ASPIRING TO BE GLOBAL: LANGUAGE, MOBILITIES, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN A TOURISM VILLAGE IN CHINA

GAO SHUANG
(MA, BA)

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

AND

CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE & COMMUNICATION
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me
in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information
which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree
in any university previously.

Gao Shuang
30 May 2014
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Summary

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the sociolinguistics of globalization by examining a tourism site in Yangshuo County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China. A former residential neighborhood street West Street (西街 Xī Jiē) in Yangshuo has been gaining increasing popularity among domestic Chinese tourists, known as a ‘global village’ and ‘English Corner’, as Yangshuo transformed from an agriculture-based into a tourism-based economy during the past three decades. This observed tourism development in West Street differs from existing research in other tourism communities (see e.g. Heller 2003; Coupland, Garret and Bishop 2005; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010) in that its sociohistorical transformation involves the re-evaluation of non-local, instead of local, linguistic resources. This study investigates this socio-historical change as an issue for the sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert 2010), wherein the English language, along with other semiotic resources, is appropriated and commodified for domestic Chinese tourists. Specifically, it seeks to address how has West Street become a ‘global village’ and ‘English Corner”? What are the tensions arising from this socio-historical change? And what is the role of language and communication in the tensions that arise from the re-imagination of West Street as a global village and English Corner?

To address these questions, I look at data collected both online and during three-month fieldwork. These include tourism promotional discourses, tourist writings online, (participant) observations, interviews, field notes, documents, and
signage. In analyzing these data, I draw on insights from sociolinguistics, tourism studies, human geography, and applied linguistics to provide multidimensional analytical perspectives into the ‘global village’, including place-making, tourist identity and stance, multifunctionality of space, and educational tourism.

It is shown that the observed socio-historical transformation cannot be simply explained as an inevitable result of globalization in the sense of westernization; the touristic significance of the ‘global village’ corresponds to the changing ideologies of tourism and language in a globalizing China where touring has become a consumer activity and the English language a marker of social status. Nevertheless, it is also shown that there are tensions arising from this socio-historical change, as shown in the contested negotiation of the meaning of the ‘global village’ among tourists, local people, and English language learners. More specifically, the ‘global village’ appeals to emerging middle class Chinese people with xiǎozī aspirations, who are nevertheless mocked and criticized by people claiming to be more knowledgeable and sophisticated (see Chapter 4); the commercial development of the ‘global village’ during the second wave of mass commercialization is also fraught with tensions in the use and functionality of space among different groups of people (see Chapter 5); and English language learners seeking to talk with foreigners is caught in what I call interactional straining (see Chapter 6). These tensions indicate that the English language, as one important semiotic resource commodified in this global village, has contested meanings as a language of globalization and upward social mobility, and the
globalization experience in this ‘global village’ is characterized by class and taste based dynamics.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1 Starting the journey

This research originates from two main inspirational sources, one in the chair, another on the road. Back in May 2006, when I was about to finish my Bachelor’s at Central South University in Hunan Province, China, a couple of classmates suggested that we went for a graduation tour. We finally decided to go to Yangshuo County and the city of Guilin which, located right in the neighboring Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (see Map 1.1), have always been well-known for its beautiful natural sceneries. As the popular saying goes, ‘Guilin has the best scenery of mountains and rivers; Yangshuo boasts even better’. Thus there we were on the road.

As we got on the train, we found ourselves in the same carriage with another group of students. Actually I should say we were complete outsiders there, because as quickly became apparent to us it was ‘their’ carriage. With us were a cohort of college students, about a hundred of them, going to Yangshuo together with their teachers. They went there to practice English with foreigners, I was told. I had heard that Yangshuo was quite popular among foreign travelers, but the idea still intrigued me because I was not sure how they were going to do that. Maybe as intern tour guides, I supposed but quickly forgot about it as the travel fatigue got me.
Map 1.1 Geographical location of Yangshuo. Courtesy of Leonardo Zurita-Arthos.
After travelling around the city for about three days, we headed without break towards Yangshuo. Like going to other countrysides, it takes some time to reach Yangshuo County from the city. But unlike most journeys, the time on the road may not necessarily be very dull. As the bus leaves the city of Guilin behind, the views along the road become refreshing and soothing – rivers, Karst mountains, extensive farm lands. And one could have a more intimate experience of the natural beauty if one chooses to take a boat down the famous Li River running across the County from the city (see Figure 1.1). Indeed, Yangshuo has always been attractive. It is unique and well known for its Karst geography among travelers, and actually used to be reserved as a natural resort for imperial officials back in the Song Dynasty (1100s).

Figure 1.1 Yangshuo scenery. Photo by author, 2011.

As we arrived, we quickly found a nice but cheap hotel to stay (a triple room for only 40 yuan per night) near Yangshuo bus station, and then we were ready to exhaust the place and ourselves - cycling, mountain climbing, bamboo rafting,
and others. In the evening a friend suggested that we went for a walk in a local street, West Street (西街 Xī Jiē). A traditional neighborhood street on the west bank, West Street winds into the town from the dock of the Li River. This particular street over the last three decades has been the place for many travelers to take a short break after their journey, or to base themselves if they plan to further explore the countryside. It is not a very long street, several hundred meters, paved by large uneven black marble stones, and lined by Ming-Qing style residential buildings (see Figure 1.2). But further into the street, it is a different world. In contrast to the laid-back countryside, West Street is busy. At night, colorful neon lights up the street. Before you realize it, you are part of the crowd, passing by souvenir shops, artistic craft tables, seeing people of different colors chatting over beer, coffee, or pizza. I remember watching a white-bearded foreigner happily playing his guitar in front of a bar, leaving his smile to many tourists and their cameras. Obviously, he was much more at home than I was. After walking for a while, one of my friends insisted that we went into a bar for a drink. Amid colorful lights and live band music, a sense of displacement and uneasiness had finally completely got me, making me wonder about how all these had ended up together here in this a small town in a far away countryside. Yet never quite used to this kind of bustling nightlife, I quickly finished the worst lemon tea ever and left my friend there to enjoy herself. The next evening, as we flashed the camera to capture a final picture of the river at the sunset while running to catch the last bus, I told myself I must come back again. I never expected, however, I would return as a researcher.
This research is about West Street, Yangshuo, a changing place in a rapidly changing China. What brings me back to Yangshuo is a concern for the changing roles of language in its sociohistorical transformation. In the current phase of globalization, it has been observed that socio-economic restructuring of late capitalism, or the general tertiarization of economy, has led to the re-conceptualization of language as a commodity, notably in the tourism industry. For instance, Monica Heller’s (2003) ‘Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity’ examines a tourism site in francophone Canada. She explores how economic restructuring and entry into the global market requires a re-evaluation of the multilingual repertoires in francophone Canada and leads to the commodification of the local variety of French for heritage tourism, or generally the entrance into ‘language industry’ (Heller 2010: 352). This strategy is also found among other ethnolinguistic communities. Coupland, Garrett and Bishop (2005) discuss the commodification
of Welsh for the heritage tourism of mining. Thurlow and Jaworski (2010) examine minority language textbooks at tourism sites and television tourism programs where minority languages are used to produce a sense of ‘exotic’.

The case of West Street, however, differs from the above cases in that its sociohistorical transformation involves the re-evaluation of non-local, instead of local, resources. While located in a region with multiple ethnolinguistic minorities, most notably Zhuang, the tourism development of West Street has been capitalizing on the English language, as well as other semiotic resources, as opposed to ethnolinguistic varieties. In recent years, the image of foreigners living happily in Yangshuo figures prominently in the media, in particular in tourism promotional discourses targeting at domestic Chinese tourists. It has actually been described as a ‘global village’ and an ‘English Corner’ wherein western elements, the English language in particular, are highlighted whereas indigenous local elements are downplayed if not erased.

This study therefore seeks to explore the tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo as an important case for contributing to our understanding of sociolinguistics of mobility. Jan Blommaert (2010) in his recent book *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* observes that there are now shifting perspectives into language and society, one of which involves shift

‘from a view in which language is narrowly tied to a community, a time and a place, and in which language is primarily seen as having local functions, to a view in which language exists in and for mobility across space and time. This shift, I would say, is conceptually far more momentous …, because it
forces us to consider linguistic signs detached from their traditional locus of origin (in a speech community, and with a specific set of local functions), and instead replaced, so to speak, in a very different loci of production and uptake – where the conventional associative functions of such signs cannot be taken for granted… it is only when we think of linguistic signs as being very much “open” signs, onto which several functions (simultaneously) can be projected, that we can start to find answers to the complex and often bewildering phenomenology of language in globalization’ (Blommaert 2010: 181-182).

Adopting this perspective, my research examines language as ‘open signs’ where the social meanings of language cannot be assumed or taken for granted, but only be revealed by exploring the specific historical process of meaning projection. More specifically, I investigate:

• How has West Street become a ‘global village’ and ‘English Corner’?

• What are the implications of this sociohistorical change for the local community?

• What roles do language and communication play in this process of social change?

In other words, the various issues the case of West Street, Yangshuo implicates and entails, I believe, are not exclusively relevant to tourism studies, but bear significance for the larger problem of coming to terms with the current phase of globalization characterized by the ‘mobility turn’ (Sheller and Urry 2006)
and pin down towards understanding what language and communication mean in relation to it (c.f. Blommaert 2010; Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010).

1.2 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. This chapter so far has briefly introduced the research topic, the research questions, and the significance of the research. In Chapter 2, I contextualize the present research in the larger research field of the sociolinguistics of globalization and tourism, and provide a conceptual framework for the present study. I show how tourism provides an important domain for addressing the current concerns and questions of the sociolinguistics of mobility. I also introduce the changing ideologies of tourism in China. Chapter 3 introduces the research site and field methods. I show how more specific research questions emerged during my fieldwork as well as explaining issues of field access, field methods, and constraints in data collection.

Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 present empirical analysis of Yangshuo from multidimensional perspectives, drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, tourism studies, human geography, and applied linguistics. Chapter 4 looks at how the so-called ‘global village’ is established and in what specific ways it appeals to domestic Chinese tourists. Through examining tourism discourses, this chapter shows how the construction of the so-called ‘global village’ reproduces the changing ideologies of English as a status marker. Nevertheless, it is also shown that tourists through their post-tourism writings position themselves in varied ways to this ‘global village’. This commodified sense of place is negotiated by
tourists as they activate and (re-)work the social meaning of place through their discursive practices. This highlights how place is a social construct, constantly transformed in the process of socio-historical change, and also mediated by people’s conceptualization, imagination and experience.

This transformation from a former neighborhood to a ‘global village’, however, is not without tensions. In Chapter 5, I explore how different social groups are involved in and are variously positioned in relation to each other during this historical process of dramatic change. Drawing on multiple data resources, I delineate a three-phase account of the historical transformation, and explain through this historical perspective how the spatiality of the ‘global village’ is fraught with tensions, as shown in cases of spatial marginalization and conflicting functionalities of space (Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005).

Chapter 6 looks at English educational tourism. Through promoting the unique opportunity to practice English with English-speaking foreigners, English language learning has become one important part of the local tourism industry. Chapter 6 examines this ‘talking to foreigners’ phenomenon in Yangshuo. It shows the strategies of mobilizing English resources in the ‘English Corner’, that is, how foreign travelers embodying valuable English resources are mobilized by local language schools for English language teaching. Based on interviews with students (who are working professionals) and foreigners, as well as (participant) observation, I reveal how talking to foreigners turned out to be full of constraints and tensions, which I characterize as interactional straining. I then discuss the
significance of this finding for understanding the role of English for working professionals in a neoliberalizing China.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarizing its main findings and showing their significance. Limitations of the research and future research directions are also discussed.
Chapter 2 Sociolinguistics and Tourism Mobilities

2.1 Introduction

As already briefly introduced, this study aims to contribute to the emerging research into the sociolinguistics of mobility. In this chapter, I elaborate on this perspective. I first provide the conceptual framework for the present study, outlining the key issues of globalization, mobility, locality, and historicity (section 2.2). I then turn to tourism studies, suggesting that tourism provides one important domain for exploring the above issues facing the sociolinguistics of mobility (section 2.3). In section 2.4, I move on to introduce tourism mobilities and social change in China in general, contextualizing the present study of Yangshuo in the changing ideologies of mobility, tourism, and language in a globalizing China. Section 2.5 provides a summary of this chapter.

2.2 Sociolinguistics of globalization

Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been an increasing concern with the issue of globalization in sociolinguistic research, though this development is not without disputes. In his introductory paper to a special issue on ‘sociolinguistics and globalization’, Coupland (2003b: 465) notes that, ‘in one sense we might say that sociolinguistics is already “late getting to the party” – without at all wanting to dignify globalization as something to celebrate. The point is simply that social theorizing of globalization already has a considerable momentum’. This line of thinking, as Coupland (2003b) observes, comes at a time when ‘globalization’, however defined, was generating debates among sociologists and cultural
theorists as to whether ‘globalization is a new and real historical phenomenon or, from a more skeptical perspective, merely a shift of analytical perspective, asking new questions about old phenomena’ (Coupland 2003b: 465) \(^1\). Indeed, as Beck (2004: 131-132) also acknowledges, ‘globalization’, the keyword of our era, has undergone phases of outright dismissal, clarification of definition, before finally generating an epistemological turn ‘as researchers in all the social sciences got down to the task of conceptualizing the various aspects of globalization and attempted to locate and study them both theoretically and empirically’.

For sociolinguistics, Coupland (2003b: 465-466) notes further, debating about the timeliness of its engagement with globalization is ‘surely irrelevant’, and ‘opening up to globalization’ is not ‘slavish convergence to a trend in social theory’, because it can contribute to the ‘internal development’ of sociolinguistics as a discipline (see also Coupland 2010a). Blommaert (2010) also notes, the challenge of globalization for sociolinguistics is that the old metaphor of ‘village’ no longer works: ‘The world has not become a village, but rather a tremendously

\[^1\] As Coupland (2010a) notes, this sociolinguistic engagement with globalization is fraught with many significant disputes. ‘There are different levels of political engagement: Is the global expansion of particular languages something we should regret and oppose, or something inevitable and familiar? There is disagreement over units of analysis: Is linguistic globalization about the fates of languages, regarded as bounded linguistic systems within changing social and sociolinguistic systems, or is it about ways of using language, new repertoires, diffusing genres and styles, and changing ideologies around language use? There is disagreement about the necessary theoretical infrastructure: To what extent should sociolinguistic refashion its own theory in response to the new challenges posed by globalization? Or can we get by with what we have? These are some of the debates round which a sociolinguistics of globalization is being carried forward, and there are many more to come in volume. The terrain is too challenging and too interesting for us to expect bland consensus’ (Coupland 2010a: 11-12).
complex web of villages, towns, neighborhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways’ (Blommaert 2010: 1). It is messy, complex, fluid, and unpredictable (Blommaert 2010, 2012; Coupland 2010a). ‘Globalization’, Blommaert (2010: 1; see also Blommaert 2003, 2012) further notes, ‘forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements’.

The opening up of sociolinguistics to globalization, therefore, comes with much disciplinary reflexivity, concerning the fundamental issues of, among many others, language (e.g. Heller 2003; Blommaert 2003, 2010), community (e.g. Rampton 2000), authenticity (e.g. Coupland 2003a; Bucholtz and Hall 2003; Eckert 2003). To speak of remapping the discipline, however, is not to assume that globalization is unprecedented in history (Blommaert 2010: 13-14; Coupland 2010a: 1). ‘The consensus is that, while globalization is certainly not without precedent, its scale and scope are new and detectable in changes over recent decades – and most clearly since the 1980s’ (Coupland 2010a: 4, italics original; see also Blommaert 2010). And this unthinking and rethinking, as Blommaert (2010: 2) cautions, is not to be reduced to a matter of method, but requires ‘ontological, epistemological and methodological statements’.

In this section, I discuss some of the key issues and concepts for a sociolinguistics of globalization. The purpose is not to provide a comprehensive review of the entire field – there are scholarly work on this (see e.g. Coupland
2010b; Kearney 1995) – but to outline a conceptual framework that could help illuminate the present study of West Street, Yangshuo.

2.2.1 Globalization

‘Globalization’ is often used to refer to this age of time-space compression we are living in. This seemingly straightforward definition, however, erases much complexity, because experiences and perceptions of globalization differ depending on one’s social, cultural, and political viewpoint (Garrett 2010). Urry (2000) summarizes that there are mainly five different, yet interrelated, globalization arguments, including globalization

1. as a strategy, as developed by transnational corporations;
2. as an image used, for example, in commercial advertisements;
3. as an ideology of global capitalism which argues for reducing the regulatory power of nation-states;
4. as a basis for mobilizing individuals and organizations; and
5. as scapes and flows which involve the movement of people, money, capital, information, ideas and images through complex interlocking networks (Urry 2000: 12).

This study does not attempt to provoke debates among any of them. Actually, these meanings of globalization are interlinked, and are all touched upon to various degrees in this research. As I will show later, the establishment of the ‘global village’ in Yangshuo is both a strategy for local economic development, and an image produced in tourism promotional discourses. This developmental process involves multiple tourism mobilities, which also serve as the basis for
further strategic appropriation and use of certain flows, in particular the English language and the presence of foreigners. And throughout this process of tourism development, private enterprises and investments are playing increasingly important roles in the commercial development of the local tourism industry.

In adopting this understanding of globalization above, I consider the case of West Street, Yangshuo not as being an inevitable result of globalization in the sense of westernization. Instead, the focus is on examining how various mobilities and flows in West Street are strategically managed, by whom, for what, and why. Below, I develop a more detailed understanding of globalization based on the concepts of mobility, locality, and historicity.

2.2.2 Mobility and locality

In a number of publications, Urry (2000: 2) suggests that ‘the material transformations that are remaking the “social”, especially those diverse mobilities,…are materially reconstructing the “social as society” into the “social as mobility” ’ (see also Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). Sociolinguistics can be roughly defined as the study of language in society. If the empirical phenomena we are observing are changing, as Blommaert also notes, so should our analytical framework (Blommaert 2010). ‘A sociolinguistics of globalization’, as Blommaert notes, ‘is perforce a sociolinguistics of mobility’ (Blommaert 2003: 611; see also Blommaert 2010; 2012). He further elaborates that

‘Mobility is the great challenge: it is the dislocation of language and language events from the fixed position in time and space attributed to them by a more
traditional linguistics and sociolinguistics (the Saussurean synchrony) that will cause the paradigm shift that we are currently witnessing to achieve success. In order to get there, the notion of “mobility” itself must be developed as well’ (Blommaert 2010: 21).

At the same time, globalization is also bound up with locality. As Blommaert (2010: 22) notes, ‘mobility is the rule, but that does not preclude locality from being a powerful frame for the organization of meanings. Locality and mobility co-exist, and whenever we observe patterns of mobility we have to examine the local environments in which they occur’.

To engage with this challenge of globalization, Blommaert (2003: 607) notes, ‘the first phase … is … the laborious and often unrewarding phase of trial-and-error: see what works, define topics, units and fields, and try some analysis’. Also, ‘all of this will, furthermore, have to be demonstrated not as an effort of theory but as one of analysis, that is, as a practical research problem for which particular types of research design and data can be used’ (Blommaert 2010: 21, italics original; see also Blommaert 2012; Coupland 2010a).

I conceive of this study as one of such ‘trials’ in the sociolinguistics of globalization, and will do so through addressing the ethnographic question of what’s going on in a village in the global South as a case of globalization. Here, I explain how mobility and locality are understood for the present purpose. Specifically, I address two aspects of mobility: language as mobile resource (Blommaert 2010: 9) and differentiated mobilities of people (Massey 1993: 61). I also show how mobility and locality are interconnected by discussing three
understandings of locality, including the relationality of locality; locality, space and place; locality and language ideology.

One way towards an understanding of language as mobile resource is to differentiate between what Blommaert (2010: 5) calls ‘sociolinguistics of distribution’ and ‘sociolinguistics of mobility’. The former sees the movement of language resources ‘as movement in a horizontal and stable space and in chronological time; within such spaces, vertical stratification can occur along lines of class, gender, age, social status etc’, whereas the latter ‘focuses not on language-in-place but on language-in-motion, with various spatiotemporal frames interacting with one another’ (Blommaert 2010: 5). Coupland (2010a) elaborates on this interaction of spatiotemporal frames in more specific terms. Drawing on Bartelson (2000), Coupland (2010a: 7, italics original) distinguishes among three ways of conceptualizing flows in relation to globalization: *transference*, *transformation* and *transcendence*. He notes that transference, ‘the movement or exchange of things across pre-existing boundaries and between pre-constituted unites’, constitutes the most established form of flows (Coupland 2010a: 7). Specifically, ‘demographic migration and the dissemination of cultural formats and products are straightforward examples of transference’ Coupland 2010a: 7; see also Urry 2000: 3). And the ‘nothing new’ argument regarding globalization (Coupland 2010a: 7) can find its evidence in this sense of globalization as transference, notably in scholarly works on language contact (Coupland 2010a: 10; see also Jacquemet 2005: 260). On the other hand,
transformation implies a more radical change, whereby flows modify the character of the whole global systems in which they function. Boundaries and units are themselves refashioned, as well as things flowing across and between them. In the third scenario, transcendence, “globalization is driven forward by a dynamic of its own and is irreducible to singular causes within particular sectors or dimensions” (Bartelson 2000: 189, original emphasis) (Coupland 2010a: 7).

It is this understanding of flows in terms of transformation and transcendence that informs the present conceptualization of language as mobile resources. More specifically, in the case of West Street, Yangshuo, the inflows of foreigners together with the English language are not to be understood simply as movements across the pre-existing geographical area of Yangshuo in the sense of transference (Coupland 2010a: 7); instead, these mobilities bring about concrete semiotic and material changes in West Street through transforming the space they are in and redefining the sense of place. Here, the English language acquires new meanings and significance, and constitutes an important resource in this transformation of a former neighborhood to a ‘global village’. Language is therefore understood as a resource rather than a structural and autonomous system (Heller 2010: 360-361), as being mobile and dynamic, ‘framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements’ (Blommaert 2010: 9), rather than being static and bounded. At the same time, the construction of the so-called ‘global village’ is driven by multiply interrelated factors, including not only ‘a dynamic of its own’, that is, inflow of international tourists, the local economic restructuring, but also the
changing ideologies of English and tourism mobility within the larger context of China. It is through this ‘transcendence’ perspective that I look at the transformation of Yangshuo at the nexus of local-national-global.

This then points to the importance of examining the language ideological processes through which languages are mobilized and enter into the local environment. As Blommaert (2003: 608-609) observes, the insertion of ‘globalized varieties…into local environments’ reorders ‘the locally available repertoires and the relative hierarchical relations between ingredients in the hierarchy’, creating ‘newly stratified orders of indexicality’. And ‘the key to understanding the process… is to discover what such reordering of repertoires actually mean, and represent, to people’ (Blommaert 2003: 609; see also Pennycook 2010: 6). The construction of a ‘global village’, as observed in Yangshuo, involves the mobilization of semiotic resources which are mediated by ideologies of language, that is, ‘the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships’ (Irvine 1989: 255).

Here, Irvine and Gal (2000) provide the useful concepts of iconization, erasure, and fractal recursivity for exploring the semiotic processes for linguistic differentiation. They observe that ‘it has become a commonplace in sociolinguistics that linguistic forms, including whole languages, can index social groups. As part of everyday behavior, the use of a linguistic form can become a pointer to (index of) the social identities and the typical activities of speakers. But speakers (and hearers) often notice, rationalize, and justify such linguistic indices, thereby creating linguistic ideologies that purport to explain the source and
meaning of the linguistic difference’ (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). The three semiotic processes are defined as below:

‘Iconization involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic practices, features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic practices that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them – as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence. This process entails the attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection (between linguistic features and social groups) that may be only historical, contingent, or conventional… Fractal recursivity involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level… Erasure is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away’ (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37-38, italics original).

In chapter 4, I show how these semiotic processes work in creating certain language ideologies which help construct an image of ‘global village’.

At the same time, mobility involves not just the differentiation of linguistic resources, but also differentiated mobilities of people (Massey 1993: 61). People embodying valuable linguistic resources might be mobilized and used for the local purpose, which may result in changes in demographic makeup as well as unexpected ways of using and organizing space. This points to what Massey
(1993) calls the ‘power-geometry of space’, that is how people are differentially positioned in relation to flows and movements. She notes that

‘this point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn’t … it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it’ (Massey 1993: 61, italics original).

This observation of ‘differentiated mobility’ wherein some people might be ‘imprisoned’ (Massey 1993: 61) echoes what Blommaert (2010: 154) calls ‘soft marginalization’: ‘the marginalization of particular cultural features, identities, practices and resources such as language’. It is through understanding the dynamics and relationality among (im)mobilities that a sophisticated understanding of mobility can be achieved. I will show, in Chapters 5 and 6, how English-speaking foreigner travelers, embodying valuable English language resources, are mobilized for the local educational tourism industry, and how during the second wave of tourism development since the mid-2000s, tensions arise as to what West Street should be like and who should have control over and access to it.

Having established the understanding of language as mobile resources, and differentiated mobility, I now turn to locality. I already noted the language ideological aspect of locality in relation to mobility. I will then further elaborate on the issues of relationality of locality, as well as space and place.
Understanding locality requires understanding the relationality between the local and non-local. As Coupland (2003b: 466) notes, ‘even when our primary concerns are with sociolinguistic issues in particular locales (which is sociolinguistics’ traditional ground), we need to address a range of factors linked to processes of globalization to account for these local circumstances’. This is because in the age of globalization ‘attention limited to local processes, identities, and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local’ (Kearney 1995: 548) such that local events need to be ‘read locally as well as translocally’ (Blommaert 2003: 612; see also Pennycook 2010; Rampton 2000; Leite and Graburn 2009).

This does not necessarily mean that locality should be understood from a defensive perspective. As Pennycook (2010: 3-4) observes,

‘to the extent that globalization is seen in terms of the homogenizing effects of capital expansion, environmental destruction, cultural demolition or economic exploitation, for example, the local becomes the site of resistance, of tradition, of authenticity, of all that needs to be preserved’ (see also Jacquemet 2005: 263-264).

This presents just one way of understanding locality. And as Massey (1994: 151) also observes, ‘on this reading, place and locality are foci for a form of romanticized escapism from the real business of the world… ‘space/place’ is equated with stasis and reaction’, as shown in forms of ‘reactionary nationalism’ or ‘introverted obsession with “heritage” ’ (see also Jacquemet 2005: 261). In this
study, I adopt what Massey (1993; 1994) terms ‘a progressive sense of place’, as she argues that:

‘those writers … frequently go on to argue that, in the middle of all this flux, one desperately needs a bit of peace and quiet; and “place” is posed as a source of stability and an unproblematic identity. In that guise, place and the spatially local are rejected by these writers as almost necessarily reactionary. ...Perhaps it is most important to think through what might be an adequately progressive sense of place, one which fit in with the current global-local times and the feelings and relations they give rise to, and one which would be useful in what are, after all, our often inevitably place-based political struggles. The question is how to hold on to that notion of spatial difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness if people want that, without it being reactionary’ (Massey 1993: 64, italics original).

Massey (1994) further suggests that there are ‘a number of ways in which a global sense of place’, that is, a sense of place which is ‘extroverted’ and ‘integrates the global and the local’ (Massey 1994: 155), might be developed:

‘First of all, it is absolutely not static. If places can be conceptualized in terms of the social relations which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time. They are processes …Second, places do not have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures….it can come precisely through the particularity of linkage to that “outside” which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place…. Third, clearly places do not have single, unique
“identities”; they are full of internal conflicts: a conflict over what it past has been (the nature of its “heritage”), conflict over what should be its present development, conflict over what could be its future. Fourth, and finally, none of this denies place nor the importance of the uniqueness of place. The specificity of place is continually reproduced… There are a number of sources of this specificity – the uniqueness of place. … Globalization does not entail simply homogenization. On the contrary, the globalization of social relations is yet another source of (the reproduction of) geographical uneven development, and thus of the uniqueness of place. There is the specificity of place which derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations. There is the fact that this very mixture together in one place may produce effects which would not have happened otherwise… all these relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated history of a place, with that history itself imagined as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world (Massey 1994: 155-156).

It is this progressive and global sense of place that informs the present exploration of local and non-local dynamics. As I will show in chapter 4, the so-called ‘global village’ in Yangshuo is not to be understood passively as an inevitable result of homogenizing globalization; rather, I show how the ‘global village’ is a social construct whose significance corresponds to the changing ideologies of English and tourism in contemporary China. And in chapter 5, I discuss the tensions around this sociohistorical transformation not in defensive
terms as, for example, loss of a former residential neighborhood; instead, I delineate the tensions around space in terms of the varied ways different groups of people react to this social change and relate to each other.

This leads to the importance of understanding locality in terms of space and place (Pennycook 2010: 3). In this conceptualization, locality is not simply understood ‘in objective, physical terms’ (Johnstone 2004: 65) or just a context in the sense of ‘spatially fixed geographical container’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 209). As Pennycook (2010: 7) suggests, ‘the local needs to be understood in relation to a dynamic interpretation of space; … local practices construct locality’. This study therefore adopts an understanding of place and space as below:

‘What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value … the ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. ... Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place’ (Tuan 1977: 6, as cited in Cresswell 2009: 4).

Specifically, my study addresses this issue of place and space in two ways. On the one hand, I explore the touristic construction of place from a process-based perspective (Harvey 1993; Massey 1994), looking at the material sociohistorical processes through which the tourism site of West Street is constructed as well as examining tourism promotional discourses to see how certain sense of place is made and promoted. I will elaborate this point below. On the other hand, I also examine the spatial dynamics, that is the potential ‘in place/out of place’ tensions
(Cresswell 2009: 5-6). As Cresswell (2009: 5) notes, ‘the mapping of particular meanings, practices, and identities on to place … leads to the construction of normative places where it is possible to be either “in place” or “out of place”. Things, practices, and people labeled out of place are said to have transgressed often invisible boundaries that define what is appropriate and what is inappropriate’. This points to the importance of examining ‘how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, event to event’ (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 4; see also Massey 1994: 155). I explore this issue in Chapter 5.

2.2.3 Historicity

I have so far explained how the understanding of globalization needs to address issues of mobility and locality. Both, however, also need to be examined within particular histories. This is because ‘mobility is something that has temporal as well as spatial features’, such that ‘even if features occur all over the globe, the local histories which they enter can be fundamentally different and so create very different effects, meanings and functions’ (Blommaert 2010: 24; see also Massey 1994: 156).

Underscoring the issue of historicity is important for the present study in two ways. First, examining Yangshuo through historical lenses helps reveal the specific historical processes through which the so-called ‘global village’ gets constructed in the first place. As Harvey (1993: 4) stresses, ‘the first step down the road is to insist that place in whatever disguise is, like space and time, a social
construct. The only interesting question that can be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?’. Keeping this in mind helps us understand the specificities of the local historical transformation, and the potential tensions and power relations involved in historical changes, thereby avoiding the pitfall of the often deceiving image of global homogeneity caused by globalization (c.f. Blommaert 2010: 140-144).

Second, historicity is also important for addressing the more specific issues of what particular activities and interactions mean for people concerned. As Williams (1979: 276) observes, what occurs in a place is not simply an event ‘but the materialization of a history which is often quite extensively retracted’” (as cited in Harvey 1993: 12). The particular histories of China and its changing position in the world affect the way how specific cultural, spatial, and linguistic practices acquire their functions and meanings. I will introduce such historical contingencies in broad terms in section 2.4, showing how mobilities and tourism acquire new social meanings for Chinese people in post-Mao China. And throughout my study, I always address how particular events and their significance are embedded in personal and social histories.

In this section, I have outlined an understanding of sociolinguistics of globalization for the present purpose. I explained several interrelated conceptual points including globalization, mobility, locality, and historicity (see table 2.1 for a brief summary). In the next section, I show more specifically how tourism provides an important domain for exploring these issues.
### Table 2.1 A brief summary of key issues.

**globalization**

The understanding of globalization involves multiple and interrelated conceptualizations of globalization as an economic development strategy, a projected global image, ideology for capitalist expansion, the basis for mobilization of resources, multiple scapes and flows (Urry 2000: 12).

**mobility**

Language can be understood as mobile resources as opposed to autonomous structural systems (Blommaert 2010: 5; Heller 2010: 360-361; see Chapters 4 and 6); there is also the issue of differentiated mobility of people as, for instance, in the mobilization of people embodying valuable language resources (see Chapter 6), and the ‘soft marginalization’ (Blommaert 2010: 154) of people incompatible with entrepreneurship and mass commercialization (see Chapter 5).

**locality**

The local appropriation of language is mediated by conceptualizations of ‘social and linguistic relationships’ (Irvine 1989: 255), that is, language ideologies (see Chapter 4); understanding locality also needs to address the relationality of local and non-local (Blommaert 2003; Kearney 1995; Pennycook 2010; Rampton 2000; see Chapters 4 and 6); locality is also about understanding space and place (Pennycook 2010) (see Chapters 4 and 5).

**historicity**

The issues of mobility and locality also need to be examined within particular local historical processes (Blommaert 2010: 24; Harvey 1993: 4; see section 2.4 of this chapter and also Chapters 4, 5 and 6); historicity is important for understanding local meanings which are often formed in particular local histories (Williams 1979: 267, as cited in Harvey 1993: 12; see section 2.4 of this chapter and also Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

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**2.3 Tourism studies and the mobility turn**

Tourism is often considered as the biggest industry in the world and represents ‘the largest movement of human populations outside wartime’ (Crick 1989: 310, as cited in Wang 2000: 1; see also Dann 1996). It has been a topic of research in disciplines as various as geography, economy, anthropology, sociology,
sociolinguistics, and others (see e.g. Dann 1996; Nash and Smith 1991; Stronza 2001; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010). This cross-disciplinary exploration of tourism, however, does not mean tourism has always been a key concern in social sciences (Wang 2000: 1). Indeed, tourism itself cannot yet claim to have its own disciplinary integrity and it has been having difficulty finding itself a disciplinary home (Dann and Cohen 1991; Leite and Graburn 2009). It is therefore not surprising that definitions of tourism vary not only across disciplines, but also according to the specific theoretical perspectives one takes within one discipline (Dann and Cohen 1991; Leite and Graburn 2009; Nash 1981; Wang 2000).

This is not necessarily something regretful. Indeed, Dean MacCannel, one of the founding scholars of tourism, suggests that the significance of tourism research lies in exposing ‘a deep flaw in discipline thought’:

‘Whatever its methodological or theoretical orientation, and even when it does not intend to do so, tourism research exposes a deep flaw in discipline thought: specifically, a methodological commitment to, or at least a dependence upon, the assumption of cultural homogeneity within the various fields of study … But mainly (and this is their central failing when it comes to analysis of current social forms), sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, even history, operates as if their subject matter is framed by a single culture, unifying logic, intersubjective agreement, parallel intentions, and motivations’ (MacCannell 1989: 2, italics original).

Such disciplinary practice based on assumptions of homogeneity or rigorous commitment to the uncontaminated, isolated and therefore authentic, MacCannell
(1989: 2-3) argues, has resulted in the exclusion of those social forms that are ‘emerging, new, unplanned, unstable; shaping thought and behavior in still unknown ways’ (MacCannell 1989: 2-3; c.f. Pratt 1987). I am in no position to assess whether tourism research has succeeded in achieving this goal, but during the past decade scholars in tourism research are still debating over how to move towards a post-disciplinary perspective and rethink tourism not just theoretically but ontologically (see e.g. Winter 2009: 22-23). This need for rethinking has recently been most strongly advocated as Sheller and Urry (2006) propose a ‘new mobilities paradigm’:

‘Social science has largely ignored or trivialized the importance of the systemic movements of people for work and family life, for leisure and pleasure, and for politics and protest. The paradigm challenges the ways in which much social science research has been “a-mobile”. …. Travel has been for the social sciences seen as a black box, a neutral set of technologies and processes predominantly permitting forms of economic, social, and political life that are seen as explicable in terms of other, more causally powerful processes’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 208).

