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Outdoor Theatrical Shows in the Remarkable Landscapes of the Chinese Mountains, Between Reinvention of a Tradition and Development of Tourism: the Example of the ‘Tianmen Fox Fairy Show’ at Zhangjiajie

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- 1 Using dance, music and spectacular sound and light techniques, the outdoor show links the narrative and romantic approaches. It provides viewers with sensations arising from the spectacular effects obtained *in situ* by laser projectors and amplifiers, and attempts to leave them with a palpable and rewarding experience. The first outdoor show in China was created in 2004 in Guilin. A tourist town for about 40 years now, Guilin is the main city in the Guangxi autonomous region, in southern China. Poets and landscape painters have immortalized this region’s sugar-loaf mountains, and imprinted its landscape in the country’s collective subconscious (Taunay, 2008). This first show was called ‘Impressions of Liu Sanjie’¹ and was directed by Zhang Yimou and Mei Shuaiyuan. It was conceived as an artistic marriage between the mountain landscape of Guilin and the popular tale of ‘Liu Sanjie’. Since then, the number of such shows taking place throughout China has increased to more than 400 (Huang, 2015). As Table 1 shows, the number of cultural shows really took off starting in 2007. About 10% of these shows are performed outdoors, and 35 of them are deemed to be ‘high-quality’ (Liang, Zheng, 2011) and included on the list of the government’s cultural tourism project. There are two underlying reasons: first, the desire of the Chinese Ministry of Culture to ‘encourage and support private enterprises to

develop cultural activities'², and, second, the unprecedented success of the 'Impressions of Liu Sanjie' show in 2004 (whose revenues have touched 300 million Yuan) that has sealed the reputation of Guilin as a tourist destination.

- 2 These festivals have thus become one of the mainstays of the Chinese cultural economy to the extent that they are now at the centre of tourist and leisure activities. A significant part of tour group itineraries is organized around this type of show, which brings in substantial incomes locally. Indeed, the individual ticket is expensive, between 150 and 800 Yuan per person depending on the seating location and the show (between 20 and 110 Euros). These prices are similar to those charged at the Avignon Festival in France, for example, even though the average salary of a Chinese city inhabitant is 600 Euros/month, or one third of what it is in France. Thus, this cultural offering is a luxury product for many tourists (except where the excursions are paid for by large companies). Festivals have become periods of leisure, 'commercial activities, dependent on an offer and part of an economy of symbolic goods and services' (Saez, 2002).

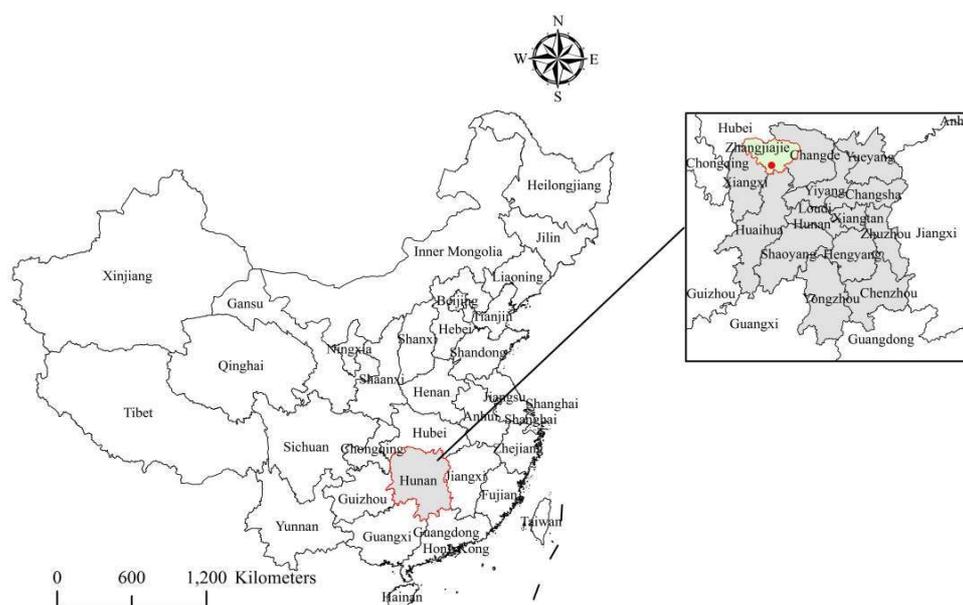
Table 1: List of shows in remarkable landscape sites 2004 - 2011 (Xiang, 2016)

