs, and traditional life in this place may have deeply influenced Zhang’s early life and his films. Consequently, his early films are closely connected to the old customs and traditions of Chinese society’ (Tu, 2005, 22).

His early works endure the turbulence of the 1940s through the 1970s, a key transition period in contemporary Chinese history and social transformation (Gateward, 2001).
This is the golden period of Zhang Yimou. *To Live* was acknowledged by Western movie festivals but was banned in China. The extravagant display of exotic colours and Chinese customs captured the eyes of the international filmmaking academy. His films in these periods achieved great international acclaim and won awards in Cannes, Hong Kong, Berlin and Australia. As a consequence, Zhang gained international fame; his works were believed to be ‘superbly crafted and refined cinematic texts worthy of critical attention.’ (Liang, 1999, 3)

With the rising attention of Chinese movies and culture globally, Zhang Yimou’s career shifted focus: from being an artistically and critically acclaimed filmmaker to becoming a box office success. He adapted his filmmaking style to suit a commercial audience with the release of *Hero* (2002), and followed it up with the *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* in 2006 and 2007. The commercial characteristics of these works coincide with China’s recent rise in the world geopolitical economy (Larson, 2008). The increasing affluence of the Chinese audience along with access to modern cinema encouraged Zhang to shift his film-making style to include commercial elements.

His recent productions share several features of commercialisation. Primarily, they gained commercial success both domestically and internationally. *Hero* achieved the record for highest box office takings in Chinese film history in 2002 with $53,710,019 in the domestic box office and $122,500,000 in overseas box office incomes (Tu, 2005, 29). Zhang has become China’s most successful film-maker; he proved his skill not
only in translating traditional Chinese themes into international box office successes but also in contributing to the Chinese movie industry by drawing Chinese audiences back to cinemas. According to some Zhang is considered a ‘saviour’ of the Chinese film industry (Tu, 2005).

Indulging in commercial success signals a number of significant departures from Zhang's earlier works. Hero, House of Flying Daggers and Curse of the Golden Flower contain fragmented narratives highlighted by colour and symbolism. There is a withdrawal of commitment to realism and comprehensible narratives. All three movies are focused more on cinematographic features. The New York Times writer Robert Mackey commented that major colour themes dominate the screen, a different colour for each perspective of a story (www.nytimes.com/2004/08/15/moview/film-cracking-the-color-code-of-hero.html). A renewed desire for enlightenment modernity is wedded to all these three films. According to David Leiwei Li, they promote ‘contemporary Chinese integration into a global capitalist modernity’ (2007, 301).

On the other hand, all these movies feature Chinese elements such as kung fu, traditional forms, architecture and spatial organizations, elements which reflect splendid aspects of Chinese history and culture. Later movies have ignored the negative elements of Chinese culture. For instance, the greatest commercial hits of Zhang are martial arts extravaganzas. Hero was expressed visually, featured aestheticized cultural forms: fantastical martial arts, calligraphy, Chinese chess and Daoist mental virtuosity.
Lau (2007) has commented that *Hero* presents Chinese culture with style and dignity, a way of developing a ‘Chinese cultural blockbuster’. The ‘Chinese cultural blockbuster’ refers to a cultural product not only having a Chinese story but also, more importantly, Chinese aesthetics and values.

There are two major criticisms of these recent movies; first, they are poor at constructing narratives and second, they no longer examine social problems in-depth. Chan (2004) believes that Zhang’s later films lack character development and plot, and that they are distanced from historical reality. Another critic (Li, 2007) said that the films are not critical of society. Li (2007) commented,

In this later period, Zhang’s camera no longer lavished attention and affection on sovereign subjects…instead, it turns with fondness towards the masses. (Li, 2007, 302)
1.2 Multiple roles

Zhang has transferred his cinematic style into other platforms. Zhang began to be experimentally active outside of the film world with a commitment to stage direction in *Turandot* (2005). In addition, there was the Beijing Olympic Inauguration and Closing Ceremony in 2008 and *The First Emperor* which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2008. *(The New York Times,*
Significantly, the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony viewed worldwide by several billion people, introduced a vast new audience to Zhang's impressive work in the realm of live musical and dance productions. The Olympic performances were a taste of what lay in store for viewers of the Impression Series. The audience for Zhang Yimou was expanding from cinema fans and theatre lovers to tourists.

In comparing his film works to staged plays, it is evident that his style of simplified narrative with rich visual sentiment is more suited to the latter; for example, the core concept in the Impression Series casts abstract story forms that leave the imagination up to the viewer. Zhang’s outdoor musicals are globally accessible through the universal language of music. For Zhang, the antiquity of the historical setting and the linguistic particularity of classical Chinese culture are embedded in the story theme, in innovative technological stage effects and music. Compared with cinema, the difference in the mode of communication through stage performance allows the audience to feel a unique quality that I define in my thesis as ‘cultural experience’. In this sense the audience is not ‘lost in translation’. The signature of Zhang’s visual cinematic, for example, a green umbrella carried by the White Lady in Impression West Lake serves to make the theme comprehensible to global audiences. Zhang’s recreation of a modern performance from old materials mixes Western and Eastern influences, traditional and modern elements. Cultural mixing and technical innovations are employed for quite
different aims and entail different outcomes. As for *Impression West Lake*, the outcomes are a technically flawless production, a visually interesting canvas and a product that embodies sentimentality, emotion and power.

1.3 Controversial character: art or commerce?

Although he has scored major cinematic triumphs, Zhang Yimou has become embroiled in controversy when he has submitted films and musical spectacles that are commercially successful both in China and abroad. Domestic critics argue that his work is not subversive, that he is just pandering to western stereotypes of China and that he is not really a Chinese filmmaker. For example, the narratives of rural and the urban life from his early work were criticized by Chinese critics as catering to the ‘eyes of foreigners’ and Western beliefs that China is backward and anachronistic (Chow, 1995, 155). More recently, critics have accused him of selling out to pure entertainment over art. Kevin Lee (2007) has gone so far as to criticise Zhang as a ‘commercial hack who sells Orientalist imagery’. Lee (2007) believes that his later work has compromised his art to appease the government.

China's transformation from revolutionary socialism has not been without political twists and turns. In this context, Zhang’s career pathway has been about survival first and artistic value second. In this manner Zhang's productions have encountered tensions central to the globalization of capital and culture, as well as the need to please local supporters. With his survival assured and his resources virtually unlimited, Zhang
Yimou has rediscovered artistic values. In spite of his streak of critically acclaimed commercial films, he has continued to produce more experimental work, a combination of cultural and commercial elements. He has turned more attention to directing profitable stage performances and making spectacles. Hence, I regard him as a ‘creative entrepreneur’ in this research. *Impression West Lake* illustrates a combination of art and commerce.

### 1.4 Zhang Yimou becomes a brand

Zhang’s distinctive aesthetic style, his strong artistic sensibility for large scale outdoor spectacles, as well as his controversial reputation, have added to his image. He has become a fashionable brand. His appearance in advertisements and his direction of advertisements has attracted publicity within China and globally. Because of Zhang’s personal achievement before the early 1990s, every film he has made since has received great media attention. This popularity has delivered him the respect of the Chinese film industry. Therefore, Zhang’s personal achievements are one of the elements that have contributed to the success of his later films and his outdoor spectacles. In other words, the great success of Zhang’s later works is not only the result of the films themselves, but also his reputation.

Another factor is that Zhang’s oeuvre has distinctive artistry. His works are particularly noted for their use of colour and symbolism. Therefore, he is referred as a master in
most Chinese media and production promotions. According to the poster of *Impression Series* and *Turandot*, these are ‘Zhang Yimou’s masterpieces’.

![Poster of Impression Series and Turandot](http://en.piaowutong.com/Web/Ticket/ticket_4976.html)

**Figure 2: Zhang Yimou’s Jurandot Price List and Poster (Source: [http://en.piaowutong.com/Web/Ticket/ticket_4976.html](http://en.piaowutong.com/Web/Ticket/ticket_4976.html))**

The *Impression Series* production extended Zhang’s brand equity. ‘A brand leveraging strategy uses the power of an existing brand name to support a company’s entry into a new, but related, product category’ (Giddens, 2010, 3). Generally, consumers maintain a consistent brand perception until disappointed. The benefits of brand equity are that the cost of introducing a brand-leveraged product is less than introducing an independent new product due to a much smaller investment in brand development and advertising recognition. A full line permits coordination of product offerings in the management and investment level in the business and government relations’ networks. Zhang’s
profile has leveraged a series of branded products; movies, theatrical plays, national
events and outdoor tourism spectacles. Moreover, Zhang’s oeuvre has distinctive
artistry. He can transform his artistry and celebrity identity from movies to stage
directing as well as outdoor spectacles. Moreover, he references his own cinematic
theme and style in the formatting of the core concepts of the *Impression Series*.

Figure 3: Zhang Yimou’s cultural and creative product extension

The continuity in Zhang’s work reflects his reputation. The brand is perceived as
Zhang’s brand personality: cultured, educated, dedicated, simplified in narrative but
rich in visual display. His brand equity is accomplished, influential, and competent. The
continuity of his brand prolongs the circulation of his cultural products to fit the
product-life-cycle concept, which I will discuss in the final section in chapter three
titled ‘The Process of Circulation’.
Zhang has a reputation for Orientalism according to some accounts. Rey Chow (2005, 22) argues that Zhang is a practitioner of ‘Oriental’s Orientalism.’ ‘Orientalism’ is a critical concept that suggests that Eastern societies may appear at once as objects of admiration for their civilisational achievements but that these are often stereotypes that mask the complexity of the societies themselves (Dirlik, 1996). Zhang, being ethnic Chinese, has attempted to install a specific cultural significance in *Impression West Lake* that no other non-Chinese director or the production team would attempt to do. He mentioned many times in interviews that he feels bound to China—to the language, history and traditions that he believes are the ground of his creativity (Stone, 2010).

His works meet the trend of China's self-presentation to the world as a deeply authentic, culturally rich country. Before the Beijing Olympics, which was viewed worldwide by several billion people, David Leiwei Li (2007) suggested that Zhang had become an official organ of the state. Zhang’s promotional skill facilitated Beijing’s winning bid of the 2008 Olympics. Even the Cultural Minister Cai Wu told reporters in the run-up to the National Day festivities that Zhang is now the perfect ambassador for the authorities. ‘Zhang Yimou is a major contributor to the development of Chinese culture...’ (Wu, 2009) As one of the key symbols of the new China, this legacy brings him and his production team plenty of exposure and ‘story angles’. His current good relationship with government in turn facilitates collaboration with business in the creative industries. Indeed, Zhang has arguably positioned himself as the chief artistic ambassador for the ‘new China image’, an emerging political and economic giant. Zhang’s later work,
including *Impression West Lake*, is a great medium for building a unifying national symbol.

Zhang’s international fame has helped him to collaborate in cross-cultural projects with world-class artists and with emerging talent. The example of my case study is the single most significant collaboration, between Zhang and the opera composer, Kitaro. This pairing of Japanese and Chinese is a rare combination of two artists at the peak of their creative talents.

### 1.4 The *Impression Series*

Zhang Yimou has explored new art and commercial formats in the ongoing outdoor scenic musical *Impression Series*. The *Impression Series* consists of *Impression Liu Sanjie* (2003), *Impression Lijiang* (2006) and *Impression West Lake* (2007). *Impression, Liu Sanjie* is performed in an outdoor scenic setting on the Li River with a background of mountains in Yangshuo County of Guilin City in South China. In 2006, Zhang Yimou continued his Impression Series with *Impression Lijiang* set at the bottom of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Lijiang, Yunnan province. It is still in production performing twice a day, most days of the year. In 2007, Zhang Yimou premiered *Impression West Lake*. As the successful models are set in the tourism locations of Lijiang and Hangzhou, more and more tourism destinations in China have sought to replicate the model with different local investors under Zhang Yimou’s reputation.
Zhang continues to extend his *Impression Series* with *Impression Da Hong Pao*, set amidst the natural landscape of the Wuyi Mountains in south-eastern China in 2010 and the *Impression Ri Yue Tan*, which is invested in by Guo Tai-Ming is the CEO of Foxconn Electronic Inc. in Taiwan.

The *Impression Series* has provided recognition of the pivotal role of scenic live-action performances strongly featuring local traditional culture and people. The spectacles reflect the cinematic approach by highlighting the use of symbolism and the power of imagination and sensation. Co-directors Wang Chaoge and Fan Yue were also involved in the Olympic Games. In the promotional advertisements for the *Impression Series*, Zhang, Wang and Fan are addressed as the ‘Iron Triangle of the *Impression Series*’. All four performances are co-directed by Wang Chaoge and Fan Yue. According to the introductory information on the *Impression West Lake* official website, Wang is a stage director well known in China for the show *China National Spirit*, staged in the People's Great Hall in 1995, while the multi-award winning Fan is a dancing/art designer and director in the General Political Singing and Dancing Troupe. (*Impression West Lake* Official Website, 2010, http://www.hzyxxh.com/en/index.htm)
Zhang Yimou demonstrates three characteristics of a creative entrepreneur. First, he has a core talent which he exercises passionately. Second, he is not only a creator, someone who has original ideas, but he is also a facilitator/entrepreneur in the sense of someone who makes ideas happen. Third, Zhang has used these personal skills not only in his own core field of film-making but in tourism development. This restless inter-industry transfer of skills is typical of many creative people. Zhang’s personal visions have attracted private investors in line with the regional government policies to build creative partnerships (Keane, 2010). Zhang’s gift is not only artistic expression but also technological innovation. He was the first person to seed tailored productions such as the Impression Series and then harvest them in tourism centres in China. The Impression Series has been popularized. Now many scenic spots and their local governments are hoping to invite Zhang and his team to participate, or following Zhang’s lead, to just copy the ‘format’.
1.6 Zhang’s input in *Impression West Lake*

The drama represents the legend of the White Lady Snake and Xu Xian, a love story well known in Chinese history. This story is associated with Hangzhou local culture. The tragic Chinese story of *Butterfly Lovers* is also recounted. There are five episodes: Making Acquaintance, Falling in Love, Parting, Memory and Impression. The performance of *Impression West Lake* has become a unique metropolitan out-door performance on a natural stage setting located in one of the most famous tourism destinations in China.

Zhang’s direction continues to use his trademark minimal dialogue, haunting music and stunning visuals to tell the story. From a tourism marketing perspective it creates a branded commodity, from its deliberate pitch of aesthetic distinction to the international stage music performance. A unique experience occurs when the modern format of light, dance, and water effects combine through sound and image. The natural landscape is combined with vivid cultural symbols and cultural nuances.

The music is composed by the Japanese ‘New Age’ musician Kitaro and sung by Jane Zhang Liangying. Kitaro (original name Masanori Takahashi), was born in 1953 in Joyohashi, Japan. He is a Grammy and Golden Globe-winning artist who used the electronic synthesizer to demonstrate the spirit of oriental culture in the 1980s. His music was used in TV programs in China. The success of his *Silk Road* (Kitaro, 2010,
http://www.last.fm/music/Kitaro/_/Silk+Road) provides a connection between Japan and China’s cultural heritage. The show's soundtrack also features rising mainland Chinese pop star Jane Zhang Liangying who appeals to segments of the youth generation. Student audiences are attracted to her theme song in *Impression West Lake* because she identifies as talent from the grassroots. She rose to stardom after winning third-place in the 2005 season of the *Super Girl* (chaoji nvsheng) contest, a national singing competition adapted from the successful Idol format. She gained unprecedented popularity in China with 3.52 million votes (Chen & Xu, 2005, 33). She is promoted as a world peace activist and an Eco-artist and has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show and at the Grammy’s.

With the music and theme song composed by Kitaro and sung by Zhang Liangying, elegance and mystery has been added to the landscape show. ‘New age’ implies a way of life and a set of values that engage with spiritual practices and philosophies. It plays a role in inspiring contemporary activities and lifestyles such as meditation and includes elements of ecology and environmentalism (Heelas, 1996). The international fad of ‘New Age Movement’ collaborates well with the concept of the *Impression West Lake* and its environmental friendly publicity.

The main purpose of the *Impression Series* is of course commercial success. The creative inspiration is to some extent dependent on commercial formatting, production and promotion. The target audiences include not only local residents and domestic
visitors but international tourists. Hence, *Impression West Lake* presents a contemporary rendition of a classical Chinese work in a way that is acceptable to a broad audience.

![Figure 5: Poster of Impression West Lake](Source: www.morehangzhou.com/.../venue-1949-open.html)

### 1.7 Location, location

The *Impression Series* favours picturesque scenery. Each is staged in a well-known Chinese ‘scenic spot’ (jingdian) or tourism location. *Impression West Lake* selected West Lake as a typical Chinese tourism area. Hangzhou is one of the cities chosen by the central government in China for tourism development. In 1999, West Lake was ranked among the ten top beauty spots and was designated as the national model by CNTA. CNTA is the China National Tourism Administration, directly regulated by the
State Council, which is responsible for developing, promoting and regulating Chinese tourism. CNTA supervises lower level tourism authorities, such as provincial and municipal tourism administrations. The central government has already devised many development plans concerning regional economic growth as well as cultural and creative industries preservation in each region. (China National Tourism Administration, 2010, http://en.cnta.gov.cn/)

(Source: http://www.travelchinaguide.com/map.htm)
1.7.1 Economy

As the capital of Zhejiang province, Hangzhou is the regional centre of provincial politics, economy, culture, science and education. Geographically, Hangzhou is located close to China’s east coast, in the lower reaches of the Qiantang River at the southern end of the Grand Canal (Beijing - Hangzhou). It covers an area of 682 km² with a resident population of approximately 8 million as of 2003 (China National Tourist Office, 2010, http://www.cn.to.org/hangzhou.asp). The economic strength is ranked second among all provincial capitals while its economy is listed in the top ten of all cities in China. The economy has developed rapidly. In addition, Hangzhou has a high level of entrepreneurial culture which is seen in the proliferation of Zhejiang’s
household goods industrial clusters and the advanced manufacturing centres of the Yangzi River Delta.

The emergence of commercial tourism in China is concerned chiefly with economic and social change. Hangzhou became part of the international and domestic tourist circuit after the beginning of economic reform in 1980 and is one of the most frequently visited cities in China. West Lake’s landscape and atmosphere have attracted both foreign and domestic visitors.