On a more general level, they observe that:

‘Social science has thus been static in its theory and research. It has not sufficiently examined how, enhanced by various objects and technologies, people move. But also it has not seen how images and communications are also intermittently on the move and those actual and potential movements organize and structure social life’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 212).
It is in this mobility turn that tourism research gets most integrated with social science (see Leite and Graburn 2009: 52; Cohen and Cohen 2012; Mavrič and Urry 2009). In this study, I adopt a broad definition of tourism in relation to mobility. That is, my analytical scope is not confined to touristic activities in a narrow sense (c.f. Cohen 1984)\(^2\); rather, I explore the tourism site of Yangshuo as what Leite and Graburn (2009: 37) term ‘a social field’:

‘… an anthropological approach precludes viewing tourism as a distinct entity in itself, to be defined everywhere in the same way. It is, instead, “not one, but many sets of practices, with few clear boundaries but some central ideas” (Abram et al. 1997: 2), all embedded within broader social, political, and historical framework. As a cultural phenomenon, its significant components will shift depending on one’s starting point. Thus “tourism” can refer to a category of experience counterposed to everyday life; a local, national, or global industry; an opportunity for employment; a source of strangers in one’s home locality; a force for social change; a form of cultural representation and brokerage; an emblem and a medium of globalization; a venue for the construction and performance of national, ethnic, gendered, and other identities; or any combination of these and more. Tourism is thus most productively viewed not as an entity in its own right, but instead as a social field in which many actors engage in complex interactions across time and

\[^2\] Erik Cohen (1984) in his paper on the sociology of tourism outlines four directions for tourism research, including tourists and their motivation; the relations between tourists and locals; the structure of the tourist system; the impact of tourism.
space, both physical and virtual … [so as] to explore the ambiguities, contingencies, and slippages revealed in the particularities of each instance. The resulting body of scholarship attends to how actual people understand and conduct their involvement in the interrelated practices of travelling, encountering, guiding, producing, representing, talking, moving, hosting, and consuming’ (Leite and Graburn 2009: 37).

This study does not address all these possible ‘interrelated practices’, but has its own ‘starting point’ and particular concerns. Below, I introduce these specific concerns, including place-making, tourists, spatial tensions, and educational tourism.

2.3.1 Place-making

Tourists seldom begin their journey blank-minded. Urry (1990: 26) in writing ‘consumption of tourism’ observes that ‘before the actual consumption of a particular tourist destination, potential tourists already have anticipated experience of the place through ‘non-tourist’ practices, such as film, newspaper, magazines etc’. ‘Without this discourse of publicity’, Dann (1996: 1-2) also argues, ‘there would be very little tourism at all’. As Campbell (1987) also suggests, covert day-dreaming and anticipation are processes central to modern consumerism. Individuals do not seek satisfaction from products, from their actual selection, purchase and actual use. Rather satisfaction stems from anticipation, from imaginative pleasure-seeking. People’s basic motivation for consumption is not therefore simply materialistic. It is rather that they seek to
experience ‘in reality’ the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination (as cited in Urry 2002: 13).

Therefore official place-making discourses have a great influence on the way people perceive of place and carry out touristic activities. As Bruner (1991: 240) cautions, ‘it would be too easy to dismiss the language of tourism as mere advertising, as characterized by extravagant promises and exaggerated claims that no one takes seriously, as just purple prose for the purpose of selling the tour’. Rather, tourism discourse ‘is as much a structure of power as it is a structure of meaning, [which] serves to position the tourist and the narrative relative to each other, and to provide each with social role models’ (Bruner 1991: 248).

This study therefore addresses this issue of place-making by examining tourism discourses. In Chapter 4, I examine media discourses to show how the image of ‘global village’ is produced and promoted, and how certain tourist roles are projected for domestic Chinese tourists.

2.3.2 Tourists

The making of a tourism site also in some way defines tourists, because ‘at the heart of any definition of tourism is the person we conceive to be a tourist’ (Nash 1981: 461). However, the study of ‘tourist’ originated from an embarrassing situation when ‘in the 1960s, some anthropologists were struck by the intrusion of tourists into their field’ (Leite and Graburn 2009: 39). As mentioned earlier, due to the disciplinary bias of documenting the ‘authentic’, many anthropologists adopted an attitude of resistance by either resisting to interact with tourists, in particular when they themselves could be (mis)taken as tourists, or intentionally
omitting tourists from their publications (Leite and Graburn 2009: 38-39; see also Graburn 2002). This is especially the case when tourists could also claim knowledge about the field.

Meanwhile, scholars from other disciplines, mainly sociology and psychology, have been documenting the typology of tourists and their motivations (Cohen 1984: 376-379). There is also research about the touristic experience itself, which generates debates about how tourism could transform people’s identity. MacCannell (1973) proposes the conceptualization of tourist as a pilgrim searching for an authentic self. Desforges (2000) provides an empirical study of tourists’ identity change by interviewing people before and after tourism, and concludes that they do change their identities after tourism. McCabe (2002), from an ethnomethodological perspective, proposes the argument of ‘tourist at home’: tourists do not assume a different identity during tourism; it is when they are at home sharing tourism souvenirs or stories that they become tourists. There are, however, different opinions about identity search or transformation. Bruner (1991) criticizes the idea of tourist identity change and argues that the reality is the other way around: it is not only that tourists rarely change as promised by tourism promotions, but locals who are often depicted as natural, traditional, authentic, static, primitive undergo profound changes.

This study does not erase tourists deliberately, nor does it present a comprehensive typology of tourists and their motivations in psychological terms. Instead, I welcome the existence of tourists and look at their writings in two ways. On the one hand, I rely on published tourist writings (Lonely Planet publications
in particular) where appropriate, to provide otherwise unavailable historical anecdotes of tourism in China in general and tourism in Yangshuo in particular. Of course, there are reasons to question the validity of these guide books – at least, they are themselves presentations of place from certain cultural and institutional perspectives – but in this study I find it useful to refer to these writings (see also Graburn 2002: 25) and thereby leave the task of testing their validity to other interested researchers or historians.

On the other hand, this study looks at writings online by domestic Chinese tourists visiting the ‘global village’. Following Urry (1990), I consider tourists as consumers for whom touristic activities bear the importance of social distinction. Urry (1990) summarizes that the democratization of travel since the 19th century has transformed travel from one social activity confined to a narrow population of elites to the masses. But more importantly, tourism becomes a form of consumption which shows one’s taste, and therefore ‘where one travelled to became of considerable significance’ (Urry 1990: 24). In this sense, tourism plays a part in potential tourist identity construction.

This study therefore examines how ‘moving between places … can be a source of status’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 213). As also suggested by Aitchison (2009: 377) ‘in a world where differences are increasingly marked by patterns of consumption rather than modes of production, the world’s largest “industry” [tourism] has become a key signifier of economic, social and cultural capital formation shaping identities of gender, class, nation, ethnicity, religion, race, disability and the myriad intersections between these identities’. I will show in
Chapter 4 how domestic Chinese tourists in their post-tourism writings take certain touristic roles and stances while positioning themselves in varied ways vis-à-vis the ‘global village’.

2.3.3 Tensions of space

Another issue this study addresses is tensions of space in this place of constant change. While research on the impact of tourism has looked at how it may affect the local socio-economically in various ways (see Leite and Graburn 2009: 40 for a review), the increasing flows of population have made dichotomies like ‘host-guest’ less realistic. This is because, as Cohen and Cohen (2012: 2182) note, ‘“Hosts” are frequently themselves “guests” in little developed destinations, wherein outsiders often engage in tourist businesses. Likewise migrant workers, guests themselves within a country, often also assume the role of host through casual employment in tourist enterprises’ (see also Mavrič and Urry 2009: 650).

This is exactly the case in Yangshuo. In exploring the local dynamics during the tourism development, this study addresses how multiple groups of people are involved in the semiotic construction of place, and yet are differentially positioned in relation to the various mobilities of the ‘global village’. Such tensions cannot be explained simply as tensions between hosts and guests, or the displacement of the local. Rather, the socio-spatial relations are explored by looking at the multiple interconnectivities among diverse social groups. As I will show in chapter 5, indigenous West Street residents are not ‘hosts’ to tourists; rather, business shops on West Street are run by people (foreign and Chinese)
who have relocated to Yangshuo for varied reasons at different phases of the
tourism development of the ‘global village’. And the tensions around touristic
development of West Street are explored by examining how varied groups of
people relate to each other during this process of social change.

2.3.4 Educational tourism

While tourism is often understood as a form of leisure involving movement (Nash
1981: 462), there is the increasing recognition that the boundary between tourism
and other forms of mobility is becoming less clear. As Leite and Graburn (2009:
49) note, ‘while tourism is fairly easily distinguished from the other major forces
currently moving people around the globe, particularly migration and refugee
flight, its relationship to other forms of travel is less clear’. Cohen and Cohen
(2012: 2181) address this in more specific terms, observing that ‘the late modern
process of de-differentiation in social life weakens the conventional boundaries
between distinct domains, such as work and leisure, study and entertainment,
ordinary life and extraordinary holidays, and even reality and fantasy’. In Chapter
6, we will see that in Yangshuo the boundaries between ‘work and leisure, study
and entertainment’ are blurred. English-speaking foreign travelers in Yangshuo
take up the job of teaching English in local language schools, while English
language learners in Yangshuo also came from neighboring provinces, looking for
the opportunity to practise English with foreigners. The tensions around talking to
foreigners are also explored.

In this section, I have explained how tourism presents an important domain for
the sociolinguistics of mobility. Specifically, I have focused on several issues of
concern for this study, including place-making, tourists, tensions of space, and
educational tourism. However, as I mentioned in section 2.2, these issues need to
be examined in a specific socio-historical context. The next section therefore
looks at the changing ideologies of tourism in China.

2.4 Tourism and social change in contemporary China
One recent change in the global tourism industry is the rise of Asian tourists
during the past decade (Cohen and Cohen 2012; Winter 2009). It is even predicted
by the World Tourism Organization that China will dominate the global tourism
market in 2020’ (Nyíri 2009: 153). The significance of this change, however, is
more than simply adding another big figure onto the already largest industry in
the world. It raises the important question of whether Asian tourism can be
explained by existing tourism research established from an ethnocentric
perspective. As Winter (2009: 23-24) notes:

‘Given that the paradigm of tourism has in large part been constructed around
an analysis of west-to-east, north-to-south encounters, rooted in ideas of
globalization as a process of westernization, our tourist has been silently
conceived as white (and male). (see also Cohen and Cohen 2012: 2195).

Indeed, after World War II post-colonial countries were first advised by their
former colonial countries to establish tourism sites to regain economic
development (Leite and Graburn 2009: 40). This neo-colonial practice helps
perpetuate the presumption that Asia is on the receiving end of tourism mobilities,
though recent research are beginning to document Asian tourists (e.g. Nyíri 2009).
One way to work against this ethnocentrism and better appreciate tourism in Aisa,
Winter (2009: 28) notes, is to make up for ‘the lack of historical accounts’ by ‘situat[ing] the historical growth of travel … within their appropriate societal changes’. This is the task of this section.

Below, I provide a brief account of the historical change of tourism mobilities in China, looking at how the social meanings of mobilities change in China (section 2.4.1), how tourism (international and domestic) started in China (section 2.4.2), and how cultural and linguistic diversities, particularly those mediated by tourism mobilities, are perceived and managed in a globalizing China (section 2.4.3).

2.4.1 Changing ideologies of mobility in China

‘Mobility’ was not considered favorably in China until the recent modern history. In terms of its international connection, China was a closed up country and proudly considered itself as the centre of the world, hence its name zhongguo (中国), until its door was opened by western imperialist forces in the early 19th century. After a century of social turmoil due to international and national wars, the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949 and was under the Mao regime until his death in 1976. During his governance, geographical mobilities of Chinese people have been sanctioned mainly by two governance systems, hukou and danwei. The former is residential registration, used to position Chinese citizens to their birthplaces through spatial differentiation of social welfare. This includes the rural-urban as well as inter-city differentiation (for details, see Cheng and Selden 1994). The latter danwei, also known as working unit, is the monitoring and control of working staff. The working unit functioned as an
immediate authority for each working staff in almost every aspect of their working and private life, including marriage, giving birth, and many others (see Hoffman 2010). There were mass population movements during the 1950-1970s, but this was mainly initiated through the movement of millions of urban intellectuals for them to be re-educated on rural farmlands, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

The year 1978 is widely recognized as the starting point of the globalization process for modern China. This year marks the coming into power of Deng Xiaoping, whose wisdom was to set China on a fast-paced economic development, albeit fraught with increasing inequalities, through his reform and open-up policy (see Harvey 2005: Chapter 5). The implementation of this policy is often considered as China’s second revolution, after the establishment of the PRC (Xiao 2006: 803) and is still an important government policy to this day. This policy marks the end of centralized planned economy, and the start of economic reform towards a market economy with Chinese characteristics.

The early reforms were gradual but still also produced problems that finally led to the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. This political event had created much uncertainty within the Communist party, and there were divergent opinions within the Party as to how exactly to continue with the reform policy (Zheng 2014). Nevertheless, Deng’s south China tour in 1992 was significant in showing the Party’s resolution in China’s reform. After this year, more decisive policies and measures were taken which set China in motion, in particular through internal labor migration (Bian 2009).
Mobilities for Chinese people no longer just mean the freedom to move geographically, it also means breaking through the spatial constraints attached to their daily and working lives under the previous bureaucratic system, and moving out of their designated spatial order, relocate to a place of their own choice, and at the same time adjust themselves to the social organizations of the new space they are in\(^3\). Labor mobility, at this important turning point of a changing China, therefore marks the beginning of new ways of life for Chinese people.

The above account shows that China is set in motion through the reform and open policy, and most evidently after Deng’s South China tour in 1992. But if we broaden our scope and position China in the world, we see that while large-scale labor mobilities within the modern Chinese society starts only since the early 1990s, mobilities into China happens much earlier, in particular through the tourism industry. Tourism actually has played (and is playing) an important role, politically, economically and culturally, in China’s globalization process, as we will see.

2.4.2 Tourism in China

As noted by Urry (2002: 142-143), ‘in certain cases becoming a tourist destination is part of a reflexive process by which societies and places come to enter the global order’. This is exactly the case in China. The development of the

\(^3\) The freedom to move also comes with personal costs. While people’s personal and social lives are no longer supervised by their danwei, the hukou system is still very relevant today for people’s general social welfare. Relocating to and living in a place without a valid hukou of that place often renders one unqualified for the social welfare specific to that place, for example, in the aspects of education, health care and others.
tourism industry was an important part of Deng’s open and reform policy. As Xiao (2006) shows, in a matter of 10 months from October 1978 to July 1979, Deng gave five directional talks on China’s tourism development as an important part of his open and reform policy, so as to both improve international relations and achieve economic development. This was a sharp departure from the Mao era, when ‘travel to the PRC was forbidden by the United States and many other western governments. China reciprocated by generally denying entry to most foreigners’ (Ritcher 1989: 24, as cited in Xiao 2006: 804). This sudden open of the door was recorded by the early international tourists as below:

‘After being closed for repairs for almost 30 years the Middle Kingdom suddenly swung open its big red doors – but not quite all the way. Comrades! We must increase the production of tourists! China desperately needs the foreign exchange that tourism so conveniently provides, and it has done very well out of the deal so far. With several million tourists flocking in every year, the tallest buildings in China are, appropriately, hotels. Come back in five years time and there’ll be Marco Polo Pizza Bars dotting the Great Wall.

In the late 1970s the tour groups started rolling in but the prospects for individual travel looked extremely dim. It has always been possible for individuals to travel to the PRC, but by invitation only, and until the late 1970s few managed an invite. The first regulars were people from Sweden and France (nations favored by China) who stepped off the Trans-Siberain in 1979 when it reopened after 30 years.
In 1981 the Chinese suddenly started issuing visas to solo and uninvited
travelers through a couple of their embassies overseas, but mainly through
various agencies in Hong Kong. Just about anyone who wanted a visa could
get one, but since there was no fanfare, news spread slowly by word of mouth.
By 1983 it seemed that just about everyone who landed in Hong Kong was
going to China. After all, we’d been waiting over 30 years to travel in the
country unfettered by tour guides’ (*Lonely Planet China* 1988: 7)

In contrast to the favorable policy towards international tourism, the prospect
of a domestic tourism market was still slim until the 1990s. As Nyíri (2009: 153)
notes, ‘before 1978, …tourism, which in any case lacked any significant domestic
tradition, …was regarded as part of the bourgeois lifestyle and, as such, taboo’.
But even ‘as late as the mid-1990s, the issue of whether China should support or
discourage domestic tourism was contentious within government circles. Its
opponents argued that tourism bred immoral behavior, wasted resources and
distracted the population from productive activities’ (Nyíri 2009: 153-154).

The establishment of the domestic tourism market finally took shape in the
This is because such endorsement came at a time after the Asian financial crisis
when the government ‘faced an urgent need to increase domestic consumer
demand’ (Nyíri 2009: 153; see also Zhang 2003). Nevertheless, such initiatives
were compatible with an already changing China wherein internal migration and
labor mobility were already becoming a new way of living. In other words,
tourism became another form of mobility for Chinese people, which not only
helps form a leisure market but also a means of searching for new lifestyles in a consumer society (Nyíri 2009: 153; see also Arlt 2008).

The promotion of domestic consumption actually also represents an important transformation in China’s economic development strategy. A series of events in the late 1990s make China realize that the interconnectivity of the world would position China in an unfavorably constrained condition if it continues the export-oriented and production-based economy. Domestic consumption was thus explicitly stated as the ‘new source’, ‘new impetus’, ‘main engine’ for China’s long term economic growth (Croll 2006:1). This turn towards a consumer society is also reflected in the new vocabularies used to describe certain lifestyles, such as bobos, a mixed style of Bourgeois and Bohemia; neo-neo-tribe, a teenage style of exaggeration and uniqueness, non-mainstream, a less expensive but equally fashionable style. As Wang (2005) shows, these labels have been used as a marketing strategy in commercial advertisings which satisfy the Chinese consumer psychology of what Veblen calls ‘pecuniary emulation’, that is, a tiered logic of consumption wherein emulating a higher lifestyle is considered as the fastest way of acquiring social prestige (Wang 2005: 532). Against this context, tourism, formerly unfavorably considered a bourgeois and capitalist activity, started to become a celebrated consumer activity in this national turn towards a consumer society.

Of particular interest to the present study is the term xiăozī (小资), which comes to refer to people aspiring to western lifestyles and valuing worldliness, fashion, hedonism, including the use of foreign languages (Bao 2002). In short, it
is about taste and style, in particular among young urban dwellers who have not yet achieved middle class status economically⁴ (c.f. Wang 2005). I will explore this issue in chapter 4, showing how the ‘global village’ packages various semiotic resources for potential xiăozī tourists.

Apart from this particularity of Chinese tourist mobilities, another point worth mentioning is how the development of the tourism industry in China is also characterized by a rural-urban differentiation. As Xiao (2006: 811) observes, ‘unlike Mao’s victory in establishing the People’s Republic, which started from the rural to besiege the urban, the story of China’s tourism unfolded in the opposite way - starting from urban areas and dominated by sightseeing and mass tourism. Inevitably, planning for tourism also involves urban design and (re)construction’.

While the County of Yangshuo was already officially designated as one of the first places in China open to international travelers in 1978, its significance was largely recognized due to its geographical closeness to the city of Guilin, which is also famous for its beautiful sceneries (Jiang 2009: 198). The importance of the Li River as a scenic attraction, which runs across the city and the county, was highlighted by Deng Xiaoping during his two trips to the city of Guilin in 1978 and 1986 (Xiao 2006: 809-810). Also, Guangxi government had also been dedicating much effort to the development of the city of Guilin, and different

⁴ Cited from the Chinese version of Wikipedia http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%B0%8F%E8%B5%84 Last accessed 02 January 2014.
proposals were made to establish it as a ‘modern industrial city’ (1959); ‘Eastern Geneva: a scenery city with Chinese characteristics’ (1963); ‘socialist city with beautiful sceneries, modern industry, modern agriculture, modern science and culture’ (1973) (Contemporary China: Guangxi: 359). Such development policies have positioned Yangshuo in a dependent relationship in terms tourists source to the city of Guilin until the 1990s when initiatives were taken by the local Yangshuo government to support tourism as an important industry (Chapter 5 provides details). This is consistent with tourism development in other parts of rural China, where tourism was first started as a means to alleviate poverty as rural residents engage in businesses to improve their own living conditions while their ‘small businesses… complemented the entire tourism supply system that state-owned tourism enterprises could not fully cover (Gao, S. Huang and Y. Huang 2009: 441).

But since the 1990s, against the background of China’s more aggressive turn towards a market economy, the significance of tourism as an industry became recognized and even prioritized by the local Yangshuo government. The importance of Yangshuo as a tourism site was also acknowledged and highlighted by two national government officials - the then Prime Minister Li Peng and the former President Yang Shangkun. In their separate visits to Yangshuo in the year 1996, both declared in calligraphy writing the importance of Yangshuo as a tourism site: ‘Yangshuo, A Famous Tourism County in China’ by Li Peng and ‘Yangshuo, the No. 1 Tourism County in China’ by Yang Shangkun (A Fast-developing Tourism County 1999: 3). The various aspects and specifics of this
historical change towards a tourism economy in Yangshuo will be explained in the empirical chapters below.

2.4.3 Multiculturalism and multilingualism in China

Tourism mobilities, both domestic and foreign, contribute to the cultural and linguistic diversity of tourism sites. It is important, therefore, to note how in an already multi-ethnic China, multiple diversities are perceived by the general public and managed by the state. Below, I briefly explain two aspects of diversity: ethnic diversity within China, and foreign migrants to China.

Farrer (2014: 19) notes that, ‘multiculturalism in China has been conceptualized primarily in terms of relations between the majority Han population and the ethnic minorities’. He further elaborates that:

‘China’s current politics of multiculturalism developed in a twentieth-century context of colonialism, invasion, and national resistance. Upon seizing power in 1949, the Communist Party rapidly moved to assert control of minority border regions that had in some cases gained de facto independence or were occupied by foreign powers. In contrast to the previous regime of the Republic of China that downplayed the very existence of ethnic minorities in China, the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] employed the rhetoric of a multi-ethnic nation and political self-determination to stave off independence movements and counter the involvement of foreign powers in border regions. … Despite the rhetoric of cultural diversity and political autonomy, the Party’s desire to assert control over these resource rich and strategically important border regions meant that China’s multicultural policies have always involved an
unstated goal of assimilating “backward” minority populations into a Han-dominated political culture’ (Farrer 2014: 19).

This assimilation of minorities towards a Han culture is also evidently demonstrated in terms of language. As Zhou (2003: 27) shows, ‘In 1949, the percentage of Chinese-speaking minority people was probably below 20 percent… In the late 1980s, 50 to 60 percent of China’s minority population could speak and understand Chinese… since the late 1980s China’s market-oriented economy has greatly increase population mobility, both from minority communities to Han communities and from Han communities to minority communities. As more and more minority people speak Chinese as a second language or shift to Chinese as the first language and Chinese occupies more and more domains of language use, minority languages in China become less and less vital’.

Nevertheless, some existing research has argued that the recent global economic change has provided new opportunities for the revitalization of minority language through commodification, in particular in heritage tourism development. For example, Heller (2003) approaches language from the perspective of the new economy wherein the economic restructuring and entry into the global market requires a re-evaluation of the multilingual repertoires in francophone Canada, and leads to the transformation of the development mode from workforce into wordforce (Heller 2010: 353), or the entrance into ‘language industry’ (Heller 2010: 352). This strategy of ‘globalizing nationalism … abandons, in many aspects, the focus on nation-state institutions and searches for resources and
power in international markets and institutions’ (Pujolar 2007: 82), and can also be found among other ethnolinguistic minority tourism sites (see, for example, Couland, Garrett and Hywel 2005; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010).

Though the francophone case may leave the impression that ‘globalization can increase the value of otherwise minorized varieties’ (Blommaert 2003: 613) and may be ‘the reason for the revival of local cultural identities’ (Giddens 2000: 13), such commodification of local language and identity is materialized with conditions. As acutely pointed out by Heller (2003: 487-488), heritage tourism depends on ‘the strength of the older ideology of community’, because it ‘combines the value of the authentic community with the development of a unique francophone product, of unique interest to francophones, and under francophone control’. This observation points to the importance of ideologies of language and culture as mediating factors between macrostructure and micro language practice. Thus, while the globalized new economy provides an opportunity for some minority people and their languages, others may have to resort to other strategies to enter the global market.

In the Chinese context, for instance, language situation in ethnolinguistic minority groups is complicated by the stigmatization of minority languages, weak community participation in community development (see Bao and Sun 2007), and the Chinese consumption culture, as mentioned above. For example, Bai (2001) describes the failed attempts by Manchu minority elites in northeastern China to revitalize their community as a tourism site through Manchu language education under the overwhelming promotion of Standard Chinese (Putonghua) and English.
learning. Pan (2005) examines the changing language attitude and language practice at the heritage tourism site Xi’an, which leads to the devaluation of the local Xi’an dialect, changing attitude towards Putonghua as a lingua franca, the increasing desire to learn other dialects for better domestic tourism service, and the frequent use of simple Japanese and English to serve international tourists. Su and Teo (2009), in their study of a heritage tourism site at Lijiang, observes how the local language is used for emblematic, decorative and authenticating purposes (such as dialect engraving on the wall), totally deprived of the communication function of the language (Blommaert 2010: 29). What we see at West Street, Yangshuo, however, is not only the de-valuation, if not erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), of the local language in tourism development, but more importantly the strategic use of English to establish itself as a ‘global village’.

The second point I would like to make is concerned with the inflow of foreigners into China. To understand how foreigners live around in the Chinese society, we need to look at the changing attitudes towards foreigners in the recent Chinese history. Again, Farrer (2014: 19-20) notes that

PRC [the People’s Republic of China] attitudes towards “foreigners” were also cast during this same period of state formation that emerged out of a long struggle against colonialism and foreign invasion. During the first half of the twentieth century many Chinese cities had gained substantial foreign populations, mostly located in semi-colonial “treaty ports” such as Shanghai and Tianjin, or colonial possessions wrested from China, such as Hong Kong and Dalian. The new Communist leadership was determined to eliminate
foreign political influences, expelling resident foreigners from the country in
the early 1950s, or encouraging them to emigrate, including almost all long-
term resident Westerners (and the last remaining Japanese) as well as Russians,
stateless Jews, and other refugees still living in Chinese cities after the
Communist takeover. Soviet advisers were an important exception to this
cleansing of China’s cities, but with the cooling of ties between the Soviet
Union and China after 1956, they too were expelled, and previously
multicultural (and colonial) cities such as Shanghai and Dalian became nearly
devoid of foreign residents for most of the 1960s and 1970s. Beijing had a
small population of diplomats and a few resident foreign communists, but even
the capital city was scarcely a multicultural metropolis.

The open and reform policy in 1978 ended decades of isolation for China and
its people. However, ‘in as much as Chinese did come into contact with foreigners
inside China, the state worked to limit contacts to a polite facade of politically
correct “friendship” (Brady 2003). These policies of restricting foreigners’ entry
to China, formed in a period of perceived national crisis, reinforced a
psychological and social barrier between Chinese and foreigners that still impacts
on intercultural relations today’ (Farrer 2014: 20). Early foreign travelers to China
were often able to record the extraordinary attention they attracted from Chinese
people - the ‘staring squads’:

The program is *Aliens*, you are the star, and cinema-sized audiences will gather
to watch. You can get stared at in any Asian county if you have western racial
features, particularly when you go off the beaten track where the locals have
seen few or no foreigners. But China is phenomenal of the size and enthusiasm of its staring squads. …You don’t have to do anything to get a crowd. Stop for a minute or two on the street to look at something and several local people will also stop. Before long the number of onlookers swells until you’re encircled by a solid wall of people (Lonely Planet China 1994: 148).

Chinese people also have a term for addressing foreigners in general, ‘laowai’ (老外), which is considered to be another evidence of how foreigners tend to be considered an outsider:

Laowai! This is just an extension of the staring-squad problem. Laowai literally means ‘old outside’, but it’s just a Chinese idiom for ‘foreigner’. It is not a term of abuse – in fact it’s the politest word for ‘foreigner’. Nevertheless, it gets irritating, just as the words ‘Hello Mister’ in Indonesia begin to sound irritating after you’ve heard it for the 100th time in the course of 30 minutes. Just why the Chinese are so easily amused by standing next to a forefinger and repeatedly yelling ‘Laowai’ is hard to figure out – they must be very bored (Lonely Planet China 1994: 148).

While in both academic and popular discourses, the intercultural experience between Chinese and foreigners are often said to involve such socio-historically formed barriers, one social event called ‘English Corner’ has received relatively little attention, in particular in regards to how in such events foreigners have come to assume an instrumentally important role (Wee 2003), rather than simply being laowai to be stared at.
The formation of English Corner dates back to the year 1978, when China resumed English teaching after the Cultural Revolution. The first English Corner was formed at People’s Park in Shanghai. A place with relatively many foreign travelers in China at that time, it quickly became the gathering place for people to find foreigners to practice their spoken English. Soon practising spoken English became widespread across the whole China. Its proliferation was driven largely by the need to improve and practice spoken English beyond the classroom. Since the 1980s, almost every city in China has at least one free public place for weekly English Corners. Jin and Cortazzi (2002: 60) define English Corner as ‘a characteristically Chinese approach’ to learn English: ‘a weekly gathering in a park, a square or at a street corner where university and middle school students create their own learning environment with each other and passers-by, to practice English’. ‘In most English corners, there is little organization and participants simply know that they can come and speak English to other learners at particular times. They may talk to complete strangers to make friends with people through practicing English together at will’ (Gao, X. 2009: 61).

While an English Corner does not necessarily need to be held with the presence of foreigners, the appearance of foreigners is now being advertised by language schools in Yangshuo as one of the important factors that differentiate them from other learning environments. On West Street, Yangshuo, a T-shirt (see Figure 2.1) from a T-shirt shop shows with some humor how as foreigners are

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5 For more information, see http://baike.baidu.com/view/1693832.htm?fromTaglist. Last accessed on 09 Dec 2013.
still kept at some distance (see (1) ‘Thou shall not stare fixedly at foreigners’),
they are also important resources for practising English (see (8) ‘Thou shall not
utilize foreigners to practise English’). This new spin on interaction with
foreigners is explored in Chapter 6.

Figure 2.1 A T-shirt with ‘Chinese 10 Commandments’. Photo by author, 2011.

In this section, I have provided an account of the changing ideologies of
mobilities and tourism in contemporary China. I have shown that tourism
mobilities constitute important aspects of the globalization process of China.
While since the year 1978, international tourism has helped open the door of China to the outside world, the socio-economic change since the early 1990s set China in motion, in particular through internal labor and tourism mobilities. Yangshuo, as one of the first places open to international tourists in China and a popular domestic tourism site, represents an important locale for examining how international and domestic tourism mobilities contributes to the reconfiguration of place, and how such transformation is related to the changing ideologies of language and mobility in an increasingly globalizing China.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the case of Yangshuo could contribute to our understanding of the sociolinguistics of globalization. For the present purpose, I showed how the understanding of globalization needs to address issues of mobility, locality and historicity. Tourism, I have argued, provides an important domain to explore these issues, in particular through looking at the issues of place-making, tourists, tensions of space, and educational tourism. I also suggested that understanding tourism in China requires addressing its historical particularities, and I have shown how ideologies of mobility have been changing in a globalizing China.

The next chapter introduces the research site and methodological issues in data collection.
Chapter 3  Research Site and Field Methods

3.1 West Street, Yangshuo: A brief introduction

Yangshuo County (1436.91 km²) is located in the southeast of Guilin City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China. The Region, as its name indicates, has the largest number of Zhuang ethnic people, accounting for more than 90% of the Zhuang population in China. In Yangshuo County, according to the 2003 statistics, 12.6% (37,760) of the residents (299,434) are from minority groups including Zhuang, Yao, Hui, Miao, Tibetan, Dong and others, though the majority of the population is Han. Historical study indicates that Yangshuo as a County was established as early as the year 590, though the earliest written record of the County, as available now, could only be traced to the Qing Dynasty (1673). And ‘West Street’ got its name in the year 1674 for no reasons other than that it is on the west bank of the Li River (Wang 2006a: 112-113).

For the most part of the recent history, Yangshuo people have been making a simple life on agriculture and fishery, but they have always been closely connected with the outside world as well. While located in a relatively remote region, Yangshuo’s geographic location near Li River has made it a favorable transit spot for businesspersons when freight transportation was dependent mainly on boats and ships. Also, in the early half of the 20th century, a period of social turmoil caused by international and domestic wars, people from neighboring provinces, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hunan also came over for various reasons of war, famine or others (Wang 2006a: 117-118). Around this time, several guilds were
already established for people from the same hometown. At Guangdong Guild, an English language editor who came here for a shelter from a Shanghai publishing house was invited to run the first English workshop. In the 1940s, a foreign language training centre for Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist Party) officials also moved here to train embassy interpreters and translators. And there were foreign expatriates as well. Apart from one or two western preachers (Wang 2006: 121), the establishment of a prisoner-of-war camp in Yangshuo during the anti-Japanese War and the second World War also brought in large number of foreign people, mainly German, Japanese, Italian, as the Nationalist Party of China moved to Yangshuo. This period thus witnessed a sudden and temporary increase in the number of population from only 2,500 to around 10,000 (Wang 2006a: 122).

A relatively stable, though short-lived, time came with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, and attempts were made by the local and national governments to develop the area as a tourism spot. However, these development projects failed to be fully implemented because of the Culture Revolution (1966-1976). Even the name ‘West Street’ with the word “west” could be politically incorrect so that it was changed into ‘East Wind Street’, until the year 1982 when those cultural sanctions were finally eradicated (Wang 2006a: 113-114). Almost around the same time, with the collapse of the Sino-Russia relationship, the Russian language was replaced by the English language in China’s foreign language policy, though English was only taught at its minimum to advocate Maoist doctrines during the Cultural Revolution (see Wang 2006a; Ji 2004). Therefore West Street until the Open-up and Reform in 1978, has mostly
been a typical traditional street where people lived in traditional houses and occasionally sold their own extra agriculture products just in front of their own houses.

With Deng Xiaoping’s coming into power in 1978, China embarked on the process of modernization through a gradual transformation from the planned to a market economy. Yangshuo, due to its special natural scenery, was designated as one of the first places for foreign tourists as China opened itself to the outside world. But the designation of Yangshuo as a tourist destination was more of a political mission assigned by the central government than simply an economic activity. The main purpose of tourism in this period, as everywhere else in China, was to earn the badly needed foreign currencies for the young China (Su and Teo 2009; Zhang 2003). And the limited number of tourism-related businesses were owned and managed by the local government. Yangshuo in the early 1980s barely managed to prepare itself for these early tourists, as recorded by the early Lonely Planet tourist-writers,

In 1983, when the first edition of this book was being researched, there wasn’t much in Yangshuo. The tourist market by the dock catered to the flotilla of tour boats bearing Chinese, Japanese and westerners who swept through like a plague of locusts before being bundled on buses and whisked back to Guilin. Three hotels (one of which they wouldn’t let you stay at, and another which didn’t have toilets) and a couple of soupy noodle dispensaries catered to the meager number of backpackers who found their way here (Lonely Planet China 1988: 607).
With the de-politicization of tourism as an industry and with the further privatization of business operations under the market economy, the local government in 1985 started to recognize tourism as one part of the local economy, though agriculture and fishery still accounted for the majority of the local revenue\(^6\). At this time, some local people started to do small family businesses catering to international travelers. But they only learned to use English or Japanese as they communicated with foreign travelers, and it was not rare to see people talking with body language. Some chose to sell ‘antiques’. ‘Most people, at the beginning’, as one local business person told me, ‘they just searched for old wooden boards or “ancient” stones, and sold them. That’s it. Those kinds of old stuff, which looked like ancient treasures. Hahaha. They were just not sure about what they should sell to the foreigners’. Some entrepreneurial others experimented with the new market economy, learning to make and sell western food. In 1988, ‘you can munch on banana pancakes and muesli, slurp coffee and hang out in half a dozen or more travelers’ cafés with Midnight Ol and Dire Straits tapes playing in the background’ (*Lonely Planet China* 1988: 607).