Number	Name of the show	First performed	Location
1	Impressions of Liu Sanjie	March 2004	Guilin (Guangxi)
2	Sanxia Meng	October 2005	Yichang (Hubei)
3	Impressions West Lake	March 2007	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)
4	ChangHenGe	April 2007	XiAn (Shanxi)
5	Tianxia Emei	April 2007	LeShan (Sichuan)
6	Zongchan Shaolin	April 2007	Dengfeng(Henan)
7	Yanhuang Shengshi	October 2007	Zhengzhou (Henan)
8	Mengxun Huizhou	May 2008	Hongcun (Anhui)
9	Impression Lijiang	July 2008	Lijiang (Yunnan)
10	Tima Shenge	July 2008	Zhangjiajie (Hunan)
11	Loulan Qianxi	August 2008	Shanshan (Xinjiang)
12	Mount Jinggang	October 2008	JiAn (Jiangxi)
13	Impression Hainan	March 2009	Haikou (Hainan)
14	Dasong Dongjing Menghua	April 2009	Kaifeng (Henan)
15	Junshan Zhuimeng	May 2009	Luoyang (Henan)
16	Mount Meng and River Yi	May 2009	Linyi (Shandong)
17	Chengjisihan	July 2009	Hulunbeier (Mongolie)
18	Fengchan Dadian	September 2009	TaiAn (Shandong)
19	Tianmen Fox Fairy	September 2009	Zhangjiajie (Hunan)
20	Impression Dahongpao	March 2010	Mont Wuyi (Fujian)
21	Shenyou Huaxia	May 2010	Weihai (Shandong)
22	Taihu Chuanshuo	May 2010	Wuxi (Jiangsu)

23	Daojie Dujiangyan	June 2010	Dujiangyan (Sichuan)
24	Yanyu Chunqiu	July 2010	Changzhou (Jiangsu)
25	Impression Putuo	December 2010	Zhoushan (Zhejiang)
26	Menghuan Beibuwan	May 2011	Fangchenggang (Guangxi)
27	KangXi DaDian	June 2011	Chengde (Henan)
28	XiYi DaLi	July 2011	Dali (Yunnan)
29	Mount Taihang	August 2011	Changzhi (Shanxi)
30	Impression Wulong	October 2011	Wulong (Chongqing)

- 3 Following these few general introductory remarks, we characterize this type of outdoor show performed in remarkable landscapes by using the example of the ‘Tianmen Fox Fairy’ show which is held in the mountain landscape of the Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, which was established in 1982 in the north-west of Hunan Province (Maps 1 and 2)³. We shall then try to analyze, based on a survey carried out through questionnaires, the way in which this show is perceived by the spectators. We shall see that these major shows, which are very extroverted in their scenic design and in their efforts to attract the public, lead to questions about local development and the identity of so-called ‘minority’ ethnic groups.

Map 1: Location of the Tianmen site



Design: Xiang, Derioz, Bachimon 2016

Map 2: Tourist map of Mount Tianmen



Design: Xiang, Derioz, Bachimon, 2016

The Chinese conception of a landscape site

- 4 In China, protected and classified landscape sites are, for the most part, inhabited areas, populated in particular by ethnic minorities who have historically found refuge there to practice their religions, most notably Buddhism and Taoism. Today, many mountain landscapes still have a major human and cultural heritage significance, forming part of the tradition of contemplation. The notion of the resort landscape emerged in China during the first half of the 20th century, in reference to the environment of thermal spas such as those at Beidaihe (on the coast near Beijing). It was not until 1985 that the State Council promulgated the Provisional Regulations for the Management of Remarkable Landscapes ('fengjing mingshengqu guanli zhanxing tiaoli'). Three decades later, there are 225 remarkable landscapes, which are defined under law as 'places of aesthetic, cultural or scientific value, offering natural or cultural landscapes that are fairly concentrated, offering beautiful landscapes and of a certain size, which people can visit and where they can rest or engage in scientific or cultural activities.'⁴
- 5 The Chinese have had original ideas about the relationship of Man with nature long before these developments. The fusional relationship of indigenous peoples with nature is seen as having a profound impact on their spiritual life. Great masters of Chinese painting were among the first to wonder about the landscape (Berque, 1995). In the case of landscape painting, the 'mountain and water' ('Shanshui' in Chinese), the harmony of the yin and yang elements, the play of atmospheric elements and of the geological strata, and of textures rendered in black and white form the basis of the expressionist appropriation