After 1949, Hangzhou developed as a resort. Receptions for international and domestic meetings were held for high government officials. After 1989, however, the reform and opening policy penetrated into east coast areas and a structural change occurred in the tourism market. Because West Lake and its surroundings had already developed as a traditional tourism destination in China, prompt action and improvements were adopted in the 1990s ushering in a new model of regional development. Figure 7 shows data related to the development of international tourism in selected areas in China. The growth rate of overseas tourists and tourism earnings in Hangzhou is less than some other major tourist sites, although this phenomenon may also reflect the age of this tourist site. However, domestic tourists are particularly important. In general, they tend to spend more money than overseas tourists; for example, the average amount spent was around ¥1200 per visit in 2006, which was three times the figure in 1995 (See Figure 21). (Hangzhou City Travel Committee, 2010, http://en.gotohz.com/web/guest/surey)
Hangzhou’s experience represents a recent phenomenon, wherein cities have exploited their cultural heritage to capture tourists and become cultural tourist centres. With the opening to the international community, Hangzhou became a destination for international travellers. Statistics show that the number of international visitors grew dramatically from 1995. In contrast with the pattern of high spending domestic tourist, revenues per overseas visitor in Hangzhou are relatively high compared with other regions, meaning that they tend to pay more for attractions, shopping and accommodation. As a top tourism site in China, Hangzhou has an annual influx of more than 38 million visitors who come to see and experience something special.
Tourists from abroad come mainly from the Republic of Korea, Japan and the USA (except for Taiwan and Hong Kong). Drawing on the official Chinese government statistics, it is estimated that the number of overseas tourists who stayed overnight in Hangzhou in 2006 was 1,820,200; foreign tourism income was USD 909 million; the number of domestic tourists was 36,821,400; and domestic tourism income was RMB 471,240 million (China Tourism Statistics, 2010, http://www.cn.to.org/chinastats_2006MajorStats.asp).

Figure 8: Tourism Development in Hangzhou
(Source: http://eng.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zpd/English/goal/gov/T324611.shtml)
While its neighbour Shanghai held the World Expo 2010, Hangzhou was able to gain reputation as the ‘back garden’ of the bustling commercial hub and attract more tourists. Location and proximity to Shanghai makes *Impression West Lake* the most accessible of the *Impression Series* to date. Domestically, Shanghai residents regard Hangzhou as the prime destination for leisure activates because the distance between Hangzhou and Shanghai is 200 kilometres, and they are connected by railway and highway. It takes less than 2 hours to reach Hangzhou from Shanghai.

### 1.7.2 Culture

Hangzhou is one of the seven ancient capitals in China. Marco Polo, who once visited here, praised it as ‘the finest and most splendid city in the world.’ There is a famous saying, ‘Up there is heaven, down here is Su and Hang.’ Chinese people regard Hangzhou (Hang) as ‘the paradise on Earth’. This setting provides both cultural and natural resources for the local creative industries.

The tourism market has provided motivation for Hangzhou to display its rich heritage of art, architecture, and music. Rather than yielding to cultural homogeneity, Hangzhou is positioning itself within the international community on the basis of unique cultural contributions. As one guidebook puts it, ‘The key to Hangzhou’s seemingly rapid transformation is the cultural capital embodied in a relative intact central core.’ (Hangzhou Tourism Committee, 2007)
Hangzhou is valued for authenticity and uniqueness. Ever since the late Neolithic Period, the area has experienced many cultures: Liangzhu culture, Wuyue culture, Southern Song Culture and Ming-Qing culture, which form a complete series of cultural development, making an important contribution to China's cultural history. Hangzhou culture has nurtured and attracted numerous politicians, scientists, artists, national heroes, loyal officials, righteous persons, judicious governors and skilful craftsmen, who made outstanding contributions to their nation and their hometown's political, economic, cultural and social development (Hangzhou City Travel Committee, 2010, http://en.gotohz.com/web/guest/surey)

Cultural and artistic activities have flourished. Local dramas and operas have been maintained while journalism, publication, broadcasting and TV have developed steadily. The key to Hangzhou’s seemingly rapid transformation is cultural capital, which as will discuss in chapter three constitutes the ‘core concept’ value of Impression West Lake. Impression West Lake can therefore be regarded as the preservation of Hangzhou’s historic core in a modern format.

The image of Hangzhou as a highly cultivated place with beautiful scenery draws on China's history, philosophy, culture and traditional literature, as well as the modern attractions of nature and self-improvement. Impression West Lake offers an ‘experience’ of Hangzhou local culture. From one perspective Impression West Lake is a communication to diversified international audiences of the culture shared by local residents in the past.
1.7.3 Concluding remarks: the West Lake factor

The most famous attraction in Hangzhou is West Lake (Xi Hu). West Lake covers around 60 square kilometres, including 5.68 square kilometres of water. For centuries, West Lake has been well known both for its picturesque landscape and its cultural heritage, which dates back to the medieval dynasties. Whenever Hangzhou is referred, West Lake is invariably mentioned. It is so named because it is located on the west side of the city. Hangzhou benefits from having beautiful landscaping and the remarkable legacy of historical buildings. West Lake is home to many historical sites. Every hill, creek, pond, pavilion, or pagoda has a historical background of some great significance; as a result, everything becomes symbolic, the Lake itself is the symbol of symbols.

In Chinese cultural and literature tradition, many pieces have been written about the West Lake and almost all of them are masterpieces of different eras. The West Lake is often illustrated on foldable paper fans, a common souvenir of Hangzhou. The West Lake bears poetic and picturesque names with a grand title of ‘Heaven on Earth.’ Impression West Lake is suffused with impressions, similar to the cultural atmosphere created by Chinese traditional ink painting. The cultural elements represented in the show that appeal to foreigners, however, are only surface elements; they form only the tip of the cultural iceberg. The main culture lies deeply rooted in lives of the Chinese people’s life and is difficult to be fully comprehended by non-Chinese. Hence, the show gets its name as ‘Impression’, as it gives an abstract view of Chinese culture and also leaves space for artistic interpretation.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of literature. It begins by identifying the role of culture in economic development which locates the research in the academic sub-fields of creative industries and ‘experience economy’ (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Boswijk, Thijssen et al., 2007). It then argues that Chinese scholars and practitioners have formed their own perspectives on cultural reconversion and cultural identity. It also describes concepts of competitive advantage and place competition which identify the political, cultural and economical constraints of cultural tourism. The ‘expediency of culture’, that is the need to exploit cultural resources, converts the tourism spectacle into a (formatted) business model that can be used in regional tourism development strategies.

The term ‘creative industry’ is a category in academic, policy and industry discourse. It refers to a number of sectors that generate products or services with artistic, creative or cultural value (Caves, 2000). Scholars such as Richard Caves and John Howkins have paid attention to economic arguments. Caves uses the term ‘contracts between art and commerce’. This provides a basic framework to begin to analyse the business strategy in Zhang Yimou’s creative production models and a critical analysis of creative workers, although as Michael Keane has pointed out there are distinctive institutional factors that shape value in China (Keane, 2007).
The first recognition of the distinct contribution of the creative industries was documented in the Creative Industries Task Force Mapping Document (CITF (1998) 2001) in the UK. This document defined creative industries as ‘activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through generation and exploitation of intellectual property.’ (DCMS (1998, 2001)

Based on economic benefits and claims to capture significant ‘new economy’ enterprise dynamics, the significance of the creative industries has been widely accepted by policy makers. Regions and cities, as well as venture capital, are providing focused support measures (Cunningham, 2002, 2). As Keane has argued the creative industries constitute a template on which much policy development work has been conducted in China (Keane 2010). According to the Chinese Creative Industries Blue Book (Zhang et all, 2006), creative industries policies have impacted in China on national and regional levels because the increasing awareness of creativity (and innovation) stresses commercial or commercialisable cultural resources and the overall strategic importance of creative content for China’s export profile and international branding. Another scholar Li Wuwei has provided a Chinese vision of the emerging creative industries. He analyses four aspects: geographical distribution, intellectual property, marketing resources and cultural atmosphere. (Li, 2008) Many reports have been published analysing different understandings and categories of creative industries in different
areas. In some instances they are merged with the term ‘cultural industries’, which is favoured by the central government.

The popularity of the term ‘creative industries’ in China leaves some questions unanswered and misunderstood. Critics point to its lack of differentiation of the cultural and creative industries. According to Keane (2010), the Fifth Session of the Fifteenth Party Congress in October 2000 introduced the cultural industries as part of the ‘recommendations’ for the national Tenth Five Year Plan at the governmental policy level.

The creative industries are considered, sometimes very optimistically, as a new strategy to produce social cohesion and inclusion, as well as economic prosperity. The idea has become powerful in a short space of time. Li Wuwei, a senior spokesperson and a Vice-Chair of the Guomindang Revolutionary Party believes the social impact includes improving and renewing social transformation. Keane says that creative industries might be a Trojan Horse, bringing further liberalisation:

> the fact that creative industries might produce positive externalities runs up against a degree of denial by critics and journalists who have relied on maintaining the image of an uncompromising party-state apparatus (Keane, 2010, 9).

Another reason that the creative industries idea appeals to Chinese regional governments is that it facilitates the capacity of regions, cities and districts to gain
autonomy. Municipal, city and district governments choose their own development paths in the cultural and creative industries (Keane, 2010). In contrast to the more nationalistic cultural industries, the creative industries were championed by local and city governments because they are a more international idea, and have the capacity to attract foreign investors.

A problem associated with the increasing focus on the creative industries in China is that there is a lack of centralization of an effective public policy. Much depends on the policy maker’s understanding of creative industries and how to develop programs and projects. These are not only theoretical questions but go to issues of how to measure the size, nature and potential of ‘emergent industries’. However, government policy in many instances is more theoretical and bureaucratic; the practical input and innovations rely heavily on entrepreneurs. As a result, there is a demand for entrepreneurs to partner with local governments. The significant role of the creative entrepreneur, in my case Zhang Yimou, is the key factor linking place, practitioners and communities.

2.2 Creative or experience industries?

The case study of Impression is directly associated with cultural tourism. Internationally, tourism is generally not considered a part of creative industries. In China, however, the tourism sector is considered ‘creative’ through the marketing and advertising. The Shanghai Municipal Government extended creative industries to include tourism in its annual Creative Industry Week in 2005.
In this study, I have utilised the concept ‘experience industry’ to address cultural tourism, notwithstanding the fact that China sees tourism as a creative industry. I explain the concept of ‘experience economy’ later in this section. For now, the experience industry concept is more useful for explaining cultural tourism; place marketing strategies play a key role in exploiting the cultural resources of major historical centres of China. Local production of heritage and culture is intimately linked with social consumption of cultural and heritage tourism, often in large groups. The international competition for cultural tourism earnings, particularly in Asia, means that China needs to make effective use of traditional Chinese cultural assets, but at the same time will also have to develop new contemporary cultural products.

2.3 Cultural theory and cultural entrepreneurs

Several authors writing on ‘the production of culture’ support the role of entrepreneurs in combining culture and commerce. Smith (2001) says that cultural entrepreneurs play a role as organizational gatekeepers in promoting particular kinds of art. The production of *Impression* is evidence of this. Through these productions Zhang Yimou has pioneered an experiential use of cultural goods to achieve commercial success. His *Impression Series* is a creative commodity, packaging and marketing performing arts for inbound tourists. Adorno and Bernstein elaborate:
Culture becomes an industry shaped by capital investment, business organisation and industrial processes to produce entertainment commodities to be sold in a market. (Adorno and Bernstein 1991, 224)

This negative critique of the ‘culture industry’ is well known. Adorno sees the consumer as playing a passive role. Pursuing this idea further, Crane (1994) maintains that culture has been produced in an industrial form and distributed through market strategies. In other words, just as the manufacturing industry satisfies material needs, the cultural industry satisfies consumers’ entertainment needs. Taking a similar perspective, Smith (2001) explores the idea that cultural producers shape their output to fit what they perceive to be the needs and interest of a target audience. Burston (2009, 162) indicates several business strategies for the purpose of ‘consuming cultures’.

Hence, the cultural appeal of cultural commodities is central to their economic success and thus cannot not be rigidly planned.

Zhang Yimou’s contemporary mediated spectacles combine entertainment with cultural enlightenment. These events take the form of ‘experiences’; they contain value that can’t be evaluated only in economic terms. Impression West Lake is a cultural commodity that seeks to maximize audience appeal to obtain profit.

The governmental ‘turn’ to creative industries provides new opportunity for creative and cultural entrepreneurs. Cultural policy has been implemented by Chinese authorities to promote socio-political and economic utility. To improve national
competitiveness in the creative industries, creative personnel and entrepreneurs such as Zhang Yimou have been encouraged to promote the distinctiveness of a new Chinese image in a way that is accessible and attractive to inbound tourists.

Zhang Yimou’s journey is a model for other creative and cultural entrepreneurs in China. However, this is not to say that Zhang is beyond criticism, as I will show later. Generally, his many critics cite over-commercialization; for instance romanticism holds that the artist creates out of inner necessity. ‘Imagination and passion carry their own warrant and should not compromise with reason and establish practices.’ (Caves, 2000, 3) Many artists share the attitude that money is an unnecessary evil. They believe artists should maintain a subversive quality in their work. This romantic view identifies the difference between art and commerce. Art claims the independence that separates the artist from the craftsman (Sennett, 2005).

2.4 Cultural adaptation, cultural reconversion and cultural resources

This evaluation underpins criticisms of the over-commercialized nature of Zhang’s productions as a new symbol of Chinese culture. Many scholars have investigated concepts regarding the production of culture: for instance, cultural adaptation, cultural reconversion, cultural identity and cultural tourism. Cultural resources, including local inspiration, add value to the content of the artistic performance and build a unique experience for audiences.
Linda Hutcheon writes about cultural adaptation. She says that cultural adaptation is repetition but not a replication (Hutcheon, 2000, 9). I use this aspect of the theory of cultural adaptation to identify how *Impression West Lake* is borrowing a traditional story and transforming it into a modern form. Cultural adaptations are often criticised as being secondary and inferior modes, because the adaptation is departing from fidelity of the original sources. Hutcheon argues that in transculturation or indigenization across cultures, languages, and history, the meaning and impact of stories can change radically. This can be seen in negative feedback and ‘misunderstandings’ of the original story of *Impression West Lake*.

Burston (2009) demonstrates that in established and emerging theatrical economies, live Broadway productions adopt standardization and routinization. In turn there is evidence of workforce alienation. Burston (2009, 167) defined ‘theatrical Fordism’ as ‘a set of post-Fordist logics offering new instances of standardization and routinization.’ There are similarities between the Chinese business strategy and standardization in Broadway productions as well as entertainment show formats, such as the ‘Las Vegas model’ (Thompson, 1999).

Another perspective is ‘cultural reconversion’, showing the adeptness of national cultures within processes of globalization. The concept of cultural reconversion, developed in the Latin American context by critical theorist Canclini (1992) provides one way of understanding this. Canclini (2005) explains cultural reconversion as reformulating function and meaning, in which innovative approaches replace the
original cultural format and ways of transmitting knowledge. The definition from Canclini of reconversion is the strategy to ‘transfer symbolic patrimony from one site to another in order to conserve it, increase its yield, and better position those who practice it’ (Canclini, 1992, 32). Flew (2007, 27-30) concluded that Canclini explores problems in relation to the theories of the culture industries confronting substantive processes of cultural change; in effect:

…A consequence of a collapsing of the distinction between mass popular modern culture and traditional “folk” cultures, and an associated set of distinctions between what is deemed to be ‘art or heritage, and those media and cultural products that form a part of the ‘global popular’ and driven by the commercial marketplace.

Canclini presents cultural reconversion as a radical challenge to the precepts of cultural modernism and national cultural policy: He argued that

Reconversion thus challenges the assumption that cultural identity is based upon a patrimony, and that this patrimony is constituted by the occupation of a territory and by collections of works and monuments…it questions the notion that popular sectors achieve emancipation and are integrated into modernity by means of the socialization of hegemonic cultural assets through education and mass dissemination. (Canclini, 1992, 32)
Cultural reconversion is reflected in *Impression West Lake* which has reconverted symbolic resources into economic assets, and as a result, has helped sustain traditional culture. Zhang Yimou’s production *Impression of West Lake* has used new media technologies in order to expand the audience. Zhang himself believes that this is a way of reviving traditional cultural forms. The story of *Impression West Lake* draws on traditional cultural forms which their original presentation struggle to attract the attention of younger generations or are hardly known by the rest of the world. The repackaging of culture in Zhang Yimou’s *Impression Series* renews and reinvigorates authentic resources; in turn it customizes them for a broader diversified audience; the new format reshapes communication between audiences. However, this repackaging is itself controversial, as we will find out.

These approaches—experience economy, cultural adaptation, cultural reconversion and cultural resources taken together—allow us to observe innovations in the production of outdoor tourism spectacles. *Impression West Lake* reorganizes the production from a heritage-defined understanding of traditional culture to a technology-enabled fusion of high, popular, folk and mass art, in order to enhance public attendance, commercial sponsorship and economic turnover.

### 2.5 Cultural tourism and national identity

Cultural tourism represents an area of significant economic benefit to heritage sites with
rich natural and cultural resources. *Impression West Lake* in particular exploits cultural and heritage resources in Hangzhou to explore ways and means to increase attendance, to generate revenue (and to control operating expenses); in return it benefits other tourist industry sectors such as hospitality, retail industries and travel agencies. Making this a successful enterprise requires looking carefully at operating policies and practices to focus on issues such as collaborative marketing strategies, customer demographics, distribution, partnerships and packaging opportunities; in addition there is a need to be open to entrepreneurial approaches while continuing to meet their heritage preservation and education mandates to promote an image of a location. Hangzhou is an example of how regions have used ‘place marketing and people marketing.’ (Kotler et al, 2002) However, approaches vary in both professionalism and sophistication.

As mentioned above, the presentation of *Impression West Lake* is a creative and cultural commodity to attract tourism. Drawing on studies of cultural tourism, Jenkins and Go (1996) note that heritage tourism is a marketing strategy for countries to position themselves as competitive destinations and to complement their established image while protecting natural and cultural assets such as folklore and the arts. Craik has pointed out that

> Tourism is feted as a sunrise industry with the potential to replace declining industries and economic sectors as well as add value to other viable sectors. In addition to these prosaic economic calculations, tourism has increasingly been embraced as component of cultural policy
and as the definer of coordinating points of national identity and culture.

Tourism thus performs a double duty as economic salvation and nationalist cultural iconography. (Craik, 2001, 94)

Tourism brings wider social benefits including employment, foreign exchange earnings and identity boosting. Cultural products attract tourists through providing signs of symbolic differentiation in urban consumption. Industrially produced goods lack this intangible value. The main effects of the cultural ‘experience’ include (1) helping Hangzhou tourism generate a cultural market; (2) enabling the development of Chinese cultural heritage value; (3) encouraging tourists to return and generate income; (4) strengthening identity to ‘re-image’ place.