This small and laid-back neighborhood since then has been gaining increasing popularity among international travelers:

‘Just 1.5 hours from Guilin by bus, Yangshuo has …become one of those legendary backpacker destinations that most travelers have heard about long

\(^{6}\) As I will show later in Chapter 5, it was only since the late 1990s that the local government started to consider tourism as an important driving force of the local economy.
before they even set foot in China. … Yangshuo is still a great laid-back base from which to explore other small villages in the nearby countryside. With its western-style cafes, Hollywood movies, Bob Marley tunes and banana pancakes, Yangshuo may not seem like the ‘real China’, but who cares? It’s a great spot to relax, see the scenery and grab a good cup of coffee—the perfect antidote to weeks or months on the road. Don’t make this your first or second stop coming from Hong Kong. Save it for after knocking around Guangzhou or Guangxi for a spell. You’ll appreciate it much more’ (Lonely Planet China 1998: 774).

From the late 1990s, national media reports started to portray West Street as a ‘global village’. Through examining written documents, tourism discourses and tourist writings in the media, my preliminary study indicates that it would be a simplification to conclude that the ‘global village’ is a result of the inflow of international tourists, though that does contribute to the observed social change. The popularity of the site among domestic tourists indicates that other national factors must be at work as well. As we will see in Chapter 4, the media discourses constitute important sources for constructing and promoting the image of ‘global village’, which are meant to attract domestic Chinese tourists. Keeping these complexities in mind, the fieldwork aims to find out further information on how exactly has West Street, Yangshuo become a ‘global village’, and what this means.

3.2 Field methods

3.2.1 Before entering the field: Working plan and working assumptions
Fieldwork is meant to be a process of ‘progressive problem solving’ (Erickson 1986: 140). Some more specific questions guiding my fieldwork included what roles does the local government play in this historical change? How do various groups of people, that is, local indigenous residents, businesspersons and tour guides, relate themselves to this social change? Local indigenous residents, in particular, tend to be silenced, if not erased, in media discourses. What do they think of this social change? How do they adjust to it? I would like to hear their voice. And also, what is the touristic experience like, for both domestic and international tourists?

My fieldwork plan therefore included collecting official documents and tourism promotional materials, carrying out interviews with and making observation of local people\(^7\), doing participant observation of guided tours, and collecting tourist writings.

However, the very same field methods or techniques can be used by researchers with different assumptions in knowledge production (Erickson 1986: 119-120; Rampton 2006: 387). So, before going into details about my fieldwork per se, some preliminary statements regarding the rationale and assumptions underlying my fieldwork, or ‘critical epistemological issues buried in the seemingly simple fieldwork practices’ (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 5), are in order.

\(^{7}\) Here, ‘local people’ is loosely defined as people working and living in Yangshuo. This loose definition helps avoid dichotomies like host-guest (see section 2.3.3 for details), and would include businesspersons and the so-called ‘local foreigners’ who are long term residents in Yangshuo.
Methodologically, I adopt an ethnographic approach to the tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo, and accordingly take on board some very fundamental assumptions as below:

- **Complexity**

One of the defining features of ethnographic research is to capture the complexity of the field (Blommaert 2007a; Blommaert and Dong 2010; Blommaert and Rampton 2011). Whereas in many other approaches several variables might be predefined and/or controlled so as to be tested in a correlational manner, ethnography aims to capture social life as it is (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 11-12; Rampton 2006: 385). Actually, ‘if [ethnographic] fieldwork doesn’t start from assumptions of complexity’, as Blommaert and Dong (2010: 86) put it, ‘it is bound to miss the whole point’. In this sense, fieldwork is ultimately a process of learning which, as most elegantly summarized by Dell Hymes (1996: 13), ‘is continuous with ordinary life’: ‘Our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human being must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life’ (Hymes 1996: 13). It is this openness of ethnography to everyday life that differentiates it from many other approaches.

However, two disclaimers are necessary here.

First, as Dell Hymes (1996: 7) states clearly, ‘all this is not to say that ethnography is open-minded to the extent of being empty-minded, that ignorance and naivety are wanted. The more the ethnographer knows on entering the field, the better the result is likely to be. Training for ethnography is only partly a matter of training for getting information and getting along. It is also a matter of
providing a systematic knowledge of what is known so far about the subject’ (see also Blommaert and Dong 2010; Erickson 1986; Heath and Street 2008). Therefore, pre-fieldwork preparation involves getting to know as much as possible about the field, particularly through adequate contextualization of the research site (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 17-18). In my pre-field preparation, I made full use of news reports, tourism websites, tourist writings, guidebooks, as well as other historical documents/records available in library archives, so as to know as much as possible about the relevant social, historical, economic and cultural aspects of Yangshuo and of China in general. This prior knowledge was both the company I kept (Heath and Street 2008: 49) during my fieldwork and the claims I wanted to hold in check (c.f. Rampton 2006: 388-389). Among other things, one of the reasons for choosing to carry out my fieldwork in summer months (May to July) was partly based on the knowledge that this period tends to be a popular tourism season in Yangshuo.

Second, complexity does not mean to complicate through, for instance, whatever forms of intervention. Rather, ethnography tries to ‘“mirror” the events and processes it describes’, ‘to be iconic in relation to its object’ (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 85, italics original). In other words, ‘if these [events and processes] are complex, the analysis is complex; if they contained paradoxes, such paradoxes will also emerge in the analysis’ (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 85). Bringing out the full colors of life, therefore, is what ethnography aims for. Given that my research field is a place of constant change and transformations wherein varied mobilities have rendered invalid many assumptions about community (see
sections 2.2 and 2.3 in Chapter 2), an ethnographic approach which could capture the complexity of the field is therefore adopted (Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

- Nativeness

In grasping the complexity of the field, researchers try to find out the native’s viewpoints, instead of relying solely on existing published materials or documents. (Erickson 1986: 123). Indeed, ethnographic work has the potential to challenge and critique established views (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 10-12). And the validity of ethnographic inquiries also depends on accurately capturing ‘the meanings of behaviors and institutions to those who participate in them’ (Hymes 1996: 8; see also Erickson 1986: 119-120).

Two main methods are used to capture the local meanings in the present research: interview and observation. Specifically, I chose to use semi-structured qualitative interviews for this study. This type of interview is more of an exploratory and interactional nature, wherein the interview is conducted along certain themes or topics but always in a very much conversational manner to elicit viewpoints, stories and unexpected anecdotes (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 46-47). Therefore the questions I prepared served more as a rough guideline than a schedule to be strictly followed. This type of interview is appropriate for ethnographic research wherein participants’ viewpoints are valued (Warren 2001: 85).

At the same time, as Dell Hymes (1996: 8) cautions, ‘all this is not to say that members of a community themselves have an adequate model of it, much less an articulated adequate model’. This is because, ‘all of us are only partly able to
articulate analyses of our lives and their contexts. The meanings which the ethnographer seeks to discover may be implicit, not explicit. They may not lie in individual items (words, objects, persons) that can be talked about, but in connections that can only gradually be discerned. The deepest meanings and patterns may not be talked about at all, because they are so fully taken for granted’ (Hymes 1996: 9; see also Blommaert and Dong 2010: 2-3; Rampton et al. 2004: 3). Besides, what is articulated by participants is not to be taken as truth discovered through interrogation. On the one hand, their words are themselves discourses produced during the situational context of interviews from a viewpoint formed during their life history (c.f. Briggs 1986: 13-14; Warren 2001: 84-85). On the other, ethnographic interview pays attention to not only to what is said, but also how it is said, which can be crucial in getting the intended meaning and viewpoints (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 43; Warren 2001: 85).

This then leads to the importance of making observations. As will become clear in the section below, observations in the present study serve as the means to both gain a better understanding of my participants and their life before actual interviews were conducted, and supplement and refine the knowledge I learnt during interviews. These are complementary ways of learning.

- Adaptability

While as mentioned earlier there were plans guiding my fieldwork, the actual fieldwork process is also contingent on the realities of the field. As I will explain in the next section, the plans only served as a rough guidance; they were kept being revised according to the actual situational affordances and constraints of the
field. The fieldwork involved a constant process of adjusting my understanding of the field itself and revising my perspectives and questions towards the various happenings. There were also unexpected questions coming up during the fieldwork, which were interesting enough to demand adaptability and flexibility of my plan.

Such change in research plans and process can be seen as quite disturbing, especially to someone with a positivistic mindset. But this is actually what differentiates ethnographic work from many other approaches. One of the fundamental ethnographic facts is that ‘everyday life will never adjust to your research plan; the only way forward is to adapt your plan and ways of going about things to the rules of everyday reality’ (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 1). Indeed, as Dell Hymes stresses, ‘it is of the essence of the method that initial questions may change during the course of inquiry. …an essential characteristic of ethnography is that it is open-ended, subject to self-correction during the process of inquiry itself’ (Hymes 1996: 7; see also Blommaert and Dong 2010: 12; Rampton et al 2004: 2).

- Reflexivity

As researcher adapts plans to best reproduce a ‘mirror’ image of the field (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 85), it also needs to be remembered that there is hardly anything as an ‘objective’ image. This is because ethnography is ‘interpretative research in a situated, real environment, based on interaction between the researcher and the subject(s), hence, fundamentally subjective in nature’ (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 17, italics added). As Dell Hymes puts it
most emphatically, ‘there is no way to avoid the fact that the ethnographer himself or herself is a factor in the inquiry’ (Hymes 1996: 13). Specifically, ‘the researcher’s own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex intricacies of situated everyday activity among the people being studied’ (Rampton 2006: 392). Therefore, inclusion of oneself has been increasingly adopted and accepted in ethnographic stories (Graburn 2002: 25). As very obviously shown in the reflexive style of my writing, I am part of the story being told here.

- Partiality

This leads to the final point I want to consider - partiality. The story here is partial not only because of me telling it from my own perspective, but also touches upon the often debated issues of representativeness and generalization in ethnographic research.

The tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo, as well as the claims made about it here, is not to be taken as reflecting a prototypical tourism site in China. Actually it can be said to be a quite exceptional case of tourism development (see section 2.4 in Chapter 2). But at the same time, this is also a most ‘telling case’ (Heath and Street 2008: 64) because it speaks most directly to the research paradigm of the sociolinguistics of mobility. As Rampton (2006: 402-403) observes, in ethnographic research,

rather than taking sole responsibility for a general claim which stands or falls in subsequent argument, the objective is to build towards cumulative, comparative generalizations, sharing the responsibility for doing so with
critical but cooperative readers (Hymes 1980: 119 ff.). By specifying as many of the conditioning factors as can be reasonably identified, there is an attempt to enhance the comparability and translatability of the account, saying in effect: “these are the practices I found, and this was the situation. Look at it in detail. How does it compare with the practices and situations you’re studying? Are there processes and conditions that compare with things you’ve observed? Are your processes a bit different? What is it in our two situations that could account for these similarities and differences?” (see also Blommaert and Dong 2010: 16-17).

With these ethnographic assumptions said, I can now go on to introduce my work in the field.

3.2.2 In the field: Working to learn and learning to work

I was in Yangshuo for three months from May-July 2011. Here I explain the issues of field access, field methods, and also talk about the constraints in obtaining some data, before moving on to a more detailed field description in section 3.3.

After arriving at Yangshuo, I first made a temporary stay for about two days at a little hotel near Yangshuo bus station. I then found a permanent place for my entire stay in a little family style hotel on Xianqian Road, which leads directly to West Street but has much more quietness. This gave me the convenience of going to West Street within only 2 minutes, but at the same time protected me from the bustling West Street whenever I needed it.
My first impression of getting back to West Street after five years was it has become somehow urbanized. McDonald’s and KFC have found their way to West Street. Located just around the entrance to the street, the KFC logo and the big yellow M stand obtrusively between viewers and the green mountains stretching far away. Into the street, the traditional buildings are still housing little souvenir shops, coffee shops, and restaurants, but there are also a modern bakery store with landing windows, several shops selling branded handbags and luggage, and quite a few fancily-decorated night clubs. And while there are still people drinking and eating at the tables along the street, at some restaurants the more or less uniform decoration and tidy layout of the tables looked much more business-like (see Figure 3.1) than the casual family businesses I had seen in 2006, as I noted down during my first visit to West Street in 2011:

Around 5pm, I went for a walk on West Street. It was not dark yet and I did not see many tourists there, but it seemed that at every business shop people were preparing for the beginning of the night life. They carried tables and chairs out, covered the tables with the local dyed cloth, and arranged them in rows. It looked like a big banquet street. I passed by two male Chinese tourists and overheard them asking a waiter standing by the street, ‘where is the famous restaurant with the best beer fish?’ When they got the direction, they inquired further ‘and which do you think is the best night club to go to? The waiter recommended one. It seemed that night clubs, like the local food, have gained its fame and become one of the attractions (Field note, 09 May 2011).
After settling down, I first paid a visit to the Yangshuo Tourism Bureau, intending to do some document research there. The bureau was about 15 minutes’ walk from West Street only. However, compared with the renovated Qing-Ming style buildings on West Street, the office building seemed too shabby for a governmental bureau. The walls were dark and peeling, the green paint on the wooden doors was losing color, and the windows were dusty. And as I looked for the office of the head of the bureau, the names of the offices caught my attention. All names ended with ‘share’ (股), instead of ‘office’ (室, 科 or 所) as normally is the case. It seemed to indicate that each office is not only in charge of certain aspects of the bureaucratic responsibility, but also holds corresponding shares (股) of the relevant tourism revenue.

When I returned to the hotel I stayed, I told my observation to the night keeper. ‘You see that hotel there’, he pointed at a building opposite our hotel. It was a nice marble stone building with delicate wooden carvings in the front door and
windows, unlike most ordinary residential buildings around. It could be a quite fancy hotel, I thought to myself. Then it came to me that I have never seen people coming in or out of it. ‘There is dispute’, he explained. ‘Several bureaus want to claim the property as theirs, but it cannot be decided whose property it is after all, so they just let it be a waste there until the dispute can be settled’. As it turned out, it was a matter of which bureau could claim the property and its management rights, and thus to which bureau the possible business profits should go to. In short, it was a matter of who has the rights to make profits out of it. While I had already known about the weak community participation in the local tourism development from one study (Bao and Sun 2007), I was a little surprised to know that the government also has vested interest in owning and managing some businesses here. This therefore complicates the way the local government gets involved in the ‘global village’, and also, as I will show in section 3.3, contributes to the tensions and struggles in this so-called ‘global village’.

At the same time as I collected written documents by visiting relevant bureaus and the local library, I also visited the business shops on the street as well. This did not create the time clash problem at all, because all the bureaus, while the officially open from 8.30am to 5.00pm, actually had quite generous lunch break (12.00pm-3.00pm). But even during working hours, the working staff may very likely be away, which meant for me another visit at another time. So I always had that plan B to walk around West Street to visit some businesses there. Those businesses where I did my research, some were names that I have read about during my preliminary research based on the internet data, some were introduced
by my participants and local friends, and others were selected by myself. The general principle was to gain an understanding of the various types of business in West Street, and their relations to this new representation of ‘global village’. I thus included coffee shops, hotels, travel agencies, bars, cafés. For personal reasons, I did not do research on or pay personal visit to night clubs where, it was rumored, illegal drugs were secretively sold, though I will explore their contribution to the tensions in West Street through indirect sources.

I carried out interviews with the business owners, but the specific questions were only developed gradually after several visits and observations of each business, and interviews were carried out individually in a semi-structured way so as to allow space for issues posed by interviewees. Except for some providing breakfasts, all businesses operated from around 11.00 am to about 11.00 pm or even after mid-night seven days a week, so interviews were carried out during their business hours. The interviews were audio-recorded (except in one case) and were carried out in English with non-Chinese and in Mandarin with Chinese people inside participant’s business house. Each interview lasts about one hour, but sometimes the interviews were intersected by the need to take care of business. And on one occasion, the interview was only finished after three visits because the owner had to prepare coffee for customers as they arrived. Together, I interviewed 9 business owners, including 1 hotel owner, 3 coffee shop owners, 3 restaurant owners, 1 travel agency owner, 1 bar owner (see Table 3.1 for details).

As I will explain below, for about one month in July 2011, I also did participant observation in one language school, though this was not included in
my original research plan. My job involved one-to-one interaction with English learners at the school, twice a week, each time two one-hour sessions. All interactions and interviews were audio-recorded. Since the purpose of the one-to-one interaction, as an integral part of the school’s program, was to provide an opportunity for them to practice spoken English, this gave me the opportunity to ask questions of my concern, with the permission of the school. I interviewed 24 students (see Table 3.2) in English, though occasionally switching into Mandarin.
All names appearing in this thesis are pseudonyms. And the pseudonym is meant to reflect the participant’s nationality. However, English pseudonyms are used for English language learners despite their Chinese nationality (see table 3.2). This is in conformity with the general practice of the school.

Several of these businesses, are opened through partnership or together with spouses, as indicated in place(s) of origin. All the interviews were audio-recorded, except the one with Sun.

The three businesses in the lower half of the table changed locations later, as I will explain in Chapter 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Owner⁸</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place(s) of Origin⁹</th>
<th>Starting Year(s)¹⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee shop</td>
<td>Meng</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Ding</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Henan (China), Belgium, Australia</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee shop</td>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel service</td>
<td>Liu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee shop</td>
<td>Tian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Guangxi, Taiwan</td>
<td>2000/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>1992/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Guangxi, Singapore</td>
<td>1995/2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Businesspersons interviewed.

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⁸ All names appearing in this thesis are pseudonyms. And the pseudonym is meant to reflect the participant’s nationality. However, English pseudonyms are used for English language learners despite their Chinese nationality (see table 3.2). This is in conformity with the general practice of the school.

⁹ Several of these businesses, are opened through partnership or together with spouses, as indicated in place(s) of origin. All the interviews were audio-recorded, except the one with Sun.

¹⁰ The three businesses in the lower half of the table changed locations later, as I will explain in Chapter 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>(Previous) job</th>
<th>Job location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Production manager</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Salesperson and HR</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sales assistant</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scot</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Inner Mongolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(Car) Parts department supervisor</td>
<td>Hunan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Electronic engineer</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Logistics (planning to be salesperson)</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reid</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Typesetter (planning to do trading)</td>
<td>Hebei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Order processor</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Project engineer</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>family business</td>
<td>Hubei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Operation department (shipping company)</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Student-interviewees. (Total 24, 15 males, 9 females. Average age: 27.8)
There were also constraints during the fieldwork. This mainly involves video-recording touring experiences. I had planned to follow tour guides with their tourist groups to West Street, so as to find out how tour guides would introduce West Street, and how tourists show preferences over certain kinds of shops or souvenirs, and how they interact with other people along the street (c.f. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). It was assumed that at least compared with individual tours, guided tours may be easier to follow as it is more organized, and also the tour guide could be a more or less stable middle person between me and the transient and temporary tourists. However, I was not able to follow the guided tours. This difficulty was partly due to the fact that tour guides work for commissions from tourists’ expenditure at the shops rather than simply for a fixed salary. Since most businesses on West Street are small scale shops or restaurants, most tour guides, knowing they would not get much commission fees from these shops, would not bother walking with the tourists into the street. This was confirmed by my experience of asking for tourism brochures about West Street at the local tourism agencies. When I went to check whether there are any brochures for West Street, people would first give me a surprising look, simply replied ‘no’, and then ignored me completely. Guiding tourists to the countryside tourist spots with entrance fees tend to be their regular business. Besides, as one tour guide explained to me, simply adding another person to the touring group might invite complaints from other tourists as this is against the touring contract they had with the tourism agency.
Perhaps one possible option for recording tourist experience may be doing long-time participant observation at one local business. This may not capture the entire touring experience, but could hopefully record recurrent happenings at one particular site. But due to time limit, this was not attempted. Thus unfortunately, I was not able to record tourists’ touring experience.

Overall, based on data collected online and during fieldwork, the whole dataset includes:

- online tourism promotional discourses;
- online foreign and Chinese tourist writings;
- on-site observational field notes;
- photographs of signage
- interviews with West Street business owners;
- informal interaction with local people;
- participate-observation and interviews at one language school for about one month;
- document collection/research at Yangshuo Library and Yangshuo Tourism Bureau, including books, videos, policy documents, newspapers and magazines.

3.3 Some brief stories

In this section, I provide more detailed description of the field, as well as showing how the complexity of local relations shaped my fieldwork. Specifically, I
introduce how I ended up doing (participant) observation and interviews in a local language school (section 3.3.1), and how controversies around what West Street should be like came up as a recurring theme during my fieldwork (section 3.3.2).

3.3.1 ‘You are here to learn English, aren’t you?’

Hardly had I settled down for the first few days, I was repeatedly asked one same question, ‘You are here to learn English, aren’t you?’. While you can politely suppress your surprise at this come-from-no-where question and say no the first time you got it, you started to wonder what’s wrong with them, or rather what’s wrong with me, when the question kept repeating itself. So I decided to return this puzzle to the owner of the hotel I stayed in. She did ask me this very question when I first arrived. Cindy spoke Mandarin, and turned out to be Chinese Malaysian. She had been here running her hotel for only about one year, but spoke with experience and observation. ‘There are two types of people who would stay here long. One is those who want to learn English, another those looking for business opportunities’. Assuming that those learning English should be school students, I asked further, ‘well it’s not school vacation yet, are there students coming here to learn English?’ ‘Many English learners are not students’, she quickly corrected me:

‘They work somewhere else but still want to improve English. So they come. But speaking of schools, I had some schools book rooms for their students last year, to learn English here [in Yangshuo]’. In a cheerful manner, she continued, ‘the students are supposed to look for foreigners to have a talk in English, as an assignment, but they don’t really know where and how they can
do that. One day, Xiao Zhang [the cleaner at the hotel], heard the students worrying about where they could find a laowai [foreigner] to talk with. She immediately pointed out, our hotel owner is a laowai! So all the students came downstairs to me to practice English. Hahah’. (Field note, 11 May 2011)

Intrigued by this, I decided to look for a local language school to see how English learning really worked here. I started from those well-known ones, as recommended by one local informant. The first few schools I visited would not allow me to do research inside the school itself. But when asked what kind of learning programs they provided for their students, all the schools suggested that I could consider going to the bars, because ‘we encourage the students to go to the bars; they can practice English there with foreign travelers’. One member of the working staff also nicely gave me a few names of the bars.

While going directly to the bars would allow me to observe people talking there, but with people coming and going, it would be difficult for me to identify and approach students, and more difficult to interview them or record their conversation on the spot. So I tried another two schools, and as luck had it, I finally got the permission to do my research at one. This school, Samuel Language School, turned out to be one of the most popular schools among students, and was one of the oldest foreign language schools at Yangshuo, with a history of around ten years. Right outside the school building, there was a notice board with two impressive phrases: ‘English Only’ and at the bottom in smaller fonts ‘success in English, success in life’.
I went in and explained to the reception my intention, and very soon the manager walked out from his office. ‘Hi, what’s your name?’ he asked as he shook my hand. I was a little surprised that he spoke to me in English. I stumbled a little bit but nevertheless replied in English. He invited me to come over to his office for a talk, again in English. After examining my research information sheet, he kindly offered that I could not only do my interviews, but also participant observation as well if I would like to. I thanked him as I walked out of his office, but I could not help also checking with him, ‘are you Chinese?’ ‘Yes’, he smiled and continued in English, ‘we are supposed to speak English here - that’s part of the requirement of the school; it’s good for students. The same for you when you go around the school.’

Part of the reason they allowed me in was because the school had a VIP student learning program. This program is designed for students who sign learning contracts with the school for more than 28 weeks, thus automatically
becoming VIP students. One privilege of being VIP students is that throughout their entire stay, they are entitled to three one-to-one individual interaction sessions with three different foreigner teachers (though I am definitely not). The purpose is to practice spoken English. The interactional content can be quite flexible, only need to be appropriate for the students’ English competence. Usually the school manager would help prepare a question sheet for the teacher, but I was allowed to ask my own research questions, at the permission of the school. (See Appendix 1 for interview questions).

The language of the interviews was English, of course. However, the students were from different English levels, ranging from level 1 (introductory level) to level 5 (advanced level) as defined by the school, so I tried to vary the wording but still basically ask the same questions based on students’ language competence. But at times, the students still had difficulty understanding even repeated simple English, and I would then suggest using Chinese, to which no students objected. All together, I interviewed 24 students (aged from 22 to 40), each lasting around one hour. I asked questions about English learning inside and outside school, the reasons for coming here and others (see appendix 1 for interview questions). Generally speaking, they were young working professionals (with an average of 27.8), some of them without college degrees. They used to hold lower-rank professional positions in small or medium sized enterprises dealing with international trade (see table 3.2). But all of them had the similar experience of quitting, or intending to change, jobs before they came here, hoping that better English in the near future would help them find better jobs. The learning program
at language schools in Yangshuo, which advocate improving English by talking with foreigners, is what has attracted them here (see extracts 3.1 and 3.2).

Extract 3.1\(^\text{11}\):

(Interview with Frank, 23yrs old, work at Guangdong)

Shuang: what do you think is good about Yangshuo?

Frank: I think the most important one is West Street, West Street.

Shuang: West Street? Why?

Frank: West Street, yes. Because there are a lot of foreign travelers at Yangshuo. I think it’s a good place to study English.

Extract 3.2:

(interview with Ted, 31yrs old, work at Sichuan)

Ted: … I have many chances to job hop, if I, if I, but my English is very bad, so I can’t get this chance, if my English is well, I en, can success to job hop.

Shuang: you mean get another job, a better one?

Ted: I can get, I can get, maybe, er 20,000 yuan salary, but now I can’t….So I made a big decision to quit my job to study English for a long time.

Before the interviews, the students were told that the recorded interview was part of my research on English language learning at Yangshuo, and when I

\(^{11}\) Throughout the thesis, broad transcriptions are used for interviews, because the focus of analysis is on contents of interviews, as opposed to language use or prosodic features.
finished my questions, I would allow the students to ask any questions they have as a return of favor. The most common question I was asked is how to study English well. While I did not have a ready answer, some students always readily produced a notebook, jotted down my words, and asked for the spelling if they were not sure.

I should also mention that the school very nicely put me in the orientation program in the first place, which involved observing several classroom lessons. This conveniently put me in touch with more people. As it turned out, I was not the only new teacher. One South African, one American, one Irish, and one Canadian were there at the orientation on the same day with me. At this time of the year, as summer approached and more students were about to come, the school started to recruit new teachers. Except the Canadian who just opened his business here, all other three foreigner teachers were travelers here and intended to teach for several months or longer (see Table 3.3 for a full list of teacher-interviewees). This English-teaching job would provide them with extra money for travelling, and is also a very convenient way to get the visa. The good thing for me as a researcher was that as I got to know these and other teachers better, I also got to know about the ‘western community’ in Yangshuo. During their stay, many teachers here had already formed some social network within Yangshuo, thus getting in touch with them offered me the convenience of getting to know about the foreign travelers and their life here.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Language(s) spoken</th>
<th>Length of teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>English, French, Spanish, Chinese</td>
<td>1.5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>B.Sc.</td>
<td>English, Chinese, Japanese</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Teacher-interviewees (Total, 7; 1 female; 6 males. Average age: 30.7)

As I will elaborate in chapter 6, these foreigners teaching English at local language schools, due to their relatively long-term stay, are also called ‘local foreigners’ (本地老外) by local Yangshuo people. Length of teaching here refers to the time spent in their current teaching position in Samuel Language School till the time of interview. Three of the teachers, Steve, Sam and Peter, had taught in either Samuel’s or other language schools in Yangshuo. Philip and Steve were working part-time, and others were full-time teachers. Except for Steve and Jason who traveled to Yangshuo for the first time and stayed, the other five teachers had actually travelled to Yangshuo before.
3.3.2 ‘What do you mean by “global village”?\textsuperscript{13}

During the many interactions with my participants, foreign and Chinese, I always sought to find out how they relate themselves to this place and its social change. Some peoples had no trouble at all in giving a positive answer, even offering elaborations cheerfully, being proud of it; some would look puzzled by my question - they either repeated ‘global village’ slowly as they thought about it, or directly returned the question to me, asking instead ‘what do you mean, “global village”?’; and there were those who refuted me by immediately offering alternative labels, claiming that it’s not a ‘global village’, but ‘Wenzhou village’ and ‘Guangzhou village’\textsuperscript{13}. These observations complicated what I had assumed before my fieldwork. My assumption was that the business owners may have decided to open their business here because of the expected economic returns in this ‘global village’, and therefore like West Street as it is; the local indigenous people, on the other hand, may think the commercial development of the ‘global village’ means the loss of their neighborhood, and would try to defend against the change in some way. However, as became clear during my fieldwork, the tensions around the social change cannot be understood as tensions between businesspersons and indigenous residents of the former neighborhood.

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Guangzhou village’, as Ding explained to me, means that there are so many people from the neighboring city of Guangzhou that they have almost occupied the entire street. ‘Wenzhou village’ here is used rhetorically by Sun. Wenzhou people are known in China for their accumulation of personal wealth through doing small business. ‘Wenzhou village’, as Sun explained, means everything is about money now.
Specifically, my understandings of the tensions around the ‘global village’
became much clearer one day when I noticed a protest paper on the street.

One day, wandering around the street again, I saw a very eye-catching white
protest placard right in front of a hotel. Of course I had noticed the hotel before,
but it never caught my attention, like other hotels. However, the placard did say
something: the hotel was putting on a protest against the construction next door.
Right beside the hotel, Henry, the hotel owner told me, another night club was to
be built. He already had enough of the booming noise because of one night club
operating on one side of his hotel. Now, if this night club is built, his hotel cannot
really do business anymore- it would be noise from both sides. When he came to
Yangshuo around 2000 from America, he chose to open a hotel because he liked
here, the beautiful scenery and the nice little neighborhood. But now everything
has changed, worse than he could ever think of. Asked what’s his plan now? He
said he’s closing, right now. He could find no way to negotiate with the neighbor
next door, because their construction had the approval of the local government, so
why would they care? The placard read,

‘As a private business, our hotel has always dedicated itself to charity work,
donating about 650,000 Chinese yuan for the past ten years. Despite this, we
now have to close our hotel because the Housing Construction Bureau has
done nothing but destroying our peaceful life here. We thus had to close since
13 May. We welcome anyone interested to come in and have a look’.

This eye-catching placard thus represented a last hope for Henry that it could
help to whatever extent. As I can see clearly, Henry’s hotel was not only affected
because of the construction noise, but even the entire adjoining wall at one side of the stairs was demolished.

Henry’s case may seem like an exception or simply an incidental conflict between a neighbor’s business decision, which was supported by the government, and another individual’s hotel. But Henry’s indignation at being unfairly treated, if not brutally violated, and his general dislike towards the current West Street actually have resonance among some other participants. The commonality among those who would not relate positively to West Street is that most of them had arrived in Yangshuo before its most extensive development around the mid-2000s, and now tended to choose to live away from West Street. As I will show in Chapter 6, Henry’s case, among others, sheds light on the complexities and tensions around space, and helps illuminate how these seemingly idiosyncratic and different perspectives towards the ‘global village’ could actually reveal the issues of power and differentiated mobility (Massey 1993) implicated in this socio-spatial transformation.
3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a general introduction to West Street, Yangshuo, and spent more space in sections 3.2 and 3.3 describing in detail the issues of field access, field methods, fieldwork constrains, as well as providing some field descriptions. But a more detailed and specific exploration of Yangshuo still deserves some space, so that the contextual account is not reduced simply to a background information, to the point that it becomes, as Blommaert (2007a: 6) warns against, ‘a falsification of the ethnographic endeavor’. Also, I already mentioned in Chapter 2 the importance of examining the process of place-making, and noted that tourism promotional discourses also have implications for the way tourists negotiate the meanings of tourism sites (see sections 2.2 and 2.3). The
next chapter therefore looks at the material and discursive processes of how the ‘global village’ gets constructed for potential domestic tourists.
Chapter 4  Commodification of Place, Consumption of Identity: The
Sociolinguistic Construction of a ‘Global Village’

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the construction of the so-called ‘global village’ based on
an understanding of place in relation to globalization and mobility. As mentioned
in Chapter 3, the presence of the English language and foreigners in West Street,
Yangshuo represents a ‘semiotic opportunity’ (Blommaert 2010) for constructing
a ‘sense of place’ (Gieryn 2000; Johnstone 2010a), in specific terms a ‘global
village’ for domestic tourists. In a country where learning English meant learning
communist or Maoist doctrines (see Ji 2004), and where tourism was cracked
down as capitalistic during the Cultural Revolution (see Arlt 2008; Urry 2002), it
is desirable to look into deeper sociopolitical factors to find out how tourism and
English acquire new social meanings and how that relates to the formation of a
‘global village’ in Yangshuo.

In examining the above issues, it would be problematic to confine the
analytical scope to the local community. As Philips (2004: 489) admitted,
‘villages were treated by anthropologists as bounded at one time, even though we
know this is an analytical strategy rather than the only reality’. On a related note,
Rampton (2009: 700; 2010: 286-288; italics original) argues that ‘when it comes
to larger social change and political structures’, looking ‘within rather than
between or across communities [provides] limited explanatory power’. This is
particularly true in the age of globalization when ‘all places are tied into at least
thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 209). Tourist destinations, moreover, function in a contingent system consisting at least of tourists, local people, and their respective cultures (Leiper 1990) wherein the ‘fluid interdependence’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 212) of factors on different scales form a global-national-local nexus (Su and Teo 2009).

Drawing on these insights, this chapter problematizes a static, bounded and homogeneous understanding of place. First, language helps construct senses of place, which in turn can be commodified for structuring human experience (Johnstone 2010a: 10). ‘Sense of place’ refers to the attributes and qualities ascribed to a physical location and its semiotic-material components (Gieryn 2000), and thus language and discourse constitute important resources for place-making (see Johnstone 2010a). Second, place only makes sense through the subjective mediation and experience of place, such that ‘physical spaces are sometimes designed with particular human experiences in mind’ (Johnstone 2010a: 10). Third, the meaning of place could also be variously activated and negotiated through specific linguistic practices, pointing to the importance of examining the relationality between people and place through tourist discourses. As Pennycook (2010: 7) argues, ‘our words are produced and understood in places that are themselves constructed and interpreted’. In talking about tourist destinations in particular, Sheller and Urry (2006: 214) observe that ‘[tourist] activities are not separate from the places that happen contingently to be visited. Indeed, the places travelled to depend in part upon what is practiced within them’. In other words, place acquires its sociocultural meaning not only because of its
producers but also its consumers, who, in this sense, co-construct the sense of place as well. Tourist destination is thus interactively constructed, mediated by and subjected to the ideological interpretation of tourists. Hence, language as a social practice, or more specifically, ‘a spatial practice’ (Pennycook 2010: 7), needs to be considered as one useful way to explore the issue of place.

In the following sections, I first provide an account of the sociohistorical factors leading to the observed development of West Street into a ‘global village’ (sections 4.2 and 4.3). I then analyze two tourism promotional discourses (section 4.4) and four tourist writings (section 4.5) to explore the interconnectivity between people and place. I conclude by suggesting an understanding of the tourism site as a social construction wherein the social meaning of place is constantly constructed, mediated and even contested by, instead of only being a context for, particular tourist activities and behaviors.

4.2 The recent socio-historical transformation of West Street

After decades of social turmoil, China finally started to turn its attention to economic development with Deng Xiaoping’s coming into power in 1978. The same year, Yangshuo (Guilin) was designated by the central government as one of the first few places open to foreign travelers. The domestic tourism market, on the other hand, remained largely non-existent, not only because leisure travel was unaffordable for the ordinary people, but also because it was socially sanctioned. Mobility was considered as undermining social stability and running contradictory to socialist doctrines (Nyíri 2009; Su and Teo 2009; Zhang 2003).
China, until the 1990s, was largely an inbound tourism market for international travelers (Zhang 2003).