of nature (Xiang W., 2011). The pictorial movement known as 'Mountain and water' was thus inspired by real places, in which it represented purely dream worlds. In this way, the Chinese landscape gives shape to a mental universe in which 'mountain and water' express the omnipotence of nature, within which Man appears, a tiny and yet necessary being. According to the Taoist tradition, the mountains are the abodes of the immortals, they rub shoulders with the sky and it is from their summits that the ascent to heaven begins.

- 6 This is why outdoor shows often take place in mountainous sites that have been depicted by painters, and in which the real landscape can be seen as a backdrop. It can then be illuminated, or partly reconfigured, and finally brought into conformity with its representation. The site itself becomes a stage on which artists wear traditional costumes and interpret, according to an almost immutable ritual, plays and dramas in which nature often plays a fundamental role, as a miraculous source, refuge of geniuses, sacred mountain, etc. The well-known landscapes of landscape sites thus play a fundamental role in the staging of these shows, which are currently the subject of a veritable craze in China.

The gigantic scale of the Tianmen Fox Fairy outdoor show

The organization of the staging and its landscape context

- 7 The Mount Tianmen Fox Fairy show was created in September 2009 by two private operators in Zhangjiajie and Guilin who invested one hundred million Yuan (17 million Euros) in its production. It is a major cultural cooperation project between these two companies. Headed by director Mei Shuaiyuan, the Guilin company had already undertaken several cultural cooperation projects with local tourism companies located near remarkable landscapes. The best known is the 'Impressions' series which continues to enjoy great success. The Mount Tianmen Fox Fairy production includes a large 10,000 square-meter tempered glass stage. It serves as a setting for the 530 actors, including 216 professionals and 264 student artists from Zhangjiajie school. An additional 50 people are involved in stage management, sound and electricals. The open-air theatre can accommodate up to 3080 spectators.
- 8 The stage is divided into 4 zones which combine the real and the dreamlike. One zone symbolizes the real world (on the left side), another the immortal world (on the right side), a division that is replicated in the show, with the representation of a traditional Tujia⁵ village on the left side, while dances and songs from Tujia culture are performed on the right. The local scale of the scene is given context by the architectural environment of the background, with the silhouette of Mount Tianmen (1519 m) visible at a distance of 7.5 km, which constitutes the life-size natural scenery and provides the general context of the show.
- 9 It is worth emphasizing here that this 'natural' landscape – whose sandstone peaks also served as setting for director James Cameron for the planet Pandora of his film 'Avatar' – is already powerfully 'staged' for tourists by the impressive large-scale facilities involved: access to the summit and to the monumental natural arch which crosses the cliff from one side to the other (the 'Gate of Heaven') is via minibus on a vertiginous road 11 km

long with 99 bends or by a cable car that is one of the longest in the world, about 7.5 km from Zhangjiajie Station to the summit. The tourist experience, which combines a sacred dimension (at the top visitors can visit a contemporary replica of a temple of the Tang dynasty era) and contact with nature in its dreamlike dimension, relies fully on the audacity and the enormous scale of its facilities, like the monumental staircase leading to the Gate of Heaven, or the transparent glass-floor trails built above the void that allows one to go up the cliffs. The evening show, which ends with the illumination of the mountain that blocks the valley in the background, offers tourists an extension to their visit of the day, itself already thought of as a highly organized scenic tour (minibus, cable car, lift, stairs, etc.).