Tourist culture is how tourism is articulated into products and services and how it is experienced by visitors (Craik, 2001). Cultural tourism involves an emphasis on the potential of tourism to provide enrichment to visitors through exposure to cultural activities, sites, objects and experiences as opposed to mere sight-seeing. This market trend provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to produce new (or not so new) cultural performance models. Supporters of the Impression Series say that it incorporates Chinese culture in tourism; however, the application of experience has gone beyond merely visiting heritage sites; it is a strategic experience product with export opportunities. It links tourism to diverse cultural industries and in doing so promotes the culture of the nation. This pitch also includes ‘special interest’ tourism that promotes culture more generically by packaging special types of tourism experiences.
The critical aspect is whether or not these trends of localization, diversification and specialization of tourism behaviour will last.

National cultures provide cultural resources which can be formatted to exploit ‘authenticity’ content in a commercial form. Resources contribute to the Chinese created brand image, adding value to urban gentrification, the tourism industry and the local economy. With a recorded history of over 5000 years, China is well endowed with cultural and natural tourist resources. *Impression West Lake* is an example of a cultural and tourism product associated with national identity and national culture.

### 2.6 Cultural protection and policy

While cultural resources distinguish the image, they also provide ‘competitive advantages’, defined as the resources and capabilities possessed by a country or region that underpin its competitiveness (Hetsroni et al., 2007). Using Chinese cultural resources in a global market gives a competitive edge over rival suppliers. Government policy has played a significant role in supporting cultural tourism activities. In supporting government ‘soft power’ policies, Zhang has sought to preserve Chinese culture from industrialization, urbanization, and foreign influences. For example, the popularity of Disneyland in Hong Kong and in Shanghai (which represent American culture) poses a threat to Chinese-owned tourism operators. (Ho, 2004)
The revival of ‘China created’ cultural and creative commodities is associated with soft power in China. This supports Yudice’s claim that culturalization is a form of ‘political economy’. Political economy means political aspects of economic policy-making. Political and strategic relations are of great significance in economic considerations. The traditional meaning of the term political economy is: that branch of the art of government concerned with the systematic inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. Adam Smith defined political economy as a ‘branch of the science of a statesman or legislator’ concerned with the twofold objective of ‘providing a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people … and [supplying] the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public service. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign’ (Smith, 1991, 325).

The concept of cultural imperialism is a component of critical political economy. Cultural imperialism refers to the ways in which the economic power of the dominant nations combines with the global reach of cultural commodities. The concept drew attention to the extent to the rise of cultural commodities of China along with the rise of Chinese economic significance in the world. Schiller has pointed out, ‘the globalization that many find such a promising prospect can be viewed more realistically as the phenomenally successful extension of marketing and consumerism to the world community’ (Schiller, 1996, 115).

Cultural imperialism has come under attack from a number of writers. Joseph D. Straubhaar (2000) has described the alternative concept of ‘cultural proximity’. He
argues that audience preferences are formed within the overall trend toward cultural proximity within both national and cultural-linguistic boundaries. However, within this logic of cultural proximity, other forces also apply. It is important to understand cultural proximity working not only at the national and supranational levels but also at the subnational and regional spheres. Straubhaar’s work was primarily concerned with television programming: melodrama and telenovela. However the idea that proximate cultures have similar tastes applies to my case study. East Asian cultural values embodied in the production can generally be understood by Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese audiences.

2.7 Experience economy models, cultural branding and cultural experience

In recent years many scholars have used the concept of experience economy. Studies have argued that there is a shift from material needs to intangible needs, from commodities and products to services and experience. (Rifkin, 2000) Jeremy Rifkin in *The Age of Access* argues that the capitalist journey, which began with the commodification of goods and the ownership of property, is ending with the commodification of human time and experience, enlightenment and play, grooming and grace, and everything in between. ‘Lifestyle marketing’ is about buying access to one's very existence in small commercial time segments. People are even living out their lifestyles in planned commercial residential communities. The changes taking place are part of even a larger transformation occurring in the nature of capitalism. There is a
long-term shift from the old giants of the industrial age to a system based on the selling
of cultural experiences especially for global travel and tourism, theme cities and parks.
Destination entertainment centres, wellness, music, and social causes are fast becoming
the centre of an economy that trades in cultural resources. The new giants of cultural
capitalism in the western context include Viacom, AOL Time Warner, Disney, Sony, and
News Corporation. These transnational companies, with communications networks that
span the globe, are mining cultural resources in every part of the world and repackaging
them in the form of commodities and entertainment.

With consumers spending as much income accessing cultural experiences as buying
manufactured goods and basic services, Rifkin says that when culture is absorbed into
the economy, only commercial bonds will hold society together. The critical question
posed by *The Age of Access* is whether civilization can survive when only the
commercial sphere remains as the primary arbiter of human life.

Commercialization of culture and of experience, plays into the hands of entrepreneurs.
Zhang Yimou and the cultural production company have stressed ‘the experience’ as a
brand building strategy. The key to the experience orientated strategy is the use of
location and personal engagement. Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduce a
marketing-oriented approach to understanding the experience economy. They define
experience as a differentiated mental journey connecting audiences in a personal,
memorable way. Pine and Gilmore’s (1999, 30) model suggests that experiences have
four functions: entertainment, educational, aesthetic or escapist. This model
demonstrates how the experience business model achieves different functions in terms of how it engages diverse audiences. In following Pine and Gilmore, my study acknowledges that the consumption of shows occurs in a similar way in China. Moreover, production is designed for a unique cultural experience in Hangzhou.

Pine and Gilmore also discuss how experience is ‘packaged’ and commodified. I note the commodification tendency in the four live action performances known as the *Impression Series*. In this sense, there could be an ongoing production line of similar performances in other tourism areas in China labelled as part of the Zhang Yimou’s *Impression Series*, with the same formatting concept and standard business model.

The importance of how a ‘concept’ underlies the ‘experience’ is discussed in Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen’s experience production system model:

> A concept can be defined as an idea which is the general framework for the products and it is crucial that the experience provider creates a story about the concept so that the audience will know it. (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008, 94)

The ‘concept’ not only refers to the production but also the marketing strategy. It implies that artistic ideas must adapt to management strategies. In responding to the emphasis on a core concept a story has to be created and communicated to the market (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008). Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen assert
that technological innovation informs creativity. ‘Technologies not only moderate the content of the performance, but also power the experience’ (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008, 94). In *Impression* authentic value and tradition is integrated into a contemporary setting by means of technology. The details will be presented in chapter three.

According to a ‘solar system’ model developed by Nielsen (2004), the experience industry is based on creativity and associated with economic value such as ‘sales, enabling and image’. ‘Sales’ refers directly to consumption of experiences and the products that are sold in the market. ‘Enabling’ covers certain manufacturing industries, distribution and other supporting sectors that are co-dependent with the experience industry. ‘Image’ is the publicity that is created by the experience industry which could benefit other industries. It accommodates factors of national identity, added value in the form of sub-contractors and artistic value. In *Impression West Lake* Zhang Liangying, a finalist in Super Girls, a Chinese reformatted version of television *Idol* format, performs the theme song and plays a role as ambassador of the show to appeal to local and younger audience. The Japanese music composer Kitaro’s new age CD album, *Impressions of the West Lake*, is another example of value adding in the form of merchandising; the details will be presented in the section on ‘Marketing approach’ in chapter three.

Boswijk, Thijssen et al. (2007) exemplify the role of sensory perception and sensation in the experience process, stating that ‘…they actually occur within any individual who
has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level.’
(Boswijk, Thijssen et al. 2007, 20) The example of Impression West Lake suggests that
highly packaged bundles of authentic experience are co-created within the customer.
Boswijk et al (2007) explain that the experience of the audience adds meaning to the
process of entertainment. My case study exemplifies how the key concepts of
Impression West Lake make authentic Chinese culture meaningful to a broad audience
through ‘a cultural experience.’ The merging of art, architecture, history and nature
generates an array of sensations that add to the total ‘experience package’.

Together with the insights generated from ‘experience economy’ scholars we need to
consider national branding, which is based on the notion that ‘a country can be actively
marketed to the rest of the world: for growth, for tourism, for trade and for positive
‘image’ generally. (Anholt 2003, 213) Place branding refers to how the country exports,
and the ways it promotes, represents and shares its culture with other places. The power
of country of origin (Anholt 2003, 217-218) situates the central role of cultural
branding in Chinese government policy. Zhang’s Impression Series reaffirms China’s
traditional brands of exoticism, mystery, luxury and sensuality. This branding effect is
in accordance with the function and distinctive vision of ‘experience’ strategy. The
‘cultural experience’ is the take-away memory of (the experience of) Impression West
Lake. It is therefore instrumental in enhancing national brand and international
reputation.
2.8 Concluding remarks

In developing the idea of the experience economy in this chapter I have suggested that countries have different competitive tourism advantages. Culture provides significant benefits to the Chinese economy and cultural tourism reflects how the creative industries are implemented in China. Most creative industries research excludes cultural tourism. This chapter has explored determinants for success in experiential cultural goods together with the overall social, political and economic factors in China’s cultural market. The development of cultural experiences illustrates both the strategy of packaging cultural products and the tourism experience. It is both a hallmark of Chinese traditional appeal and an innovation in the new image of China.

Moreover, this chapter has emphasised the relationship between economics, politics and culture. China’s social, cultural, economic and political system is evolving. The commercialization of culture is a future trend and a leading model in the East Asian region. The formula in China is to exploit cultural resources economically. Thus, in the following chapters I will argue that the richness of traditional cultural resources has nourished development of a creative format that takes account of cultural policy and business management.
CHAPTER THREE: CONTENT, BUSINESS MODELS AND FORMATS

*Impression West Lake* is defined as an artistic tourist spectacle which is consumed in the form of experiences. Experience productions have two aspects: creativity in business strategy and artistic creativity. According to John Howkins (2001), ‘creativity’ is the ability to generate something new to create value and wealth. ‘It means the production by one or more people of ideas and inventions that are personal, original and meaningful.’ (Howkins, 2001, ix) This definition provides a theoretical framework to examine Zhang Yimou’s *Impression.*

Moreover, as technology is being introduced, the channels for delivering experiences have increased. *Impression West Lake* represents an experience which is adaptable to the tourism industry in China. Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo (2008) identify tourism as a primary experience sector where experience is the core product. *Impression West Lake* is a commodity where experiences are delivered directly to end users who are tourists, domestic and international.

The definition of creativity in this study has the following four dimensions, which all are important for the business performance of the production: (1) creative development of an idea which is reflected as the core concept; (2) creativity as combination of cultural and natural resources; (3) technological innovation in term of presenting the visual art and stage effects; (4) business strategy which is ‘successful marketing of the
idea and the creation of profit.’ (Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo, 2008, p.84) The promotion of *Impression West Lake* reveals various product value chains and marketing efforts which are designed to promote cultural amenities specific to place-related destinations. As shown by the business strategies of the producers of *Impression West Lake*, these dimensions can be applied in formatted business models.

First, I will discuss the core concept by tracing into the original story and how the core concept comes from traditional folk storytelling. The second taxonomy considers marketing forces such as value chain, celebrity packaging, audiences, ‘fantasy making’; and the third conceives the innovation of *Impression West Lake* in terms of technology. I discuss how experience firms innovate. Innovation is currently a core factor in the development of the production system. After this I will go into a more detailed analysis of the strategy as a framework for understanding the organizational form under which they are managed. The internal factors cover the core concept, the value chain, further leading us to an analysis of Zhang Yimou's business models and how it is reflected in *Impression West Lake*. The external factors concern the Chinese tourism experience and how cultural resources have become the core competency.

In contrast to Pine and Gilmore (1999) who define experience as a generic business, I point out the concept of trading experience is established by applying cultural adaptation to branding. Hence, I identify three models: Zhang Yimou's Production Model (this reflects his celebrity phenomenon), the Business Model of the *Impression Series* and the National Diffusion Model. The repackaging of an ethnic story for global
audience manifests two linked characteristics of cultural production: the indispensable role of capitalism in marketing, financing and distribution, and the emergence of cultural adaptation as a prevailing strategy for formatting.

3.1 The core concept: a taste of Han culture

The preparation involves a lot of research. It's not something you can do by reading a couple of travelling pamphlets. Instead, you have to consult with local scholars and industry officials to understand the essence of the cultural legacy. We have to see what is most representative of the West Lake. Otherwise, we wouldn't even know where to start.

Zhang Yimou
(http://sinoimpression.com/LocalInfo2009421112549.html)
(China Daily, 2009,
http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/m/hangzhou/e/2009-08/11/content_8554146.html)

The core concept of Impression West Lake derives from Han culture. According to (Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo, 2008, p.94), ‘the notion of concept plays a major role in designating the overall conceptualization of the experience.’ The concept not only refers to the production side, but also the marketing side. Impression West Lake
has created its own official website in five languages Chinese (both simplified and traditional form), Korean, Japanese and English. In a description on the official website, the core concept of *Impression West Lake*


*Impression West Lake* is a romantic love story with epic, tragic elements developed from Chinese traditional literature and opera. The main content reflects cultural legacy and local charms.

**3.2 The original story**

The spirit of *Impression West Lake* is its narrative and not technology. ‘It is crucial that the experience provider creates a story so that the audience will recognise ‘storytelling about a concept.’ (Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo, 2008, 94) This explains how the creative activity can create value and encourage consumers to purchase tickets. For example, on the West Lake there is a water show free for the public. It is popular, but people are still willing to purchase tickets to watch *Impression West Lake.*
"Impression West Lake"’s storyline originates from the folklore of Hangzhou called ‘The Legend of the White Snake’. It is based on a popular ballad that was written during the Southern Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) in the West Lake area. Across several generations, the story was an oral tradition in the Southern Song before undergoing a series of transformations in folklore, literature, and drama. The thirteenth century saw the first literary versions, no doubt borrowed from professional storytellers in the streets of Hangzhou. It first appeared on stage in the fourteenth century, and the story is today one of the most often performed in Chinese opera. In modern times it has been adapted into Chinese operas, television series, and at least two films in China and Taiwan prior to the "Impression West Lake" production. The story became famous in Hong Kong when the Hong Kong fantasy movie *Green Snake* was released in 1993, starring Maggie Cheung and directed by Tsui Hark.

According to legend, the story is about a legendary female white snake spirit Bai Suzhen or Lady White, who has been training for many centuries to take human form and experience the love, freedom and wisdom that is supposedly only available to humans. So she takes on mortal form and steps into the human world. On her way to cruise the West Lake, she meets a handsome scholar Xu Xian, who saved her life in a previous life. The two fall in love and get married. However, a monk Fa Hai intervenes and makes various attempts to banish them from the human world. The monk thinks of himself as a keeper of the natural order of the world and is very prejudiced against spiritual beings seeking to improve themselves. At the end of the story he casts Lady White into a deep well under the Leifeng Pagoda. The story, which features the love
between Lady White and Xu Xian, is one of the ten most popular folk tales in China, and exemplifies anti-filial piety both in Chinese classical and modern literature.

The background of the original story is the Hangzhou local environment. However, *Impression West Lake* does not delve deeply into the political background behind the original legend, which had a theme of revolution from the grass-roots against higher authorities. This is represented metaphorically by the struggle of the fairy maiden Bai Suzhen against the cruel monk Fa Hai in her pursuit of freedom and happiness.

As a legend connected to Hangzhou’s West Lake, it is located in local atmosphere. The story is embedded within natural themes. Together with other legends of the lake, it reflects every corner within the landscape. In the original story the two leading characters first met and fall in love (at first sight); they take the ferry on West Lake; they are forced to depart at the broken bridge of the West Lake and the lady is imprisoned at the Leifeng Pagoda. The outdoor performance on the natural stage (The West Lake) allows audiences to see real monuments from the original story; in doing so it combines experience and fantasy, making the audience more connected. The story allows an interaction with the natural setting: elements in the authentic story became a source of inspiration for the innovation on stage.

*Impression West Lake* is a variation of the original story. It adds dancing performances with singing, music and lighting effects. At one dramatic point, even the Pagoda of the area is lit up in resplendent colour. However, its ‘core concept’ eliminates traditional
narrative weight. The strategy is to keep the story simple: the original story is therefore interpreted as a universal theme of love and freedom. This minimal treatment, both in form and content, is a strategy to create content that is ‘least objectionable’ to a large, diversified audience. As a result, the positive side is that it targets more diverse audiences but it raises the problem of authenticity among Chinese viewers. In meeting the needs and tastes of different viewer groups—or simply as a reflection of the way production is organized, specific, content design strategies remove, incorporate, transform and redefine a number of Chinese elements that relate to the specific geographical location, time, social, political and economic setting, or to cultural values and practices. This is cultural adaptation.

3.3 Cultural adaptation

3.3.1 Reformatting of the Story

There are two elements of an experience product. The core is the pure performance, the art or the intended performance. The audience experiences this together with the story. The story adds to the performance and gives a framework to understand the performance. The performance is intended to allow the viewers to grasp different levels of meaning simultaneously. According to the official introduction in the brochure of Impression West Lake, the performance is divided into five parts, ‘Meeting’, ‘Falling in love’, ‘Saying Goodbye’, ‘Memory’ and ‘Impression’. The performance begins with female performers in their traditional Kun opera costumes holding a green Chinese
traditional paper umbrellas flying to the surface of the lake. The brochure explains (author’s translation):

First Act: Meeting

‘A white crane flies from the remote horizon, lands and changes to a young scholar. At the same time, another white crane flies and changes to a young lady. They fall in love with each other at first sight. They revel in and enjoy the spectacular lake scenery.’

Second Act: Falling in Love

‘The fish in West Lake is full of spirit! They play, chase and swim freely in the love lake…Love is a promise from lovers, a beautiful harmony of two hearts. The closeness of heart and spirit make people close, intimate and happy in their world of love.’

Third Act: Saying Goodbye

‘Happy times are as short as the flames of the fire. The roar of the drums indicates that suffering is coming; a huge power will separate the lovers. The white crane that changed to the lady is now dead…just like the tragedy of Xu Xian and Bai Suzhen…All thoughts in life can be recognized as a simple meeting, behind which is poetry keenly felt.’