To develop international tourism and facilitate tourist travelling to the rural village, Guangxi Communist Party initiated plans in the early 1980s to develop Li River running across Guilin City, which could allow tourists to travel on ships and enjoy the beautiful scenery all the way from Guilin to Yangshuo (The Tourism Industry in Contemporary China 2009: 137-138). West Street, located on the west bank of the Li River, was the first place foreign travelers disembarked on after hours on the river. As more travelers arrived to explore the countryside beauty, residents on this 500-meter long street started to run western food restaurants and small family hotels catering to foreigners. Some other local residents searched their backyard for typical Chinese products for sale, or did carving, painting and calligraphy writing on the street, catching the eyes of foreign travelers who were just amazed about anything Chinese. Through business services and self-learning, local residents were able to pick up some foreign expressions, like Japanese and English, enough to serve travelers from neighboring and western countries. Yangshuo’s beauty quickly made it a popular tourism site, and in 1998 it had already become ‘one of those legendary backpacker destinations that most travelers have heard about long before they even set foot in China’ (Lonely Planet China 1998: 774). West Street, the only street in the County with hotels and restaurants, also became a resting place for foreign travelers after exploring the surrounding countryside and villages. Its atmosphere is well captured by a Canadian tourist:
Extract 4.1:

Yangshuo is unlike any other place we have seen in China to date - one entire section of the town seems like it has been lifted from somewhere else and plunked down in the middle of southwestern China. Cafe after cafe offering western food, espresso, capuccino [sic], pizza, real French baguettes, Italian gelato, and apple pie. Shop after shop with beautiful things from all over southern China from batik work to silk pyjamas [sic]. You could enjoy one English-language movie over dinner and stay for the double feature over dessert (Parlow 2001)\textsuperscript{14}.

This transformation of West Street is such that it looks even ‘unrecognizable’ to people who visited there in the early 1980s:

Extract 4.2:

The pictures of West Street came as somewhat of a shock to me. When I went to this lovely place in 1984 there were less than 3-4 foreign tourists. No signs were in English. I stayed in an unpretentious room in a hotel with a central courtyard. Dinner was taken in a poorly lit restaurant where I sat for many hours holding the owners [sic] baby in my lap as I simply relaxed and watched the family. There were bikes for rent and I went with a friend to the countryside for an afternoon. I met another traveler who was out too late one

\textsuperscript{14} Except for Extract 4.1 and 4.2, the other extracts were all translated from Chinese by the author, except for italicized bold words originally in English. … is used to represent omission of texts, [ ] to insert author’s comments.
day to get back to town, so a family took him in. He slept in a large bed with the entire family under one big blanket. From the pictures on this site it looks like this place has become yet another "hip" tourist trap. It is completely unrecognizable. I am glad I went when I did (Leach 2004).

It would be a simplification, however, to consider the transformation of West Street as westernization driven by globalization, though international tourism does contribute to the observed change. As will be demonstrated in the next section, in its attempt to explore the domestic tourism market, West Street is no longer just a geographical location for western food, but has acquired a new social meaning - ‘global village’.

4.3 West street as brand: English, tourism and (post-)modernity

As Yangshuo (and West Street) enjoys growing popularity among foreign travelers, tourism in China also acquires new significance and meaning after decades of sociopolitical constraints and ambivalence. Starting from the early 1990s, after the Asian financial crisis in particular, domestic tourism started to be heavily promoted by the central government as it tried to encourage consumption to boost the economy (Zhang 2003). Three weeklong holidays (Labor Day, National Day, Spring Festival) were introduced in 1999, aiming to ‘truly make tourism a part of the people’s common consumer practices’ (Nyíri 2010: 62; Zhang 2003). These new policies and propaganda aimed for new subjectivities among Chinese people towards leisure, consumption and tourism, and in the end helped Chinese tourists gain the widespread reputation of ‘big spenders’ (Nyíri 2010). Tourism thus represents not only leisure, but also a ‘quest for modernity’
In this national turn towards a consumer economy, Yangshuo Tourism Promotion Committee was established in 1999, and a series of policies and projects were initiated to share this burgeoning domestic tourism market. The initiative began with the ‘West Street Protection and Development Project’ in 1999 which, while aimed at restoring the historical architectural style of West Street already popular among foreigners, can be considered a precursor of the more extensive commercial construction of a ‘global village’ to take place later. Generally speaking, the re-naming of West Street as a ‘global village’ attempts to construct and commodify a sense of place. While English has mainly been used in West Street as a tool of communication for service encounters with foreign travelers, the local government\textsuperscript{15} now started to reframe the presence of English as a ‘opportunity’ (Chen, X 2009: 80) which needs to be further explored and appropriated as one of the resources for constructing a sense of globality for Chinese tourists. To understand this strategy, the social significance of English among the Chinese people needs to be introduced.

The English language was re-integrated into the national education policy for China’s modernization back in the late 1970s (Pride and Liu 1988). However, the current social importance assigned to English has gone beyond national

\textsuperscript{15} The commercial development of West Street is a governmental initiative, instead of a community decision, as in Heller’s case (See Bao and Sun 2007 for a discussion on the weak community participation in Yangshuo).
development and international communication, to become one social stratifying factor within the society. For one thing, with the further implementation of market economy in Deng’s China, English has become an unequally distributed educational resource, making English learning more of a market driven activity. As a foreign language, English is learnt as a school subject through formal education, and has a high stake in entrance examinations from secondary level to postgraduate studies under the country’s drive to enter the international community. Consequently, English competence and education level are to a large extent mutually indexical - English competence could be one indicator of one’s ability and social status (Zhao and Campbell 1995). However, equalitarian distribution and access of language education resources proved hard to implement in China, given the regional differences socioeconomically on the immense landscape of China. More importantly, with the further implementation of the market economy, foreign language education started to be decentralized and pragmatically differentiated according to each region’s specific socioeconomic reality (Hu 2005), which makes language learning more of a personal responsibility and investment. For another, English in China has a high value, even greater than Mandarin, in people’s upward social mobility (education, employment and others). While this over-emphasis on English has always been a hot topic of debate, as one social critic famously questioned ‘我们Chinese总不能拿英语互相问路到长城怎么走吧?’ (Shall we Chinese use English to ask each other which is the way to the Great Wall?) 16, English nevertheless has become a

16 This critique was made by Han Han (1982- ), one of the most influential writers
key index of personal competence and social status (Jin and Cortazzi 2002; Zhao and Campell 1995), leading to not only the nationwide craze towards English, but also critical self-evaluation of Chinglish or Chinese English (see Henry 2010). English, as a marker of prestige and cosmopolitanism, therefore becomes a necessary or desired part of the stylistic repertoire for many Chinese people.

Against this social background, the local Yangshuo government started to capitalize on English and develop West Street as a brand, as illustrated below from an article titled ‘The soft power of culture in Yangshuo tourism development’ by one local official:

The tourism industry could be most developed when it is well integrated with cultural elements. Tourism development is actually a process of producing, managing, and selling culture, to be followed by tourists buying, enjoying and consuming culture. West Street, Yangshuo … has become the largest English Corner, the ‘Global Village’ in China … West Street offers its tourists super value services more than worthy of this brand. Culture development thus should follow the steps of tourism development: cultural products can become commodities, as highlights and brands of the tourism industry (Chen J. 2009: 172-173).

and social critics in contemporary China. The specific source of his remark can no longer be traced, but it is included in the online Chinese Wikipedia Baidu Baike as one of his many famous words. Last accessed 21 Feb 2012 at http://baike.baidu.com/view/5972.htm
This branding strategy was actually implemented through two interrelated projects. The first concerns the development of an English education industry through building on the English speaking environment in West Street. With the initiation of English Summer Camp in 1998, ‘educational tourism’ was promoted as a new tourism attraction for Chinese nationals who wish to learn/speak English in an ‘authentic’ environment. As one official stressed in his article ‘Promoting Yangshuo: Towards a scientific development of the County’s economy’:

We should fully explore the opportunities of mixing Chinese with western cultures by strategically integrating more western elements into local Yangshuo culture. This would include importing educational resources from both home and abroad, so as to further expand and develop the foreign language education as an industry (Chen X. 2009: 80).

Building on the presence of foreign travelers, and based on the teaching philosophy of encouraging students to practice what they learn in the classroom by talking with foreigners, private language schools started to proliferate, and English language training became an important part of the local tourism industry (see Chapter 6 for details).

At the same time, building on this popularity of West Street among tourists, the local government also decided to further expand and establish West Street as a ‘global village’. With the ‘West Street Protection and Development Project’ still underway, the government in 2003 initiated projects for the commercial development of real estate surrounding West Street. Favorable investment policies were issued, which were meant to attract private business investors from China.
and abroad\textsuperscript{17}. To further promote and celebrate a ‘global’ image, cultural activities like Beer Festival and Christmas Party started to be organized by the local Yangshuo Tourism Bureau on West Street every year. This image has become such an important part of the County’s self-presentation that in the year 2005, a Frenchman running a restaurant in West Street was invited by the local government to be the spokesperson for Yangshuo (Liu 2005).

West Street thus now is not just a place for international travelers to take a break, but has also become a ‘global village’ where aspiring middle class Chinese tourists could try out stylistic repertoires. People from neighboring provinces and cities, Guangdong in particular, now literally consider Yangshuo their ‘backyard garden’ to spend the weekends. During summer time, West Street is the popular place for people from different parts of China to practice their spoken English. Part-time and unpaid volunteer working positions at hotels, bars, and cafés even become opportunities only available on a first-come basis due to the sheer number of people eager to talk to foreigners through this ‘convenient’ means. While the popularity of West Street benefits the local business to some extent, the ideology of English symbolism also brings a dilemma: Not only is the street now losing its tranquility; business owners and foreign travelers sometimes find themselves

\textsuperscript{17} Non-local capital is recruited for two reasons. First, as a countryside village, both the local people and the government lack the financial capital for investment. Second, it also helps attract foreign businesspeople for the construction of a global image. See chapter 5 for details.
caught up with domestic tourists and English learners, who are eager to strike up an English conversation yet usually with no clear communicative purposes.

In this section, I have shown that the transformation of West Street from a traditional residential neighborhood into a ‘global village’ involves reframing English as one of the semiotic resources to be mobilized and appropriated for constructing a sense of globality for domestic tourists. These developmental projects, however, are at the same time complemented by various discourses of tourism promotion. Indeed, producing various discourses of publicity constitutes an important part of tourism development (see section 2.3.1 in Chapter 2). It is specified explicitly by the local Yangshuo government that ‘advertising and promotion constitute important aspects of tourism development… In terms of specific methods, we should rely on …various tourism meetings and events, and also use the modern multimedia technologies of television and internet …to promote in multiple channels and multiple forms’ (A Fast-developing Tourism County 1999: 46). The following section therefore examines two promotional discourses where this image of global village is produced and promoted.

4.4 Semiotics of the ‘global village’

The following extract is a quite typical introduction to West Street, from the travel section of www.china.com.cn, which is one general information websites under the supervision of the Information Office of the State Council. This article appears in Chinese in the travel information section, and is intended for domestic
Chinese tourists. Similar introductory texts can also be found in many other information websites and travel forums\textsuperscript{18}.

Extract 4.3:

Yangshuo has picturesque scenery and rich cultural heritage. …The most famous is the ancient stone street, West Street, which has many craft shops, calligraphy and painting shops, hostels, cafés, bars, and Chinese kung fu houses. It is also the gathering place for the largest number of foreigners - more than twenty businesses are owned by foreigners. So the place is called the ‘Foreigner Street’. And since all the locals can speak foreign languages\textsuperscript{19}, it is also called the ‘Global Village’ [Chinese original: 地球村]. …Another attraction is the study and exchange of Chinese and foreign languages and cultures. …Chinese people teach their foreign friends Chinese cultures including its language, calligraphy, taiji, cooking, chess; at the same time foreigners teach Chinese people their languages and cultures, so that both finish their ‘study abroad’ within a short time (‘West Street’ 2001).

The article, entitled ‘West Street, Yangshuo: Heaven for xiăozī (xiăozī tiāntáng 小资天堂, to be explained later)’, introduces West Street as a ‘Foreigner Street’ (yángrén jiē 洋人街) after briefly describing its geography and history. While this

\textsuperscript{18} A Google search in Chinese of ‘xiaozī West Street Yangshuo’ produces about 7,590,000 results.

\textsuperscript{19} The original Chinese version does not indicate the number of ‘foreign language’ (外语 wàiyǔ), or specify which language(s). ‘Foreign languages’ is thus used as the translation in a general sense.
name foregrounds the presence of foreigners and thus helps create a sense of Otherness, as I will demonstrate below, it is only introduced to be reframed for the construction of locality.

Through highlighting (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Park 2010a), if not exaggerating, foreign languages as part of the local linguistic repertoire (‘all the locals can speak foreign languages’), foreign languages are appropriated recursively (Irvine and Gal 2000) to transform Otherness into locality. This sense of locality is then further constructed as globality- foreign language competence is linked up in a causal relation with the notion of ‘global village’ – thus both establishing and naturalizing foreign languages as index of globality. Through these semiotic processes, Otherness is thus transformed into localized globality. This recursive move becomes more evident when the author likens coming to Yangshuo with ‘studying abroad’, which differentiates West Street from the rest of China.

What is important, however, is not only the semiotic construction of global village, but how tourism discourse, as Leiper (1990: 17-18) sharply points out, serves as the ideological (-ism) positioning of tourists (see also Bruner 1991: 248). Based on a presumably transient (‘within a short period of time’) and synthetic friendship (‘foreign friends’, ‘Chinese friends’), Chinese people are encouraged to participate in exchange of languages and cultures, which are represented as accessible and pleasurable. Here it is important to note how this touring experience can become symbolic performance for constructing certain tourist roles. West Street, as indicated in the title, is supposed to be the heaven for xiăozī,
who can be said to be the cultural role model in modern Chinese society, in particular among the younger generation. As either a noun or an adjective, xiăozī refers to (a persona characterized by) a cultured and studied way of being under consumerism and hedonism (Bao 2002), capturing qualities which may include:

Non-mainstream and elusive uniqueness, which shows a surrealistic and romantic contemplation of life by displaying observable nostalgia, solidarity, educatedness, sophistication, elegance, usually in place and space with western associations like coffee shops and bars, so as to find a way of being and a sense of self in a post-modern spirit.

Xiăozī thus tend to challenge and change everyday mundaneness into aesthetic and artistic experience, through travelling, clothing, furnishing, romantic love, etc., as exemplified by their preferences for movies (e.g. *In the Mood for Love*; *Sleepless in Seattle*), people (e.g. Zhang Ailing; a street beggar reading *Norwegian Wood*, see Bao 2002), cities (e.g. Beijing, Shanghai), music (e.g. jazz, blue, folk), and others.

The tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo, as we see in extract 4.3, provides opportunities for tourists to engage with the West, including the opportunity to meet and interact with foreigners, relax in bars and coffee shops, try western food, and others. Through these consumption and interactional practices, tourists exhibit their taste and lifestyles which, as we shall see in section 4.5, might carry the connotations of being xiăozī. In particular, one specific language indexical of
xiăozī is English, an indispensable element of the middle class stylistic repertoire.

In Extract 4.4, West Street is promoted as the largest English Corner:

Extract 4.4:

Yangshuo is a good place to cure your ‘dumb English’ [Chinese original: 哑巴英语] and ‘deaf English’ [Chinese original: 聋子英语]. ...At West Street, you can always see West Street people talking in fluent English with western travelers for business or just having small talk. Even old grannies in their 70s or teenage kids can chat [Chinese original: 拉呱 láguā] with laowai in English. Many western travelers say they just feel no foreignness here. West Street is the largest ‘English Corner’ in China now (Yangshuo Tourism Bureau 2009).

The article begins by invoking linguistic insecurity among Chinese people with the popular terms ‘dumb English’ and ‘deaf English’, which refer to inadequately developed English speaking and listening competence respectively. Such stigmatization of ordinary Chinese people’s English is legitimated and justified by taking an authoritative stance with the clinic metaphor ‘cure’, which endorses West Street as the ideal place to improve English competence. Such linguistic authority is further attested to by depicting English as already being a natural part of the local linguistic repertoire (as indicated by the characterization of speaking English as 拉呱 láguā, a colloquial and laid-back style of conversation), and also by citing western foreigners’ judgments for credentials (c.f. Park 2010b). While this seems to suggest that English might already be part of the local linguistic repertoire, and even language shift might be happening here, evaluation of
language competence is always situated and ideological (Blommaert et al 2005; Park 2009; 2010a; 2011). Indeed, during my fieldwork, I never heard the local people chitchat, or láguǎ, in English among themselves. There were also quite a number of people, working staff and owners of businesses, telling me that they spoke little or no English at all. As Song, a restaurant owner, told me,

‘I speak little English myself, and so do my staff. You cannot require them to know a lot [of English]. It’s fine that they only know a little bit English words. If you want people with good English, you will never be able to find someone to work for you. Those people speaking good English would be competent enough to work in big cities in Guangdong or Shanghai’. (extracted from interview)

Nevertheless, while the locals may not really láguǎ in the manner the text describes, the English language, as well as the presence of western travelers, occupies a significant part of Yangshuo’s self-presentation. And such constructed language competence and authority, while questionable, have been quite successful due to mediatization in attracting Chinese tourists, who not only come to polish their English but also witness the local’s linguistic achievements. An elderly woman living at Moon Hill Village in Yangshuo County has become a national celebrity after she was reported as capable of speaking as many as eight foreign languages. Domestic tourists not only attempt to strike up an English conversation with her, but also take photographs with her, though she also
admitted later she only picked up a few simple foreign expressions in a national television interview (Yu 2005).20

In this section, I have shown that the ‘global village’ image is constructed in tourism discourses through the semiotic processes of recursively appropriating linguistic and cultural resources, naturalizing their indexicality as globality, and establishing linguistic authority. Such discursive construction fits into and facilitates the tourism developmental strategies adopted by the local government since the late 1990s, and have implications for the way potential tourists perceive of this ‘global village’. So, how do tourists align themselves with such discursive strategies of attracting tourists? The next section examines tourist discourses online to find out how they position themselves in relation to the ‘global village’.

4.5 Performance, stance and identity: Post-tourists and anti-tourists

Tourists, through their discursive practice, may activate the indexical meaning of various symbolic resources in West Street and thus position themselves in relation

20 Mama Moon’s foreign language competence is also critically commented by a working staff at the Television and Broadcasting Bureau of Yangshuo. One afternoon, I visited the bureau to see whether they have media archives I can use. I mentioned to a working staff there that I had heard about a documentary called Mama Moon. He immediately said, ‘These videos are not done by us. There are too many broadcasting companies wanting to see her, and there are actually too many videos about her. We are just a County-level bureau, and don’t always have the resources and time to do that. All we can do is to listen to the County government. Those broadcasting companies come, and they’ve got to do something. It’s all about media hype. Well, true, she was the first tour guide in Yangshuo, but she’s not really into business, otherwise she could have achieved something today. It’s all about media hype. It’s reported that she knows many languages, and can speak ‘hello’ ‘bye-bye’ in English or German. But is that being able to speak a language?’ (Field note, 10 May 2011).
to the image of ‘global village’ (Jaffe 2009). The indexicality of English as xiăozī, however, can also be subjected to negotiation. As have long been recognized in tourism studies, ‘participants in a performance do not necessarily share a common experience or meaning; what they share is only their common participation’ (Bruner 1986: 11), and thus ‘referring to the tourist … is unrealistic’ (Leiper 1990: 17, originally underlined). Based on an understanding of identity as positioning oneself through linguistic practices (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), I show two different stances tourists take towards the ‘global village’: post-tourists and anti-tourists. While the former explicitly embraces West Street as the wonderland for styling oneself as xiăozī, the latter distances themselves from such stereotypical image in various ways.

4.5.1 Post-tourists

The post-tourist, according to Jamal and Hill (2002: 94), is ‘a sophisticated traveler who enjoys ludic experiences … The visitor participates in an illusory, hedonistic consumption of signs, symbols and images where the aesthetic experience rates higher than capturing the “authentic” original. In this postmodern scenario, accumulating aesthetic and culturally driven experiences becomes a game of achieving status, distinction and “difference”’. One such tourist is ‘A cloud in the heart’, a registered member of lvping.com, a website under China’s largest travel service company Ctrip. Her excitement of having-been-there is expressed in a more than ten thousand words travelogue ‘Xiăozī life in Yangshuo, Guilin’, which describes in great detail each day of her travel by inserting exclamation marks and symbolic tokens of English. A few are extracted below:
Extract 4.5:

The bus stopped at the entrance to West Street. Here it is. The legendary West Street, right now in front of us. Yet, I did not feel fully prepared to say to it “Hello! Nice to meet you” (para 6);

That’s the best position to take a picture of the Elephant Trunk Mountain, so here robbed us of our numerous feelings, hahah (para 18);

[Coffee shop name] has comfortable sofas and good coffees. The music is good, too. After we came in, many people as xiăozī as us also had their seats. We just indulged there for the whole afternoon. I guess a real xiăozī life is just like this. I can’t love it more!! (para 76).

After a detailed account (470 words) of her pre-trip preparation and flight to Yangshuo in Chinese, switching into English at the first sight of West Street is a marked choice of code. On the one hand, it signals a change of semiotic space, thus foregrounding the foreignness of West Street and setting the scene for her later use/choice of English. On the other, the personification of West Street through greeting indicates an evidently positive stance towards the place, setting the tone for a happy touring experience. This English greeting thus serves as a metapragmatic frame, or a ‘key to performance’ (Bauman 2011: 711), both setting the stage (West Street) and introducing the performer (the author). The following discourse thus involves enthusiastically switching into English as a stylistic resource, projecting an image of a fun-loving tourist (e.g. para 18). This construction and performance of identity becomes more evident in a coffee shop. Here the author both assumes and identifies with the xiăozī identity (‘many
people as xiăozī as us’) by ‘indulging’ in coffee, which represents middle-class
taste in a traditionally tea-drinking country (see Bao 2002; Simpson 2008). But
since performance of identity can always be subjected to evaluation or even
contestation (Bauman 2011; Bell 2011), a sense of insecurity was countered by
reflexively authenticating oneself as a xiăozī (‘I guess a real xiăozī life is just like
this’). Thus in seeking to maximize the acquisition and exhibition of xiăozī
stylistic resources, ‘A cloud in the heart’ positions herself as a post-tourist who
enjoys West Street as the so-called heaven for xiăozī.

Since performance as ‘virtuosic display’ always requires ‘creative exercise of
competence’ (Bauman 2011: 709, italics mine), we could also expect to see how
knowledge of performance can transform into discourse for self management (c.f.
Gershon 2011: 542-543; Jaworski and Thurlow 2009: 209-210). As will be shown
below, performance of identity in West Street also occurs at a higher level of
reflexivity, wherein tourist discourse becomes both the discourse of performance
and the meta-discourse of performativity.

Extract 4.6 is written by Bamboo, who introduces him/herself as an
experienced xiăozī tourist, claiming that ‘if you follow my advice, you will never
be ignored in Yangshuo’ (para 2). This expert stance is constructed by
appropriating the genre of guidebook: the title ‘Guide for Being xiăozī in
Yangshuo’ metapragmatically schematizes his/her personal experience and
observation into authoritative expert advice (Bauman 2011: 711). The Guide is
neatly organized into three sections ‘Preparation’, ‘Sight-seeing’ and ‘West Street
Life’, each containing specific suggestions on stylistic resources for distinction,
including clothing (para 5), trip planning and transportation (para 6-7), restaurants (para 8-14; 17; 19), and displaying cultural and symbolic capital, such as flipping through English books and talking with foreigners (para 14-16; para 19). Thus in attempting to stylize other tourists, the author simultaneously positions him/herself as an experienced and superior post-tourist and reproduces Yangshuo as a place only for people with xiăozī aspirations. This assumed tourist-ship (and readership) is actually clearly indicated right in the beginning by pointing out the need to pay attention to identity and language:

Extract 4.6:

Identity

It would be best of course if you are a laowai or a mixed-blood [born to parents with different nationalities]. But since this guidebook is not for laowai, so let’s just forget it. Putting that aside, you should come from Guangdong and it’s better if you are from Guangzhou or Shenzhen [two large cities in Guangdong province], being a white collar with xiăozī experience or expectations. Besides, you may also come from Beijing or Shanghai, which are also places full of xiăozī. Yangshuo welcomes those people.

Language

You must hold a CET-4 certificate\textsuperscript{21}, with relatively fluent spoken English, because at West Street, or just at countryside farmhouses of Yangshuo, even an

\textsuperscript{21} CET-4, abbreviation for College English Test (Band 4), is a national English exam, and in many universities a pre-requisite for college degree attainment.
old grandma or an egg-seller from a rural family could surprise you with their amazing English and at least another foreign language. Next of course you should know Cantonese, kind of an official language here, ‘cause more than half of the xiāozī are from Guangdong. The third comes Putonghua, better with Beijing accent. The local dialect just does not work there. (Bamboo 2002)

In these two points, the author maps a relationship between language, place and identity, yet in a rather non-essentialist paradigm, implying that what matters is not identity in the demographic sense, but how language can be employed as a stylistic resource to perform coolness and cosmopolitanism. This expert post-tourist stance is strengthened by prescribing an ‘order of indexicality’ (Blommaert 2007b), with fluent English topping the hierarchy as a ‘must’ and local dialect being silenced (c.f. Bruner 1991; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010) as useless. However, the author not only indicates his/her superiority by giving expert advice, but also demonstrates this self-claimed xiāozī identity through his/her own linguistic practice (e.g. ‘Of course I would go with banana pancake or other fruit cakes, egg rolls, plus Coffee, Milk or Juice. Enjoy a western breakfast can be so cheerful and luxurious’. Para 14, not extracted). Thus in presenting his/her touring experience as a Guide, Bamboo not only projects a post-tourist identity, but at the same time sets her/himself as the very referee (Bell 2011) for other tourists.

4.5.2 Anti-tourists

We now turn to a different stance. There are also anti-tourists who focus on ‘the expected or perceived shallowness of experience of place within traditional tourism, [with] a tendency to condemn superficiality’, thus distinguishing and
distancing themselves from other tourists (McCabe 2005: 91-92). Extracted below is from ‘West Street, Yangshuo: Loss and Indulgence’ by nowherekid, which appeared in the travel section of the popular website Sina.

Extract 4.7:

We’ve read many travelogues about West Street. It’s said that West Street is not just a place for a tour – it should be lived and enjoyed. So we spent most of our week living there. West Street is actually a place for hedonism, where you can forget everything and just indulge yourself. The most popular? Bars and foreigners… Our best memory about West Street was sitting in an open-air café, just watching people come and go, aimlessly killing the afternoon … And at a bar, after writing many words, I left with satisfaction and fulfillment… So that’s why people love here. From the perspective of a xiāozī, it’s true that Yangshuo is a good place, a habitat for your soul… But I would not consider myself a xiāozī, and feel no good about the label… The heaven for xiāozī can be a hell for me sometimes… Things here are overcharged… the highly commercial atmosphere is disgusting… As it is, Yangshuo today no longer needs painter Xu Beihong, or National Father Sun Wen22. It’s just where you can be xiāozī, lose yourself, and indulge yourself. (nowherekid 2010)

22 Xu Beihong (1895-1953) is one of the greatest painters in modern China, and Sun Wen (better known as Sun Yat-sen, 1866-1925) is the founder of Chinese Nationalist Party. Both spent some time of their life in Yangshuo. Yangshuo County still reserves the former residence of Xu Beihong, and has established a statue of Sun Wen at the square where he made an influential speech. These two places are just within a few minutes’ walk from West Street.
The way *nowherekid* consumes the symbolic resources through coffee, English, and bars in West Street resembles most post-tourists—she actually both anticipates and acknowledges that she might be taken as another xiăozī tourist by just being in Yangshuo (e.g. ‘From the perspective of xiăozī, it’s true that Yangshuo is a good place, a habitat for your soul’). Nevertheless, she attempts to differentiate herself from such stereotypical image by explicitly denying the indexicality (‘But I would not consider myself a xiăozī’). Thus while being a co-participant in the global village with post-tourists, she re-constructs her touring experience and thus her identity by taking a moral stance against both West Street and xiăozī tourists in terms of its commercialization and loss of sociohistorical consciousness. Thus in adopting an anti-tourist stance, *nowherekid* simultaneously distances herself from post-tourists and positions herself as a more sophisticated tourist with sociohistorical concerns.

The reservation towards West Street as a global village for xiăozī is also shown in less explicit but more critical ways. ‘Brother Big Horse’ has a blog entry at Sina, one of the most popular blog sites in China. The article, humorously entitled ‘Travelling fugue at West Street: Suggestions and Strategies’, begins with a parallel of propositions: ‘West Street is the heaven for xiăozī. If you come to have fun, you should be a xiăozī; if not a xiăozī, then a to-be-xiăozī; if not a to-be-xiăozī, then a pretending xiăozī’ (para 1). While it sounds the author intends to provide helpful suggestions based on his ‘close observations of xiăozī in West Street so as to play it real’ (para 4), his actual advice, most concerned with language use, turns out to be subversive parodies:
Extract 4.8:

1. No real names. You need to get a foreign name using the ‘bird language’
   [鸟语 niăo yŭ], better with about four syllables. It sucks if you call out ‘hey, brother’.

2. Don’t drink tea or juice. Drink coffee. Tea, or juice, that’s just being lame.
   How elegant drinking coffee is! …

3. While talking, even if you speak Guilin dialect, remember to insert several bird words. Two cautions: choose familiar words and pronounce the bird language in a pure and standard way; another is pretending to speak casually and effortlessly.

5. Be crazy! Even with the slightest fun, say ‘yĕ’ [野]! …

8. Expressway to being a xiăozī. Order coffee at tea houses. But don’t you say ‘give me a cup of coffee!’ Say gently ‘kāo fēi’ [尛绯]! (Brother Big Horse 2006)

Using foreign names, a seemingly most accessible strategy to construct xiăozī identity, is considerably undermined when the author re-names English the ‘bird language’, a term used among Chinese people to flag language crossing (Rampton 1995), implying that the language makes no sense. This illegitimization (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) of English therefore not only subjects post-tourists’ linguistic practice to ridicule, but also re-keys the author’s advocate for longer (‘four syllables’, maybe thus sounding more sophisticated) English names as quite sarcastic. This anti-tourist stance is further shown in his seemingly pompous
comments on coffee (point 2) and wine (point 3, not extracted), the symbolic resources favored by xiăozī. His satire towards the post-touristic linguistic practices continues in point 4. By hypocritically reminding tourists the issues of word choice and manners of articulation, he hints at the ill-at-ease efforts post-tourists make when trying to sound fluent and natural, indicating the possibility of failed attempts by either overshooting (Bell and Gibson 2011, so ‘speak casually and effortlessly’) or undershooting (Bell and Gibson 2011, so ‘choose familiar words’). Such performance failure actually becomes the target of the author’s sarcasm later. By deliberately mis-transcribing ‘yeah’ as ‘野’ (yě), and ‘coffee’ as ‘尻绯’ (kāo fēi), while the correct Chinese equivalents should be ‘耶’ (yè) and ‘咖酚’ (kā fēi) respectively, the author re-indexes the use of English as being irrational ['野' (yě)] and nonsensical ['尻绯’ (kāo fēi)]. Thus in a disguise of giving voice to post-tourists, the author subversively exposes their linguistic practices in a highly stylized manner, transforming post-tourists from being the subject/agent of performance to the object/target of ridicule, through which he was able to metalinguistically criticize such performance as pretentious, illegitimate, and irrational, thus distancing himself as an anti-tourist.

The above analysis shows that tourists, through their discursive practices, position themselves in relation to the semiotics of the place, align themselves with other tourists, and at the same time reproduce or reconstruct the social meaning of place in varied ways. Tourist discourse therefore serves as an important site where the contradictions and tensions surrounding the indexicality of English, the
identity performance of Chinese tourists under consumerism, and thus the reservation towards the global village image are being worked out.

Understandably, post-tourists and anti-tourists, as introduced here, are not meant to be exhaustive categorization of all tourists to West Street, Yangshuo (see section 2.3.2 in Chapter 2). Instead, it shows how tourists adopt different tourist roles during their touristic consumption while displaying varied levels of reflexivity and taking different stances towards each other and the global village. While post-tourist discourses reproduce West Street as a place for accumulating stylistic resources to construct xiăozī identity, for anti-tourists such identity performance only represents superficial touristic consumption to be criticized and ridiculed. The anti-tourists, as we have seen, positions themselves in varied ways to the ‘global village’. Their contestation is established through negatively evaluating the tourism site and other tourists, thereby positioning themselves as being more sophisticated and knowledgeable. Through showing their cultural and historical awareness (‘painter Xu Beihong, National Father Sun Wen’ nowherekid 2010) and mocking the pretentious and erroneous use of English by post-tourists (Brother Big Horse 2006), anti-tourists seem to indicate that the touristic significance of the ‘global village’ corresponds to people of a particular social class and taste, which more sophisticated and knowledgeable people may not conform with or even hold in contempt.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the issue of place by examining the construction of a ‘global village’. I have shown that this process involves not only material
processes of tourism planning and development, but also discursive construction of the image of place in the media. Specifically, I have shown the semiotic processes in which the English language is appropriated for commodifying a sense of globality for domestic tourists in tourism promotional discourses. Understanding this sociohistorical process, I have argued, needs going beyond locality in our analytical scope and beyond a static and objective understanding of place, to consider the convergence of various sociohistorical factors at a global-national-local nexus (Su and Teo 2009). In the present case, the observed commodification of place occurs in the context of a national turn towards consumerism, wherein English acquires functions of social stratification and tourism becomes a modern consuming practice. The ‘global village’ is thus neither simply a geographical location nor a product of westernization, but a social construct whose significance corresponds to ideologies of language and culture at wider national levels.

It is also shown that understanding tourism sites requires exploring the interconnectivity and contingency between people and place, because tourist activities and behaviors constitute an integral part in (re-)producing, mediating and negotiating the meaning of place. Globalization challenges an objective and bounded understanding of place not only because of the mobility of symbolic and material resources across space, but also because people are both on the move and positioned to move. As Sassen (2002: 2, as cited in Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 7) notes, the mobility of resources always involves ‘pronounced territorial concentrations of resources necessary’ for managing mobility. This study shows
that West Street is commodified as a global village through mobilizing and concentrating semiotic resources into one geographical location so as to mobilize people by promoting certain tourist roles. In this sense, semiotic resources are mobilized both for constructing locality and for channeling mobility.

It is worth noting that English, as one important stylistic resource for constructing xiăozī identity, only represents one part of the stylistic repertoire for tourists, and identity performance always happen in multimodal environments (Bell and Gibson 2011). As the analysis shows, coffee shops and bars are relevant spatial resources as well. It is the indexicality that English language affords in combination with other semiotic resources that makes xiăozī experience both possible and desirable.

At the same time, it is shown that the construction of tourism sites also involves tensions because of tourists’ diverse conceptualization and imagination of place. Touristic experience does not happen passively in a presumably given geographical location. Rather tourists through their discursive practices reflect on the relationality between their behavior and place, in terms of the meaning of touring experience, their relation with other tourists, and their stance towards the place. The contestation and negotiation of the touristic meaning of the ‘global village’, in particular by anti-tourists as we have seen, indicates that there are class and taste based tensions around what the ‘global village’ means. The next chapter further explores the contested nature of the ‘global village’, yet shifting the perspective to the local dynamics of space.
Chapter 5  Tensions of Space in the ‘Global Village’

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen that West Street since the late 1990s has been branded as a ‘global village’ for domestic Chinese tourists, and I have shown how tourists position themselves differently vis-à-vis this ‘global village’. Having examined the media discourses from a commodification-consumption perspective, in this chapter I turn to the local dynamics arising from this sociohistorical change. Ten years after the West Street development project (see section 3.3 in Chapter 3), voices of concern are heard from one local official about a developed West Street:

Extract 5.1

‘There are now challenges for West Street. West Street has been expanded, but it has also undergone changes in its outlook, which means it is now attracting different customers. The street used to mainly offer leisure activities for international travelers. But later, large numbers of domestic tourists come as well, because they want to take a look at the ‘Foreigner Street’ and experience western ways of living. Therefore, the current West Street has added some extra attractions for domestic tourists, which means West Street could no longer be the same. This would have negative effects on the future development of West Street. We should recognize that, the reason West Street has become so famous and attract so many domestic tourists is because it has been attracting international tourists in the first place. And yet don’t forget the
reason why West Street attracts international tourists is because they can enjoy the traditional leisure culture here’ (Chen, X 2009: 81).