Indigenoussness in terms of its depiction

- 10 The script of the show is based on a local folk tale about the love between a woman and a fox. This popular legend tells the story of a fox king who has fallen in love with a fairy. This unusual attraction between the two has to contend with many difficulties and their tale has many twists and turns, but in the end, the two lovers overcome all obstacles and their story has a happy ending. The script is inspired by the Hunan opera 'Huaguxi' to which Tujia dances and songs have been added. During an interview we had with Mr. Xie, who is in charge of the show, he told us that it conveys the unique value and sense of testimony of the local culture (that of Hunan Province) simply 'enhanced' with special effects.
- 11 In Chinese, the term for the indigenous native is 'bentu de'. In China, it is in contrast to the Han majority that indigenous peoples are designated by the term 'minority'. The region of Wulingyuan and Zhangjiajie is inhabited by several ethnic groups such as the Tujia, Bai and Miao, with the Tujia accounting for almost all of the population (97%). Tujia customs, and in particular their traditional dances and music, are considered very attractive for Chinese tourists and have become much sought-after because of their rarity. This rarity is a result of the modernization that has affected the minorities. They have gradually lost their traditions. The young people no longer want to learn or practice them, which has led the central government to pursue a policy of preserving this intangible heritage by financing rural artisans so that they can transmit their know-how in a context in which there are fewer and fewer people wearing traditional costumes on a daily basis or playing old musical instruments during festivals. Personal entertainment systems and jeans have erased this legacy. Finally, what remains as a living element of a symbol of immutability is the mountain landscape, which provides an exceptional setting and plays a key role in the show. Hence the special care that is taken to make it visible at night by illuminating it.
- 12 It is in this context of cultural abandonment that the political, economic and artistic stakeholders of the sector have reached a consensus around this modality of putting on show. It is in this sense that they have scripted idyllic representations that they obtained from the 'local' historiography or from the familiarity with the works of well-known painters or writers. The resulting copy is meant to be felt by the public as 'more true than nature'. This formalism diminishes the local tradition, which finds itself relegated to the background in a rereading and interpretation essentially intended for the Han majority, the ethnic group of the spectators, whose viewpoint remains external. In a way, idyllic and typical Tujia landscapes are constructed, which owe little to the Tujia tradition. In

reality, as represented, this tradition is merely a shadow of itself. At the end of the performance, spectators often speak of an 'emotional upheaval and an aesthetic euphoria' to describe their experience. More rarely, they evoke a 'deepening of their knowledge' about the Tujia. This is rather paradoxical since that is the professed goal of the show's promoters. And this is what characterizes the production of a process of massive folklorization⁶. The desire for authenticity and for the 'consumption of all that is true' leads in some way to a process of elaboration of otherness which is often based on oppositions. We have studied the feedback of these processes on the Tujia themselves (Xiang W., 2011) in terms of the distancing they induce.

- 13 Mac Cannell (1973: 589-603) notes that while it is difficult to measure the degree of authenticity of a tourist experience, many tourists in search of authenticity are often disappointed with the experience they are offered – which is certainly not the case today for Chinese tourists. We should therefore recall Philippe Bachimon's (2001) analysis of the tourist product as a materialization of myths, which began with the example of Disneyland, a materialization undertaken to satisfy a tourist desire for authenticity through experience, but a materialization that here kills, or at best freezes, tradition.