Fourth Act: Memory
‘When the scholar returns to their first meeting place, the beautiful scene is still there; many ladies are present but he cannot find the one he loved before. He remembers the rain, and pursues the boat they made a pledge on…all he can do is to call her name in his heart. The scholar recalls the elapsed world with sadness…’

*Fifth Act: Impression*

‘Just like the lake, beautiful, graceful, massive and vacant. Sorrow is without wound. The couple is present in the dream and gone with the water. At this moment, there is a warm affection in your heart. Feel the unreachable and magic moment. You want to live in that happy moment…

In West Lake, a lotus leaf, a gentle breathing, a group of fish, a shadow of love…such feelings can be felt but not be expressed in words. *Impression West Lake* is waves of sensory impressions, staying in the mind forever. The impression will be in the form of a silent memory: your heart opens in a gentle moment to taste the joy and the grand impression.’

*(2009, *Impression West Lake* official brochure)*
3.3.2 The Chinese content: symbolic hues and forms in a new format

The placement of traditional icons such as fish and lotus lanterns evokes images of Chinese culture. Through a process of ‘reculturalization’, elements that are culture-specific are highlighted, including those that are ethnic and historical thus guaranteeing comprehension across viewer groups. Hence, the core concept of *Impression West Lake* defines itself as a cultural show demonstrating traditions and Hangzhou local culture with Han culture as the bigger picture. The major cultural elements embrace traditional Kun Opera costume and makeup, the traditional heritage of the architecture, the tragic beauty and easily comprehensible story lines from traditional literature. *Impression West Lake* thus mixes mythological epics, dances and rituals, new age music, visual spectacles of the West Lake and Hangzhou natural
landscape in China.

Coordinated by assistant Wang Chaoge, the performances exhibit contemporary music and choreography, capturing the romantic mood and emotionally touching the audience during the climax. The costumes and set pieces by set designer Fan Yue further enhance the colourful performances. Zhang's assistant Fan Yue said the success of the performance lies in the local custom and culture. (2006, http://www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Jul/175626.html) The ‘Chineseness’ of *Impression West Lake* is characterized by a specific Chinese location, characters and narrative motifs.

3.4.3 The core concept: tourism experience and location

The natural stage is set around Su Causeway, Curved Yard and Lotus Pool, on the water of Yue Lake which is part of the West Lake. When the night falls, coloured lighting shrouds the lake with hills and water as its backdrop. Lady White walks across the water to meet her lover Xu Xian coming in a small boat. The stage is set three centimetres below the lake and can descend a further half a metre. When the light fades, we can see fish and lotus lanterns - displayed by hundreds of actors - glimmering in the dark. With the help of modern technology, a ‘bridge of heaven' rises into the sky, uniting the long-separated couple at end of the play. The *Impression West Lake* offers a panorama of the legendary lake. *Impression West Lake* is on show all year round. This
visual spectacle has become a major draw card for visitors in Hangzhou, for everyone to experience the beauty of the West Lake.

How has the lake and the legends surrounding it inspired the director? According to a news article ‘Zhang Yimou to Work on Impression West Lake’, reporter Ting Shen from CRI ( China Radio International, http://english.cri.cn/ ) cited Zhang Yimou’s own comment on his chosen location.

People usually say that the West Lake is more beautiful on rainy days than in sunny days. My partner has produced some pictures showing the West Lake on rainy days and showed them to me. I suddenly got inspired.


Hence, we can see the beautiful lake and the legends underlying the inspirations of the Impression West Lake concept. The ‘rainy’ imagery, so central to the Lake, is produced by sophisticated water effects: a pyramid of water is created on the natural stage of the lake. The lyrics of the main themes reflect the concept of rain. The lyric of Impression West Lake Rain is translated as:

Rain is still pouring, a lake covered with smoke
Bridge, silk umbrella, black and white of the thoughts
Who is on board to write my past
A blush of promise, departing all over
Standing in the rain the lake
Rain, looking to the distant shore

My farewells, endless longings
West Lake, on, over and over again

White wings, fleeting
Sigh, heaven and earth

Tell me, my love, where are you?
A silk umbrella left lying beside the Broken Bridge
Tell me, my love, where are you?
Lotus Fragrance, fog water
Rain rain
Rain, the rain, you tell me
A thousand years ago separated lovers ah
Smoke floating on the lake falls
You can wait for my love
Rain
Tell me ah my love Where Are You?
Green tree grey sky and red sunset
Tell me ah my love Where Are You?
Rain soaked wet lake breeze
Legend soaked wet season
I have to look for a thousand years ah
The tourism experience is transformed into a performance experience. The themes and performances of ‘fish’ and ‘lotus’ link to the ‘Ten Scenic Views of West Lake’ and are related with the symbol of ‘water’, which is a key theme in scenic spot classifications in the West Lake Scenic Area. One of the scenic spots referred as ‘Lotus Stirred by the Breeze at Courtyard’ is a large park consisting of six parts, featuring lotus, lakeside woods and villa village. Another scenic spot is ‘Viewing Fish at Flowery Harbour’, a pond in West Lake which provides a popular viewing spot to see beautiful fish. The dancers in the Impression West Lake show use props to replicate the two scenic spots and reinforce the cultural experience for the audience as illustrated in the following
figures. These poetic sentiments capture the glory of the scenery that inspired the formatting of the performances.

Figure 11: West Lake transformed
(Source: http://hz.piaowutong.com/main/zhuanti/yxxh/index2.html#5)

Figure 12: Authentic Chinese symbols
(Source: http://former.asiaeducation.edu.au/china/resource/original/pc1.jpg)
3.3.4 Audience feedback

The local elements are important to understanding the experience and accordingly I sought to gauge some feedback through some basic surveys (see appendix pp.171-177). The feedback of audience members in my questionnaire revealed that spectators from across the world were highly satisfied by the spectacle, an overall satisfaction rate of 80 percent. However, one person pointed that the core concept could be misunderstood or ignored because audiences are more likely to pay attention to visual effects of the show, making the story ambiguous for both Chinese and international audiences. Critics also complain that the narrative does not have a strong plot and the show is directed towards tourists. In chapter five this issue will be further elaborated in the section on cultural authenticity,

3.4 Marketing approach

3.4.1 Celebrity endorsement packaging

A key way of engagement with the audience is the packaging of celebrity collaborators at international and multi-segment levels. The combination of multicultural celebrity endorsements are implemented to influence consumers’ behaviours in diversified market segments and to compensate for certain weaknesses in the creative product. Zhang Yimou’s international and domestic reputation, Kitaro’s new age music niche market and Jane Zhang’s domestic pop cultural market attract different networks of
audience to guarantee a wider target audience. In these instances, the production of *Impression West Lake* is capitalizing on the popularity and currency of fashion as a vehicle to communicate messages and draw audiences to content or issues that may otherwise seem inaccessible or unfamiliar. Because of the high viewership by young audiences evidenced by my survey, *Impression West Lake* is a representative case of a combination of diverse forms and channels of pop culture; that is youth groups, new age niche markets, and Chinese traditional culture combined together to produce a multi-layered effect. The packaging has different appeals, represented by the different cultural icons. Also, the blending in of youth popular culture maintains freshness and variation.

Celebrity is a product of the promotion and publicity industries; celebrities themselves are drawcards. The celebrity function generates publicity and media attention (Marshall, 2001; Dyer, 1979; Turner, 2004). People take an active interest in celebrities; products dealing with them, directly or indirectly, are commercially successful. In the case of *Impression West Lake*, the creative and cultural production and the production of celebrity form a win-win situation; the popularity of the production leaves the celebrity triumphant and their reputation enhanced while the celebrities bring the production to the object of media and public attention. In a related development, the objective of celebrity packaging, the production is increasingly dependent upon marketing these individuals as a means of attracting audiences to the products with which they were associated.
3.4.2 Product value chain

The integration of international collaborators, as illustrated by Chinese director Zhang Yimou and Japanese musician Kitaro, enhances the product value chain; the packaging of celebrity fame enhances diversified target audience segments. The experience industry creates added value in the form of sub-contractors to other industries including music and lifestyle products. The main creative product is like the sun’s energy in the solar systems. (Nielsen, 2004) Impression West Lake contributes the energy and passes this to its value added contractor; the value added contractors in turn provides energy to the creative product.

3.4.3 Value added collaborator

Nielsen (2004, 24) argues that experience industry product sales help boost sales of other products. The experience industry’s role is to be an integral part of the production process, a catalyst. The branding of Impression West Lake creates opportunities for other industries: composer Kitaro’s New Age CD Album: Impressions of the West Lake and his by-products Kitaro Impressions 2007, Maboroshi Pinot Noir and vocal musician Jane Zhang (Liangyin Zhang)’s song and album Impression West Lake Rain are examples of value added contractor benefits.
Figure 13: Kitaro New Age Album ‘Impressions on the Westlake as a by-product’
(Source: http://www.domo.com/kitaro/)

Kitaro ‘Impressions’ 2007 Maboroshi Pinot Noir

In Kitaro’s official website (http://www.domo.com/kitaro/) Kitaro ‘Impressions’ 2007 Maboroshi Pinot Noir is introduced. On the site it says that Kitaro is in collaboration with Maboroshi Vineyard, preparing for the premier release of his ‘Impressions’ 2007 Maboroshi Pinot Noir. It debuted in September 2009 along with the album Impressions of West Lake, promoted as a musical interpretation inspired by the ethereal Opera on Water performances at China’s West Lake. According to the information, Kitaro’s journey corresponds with the Impression West Lake experience and raises awareness among his fans. Kitaro has been an internationally recognized icon and globally acclaimed composer and musician. His pioneering fusion of electronic artistry,
traditional Japanese forms, and pop-inflected Western idioms has created a lush, harmonic and poetic sound. His new age style fits the *Impression West Lake* core concept. Kitaro’s endorsement is selected by the production team to appeal to Japanese tourists in particular.

Zhang Liangying performs the vocals and is the ambassador of the show for local and younger audiences. She rose to prominence after her third-place performance in the 2005 season of the *Super Girl* contest, a national all-female singing competition. The theme song *The Impression West Lake Rain* became a hit. As celebrity endorsements will affect consumers, Zhang Liangying provides positive publicity and individuality. Her popularity draws youth in China to listen her theme song. The theme song was simultaneously released with one of her albums, and her record company and the publisher collaborated to promote *Impression West Lake*. Again, by disseminating the image of an established commodity through an appealing format, collaborators can cater to the tastes of the target audience in diverse formats and maximize profit.

Both music CDs have imagery from the poster of *Impression West Lake*; they both promote and update the information on *Impression West Lake* on their respective websites and touring news. Before the launching of *Impression West Lake* they both generated news releases in different channels. For example, Jane Zhang appeared in entertainment news and pop song TV programs to promote her new hit and *Impression West Lake*. 
Figure 14: Kitaro signing on the byproduct ‘Impressions 2007’ Maboroshi Pinot Noir
(Source: http://www.maboroshiwine.com/maboroshi/?page=22)
Limitations of the value contractors

Despite these packaging strategies, *Impression West Lake* has largely failed to capitalize on the economic and merchandising opportunities that have arisen as a result of a growing reputation and wider acceptance in the community. For example, there is no merchandising shop for *Impression West Lake* in the venue, which one would expect, allowing customers to take home a piece of memorabilia from the show. The same problem arises when customers want to purchase the music CDs of Kitaro or Jane Zhang; they can’t find avenues to purchase them after the show, leading to missed opportunities. There seems to be an ignorance of merchandising and lack of proper channels to distribute by-products associated with *Impression West Lake*; this is unlike Disney which capitalizes on customers’ demands by making the by-products available.
through outlets and creating effective distribution channels.

3.4.4 Diversified market segments

From the perspective of the customer and people’s psychological needs in terms of experience, marketing segmentation involves aggregating prospective audience into groups that have common emotional needs and will respond similarly to a marketing campaign.

My surveys defined a diversified audience; the results can be classified into two groups by nationality: the Chinese and the international audience. It also corresponds with the strategy of the marketing promotion as Zhang Yimou said, ‘the show is mainly dancing and movements that everyone will be able to understand. My aim is to show the world that Chinese culture is also international.’ Therefore, Impression West Lake is designed to give Western audiences a good opportunity to get up close and personal with several aspects of contemporary Chinese performing and visual art by showcasing China’s cultural attractions.

The production team has a preconceived idea of the needs and preferences of viewers; the target audiences’ backgrounds, aspirations and life styles determine the way in which the project is organized. As a result Impression West Lake is an attempt to exhibit distinct features that represent the different types and nature of their market segments. Impression West Lake targets multiple segments including those with intellectual and
cultural needs for educational and cultural immersion.

According to the findings of the survey, the characteristics of the audience of *Impression West Lake* are: niches seeking high and differentiated quality products, highly educated and well-paid segments. People surveyed had a wide variety of occupations—from technology to entertainment, journalism to finance, high-end manufacturing to the arts. They do not consciously think of themselves as a class; yet they share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit. Creative-minded people enjoy a mix of influences. They want to meet and socialize with people unlike themselves, trade views and discuss issues.

In order to maximize tourist expenditures, Hangzhou seeks to attract visitors from around the world, many of whom want to escape the pressures of modern life. They do not represent a singular market, but a complex one consisting of different nationalities, ages and income groups. They are young travellers, backpackers, single Japanese women, large tourism groups, family vacationers and honeymooning couples. (Kotler et al, 2002)

The majority of the respondents to my survey were travellers. The survey results, while drawing on a small sample, indicate that these people are perhaps more inclined to embrace the open meritocratic values of the creative age. Their most highly valued cultural options were experiential ones—interesting music venues, neighbourhood art galleries, performance spaces, and theatres. They favour active, participatory recreation
over passive, institutionalized forms. They prefer indigenous street-level culture, a
teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk performers and spectators. They crave stimulation,
escape. Ten interviewees responded in my survey that they wanted to pack their time
full of dense, high-quality, multidimensional experiences. They value active outdoor
recreation very highly. They are drawn to places and communities both because they
enjoy cultural activities and because their presence is seen as a signal that the place is
amenable to a broader creative lifestyle. These targeted travellers include
history-seekers, arts enthusiasts and business visitors.

On the other hand, the campaign was designed to appeal to the young generation in
China. Zhang Liangying’s reference groups are the X and Y generations which reflect
the generations born after 1980 and 1990. The majority are the only child in the family
due to the one-child policy in China; they are already aware of the global environment
via media entertainment and local changes. To the youth of post-Cultural Revolution
China, traditionally dominant expressive forms such as Kun Opera have lost much of
their resonance. Instead, these youths have turned to Western-influenced rock- and
pop-rooted forms as their music of choice or Japanese and South Korean television
serial drama. Therefore, Zhang Liangying’s endorsement is the way to lead them back
to the cultural products of China. Their interest in the Chinese-owned creative products
will benefit creative industries sectors in China enormously in the long term.
3.4.5 Profit and value form

The intangible experience offered by Impression West Lake represents the price that customers are willing to pay for the experience.

The ticket price

The show is quite accessible in Hangzhou. It is well-promoted and tourists can arrange tickets either at hotels or at a travel agency, both of which can also arrange guides. Tickets can be bought from the ticket booth in Hangzhou for 220RMB and the VIP price of 1000RMB. By drawing many tourists, Impression West Lake has had an indirect positive impact on the economy through a boost in hotel and lodging bookings, airline bookings, transport and the other industries associated with tourism. Through viral marketing, the websites and promotional activities of the tourism industries incorporate the advertisement of Impression West Lake which creates a mutual benefit: of drawing customers to the Impression West Lake show as well as other tourism industries and services. The virtual promotion for Impression West Lake is sophisticated. According to the director Wang, ticket sales are not the only revenue stream from the productions – related industries such as real estate, hospitality and tourism have also benefited greatly. Wang also commented that the rate of recovering the invested funds was also relatively fast, with an estimated annual 4 million people attending the four established Impression productions, each spending around 220 yuan (A$29 dollars) on a ticket.

In 2009, 610,000 people went to Impression, West Lake…Impression West Lake provides a living for 100,000 Hangzhou local people. We have
to go back there every season for rehearsals and to maintain the equipment; if the show stopped, tremendous damage would be incurred by the local economy. (2010, http://life.globaltimes.cn/top-photo/2010-02/502511.html)

*The price level*

![Figure 16: the floor plan of the seating and ticket price of *Impression West Lake*](Source:www.gotohangzhou.com/Tour-44.aspx)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ticket Category</th>
<th>Published Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal Seats (C Area)</td>
<td>220RMB/person (27USD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP Seats on Upper Floor of the Boat (A1-A4 Area)</td>
<td>600RMB/person (81USD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIP Seats on Ground Floor of the Boat (A1-A4 Area) | 450RMB/person (59USD)
---|---
VIP Balcony Room 1 | 10000RMB/room (1325USD)
VIP Balcony Room 2 | 8000RMB/room (1105USD)
VIP Balcony Room 2 Seats | 600RMB/person (81USD)

The pricing level has different impacts on the two categories of the target audience, the domestic Chinese audiences and international tourists. For the Chinese, the price is regarded as quite expensive. This price structure is also associated with the target audience income level. Compared with the ticket prices of the Broadway show *Cats*, which toured in China, *Impression West Lake*’s price is higher. *Cats*’ prices range from 100 to 980 RMB in Beijing. *Impression West Lake*’s price is higher than *Cats* even though the performance costs were much less. Hence, it is quite a luxury for local Chinese students or blue collar workers to purchase *Impression West Lake* tickets.

Economic benefits prices can be determined from a number of different perspectives. Profitability is the principal motivation for the investors, who are concerned with the value of the box-office revenue and related profits. While *Impression Series* has high sunk costs, it expects high returns. Contracting famous artists is also a major expense.
According to the interview by the *Global Times* (2010),

Considering the costs and returns, Wang revealed that although an Impression production generally costs around 100 million yuan ($14.65 million), that figure includes building a theatre, constructing a stage and funding a complete performance troupe. No current local productions can manage that.


According to Zhang Yimou (2005), compared to film production, the creation of an ‘on-site’ performance is more demanding on the production team. He stated:

When the box office rating of a film is not good, you can turn to the DVD market. But this is not the case with an outdoor musical. These musicals usually have a big budget, and if audiences don't like the show, there is no way to make up for the losses. So we have to take many things into consideration. (2009, http://english.cri.cn/349/2005/10/17/44@25173.htm)

Accordingly, because there are pressures to be successful, creative services have a price: this in turn contributes to the ticket prices. The higher the production sets its prices, relative to their costs, the more readily sunk costs are recovered, assuming of course that the production is a success.
The production of a creative good such as Impressions incurs significant sunk costs. The ongoing development of the production also requires high fixed costs for example, the cost of latest innovative equipment. As a result of the increasing level of innovation, other attractions such as performing artists or cultural workers, narrative roles are relatively declining. As technology has become one of the pillars of the cultural product, human capital has less bargaining power. This makes the production easier to control. As the technology is a sunk cost and the human capital is a variable cost, this can lead to a reduction in human capital costs.