The concern does not come from the local government alone. During my field as I talked to my participants, foreign and Chinese, they always critically reflected over and commented on how they liked and lived around West Street and Yangshuo (see section 3.3.2 in Chapter 3). Then exactly, who are the people living there now? What kinds of touristic businesses are there? What changes have taken place in the ambience of West Street? And how does that raise problems for the ‘different customers’ of West Street? To address these issues, I will map out the demographic, linguistic and geographic changes of West Street, and then explicate the specific ways people adjust and relate to a fast changing place.

But I should stress outright, however, that I do not seek to pinpoint where and what is ‘wrong’ with the tourism development and offer practical solutions or suggestions for the future tourism planning and policy of Yangshuo – it is beyond my ability and is never my intention to do so. Instead, my objectives in this chapter are to (1) explain and demonstrate through historical lenses how the construction of the ‘global village’ involves the re-organization and differentiation of space by different businesspeople, and (2) map out some of the current local dynamics arising from this socio-geographic and demographic change. I will engage with these issues by looking at mixed evidence from:

- policy documents and demographic data
• interviews with businesspersons and local foreigners (see Tables 3.1 and 3.3 in Chapter 3)
• field notes and observations
• linguistic and semiotic materials, including signage and language use

These data provide complementary insights into the historical change and current local dynamics in varied ways: policy documents and demographic data help produce official and statistic accounts from a perspective of tourism planning and development; interviews, field notes, and observations bring in local perspectives; and signage and language use provide insights into West Street as space of transformation (e.g. Blommaert 2012; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009; Stroud and Jegels 2013). In their call for a material ethnography of linguistic landscape, Stroud and Mpendukana (2009: 363) define ‘landscapes as semiotic moments in the social circulation of discourses (in multiple languages), and view signs as …socially invested distributions of multilingual resources, the material, symbolic and interactional artifacts of a sociolinguistics of mobility’. Blommaert (2012: 46) also suggests ‘see[ing] signs as material forces subject to and reflective of conditions of production and patterns of distribution, and as constructive of social reality’. Adopting this materialist perspective enables us to examine ‘how space is semiotized, and how it semiotizes what goes on within its orbit’ (Blommaert 2012: 29), and more importantly could potentially contribute to our understanding of the dialectics among signs, practices and people (Blommaert 2012: 59) and ‘the situated social dynamics of multivocality in local places’ (Stroud and Jegels 2013: 2).
I should emphasize here that I can only hope to provide a partial - if there is such a thing as full knowledge (c.f. Blommaert 2012: 12; Hymes 1996: 13) - picture of the tensions around the sociohistorical change of Yangshuo during the past three decades. And in synthesizing these mixed evidence, I adopt an narrative-descriptive approach as suggested by Yi-Fu Tuan, a humanistic geographer, who observes that ‘all narratives and descriptions contain at least interpretative and explanatory stratagems, for these are built into language itself’ (Tuan 1991: 686). He further elaborates that:

…a theory, by its clarity and weight, tends to drive rival and complementary interpretations and explanatory sketches out of mind, with the result that the object of study – a human experience, which is almost always ambiguous and complex – turns into something schematic and etiolated. Indeed, in social science, a theory can be so highly structured that it seems to exist in its own right, to be almost “solid”, and thus able to cast (paradoxically) a shadow over the phenomena it is intended to illuminate. By contrast, in the narrative-descriptive approach, theories hover supportively in the background while complex phenomena themselves occupy the front page. For this reason, the approach is favored by cultural and historical geographers, historians generally, and cultural anthropologists – scholars who are predisposed to appreciate the range and color of life and world. Their best works tend to make a reader feel the intellectual pleasure of being exposed to a broad and variegated range of related facts and of understanding them a little better (though still hazily), rather than, as in specialized theoretical frameworks, the
intellectual assurance of being offered a rigorous explanation of a necessarily narrow and highly abstracted segment of reality’ (Tuan 1991: 686; see also Rampton 2013: 5-6).

This chapter develops as follows. In section 5.2, I provide a three-phase historical account of the ‘global village’, delineating the local demographic, semiotic, and spatial transformations, focusing more on the two waves of tourism development during the past decade. I show how this historical process of development results in the redefinition of space along practices of mass consumption and entertainment. Then in section 5.3 I propose a descriptive typology of space of the current ‘global village’, suggesting how the different touristic businesses on West Street represent different ways of organizing space which affect the way people relate to and live around this ‘global village’. There are spaces of privacy, spaces of transaction, and spaces of sociability. Then in section 5.4, I focus on businesspersons and local foreigners, the two major groups of people living in this ‘global village’, to see how they relate in varied ways to this fast changing place. I examine this by looking in particular at how spaces of sociability constitute key sites of spatial differentiation and friction. I explicate that different styles of sociability, arising partly due to tourism business investments and mass commercialization, are manifested socio-geographically in this ‘global village’ in two ways. First, I show three cases of moving-outs and one case of closing down (section 5.4.1), that is, how the three businesses had moved away from West Street into quieter streets nearby, and how in one case a hotel was struggling over closing down. I then outline the tensions around the (mis)use
of space in these relatively quieter streets, which are local foreigners’ niche of sociability (section 5.4.2). This also sets the scene for chapter 6. I conclude in section 5.5 to argue that the ‘global village’ is not a space of free mobilities and flows, but a precarious space of tensions for its varied inhabitants.

5.2 Historical transformation of the ‘global village’

In this section, I provide a historical account of the demographic, semiotic, and spatial change of West Street, focusing more on the first (late 1990s to early 2000s) and second waves (mid-2000s to 2011) of tourism development. And at the end of this section, I provide a summary table of these changes (see Table 5.1).²³

5.2.1 Till the late 1990s: A laisser-faire West Street

West Street, as we already know, used to be a residential street in Yangshuo, a multi-ethnic county populated by eleven ethnic groups, including Zhuang, Yao, Hui, Miao, Tibetan, Dong, Korean, Tujia, Manchu, Bai, with the majority (87.4%) being Han. The official languages of the county, as elsewhere in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, are Standard Chinese and Standard Zhuang. Each ethnic group is said to have its own ethnolect(s). Han people are speakers of different Chinese language varieties. Hui people use Chinese language as well, but also have borrowed vocabularies from Arabic due to their religious practice of

²³ It is not my intention to cut historical change into neat phases. As will become clearer in later sections, I will explore the dynamic interrelations among these seemingly neat historical phases.
Muslim. The other ethnic groups also have their own ethnolects and corresponding writing systems.

No historical statistical data is available on the demographic makeup and language use on West Street per se, but according to the official statistics in 1988\(^{24}\), the most commonly used Chinese languages among Yangshuo people in general are Yangshuo dialect, used by more than 90% of the population; Hokkien, used among early immigrants from Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan and other provinces; and boat people language\(^{25}\) (船家话 chuánjiā huà or疍家话 dànjiā huà), a sub-variety of Cantonese used among boat people (also called Tanka people) who make a living on fishing. But most people are said to be able speak or understand Standard Chinese (Yangshuo County Chronicles 1988: 412-416)\(^{26}\).

Apart from these Chinese language varieties, the Zhuang language\(^{27}\) is supposed

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\(^{24}\) This is the only statistical data I can find regarding language use in Yangshuo.

\(^{25}\) This is my literal translation of the name of the dialect. I was not able to find the official English equivalent.

\(^{26}\) To my best knowledge, there is no academic research yet into the language contact issues in this multilingual and multiethnic Yangshuo, and it is far beyond my limited ability to carry out a systemic and comprehensive research to address the potentially relevant issue of dialect leveling. Johnstone (2010b: 388) notes that “the sociolinguistic consequences of early twenty-first-century urbanization in India, China and elsewhere have yet to be studied in detail, but it would not be surprising to find there the same processes leading to similar results”, which according to her is dialect leveling.

\(^{27}\) The Zhuang language belongs to Zhuang-Dong (also called Kam-Tai) languages of the Tai-Kadai language family (Bodomo 2010: 180). Its many varieties, due to the uneven geographic distribution of the Zhuang people, are sometimes categorized into Northern Zhuang and Southern Zhuang by dialectologists (Edmondson 1994). There are two different writing systems for the Zhuang language, one based on the Chinese character writing system, the other on Latin alphabets (Bodomo 2010: 181). The latter enjoys an official status, codified
to have the second largest number of speakers since the Zhuang people are the second largest ethnic group in Yangshuo (more than 10%). No existing academic research, however, can be found on the use of Zhuang language, or ethnolects in general, in Yangshuo. And the very few studies into the use of the Zhuang language in other areas of Guangxi produce mixed results, perhaps partly due to the large geographical distribution and variation of the Zhuang people and their languages. During my fieldwork, I got to know two Zhuang people, in their late 20s and early 30s respectively. And yet neither is distinguishable from Han people by appearance, costumes and even language. One is Meng, the owner of a coffee shop on West Street. She moved to Yangshuo from another city in Guangxi and told me she is half Zhuang, because her mother is Zhuang and her father is Han. She claimed to speak a little bit Zhuang. The other is a tour guide from Yangshuo. According to him, even his grandfather cannot speak Zhuang. The only trace of ethnolinguistic diversity, as I observed around West Street, is reflected in the bilingual sign boards of official institutions. Variously located within about 5-20 minutes’ walking distance from West Street, all official


28 According to Bodomo (2010: 182), the Zhuang language can be considered an endangered language, because language shift towards Chinese is being observed among Zhuang families despite the fact that preservation of the language is a prevalent public concern. But in another very recent study carried out in another rural village in Guangxi, Stanford and Pan (2013: 579) observe that the Zhuang language remains its vitality in the daily rural life for both adults and children. Also recall that the geographical area of Guangxi is 236,700 km², only slightly smaller than that of the UK (243,610 km²), which might account for the reason for divergent claims regarding the vitality of the Zhuang language.
institutions are linguistically marked in both Zhuang letters and Chinese characters (see Figure 5.1), with the police station bearing a third language of international communication – English (see Figure 5.2). Apart from these signboards of official institutions, the Zhuang language is nowhere to be seen around Yangshuo.

Figure 5.1 'Yangshuo County Library' in Zhuang (above) and Chinese (below). Photo by author, 2011.
While the ethnolinguistic diversity of West Street is difficult to trace, the start of tourism in the late 1970s already seems to have prompted the use of English among the early business owners. Some were starting to use bilingual signboards. According to Wang’s (2006a) historical research into West Street, Meiyou Café was one of the early private businesses, opened by a Zhuang girl from southern Yangshuo. She first named her café ‘Ping’, a character from her given name. However, tourists, foreigners in particular, were always disappointed by the fact that her restaurant did not have so much to offer. Wang (2006a: 129-130) recorded that

‘When foreigners came and asked ‘do you have beer here?’ She told them ‘meiyou.’ [a Chinese word in pinyin, meaning ‘don’t have’] ‘How about Italian pizza and Mexican burritos?’ ‘Meiyou.’ ‘French champagne and salad?’ ‘Meiyou.’ ‘Then you have nothing here’, the foreigner teased her. But
gradually she learnt about what the tourists need for food and drinks, and also learnt to make them. She then with the help of friends made a cartoon style bilingual signboard and changed the name of her shop to ‘meiyou café’ (see Figure 5.3). This caught the eyes of passers-by and she was able to make a big success’.

Figure 5.3 Meiyou Café. Reproduced without permission from An Intoxicating West Street (2007[2004]: 84)29

However, not everyone was as lucky as Ping. According to Yan, who had a restaurant on West Street since 1995, ‘there were not as many restaurants with western food. Even in the 90s, there may be only less than ten such restaurants. It was not easy to buy the ingredients for western food’. Besides, coming from the planned economy, people had to learn to do business through trial and error, and it was not rare to hear people lose money from investing in businesses (Wang

29 The author would be happy to comply with any copyright requirements upon request.
2006a). But nevertheless, there were some shops that started selling traditional cultural products. Wang (2006b) recounts how the very first antique store on West Street ‘Xiao Jin-Ge’ got opened up and even had an eye-catching golden character signboard:

‘In the mid-1980s, there were not many business shops. Some houses had brick walls and were renovated with windows so as to be used as living rooms or for housing tourists. The owners of the shop Xiao Jin-Ge paid a monthly rent of 60 yuan for a room of more than 30m² to sell antiques. At that time, there were tourists from Western Europe, Japan, and also Taiwan. Every noon, more than 100 ships and boats would stop by the east dock, and these tourists would step on to West Street. …One day, a tourist from Taiwan…said to the owner of this very first antique store: “Mr Zhang, there are many foreigners on this street and you have very good business, but why don’t you have a sign board? With a sign, people recognize and remember you, and can come for you or even introduce businesses to you”. The couple then decided to pick one character from each of their given names, and named the shop Little Jin-Ge (小金閣 xiăojīn-Ge). During the Spring Festival that year, Mr Zhang heard that a famous calligrapher was helping residents with spring couplets30 at the People’s Hall. So he went to ask the calligrapher to help him write the three…

30 Writing spring couplets (春联 chūn lián) on red papers and posting them on both sides and the top of doors is a traditional Chinese New Year practice. The couplets are parts of the New Year house decoration to express good wishes and aspirations for a new year.
characters “小金阁”. He then found a wooden board at home, placed the characters on board, and spent three days carefully carving out the three characters as exactly’ (Wang 2006b: 590).

There were also some other local people who knew about drawing, painting, calligraphy, or seal-carving and began to sell these products. Liu, the travel service center owner, told me that in the 1990s, he would come over to West Street every now and then. His girlfriend, now his wife, was a resident on West Street. At that time, he was working as a secondary school teacher of mathematics at his hometown nearby, but he also had great interest in drawing. So later, he started drawing and selling T-shirts while also learning to speak English for business interactions in the process, and finally resigned his job to work also as a tour guide in Yangshuo.

During this period, West Street was largely a residential street, though there were also a couple of souvenir shops and restaurants for tourists. And the development of West Street was left to chance. As Liu told me, ‘the local government did not care much about our business. Yangshuo did not have as much publicity in the 90s. The government did not try to get enough publicity, nor had clear plans to develop any tourism sites’.

5.2.2 First wave of development: ‘Global Village’ and ‘English Corner’

Since the late 1990s, some businesspersons from home and abroad gradually started to settle down in this neighborhood. Tian, who claimed to have opened the very first coffee shop in Yangshuo in 2000, recalled what West Street was like back in the year 2000:
Extract 5.2:

‘Most people, they just searched their backyards for old wooden boards or “ancient” stones, and sold them. That’s it. Those kinds of old stuff, which looked like ancient treasures. Hahaha. They were just not sure about what they should sell except that the foreigners might be interested in this kind of stuff’ (extracted from interview).

It was also around this time that tourism started to gain increasing importance in the local economic development, in a turn to a ‘tourism-based economy’. Apart from the socio-economic change within the larger context of China (see chapter 3.3), there were also several local factors have contributed to this turn towards tourism, including mainly the recognition of the importance of the tourism industry for the local economic development, and the privatization of economic forms. First, the privatization of the economy was not only triggered by the burgeoning market economy, but also by the reduction of national and regional subsidies for economic development. This means that the local government has to assume more autonomy and independence in seeking financial resources, relying more on private investments. As one government official said,

‘As has already been pointed out by the Regional Communist Party, no more state-owned business enterprises will be approved in any County and levels below. This means that our future economic development has to rely on the existing public economy, and yet at the same time we need to seek out new developments through non-public economies. We should break away from the outdated dichotomy between the so-called “public” and “private”, and
establish an ideology where private and public economic forms are equally recognized ... To achieve this, we need to first create a favorable environment for fair business competition, abolishing the outdated regulations and rules set against private and individual business forms; second, warmly welcome non-local non-public enterprises, including foreign businesses; third, supporting existing private and foreign business…’ (Guo 1999: 22).

Second, in this time of financial and economic structural change, the local government also began to attach great importance to the tourism industry as a key contributor to the local economy. As one local official argued:

There are still many problems in our tourism development: the development rate has been slow, the overall quality is not good enough, tourism resources have not been well explored, and the whole industry is not yet systematically organized and managed. This will affect the future of tourism development … The main reason for these existing problems is that we have not yet fully recognized the importance of the tourism industry. It is true we have been engaging in tourism, but we have never considered it seriously, which thus constrains the development of tourism and use of tourism resources. Therefore, we must first of all reach a new understanding of tourism so as to further develop it. We must recognize that tourism is an economic industry with a large demanding market. And more importantly, it requires relatively fewer investment capitals and yet brings quick economic returns. This is a great advantage compared with other industries… Moreover, the tourism industry is a comprehensive industry and its development could also bring about
development in related industries. It could not only provide a large market for agricultural, industrial and other business products, but also help stimulate the development of transportation, communication, food industries, and entertainment (Zhao 1999: 45-46).

It was also specified that:

‘tourism should be developed as the leading industry of the local economy. … The ultimate objective is that for the next five-year plan (1998 to 2003), the average annual growth rate of the tourism revenue should be more than 16%, aiming for a total annual tourism revenue of more than 250 million Chinese yuan in the year 2003. The added value of the tourism industry should account for more than 50% of that of the tertiary industry’ (Guo 1999: 19-20).

Meanwhile, it was stressed that developing the tourism industry ‘requires a departure from the old production-based development ideology to one focusing on circulation, flows and service’ (Tan 1999: 31-32). The local government also decided that tourism forms needed to be diversified ‘from only scenery tourism to be expanded to include culture, agriculture, exploration, entertainment, and learning’ (Tan 1999: 33), including English language teaching, as we shall see in detail in chapter 6.

It is against this local context that some new businesses were starting to appear on West Street. Not far into West Street, for instance, there is this very large French restaurant LeVotre (see Figure 5.4), opened by that spokesperson for Yangshuo I introduced in chapter 3.3. He had been staying in Yangshuo since the year 1993 and opened his restaurant in 2001 (Liu 2005). It is said that he has
managed to cooperate with tourism agencies back in France which have been providing about 10,000 French tourists to his place each year (Liu 2005).

Figure 5.4 樂得法式餐廰 LeVotre Restaurant. Photo by author, 2011.

In this early phase of development, the former residential neighborhood with family business was gradually changed both demographically and economically. While new business types, like coffee shops and the French restaurant, were starting to appear, family businesses opened by West Street indigenous residents were still the majority.

5.2.3 Second wave of development: Geographical expansion and business investment

The more profound change came around the mid-2000s. In an effort to further develop its tourism economy, Yangshuo started a more comprehensive tourism
development plan through economic-geographical expansion. In 2003, several connected streets near West Street, including Xianqian Road, Binjiang Road, Guanlian Road, Chengzhong Road, Fuqian Lane, Guihua Road, also started to be developed (see Map 5.1). Existing old houses were renovated in accordance with the style of West Street so as to establish a ‘big West Street’, a concept proposed by the local government to expand the scope of the so-called ‘global village’ (Huang 2009: 21-22). This project is further complemented by another investment worth tens of millions Chinese yuan, making West Street a model tourism site of folk culture preservation (Chen, W. 2009: 359). Pointing to nearby Guihua road, a local tour guide told me:

Extract 5.3:

‘this street used to be an old open-air grocery market. When the government invited bids for real estate development, the old grocery market was

31 Further development was not only confined to the area around West Street. In 2004, ‘Impression: Liu Sanjie’ (see the official website of the show http://www.yxslsj.com/ for details), a live performance show was finally launched after more than five years of preparation under the direction of Zhang Yimou, a multiple award winning director who also directed the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The show involves more than 600 performers performing live on the about 1.6 km² area of the Li River. Being the first real-scene live show, it gained acclaim nationwide and also among international tourists, and since then it has become a regular night show and another main attraction of Yangshuo. In 2007, another 400 million Chinese yuan were also spent on preserving and consolidating several major natural resources in Yangshuo (Chen, W. 2009: 359). The project was still in progress during my field work in 2011. In year 2010, the tourism industry contributes to a total of 3.15 billion Chinese yuan to the County revenue (Statistics obtained from the statistics office of Yangshuo Tourism Bureau during fieldwork in 2011).
demolished. There were also residential houses, but they were actually too poor for people to live in. Nobody even dared to go to that street at night – it’s dark and scary. But then houses were repaired and renovated so that they can now be used for businesses’ (field note, May 2011).

On these renovated streets, new businesses gradually appeared. For example, Kelly’s Café (see Figure 5.5) has been there on Guihua road for several years. It is quite popular among backpackers, and has even gained recommendation from the backpackers’ Bible *Lonely Planet*. The café was opened by a local Chinese girl but it was rumored that she had been trained by a foreign chef. And there were also some less famous but equally popular ones. The Alley bar (see Figure 5.6) was opened by an Austrian, and according to Philip, the English teacher from Canada, it was the best model of a traditional western style bar in Yangshuo, with beers from almost everywhere in the world - ‘not drink just like Jack Daniel’s, the stuff you can buy everywhere’.
Map 5.1 West Street and surroundings (Impressionistic). Courtesy of Leonardo Zurita-Arthos.
However, the same time as these nearby streets developed, West Street - the centre of the so-called ‘global village’ and ‘English Corner’ – grew into an increasingly desirable piece of land for businesses, contributing to further
investments for commercialization, mainly from middle class businesspersons in Chinese cities. As Liu observes:

Extract 5.4

‘They [businesspersons] came and bid for the rental prices because they were trying to secure a place for their business. They used to pay rents like 700,000 yuan a year in big cities like Shanghai, so here they very willingly offered to pay us 200,000. They offered such good price themselves. But we’d never seen so much money before. So that’s how now almost all the businesses are opened by non-locals.’

According to him, the rental fees then suddenly increased tenfold in a matter of two or three years after the SARS crisis (2002-2004). The house-owners on West Street also started to rent their houses out at the good price, and became the new-rich of the County, moving into much nicer and bigger houses somewhere else 32. These incoming businesspersons arrive with profit-making plans and start to run

32 I was not able to find and talk to an indigenous West Street house owner. But one local Yangshuo resident in her mid-20s told me, ‘The indigenous West Street residents are rich now, and would call themselves West Street people, instead of Yangshuo people. They rent their houses out and make big money every year. They do not even have to work anymore. They live in nice villas and send their kids abroad to study. They just think they’re different ... West Street is a walking street, and there should be no cars, but some former West Street residents are just being rude by driving directly to their own houses on West Street. You know, there’s a tradition here that people should not die at hospitals but at their own houses so that the prosperity of the family could carry on for generations. I once saw a car driving directly into West Street, causing a stir in the crowd. Then several people got off, carrying an old lady almost green in color. I was so terrified and stood stiff there. They carried the old lady upstairs to their old house so that she could die there to let the family’s fortune continue’ (Field note, 1 July 2011).
more fancy establishments, in particular night clubs and KTVs, which change the types of businesses available on West Street. For example, near the west entrance of West Street, we still see ‘meiyou café’ (see Figure 5.7), but it has now changed hands (Wang 2006a). While something similar to the old sign board is still there, another colorful neon sign board is erected above it, which provides a service telephone number consisting of serial lucky numbers 8 and 5 (8882555), announces in Chinese the availability of ‘luxury KTV’ (豪华KTV) on the third floor, and a ‘leisure centre’ (休闲中心) on the fourth. On the first floor, we also see another restaurant, advertising the famous local dish ‘beer fish’ (啤酒鱼), which is claimed to have received coverage from the national television of China. In contrast to Kelly’s café (see Figure 5.5) and the Alley bar (see Figure 5.6), and also very different from the former meiyou café we have seen in Figure 5.3, the new meiyou Café now provides extra extravagant services which would potentially attract big-spending Chinese tourists.

33 KTV means Karaoke box.
Figure 5.7 Meiyou café and others. Photo by author, 2011.

- Meiyou café
- Leisure centre on the fourth floor
- Tel: 8882555
- Meiyou club
- Luxury KTV on the third floor
- Beer fish
- No restaurant
This, of course, is not the only business that has changed. As Harvey (1993) notes, a kind of ‘business coalition’ always occurs as investors try to make the most out of their businesses:

‘those who have invested … have to ensure that activities arise that render their investments profitable. Coalitions of entrepreneurs actively try to shape activities in places for this purpose…The “social networking” which occurs in and through places to procure economic advantage may be intricate in the extreme but at the end of the day some sort of coalition, however shifting, is always in evidence’ (Harvey 1993: 6; see also Blommaert et al. 2005: 221; Gotham 2005: 1109).

West Street now is being occupied by an increasing number of similar businesses which feature dancing and singing. In Figure 5.8, we see another night club, which has a whole window wall facing the street with electronic signboards. More or less similar styles can also be seen along the street (see Figures 5.9, 5.10). These bars usually have no English names, though the English word ‘bar’ does get into the signboard occasionally. Jason, the English teacher from South Africa who also played guitar at a quieter bar, told me,

Extract 5.5:

‘West Street is more night clubs. People in China would call that bars, but I would call them night clubs, ‘cause it’s very loud music, everybody is dancing. Bar for me is somewhere you sit quietly and just talk’.
These so-called bars tend to have dark halls or rooms lighted only by dim neon lights. They usually open till early morning hours, play loud and fast dance music, and sometimes also feature pole-dancers. According to Liu, they are the money-making machines on West Street:

Extract 5.6

‘now if you still operate the business like before, putting out tables and let customers drink over beer and chat for hours, it definitely won’t work, you get nothing! … [with the rental fee so high] If you don’t do clubs, it’s very likely you will lose your money, because only selling expensive drinks brings profit’ (extracted from interview)
The existence of these ‘bars’ is quickly introducing new types of businesses and therefore also new ways of consumption and entertainment for tourists on
what used to be a relatively traditional neighborhood street of souvenir shops and cafés. These businesses are not only redefining the use of space, but also prompted the appearance of other related, or as what Harvey (1993: 6) calls somehow ‘networked’, businesses. In Figure 5.11, we see several bars in a row. In-between there is one shop called ‘Gobon’ with glaring white light which sells sexual products (see Figure 5.12). Right next to Gobon is another souvenir shop. Here we see three layers of sign boards which indicate the historical change of the former neighborhood. In the middle, there is a wood sign board which says ‘民族饭店nationality hotel’, above it, we see the glaring lights of a KTV, and below, we see a ‘match paradise’. The lights on the four Chinese characters of ‘nationality restaurant’ are off, probably indicating that the former restaurant no longer exists and ‘match paradise’ seems to have taken over. Indeed, upon entering ‘match paradise’, I saw nothing about a restaurant, but a whole range of souvenir products with profane messages (see e.g. Figure 5.13).

34 ‘Match’ here means lighting matches, as indicated by the Chinese name.
Figure 5.11 Several bars in a row. Photo by author, 2011.
Figure 5.12 Sexual product shops. Photo by author, 2011.
Figure 5.13 ‘Beware the affaire!’

‘Beware the affaire! Affaire Index [unclear number]%’
These shops contribute to what can be called an emerging night club culture and underground sex market. Below is an observation of West Street I got to find out from a male’s perspective:

Extract 5.7

Late in the afternoon, Cindy, my hotel owner, told me there were several people of similar age in the hall, and she asked whether I wanna go downstairs for a chat. I immediately seized this good opportunity to know tourists, and went down. And as I found out, one of them was a third year college student studying tourism in a college nearby. He also said he had been here a few times. So I started to talk to him a lot. “Now West Street has become more commercialized”, he told me. “When I first came here, I did not expect here to be like this… Now the place is quite changed. When you go out, a pimp will ask you do you want a hooker? …When you go to West Street at night, you will see. They will just stop you, and ask “do you want a hooker?”.” (Field note, 12 May 2011).

As a female researcher, I was never ever approached this way during my fieldwork, but I did see the very obvious messages on T-shirts which were put up by a T-shirt shop in a quite noticeable position along the street (Figure 5.14). It is not (necessarily) that people would wear them to find a hooker, but these calligraphic landscapes do point to the existence of a profane market.
In fact, the ‘global village’ keeps changing on a high speed gear. During the three months of my fieldwork, I witnessed several shops being renovated or changing hands, sometimes just in a matter of several days, without me even noticing the process. A bar across the bridge near where I lived no longer had the same sign board when I noticed it again a few days later. I then remembered talking to the bar owner some time ago and he said he was heading to Guangdong to see whether there are opportunities there. Since then, I had never seen him again. A little café, which used to be run by a Frenchman, had changed hands and was undergoing renovation into I don’t know what. Also I noticed a new souvenir shop opened on West Street, but I could not even recall what used to be there. So what I have described so far only represents particular ‘semiotic moments’ (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009: 363) in an ever changing place.

Nevertheless, in this section, I have provided an outline of the demographic, spatial and semiotic change centred on West Street during the past three decades.
(see table 5.1). These changes, as we have seen, involve transformation of space by different layers of businesspersons. While the first wave of development started around a period of branding the traditional neighborhood already popular among international tourists to the domestic Chinese market, the further developments of the ‘global village’ since the mid-2000s result in increasing inflows of private capital investment which have been redefining the social space demographically and semiotically. In the sections below, I look more closely at the current spatial organization of the ‘global village’ to see how we might understand the dialectic of signs, spatial practices and people (Blommaert 2012: 59). In particular, how is the meaning of ‘global village’ being negotiated as a result of this second wave of mass commercialization? What does this change imply for the English language teaching business that constitutes an important part of the first wave of development?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>General socio-geographical change</th>
<th>General demographic, semiotic, material change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Till the late 1990s</td>
<td>Residential street with some family businesses</td>
<td>• Mainly residential houses, plus some small family businesses selling antiques, as well as a few cafés; • Opened by residents or people from nearby villages; • Rental fee (about 60 yuan per month in the mid-1980s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First wave development (late 1990s to early 2000s)</td>
<td>Branding ‘Global Village’ and ‘English Corner’ (see also section 4.3 in Chapter 4)</td>
<td>• Inflows of businesspersons from elsewhere; • Increase in business types, for example, coffee shops; • Majority of the businesses are opened by local people; • Appropriation and commodification of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second wave development (mid-2000s to 2011)</td>
<td>Geographical expansion and business investments</td>
<td>• Bifurcation of West Street and surrounding streets; • Relocation of West Street house owners who have become the new-rich by renting houses out; • West Street: inflow of business investors, increasing rental fee (200,000-300,000 yuan per year), increasing appearance of fancy night clubs, few businesses by local Yangshuo people • Surrounding streets: rental fee cheaper than in West Street, mainly restaurants, cafés and relatively quieter bars, local foreigners’ niche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Summary of historical change of West Street.
5.3 Types of Space in the ‘Global Village’

To first provide a very broad picture, the following business types are observed on and around West Street as in 2011:

- restaurants/cafés
- coffee shops
- bars/clubs
- hotels
- bakery/snack stores
- clothes shops
- souvenir shops
- luggage stores
- book/DVD stores
- travel agencies

Generally speaking, the businesses run by Chinese people can at least manage to speak/write English for the specific purpose of transaction, as well as different

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35 In Yangshuo, some business houses tend to provide multiple types of business services, though the main business remains the one as advocated on the signboard. Inside some restaurants and coffee shops, for example, there are books and magazines on display, both for browsing inside and for sale (see Appendix 2). Also hotels in Yangshuo also provide touring services through cooperation with tour guides or travel agencies. The little hotel I stayed in provides touring brochures for tourists, arranges tours for individual travelers upon request, rents bicycles, and even sells tickets for shows and performances. The night keeper of the hotel used to be a tour guide in another province in China, and he told me in his hometown hotels are forbidden from providing touristic and guiding services, but in Yangshuo this is allowed and prevalent (field note, 1 June 2011).
Chinese dialects. And all the non-Chinese business owners I know\textsuperscript{36} can speak English and at least survival Chinese. In all these businesses, it can be expected that English and Chinese are the main languages of communication, though due to the rather diverse sources of tourists and businesspersons, the language used can vary. Also, the language used at a business is not always the same as that of the business owner, or as indicated in the signboards. There is no simple correlation, because these businesses are not exclusive but open spaces to all potential tourists who care to go in, no matter where they are from and what languages they speak. These are what Blommaert et al (2005: 215) calls ‘as-necessary dialogic places’.

Meng’s coffee shop on West Street is one example of this. Meng comes from another city in Guangxi, and her shop uses a bilingual English-Chinese signboard. She opened this shop in 2003 with the help of a Taiwanese friend who had learnt to cook coffee and snacks in the US back in the 1980s or 1990s. But her shop would start playing only Spanish music around 11.00am every day. This is because as she got to know a Spanish-speaking Chinese tour guide for Spanish tourists, and as they somehow became good friends, the tour guide would always bring her Spanish tourist groups here. This shop then became Spanish tourists’ paradise. This is despite the fact that Meng spoke no Spanish at all, and the waitress only managed to pick up some after serving many Spanish-speakers. The tour guide could act as the translator, or the Spanish tourists could hopefully speak English and at least survival Chinese. In all these businesses, it can be expected that English and Chinese are the main languages of communication, though due to the rather diverse sources of tourists and businesspersons, the language used can vary. Also, the language used at a business is not always the same as that of the business owner, or as indicated in the signboards. There is no simple correlation, because these businesses are not exclusive but open spaces to all potential tourists who care to go in, no matter where they are from and what languages they speak. These are what Blommaert et al (2005: 215) calls ‘as-necessary dialogic places’.

\textsuperscript{36} I know about five foreign business owners, including Kay (South African), Henry (American), Philip (Canadian, who works as teacher but also runs a hotel), Cindy (Malaysian), Song’s husband (Singaporean). And according to Philip, the owner of the Alley Bar (Austrian) can also speak Chinese.
speak some English. Different groups of Spanish tourists would then always be brought here at that same time everyday to enjoy the music as well as the coffee. Another example can be seen in the tourist messages in Tian’s coffee shop (see Figure 5.16). Tian’s shop (see Figure 5.15) has a Chinese language signboard, without an equivalent English name, though there is an English phrase ‘the best coffee’. In the tourist messages, we see writings in Chinese, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish, which testify to the diversity of customers.

![Figure 5.15 Tian’s Coffee shop. Photo by author, 2011.](image)

37 Certainly, there are valid reasons to question whether we can tell from the written languages alone the writer’s nationality or ethnicity, and unfortunately I have little ethnographic evidence to argue about this. Indeed, based on my rough examination of more than 200 pages of customers’ messages in the shop, the code itself may not necessarily tell where the writer is from. In one instance, a person wrote in not so fluent Chinese characters, but in her signage she wrote that she was an American living in the city of Changsha, China (See Appendix 3). Nevertheless, I did observe hand-written languages as diverse as English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Italian, as well as Chinese (in either simplified or traditional characters), which presumably shows the diversity of customers.
We see here linguistic diversity in this ‘global village’ brought in by the constant and yet transient inflow of people from all over the world. While the former ethnolinguistic diversity is relatively local in its base, more stable in number and name, the new linguistic diversity generated by the tourism industry is more global in origin, transient in time, and unpredictable in number and name\textsuperscript{38}. The specific language used is also contingent on the particular tasks on hand, on the interlocutors one has, and on the specific place one is in. This

\textsuperscript{38} See Appendix 5 for statistics on tourism in Yangshuo from the year 2000 to 2010. No data on the ‘global village’ alone is available. Nevertheless, since the ‘global village’ constitutes an important site of the entire Yangshuo tourism system, these numbers could provide a rough sense of tourism in the global village. Statistics obtained from the statistics office of Yangshuo Tourism Bureau during fieldwork in 2011.
constant inflow and outflow of people indicates that West Street a very open space for speakers of different languages. This is actually also the image depicted for West Street in the media, a truly global place where people and stuff from all over the world mix and match and live together in peace (see section 4.4).

Then, how to make sense of a ‘global village’ which seems to be open to everyone who cares to enter? How to provide a critical assessment of the image of free flows, as represented by the media? To addressing these issues, we need to step back from language for a while and turn to spatial function, an insight from Dell Hymes as cited in Blommaert (2010):

‘… it will not do to begin with language, or a standard linguistic description, and look outward to social context. A crucial characteristic of the sociolinguistic approach is that it looks in toward language, as it were, from its social matrix. To begin with language, or with an individual code, is to invite the limitations of a purely correlational approach, and to miss much of the organization of linguistic phenomena. (Hymes 1974: 75, as cited in Blommaert 2010: 10-11).