Photo 1: Mount Tianmen



PHOTO: WANG, 28 MARCH 2016

Photo 2: The setting of the Mount Tianmen Fox Fairy show

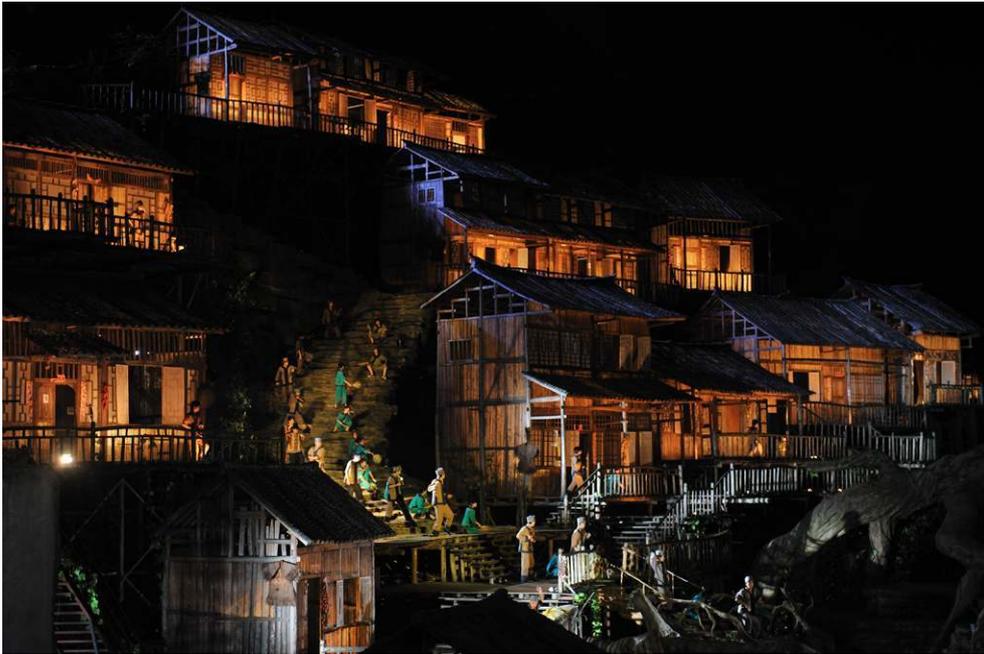


PHOTO: WANG, 28 MARCH 2016

From the design of this show to its reception by tourist-spectators

- 14 In order to better understand this show and, in particular, to gauge the reactions of tourists, we distributed 100 questionnaires to tourists, 87 of which were validated between 27 and 31 March 2016 in the city of Zhangjiajie. We also spoke to some local stakeholders, including local government officials and the head of the show. First of all, the show is stereotypical⁷. And this is so from many different points of view. The narrative on which the show is based, and is interpreted by professional and amateur artists, uses imagination as its basis. Director Mei Shuaiyuan defines it as follows: 'Our job is to find, dig deep into, interpret and "package" the local culture. We exaggerate its essential elements to eventually return to its primitive state, that of the natural environment in which it was born' (Shen Danhui, 2012). This kind of creative technique is, no doubt, very reductive and produces the illusion of a spirit of the place which engenders an 'instantaneous and ephemeral' aesthetic impression. It is therefore a matter of playing on the register of emotional shock and aesthetic impregnation.
- 15 Sound and light effects are placed at the heart of the folklorization. For many tourists, the outdoor show is a mixture of 'grandiose scenes, effects and folklore'. In a society in which the culture of the image is becoming dominant, the technology of sound and light and the outdoor show can only strengthen the performance and its living aspect, even though finally it is just a reconstruction. It can also produce an appreciated ambience, that of the massive shows, driven by elaborate technical effects, that one increasingly finds in the great stadiums of the world. 'Mass society, on the contrary, wants not culture, but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just as any other consumer goods' (A. Bell, 1996). Not only is the

image increasingly replacing discourse, but reality itself exists more and more in the form of images. The result is a new 'regime of signification' in which the distinction between signifier, signified and referent is blurred due to the fact that the image belongs to all three, leading to a risk of subjectivist confusion between the subject and the object, and a loss of critical thinking (Lambert Yves, 1995). Little by little, the marvellousness of the performance dominates the narration (Scott Lash, 1990). The outdoor show is very much a part of this logic. Most of these shows use very high-quality lighting and sound systems that help in the overall fascination of spectators. This is the outcome of our survey. A full 66% of the tourists surveyed said they wanted to come back a second time thanks to 'a powerful effect of the show's backdrop (Mount Tianmen)'.