3.5 The fantasy strategy: experience the commodity of fantasy

‘The best way to learn is to experience it’ (Yudice, 2007)

In the sections above I have elaborated on business orientations of Impression West Lake, and how the production employs strategies in order to create distinctive content, an innovative format and target diversified target audience segments. The business strategies include content formatting, distribution, product value chains and marketing promotions. However, we need to consider the kinds of experience that are involved in production and how ‘cultural experience’ is becoming increasingly important. Why do Chinese and international tourists pursue certain experiences of Impression West Lake? How did Zhang and his production team produce and develop an ability to stir the sentiments that engage consumers on varied levels? These questions can be answered
within the framework of ‘the Experience Economy’. (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) On the basis of my case study I argue that the ‘cultural experience’ uses a fantasy strategy. Zhang’s production introduces a fantasy that is targeted to specific audiences.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) have defined experience as a mental journey created with the customer. Experiences must provide a memorable offering that will remain with one for a long time, and to achieve this the audience should feel a sensation. Zhang Yimou has created strong emotional connections with audiences by evoking emotions in a formatted ‘cultural experience’. In order to deliver the experience, *Impression West Lake* delivers experiences by theme: experience through the power of imagination, engagement of the senses and a unique outdoor natural theatre on the lake. As the result, it harmonizes impressions with positive cues and mixes in memorabilia. Bohm (2004, 50) explained this process of ‘psychologising’ of experience as memory.

The power of imagination has been regarded as a passive and mechanical capacity to arrange and order the images of thought arising associatively out of memory…conducive to its own pleasure, comfort, and superficial satisfaction. (Bohm, 2004, 50)

The power of imagination in the formatted performance and in storytelling gives the viewer access to the poetic world of the performance; it holds the key to Zhang’s stance on the viability of cultural experiences. The varied scenes in *Impression West Lake* illuminate many aspects of cultural power. When the performance is expressed visually, featuring highly aesthetic cultural forms—fantasy music and Taoist mental
virtuosity—it unfolds as a subjective and imaginary experience; scenarios that are spun out of imagination explode into colour, movement and form as if they were real. The performance of the mythical world takes on characteristics of an imaginative realm in which it is embedded; these scenes are among the most spectacular of the performance. The sign of the ultra-aesthetic nature of the narrated story indicates that it can stand as a metaphor of abstracted cultural essence. As a consequence, it appears to the audience as pleasure-producing and grants attractive and formidable powers to aesthetic imagination. In other words, embellished storytelling validates culture. Wang Chaoge, co-director of the play explains their initiative.

The beauty of the West Lake goes far beyond its natural scenery. Its stories and cultural heritage make the place more appealing. It's meaningless to replicate plants and hills. Instead, we try to create a space for imagination. It is a great challenge for us to turn real nature into an imaginary fairyland in people's minds.' For example, in the section of ‘Fish and lotus’, ‘Wedding night on the boat’, ‘Feather boat’, the movement of the dancers is expressive of beauty, love and harmony in the drops of the rain. These three scenes all allow the poetic surplus of the cultural world to burst out in luxuriant imagery, and illustrate for the viewer the allure, for the audiences, of the creative urge towards the imaginary. The exuberant, colour-coded and colourful scenes allow the viewer to fully indulge-sensually, emotionally and visually-in the embodied world that underlies the unique Chinese mythology. (cited in 2009, http://www.sino-impression.com/LocalInfo2009421112549.html)
Through emotion, brands can achieve the loyalty of consumers by tapping into human values and aspirations that cut across cultural differences. *Impression West Lake* reaffirms China’s traditional brand qualities of exoticism, mystery, luxury and sensuality. Cultural symbols in the scenes stir up deep feelings. The emotions brought by the stories are reinforced by lighting and music. Emotions and their intrigues are allowed free rein; a deep loyalty to ‘place and people’ informs domestic audiences’ sense of belonging and nostalgic imaginary of ‘history and location’. Culture here includes not only Chinese tradition, new age music and Taoist philosophy, but also longing for ‘home’. At an emotional level, a universal love theme is embedded with subjective experiences, which are highly aestheticized, poetic and emotive.

A fantasy strategy is used to meet the aspiration and motivation of people. ‘Fantasy’ is a construction involving the combination of separate and distinct images already available from memory; in the case of *Impression West Lake* the audience recalls cultural symbols from movies and previous impressions of Zhang Yimou. A crucial factor is the resurgence of a kind of fashionable Orientalism. The function of developing an Oriental fantasy is to exploit an exotic and mythic theme. ‘China’s rapid economic and political development invites the interest and attention of the world’ (Wang 2008, 164). It is a trend that more and more non-Chinese have begun to admire Chinese culture, to learn Chinese, and want to learn more about China.

Since the core concept of *Impression West Lake* is concerned with myths and legends of
the West Lake, the show is described in their official website as leading the viewer to a
sweet thousand year dream. Symbols of Chinese culture blanket the advertising
campaign. The slogan ‘Authentic Dream’ is intended as an invitation to explore Chinese
culture. Diminishing its directness would diminish its authenticity in the eyes of the
target market. The campaign, created by *Impression West Lake* production team, pushes
the experience of authenticity perspective.

International travellers are one of the segments of *Impression West Lake*’s target
audience; many are ‘experience seekers’. Craik (2007) has identified that the global
travellers eschew conventional mass tourist experiences for travel that offers something
a bit different. She points that ‘moving or emigrating to another culture is another
example of a watershed in one’s life, something that gives an individual’s life an
entirely new twist.’ (cited in Boswijk et al 2007, xii)

Such tourists are particularly attracted to special interest tourism, especially cultural
tourism and its ilk. The insights of young generation longing for travel and exploring
different culture is another motivation. ‘The postmodern tourist’ is defined as an
individual in restless pursuit of knowledge or pleasure and/or escaping everyday
alienation. These trends give rise to consumption of culturally nourishing activities:
creativity lies in diversified indulged pleasure

Moreover, internationalism and multiculturalism lead people throughout the world to
frame their aspirations in terms of experiencing other cultures. It advances the interest
of other culture (MacCannell, 1976, 1). In a metaphor, this concept is similar to consumers’ excursions into an alternative restaurant. For example, people in the city would like to try out different cuisines. A Caucasian consumer might like to try Middle East cuisine on Friday night. For foreigners, a Chinese holiday offers an unforgettable experience that is embraced with exotic and rich history and culture. Oriental culture has always featured prominently as a symbol of China.

*Impression West Lake*’s success lies in engaging audiences on four distinct levels. These are the integration of education, entertainment, escapism and aesthetics, following Pine and Gilmore’s four realms of experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Targeting domestic and international audiences, *Impression West Lake* commodifies collective identity, inspires love of national culture, and educates the community to the common cultural heritage. Meanwhile, it has an informative function for international tourists. Watching *Impression West Lake* may just be more fun than reading Confucius. As noted,

…a significant portion of the experience industry has its own intrinsic value that cannot only be encapsulated in economic terms. An intrinsic value in aesthetics, art, culture and beauty is good for welfare in general. (Nielsen, 2004, 27)

This dimension also has effect on the domestic audiences of China. According to the observation of *Financial Times* columnist Guy de Jonquieres (2007), harsh constraints of contemporary life, relentless materialism and spiritual poverty remain high in today’s
Chinese society: people are seeking a way of escape from their routines and hassles through shows like *Impression West Lake*. The international audience can take a break and escape to a new world where they are treated to a new cultural experience.

### 3.6 Location and experience

Another aspect is that the performance of *Impression West Lake* provides a unique metropolitan outdoor experience on a natural stage setting. Unlike DVDs, the live action theatre 3-dimensional experience is unique. The outdoor theatre is specifically designed to showcase the West Lake and its surroundings; the stage setting is convincing while artificial, drawing attention to the link with nature; this acts as the vehicle of empowerment.

The audience experiences the unique historical atmosphere. It is a show with a heritage worth thousands of years; the outdoor theatre is integrated in an historical surrounding: real heritage bridges and pagoda. This natural stage design is deployed to differentiate the experience and make history more accessible and more engaging.
Besides Orientalism, the lifestyle oriented and consumer driven trend has inspired the creativity of the outdoor natural stage. The theme of harmony between humans and nature in traditional Chinese Taoist roots of belief also strikes a chord in western fashions and fads. However, Impression West Lake maintains a balance between Chinese and Western trends.

While many western nations are fashionably wringing their hands about the nature of capitalism, and about brands as their highest profile manifestation, developing nations are coming to the branded businesses, and indeed their own images, as their opportunity for development and
more stable wealth and economic control. Western consumers’ constant
search for novelty and authenticity may also help ensure the ‘newer’
economies have an interested audience for their propositions. (Kotler et
al, 2002, 72)

Li Wuwei (2008) argues ‘the traditional Chinese cultural values, at whose core is the
concept of ‘harmony’, are the basis of Chinese cultural appeal in an era of cultural
diversification and globalization. In modern history Western civilization, epitomized by
science, individualism and materialism, has pushed for industrialization but has caused
many problems in the process, including environmental degradation, confusion in social
ethics and international and regional conflicts. Traditional Chinese culture, which
stresses ‘giving priority to human beings’ (yi ren wei ben) and ‘harmony between
nature and humankind’ (tian ren he yi), provides alternative approaches to these
problems, thus putting Chinese culture in a more advantageous position in the
post-industrial information era’ (Li, 2008, 292). *Impression West Lake*’s creativity in
creating the outdoor experience has followed the concept of ‘tian ren he yi’. This
argument demonstrates the advantages of China’s cultural experience because it
approaches the experience on a spiritual base, which accords with Pine and Gilmore’s
indication of ‘a stage of transformations’ and ‘life transformation.’

3.7 Technological Innovation: Ancient Paths, Modern Voices
The rapid development of science and technology is important. Zhang’s production model is characterized by the simplicity of the story combined with technical innovation. Innovation transforms a Chinese legend into a modern, entertaining experience product.

Technology has three functions: first, it is used to enhance an established narrative communication: second, it is used to adapt, repackage, and transform an existing product to make it more appealing to different viewer groups. Third, technology helps create an experience for the audience.

According to Caves, ‘innovation likely increases the total volume of activity in a creative sector, because it involves more than the restyling of a constant flow of creative goods to consumers.’ (Caves, 2000, 203) Innovation in the performance ensures a modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling; it marks a change in presentation style; it transforms oral storytelling and engages a palette of technical tools to weave traditional tales using images, graphics, music, water effects, and sound mixed together.

Technology produces a hybrid format in an outdoor natural theatre. Using technology, the producers recreate The Rain of West Lake, which in some ways reflects the natural charm of rain on the West Lake.
Figure 19: Innovation of innovative technology of water pyramid of ‘Impression West Lake’
(Source: en.gotohz.com/.../xiuxianyule/images/tu15.gif)

Technology facilitates an urban leisure experience; innovation determines the physical design related to the experience. The special concealable auditorium provides a wide and
bird’s-eye view. Each seat is a place to enjoy the panoramic view of the West Lake even without watching the show. The sound system offers musical enjoyment. As the show is dependent on lighting effects it is shown only daily - in the evening. Impression

West-Lake uses the surface of West Lake as the stage, and the existing tree and kiosk in the lake as scenery. More than 300 special lights provide the effects. Bright colours wash over the stage and the lake surface. The stage is three centimetres lower than water surface, so the 300 actors seem to be dancing on the water. There is a retractable and moveable elevation-type stand which can hold 1800 audience members. According to one report,

The unique telescopic ladder auditorium is designed for the Impression West lake landscape theatre. In daytime, the entire auditorium is broken up into parts and immersed in the peripheral environment, thus the original landscape of the West Lake will not be affected. At night time the auditorium is unfolded and a top-grade urban landscape theatre is presented; the audience has a unique prospective where they are personally on the scene. (Impression West Lake Official Brochure)

Advanced technology has been an important factor in accelerating and expanding the global penetration of the show. Through improved technology (for example, special water effects equipment), special features enhance the viewing experience. They cater to multiple viewer preferences: audiences who enjoy dubbed versions, which may help to make the content more accessible; viewers who don't understand the Chinese language
and viewers who do understand Chinese can both enjoy special features via technology. It is like a new bottle to package the old wine; the attractions come in the form of innovative technology. In my survey, all respondents approved of the new technology introduced in *Impression West Lake*. Among these 60 percent of these people were under the age of 30 years.

Technology helps with communication and modernization of content; technology can also help preserve traditional culture. It aids in the preservation of ancient manuscripts and artefacts; it aids in exploring history and culture. Preservation of traditional ways of life through the application of new technologies expresses traditional memories: the traditional and the modern are recombined and reformatted. In these new settings of modernization facilitated by technological appeal, Chinese cultural capital is reconverted and articulated to modern processes. By utilising complex technologies in modern lighting, visual effects, literary dancing, and staging effects *Impression West Lake* transfers symbolic patrimony from one site to another in order to conserve it. These combinations, essentially formatted traditional folk stories, coexist with modern popular culture. Technology and culture are not contradictions.

3.8 Zhang Yimou’s Cultural Production Model and National Diffusion

As mentioned in the introduction and chapter one, because he is a celebrity entrepreneur with an international profile, Zhang Yimou is often portrayed in the Chinese media as a ‘creative model’, providing a road map for others in their quest for success. If Zhang
himself is a ‘model’ then his productions can also be regarded as business models. In the *Impressions Series* the model is a distinctive and recognizable aesthetic format linked to the global lifestyle trend of eco-recreation. Although eco-recreation is a contemporary ‘experience industry’, usually responding to aspirations of affluent social groups, it has deep roots in Chinese traditional values and therefore has appeal to a broad cross-section of Asian cultures. Adding to the mix of aesthetics, pyrotechnics and outdoor scenery is Zhang’s propensity for colourful interpretations of Chinese tradition best typified by the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2003 movie hit *Hero.*

Zhang’s outdoor tourism spectacles have established a new benchmark for success in the domestic tourism market; to date the tourism spectacle model in China has most typically involved historical re-enactments of classic legends and tales or cultural troupes reproducing minority cultures. Singers, dancers, story-tellers and acrobats perform. This is a time-honoured model characterised by tradition and technique more so than creative flair.

What is interesting about the *Impression Series* is that it is a formulaic approach: a Chinese cultural format enhanced by technology and pop culture. These productions exploit the rising importance of Chinese culture in the global entertainment and tourism markets. Moreover, they appeal to international consumers by incorporating essentialist images that not only link the product with stereotypical oriental images but simultaneously offer the appeal of the exotic locale. China’s desire to build cultural capital, or soft power, using such an approach highlights the need to reconnect with the
global tourism market in the post-Beijing Olympics era. The case study *Impression West Lake* is therefore a model for the franchising of contemporary artistic events in other parts of China. For instance, following in the footsteps of Zhang Yimou’s *Impression Series*, Feng Xiagang is set to launch a new extravaganza *Dreamy Beibuwan (Menghuan Beibusan)* which is scheduled to open in October 2011. Similar to Zhang’s *Impression Series*, Feng’s outdoor mega show embraces rich history in a stunningly picturesque backdrop. *Menghu Beibuwan* will be set among the outdoor landscape of Beibuwan and will recreate the ancient Maritime Sild Road and the voyage. Similarly, *Menghuan Beibuwan* is a collaborative effort between Feng and the Fangchenggang local government. Another celebrated director, Chen Kaige, is preparing to open *Xi Yi in Dali* next year to commemorate the voyages of navigator Zheng He to the Western Ocean (now called the Indian Ocean). (Leng MoLeng, Global Times, 2010, (5/17/2010), http://life.globaltimes.cn/entertainment/2010-05/532605.htmlIdylllic seaside setting)

Formatting has been discussed in relation to media and entertainment programming as well as built environments by Moran and Keane (2010). They write:

> The key dynamic of this flow of cultural ideas from one place to another and from one time to another involves multifarious processes if identification, selection, adaptation, possible rearrangement and redeployment of cultural forms and styles, often in unexpected and highly productive circumstances (Moran and Keane 2010, 3).
Formatting is most often found in film and TV industries and this illustrates how Zhang Yimou, a noted impresario, has exploited the formatting model. Futures analyst David Loye has identified a series of processes by which creative works are materialised. A film may begin as an idea in the minds of someone, maybe even as a scrap of an idea, a character or a scene, perhaps associated with some current fad. Due to the high probability of failure the idea is forced into a particular genre or form for the purposes of marketing; for instance romantic comedy, action adventure, thriller, road movie etc. In the case of an unformed idea, a writer or writing team is called in to expand the idea such that it fits the generic conventions of the market. The script is read by one of many experts who are hired to read the hundreds of scripts that appear; the decision to proceed will be weighed against information from the market, the availability of stars, previous successful films in the same genre or social trends. This Predictor Factor Checklist is an industry gauntlet which includes the story itself (it is appealing), the target demographics, the costs, expected returns, press-sell, stars, distribution, markets, ratings (e.g. PG, M), release time, and the novelty factor (does it have a memorable gimmick?).

In addition to these factors, Loye draws attention to ‘cycles in the dream factory’; for instance, periods when certain kinds of films are ‘hot’. The first stage in this cycle is innovation whereby a new idea gets created, purchased or elaborated. This is followed by the production or ‘implementation’ stage. By the third stage certain ‘imitation’ tendencies emerge as a result of the commercial imperatives: this is the goal of making the product like something else in the market, often to the point of ‘replication’. The end
result is a spate of similar but different films that ‘proliferate like mushrooms on the lawn’. Such a proclivity to replicate is found in all industry sectors from fashion to computers. However, rapid replication leads to ‘saturation’ and ultimately the progressive ‘degradation’ of the product, the final stage of which is ‘boredom and satiation’, the demise of novelty.

The business format developed by the contemporary Broadway show is reflected in Zhang Yimou’s *Impression Series* which embraces aspects of live theatrical production, digital technology and business management and promotion. Zhang draws on the capacities of the unique Chinese local cultural and natural assets to differentiate the content. This forms the core value of the content which reinforces cultural identity and adds to the competitive advantage of Chinese created cultural goods.