To achieve a more differentiated understanding of the flows in and around West Street, it is important to distinguish several different ways in which tourist spaces may be used. Although the businesses I have referred to are potentially open to all tourists/customers, different businesses also cater to people with different patterns of consumption and mobility. Hotels are for people on the road – they are *spaces of privacy* which are supposed to offer people restfulness and peace of mind in a relatively busy and strange tourist destination. Bakery/snack
stores, clothes shops, souvenir shops, book stores, and luggage stores, as well as the vendor stalls, are *spaces of transaction* where customers are supposed to simply come, buy (or not buy) their stuff, and leave. Restaurants/cafés, coffee shops, bars/clubs, on the other hand, are *spaces of sociability* where people do not simply buy food and drinks but are likely to consume them in the environment provided. In fact, as we all know, the physical, social and semiotic ambience can be a very important consideration in customers’ choice.

Admittedly, what I have outlined above is only intended to be true from a *touristic business perspective*, and represents a very rough categorization. As Blommaert et al. (2005: 207) make clear, space is multi-functional and susceptible to ‘the kind of intervention that is oriented to a *redefinition* of the space’ (Blommaert et al. 2005: 219, italics original). For example, one can imagine that a business house might be a sleeping room for the business owner after mid-night, therefore making it a space not of transaction but of privacy. Also, friends of a souvenir store owner might go to him/her for whatever reason and they might start chitchatting over the tea. In this way, the owner can get ‘disturbed’, so to speak, by having also to serve customers when they arrive. Or for me, there are some ‘disturbing’ moments when the business owner had to go to serve customers in the middle of our interview. Nevertheless, a rough typology of touristic uses of space provides a useful starting point for more nuanced analysis.

So, focusing on spaces of sociability in particular, restaurants/cafés, coffee shops, bars/clubs tend to be spaces where people travelling or living around
Yangshuo could hang out in. Generally, people entering these spaces would expect to socialize, as opposed to retreat into private life or make brief transaction. For long-term staying tourists, in particular, they would well likely socialize with each other and form social networks here. Second, there are also varied styles of sociability. We have seen in section 5.2.3 that bars on West Street and its surrounding streets are, generally speaking, different spaces semiotically, which provide different physical environments and aesthetic experiences. The differentiation of space arising from tourism investment may also mean that former spatial orders are disturbed, and meanwhile the new spatial order might have to exist in tension with former ones. Here we might see inter-spatial dynamics, that is, how businesses co-exist as spaces of different types and styles. I will elaborate on these nuances in the next section.

5.4 Living in a Changing ‘Global Village’

5.4.1 Closing-down and Moving-out

As we have seen, the second wave of tourism investment has brought in new businesses on West Street, many of which are night clubs. These businesses introduce new styles of sociability but also create inter-spatial tensions with older businesses established during the 1990s and early 2000s. In this subsection, I focus on how types of space, styles of sociability, and styles of living emerge as sources of tension among business owners in this changing ‘global village’. I show this through one case of closing-down and three cases of moving-outs.

In Chapter 3, I introduced a protest placard at Henry’s hotel, which is reproduced here for convenience (Figure 5.17). As already indicated, this is not to
be considered merely as an incidental case but points towards the tensions around the spatial transformation of West Street in general. Let me very briefly reproduce the story here before attempting further explanations.

This sign was put at the entrance of Henry’s already closed hotel – it was no longer accepting customers though still ‘welcomes anyone interested to come in and have a look’, as stated in the text. The reason for closure is given to be the ongoing construction of a night club next door (see Figure 5.17), which had been (and would be) interfering with what is supposed to be a quiet and cozy hotel. This issue was raised with the local bureau of construction but failed to receive any due attention from the officials who, according to the owner, were indifferent. Hence the placard here.
One might be careful enough to notice that the traditional orthography of Chinese is used here. It is actually a common practice to use the traditional, instead of simplified, orthography in calligraphic writings, among the older generation in particular, and in other artistic writings. See Appendix 4 for the carving of ‘Yangshuo’ as ‘陽朔’ instead of ‘阳朔’ along the river dock. According to Qin (2004), the two characters ‘陽朔’ were first written by the then vice-president of Guangxi Huang Yun, and then carved onto the stone as exactly by two professionals in 1982. There were three considerations in the carving: first, to inform people of the place name; second, decorative; third, it is also a cultural landscape (Qin 2004: 329).
The hotel had been running in a relatively congenial business environment for about ten years. Actually there was already one club next door which had been a little disturbing to the hotel, but now the construction of a second club next door would only make the hotel more inoperable. When Henry first came to Yangshuo in 1998 from the US and then opened his hotel in 2002, it was because he liked the beautiful natural scenery and the nice little neighborhood. But now everything has changed, worse than he could ever think of:

Extract 5.8

‘It’s changed too much. It’s too bad. This is very disappointing …because it used to be a very special street, and very unique atmosphere draws people here. But now it’s just a noisy place, you know. There’s about 16 bars and discos, a lot of noise and music. It’s hard to talk to people, it’s too noisy. And it’s not a
good location for a hotel any more. ... The discos make a lot of money every year. That’s the best business on West Street. But if people like to drink, get drunk, and hear loud music, watch naked girls pole-dancing, that’s what they are doing’.

What we see here is a tension in the use of space among a hotel owner and a night club owner. A night club, as space of sociability featuring loud music and dancing crowds, is located next to a hotel, a space of privacy which is meant to provide peacefulness for its customers.

The inter-spatial dynamics are also shown through people moving-out. While Henry was trying hard to protest on West Street, some businesspeople have already relocated to much quieter streets with affordable houses nearby. While the increasing rental fee counts as one major concern, moving out is also a way to regain the quietness and casualness which had been the original reason for living in Yangshuo. Tian’s coffee shop used to be located on West Street when it first opened in 2000, but it moved to Binjiang Road in 2009 after the house rent increased. The shop now has a very nice view of the Li River and mountains across the river. Tian explained how they decided to move:

Extract 5.9

‘West Street started to change around 2004 or 2006. A house of only about 30 or 40m² would cost several hundreds of thousands [a year]. We are here just for a lifestyle. If things become too expensive, it no longer makes sense for us. …Like many others, we arrived here for a simple life, and opened the business just to make a living. But with the rental fees so high, there would be too much
pressure. We could make money there, but that’s not the life we want. … West Street has become too noisy. There are always drunk people on the street, they are not the customers we want’.

Moving out so as to regain a more peaceful and less competitive life is also what Song and her Singaporean husband had decided to do in 2007. She started off on West Street in 1995, and was now on Guihua road:

Extract 5.10

‘Those with Karaoke’s make big money. For us little restaurants, even if we want to make 200 or 300 a day, we would have to work our ass off. … We were on West Street first in 1995, making coffees and dishes. But what can we do now? West Street has become too expensive, 2 or 3 hundreds of thousands [a year]. It is very difficult [for us]. Everybody wants to outdo everybody. We hope to still have some relaxation, without too much pressure’.

Making coffees and preparing dishes, and just living a simple life, these lifestyles are no longer sustainable on West Street

Similar laments are also voiced by Sun. ‘West Street used to be like, we would put tables along the streets, tourists would sit there, have their beers, and we chat about whatever they see or do during their travelling in the day. That kind of life, it’s such a memory and I miss it a lot’. In his late 50s, Sun is respectfully called a ‘master’ by the locals. He is keen on traditional Chinese culture and could be seen as a living symbol of it: he wears traditional loose Chinese shirts and pants, keeps a Taoist hair knot or sometimes just wears his hair loose till his legs. He is also
famous for his artistic practices in painting, calligraphy, and Chinese seal carving. He used to be a farmer in another village in Yangshuo, moved to West Street to do some carving in 1985, and opened his café there in 1992 until 2003. He is cheerful and talkative, as everyone can tell, and has made friends with many tourists – he learnt English by himself – who still visit him in his new place these days when they come back again.

He is disappointed by the change of West Street – he said it’s become a Wenzhou village\textsuperscript{40}, which means everything is about money now. He now has left his former little café on West Street, and opened a new one next to the little hotel I stayed in. Obviously, he could not make much money with it. Few tourists would find their way to this relatively quiet place and on several visits I saw his restaurant was closed. He said he would rather sacrifice money for the sake of a way of living he prefers: ‘people there are gold-diggers. I don’t want to go there, haven’t been there for some time. Here, I have my quietness. As to whether I can have customers, I don’t care.’ As we talked, he very happily went in to fetch a seal he had just finished carving. ‘This is a very high quality stone, a gift from a friend’, he proudly showed it to me. Inside his restaurant, his calligraphy writings are all over the walls. He now lives at the Xu Beihong Residence\textsuperscript{41}, which is located on the same street of his restaurant, and works there as a house keeper. He would take care of the residence, and also spend time painting and writing

\textsuperscript{40} Wenzhou is a city famous in China for its many rich entrepreneurs with private enterprises.

\textsuperscript{41} Xu Beihong (1895-1953) is a renowned painter in China. He used to live in Yangshuo for some time, and his former residence is now a cultural heritage.
calligraphy there almost every day. While lamenting that West Street has become a Wenzhou village, he also shared with me his dream image of West Street. He said it should be like *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, a renowned Song Dynasty painting of a city where people enjoy lives together in an harmonious and laid-back atmosphere (summary of unrecorded conversation, 30 June 2011).

So far, we see four cases of inter-spatial tensions among older and new West Street businesses. The business owners, Chinese and foreign, who arrived during the first wave of tourism development, are now coping with the socio-geographical change of West Street in varied ways. But all of them started off opening up businesses on West Street with the desire to live in a nice physical environment. Their lifestyles, according to their accounts, were also closely interconnected with the spaces of sociability they provided for tourists. Note that Sun had enjoyed having many tourist friends through the years of running his café, and Tian was concerned that on West Street the potential customers, who tend to be drunk, were not people he would like to see in his coffee shop. Song also said she did not enjoy living in a street where ‘everyone wants to outdo everyone’. And Henry’s protest was actually not just about that one night club under construction. He mentioned how West Street has changed so much that when ‘there’s about 16 bars and discos, a lot of noise and music. …it’s not a good location for a hotel any more’. Their cases show how in the second wave of tourism development, early business owners have to adjust themselves in varied ways to a fast changing place as they find themselves no longer compatible with
West Street as a space of consumption and entertainment. While perhaps not in the extreme sense, these people might be considered as victims of the dispossessing power of neoliberal space (Peck and Tickell 2002: 389) or of what Massy (1993) calls ‘the power-geometry of space’, or also cases of what Blommaert (2010: 154) calls ‘soft marginalization’, that is ‘the marginalization of particular cultural features, identities, practices’. In the next subsection, we will see there are further complications.

**5.4.2 Local foreigners’ niche of sociability in Yangshuo**

One unplanned consequence of the geographical expansion and tourism investment on West Street, as we already see, is that the relatively quieter streets now tend to be occupied by businessperson with fewer economic capitals who run relatively modest businesses, as opposed to expensive West Street clubs. As Harvey (1993: 6) observes, ‘to say…that place construction is a given in the logic of capitalism’s production of space is not to argue that the geographical pattern is determined in advance’. Businesses on quieter streets, especially those moved here from West Street, helped keep the ‘traditional’ ambience of West Street to some extent. As Yan told me, ‘this [Guihua road] is what West Street used to be like ten years ago’. In this subsection, I look at how some businesses on these quieter streets have become the local foreigners’ niche of sociability, and how their niche of sociability are nevertheless fraught with the issue of multifunctionality of space (Blommaert et al 2005: 207) due to English educational tourism.
It is estimated that there are about 200 foreigners working in Yangshuo at local
language schools (He 2011: 56-57), and their relatively long-term stay has gained
them the name of ‘local foreigners’. They teach at school, get to know people,
socialize around Yangshuo while touring around (Chapter 6 provides details).

Jason was an English teacher from South Africa, and he was also a guitar player
in Ding’s bar on Guihua road. There he played with his band members, who are
from different parts of the world:

Extract 5.11

‘Well, kind of, I talk to people, meet everybody, I just make friends, and then
know, oh okay you play this or that. So I got introduced to a local Chinese guy.
He’s a drummer from Guilin, and he moves here and we’re already friends,
and we just meet each other at the bar. And he said do you wanna play music,
we play music together? Just me and him. And then, yeah, we kind of decided
we’re always looking for more people. If there’s another guy can play, then we
just speak, and get contact, and it’s quite easy if you find the right people, it
works easily you know. …We now have another guitar player from California,
America, the piano player from Switzerland, and we will have a new singer,
from Australia’.

The bar Jason played in was also very popular among foreigners. Talking
about bars in Yangshuo in general, Jason said:

Extract 5.12
Every bar has its place in Yangshuo, I think. Like we might go out and started at Alley bar, and sit there and relax, and you drink more and maybe decide okay let’s go dance a little bit, so you might end up at a bar with club, with dancing, for instance’.

He then noted further that for westerners in general they have preferences about which bars to go to:

Extract 5.13

‘West Street bars are, … I mean, I’ve been there a few time, but er I think westerners feel more relaxed more at home around more western faces, around western people. …so westerners like more relaxed bars, …But I think everyone has different taste in music, in their choice, their party. Things like I guess a lot of western tourists come here are what you would call backpackers, okay? And they’re more relaxed people, and they prefer the relax bars, so that they can talk to each other and got to know people’.

Similar preference is also noted by Steve, an English teacher from Ireland. He had stayed in Yangshuo for a few months, teaching part-time at different schools while travelling around. Since he enjoyed here pretty much, it was also his plan to get his Chinese visa renewed later at Hong Kong. Like other teachers, he had found his ‘niche’ in Yangshuo, and socialized a lot on Guihua road. That day, we were doing the interview at a restaurant of his choice on Guihua road. ‘Most of the tourism things seem to be concentrated on West Street, which is good I guess’, he said, ‘because we can sit here now, and it’s not extremely busy’. Below he talked about why he liked Guihua road by way of contrast with West Street:
Steve: I think it [West Street]’s trying to emulate some sort of night clubs in the west, maybe. That’s what West Street [is], I guess. Maybe they think this is what western people like. So yeah, they got these bars, and extremely loud terrible music, and very loud like dance music, with pole-dancers, expensive drinks. Yeah, you find most westerners in Yangshuo don’t go to these places, as we are not interested …Honestly, I’m not a fan of West Street.

Shuang: okay.

Steve: yeah, I think er they er. But I can understand that the local people they want to make as much money as possible. So they know that, they understand that tourists would go there. Yeah. Sure, it always going to be as busy as it is. But, yeah, I don’t know, it’s extremely touristic and noisy. …This is the same in every country. When you first go to a city, you go to where the guidebook tells you to go, or where it’s popular, so you go to West Street. And then you’ll discover, okay, this is like everywhere, this is like Khaosan road in Bangkok, or Temple Bar in Dublin. It’s where the expensive, noisy bars are all there, souvenir shops are, well, you know. I don’t know, it’s, it’s terrible… I don’t know. People just go because it’s convenient. And they don’t know any better. If you are willing to look around, there are so much, so much better place at Yangshuo. I most prefer here [Guihua road]. And I prefer the older parts of
Yangshuo, with traditional bars. I would most like to have a drink there. Even in my own city, I don’t understand why the music has to be so loud. There’s a term we would use to describe it, tourist trap, yeah tourist trap. In many parts of the world, they have beautiful places, but they use it too much, with many bars, restaurants, McDonald’s, KFC’s. I can understand they’re trying to make money, but you may end up destroying what makes it unique in the first place…. The first thing I thought on West Street is how out of place McDonald’s was [see Figure 5.19].

Shuang: out of place?
Steve: yeah,
Shuang: what do you mean?
Steve: out of place means it should not be here.
Shuang: why, why it should not be here?
Steve: because you have so many beautiful mountains here, things you have never seen. And you have things in the way of the beautiful view. It’s giant yellow M, with… It’s pretty disgraceful. I don’t know why they were allowed to do this, because the thing about Yangshuo is no matter where you are, you are got to see a beautiful view. So you shouldn’t put terrible things, like a giant yellow M from McDonald’s to block these views. …
Here, we see that the formation of local foreigners’ niche in Yangshuo is driven by the increasingly touristic and commercialized West Street on the one hand, and also by race and culture based difference in taste (‘everyone has different taste in music, in their choice, their party’, ‘westerners feel more relaxed more at home around more western faces, around western people’, ‘you find most westerners in Yangshuo don’t go to these places, as we are not interested’). For instance, while Jason plays in the band with a Chinese drummer friend and may hang out in many different spaces of sociability (‘Every bar has its place in Yangshuo’, ‘West Street bars are, … I mean, I’ve been there a few time, but…’), this is actually an alternative to the preferred way of socializing ‘around western faces’ feeling ‘more relaxed more at home’. This indicates that in this transnational space there is some sort of division along race (c.f. Amin 2013: 4; Valentine 2008: 330, 334).
But as foreigners find their niche of sociability, it also in some way provides convenience for people who would like to practice spoken English with foreigners, in particular the English language students in local language schools as we shall see in Chapter 6. While as an English teacher, Jason knows that students, including his, tend to come over to practice their English, he sometime still has to deal with unexpected situations when people would come over for free English lessons. He recalled once a student even came up to him with a dictionary after one of his guitar performances. He loved interacting with different people, he said, but ‘this is too much’.

And sometimes the use of bars for English learning opportunities not only exists as a side-function, but tends to become a dominant one if the number of students increases. The students, as we shall see in Chapter 6, tend to be lower middle class professionals coming to learn English after quitting jobs, so they tend to be careful with their money. According to Philip, who often went to hang out with Jason, ‘students would often sit together and occupy a large table. But they only order one beer, and share among themselves. This is not good for the business, you know’ (field note, 9 July 2011). Because of this, sometimes measures have to be taken to deter the improper use of space, as Kay told me:

Extract 5.15

Kay: There’s one bar particular, it’s called [name of bar] and I, I know that at one stage, I don’t know, at one stage, she’s charging Chinese people 50 yuan just to go to the bar.

Shuang: really?
Kay: because there were so many students that were trying to speak with the foreigners. And the foreigners were getting irritated. And the foreigners were starting to not go. It’s a favorite, many foreigners like going there. And because of that many student went. And yes, she had to do something, to almost to keep the students away.

Shuang: okay.

Kay: em. But basically any bar that gets many foreigners and is not too noisy tends to be popular. The longer you’re here, it irritates you more and more.

Here, we see that quieter streets surrounding West Street have generally kept a more relaxed ambience. This attracts local foreigners who prefer to relax and socialize in traditional and quieter, as opposed to fancy and noisy, bars. However, local foreigners’ niche of sociability is at the same time being used by students who would come to look for English conversations (Chapter 6 shows details). This indicates a complexity in the use of space in that these businesses provide spaces for particular styles of sociability which are favored by foreigners, who in turn are people with valuable linguistic resources for language learners, whose arrival, nevertheless, also introduces a new and conflicting functionality to these businesses as spaces for practicing spoken English. Therefore, complicating the concern of the local official we saw in the introduction (section 5.1), the tensions and developmental dilemma of the so-called ‘global village’ derive not just from the different preference of different customers. The expansion and commercial development of West Street, as we have seen, results in cases of closing-down
and moving-out, which account for part of the tensions around space due to mass commercialization. To further complicate the picture, it is the commodification of English through educational tourism that leads to the unexpected multifunctionality (Blommaert et al 2005) of local foreigners’ niche. In other words, the tensions around space do not just lie in the commercial development of West Street; language and communication can also be important bases for creating tensions around control over, access to, and functionality of space.

5.5 Conclusion

I started this chapter aiming to understand the local dynamics of the so-called ‘global village’, and I do this by drawing on mixed evidence to (1) outline the historical processes of the socio-geographical change of West Street during the past three decades, and (2) provide a glimpse of the current local dynamics arising from this historical change. I have shown that three phases of change can be observed in the recent history of West Street, with the most comprehensive change occurring since the mid-2000s through geographical expansion and tourism business investment. In this process, the demographic and semiotic change involves differentiation of spatial organization. To explore potential tensions, I propose that West Street might be examined through a typology of spaces of privacy, spaces of transaction, and spaces of sociability. I also noted that there are complications due to different styles of sociability, potential inter-spatial dynamics, as well as multifunctionality of space (Blommaert et al 2005). By examining two groups of people living in this ‘global village’, business owners and local foreigners, I demonstrate how the branding and business
investment in West Street have brought about tensions to each group as they live and adjust themselves in different, but related, ways. On the one hand, the commercial investment in West Street has led to the relocation of some businesses into quieter streets nearby. On the other, as quieter streets become local foreigners’ niche, they are also subject to the redefinition of space by Chinese people who want to practice English.

Therefore, complicating the convivial image of intercultural encounters depicted in the tourism promotional discourses (see section 4.4 in Chapter 4), we see that there are also tensions around space. And the tensions involve more than just preferences of different customers, but also point towards the re-organization and use of space as mediated by mass commercialization and commodification of English. Through tracing the multiple mobilities of people in the historical transformation of space, and delineating the geographical trajectories of business owners and local foreigners, we see how semiotic, spatial, and aesthetic differences are lived out through the multiple ways people carry about their daily lives in this global village. Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006: 4, italics original) observes that, ‘in their search for spatial ordering, the social sciences have still failed to fully recognize how the spatialities of social life presupposes, and frequently involve conflict over, both the actual and the imagined movements of people from place to place, event to event’ (see also Amin 2013; Valentine 2008). While the ‘global village’ might not be a site of conflict in the extreme sense wherein people are seriously displaced, I hope I have shown in this chapter that by examining the varied ways people talk about, move around, and live in the
space they inhabit, we start to see at least tensions and controversies in spaces of transformation and mobilities. Language and communication, in particular, constitute important bases for exploring these issues. We already have a glimpse of the tensions around multifunctionality of space due to the commodification of English; in the next chapter, I turn to the interactional practice of talking to foreigners per se and explore in details how exactly language learning proceeds in the ‘global village’.
6.1 Introduction: A mobilities perspective on English language learning

As we already know, Yangshuo provides opportunities for people to improve their spoken English by interacting with foreigners, in particular through what is known as the ‘English Educational Tourism’ (xiūxué yóu 修学游). Below is an extract from the website of Samuel Language School, provided in the Q & A session as a reply to ‘Who is this school for?’:

Extract 6.1

Harry, with a bachelor’s degree, obtained his Band-6 certificate\(^{42}\) in English during his college years. He worked as a financial manager in a company in Shenzhen ... After seeing our school on the internet, he immediately added our website to his Favorites toolbar, and asked for a leave of one month to study here. But he felt that he had not enjoyed himself enough here for staying just one month, so he simply quitted his high-salary job and studied for another two months.

When people who did not understand asked why he quitted such a good job, he explained like this: 1. You have all the chances in the world to make money, but there are not many chances like having a good time studying here. You cannot only improve your English, but also relax among the nice scenery of

\(^{42}\) College English Test, Band 6.
rivers and mountains. 2. The expenditures for learning three months here costs even less than learning for just one month in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, or Zhuhai. The price is so good. 3. The learning environment here is unique, and cannot be found in other places in China. Every night you can chat with foreigners over beer. Where else can you find such feelings?43

While the actual language learning in Yangshuo, as we shall see, is not as glorious as what is provided here, Yangshuo has indeed been attracting people due to this unique opportunity of improving spoken English by chatting with foreigners. From the initial development of educational tourism in the late 1990s, Yangshuo now claims to be ‘the biggest English Corner in China’ (Yangshuo Tourism Bureau 2009). Around the areas where several language schools are located, slogans are painted along the walls, declaring the town as a bilingual town (see Figure 6.1), and a place to ‘enjoy speaking English all the time’ (see Figure 6.2). It is estimated that there are about 30 language schools staffed by more than 200 foreigner language teachers, and each year Yangshuo in total attracts an average of more than 6,000 people coming over to learn English since 2003 (He 2011: 56-57). In this chapter, I examine the language learning industry in Yangshuo, but before doing so, it is worth first reviewing the literature on similar places of language learning in Japan and South Korea.

43 All extracts from the school webpage are translated from Chinese by the author, except the original English texts reproduced in italics. For ethical reasons, links to websites are not provided here and below.
Previous studies have shown that English language learning is increasingly characterized by varied mobilities of people, materials and semiotic resources, and these mobilities are closely linked up with imaginations of space and place (Park and Bae 2009: 366-367). On the one hand, language learners adopt
transnational migration as one of their educational strategies as they seek to improve their English in English-speaking countries (e.g. Park and Bae 2009; Kobayashi 2011). On the other hand, programs aiming at providing equally attractive language learning experience, but without students actually having to pass the immigration borders, have also been set up through what are variously known as ‘English villages/towns’ or ‘foreign language theme parks’ in South Korea (see Park 2009) and Japan (see Seargeant 2005). These English villages import infrastructural materials from the West and hire staff from native-English speaking countries to provide students an ‘authentic’ learning environment which boasts ‘more English than England itself’ (Seargeant 2005: 327).

In South Korea, English villages have been a topic of public debate, in particular with regard to the pedagogical effectiveness of the program. While Krashen (2006) questions whether these simulated environments could actually help children acquire English since there has been no formal evaluation of the program yet, Trottier (2008), in reply to Krashen (2006), suggests that actually Krashen’s own theory, in particular his acquisition/learning hypothesis, input hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis, all provide theoretical support for English villages.

44 In fact, English villages in South Korea were first established in 2004 in response to the worrisome growing outflow of its school-age children which can be ‘a drain on the Korean economy’ (Krashen 2006, para 2).

45 For sake of convenience, I will simply use the term ‘English villages’ in the rest of the thesis to refer to this type of language educational establishments, and use ‘English Corner’ for the case of Yangshuo.
Another concern is authenticity. Looking at the case of Japan, Seargeant (2005) interrogates the issue of authentic English. After reviewing the changing definitions of authenticity in applied linguistics, Seargeant observes that with the ever increasing number of non-native English speakers, there is a shift in conceptualizing authenticity as no longer residing in interaction with native speakers but with ‘effective communication via English as a lingua franca’ (Seargeant 2005: 332). Examining the case of British Hills, where native English speakers are employed to work in a simulated western environment through role-plays, providing school-age children an ‘authentic’ experience of living in the West and interacting with native-speakers, Seargeant (2005) argues that the English village contradicts a neutral model of English as an international lingua franca by reproducing an ideology of nativeness. (Seargeant 2005: 341-342).

While these studies consider the issues of pedagogical justification (e.g. Krashen 2006; Trottier 2008) and politics of authentic English (e.g. Seargeant 2005), in this chapter I hope to demonstrate that we can also ask different questions from different analytical perspectives. In particular, I focus on how English language learning gets defined in Yangshuo, how language learning proceeds here, and how the development of this language learning industry is related to the changing political economy of Yangshuo and ideologies of English in China? In addressing these issues, I hope to show how this case of ‘English Corner’ provides insights into the ‘mechanism by which language, language teaching and neoliberalism intersect’ (Block, Gray and Holborow 2012: 7).
In pursuing lines of inquiry beyond the concerns of previous studies, I am aligning with what Rampton (1997a) characterizes as a retuning of applied linguistics towards the socially constituted linguistics that Dell Hymes (1977) identified decades ago (Rampton 1997a: 8; see also Rampton 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 2006). Retuning applied linguistics like this requires ‘tak[ing] on larger political, social or educational ideas and try[ing] to work through what they mean in linguistic and discursive detail’ (Rampton 1997a: 10). In a more recent book, Block, Gray and Holborow (2012) carry this further, observing that still one gaping hole in the work of many applied linguists today…is the way that so many either ignore the economic and material bases of human activity and social life, or only deal with and incorporate these bases into their work in the most cursory of manners…these economic and material bases of human activity and social life [are] central to discussions of a range of language related issues. For applied linguistics to be truly socially constituted, it must take full account of the political economy of contemporary capitalism (Block, Gray and Holborow 2012: 3-4).

This perspective, as we will see, can contribute a great deal to understanding the case of Yangshuo.

First, tourism can be understood as a mechanism of mobility that drives the movement of semiotic, material and educational, resources, and at the same time redefines their meanings. While English villages in Japan have been characterized as ‘purpose-built enclaves’ which ‘symbolically position English outside the boundary of mainstream society’ (Seargeant 2005: 342), the case of Yangshuo
conforms more to what Sheller and Urry (2006: 214) call ‘places of movement’: ‘places are dynamic, they are about proximities, about the bodily co-presence of people who happen to be in that place at that time, doing activities together’. As I will show, the English Corner in Yangshuo exists in a parasitic relationship to an existing tourism community. In other words, it is already a place of constant flows which are then strategically managed for English language learning.

Second, the management of these mobilities for language education constitutes an important part of the strategic development of the local economy. This interconnectivity of tourism and education actually has already been documented in the field of tourism management long time ago. Cooper and Latham (1988), for example, observed that the UK government had been actively encouraging educational visits, and they noted that ‘there are sound economic reasons for attracting educational groups as they often … provide a much needed contribution to fixed costs at a time when there may otherwise be few visitors’ (Cooper and Latham 1988: 331). In section 6.2, I demonstrate the specific ways local entrepreneurs and the local government steer this language learning industry in Yangshuo by means of managing tourist mobilities as part the local tourism economy.

Following on from this, people brought together under this management of flows engage in either expected or unexpected interactions, and to examine how these communicative complexities are actually lived out, we cannot safely assume what will or could occur in these social occasions, but have to, and can only, know through ethnographic analysis. As far as I know, little has been documented
about how exactly learning proceeds in English villages. I will show in sections 6.4 and 6.5 how the development of educational tourism has sociolinguistic impacts on the local community, disrupting local communicative patterns to the point of what might be called interactional straining.

To briefly summarize, in examining this English Corner, my intention is not to evaluate its pedagogical effectiveness (see e.g. Krashen 2006; Trottier 2008) or discuss the politics of authentic English (see e.g. Seargeant 2005). Instead, through analyzing data from policy documents, participant observation and interviews, I show how varied flows are managed in the development of the ‘English Corner’ as part of the local tourism economy (section 6.2), what this construction of an English Corner says about the changing ideologies of English in China (section 6.3), and, on a more micro level, how language learning proceeds in Yangshuo (section 6.4), and how some salient interactional practices can be conceptualized (section 6.5).

I now turn to examine how English language teaching becomes an integral part of the local tourism industry by means of strategically managing tourist mobilities.

6.2 English Educational Tourism and Its Strategies of Mobilization
On a hot sunny afternoon, I paid visit to one of the popular language schools to see whether there could be opportunities for me to do research there. Hearing my intention, one of the working staff at the office replied ‘our Principal Zhang is now on his business trip elsewhere, and won’t be back in a few days. Well, actually we always have people who want to interview him, but they are from the media; you’re different. Maybe you want to go downstairs to talk to the manager’.
As it was, I did not carry out my research in this school, but at the manager’s office, some brochures and newspapers on display caught my attention. The first page of the school newspaper reports in full coverage, continued in page 2, an interview the principal Zhang had with Guilin Radio Station, wherein he explained in detail his ‘FACES successful English learning method’:

Extract 6.2

My method is to ignore grammatical concepts like tense and others completely, and start straightaway from having conversations with foreigners. … We should not think of English as knowledge, but as an everyday skill - just like we don’t really need to know about physics to learn to ride a bike. So my method can be called “learning by doing”, which is one important theory of the American pragmatist Dewey’s. ... Face means lian, mianzi. I must say we Chinese people have good English competence, and actually some are quite excellent. But we tend to be shy and dare not speak aloud. …we should not care so much about mianzi – just open your mouth even if you could make mistakes. So our FACES learning method, to say it in English, is *I enjoy losing faces in order to leaning my English way* [sic] 46.

Each character, as he further elaborated, stands for one sub-method of learning English:

**F**: face to face with foreigners

46 This is translated from Chinese by the author, except the italics.
Actually as I got to learn later, Zhang is well known in Yangshuo as the very first person to open an English language school as early as 1993. And Zhang’s school, as well as his FACES method, also serves as entrepreneurial model for the other schools that were to appear later. This FACES method, which emphasizes learning English through face to face communication with foreigners, reproduces the ideology of what Block (2002: 120) calls McCommunication. As I will elaborate in section 6.4., it is this commodified and rationalized opportunity to talk with foreigners that attracts students to Yangshuo. So how did a private language school somehow initiate a language teaching industry as part of the local tourism economy? How is that related to the changing political economy of Yangshuo? I explain this sociohistorical process in the next two subsections, and further explore what this FACES method implies for students and foreigners in sections 6.3 and 6.4.

6.2.1 Contingent exploration of the exception

The idea of opening a language school first occurred to Zhang in the early 1990s. By then, he had been working for several years in Yangshuo first as a restaurant
owner and then a tour guide, after quitting his state assigned position in aquaculture in 1987 in Hunan Province. However, in 1993, during the early stage of China’s turn to a market economy, the idea of opening a private language school was completely unheard of. It was too creative, if not entrepreneurial or capitalistic, to be approved by the local Yangshuo authorities. Besides, private English training enterprises were almost non-existent in China, though English language has been a school subject since the late 1970s nationwide. To further complicate the picture, Zhang did not have a local hukou. The plan later got approved, nevertheless, when two senior officials at the local government thought that maybe they should let him have a try, on the condition that it should start first within the public educational system at one local public primary school. Through inviting foreign travelers to teach at local public schools, this trial produced positive feedbacks from the children and their parents, and the first private language school was opened in 1993. However, as a tentative and potentially controversial private enterprise, this first English language school was in fact not officially named as a language school at all, but as a culture exchange centre. Besides, the school was running on a small scale with only a few students from local Yangshuo. The teaching of English combined classroom instruction with outdoor travelling with international tourists, so that students could practice their

47 The labor system of government assigned job, known as the iron rice bowl, operated in China until the early 1990s, when transformation into a socialist market economy was officially declared by the central government in 1992.

48 Private/individual tutoring is not considered as enterprise here.
English when Zhang managed to have some international tourists to guide around (Summary notes from interview with Samuel\textsuperscript{49}).

The turning point came in 1997. Li Yang, an English teacher who had already established his fame nationwide came to the City of Guilin to promote his ‘Crazy English’\textsuperscript{50}, a unique method of practicing spoken English by shouting out loud without the fear of losing face (for details, see Bolton 2003; Gao, X. 2012). Zhang was very eager to meet his entrepreneurial idol and they were later able to cooperatively hold the first English Summer Camp in Yangshuo in the summer of 1999. The celebrity effect of Li Yang and his ‘Crazy English’ helped Yangshuo gain its fame almost overnight - a place to practice English with foreigners (\textit{Yangshuo County Chronicles} 2003).

This successful event prompted the government to start reconfiguring the significance of private language education in Yangshuo against the backdrop of a more mature market economy, and of changing ideologies of English in China at large, as I will elaborate later. Different from the tentative approach taken in the earlier 1990s, the 1999 governmental plan explicitly stated that this very first private foreign language school should be strongly supported (\textit{Yangshuo} 1999: 54-55). And under supportive government policies, more private language schools

\textsuperscript{49} Samuel is the principal of Samuel Language School, and turns out to be Zhang’s brother. English pseudonyms are used for the school principal and students, because it is the general practice for everyone at the school to be addressed by an English name.

\textsuperscript{50} Crazy English is also the name of Li Yang’s English training institute established in 1995 in Guangzhou.
were then established, targeting at domestic travelers with a tuition fee far beyond the affordability of Yangshuo local residents. In this historical process, English in Yangshuo comes to acquire economic value, and English-speaking international tourists, embodying these valuable English resources, thus become moving subjects to be managed for the ‘territorial concentrations of resources’ (Sassen 2002: 2, as cited in Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 7).

6.2.2 Assembling flows of English resources

To attract international travelers to be English language teachers, schools put recruitment advertisements not only on their official websites, but also on popular backpacker websites like Couchsurfing, or simply on the street (see Figure 6.3). Due to the temporariness of tourists’ stay, local schools usually offer three types of flexible teaching positions: volunteer, part-time teacher, and full-time teacher. Volunteers usually work for a few weeks, unpaid but provided with free meals and accommodation, while part-time and full-time teachers, apart from getting free meals and accommodations, are waged teachers with required teaching hours. They tend to be better qualified than volunteers, and usually come from the so-called native English-speaking countries with college degrees, teaching experience and/or TESOL certificates. But in all three cases, the contract could be short-term, varying from just a few months to one year.