- 16 This is undoubtedly the reason why this kind of show has been enjoying increasing success in China in recent years. Indeed, China is, without a doubt, a special case, especially when compared to Europe, where the use of sound and light in theatrical performances dates back many decades. In China, the natural environment is preferred as a setting for shows, while in Europe similar performances use monuments and buildings (for example, the Avignon festival or the Puy du Fou show) and historical themes instead of natural ones.
- 17 An overdependence on sound and light effects increases the risk of a weakening of the performance's cultural references. By overemphasizing the technical aspect, the use of lights and shadows, the show moves away from the more intimate traditional artistic spirit which it could share with knowledgeable spectators. Our survey showed⁸ that 27 out of 87 tourists did not like the Mount Tianmen Fox Fairy outdoor show, of which 3 tourists thought that the sound and light effects were exaggerated and 6 tourists thought that the artistic form was too complicated.
- 18 The outdoor show's cultural objective, which is to showcase costumes, dances, music, legends and religious ceremonies of 'minorities' of the area, tends to get blurred in an amplification of an 'atmosphere', a spirit of the place, an experience that is reduced to impressions, certainly very imposing but ultimately very artificial and ephemeral. Indeed, the result may be a production of a diminished reality, devoid of the human element, the very opposite of the professed intention. This can obviously be interpreted as an ultimate stage of a form of domination exercised over a minority's culture, reduced to the pretext of a narrative that has become subordinate.
- 19 J.-P. Augustin (1998) reminds us that the construction of cultural facilities and support for cultural events are part of an old movement to instrumentalize culture, but which today has a tendency to transform the places concerned even more. At present, 'the traces of the past and even more the staging of these forms of activity are used to express the specificity of cities and places'. On the other hand, in order to arouse the curiosity of tourists about the local culture, the outdoor show focuses on salient (and understandable) elements of the culture of the ethnicity being showcased. It is a well-known process of folklorization that ultimately characterizes this Chinese approach. The holding of the show *in situ*, in the spectacular setting so often represented pictorially (in photographs and in paintings) of the landscaped sites, is an attempt at authenticity based on a staging in an authenticated environment. It is a discursive and demonstrative principle of the 'true'. Even though, in this case, the 'falsity' of performance must be considered truer than the true. Our survey showed that the local culture (for 46 out of 87 tourists) and the outdoor show (for 24 out of 87 tourists) were the two important elements that attracted tourists travelling in the Wulingyuan Scenic and Historic Interest Area. Paradoxically, the

tourists believed that the spectacle which was presented to them helps them know and understand the local culture in a satisfactory manner.

- 20 Finally, the outdoor show is inserted into a logic of cultural consumerism. 'The consumer culture of sign-play and spectacles cannot be traced back to the designs of the seventeenth-century European absolutist state to produce the aestheticization and spectacles which became known as the culture of the baroque' (Featherstone, 1995). And the outdoor show satisfies all the criteria of cultural consumption. The links between the arts, culture and commerce, and between culture and tourism are not new, of course. But what is notable here is that everything that can in any way, directly or tangentially, be linked to the festivities is commercialized. As the commercialization of symbols takes on importance, all that can make sense is used (Isabelle Garat, 2001). This postmodernist approach (Scott, 1990) calls for the creation of such outdoor performances by the most famous filmmakers in China, such as Zhang Yimou, Wang Chaoge and Mei Shuaiyuan.⁹ The latter said about his shows: 'It is not worth digging too deep. The main thing is to make spectators aware of cultural symbols, and we must not deviate from this goal,' while his colleague Zhang Yimou noted that 'the aesthetics of the show are more important than the rest.'
- 21 Behind the outdoor show, there is a relentless logic of tourism. That is to say, the outdoor show plays a role of tourist attraction. Artistic activities become part of a utilitarian vision of tourism.
- 22 Since the landscape sites are often located in remote, fairly enclosed and underdeveloped areas, the creation of the show around a site becomes an opportunity for the concerned region's economic development. However, outdoor shows are not created as a result of local initiatives but rather due to the desire of the State and the local governments to promote destinations to tourists. Many local governments choose to host sound and light shows because typical tourists spend an average of 24 hours at the site. They visit the site during the day to admire its beauty and in the evening they attend the outdoor sound and light show to learn about the area's local culture. For the local government, it is a very good way to attract tourists, to boost tourism and, in particular, to create infrastructure and resources. According to the Zhangjiajie Tourist Board, the total income of both most famous shows (Tianmen Fox Fairy and West Hunan's Charm¹⁰) in 2011 was 400 million Yuan (the equivalent of 55 million Euros) and a total of 2 million people watched these two shows in the same year. This economy functions by deriving value from territorial attributes, based on local variations, characterized by selective features of regional history. Public action, very much oriented towards territorial marketing, participates wholeheartedly in this commoditization of territorial identities (Garat, 2001).
- 23 It should be noted that according to local government statistics (2016)¹¹, in 2015, foreign tourists accounted for only 7% of the total number of tourists, with the rest being domestic tourists. In recent years, the number of foreign tourists, especially from South Korea, has increased fairly rapidly. The South Koreans already account for 89% of the foreign tourists market, thanks mainly to the promotion in South Korea by the Zhangjiajie Tourist Board of Zhangjiajie as a tourist destination and word-of-mouth endorsements (41% of visitors).