<table>
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<th>Humanity</th>
<th>Eco Recreation Trend</th>
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<td>Fame Effect</td>
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![Diagram](image-url)
Figure 20: Zhang Yimou’s Cultural Production Model
Illustrated in the case of *Impression West Lake*

3.81 Zhang Yimou’s Business Model

‘*Disney works, why not Impression West Lake?’* –*Impression West Lake* Co director
As mentioned in chapter one Zhang Yimou has become a well known brand domestically and internationally. His unique career journey and distinctive aesthetic style, together with international recognition and often controversial domestic reputation, have added to a complex image. Zhang Yimou is ranked within the top ten celebrities in China in a Baidu poll. According to one report, because of his success before the early 1990s, every film Zhang has made since has received great media attention. This popularity has also given him the respect of the Chinese film industry. Therefore, Zhang’s personal success, as an industry trademark, is also one of the elements that have contributed to the success of his later films. In other words, the great success of Zhang’s later films is not only the result of the films themselves, but also because of his personal achievement and reputation. (Fu, 2005, 65)

Zhang Yimou is portrayed as a ‘master’ (or maestro) in most Chinese media and production promotions. The posters of the *Impression Series* and Turandot claim that these are Zhang Yimou masterpieces. In relation to the latter Zhang is an impresario. Similarly, a vast consumer population is driving the rise of China’s creative power. Chinese creative projects like *Impression Series* can play a big role in transforming cultural resources into soft power. The discussion will be elaborated in Chapter 4.
Zhang Yimou’s business model represents Chinese cultural goods. Zhang Yimou exploits cultural proximity and natural resources in a co-production with local government and the tourism authority. The three perspectives: Core Concept, Business Management and Technological Innovation, build differentiation and creativity. These perspectives integrate technology with artistic creativity and then carry out commercial operation and distribute the competitive advantages. As discussed earlier, the unique Core Concept for *Impression West Lake* covers the original folk story, local custom, stage design, outdoor live theme stage and New age music. Externally, government cultural policy, the government institutions, tourism resources and financial investment serve as a supporting environment for the ongoing production.
The three elements also ensure the experience effect, leading to ‘word of mouth’. This is outlined by three spin-off effects. Zhang’s creative models show that positive publicity can be generated from the following ‘meaningful experiences’:

1. Customers who have positive experiences will spend more: viewers touched by the *Impression West Lake* may come to see the performance more than once. In connection with a meaningful experience, they are likely to purchase merchandising products such as Jane Zhang’s or Kitaro’s music album. Also, they would be interested in other *Impression Series*.

2. The consumers have significant roles in creating ‘word of mouth’ publicity. After the trip to Hangzhou, customers who have the meaningful experience will relate it to others. In that way they act as ‘ambassadors’ of *Impression West Lake*, bringing in new customers.

3. The meaningful experience has news value; the event itself in an outdoor setting and the reputation of the celebrities creates news waves.

### 3.8.2 Formatting and the Process of Circulation
Zhang’s production and business model is stimulating a franchise model of selling experiences in the tourism and entertainment industry. The business and production model are available for other entrepreneurs in China to copy although the content is protected by copyright, as detailed in Chapter 5. Led by Zhang’s practice, there is a trend for famed directors to become entrepreneurs by integrating artistic creativity and collaboration with government cultural tourism bureaus.

This process is divided into six stages (Figure 13). The Process of Circulation includes a five-stage cycle: introduction of idea, implication, recognition, national replication and imitation by others. Another potential stage is international export. The rationale behind the concept emanates from the Product Life Cycle (Rink & Swan, 1979:219-239) and ‘Cycles in the Dream Factory’ (Loye, 1999, 33). That is, an entrepreneur’s idea (or an artistic process) has a certain market expectation but in order to be successful there has to be feasibility because of the high risk of failure in the creative industries. A fresh idea can become a ‘hot potato’ with positive publicity.

The implications concern business returns. The Chinese media analyst Lu Rui notes, ‘because the first instalment of the outdoor gala made significant profits due to the inclusion of A-list directors, this has been the reason for a national diffusion of the Impression model.’ (The Global Times, 2010, 5/17/10) Consumer recognition and acceptance signals the start of the growth stage. Therefore, in the case of Zhang’s own production, replication takes places like ‘mushrooms on the lawn’ (Loye, 1999, 55). The Impressions Lijiang, Dahongpao, and Liu Sanjie have been added to the tourism map of
China and to audiences’ memory. Hence this replication stage leads ‘the cycle to peak and to ultimately self-destruct’. (Loye, 1999, 55) Currently there are six mega-outdoor gala in different tourism regions in China under the consistent brand name of Yimou's *Impression Series*.

Another impact is that other entrepreneurs and local government authority are motivated to make something similar to the original production because of the low barriers to entry. Because it has been done before, by Zhang and others, the knowledge is there. More and more tourism authorities, local government officials, and private investors are approaching famous directors for their cooperation. Famous directors receive public attention and have the capability to enhance local stories. Imitation takes places in three ways: (1) there is the similarity of the reputational effects of the director, building the core concept related to local cultural resources and innovating in an outdoor tourism natural stage; (2) the business models of formatting an experience package and promotion campaigns; (3) collaboration with local government or an invitation from tourism sectors.
Figure 22: The Stages of Process of Circulation

In conclusion

By means of this ongoing cultural and product recycling, together with standardized management and promotional logic, local content is expanded within China, and internationally. The development potential of Zhang’s production model has a global
However, after the initial excitement of success, excessive imitation can cause the decline of cultural innovation. Eventually, the product reaches maturity stage. As consumers increasingly forsake the products and promotion, a negative attitude towards the extravaganza and similar genres arises. The Product Life Cycle theory is directly analogous to the decline of the popularity of cultural production tourism places. As David Loye (1999, 55) points out,

In the stage of saturation, because the business rather than the creative side that dominantly shapes the product, what emerges in the imitations is a progressive degradation of the product. And this degradation of product begins the stage of boredom and satiation. The replication and imitation become less exciting, more shallow, and stereotypical and farther gets away from the richness of the originator’s vision.

Because the uniqueness of creative and cultural productions appeals to audience aspirations, imitation will likely make audiences less interested in the products and their associated publicity. In the end, less novelty leads to more negative publicity. Therefore, the value of the cultural and creative products is degraded.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE IMPRESSION: CULTURAL BRANDING
AND CHINESE SOFT POWER

The production of Impression West Lake thinks globally but reacts locally. Culture is a well of revenue. In addition to economic power, cultural products provide symbolic power. The ‘impression’ is an articulation of place and meaning. The cultural adaptation of the Impression Series is not opposed to globalization; rather, is an aspect of it. In addition, cultural production and soft power form a reciprocal relationship. The ‘impression’ therefore reflects an image of China in the post-Beijing Olympics era.

Impression West Lake demonstrates cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism refers to ‘the implicit nation state mandate that each nation must have a set of distinct cultural practices, ideas and forms that inspire love and delight in the homeland, are readily represented and performed, and are powerful enough to lure and capture the gaze of the outsider while simultaneously appearing authentic in the eyes of the insider.’ (Penrose, 1995, 128) The question of Chinese cultural nationalism and the ‘rise of China’ have been addressed in a number of recent studies (Callahan, 2010; Cooper Rama, 2007; Shambaugh, 2008; Deng, 2008; Li, 2008; Keane, 2011).

Benedict Anderson has argued that cultural nationalism is aligned with ‘imagined communities’, which are sustained by a shared notion and practice of culture, which can include language, traditional cultural forms, architecture and spatial organization, appearance, food and habits of consumption’ He says that in the contemporary world,
‘such traditions are updated and reworked.’ (Anderson, 1991, 67)

In this chapter I identify the significant ‘impressions’ of cultural branding and soft power. These are the intangible forces and concepts behind the emergence of cultural and creative products. Both culture and soft power are resources for a state. China competes with other influential soft power resources such as U.S, Europe, neighbour states such as Japan’s ‘gross national cool’ and the ‘Korean wave’ to secure its cultural products a share of the market. The staging of *Impression West Lake* showcases place; it hones soft power skills through strategic marketing branding and builds soft power resources.

### 4.1 The government’s role in cultural branding

According to the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), cultural tourism is ‘the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs’ (Bonet, 1998: 187). Tourism is a leading sector that contributes to economic growth in all countries and regions. Tourism development should ideally entail an improvement of cultural and creative resources. The World Tourism Organization Statistics (WTO, http://www.world-tourism.org) show that commercialized mass tourism is one of the biggest businesses in the world with revenues
of $463 billion in 2001. The local Hangzhou government has realized the importance of cultural tourism and the implementation of cultural policy.

As far as the political system in China is concerned, the principles and action plans of creative industries in tourism development are structured top-down from the central government to local and municipal governments. It is natural then to find that key parts of the plans made by local governments are affected by policy principles designed by the central government. These strategies may include financial funding to promote creative and cultural industries best practices, promoting venture production, reducing market-entry barriers by simplifying regulatory and tax schemes, and pursuing international technology cooperation. Infrastructure items, such as electricity, water, telecommunications, suitable land, living environment and one-stop services by the government are all important to bring *Impression West Lake* production and its human skills together.

The worldwide clamour over creative industries, and the experience of successful cultural and creative production in Chinese coastal provinces like *Impression West Lake* have stimulated a great deal of interest in initiating cultural and creative industries in Chinese cities and towns. In line with movements like the Development Plan and the ‘new tourism internationalization’ campaign, ‘creative industries’ have moved westward and northward from China’s southeast coast. The phase ‘creative industries’ has appeared in preliminary research reports for the Eleven Five-Year Plan in many
provinces and cities. Efforts to plan creative industries are now under way in various regions, especially in underdeveloped regions.

It is unreasonable, however, to expect some provincial and city governments to develop creative industries, because few understand their real meaning. This trend is reflected in the speeches and reports of formal government conferences at the provincial and municipal levels. At the beginning of 2006, China’s central government outlined several strategic tasks for building an innovation-oriented country. The strategic importance of innovation related clusters has led China to confront issues of promoting creative industries development. In response to this policy the Hangzhou local government is taking the initiative of developing six potential industries highlighting Hangzhou tourism. This will strengthen comparative advantages and focus on developing arts performance industries.

According to the new tourism internationalization strategy, these six potential industries will cooperate with the tourism industry closely and become a new model for Hangzhou tourism. A quote from the official government document reads: ‘especially now we have a new attractive performance Impression West Lake directed by a very famous Chinese director Zhang Yimou.’ Foo and Rossetto’s study of the characteristics and motivations of cultural tourism has been embraced by the Hangzhou government. Impression West Lake is a matrix event combining the following: festivals or fair (music, dance, comedy, visual arts, multi-arts and heritage); performing arts or concerts (theatre, classical and
contemporary music); historic or heritage building, sites or monuments; and cultural displays (Foo and Rossetto, 1998, 7)

Hangzhou’s government has instituted a campaign since Jan.1, 2005 for international markets: ‘Visit Hangzhou, Feel China’. Through this program tourists get to live the real lives of Hangzhou people and have unique experiences in Hangzhou. Marketing and promotional campaigns have been conducted since the 1980s. ‘Since the early 1980s the Chinese government, both central and local, has invested billions in the development, renovation and protection of the historical sites and scenic tourist spots in more than 1000 cities and towns now open to foreign visitors...’ (Xiao, 2007: 53) Such campaigns are designed to increase the awareness of destinations like Hangzhou. The marketing attractions are deliberately used by the Impression West Lake production team and Hangzhou government to keep the show in the public eye; for example, a press news and print advertisement with the headline ‘Impression West Lake: a gold name card for Hangzhou.’ There is also a network of government official website promotions on Impression West Lake and local private tourism websites.

Since the comparative advantage of cites is no longer based solely on the provision of basic services and infrastructures but, to a large degree, on lifestyle and leisure experiences (Florida, 2001), cities must therefore continually invest in their leisure products or feel the consequences of diminishing attractiveness (Law, 1993:170) .A master development plan for tourism was designed in 2004 and will continue until 2025.
Hangzhou has been an active promoter of leisure tourism since 2005. Hangzhou’s plan stresses four strategies: ‘internationalization’, ‘being a tourism centre’, ‘westward development’ and ‘merging of city, culture and tourism’. The final strategy is to focus on the development of the natural environment of West Lake, including tourism development of urban as well as suburban areas. The tourism westernization strategy and tourism internationalization strategy are implemented for developing countries’ own cultural and natural resources in order to embark on full-blown tourism development.

Rich in tourist resources, the West Lake is the most famous scenic spot of Hangzhou. In recent years, Hangzhou carried out the developing strategy of ‘large Hangzhou, large-scale tour and great industry’, and has formed a travel network based on West Lake Scenery Spot, reaching Shaoxing, Ningbo and Putuo in the east, Huangshan Mountain and Jiuhuashan Mountain in the west, with Tiantai Mountain, Yandang Mountain in the south and Moganshan Mountain, Shanghai, Suzhou, Wuxi and Nanjing in the north. Hangzhou is making efforts to identify historical and cultural links between attractions and combine scenic and leisure tourism.

Place branding is emphasized by Hangzhou government. Hangzhou put forward the ‘Hangzhou Tourism Internationalization Strategy’ which stresses the ‘Eight Promotions of Hangzhou Tourism Quality’. Based on the official announcement of Hangzhou Tourism Commission (2007), Hangzhou announced its city tourism brand in 2007, which is the ‘Oriental Capital of Leisure, City of Quality Life’. It was awarded ‘The Best Tourism City of China by the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the National Tourism Administration of the People’s Republic of China. The Hangzhou
Tourism Commission implemented the Hangzhou Tourism Internationalization Strategy between the year 2004 and 2006. Within two years, Hangzhou had achieved two changes: (1) from ‘driven by domestic market’ to ‘driven by both domestic market and overseas market’; (2) from ‘famous for scenic tourism’ to ‘famous for scenic tourism, leisure tourism and Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism’ (Hangzhou Tourism Commission, 2007).

4.2 The competition to exploit cultural resources

*Kongfu is from China, Panda is from China*

*Kongfu Panda is Hollywood*

Many scholars (McLeod, 2000; Barber, 2010) in the social sciences and the humanities have attempted to come to terms with a social and cultural world which is characterized by lack of clear boundaries and unprecedented complexity. The concepts of ‘American Dream’ and the ‘melting pot’ have formed the national identity of the United States. Benjamin R. Barber has suggested the concept ‘McWorld’ to disguise the US’s hegemony in a softer ideological cloak.

McWorld does take on the colours of the cultures it swallows up--for a while: thus the pop music accented with Reggae and Latino rhythms in the Los Angeles barrio, Big Macs served with French wine in Paris or made from Bulgarian beef in Eastern
Europe, Mickey speaking French at Euro-Disney. But, in the end, MTV and McDonald's and Disneyland are American cultural icons, seemingly innocent Trojan-American horses nosing their way into other nations' cultures.’ (Barber, 2010, 23)

Many Hollywood blockbusters have long been accused of borrowing Oriental narratives and repackaging them as global blockbusters. DreamWorks’s *Kungfu Panda* (2008) and Walt Disney’s *Mulan* (1998) both feature specific Chinese locations, characters, actions, and narrative motifs. *Kungfu Panda* is about a panda in ancient China who becomes an unlikely martial-arts hero, vividly presenting such cultural elements as kung fu, panda, noodles, the distinct landscape, shadowboxing, temple fairs, calligraphy and acupuncture. *Mulan* is an animated movie about Hua Mulan, a legendary girl in China's history who fought on the battlefield replacing her father and who was held up as a female hero. *Kungfu Panda*'s box office takings exceeded 135 million yuan ($19.8 million) in three weeks, making it the first animated movie to top the 100 million yuan ($14.7 million) mark on China's mainland. (*Beijing Review*, 19 August 2008, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/life/txt/2008-08/19/content_144883.htm)

Traditional Chinese architecture, soft mountain scenery, village characters, dumplings, chopsticks, noodles and the mysterious sacred home of kungfu are represented in both movies. But despite the huge box office haul, the movies are more of a topic in China for the controversy over exploiting national cultural heritage. Chinese elements have aroused the interest and curiosity of audiences. Hence, beyond the question of
intellectual property, it is a matter of preserving and furthering national cultural heritage. Referring to the *Kungfu Panda*, The Chinese artist Zhao Bandi accused Hollywood of stealing Chinese cultural elements to weave an American cultural production which was successful and profitable in both Chinese and global market. The protest was widely reported by media in China and sparked a debate about how Chinese should react when their culture is represented in foreign movies which then make an impact around the world. Hollywood has taken China's culture; if a Hollywood adaptation with Chinese cultural elements becomes a hit in China, it poses a threat to Chinese own credibility as a creative nation. According to Zhao, ‘the movie had stolen China's national treasure and its martial art to make up an old-fashioned encouragement piece and make money in China.’ (*Beijing Review*, 19, August, 2008, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/life/txt/2008-08/19/content_144883.htm)

The indispensable role of capital - in financing, marketing, and distribution, together with the emergence of cultural hybridization as a prevailing strategy for content design - is manifested in the global audience strategy. In the Chinese market, domestic and international factors foster cultural and creative products. As the production company of Impression West Lake itself is partially government held, the production acts as a cultural tourism attraction for branding Hangzhou city tourism. While Disney exemplifies the power of the US entertainment industry, the *Impression Series* shoulders some of the expectations of Chinese soft power. In its global expansion, America has promoted American cultural products, such as Disney amusement parks
to influence the concepts and values on the younger generations of countries and regions all over the world. According to Henry Giroux in his book *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (1999), Disney has become an American cultural icon that influences the Americanizing of global culture.

Disney’s pedagogy has to do not only with the messages and values inscribed in theme parks’ attractions, social organization and heritage displays but also with the manner and extent to which the ideologies that inform them are connected to other projects in urban planning, ecological politics, produce merchandising, United States domestic and global policy formation, technological innovation and constructions of the national character (Giroux, 1999, 39).

Many non-Chinese created ‘adaptations’ have been criticized for enhancing stereotypes of China. While key elements in these cultural products are distinctive of China, they have been interpreted by non-Chinese. In this light, ‘created by Chinese’ and ‘created in China’ would seem to hold an advantage. As a result China is paying attention to cultural heritage and has focused more on how to promote it. A Chinese production like *Impression West Lake* comes at the right time. But this time the impact is arguably greater; China has the advantage of authenticity which avoids the shortcoming of ‘Americanization’ and ‘artificiality’.