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51 The specific qualifications of the teachers can also vary due to the seasonal change of the English industry. During summer vacation time (usually from mid-July to the end of August in China), for example, school-aged children would come over for about one month. This temporary increase in student numbers may result in schools hiring foreign tourists less qualified. For instance, during my stay...
As can be expected, when asked how they end up teaching here, all the seven teachers I interviewed (see table 3.3) gave me touristic reasons, as Cathy explained below:

Extract 6.3\(^{52}\)

(Interview with Cathy, 29 yrs old, American)

Shuang: how did you decide to come here to teach English?  
Cathy: well, I first decided to come here just because I had been to China in 2008 and 2009 and really want to come back and stay for a longer time.

\(^{52}\) @ indicates laughter. [ ] is used to insert author’s comments.
Shuang: you mean at Yangshuo or anywhere in China?

Cathy: just anywhere in China. I wanted to stay for a longer time. But I realize to stay, you have to make money somehow, and have some way to pay for things so I had thought a lot about teaching, because if I was a teacher then I could make some money and also stay in China. And I remember Yangshuo and how beautiful it was. So I just started to look on the internet for schools in Yangshuo, and [name of the school] came up. …But I knew that this was a nice city, and I knew that I would enjoy it, because I had already visited here. I wanted to go back to a city that is a little bit familiar to me, but I didn’t want to go to too big of a city.

Beijing and Shanghai are like, are so big. So I didn’t want to go there, and I like being outdoors, and being very active. I knew Yangshuo has a lot of activities, so.

David, the only teacher who mentioned teaching as his main reason for being here, nevertheless said that he would not have been here if it was not Yangshuo, because here he could eat western food and enjoy his hobbies - biking, hiking and photographing:

Extract 6.4

(Interview with David, 41 yrs old, American)

Shuang: after 5 years, why did you decide to come here to teach?

David: I had changed careers back in America from finance to teaching, and teaching jobs were very difficult to come by in America. So I
thought teaching in Asia for a while might be exciting. And again I remember from my trip that I really liked Yangshuo. So yeah that’s how I end up here, yeah.

Shuang: So actually this time you are here mainly for teaching English?
David: For teaching English, yes.

... 

Shuang: why did you choose Yangshuo, to teach?
David: Again I think it’s a very pretty area, and I like cycling a lot, hiking a lot. It’s a very good place, even though not as nearly good as it was five years ago….In other words, I would rather live in Yangshuo than many other places in China, so if they offered me the job somewhere else in China, it’s very possible I would not take it.

Shuang: because here you can enjoy some of the western…
David: because there’s this little bit of western food, if I do occasionally want that. And also I like the recreational opportunities here for biking and hiking, you know, that would not happen somewhere else in China.

More specifically, the reasons for taking up the teaching position include supporting themselves financially to enable touring around (Cathy, Jason, Sam, Steve), biking, cycling, photographing (David), and rock-climbing (Peter). For
Philip and Peter, teaching here could also very easily get visas so that they could stay much longer for rock-climbing and doing business. This pattern of recruitment points to how the English language is mobilized and commodified for establishing a language learning industry under the changing political economy of Yangshuo. Specifically, this historical process conforms to what Ong (2006) calls ‘neoliberalism as exception’. In examining the market economy in Asia in general and in China in particular, Ong (2006) proposes that neoliberalism with a small n could be defined as ‘a new mode of political optimization…. a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions’ (Ong 2006: 3). Exception, on the other hand, is

53 This group of people, who work to support their own travelling, has actually been observed for centuries, variously termed as drifters, nomads, wanderers, and long-term budget travelers. But whatever they are called, all these tourist-workers, Uriely and Reichel (2000: 270) observe, ‘share the tendency toward low spending as a result of both their wish to experience long-term trip despite budget restrictions. In order to finance their prolonged trip, they also tend to engage in occasional and usually short-term employment during their trips. The jobs that they take are usually not related to their education, training, or skills. … Their involvement in these kinds of work is obviously not part of an occupational career. Yet, it is instrumental in terms of financing this touristic pursuit’.

54 Ong (2007) argues that in understanding neoliberalism, we still need the old classic perspective of political distinction. This is because when we attempt to identify neoliberalism through ‘ensembles of coordinates’ (Ong 2007: 3), that is, free markets, individual liberty, etc., the result might be a normative template such that neoliberalism is to be understood everywhere the same way (Ong 2007: 7) This perspective can be called Neoliberalism with big N (Ong 2006; 2007). Neoliberalism with small n, she proposes, is a technology of governing and in meliues of transformation and change, in particular in Asian contexts, neoliberalism is selectively deployed in managing population and space, ‘a migratory technology of governing that interacts with situated sets of elements and circumstances’ (Ong 2007: 5).
conceptualized in a broad manner ‘as an extraordinary departure in policy that can be deployed to include as well as to exclude’ (Ong 2006: 5). In Asian societies, Ong observes, ‘neoliberalism as exceptions is introduced in sites of transformation where market-driven calculations are bring [sic: being] introduced in the management of populations and the administration of special spaces’ (Ong 2006: 3). In the case of Yangshuo, the former culture exchange centre was first established in the early 1990s as a contingent economic form. It laid the ground for the later strategy of ‘assembling flows’ (Ong 2005) against a background of more mature market economy in the late 1990s, leading to the establishment of the biggest English Corner in China55.

I have shown so far how international touristic flows are managed in the development of the ‘English Corner’ as part of the local tourism economy. However, the establishment of Yangshuo as an English Corner, as well as the

55 Ong (2006) also keenly observes that there is always the interplay between ‘neoliberalism as exception’, and ‘exception to neoliberalism’. She notes that ‘exceptions to neoliberalism are also invoked, in political decisions, to exclude populations and places from neoliberal calculations and choices. Exceptions to neoliberalism can be modes for protecting social safety nets … In other words, exceptions to neoliberalism can both preserve welfare benefits for citizens and exclude noncitizens from the benefits of capitalist development’ (Ong 2006: 4, italics original). In the case of Yangshuo, this can be seen in the fact that while language schools exist as private enterprises, they are also supposed to provide welfare benefits to local Yangshuo residents. Samuel Language School, for example, as one of the most popular language schools in Yangshuo, also provides one separate teaching program for local Yangshuo college-aged students only. The tuition fee for one semester in this program costs less than a normal 4-week tuition fee for regular non-local customers. Indeed, this program is separately run in a remote location far from the school district. This language learning program as a social welfare thus caters to the needs of the locals to improve English, instead of constituting a part of the educational tourism economy.
FACES method the English Corner builds on, represents not just a business strategy. The commodification of English must also correspond to a market where English is in demand. To understand the case of Yangshuo therefore, also requires understanding the larger contexts of the changing ideologies of English in China. Indeed, when talking with teachers about their students at the school, one recurrent issue teachers observed with great interest was how students ended up in Yangshuo learning English and what English meant to them. One teacher David said,

‘I find their stories interesting. They came from all over China, you know, sometimes from far away, and they come here, often quit jobs, and come here to better their English, so I think that’s interesting. It takes a lot of risk and commitment. And I respect that.’

Peter, the most senior teacher in Samuel’s, also testified to this career-orientedness of Chinese students. He compared his Chinese students with the Japanese ones he used to teach in Japan:

‘I think, I think Chinese students seem to be more career-oriented. You know, in Japan, a lot of my students were, one of the questions I usually ask my students is why do they study English. Some of my adult students in Japan, you know, well, I’m bored, or I want to have a hobby, so I study English, or a common answer is like I want to travel. It will make it easier to travel (see Kubota 2011). But like all of my students in China they say you know I want to get a better job’.

Jason, who had been teaching for more than 9 months, also confirmed this:
‘when I meet my students, I always let them introduce themselves, and a lot of them just say straightforward, that I want more money, you know. English, if I learn English, I can get a better job than somebody else maybe doesn’t speak English, does make more money, yeah’.

So, what exactly does this construction of English Corner say about the changing ideologies of English in China? The next section looks more specifically at who the students are and why they learn English against the larger context of a globalizing China.

6.3 English Market and the Neoliberal Self in a Globalizing China

Since the late 1990s, China’s economy has grown at an unprecedented speed, and the amount of foreign investment and the number of foreign invested companies has kept increasing (Pang, Zhou and Fu 2002). This growing integration with the global market has made preparing personnel with knowledge of business English an important and urgent issue for China’s development. In 2001 for instance, right after Beijing won the bid for the 2008 Olympics, and just a few days before China officially became a member of the World Trade Organization, People’s Daily, one of China’s major national official newspapers, issued a report titled ‘More Chinese Value Communication Skills’. As reported, Stephen E. Lucas, Professor of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin, had arrived to lecture on ‘China, globalization and public speaking’ at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. The participants were said to have acknowledged the need to learn ‘western style communication skills’, and expressed that ‘the cautious Chinese tradition of public speaking’ now needs
some change’ (c.f. section 6.2.1). ‘As China remains the fastest-developing economic power worldwide’, the article ended, ‘more Chinese people have to learn to voice their thoughts in a globally accepted way’ (People’s Daily 2001).

Against this backdrop, two significant changes have been observed in the recent developments of English language education in China: the import of Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT) from western language teaching methods to improve Chinese people’s communicative competence in English since the 1990s, and the privatization and industrialization of English education around the same time.

In contrast to the former emphasis on grammar-structural knowledge, ‘communicative competence in English’ is specified as the main objective of English teaching in a series of national English syllabuses issued in 1992, 1993 and 1996 (Hu 2005: 10-11). At the same time, two national English tests, the Cambridge Business English Certificate (BEC) test, and the China Public English Test System (PETS), with the emphasis on spoken English, were introduced in 1993 and 1999 respectively (Pang, Zhou and Fu 2002: 203). During the first decade of 21st century in particular, CLT as a supposedly advanced western language teaching method was intensely promoted nationwide in educational institutions (Hu and McKay 2012: 347-348). Its implementation, however, turned out to be problematic, for reasons listed as ‘lack of necessary resources, big class size, limited instructional time, teachers’ lack of language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence, examination pressure, and cultural factors’ (Hu 2002: 94; see also Liu 2007: 30-31).
Despite these well acknowledged pedagogical difficulties and ideological critiques (see Block 2002; Pennycook 1994), communicative competence in the English language still bears great importance for Chinese people in general. And improving one’s English outside public educational institutions flourishes thanks to the increasing number of private English training centers. Under the market economy, private enterprises of English language teaching quickly become important players in a fast expanding market of English, with people taking more initiative and making extra financial investment to improve their English (Hu and McKay 2012; Wang 2004). This is evidently reflected in the vibrancy of personal investment on English learning as people aspire to and compete for upward social mobility (Mok and Lo 2007: 5; see Park 2010a, 2011; Park and Lo 2012; Piller and Cho 2013 for the similar case of South Korea). It is against this national context that we see the vibrant development of private language teaching industries (for details, see Wang 2004), like Yangshuo in the present case.

The language learning program in Samuel’s, in particular, defines the way English should be learnt, as justified by the FACES method (see section 4.2), as well as learning objectives, which differ from what is usually expected of an exam-oriented society, in particular when it comes to learning English (Pan and Block 2011). The school, for example, counters the traditional view of learning by defining emphatically its objective in the following way:

Extract 6.5

the purpose of coming to our school should be to quickly improve your language use skills, like speaking, listening, communicating etc. within a short
period of time; If you simply want to improve your grammar or test-taking skills, just don’t come.

The FACES method, therefore, reproduces the ideology of McCommunication (Block 2002). Block (2002: 121) notes that the widely observed tendency of ‘treating interpersonal and workplace-related communication as a set of technical skills that can be defined, made more efficient, quantified, predicted and ultimately controlled’ can be termed McCommunication. This term emphasizes ‘not only that process relies on a frame which over-rationalizes communication, but also that this frame is commodified and spread around the world’. (see also Pennycook 1994: 170-174 for a critique of CLT). It is this commodified and rationalized opportunity to speak with foreigners to practice English, as justified by the FACES method, that attracts students here.

Almost all the students56 I interviewed are working professionals in companies with international businesses, and 17 of them are from Guangdong Province, Guangxi’s neighboring province. They may or may not have college degrees and most are actually working migrants in economically vibrant and competitive cities in southern China. All of them had left or were intending to change their jobs when deciding to come over to learn English. With years of working experience, learning English represents a calculative choice and reflexive decision in relation to the dynamism of the global economy and the labor market (Ong 2007: 4-5), as Jon told me below:

56 The only exception was Lucy. She was learning English to prepare herself for the job market after several years of being a housewife.
Extract 6.6

(Interview with Jon, 36 yrs old, salesperson worked in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for seven months)

Shuang: why did you decide to quit your job?
Jon: because it’s not easy to get more order in the market now….because it is difficult time for many companies. Maybe in this financial crisis, many companies meet, meet, er, er, this difficulty, so so I think I must I have to learn something to improve myself, and looking for another job.

This discourse of improving oneself is also echoed by other participants, as they look forward to ‘the promise of English’ (Park 2011), that is, a better job with higher pay:

Extract 6.7

(Interview with Zed, 25 yrs old, car parts production supervisor, worked in Hunan, had been studying here for more than one year)

Zed: I made a plan about my future, so I came here to study English

Shuang: what is your plan?

Zed: I want to go abroad to study and work there, I quit my job.

…actually that’s why I quitted the job. I didn’t pass the exam for

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57 Interviews with students were carried out mostly in English, though Mandarin was also used occasionally, as explained in section 3.3.1 of Chapter 3. All transcripts are presented in their original forms without editing, here and below. English translations are provided right after the Chinese originals in [bracketed italics].
the job promotion. I was the supervisor in the department, and I had to pass the exam to become the manager. I didn’t pass the exam.

Shuang: what the exam is about?

Zed: it’s about knowledge, and relationship, and professional skills, and also English. Because they use English for the interview, every part I did a good job, but interview it’s very very bad. …They have three men [examiners], they asked me many questions about cars, my hobbies, and something. I didn’t answer, because I didn’t know their meanings. It was not very difficult questions.

Extract 6.8

(Interview with Tina, 22yrs old, salesperson working in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for two months)

Shuang: so English your English is not good enough for your work?

Tina: some of what I learnt from university [about English] is not helpful enough. I want to change another job. They want PET-4 ⁵⁸.

Shuang: you want to change your job, so

Tina: I have no choice.

Shuang: what kind of job, that one needing PET-4 or 5?

Tina: I still want to do international business. I want to be a manager, not just a staff. I don’t always be a staff or worker. If I learn English

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⁵⁸ There are five levels of PETS (the Public English Testing System), from level 1, the most basic, to level 5 the most advanced.
well, I get promotion….I want to handle more business issues. You must very clear, and others. I can’t do it. I have not enough confidence. I have to improve myself.

For all my student participants then, learning English is supposed to better prepare themselves in the increasingly competitive job market in China. In the transformative turn from the planned to a market economy, the assignment system, wherein people’s work should be assigned by the state as an ‘iron rice bowl’ (life-long tenured job), was gradually replaced since the late 1990s by a labor market, which means people were encouraged for the first time to work for a workplace and at a position of their own choice (see Hoffman 2010). But the most extensive changes came after Deng Xiaoping’s South China Tour in 1992 (Bian 2009). The 1992 South China Tour was meant to open China to the market economy through neoliberalism as exception (Ong 2006), and it was at this time that Deng Xiaoping made his famous remark that ‘to be rich is glorious’, re-managing the population by fostering self-actualizing or self-enterprising subjects (Ong 2007: 5). This year marks the beginning of unprecedented mobility in China, both inter-city and rural-urban, with people plunging into the sea of the market, and layoffs since then become the societal routine (Bian 2009: 177).

It is in this historical process that we see the growth of common Chinese professionals, who constitute the emerging Chinese middle class, as both the key players in the rising market economy, and yet also the most direct targets of neoliberal thinking, with constant pressure to become ‘educated and self-managing citizens who can compete in global knowledge markets’ (Ong 2007:
‘Neoliberalism’s metaphor’, as Ong (2007: 5) sharply and succinctly points out, ‘is knowledge’, defined as those skills which can generate economic returns. Under the dual pressure of job insecurity and thus constant need for self-improvement, the Chinese working professionals are supposed to practice ‘self-enterprise and self-reflexivity in the face of market uncertainty’ (Ong 2008: 184), and even have to take further risks, including quitting jobs to learn English, the language that defines what ‘success’ means under globalization, as put forward by the school’s slogan ‘success in English, success in life’ (see figure 6.4; see also Blommaert 2010: 55-56).

However, as indicated earlier, English competence is not just part of the requirement of the labor market. As a technology of self, it is also an indicator of one’s capability and competence, and the lack of could even become a target of contempt from employees. For instance, Amy, with almost ten years’ working experience at an international company, was already a manager in charge of her company’s business transactions with about 19 countries. She nevertheless quitted her job, not just because of her incompetence in English, but also because, she

This does not necessarily mean the total elimination of favorable bureaucracies in seeking employment in China. As Bian (2009) points out, there are still ‘advantageous groups’ who are able to find or keep their jobs through skillfully using the state hierarchy and/or various other social networks and connections (guanxi) (see also Ong 2008). In the words of Philip, ‘it (learning English for upward social mobility) is only for those without relations’.
said, this led to disrespect from her employees. Below is what she told me when I asked her how she decided to learn English:

Extract 6.9

(Interview with Amy, 30yrs old, manager of a company in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for about ten months)

Amy: [While working in Vietnam] I sometimes speak Chinese, sometimes Vietnamese, but I also have assistants for translation. Most of the time, I have to use picture and body language to communicate. So I came here to study English. This is one reason. Another reason, ten years ago I had this dream of studying English, but at that time I did not have enough money. When I came to work in 1997, I was just a worker at the bottom. Though as a worker, I don’t really need English, but at the company, I saw many graduates from universities, they had high salary, and I admired them, so I really want to learn English, to get opportunities, higher position, higher pay.

Shuang: Why English is still important? You had already become a manager…

Amy: Because I want to be 名正言顺的经理 [manager in the real sense of the word]. No complaints from my employees. Sometimes my assistants would compare with me in a quite sensational way. Just like, why you don’t know English and you can get higher salary than us? And if I let them do the translation, 有时候假装没听到,
尤其是 pay day (they sometimes pretended they didn’t hear me, especially when it’s the pay day). I can feel that. Sometimes I asked them to do some extra work, they refused me. They said ‘I don’t like to work overtime, because my salary is too low, my position is low, you can do it, don’t ask us’. @@

Shuang: but you are the manager

Amy: sometimes they just leave the company without getting the salary. They just quit. They told me they think it’s unfair, they think the salary is too low.

Shuang: So what English really means to you?

Amy: I can do my future work well without translators. If I have a high position, I also need an assistant, but not for translating.

In this sense, English has become sociolinguistic stereotype through a neoliberal logic, according to which command of English could not only help maximize profit-making, but maybe more importantly, authenticate a professional identity that must be enacted through the demonstration of English as proof of legitimacy, credibility and authority (Wee 2008: 261-264). In other words, good English which represents dedicated investment on self development, a professional morality and an ideal subject under neoliberalism, lacking which would indicate less initiativeness and commitment, and invite questioning, doubt, distrust or even contempt. As Park (2010a: 25) observes, English has become ‘an index of an ideal way of being in the global world’. It is in this neoliberal turn that
Chinese working professionals in the present research started their quest for English in the hope of a better self and a better future.

The next section looks at more specifically at how students learn English in this English Corner.

6.4 Learning English in Yangshuo

6.4.1 Talking to foreigners all over the place

As already mentioned, talking to foreigners so as to improve English is the very reason that attracts people to come to Yangshuo, as Dan and Zed, two students at Samuel’s (see table 3.2 for a full list of students), said below:

Extract 6.10:

(Interview with Dan, 24yrs old, salesperson working in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for about half a year)

Dan: because we did research, because Yangshuo is good because Yangshuo is so quiet environment, it’s good for study English.

Shuang: why good for study English?

Dan: because I check on the internet, there are so many foreigner person. You know at Shenzhen, if you want to speak to foreigner, they don’t care about it, they don’t care you, because they are business man. They don’t want to talk too much with you. But now, there are so many tourists, foreign tourists, you can speak to so many tourists.

Extract 6.11
(Interview with Zed, 25yrs old, department supervisor at a car parts manufacturing company in Hunan; had been studying in Yangshuo for more than one year)

Shuang: do you think it’s good to learn English here?
Zed: yes. you get many chances to talk with foreigners.
Shuang: you mean at school or just around here?
Zed: both, even the travel guide, the assistants at the restaurants can speak English. I think it’s a wonderful place. Like I just said, there are so many foreigners from different countries, you can hear a lot of different English from different countries, from different people. So I think it’s good for your listening. Also, you can get so many information from other countries, and customs, like traditional things, you can learn so many things.

Like the students, the teachers I interviewed also explained to me how Yangshuo provides many opportunities of interactions for students to practice English. Jason, having taught at the school for almost nine months, even commented on English learning in Yangshuo as below:

Extract 6.12

(Interview with Jason, English language teacher from South Africa)

You know, I know people who have just learnt English from hanging around bars and talking to foreigners. And they tell me like - and they are students even; they come to school - they are like they waste their money in the language school; they can spend less money going to the bar, getting drunk
every night, and they learn a lot more useful English. So I, you know, I try to
tell the students like, a lot of you tell me every day that you study for a long
time, but I never see anybody in town socializing or trying to speak to
foreigners. And then some people who do, and they are, and it does makes big
improvement in their English, you know. So I often tell them like, why don’t
you guys go out, and even if you speak to one foreigner for 30 seconds, and
you leaves, you know. Like, I do always try to encourage them to do that,
because like they might meet someone they never gonna see them again, they
must, they must not feel so shy.

Jason was quick to correct himself when realizing that he might have just said
something inappropriate (we were having the interview in an empty classroom). ‘I
do not say it’s [going to the bar] better’, Jason added,

‘I tell them it can only add, add to their, it’s like, learning, learning to do
something which you’ve never practising, you know. They only have a little
bit of time at classroom to practise. So that’s great you have to come to school
and you’re gonna learn a lot here. But if you go out and practise more, it will
speed up your English learning a lot more faster you know’.

While encouraging students to go out sounds like a valid suggestion, here one
cannot help wondering how exactly students learn at the school, and what kind of
teaching is provided there. From the ten lessons at different levels I observed, the
classroom learning generally proceeds as follows.

Each day, students have three lessons, two morning lessons, one afternoon
lesson, each lasting 100 minutes, with ten minutes’ interim break. Each lesson is
taught by a different teacher, and the contents of the lesson are rather random. The 
school provides no textbooks to work with, so teachers would prepare some 
handouts by themselves, and lead the class to discuss a certain topic of his/her 
own choice (see Figure 6.5). The lessons I observed discussed topics as diverse as 
money management, love, traffic regulation, and others. So I began wondering 
how they decide on what topic to discuss, what to teach, particularly if they teach 
the same class of students. I posed this question to Jason after observing one of 
his lessons. I simply said ‘I am wondering what if you three teachers happen to 
choose the same topic’. He replied quite frankly ‘Well, we are supposed to 
circulate what we would teach, it’s good to know what each other is going to talk 
about, but nobody does that’ (field note, 26 July 2011).
So compared with English lessons in public educational institutions where teaching proceeds according to official syllabuses and guidelines (c.f. Pérez-Milans 2013), the classroom teaching seems less regulated, if not slack, at this
school. But this seemingly deregulated language teaching is at the same time strictly monitored through the implementation of an ‘English Only’ policy. Around the campus, ‘language policemen’, as they call it, would patrol the buildings and issue a warning for the culpable behavior of speaking Chinese (see Figure 6.6). And apart from classroom lessons, a variety of school activities are also provided to maximize students’ interaction with foreigners, including Social Night, Sightseeing, and VIP tutoring session. At Social Night, a weekly activity with different themes such as singing, quiz games or speech competition, teachers would either act as judges or simply be part of the audience enjoying free beer always provided for them by the school. Sightseeing is also occasionally organized which both teachers and students could participate in. In addition, since there are also foreigners learning Chinese at the Chinese Academy of the school, occasionally there are also notices about language exchange partners (see Figure 6.7). This would allow foreign and Chinese students to help each other with English and Chinese respectively. And at the same time, as Jason said, there are always enormous opportunities to practise by simply going out and talking with foreign travelers.

Figure 6.6 ‘I am sorry for speaking Chinese’. Photo by author, 2011.
In this way, students are expected not only to learn from teachers inside the classroom, but take the initiatives to explore the many opportunities in Yangshuo, as Philip, the English language teacher from Canada, said about learning English here:

‘if someone really want to learn English, you have all the chance in the world to practice their English, you know. You can go to a bar, you know, to chat with different kind of traveler every day, and at the school they can speak English 8 hours a day, even when outside the class, they speak English with us, we speak English with them. So er it’s a big opportunity for them’.
As can be seen, learning English in Yangshuo is not regulated by explicit syllabuses or guidelines (c.f. Pérez-Milans 2013), but is strictly monitored through the ‘English Only’ rule in order to maximize English speaking opportunities for students. However, this seemingly abundant opportunity to use and practice English, anywhere inside or outside campus, is nevertheless constrained as we shall see.

6.4.2 Intrusive exploitations of interaction: Foreigners’ perspectives

Yangshuo people have a name for foreigners who stay in Yangshuo for quite some time: local foreigners (本地老外 bèndì lǎowài). Having lived here long enough, local foreigners are active participants in the social and touristic life around Yangshuo and, to some extent, belong to the Yangshuo community and know it quite well. Peter, the English teacher from the US, had stayed at this school for the longest period of time among all the teachers I knew. This was his second time teaching at Samuel’s, amounting to a total of about two years. In reply to my question ‘why do you think here it has so many language schools?’, he said:

Extract 6.13

Well, I think first, it is a tourist area. So it attracted some foreign tourists. And then they start to develop like a really small foreign culture. So it started to become an easy place to practice your English. Because you know, one of the things I tell the students here, you know, the best way to learn English or learn any language is by immersion. That’s how I learn a little bit of Chinese and Japanese, just because I was lucky enough to live in those two countries. So I
said the best way is actually go to England, or Australia, or America, or something like that. But if you can’t do that, then you should go to like a bar, in West Street. Maybe you know, you can just buy a beer for a foreigner, and try to have a conversation with them, something like. So it’s an easy place for them to practice. So people who want to study English are obviously attracted to this place.

Drawing on his own language learning experience, Peter compares going to bars with immersion learning, and justifies this by comparing to his own learning of Chinese in China and Japanese in Japan. But since Peter had already mentioned to me during our interview at an earlier point that what he was ‘just interested in rock climbing’, and ‘not some person interested in bars, clubs’, I asked further:

Extract 6.14

Shuang: I think just now you mentioned you would suggest your students to go to the bars to talk with foreigners, and

Peter: yeap.

Shuang: but you yourself don’t go there, right?

Peter: em.

Shuang: I’m wondering whether you have the experience of you are kind of walking or, walking on the street, and eating somewhere at the restaurant, and someone try to talk to you, to practice their English?

Peter: yeap. This has happened many times.

Shuang: many times?
Peter: yeap.
Shuang: em, so how do you feel?
Peter: em. Well, usually I don’t have time, right, and I would say I’m sorry but I’m going somewhere, sorry I can’t. But sometimes, if I have some free time, it’s a, it’s a good opportunity for me, also to try to practice some Chinese. So if they want to come and talk to me, that’s okay, but I would prefer to speak just in Chinese, you know, well, if I can. So it’s a good opportunity for me to practice also. But, to be honest, I don’t think I’m not a very outgoing kind of person. Em, so I don’t know. It’s not, I’m usually not really excited. I mean if I want to do this, it’s very easy for me to go to West Street and find someone, like a Chinese person to talk to. But I don’t really like this environment, so I don’t know. I don’t usually have conversations like this, with er people who want to practice this English. But I think maybe maybe some other foreigners are little bit more outgoing, em, especially people that are here for a shorter time, and maybe they’re interested having this kind of experience you know, maybe it’s more suitable for them.

While Peter considered talking to foreigners as the second best way (as opposed to going to England, Australia etc.) to learn English, here he excludes himself from his own proposal by saying that ‘I’m not a very outgoing kind of person’ and this might be something others might have interest in (‘some other
foreigners are little bit more outgoing’; ‘maybe they’re interested having this kind of experience’). This contradictory self-exclusion, as we shall see, is not simply a matter of temperament (‘outgoing’ or not), as Peter himself claimed. When he added that ‘especially people that are here for a shorter time’ would be interested, he seemed to imply that if having stayed longer, foreigners would know better about why they are constantly approached for a talk in English, including teachers themselves. Then, exactly what kind of interactions do students and teachers have, and why would teachers tend to avoid such interactions?

One afternoon, I was sitting on a bench outside the school building, having a small chat with a couple of teachers. Several students then walked out from the building and eagerly ‘helloed’ to join the conversation. ‘Not a moment’s break’, Philip whispered helplessly to another teacher, Sam. When the students came over and sat down, one of them asked Sam with not so fluent English, ‘Are you a new teacher? Because I haven’t seen you before’. ‘I’ve been here for about one week’, he replied, ‘and you?’ ‘I am an old student. I have been here for for three three weeks’. Obviously, she was searching for the word ‘week’. ‘I thought you were going to say three months’, he looked at Philip and they grinned to each other (field note, 8 July 2011). Seeing this, I was reminded of the interview I had with Sam several days earlier (4 July 2011). Reflecting on his experience of being approached just for a talk in English, he said

Extract 6.15

‘Sometimes talking to a person with low English competence can be stressful. You have to change your mind a little bit. You know, you have to think slower,
and talk slower, and listen very carefully, and it’s like teaching, you know.

Sometimes you feel like if you get paid’.

As he finished, he looked at me with an awkward smile. On the one hand, he
did teach at the language school and got paid for his work. Yet on the other hand,
being constantly approached for a talk in English outside his official teaching
hours made him feel being unreasonably exploited of his linguistic capital.

Adjusting to the interlocutor’s pace of talk (‘think slower, talk slower’), being
more attentive (‘listen very carefully’) and spending greater efforts to figure out
meanings of interaction (‘change your mind a little bit’), these otherwise
unnecessary accommodations make interacting with students seem like doing
extra work without payment (‘sometimes you feel like if you get paid’). In this
sense, while teaching English here is just a means for Sam to get some extra
money in order to better enjoy traveling around Yangshuo, his very presence in
Yangshuo turns out to be a fact to be further utilized – a compromised use of
linguistic capital that he had to, and chose to, live with.

This is not to say that interactions between students and teachers could never
be pleasant. During Social Night events, for instance, I always saw students and
teachers interact and even pose for photos together. These happy moments are
also published on the school’s website. My initial thought on the Social Events
was that it was nice that the school organizes these varied kinds of activities. At
least, compared with lessons inside the classrooms, these activities, like quiz,
speech competition, singing competition, seemed to be more interesting activities
for both the students and the teachers. Or, just for me.
One day after school, I was sitting by the river with Philip, and somehow (or maybe me intentionally) we started chatting about his work at the school. At one point, I mentioned that the school seemed to have many interesting activities, like the Social Night. Hearing this, he immediately gave me a serious look and asked rhetorically ‘what do you think the Social Night is about?’ ‘It’s just for the students to have more chance to speak with foreigners, you know’, he answered himself in a complaining tone. ‘*All* the students come to you and talk. The school just wants to make them happy. That’s the secret!’ (field note, 9 July 2011).

Indeed, that day immediately after my interview with Peter, I asked whether he was going upstairs to the Social Night. ‘Yes, I will’, he replied. As he finished his banana and threw the peel into the wastebasket, he added, ‘you know, I wanted to start our interview earlier because they [the school] just told me this afternoon, they want me to be the judge of the speech competition [the theme of that day’s Social Night]. I definitely wouldn’t go if they hadn’t asked me’ (field note, 14 July 2011).

As we see, putting on a smiling face and actively interacting with students is the inevitable cost that these foreign teachers have to pay for utilizing their own linguistic capital as English teachers. But even in their personal time when socializing in bars, they tend to be constantly disturbed by conversation seekers. In the extract below, I talked about this with Steve when he raised the issue of always ‘bumping into’ students at bars:

Extract 6.16

*(Interview with Steve, English language teacher from Ireland)*
Shuang: You just mentioned at the bars, there are many Chinese students, so have they ever tried to talk to you in English?

Steve: sure, yeah.

Shuang: how do you feel?

Steve: I am talking to one now. @@ I am joking. … Of course, you are always, I mean, you gonna talk to people, and chances are that some of them are going to be students; some of them are going to be on holidays. En, yeah, that’s fine maybe. I mean they usually, er, you bumped into them, or after school you see them there.

Shuang: so why do you think the Chinese students love going there?

Steve: maybe because there’s western people speaking English, they want to practice their English. They want to experience more of our culture, where we are more relaxed and maybe comfortable. That’s why. If I was Chinese, that’s why I go.

Shuang: do you think it’s kind of boring to have a conversation with them?

Steve: of course not. If they are talking rubbish, then yeah, but they are not, you know. I mean, it all depends on the individual. I’ve talked to so many. They just so, maybe they’ve got very little English, or maybe they are just repeating themselves, of course, that’s boring. I don’t want to, it’s now my social time. I have got no time teaching them English, so people like them, you know, I’ll just finish the conversation, and talk to my friends or someone else. But, if somebody is willing, or you can have a laugh you can have
a joke with somebody, of course I will speak, but if it’s too much work, and I am not interested, well then no, it’s my time off, I’m gonna have fun. But I won’t be rude.

Here, Steve first attempted to avoid directly answering my question by invoking my Chinese identity (‘I am talking to one now’) in a joking manner, and then provided a more or less neutral answer ‘that’s fine maybe’. But after my further inquires, he acknowledged that while there might be interesting conversations wherein ‘you can have a laugh you can have a joke’, he also had ‘talked to so many’ who ‘got very little English and kept ‘repeating themselves’. In such situations, he would thus have to try to exit from the conversations to safeguard his own social time (‘it’s now my social time. I have got no time teaching them English’ ‘it’s my time off, I’m gonna have fun’).

So overall, on the one hand, we see that for foreign teachers, their English acquires economic value in this English Corner that might not be available to them in their home countries (Blommaert et al 2005; Cho 2012), and they can take on English teaching jobs to finance their touristic interests in Yangshuo. But on the other, the control of their own linguistic capital is limited in certain ways, because they have to constantly deal with students both around and outside campus who want to practise English with them. Making the effort either to patiently try to understand their interlocutors or to find an exit from undesirable conversations thus becomes an inherent dilemma involved in optimizing their own linguistic capital.
While foreign teachers are generally the easiest to meet and talk with on a daily basis, there are also other foreigners who could serve as potential interlocutors for English students. As already mentioned, it is the opportunity to practise English everywhere and anywhere in Yangshuo that attracts students in the first place (section 6.4.1). Kay, who comes from South Africa and has been running his coffee shop here since 2010, told me how over time he has learnt to avoid such interactions:

Extract 6.17

(Interview with Kay, South African, at his coffee shop)

Shuang: When you walk around here, have you ever been stopped for a talk in English?
Kay: Yes. Many times.
Shuang: so, what they are trying to talk with you?
Kay: erm most of them, it’s basically very basic English; some of the time, they’ve got projects from the schools. And there’s one project. One school makes them collect names. Just every day they have to collect either 18 or 20 names.
Shuang: oh, foreigners’ names?
Kay: yes.
Shuang: for what?
Kay: as far as I can see, it’s only, it’s just attempt to create interaction, to have them speak with foreigners. But all they do, they walk up
to you, and they say, please write your name, your email, maybe and little comments in a small book.

Shuang: okay.

Kay: that’s what they want. Some of the students want to speak to you. But when you do speak with them, [it’s] very basic, and it becomes boring very quickly.

Shuang: @

Kay: It’s short questions. They always ask where are you from? do you like china? how many cities have you been to in china? how many countries have you been to? and so, it’s just, it tends to be quite boring.