Other examples illustrate that traditional Chinese culture is a central resource for
cultural adaptations. The rapid spread of manga and anime in the global media market has Chinese origins. Many Japanese manga and anime characters are sourced from Chinese historical characters such as General Zhang Fei from The Romance of Three Kingdoms (sanguo yanyi). Inspired by the Chinese folk novel Journey to the West (xiyouji), the Japanese manga character ‘Goku’ from Dragon Ball has more popularity and recognition in the international media rather than the original character Wu Kong known as the Monkey King. Even the South Koreans have reportedly claimed Confucius as Korean (2009, Asian Fanatics Forum). The issue of distorting and claiming historical characters in Asian countries has triggered a discussion of cultural ownership. Cultural ownership refers to extending the logic of ownership and group rights to the music, art, religious rituals, origin stories and botanical knowledge of any cultural tradition. However, the issue of cultural ownership is largely untouched by intellectual property law (McLeod, 2000, http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI9978527). As Chan (2001, 4) has stated, we are experiencing a ‘give and take’ among cultures that encounter each other, a multifaceted and complex working of forces. Therefore, the argument about ownership of the cultural resources focuses on who should be entitled to promote distinctly Chinese productions.

Along with the reputational effects of Zhang Yimou come certain advantages. Unlike Hollywood animated movies with Chinese elements such as Mulan, which just touch the surface of Chinese culture or use Chinese elements as symbols, the creators of Impression West Lake have done a lot of homework and grasped the true values behind
Chinese culture. For example, the concept of *Impression West Lake* is promoted as the essence of Taoism, combining ‘harmony’ between humanity and nature, embracing universal values similar to New Age.

In spite of the threat of the decline of traditional culture and values, and China’s weakness in the face of a cultural invasion, there is another deliberate force at work, the development of Chinese ‘soft power’, consciously pursuing international trade in cultural products. ‘Soft power’ is defined by Nye as ‘the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.’ (Li, 2008, 291)

The government is executing a ‘go global’ initiative to promote cultural exports. According to Li Wuwei (Li, 2008) Chinese policymakers have already realized the importance of ‘soft power’. At the CCP 17th congress, October 15, Hu Jintao reported that ‘cultural soft power has two purposes: enhancing creativity and meeting the demands of people’s spiritual life; the other is to strengthen China’s competiveness in the contest for comprehensive national power within the international arena.’ (Li, 2008, 289)

Culture is a core component of ‘soft power’; it illustrates how ‘soft power’ can be influential both domestically and internationally. Zhang’s productions are a form of ‘soft power’ created in the market rather than manufactured by government bodies such as Confucius Institutes. *Impression West Lake*’s cultural power illuminates a kind of soft power generated by a creative entrepreneur with government cultural policy.
Li (2011) argues that traditional Chinese cultural values, at whose core is the concept of ‘harmony’, are the basis of Chinese cultural appeal in an era of cultural diversification and globalization. Traditional Chinese culture is singled out as the most valuable source of Chinese soft power, on the premise that it boasts a long history, and a wide range of traditions, symbols and textual records. The value inherent in traditional Chinese culture is found in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and other classical schools of thought.

Zhang Yimou presents Han culture and the ‘harmony between nature and humankind’ (tian ren he yi) in his *Impression West Lake*. The show’s cultural power illuminates soft power at the level of the creative entrepreneur. On the one hand, the pro-creative industries government policy provides a rationale to protect national culture; it sustains a national identity in accordance with approved cultural traditions. The entrepreneur provides the input of creativity and the marketing strategy.

The Hangzhou government official websites announce their understanding and definition on the ‘soft power’ cultural policy and its relation with the creative industries:

The soft power of culture, marked by cultural appeal and influence and the strength in culturally creative industry, is the core element in the soft power of a nation, and is an important element in the comprehensive
competitiveness of a city. Supported by an 8000-year old civilization and a 5,000 years history as a city, Hangzhou enjoys a rich cultural heritage that can turn into a great advantage in its overall development. At the same time, the new era requires the task of enhancing cultural soft power to include not only cultural heritage, but also the advanced culture, building the culture of harmony and developing the industry of culture and creativity.

The publicity continues to describe cultural benefits for all:

Such actions are of vital significance to realization of a ‘City of Quality Life’ that compares favourably with the world-celebrated cities. To increase this soft power of culture and make Hangzhou a ‘famous cultural city’, it is necessary to tap into the core value system of socialism, the socialist cultural orientations and cultural and creative industries. Public cultural service system must be perfected, development of culturally creative industry be sped up. New contents, forms and operation types of culture must also be found, and excellent young artists will be discovered in or attracted to Hangzhou, so that there is no lacking of human and material sources in the cultural development of the city. With advanced culture, the city will have better cohesiveness, the social creativity will be brought to exercise, and our people will be able to live a more satisfied spiritual life. By doing so, the city will enjoy higher
level of civilization with more culturally refined citizens, and a stronger culturally creative industry will enhance the city’s core economic competitiveness.’ (Hangzhou Government, http://eng.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zpd/English/develop/T306414.shtml)

Cultural power may in the end be more subtle and profound than power in politics. However, the dominant power lies in the political power of political authority, norms and credibility rather than in culture (Yun, 2007). From a propagandist’s perspective the weakness of Impression West Lake’s cultural ‘soft power’ is that it is not directly linked with Chinese political images and power.

4.3 Cultural branding

Because creative and cultural industries are closely associated with tourism industries, the solution has been to annex creative and cultural industries in China more directly to ideas, debates and strategies associated with national branding. In recent years, there is an emerging shift to promote intangible cultural assets to attract overseas tourists and to rebuild a national image. National branding has two approaches: ‘people marketing’ and ‘place marketing’. This is illustrated in the case of Impression West Lake which is designed to increase the awareness of the destination and to build a new national identity.
Branding is about aspiration and creating meaning. When branding is applied to a country and place, it conveys identity and communication through combining iconographical elements of place and people. *Impression West Lake* may be compared to a micro version of Beijing Olympic Opening and closing ceremonies. The marketing campaign endorses Chinese cultural achievements and portrays Chinese identity in a positive light. It is aimed at both consumers domestic and overseas; it combines a tourism advertisement and a cultural essay. The marketing campaigns based on Zhang Yimou’s reputation not only increased awareness but also lured potential customers and attracted significant publicity from the media. Therefore, the ‘people marketing’ (Kotler et al, 2002) includes the use of Zhang Yimou as a celebrity creative entrepreneur. This approach replaces political propaganda.

The national brand is also associated with place branding. Simon Anholt (2003) has pointed out that creativity is important to ‘place branding’:

> Place branding should find, release and help direct the talents and skills of the population, and promote the creative use of these in order to achieve innovation in education, business, government, environment and the arts. Furthermore, only creativity of the highest order can ‘square the circle’ of translating the complexity of a place into purposeful, distinctive and effective brand strategy. (Anholt 2003, 225)

*Impression West Lake*’s innovation lies in the new added value of China’s modern
images. Both the production and the local government are aware of the opportunity of
*Impression West Lake* as a unique cultural and creative commodity. This is a deliberate
strategy for China.

The brand of Chinese uniqueness lies in cultural nationalism, the implication that a
unique and attractive culture will earn recognition and power for the nation. As a
cultural product, *Impression West Lake* reinforces, reflects and influences the nation’s
values and traditions. With its appeal to harmony *Impression West Lake* works to
promote a new brand of China that confronts the negative image of ‘China Threat’; it
has a softer approach.

### 4.4 Reflecting a new identity of China

The image of a country is important asset for attracting visitors. Naren Chitty argued
‘magnetism is the key ingredient when cultures or places (such as Beijing, New York
and Paris) are magnetic to accentuate attractiveness’. (Chitty, November 19 2010,
*China Daily*) Likewise, the identity of Hangzhou is constructed as a romantic and
spiritual tourist resort. Wang (2008) has pointed out problems facing China in
bolstering its international image, which comes from the propaganda-heavy central
media. The rise of China has now reached the stage of a transition from a ‘Made in
China’ brand to a dynamic ‘Created/Initiated in China’ concept (see Keane 2007).
Organically grown brands imbued with new meanings reflect changes in China and the
transition from a country largely viewed as a place of original-equipment manufacturers (OEMs), one that remains in the background by supplying global brands with unbranded products, to one that creates and manages leading global cultural brands.

China’s self-presentation to the world as a deeply authentic, culturally rich country garners respect and power for the nation at a level of cultural exchange. Since 1992 China has embraced a market economy; and in 2001 it entered into the World Trade Organisation. Gradually there has been a shift of national identity from ‘old communism fashion’ to ‘new rising China’. Chinese cultural and creative industries are seeking to position as international players, carrying their brand identities domestically and internationally to compete with ‘cultural proximate’ countries.

In the context of internationalism, Zhang Yimou has already collaborated with the Chinese political authorities in a grander manner through his direction of the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies. As Craik (2007) has noted, spectacle and tourism are coming closer together. There was a time when countries used such special events to showcase new trades and wares. Beyond the political perspective Impression West Lake is a face lift for the image of China.

However, unlike the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 which occurred on large scales, China uses Impression West Lake as an ongoing opportunity to carry out public diplomacy. The China Brand is promoted by using the resources of a profitable company. Although the production of Impression West Lake is
a close collaboration with the Hangzhou Government, the political, social and cultural elements in *Impression West Lake* are not directly owned by Hangzhou Government. Its public appeal lies in the production led by Zhang Yimou that uses ‘the cultural card.’ These cultural products objectively and subjectively shift national identity from ‘a socialist country’ and ‘a Third World country’ to a new image of ‘creative and innovative cultural rich country’. Rather than carrying a strong and hard message of ‘we are China, we’ve been around for ages and we enjoy our powerful economic rise’, *Impression West Lake* churns out a soft message of ‘we would love to share our rich culture and history and creative modernity and make friends in the world.’ The marketing campaign endorses Chinese cultural achievements and portrays Chinese identity in a positive light. It is aimed at both domestic and overseas consumers.

4.5 Concluding remarks: Renaissance of faith in Chinese culture and tradition

In this chapter I have discussed issues of emerging soft power and nationalism. In this entrepreneurial model key individuals have assumed the responsibility for national and cultural revival. China’s Confucian traditions have been modernized by productions such as *Impression West Lake*. Identity has been reconstructed in the broad context of rapid modernization and globalization. The new national identity is embodied in cultural resources like Hangzhou’s West Lake. Without the interference of political ideology, the emergence of faith in Chinese cultural and tradition plays a central role in constructing national identity. Together with cultural products like *Impression West*
Lake there are many historical lectures on TV.

Guo (2004) has discussed the rewriting of history that took place during the 1980s and 90s when interest in Zeng Guofan, Chen Yinque, Wang Guowei and others under the banner of New Confucianism exploded. Guo maintained that ‘Confucianism, widely regarded as the heart and soul of Chinese culture, is now at the core of the ‘national essence’ that is being rediscovered, reinvented, and re-embraced today as an essential criterion for defining the community’ (Guo, 2004, 62)

While traditional patrimony remains the responsibility of the state, cultural branding is increasingly the task of private creative personnel, enterprises and organizations. The Hangzhou government understands the cultural policy imperatives of protecting and preserving historical patrimony in order to increase the tourism industry. For the production team the performance is a way to ‘re-present’ national history. Zhang Yimou, the creative brain behind *Impression West Lake*, has combined popular culture with modern media technologies, demonstrating the increasing integration of the new cultural identity of China into mainstream media.
CHAPTER FIVE: LOCAL ISSUES

Even though the production is claimed to increase the popularity of scenic spots and benefit the local economy, the Zhang Yimou branded Impressions has had no shortage of critics. Issues include intellectual property and copyright, industrial relations, authenticity, and pollution. The ramifications are that government cultural and creative industries policies should avoid serious adverse social, cultural and environmental problems which result in the ruining of the quality of travel experience, and lead to ‘bad press’ followed by a falloff in visits. In order to encourage and sustain variety and heterogeneity of a place, the local government should work in unison with the production company to give greater priority to sustainability, authenticity and quality. In this chapter I examine some of the negative media associated with local issues. My discussion does not take up these issue in length, however, as this is outside the scope of the project.

Impression West Lake has come under the media spotlight for accusations levelled against Zhang and his collaborators; namely that the productions were over-staged for tourists and generated substantial waste and pollution. According to the summary and translation from Rednet (BBS on January 22, 2010 http://www.danwei.org/tourism/jiang_zongfu_zhan_yimou.php):

The crush of Impressions with their massive investment and clichéd performances has thrown the country's tourist destinations into chaos.
Zhang's *Impression* series is basically three tactics. First, massive investment and a huge performance troupe rely on China's inexhaustible population. Second, a feast of light and shadow that assaults the eye but leaves absolutely nothing of the spectacle behind after it is passes. Third, an incredibly high ticket price so as to delight tour guides drivers with big commissions. But overuse has revealed the inevitable flaws of three tactics. The *Impression* series actually began losing money with *Impression West Lake*. Among all of the reports about 100- and 200-million-yuan investments in *Impression West Lake* and beyond, there are hardly any press releases about ‘revenues’ or ‘profits’.

In the case of *Impression West Lake*, another difficulty arises because decision makers lack a useful way of organizing place-marketing strategies and actions related to intellectual property, welfare of employees and environmental issues. Another difficulty arises from a failure to adequately assess the target market.

### 5.1 Intellectual property and copyright

*Impression West Lake* copyrights owners are A-Listers, including Zhang Yimou, Kitaro and Zhang Liangying. The *Impression West Lake* project is therefore highly concerned about intellectual property protection. The culture of piracy in China has posed a threat to creative products. According to surveys it is estimated that piracy rates in the
sector of entertainment products remain at between 80 percent and 95 percent in the Chinese market. (Chen, 2004; Huang, 2005; Wang and Wang, 2004) The widespread illegal use of pirated products and the problem of enforcing copyright law forces cultural producers themselves to pay attention to the protection of their intellectual property. Faced with high levels of illegal distribution, Zhang Yimou has become a victim. Moreover, because *Impression West Lake* is an outdoor event its ‘format’ can be easily copied.

Montgomery and Fitzgerald (2006) point out that intellectual property protection is aimed to prevent the value of the investment in creative output from being stolen by others in an act of ‘free riding’. Creators and commercializing agents stand to gain from commercialising creative content. Copyright encourages investment in creative production such that investors and creators recover a reward on investment. In response, the *Impression West Lake* production team employs tactics to control photography taken by audiences. Another solution is to keep the rehearsal confidential in order to ensure that the show can’t be easily duplicated. When the production team has a rehearsal, a plastic fence seals and covers the whole stage.

**5.2 Private Investors: blurring line between the public and the private**

The company responsible for the project is Hangzhou Impression West Lake Culture Development Company, Ltd., a company that undertakes outdoor performances with
natural mountains and waters as backgrounds. It is a flagship creative company in Hangzhou responsible for the management of creativity and human capital. The Hangzhou Impression West Lake Culture Development Company, Ltd. was established on December 31, 2004. It was jointly established by five investors: Hangzhou West Lake Scenic Area Management Committee (Hangzhou Urban Planning Bureau), Zhejiang Huatian Broadcasting and Television Performance Art Convention and Exhibition Company, Ltd, (Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, the provincial government directly under the public information unit), Zhejiang Kaine Group (a private company in the Chinese stock market), a large-scale co-founder of Cultural Development Corporation and the Beijing Impression Original Cultural Art Centre.

Although Hangzhou Impression West Lake Culture Development Company, Ltd is a private company, two of its investors are government regulators responsible for local issues, licensing and publicity. According to the Hangzhou government website, the Hangzhou West Lake Scenic Area Management Committee is the municipal government agency of Hangzhou Urban Planning Bureau. It has representatives of the municipal government with overall responsibility for the West Lake scenic spots protection, utilization, planning and construction. Furthermore, it is responsible for urban planning, construction management, real estate management, environmental protection and conservation and land acquisition and land-use rights management. (2010, http://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zzjg/zfjg/baseinfo.jsp?id=54) Because of issues such as environmental problems caused by the production, the Hangzhou Impression West Lake Culture Development Company is to some extent compromised:
negative behaviour might harm the interests and reputations of government agents.

The Zhejiang Huatian Broadcasting and Television Performance Art Convention and Exhibition Company, Ltd. belongs to Zhejiang Radio and Television Group which is the state owned media group at the provincial level. (2010, http://www.zrtg.com/) This relationship with a media company is beneficial for the promotion of *Impression West Lake* locally and diminishes negative publicity. This close relation explains why it is difficult to find negative aspects of the show on mainstream media in China. There is lack of voice for local issues.

Additionally the government provided a subsidy of RMB 200,000 for initial setup fees for the project as funding for local cultural products. (http://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zzjg/zfjg/baseinfo.jsp?id=54) *Impression West Lake* therefore has a partnership with the Hangzhou local government to boost local tourism and creative industries. These institutions are also the gatekeepers in the cultural and creative industry. They are also responsible for the large scale marketing promotion as well as the training of cultural workers.

### 5.3 Employment and labour issues

Human capital is an important aspect of cultural and creative industries. Caves (2000) outlines ‘vertically differentiated skills’ of those artists that supply individual creative
inputs. ‘In the terminology of economics, these creative inputs are themselves vertically
differentiated.’ The structure of creative workers can be classified into rankings of ‘A
list’ and ‘B list’ property. (7)

Creative capital reflects social and cultural relationships in China. The artists who
supply individual creative inputs differ in skill, originality, and proficiency. (Caves,
2000, 8) The A-list Zhang Yimou, Kitaro and Jane Zhang are superstars; their time for
the project is limited and flexible. They could even deliver their contribution from a
distance. They have the power to demand a higher price according to the economic
concept of ‘differential rent’. These ‘A-listers’ have the most bargaining power; they
incur a cost; consumers value the A-list factor and for this reason the tickets cost more
than other events.

The production team is led by Zhang Yimou. Zhang, Kitaro and Zhang Liangying
contract with the production institutions which in turn have a close relationship with
government bodies. These collaborating institutions have the capacity to support
Zhang’s work and ideas and articulate its virtues. Because of his status Zhang himself is
often the target of critiques of Impression West Lake.

The B list covers other Impression chief members such as Wang Chaoge, Fan Yue, the
lighting designer, sound designer, costume designer, art designer, dance general
supervisor, executive director and scenario directors. They play a role of executive
managers and put most of their time into the project. Compared with the A list, they are
responsible for the practical frontline management and have hands-on involvement in the performance.

Local performers and dancers provide the ‘C list’. The natures of their performances require far less creativity, talent and intellectual value compared with the A list and B list. And there is no shortage of mass labour in Chinese local market. It involves a lot of choreography and involves tough dancing skills. These are physical. Therefore, their work requires hard training. According to some reports the working conditions are not good, suggesting high levels of exploitation.

Figure 23: the top-down structures of creative capital

China’s mix of cheap labour, low cost production and high productivity has
transformed the nation; this phenomenon also applies to cultural production. The success of *Impression West Lake* relies on cheap labour. Directors Wang Chaoge and Fan Yue have refuted claims of exploitation by showcasing the series' achievements in job creating. An interview in *Global Times* in 2009 justifies reasons behind the recruitment. Hiring nonprofessional performers is a principle that the *Impression* series has stuck to although Fan explained that she does this not to save costs but to encourage unique artistic perspectives. Fan Yue explained that the series has had a significant social impact in terms of hiring and training local performers. Fan recalled recruiting 270 performers from Hangzhou for *Impression West Lake*; most of them were in their 20s; they were given seven months training. The dancers are required to perform in the water. It is more than simply providing them with a job, it also gives respect and confidence,’ she said, ‘this attribute is hard to find in a factory or mining job, especially for those locals who have not received higher education.’ She went on:

We also give people a greater sense of honour and a chance to spread their own culture that otherwise might remain unknown to the rest of the world….Only locals can perfectly blend local culture and sights as reflected in our shows, which is the definition of a good performer for an outdoor gala performance’

She explained that recruiting professional performers, even the country's best,
would be in conflict with local cultures and people's perspectives and views on the location.

….all we need from them is to be as responsible and professional as a real performer. We do not want to change anything else, even their accent, as long as they can deliver their lines clearly.’ (Global Times, 2009)

It is these local performers, who in Wang's words have not been ‘polluted and polished’ by urban culture, that really touch the heart of the audience. However, these workers are not well educated about their rights of equal pay; they are vulnerable to low wages and poor working conditions. They are easy to control and are easily exploited. The exploitation of creative workers has become a major problem.
According to one blog (2010, http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=570810554 (2010), there is evidence of harsh conditions in the *Impression West Lake* production: earnings are very unequal, work is irregular, and contracts are short term. According to complaints of a former worker, the basic salary of a performer is only 700 RMB (approximately equal to 100 dollars) per month which is lower than the minimum wage of 960 RMB per month in Hangzhou. One of the former performers left the following message on a BBS:

> After three years, the salary did not rise... The company previously promised a better welfare, and that our lives will get better, but now it remains without change. For example, a very simple canteen, for three years up to now, has not been improving the quality of the food for the employees. It is very inefficient and I starve sometimes. The provided accommodation is often out of water, and a room is shared by six individuals which makes it even tougher. So these problems add to additional expenses of more than 100RMB per person per month. This is the reason why I left the project.

As a result of exploitation, insecurity and casualisation of employment the cultural and
creative industries in China suffer from high turnover rates. The government’s creative industries policy largely neglects conditions of workers; the desire for economic development by regions is a priority. However a shift from a narrow view of economic development to a broad set of strategies to sustain creativity is desirable for the long term sustainability of the market. Creativity is not reducible to labour costs in the same manner as in the Made in China factory model. It is important to seek ways of nurturing artists’ success rather than exploiting their capabilities.

5.4 Problem of authenticity

Because innovative technical and stage styles interweave in Impression West Lake in terms of difference and familiarity, as well as traditional and new, origins and boundaries are left blurred, and this raises questions about cultural identity, power and authenticity. Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo (2006) have defined authenticity as:

The individual is looking for genuineness and originality and for the essence and nature of things. Authenticity is primarily about sincerity. Does someone mean what he is saying, or is he only pretending? Is something meant sincerely or is it done merely to achieve a certain goal?

(Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Sundbo, 2006, 203)

This interpretation applies in the case of Impression West Lake and raises questions
about Zhang Yimou’s motives. It returns to the argument over commercialism and artistic value of cultural and creative production; it asks questions of the extent to which Zhang Yimou weighs the balance between the domestic and international market.

*Impression West Lake* generated controversy that Zhang’s ventures were attempting to deconstruct traditional forms of Chinese culture. What critics noticed in *Impression West Lake* was the removal of traditional values, in terms of the critique of social hierarchy from the original story of Lady Whites. The issue of social hierarchy, which is central to the Lady White original, was not addressed in the *Impression West Lake* version. *Impression West Lake* is therefore a superficially romantic love story; the reason for the separation of the lovers is left to the audiences’ imagination. There is a gap for the comprehension and communication for foreign audience. For the foreign audiences, these factors might be considered incomprehensible and illusive. Yet, for the domestic audience who are literate, the adaptation of *Impression West Lake* is not faithful to the original. There is change in the presentation style and hence a lack of ‘Chineseness’.

In response to the question of *Impression West Lake*’s cultural ‘authenticity’, Wang has claimed that Orientalism lies in the perception of what one is from the perspective of colonizers, in this case foreign audiences. *Impression West Lake* was criticized for failing to be authentically Chinese. One critical view is that attaining techniques in different cultural realms and feeding these back into one’s own culture is essentially a Western idea and prerogative (Wang, 2005). A Chinese product that excludes certain
Chinese cultural attributes and incorporates Western modes of production from this perspective is considered a ‘fake’, especially for domestic audiences. The contradictions between modernity and authenticity underpin this problem. This kind of critique in China has dogged Zhang Yimou’s film work.

5.5 Environmental issues

The major public relations risk the production faces is environmental issues. These have arisen from local people’s concern. The local residents believe that the overuse of tourism resources, and excessive investment in attractions at tourist sites, such as the instalment of the set on the West Lake, results in mass tourism, which in turn causes environmental damage in the region. As a result these regions are losing their attractiveness and sustainability.

According to an environmental report by Yabuta et al 2008, the West Lake is not large but its environment is so fragile that its water quality requires continuous monitoring. The outdoor theatre could be one of the factors contributing to water pollution and could lead the lake water to become eutrophic. A grand outdoor gala performance on the lake, Impression West Lake is a contributor to problems of water and noise pollution. Therefore, there are constant conflicts between the local community and the production team.
The Chinese media has begun to paid attention to this issue because many movie crews have failed to care for the environment during shoots in the past. Over time, breathtakingly beautiful pictures have featured in Chinese blockbusters. Yet there are persistent news headlines about production teams not caring for the environment. The stunning beauty caught on camera is in sharp contrast with the destruction outside of it.

While the play continues to thrill local residences, the production team is finding ways to protect the environment of the West Lake while the show is being staged. Under intense media pressure, Zhang Yimou is trying to project a ‘green image’; this is achieved through many news releases in favour of Zhang Yimou and *Impression West Lake* in which it is claimed that Zhang Yimou is the pioneer of this green trend. The show was meticulously designed to be as minimally invasive to its environment as possible. The official website addresses awareness of the importance of cooperative activities to present a green production.

The environment of the West Lake does not only belong to the city of Hangzhou, or China. It belongs to the whole world. The performance is just a small example when one takes into account the large environmental issue. We've spent a year on environmental protection. Even the route for the audience to enter and exit the site is designed to be environmentally friendly.

Although the production is active on environment protection and publicity, there are still anomalies due to the lack of transparency. There is no third party to intervene because of the close government relations between *Impression West Lake* production team and the local government. Also, as mentioned above, the media is largely managed by the local government. Owing to strong censorship from the Chinese Government, the grassroots based local community can voice their criticism about the pollution created by *Impression West Lake* only on their personal blogs. Although the production brings much needed tourism-related benefits, the commitment towards social responsibility is very crucial for risk management in the long term. Bad publicity would ruin the reputation of Zhang Yimou and the production. The more visitors come, the more natural assets are endangered and threatened with obliteration. The expansion of tourism therefore poses an environmental challenge to the region, which could lead in the absence of skilful management and purposeful action to the stagnation or demise of projects such as *Impression West Lake*. This is a problem only beginning to receive attention from governmental planning agencies and cultural and private sectors in China’s creative industries. It is therefore important that the production promotes environmental concerns to preserve the health of its own business.
5.6 Conclusion: An international success?

The case study of *Impression West Lake* in this thesis shows that spectacular performances are not restricted to national boundaries. The opportunities for live spectacles in China are now more evident. Can the international market provide opportunities? Is it possible to export the *Impression West Lake* concept into foreign markets?

*Impression West Lake* is an example of a Chinese-made creative and cultural product which has spread out from a local source to capture global recognition and appeal. *Impression West Lake* has already toured in a modified format in New York City and
Taiwan. Since *Impression West Lake* is a distinctly Chinese owned cultural product with a clear corporate product differentiation for global consumption, it has a potential to be a successful cultural export. Thereby, China has potential to become an international exporter of leisure and cultural experiences.

The potential of *Impression West Lake* can be demonstrated from a number of perspectives.

The ingredients to the success of any product venturing globally include the ability to satisfy a universal need in a unique way aided by an effective marketing program. *Impression West Lake* demonstrates the future direction of cultural export from China. The *Impression Series* represented by *Impression West Lake* has cast the Chinese traditional elements into the mainstream media, pop culture and other art-spectacle performances. (CCTV, 2010)

*Impression West Lake* is promoted through distribution channels such as travel agencies overseas and exhibitions at cultural festivals. Another global distribution channel is the internet. South Korea and Japan could be important overseas markets. ‘Cultural proximity’ adds to the attractiveness of this special cultural product. In addition, when *Impression West Lake* is entering international markets, it has to measure up to the different cultural and linguistic aspects. Moreover, while gaining international audiences the production could encounter the problem of losing domestic
audiences. The production is keen on satisfying non-Chinese audiences. According to Wang,

We get nearly full marks from foreign audiences, most of whom come to talk to us about the show afterwards…it is interesting that foreign audiences can better appreciate this and the performance more than many Chinese. (2010, http://english.bitf.org.cn/2010-02/02/content_3370311.htm)

However, domestic sales are the major sources of revenue. According to statistics, domestic tourists are particularly important. They tend to spend more money than overseas tourists; for example, the average amount spent was around ¥1200 per visit in 2006, which was three times the figure in 1995. Therefore, the production has to utilize strategies to sustain and increase domestic audiences in order to maximize exposure and ultimately profit.

Productions like *Impression West Lake* are likely to choose a hybrid strategy, opting not to place all its eggs in one basket. According to Naren Chitty, this is a strategy to balance the audience,

China can compete in the existing markets using established Western delivery systems to distribute Chinese cultural products tailor-made for Western consumers. On the other, it can use new delivery systems to develop new markets for its cultural products abroad, targeting the
Chinese diasporas and seeking a spill over to Western consumers. (Chitty, 2010, 9)
CONCLUSION: THE ROAD AHEAD

This thesis has highlighted the unique business models and strategies of Chinese creative and cultural industries, the role of creative entrepreneurship in the case study Impression West Lake, and the role of government in shaping the creative environment and investment for creative and cultural projects.

The thesis has shown how the content of Chinese cultural resources can be adapted to a cultural experience through utilising a fantasy strategy. This is further enabled by modern technology such as visual and audio effects. In turn this leaves room for imagination. This fantasy strategy is used to hold the attention of viewers from different nationalities, ages, genders, as well as taking into account ethnic, religious, social and cultural differences.

The case of Impression West Lake has demonstrated the proliferation of cultural and creative industries in China. This can be attributed to the following four factors: entrepreneurship, local government, leading creative pioneers and cultural workers. These four factors provide both positives and negatives. China exploits culture and labour resources in ways that few countries can match. China's advantages in the global marketplace are moving well beyond cheap equipment, material and labour. Drawing on its vast population and mix of free-market and central-command economic policies, China has abundant creative industries projects in distinctive entrepreneurial enclaves such as Hangzhou.
Zhang Yimou’s creative business model has marked culture as a resource; a story is embedded in peoples’ minds. The historical memory embedded in tourist sites has potential to be commercialized as an experience that can be sold to many consumers.

In turn the cultural and creative industries constitute the institutional and social links necessary for a competitive response to a globalizing world. Yet adapting theories developed by Western scholars is problematic, because of the special properties of China’s economic landscape (Wang and Tong, 2004). China cultural and creative commodities develop in clusters where the legacy of top-down bureaucratic systems is weak and local entrepreneurship is strong. The government has direct control of tourism areas dominated by state-owned firms. New development projects are emerging as entrepreneurs come from state-owned institutes gather the cultural workers from rural villages and the collaborators from home and abroad. The results manifest in different ways, in different settings.

The success, both creativity and commercially, of Impression West Lake is an indication that China is transforming with the fast pace of urbanization and the increasing demands of social and cultural identity. It marks the rise of China and a soft power strategy implemented by the creative entrepreneur and celebrity Zhang Yimou. I have argued that Zhang has harnessed creative talents and benefited economically from China’s cultural heritage. His creative journey from film maker to impresario links China’s cultural and symbolic recourses with economic values. Since Chinese culture
and experience can stimulate the international imagination, Zhang Yimou is exporting China onto the international stage but not simply as a ‘Made-in-China’ commodity. This challenge however requires more than a simple ‘catch up’ strategy based on copying successful models from the West. Creativity, culture and symbolic values require sensitivity to the local context for both inspiration and exploitation.

The *Impression Series* success cannot be understood as an isolated event. It unfolded as a part of cultural changes in contemporary China. Shaped by the rise of consumerism, it is impacted by the rise of the ‘new economy’, the revival of the traditional culture, the rise of soft power, the effects of entrepreneurial bureaucracy, and corporate liberalism in government policies. Although there are critics of the production, it is an important landmark because it reflects the life-cycle of cultural and creative productions in China and it illustrates local issues caused by this kind of production. Taken together, these are all enormous transformations that signal a possible future direction for China’s cultural and creative industries.

Zhang’s new cultural production format provides evidence of the diversity of creative models in China and ways of constructing, consuming and experiencing tourism in the world today. The Chinese terms for ‘creative’ (chuangyi: literally ‘give meaning’) encapsulates how the concept of cultural branding ‘gives meaning’ to nation states. More importantly, China is beginning to demonstrate its cultural power and influence to challenge the western dominated creative economy. In observing *Impression West Lake* we note a creative leader following a universal formula—a business model that enables
crossing cultural barriers and capturing a broader market by following the ‘fast train’ of globalization. In turn, ‘cultural nationalism’ is expressed in the new face of branding China. The core concept however is that China is exploiting its own rich cultural heritage both domestically and internationally. It is able to compete with American, North Korean and Japanese cultural products in developing local content. Culture and ‘soft power’ exit as resources. The framework of government policy, the creative entrepreneur’s creative input into new business models together with better understanding of audience needs are making culture manageable.


   2010].

   http://eng.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zpd/English/goal/gov/T324611.shtml
   [Accessed 5, August 2010].

   2010].

   [Accessed April 09, 2010].

   [Accessed June, 02, 2010]


Beijing: Xinhua Press.


[Accessed 07, May 2009].


APPENDIX

Questionnaire

For helping my thesis on “Impression West Lake” (Ying Xiang Xi Hu), Please complete the following questions to reflect your opinions and perceptions of the Zhang Yimou’s “Impression West Lake” and to answer factual questions to the best of your knowledge.

Your information will be kept strictly confidential.

PERSONAL DETAILS

(These details are required for communication purposes only and will not be disclosed.)

NAME:

PROFESSION:

PRICE OF TICKET YOU PURCHASE:

AGE:

INTEREST AND LIFE STYLE:

Are you a

International tourist

Your nationality:

Chinese

Hangzhou resident

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE
This questionnaire is in electronic format to facilitate its completion and to enable the responses to be automatically prepared for analysis.

Please type your responses in the appropriate columns of each table. If you are a Hangzhou Resident, there is a Chinese translation version of the survey available to you.

Questions 1.0 and 1.1 – you could apply multiple answers.

Questions 2.0 to 2.3 are a scale survey that asks respondents to rate their agreement with the survey questions or statements. Rate each item by placing a cross in the relevant box. Use your TAB key to create additional lines in the tables where necessary.

1.0 Have you heard of any other Impression Series?

Impression Lijiang
Impression Liu Sanjie
Impression Hai Nan
Impression Da Hong Pao

1.1 Do you regard Impression West Lake (You may choice more than one answer)

Cultural product
Artistic event
Tourism experience
Entertainment

1.2 Do you regard watching Impression West Lake as a unique experience of Hangzhou.
1.3 Would you like to watch Impression West Lake or any Impression Series in your country?
Yes
No

1.4 Do you think Impression West Lake is a benefit for Hangzhou?
Yes
No
Why?

1.5 Have you seen any other similar shows in Hangzhou or China?
Yes
No
If so, the name of the performance

1.6 Did you hear of any information or word of mouth about this spectacle before you saw it?
Yes
No
If so, please list what type of promotion material
Print advertisement
Impression West Lake Official Website
Travel blog
TV news
Other ………..

1.7 Were you aware the no photography policy? How does this affect you?
Yes
No

1.8 Did you understand the main concept and story content of the Impression West Lake?
Yes
No
Not clear

2.0 Overall, what is your reaction to described “Impression West Lake”

Excellent  Very Good  Good  Fair  Poor  Don't Know

2. 1 Impression West Lake meets your expectation.

Strongly  Moderately  Slightly  Slightly  Moderately  Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree  Agree

2.2 The price of Impression West Lake is reasonable.

Strongly  Moderately  Slightly  Slightly  Moderately  Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree  Agree

2.3 I will recommend ‘Impression West Lake’ to my friends.
2.4 If so, how many people have you already recommend to?

2.5 The Impression West Lake reflects Chinese cultural identity.

2.6 Impression West Lake is a small version of Beijing Olympics Opening and Closing Ceremony.

2.7 I think this show is original.

Please explain your reason,

3.0 Please rate the degree of attractiveness of the following characteristics.

Very Attractive  Attractive  Unattractive  Very Unattractive

Visual Effect
Spectacle and dance Performance
Zhang Yimou’s direction

Outdoor natural theatre

Application of the new technology of water effects and lighting

Location at the West Lake

Costume and water stage

Kitaro”s music

Jane Zhang (vocal of the theme song)

Zhang Yimou”s direction and reputation

3.1 Please rate the most innovative attribute of “Impression West Lake” in your opinion?

1 2 3

Very innovative  Innovative  Not Innovative

Visual Effect

Performance

Zhang Yimou

The natural Theatre

Water Effects and Lighting

Location at the West Lake

Story

4. Is there any suggestion you would like to give to the Impression West Lake production?
Thank you for participating in this survey. If you have any questions regarding the completion of this questionnaire please contact Joy Zhang by phone [0061 415403306] or email [joydanqing@hotmail.com].

Please complete this questionnaire by [Sept. 2010] and SUBMIT. If you have any questions about how to complete it, contact Joy Zhang by phone [0061 415403306] or email [joydanqing@hotmail.com].

Thank you

Joy Zhang
Research Assistant

Creative Industries Faculty | Queensland University of Technology