Shuang: okay, so do you just try to avoid them?

Kay: probably for the first year here, I didn’t try to avoid them. But now, I do. Yes.

While these pseudo-attempts for interaction (‘please write your name, your email, maybe and little comments’) or repetitive simple questions (‘where are you from? do you like China? how many cities have you been to in China? how many countries have you been to?’) on the street make talking with students rather dull and boring, there are also other concerns for him. Since he operates this coffee shop, there are also regular customers who would come and speak to him ‘just as a foreigner’, as he told me below:

Extract 6.18
Kay: There are a couple that come in and just want to speak to me, just as a foreigner. Er originally I used to give them a lot more time, I talk with them maybe for half an hour, now talk maybe three or four minutes,

Shuang: okay

Kay: but but otherwise just take too much time.

Shuang: why do you think they want to talk with you?

Kay: er, for just practice their English. For a lot of people they’ve never spoken to a foreigner, even in Yangshuo many people never actually spoken to foreigner.

And to make the story more complicated, there are also people who want to work for him because he ‘always speak[s] English, because customers speak English’:

Extract 6.19

Shuang: em for your employees, you are, the waiter or waitress here, do you require them to speak English?

Kay: it’s important that there is always a person here that can speak English, but you don’t need anybody to speak English. Er, all the people that have worked here have been learning English

Shuang: okay

Kay: so generally they work here more to practice their English than to earn money.

Shuang: more to practice their English than earn money?
Kay: yes.

Shuang: really?

Kay: yes. A lot of, a lot of students in Yangshuo work at, work at bars, work at restaurants because they just want to be in a place where people do speak English. They want to be here because I always speak English, because customers speak English. It’s good, it’s just practice for their English….a lot of people, a lot of students especially, a lot of people ask to be volunteers

Shuang: really?

Kay: yes. They asked to, they say they’ll work for free

Shuang: oh, for free?

Kay: yes.

Shuang: so you love that?

Kay: well, no. it’s actually not good. At first I said okay, but they don’t last. They, they may work for one day, they only want to do the nice work, they don’t want to do the bad work. They don’t want to wash the cups. They only want to make the coffees, and serve the customers. Er, we’ve tried that. It’s not good. So even now if a person comes and said I want to work for free, I’d say you can work, but I’ll pay you.

Shuang: that means you can have more requirements on them?

Kay: yes.
Kay had stayed in Yangshuo partly for its nice countryside scenery and simple lifestyle. But different from the teachers, he had no intention of making use of his English as linguistic capital. Nevertheless, in this English Corner where English is commodified for language learning, he is also subjected to the prevalent demand for improving spoken English, being constantly approached on the street and inside his own coffee shop. While this might not completely work against him because he could even get free labor, this seemingly nice offer does not always work well when work has become a means to an end of learning English.

6.4.3 Excitements, frustrations, and strategies: Students’ perspectives

For students, this opportunity of talking to foreigners is the very reason they have come to Yangshuo in the first place. But since, as we have already seen, their potential interlocutors may or may not be ready to talk with them, they always encounter difficulties in either initiating or sustaining conversations. Mary, who had studied at the school for about half a year, described trying to speak with foreigners for the first time as follows:

Extract 6.20

(Interview with Mary, 27yrs old, salesperson and human resource personnel working in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for half a year)

Mary: nervous, not know how to express my meaning, just one word, one word, very slowly. The foreign friend is very friendly. He also know a little Chinese. So we talk for half an hour.

Shuang: where?
Mary: [name of bar]. But I say English sentence, very little. The other classmate together. We play the card, joker [poker?], finally we sing songs. I sing Chinese songs. And he sing English songs.

Shuang: how do you think of the first conversation with foreigners?

Mary: exciting. We are still contacting each other. He’s from Australian. Now he’s in Shantou, and we Skype.

Shuang: you really find a good friend, right?

Mary: but sometimes I can’t find the topic to talk, half an hour, and don’t know how to continue.

Shuang: do you have the experience, the foreigner say, oh no sorry,

Mary: yes, many times. Because they know we want to practice our English, so they go away.

Here we see that while Mary only managed to speak only a little English (‘just one word, one word, very slowly’, ‘I say English sentence, very little’), she characterized her experience as ‘exciting’. Yet at the same time, she also encountered the problems of not knowing what to talk about or simply being ignored. Tina, who had been studying here for about two months, also recounted similar experiences of not knowing how to carry the conversation further. Since she had always wanted to talk to foreigners, she considered not being able to sustain the conversation a ‘pity’:

Extract 6.21

(Interview with Tina, 22yrs old, salesperson working in Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for two months)
Shuang: you just said on [name of road] sometimes there are many foreigners there, and, for you to talk to them in English

Tina: But sometimes I don’t have enough communicate with them, I have not enough topic to talk with them, and they will feel very boring, and @@ go away @@.

Shuang: okay, can you tell me more about this experience?

Tina: em, sometimes, for example, we sit in the bar and with my classmates, and the foreigner just came here and said ‘hello’, and I then I say ‘hello’, and then we have no topic@@ Sometimes I think it’s very embarrassing, because we can’t communicate with them, oh my god, what a pity, because we want so much to talk with them.

Many students, just like Tina and Mary, were eager to talk to foreigners, but yet always had difficulties in either find someone to talk with (‘Because they know we want to practise our English, so they go away’; ‘they will feel very boring, and @@ go away @@’), or did not know how to continue the conversation (‘don’t know how to continue’; ‘we have no topic@@ Sometimes I think it’s very embarrassing’). However, Carl, who has been studying here for about two months, had come up with some strategies for finding the right foreigner to talk with:

Extract 6.22
(Interview with Carl, 28yrs old, business owner from Guangdong; had been studying in Yangshuo for two months)

Carl: I usually go to bar, conversation with foreigner

Shuang: oh, really, how was that?

Carl: en, so so

Shuang: how did you try to start talking with them?

Carl: em I think foreigners em like beer, er he he usually oftenly sit in bar, er only drink beer, 我可以过去跟他聊天，外国人一般不会拒绝 [I can walk over and talk to him, foreigners don’t decline generally].

Shuang: how do you usually start?

Carl: er he is very very polite,

Shuang: polite?

Carl: em polite, polite. Em, er, if he only sit here, 他一般不会拒绝。[Usually he will not decline]

Shuang: so what do you usually talk with them?

Carl: em?

Shuang: what do you talk about?

Carl: talk about China, Yangshuo, foreign country, emmmm, 气候怎么说？[What’s ‘climate’ in English?]

Shuang: climate?

Carl: oh, climate, climate, 反正很多 anyway, a lot}
Shuang: do you think that’s helpful

Carl: yeah, help, helpful. … I came with my friends, four or three together, conversation with foreign, foreigner, if I I only talk with foreigner, er, @@ I speak a little time, I talked a little time 只能说一会，然后就没什么说的了，一般是 3、4 人一起，这个不会那个说一下,这样会时间长一点吧，如果我一个人在那跟他说的话，说两句，不知道说哪里去@@ [I can only speak for a little while, and then have nothing to say. So usually we three or four people go together. If one person doesn’t know what to say, then another person can try to say something. This way, we can talk for a longer time. If I were there alone talking with him, maybe after two sentences, I don’t know what to say next @@] …

If many people together, 我不会过去[I won’t go], if em, he only sit one there, em maybe @@ talk with foreigner

Shuang: en, you mean en you see the foreigner alone, one person, she or he alone, you will try to talk with them?

Carl: yes.

Shuang: that’s quite a clever way of starting a conversation.

Carl: quite …clever?

Shuang: clever, you know clever?

Carl: oh yes.

Shuang: I mean you are clever to find that kind of foreigner to…so who got this idea, your teacher told you?
Carl: Yangshuo's students er all know. 都知道[Everybody knows].

Maybe students come to Yangshuo, study English because there’s there're a lot of foreigner in Yangshuo, so there are a lot of em English school in Yangshuo.

Shuang: em.

Here, Carl opted for the strategy of finding foreigners sitting alone, who tend to be more easily approached than those with friends; also he would go together with several other classmates so that there might always be someone to fill in the otherwise embarrassing silent moments. Another student Lora, having studied for about four months, had come up with a different way to learn. While not being able to say much or anything, simply sitting there for her is a good way to practise listening:

Extract 6.23

(Interview with Lora, 24yrs old, logistics worker in Guangdong, now planning to be a salesperson; had been studying in Yangshuo for four months)

Lora: if you go to bar, there are a lot of foreigner. We always go to [name] bar, and now we also go to [name] bar. Just follow them [my friends] to go to the bar. Sometimes we just talk about job, and habit. … foreign people also talk about travelling. When I went [name] bar, I just sat there quietly and listen to others, classmate. Said nothing. I didn’t say anything.

Shuang: why?
Lora: I can’t listen clearly, listen, listen@@ … even though I can’t speak, but I can listen, I believe several times later you can speak and your listening will be better.

Another student, Lucy, chose to take a different way to talk with foreigners by planning to work in West Street after finishing her study at the school:

Extract 6.24

(Interview with Lucy, 28yrs old, housewife, now planning to look for a job; had been studying in Yangshuo for five months)

Lucy: maybe after I study here, maybe I will find a part-time job here at some beer bar, about one month or two months, just to practice my oral English, and then go back to my home, find a good job.

Shuang: okay, you are planning that?

Lucy: yeah. first, I need learn some new vocabulary, you must, if you have talk, if you go to the bar, you must talk about different parts, low, you must er involve different parts, different industry, you must learn some vocabulary about this, this industry, so for me, now I must learn something, and enlarge my, enrich my knowledge.

Shuang: okay, do you think you have a better chance to get the job at the bar than others?

Lucy: might be. because you know, in West Street, there are a lot of the hotel, and the bar, and the shop, so they want to hire someone who can speak English, it’s, it’s easy to attract the foreign customers,
because you know when you when you, the foreign customer, the
foreigner customer want to buy something, you can communicate
with them, there and then you can sell something, you can profit,
you can make money. This very re, re energy

Shuang: do you have an idea which bar you want to go to?
Lucy: do you know there is a small hotel, [hotel name, a hotel with roof
bar]?
Shuang: oh, yeah.
Lucy: you know, you know as waitress, you can talk with foreigners for
free, you know
Shuang: there are many foreigners?
Lucy: yeah, maybe as a waitress because you can work there, and you
will get friends with customers, not customers, travelers. You can
talk with them, you know.
Shuang: okay
Lucy: but if you work at some restaurant, my everyday you must wash
plate, or clean the house, and table, you do not have so many
chances to talk with foreigners. But if you work in a hotel, it’s
different.

Here, we see that students are eager to practise their English but at the same
time are constantly frustrated by an inability to sustain long conversations, or
simply by being ignored by foreigners. However, these difficulties were tackled
by some students who might strategically manipulate the structure of conversation,
that is, multiple people engaging in conversations with solo travelers, or adopt the more passive role of a quiet listener so as to improve listening over time, or even taking a different method by working at West Street.

6.5 Talking to Foreigners: A Precarious Genre

So far, I have spent quite some length describing how the so-called ‘biggest English Corner in China’ was established in the first place and how it works. Based on a folk method called the ‘FACES successful English learning method’, this English Corner gained popularity by providing an otherwise unavailable opportunity to practise English with foreigners. I have also shown how interactions between foreigners and language learners often involve tension for both parties. On the one hand, foreigners who felt the conversation was simple and boring would find an exit from the conversation, or, as they learned better, would simply keep students at bay, in order to avoid being exploited of their linguistic capital. On the other hand, students would find ways to talk with foreigners, and failing to do so could be a source of regret. This constant search for an exit from conversations by one party, combined with the more or less persistent effort to engage in conversation by the other, is what I would like to characterize as interactional straining. This is meant to describe the clashing effort each party spends on negotiating or manipulating potential interaction, with one strategically entering into and sustaining while the other might attempt to avoid and exit from encounters, regardless of whether conversation actually occurs (ignored or not), how it proceeds (boring or not), and how it ends (sustained or not).
There is an obvious mismatch, though students can also successfully pass as legitimate interlocutors on some occasions. So how to make sense of this tension? And how such interactional straining is related to the image of an entrepreneurial self for these working professionals? In this section, I first explain how tensions around the interaction between students and foreigners can be interpreted as a clash of activity type (Levinson 1979), and then show the implications of interactional straining for understanding ‘self-enterprise and self reflexivity’ (Ong 2008: 184) in a neoliberalizing China.

First, claiming that students have poor linguistic competence only provides a partial explanation. While some students do need to look for the right expressions or have to repeat themselves (e.g. see extract 6.15), there are also cases when students could somehow sustain conversations for a period of time, according both to foreigners and to students themselves (e.g. see extract 6.18, 6.22). Actually some students who had arrived with little English told me they would only start finding foreigners to talk with after learning more English. Also, saying that students have poor social skills fail to account for the fact that some students are well aware that ‘they may feel we are boring’ (see extracts 6.20, 6.21), and some are able to come up with strategies to avoid potential interactional breakdown (e.g. extract 6.22).

The tension involved in these conversations, I would suggest, arises from the different ways the interlocutors involved conceptualize the potential interactions on hand, including what topic might be relevant (e.g. extract 6.17), how the conversation should proceed (e.g. extract 6.16), and most important of all, what
the purposes of these interactions are (e.g. extract 6.17). All these can actually be explained by drawing on Levinson’s concept of activity type, which ‘refers to any culturally recognized activity … whose local members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions’ (Levinson 1979: 368, italics original).

And ultimately it is the purpose/goal of the activity that constrains what counts as allowable contributions:

In general wherever possible I would like to view these structural elements as rationally and functionally adapted to the point or goal of the activity in question, that is the function or functions that members of the society see the activity as having. (Levinson 1979: 369, italics original).

We have seen in section 6.4 that for foreigners, socializing around Yangshuo in their private free time means having fun and enjoying themselves, or in the case of Kay, having casual talk with customers is part of his business life. But for students, hanging out round with foreigners is less about simply relaxing and having fun, and more about strategically exploiting the opportunities of practising spoken English through what seems like a casual talk, sometimes to the point of going beyond ‘allowable contributions’ to a casual conversation (Levinson 1979).

Due to the limitations of my data, which consist of reports of interaction elicited in interviews, I do not have the evidential base that would allow me to pinpoint the exact interactional details, showing how these structural constraints are
manipulated or violated. But generally speaking, we can safely say that it is this talking at cross-purposes that poses potential conflicts in interaction.

Meanwhile, though there might be interactional difficulties due to conflicting orientations to activity type within the same encounter, we have also seen that there are cases where students get to manage the interaction more or less successfully. If different activity types have constraints on allowable verbal contributions, then exactly how do some interactions manage to pass as legitimate? To answer this question, a more nuanced understanding of interactional activities is required, and I will suggest some explanation by drawing on Goffman (1963) for a depiction of how verbal communication is regulated and structured in public places.

First, physical co-presence in public places makes people accessible to each other for potential interaction, though there are regulations regarding how this accessibility should be managed (Goffman 1963: 22). Whether around campus outside of class hours, on the street, or in bars, both foreigners and students are in an open position, that is, they are accessible for interaction, though this is based on the assumption of mutual goodwill and that no one should be forced into conversations or presumptuous overtures (Goffman 1963:134-136). In particular, ‘persons sitting at the bar in a tavern are, by customary rule, in an especially open position relative to those sitting next to them’ (Goffman 1963: 134), and this explains why bars tend to be a place mentioned both by foreigners and students as one of the most accessible places to find someone to talk with (see e.g. extract
Sitting there alone in particular may make one more accessible to interaction (extract 6.22).

Second, while there are social regulations in managing this accessibility, possible gains from engaging in conversations may well encourage people to adopt strategies so as to accomplish uninformed ends (Goffman 1963: 139). In other words, despite the constraints on possible contributions, there might often be leeway for strategic manipulation and intervention. This is made possible partly because there are often multi-activities going on within the same episode, as Goffman explained below:

‘Men and animals have a capacity to divide their attention into main and side involvements. A main involvement is one that absorbs the major part of an individual’s attention and interest, visibly forming the principal current determinant of his actions. A side involvement is an activity that an individual can carry on in an abstracted fashion without threatening or confusing simultaneous maintenance of a main involvement. Whether momentary or continuous, simple or complicated, these side activities appear to constitute a kind of fugue-like dissociation of minor muscular activity from the main line of an individual’s action. Humming while working and knitting while listening are examples’ (Goffman 1963: 43, italics original).

‘Along with the distinction between main and side involvements, we must make another that can easily be confused with the first. We must distinguish between dominant and subordinate involvements. A dominating involvement is one whose claims upon an individual the social occasion obliges him to be
ready to recognize; a subordinate involvement is one he is allowed to sustain only to a degree, and during the time, that his attention is patently not required by the involvement that dominates him. Subordinate involvements are sustained in a muted, modulated, and intermittent fashion, expressing in their style a continuous regard and deference for the official, dominating activity at hand. Thus, while waiting to see an official, an individual may converse with a friend, read a magazine, or doodle with a pencil, sustaining these engrossing claims on attention only until his turn is called, when he is obliged to put aside his time-passing activity even though it is unfinished’ (Goffman 1963: 44, italics original).

For students, having conversation with foreigners is a multi-task that they set up for themselves. While they may also drink and socialize with each other, once opportunities are available for practising English, like when the loud music stops or they see foreigners sitting there alone by themselves, they may engage themselves with task of practising their English. During these interactions, practising spoken English might be a side involvement carried out in a non-intrusive and innocent manner; or there might be occasions when learning English becomes the main and dominant activity, as when students ask for repetition or spelling of words. This could result in complaints from foreigners as to whether such interactions are part of work or social time (extracts 6.15, 6.16).

Third, on a related note, some conversations may pass because the same genre can always be used for different purposes. For example, when students choose to work at the bars, serving the customers then becomes an easily accessible chance
to speak and practise their English (extract 6.24). As Bauman (1999: 86) observes, ‘certain genres may become the object of special ideological focus’. Indeed, ‘it would be misleading … to assume … that there is a one-to-one correlation between genres and speech events’. (Bauman 1999: 85). So these supposedly casual conversations may well be strategically manipulated and employed for unexpected generic purposes, including practicing spoken English.

Fourth, it takes experience for the people concerned to know what kind of social situation they are actually in, that is, the goals of these supposedly casual social encounters. Over time, the innocence of these encounters tends to be threatened because of prior experience of being intrusively exploited (c.f. Goffman 1963: 141-142). This partly explains how teachers themselves, with prior knowledge of this somehow spoilt interaction, would refrain from such undertakings themselves, but would ‘kindly’ suggest to students that they should go to talk someone who they may never see again (see extracts 6.12, 6.13).

All in all, talking to foreigners, as we have seen, turns out to be a precarious genre. In order to practise English with foreigners, students are caught in interactional straining. They have to carefully manage the seemingly convenient accessibility of foreigners, exploit opportunities amid constraints, and skillfully

60 Speech event is more or less an equivalent term to activity type, as Levinson (1979: 367-368) explained: ‘There are various terms that are employed by sociologists and anthropologists engaged in the study of language usage which are roughly equivalent, especially “speech event” and “episode”. My notion is to be preferred for present purposes because it refers to any culturally recognized activity, whether or not that activity is co-extensive with a period of speech or indeed whether any talk takes place in it at all’.
sustain the conversation, so as to preempt possible avoidance and being ignored. This way of learning English differs from English learning within formal educational institutions in China, wherein learning tends to be exam-oriented and the learning process is subjected to more or less regimented procedures and guidelines (Pan and Block 2011; Pérez-Milans 2013). Learning English in Yangshuo corresponds more to the model of a proactive and self-responsible learner, for whom the neoliberal logic of autonomy and self-government gets ‘incorporated into the common-sense way’ of interpreting and living the world (Harvey 2005: 5, as cited in Holborow 2012: 42; see also Park 2010a: 28). And these constraints and tensions, as observed here, derive not from misunderstanding or breakdown in intercultural communication involving foreign language users (c.f. Kramsch and Boner 2010; Kramsch and Thorne 2002), but from clash of communicative goals which both parties in interaction may well likely be aware of. For English language learners in particular, their involvement in and navigation of the tensions inherent in interactional straining shows that English language learners are knowing subjects who, despite potential ambivalence and constraints, work out strategies and taking the initiatives for self-care and personal development (Foucault 1988; Ong 2007, 2008). Therefore, as they seek to explore these language learning opportunities amid constraints in this English Corner, the students exemplify proactive English learning an essential aspect of technologies of the self (Foucault 1988).

6.6 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have shown how English language in Yangshuo has come to acquire economic value in the turn towards a market economy through neoliberalism as exception (Ong 2006). From the establishment of the first private language school in 1993 to what is now said to be the ‘biggest English Corner’ in China, Yangshuo has been tentatively experimenting with commodifying English and then managing moving subjects who embody the valuable resource of English, that is international travelers. Learning English in Yangshuo is justified through a widely mediatized folk language method, the so-called FACES successful learning method, and its popularity corresponds to the changing ideologies of English in a globalizing China where English is becoming an index of middle class professional identity. Specifically, the language learners in my research, coming from the competitive labor market and working in lower middle class positions in small scale international companies, constitute the ever increasing middle class workforce in China as they work hard to secure a better position up the social ladder.

I have also shown that the seemingly endless opportunities to interact with foreigners, anywhere and anytime in Yangshuo, are actually constrained. Foreigners might find the conversation too simple, repetitive or boring to be continued, or as they know better, might simply try to avoid such interactions; students, on the other hand, have learnt to come up with strategies to initiate or sustain conversations. This constant manipulation of interaction is what I have called interactional straining. Being a proactive English learner by seeking and utilizing interactional opportunities amid constraints in Yangshuo, the students
corresponds to an image of neoliberal self who makes calculative decision, takes initiatives and risks, and explores opportunities for self-improvement.
Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo, so as to contribute to our understanding of the sociolinguistics of globalization. The major questions addressed are:

- How has West Street become a ‘global village’ and ‘English Corner’?
- What are the tensions arising from this socio-historical change?
- What is the role of language and communication in the tensions that arise from the re-imagination of West Street as a global village and English Corner?

In addressing these questions, I have looked at data collected both online and during three-month fieldwork. These include promotional discourses, tourist writings online, (participant) observations, interviews, documents, and signage. In analyzing these data, I have drawn on insights from sociolinguistics, tourism studies, human geography, and applied linguistics to provide multidimensional analytical perspectives into the ‘global village’.

In Chapter 4, I looked at the branding of West Street as a ‘global village’ for domestic Chinese tourists. Examining the ‘global village’ at the local-national-global nexus, I argued that the ‘global village’ cannot be understood simply be seen as a result of globalization or westernization. Rather, the construction of the ‘global village’ involves appropriation and commodification of English, which in
turn reproduces ideologies of English in China as a status marker. Such ideologies
do not go without contestations, but are negotiated by tourists. This is shown in
the varied stances post-tourists and anti-tourists exhibited in their online writings.

In Chapter 5, I examined the local spatial dynamics arising from the
transformation of West Street from a former neighborhood to space for touristic
entertainment during the past three decades of development. I showed that this
process involves demographic, geographical, and semiotic reconfigurations of the
local and creates tensions among different groups of people who are variously
positioned to this changing place. Focusing on two major local groups on West
Street, the first-wave businesspersons and the local foreigners, I showed that the
‘global village’ is not a space of frictionless flows, but are fraught with tensions
around the use of space.

The tensions are further is explored in Chapter 6. Here, I showed that the
promotion of the place as an ‘English Corner’ has been attracting working
professionals from neighboring provinces. The social significance of English
within the Chinese context means that English bears great importance for upward
mobility in the job market. Students, who were mainly former working
professionals, are attracted to Yangshuo for this otherwise unavailable
opportunity to interact and practice English with English-speaking foreigners.
Examining this pursuit of interactional English from the perspectives of both
students and foreigners, I showed how communication between them can be
characterized as interactional straining. I suggest that by navigating themselves
among ambivalence and constraint, the working professionals exemplify what is meant by technology of self in a neoliberalizing China.

Overall, the transformation of West Street, Yangshuo from a traditional neighborhood into a tourism site of cosmopolitan ‘global village’ capitalizes on the emerging Chinese consumption culture characterized by conspicuous consumption and quest for modernity, wherein the English language as one semiotic resource is explored but nevertheless caught in tensions among different social groups in terms of the construction, negotiation, and contestation of the indexicality of English as a language for globality, modernity, and upward social mobility. I hope I have shown that throughout that the so-called ‘global village’ is as much a discursive construct as an imagined one, and its meaning and significance varies for different groups of people.

7.2 Implications

In this section, I discuss the implications of this research for our understanding of the sociolinguistics of globalization, tourism studies, English language studies, and China studies.

7.2.1 Sociolinguistics of globalization

As I mentioned in chapter 2, the tourism site of West Street, Yangshuo presents an important case for understanding sociolinguistics in relation to globalization, mobility, locality and historicity.

First, adopting a perspective of globalization that is sensitive to mobilities in specific local and historical contexts, I have shown throughout the empirical chapters that the ‘global village’ of West Street, Yangshuo in particular, and the
meaning of globalization in general, is not to be understood through the grand statement of homogenization and westernization. Rather the meaning of globalization is constructed through both tourism discourses and contested through the varied experiences of globalization by different people. Globalization, as Blommaert (2010: 1) suggests, ‘has spawned its own discourses-on-globalization’ (see also Urry 2000: 12). I have shown that such discourses are both powerful in creating images of globalization, but are also subject to contestations. Meanwhile, the ‘global village’ does not carry universally similar significance; rather, as we have seen, this particular sense of place is both marketed to and has been attracting domestic Chinese tourists from the emerging lower middle class. Therefore, the attractions of the ‘global village’, that is, the xiaozu lifestyle and the opportunity to practise English with foreigners, actually corresponds to a sense of being global for Chinese people of certain class and taste. Crossing into English, drinking coffee, and practising spoken English with foreigners, these practices can hardly be expected to carry similar meanings, if also any significance at all, for people of a different nationality, culture or class. In this sense, we may say while there are material processes involved in the construction of the ‘global village’, it is also as much a discursive construct as a product of imagination and aspiration. To borrow the terms of Anderson (1983), the global village cannot be distinguished ‘by their falsity/genuineness, but [only] by the style in which they are imagined’ (as cited in Harvey 1993: 16).

Second, I have shown a particular locale, the traditional unit of sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research, still matters. As Rampton (2000: 16)
argues, as we try to understand the various flows and interconnectivities under globalization, ‘community level studies… remain essential’. Careful ethnographic attention to the local reveals the various ways the local gets linked up with non-local forces, and this in turn helps us understand globalization in more concrete terms and avoid making general claims about globalization. This is also the perspective adopted by Blommaert (2010), as he notes:

‘… throughout the book I have often focused on the periphery as the locus from which we need to look at globalization. This, I believe, is essential: part of the shift we need to make is also a shift away from a metropolitan perspective on globalization, stressing the uniformity of such processes, towards a perspective that does justice to “vernacular globalization”, to the myriad ways in which global processes entre local conditions and circumstances and become a localized reality’ (Blommaert 2010: 197).

Third, understanding particular events in its specific personal and social histories helps us better appreciate what certain practices mean for the people concerned. This is actually only a reiteration of the important goal of ethnography ‘to grasp the native’s point of view’ (Malinowski 1922: 25; as cited in Leite and Graburn 2009: 36 ) through ‘a continuous tracking between the “inside and the “outside” of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures emphatically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts’ (Clifford 1988: 34, as cited in Leite and Graburn 2009: 36). This is especially the case when what we observe ‘come more and more to lack the particularity [and] history’ (Coupland 2003a: 425) we might expect. It is because
of this unpredictability that, as I have mentioned in chapter 2, makes attention to the local specific history more important.

Fourth, I have also shown throughout that there are various types of tensions involved in this ‘global village’, whether it is for tourists, English learners, local foreigners, or business owners. Anti-tourists’ ridicule and contempt towards post-tourists indicates the questionable indexicality of the sophistication of English; the first wave of business owners’ frustration with the mass commercialization of West Street and the local foreigners’ concern over their space of sociability also shows how there are tensions around space; the English learners’ strategic navigation among certain bars is also not frictionless. The contestations and tensions, this study reveals, are not meant to be interpreted defensively in the sense of lamenting for a lost residential neighborhood, as Massey (1993) cautions against. Rather, they are better seen as how mobile lives both presuppose and involve conflicts and compromises (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 4).

7.2.2 English language studies

In the case of Yangshuo, we have seen that the development of global village and English Corner is largely a local incentive for economic development, and in this process the English language plays a significant role as a semiotic resource. As I already argued, this appropriation of English carries very local significance and meanings. The re-evaluation, appropriation and commodification of English, as observed in Yangshuo, do reproduce English as a global language, but as I mentioned, its importance lies also in representing a ‘semiotic opportunity’ (Blommaert 2010) for the local tourism economy. Indeed, the English language
undergoes a process of re-signification, whose indexical meaning is not transparent, but is constantly constructed and promoted by tourism discourses in the media and lived out by people themselves, as in xiaozǐ taste and style (see Chapter 4), and working professional identity (see Chapter 6). In this sense, the value of English is not absolute, but is only manifested as it is constantly being promoted and lived out in people’s specific everyday practices.

Also, even when it comes to people for whom English carries uncontested significance (e.g. post-tourists and working professionals), the value of English is nevertheless constrained. In particular for the latter, the English they acquire might only operate within a particular professional rank and sector (recall that many of them are salespersons), that is, the lower middle class job market in China. Going beyond this particular social, their English might lose its competitiveness as they try to compete in large-scale transnational companies, which may well likely have higher requirements or simply hire people with degrees from prestigious universities or overseas educational backgrounds. In this sense, it can be speculated that the English Yangshuo provides corresponds to a small section of the English market in China, and the English people acquire in Yangshuo might carry only limited transference value in terms of achieving cultural or economic capital through linguistic capital.

7.2.3 Tourism studies

In this study, I have adopted a broad understanding of tourism as a ‘social field’ which precludes seeing tourism as a distinct and self-autonomous entity (Leite and Graburn 2009: 37; see section 2.3 in Chapter 2). This broad definition enables
us to examine how tourism is interconnected with and embedded in larger historical, geographical, social, cultural, economic as well as sociolinguistic processes. In particular, this study presents multidimensional perspectives into the case of West Street, Yangshuo from tourism studies, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and human geography. Drawing on various perspectives, I show that tourism can also be an important domain for exploring issues like commodification of language, tensions of space, and educational tourism.

Second, I have shown that tourism mobilities involve varied yet closely related flows of people, semiotics and materials, and it is important to explore these variously connected mobilities for tourism research to move towards a post-disciplinary perspective and get integrated with the mobility turn of social sciences (see e.g. Cohen and Cohen 2012; Leite and Graburn 2009; Mavrič and Urry 2009; Winter 2009). In particular, I hope this study has shown that tourism mobilities are interlinked with sociolinguistic mobilities. I have explored specifically the issues of discursive place-making, tourist stance, multifunctionality of space, and educational tourism, wherein language and communication are shown to bear great importance. This by no means constitutes a comprehensive list of problems for research. But complementing existing research into the sociolinguistics of tourism (e.g. Dann 1996; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010; White 1974), this study represents the first research into the tourism site of Yangshuo from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Third, this research contributes to our understanding of domestic tourism in China against the backdrop of the rise of Asian tourism (Winter 2009). It shows
particularly how the changing ideologies of mobility and language in China are manifested in the tourism site of Yangshuo.

7.2.4 **Chinese studies**

Following from the above, this study also contributes to the understanding of a globalizing China. While scholars in Chinese studies have mainly address the globalization of China through the macro perspective of international politics or trade, or envisioning the future of China’s ‘going global’ policy, this study shows how a more local perspective can help understand the various cultural, linguistic, and spatial ordering and transformations in a increasingly globalizing and diverse China. Tourism in particular, as a quickly expanding practice of consumption in China, has much to offer to our understanding of a fast changing Chinese society.

Specifically, this study shows how tourism constitutes not just a leisure activity, but also an important perspective for understanding the changing lifestyles of emerging middle class Chinese people in the consumer society of China (c.f. Nyiri 2009; Arlt 2008). It shows class-based dynamics in globalization experience for Chinese people. The attraction of the global village, as I have indicated, attracts mainly lower middle class Chinese people who may have xiaozi aspirations or hold lower-rank professional positions (see Chapters 4 and 6). In particular, post-tourists’ indulgence in the global village may be mocked and ridiculed by anti-tourists who claim to be more knowledgeable and sophisticated (see Chapter 4). The mass commercialization during the second wave of tourism development is criticized by early business investors whose interests and concerns reside less in money than a peaceful lifestyle (see Chapter 5). And the working
professionals (mostly salespersons) we saw in chapter 6 hold on to the belief that improved English could help them land in jobs of higher ranks and better pay in the field of international trade (Chapter 6). This indicates how experience of globalization is complicated by class and taste based dynamics and tensions. The significance of the ‘global village’ in Yangshuo corresponds more to people from the emerging lower middle class, who have not quite learnt to speak the global language of English, or had overseas experience especially in the global West. It is in this sense that I summarize what’s going on in West Street, Yangshuo as ‘aspiring to be global’, as the title of this thesis suggests.

7.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this research has drawn on multiple data sources and provided a multi-dimensional understanding of the tourism site from different perspectives, as I mentioned in chapter 3, I was not able to collect some potentially interesting data which unfortunately constrains the analytical scope and insights into some issues.

One limitation concerns the travelling experience of xiăozī tourists. While online tourist writings present an important source for understanding tourists, ideally video-recording of tourists could also have revealed interesting data. In tourism studies, various strategies have been deployed to capture the fleeting experience of tourists, including close observation of particular tourists, repeated travel along the same route with different tourists, conducting follow-up interviews, or participating in certain tourist gatherings or reunions (for details, see Leite and Graburn 2009: 36-37; Graburn 2002). Future studies could consider these options to explore, for example, tourists’ interactions with tour guides and
co-travelers, business interactions at souvenir shops, and others (c.f. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010) so as to arrive at fuller understandings of tourists and their touring experience.

Another limitation of the study is also related to data collection. I was not able to obtain interactional data between foreigners and students. Future studies with little time constraints could probably consider extended long term stay (or work) in certain bars so as to better observe the interactions between them, find key informants, and hopefully conduct some audio-recordings. Such data might be most useful in revealing how exactly students and foreigners navigate between entering into, sustaining, and existing from interactions.

Beyond this particular research site, further studies could also examine tourism development in other ethnolinguistic communities in China to see how socio-economic transformations might raise potentially interesting issues regarding language and globalization. Also, future research might follow up students to their working places to see whether and how the English the learnt in Yangshuo enable them to move upward professionally, what specific roles do English play for Chinese working professionals in their working environments, and how the increasing economic globalization of China provides additional twist into this issue.

7.4 Conclusion

Notwithstanding the limitations of the research, this study has provided a multidimensional analysis of what’s going on in a tourism village in southern China as a case of globalization. As I have shown, the case of Yangshuo
contributes to our understandings of a globalizing China and more importantly to the expanding research into the sociolinguistics of mobility. While as I mentioned in Chapter 2 this study represents just one trial in this research paradigm, I hope the findings and implications of this study would be of interests to scholars with similar concerns.
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Palmerston Noth: Deparment of Management Systmes, Business Studies Faculty, Massey University.


Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview questions with students

What did you do before coming here?

Why do you want to learn English?

How did you decide to learn English at Yangshuo, instead of other places?

What were your expectations for learning English here?

What do you think of your learning experience here?

Do you try to find some English learning opportunities by yourself?

Do you think it’s worth the price, time and travelling?

What’s your plan for the future?

Appendix 2

A café with books for sale. Photo by author, 2011.
Appendix 3


Appendix 4

# Appendix 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of tourists in total</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>320.2</td>
<td>353.5</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>516.3</td>
<td>559.1</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>811.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of foreign tourists</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>123.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people stayed overnight</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>118.7</td>
<td>142.7</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>212.3</td>
<td>279.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of days stayed</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of farmers doing tourism</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total avenue</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourism statistics of Yangshuo: 2000-2010 (Unit of number of people: ten thousand; Unit of money: a hundred million yuan)