Conclusion

- 24 The outdoor show, now being replicated in many of China's landscape sites, can be called a 'cultural' phenomenon given the enthusiasm it generates amongst Chinese domestic tourists. It is, no doubt, more a response to the wishes of the majority Han population than a result of any real local desire for a live performance 'showcasing' their culture. Based on sound and light wizardry, it reduces local historical tales to clichés and effects. It is thus paradoxical, since the outdoor show 'easily' satisfies the desire for exoticism of a Chinese clientele by the excellence of the artefact and the use of a stereotypical symbolism even though it avoids the cultural elements that would be more difficult to access by a tourism driven by an emerging middle class. The commercial value of the landscaped sites is no doubt ensured by delivering crowd-pleasing performances, but it is not certain that the approach is sustainable in terms of promoting the culture of ethnic minorities in China. The latter become products in this configuration, similar to those in an amusement park, and have perhaps already been partly destroyed by their consumption.

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NOTES

1. Liu Sanjie: According to a popular tale of the Zhuang ethnic group, Liu Sanjie was a well-known singer from the village of Guangxi. After her death, the Zhuang sing and dance every March 3 (according to the Chinese lunar calendar).
2. Source: Official site of the Chinese Ministry of Culture: <http://www.mcprc.gov.cn/>, retrieved 19 May 2016.
3. The Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, the first of its kind in China (1982), is part of the Wulingyuan Scenic and Historic Interest Area, identified in 1988 by the Chinese State Council as a pilot national space, subsequently recognized in 1992 by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. In addition to this National Forest Park, the World Heritage Site also includes the natural reserves of the Suoxi Valley and the Tianzi Mountain, as well as the scenic area of Zhangjiajie. The nearby National Forest Park of Mount Tianmen is, however, not part of the World Heritage Site.
4. Source: Official site of China's Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, <http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/>, retrieved 22 August 2016.
5. The Tujia belong to the seventh major ethnic group (among the 55 'minority' ethnic groups) in China. The Tujia live in the mountainous region of Wuling (Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing and Guizhou provinces).
6. UNESCO's 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional and Folk Culture applies the following definition to the terms 'folklore' or 'traditional and popular culture'. This definition has also been used by UNESCO since 1989 to designate 'intangible cultural heritage'. 'Folklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards

and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts.' (Source: Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional and Folk Culture, 1989, UNESCO)

7. Stereotypical: Using 'received ideas' to make sense. For example, Disney uses the fabulistic stereotype of the animality of human characters to produce comics, movies, theme parks, etc. and to convey a subliminal moralizing message.

8. 69% of respondents belonged to tour groups. 53% were self-employed, 16% were civil servants, 16% were retired, 13% were employed in the private sector and 2% were students. 31% of respondents were aged 26-35 years, 30% were aged 36-50 years, 19% were over 50 years, 16% were between 18-25 years and 4% were younger than 18 years of age.

9. These three are the truly famous directors of outdoor shows. Zhang Yimou has directed the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics as well as many films well-known in China and abroad, such as 'Raise the Red Lantern' and 'Ju Dou'. Even though Mei Shuaiyuan and Wang Chaoge belong to the Han ethnic group, they work extensively with dancers and musicians from other ethnic groups, such as Yang Liping (Bai ethnic group).

10. West Hunan's Charm is another wellknown show about the Tujia's culture in Zhanggajie, but it does not take place outdoors.

11. Source: Official site of the local government <http://www.zjjyd.gov.cn>, retrieved 22 August 2016.

ABSTRACTS

Using a case study (Zhanggajie), this article discusses the status accorded to outdoor theatrical shows in the remarkable mountainous landscapes of China. This type of performance has become very widespread in the country since 2004. In the form of a sound-and-light musical drama, it adopts a mythified and very formalized approach that uses and embraces the marvellous landscape and attempts to link spectacular technical effects to a stereotypical artistic approach. As an object of tourist consumption, it leads us to question the notion of 'culture' to which it attaches itself, emphasizing the disconnect it presents in terms of Western norms. A kitsch 'mass' show, it constitutes both a commercial reality of a new China and the postmodern modality of a cultural approach inherited from an official socialist discourse that is today legitimizing its actions by attaching itself to tradition.

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Keywords: outdoor show, mountain landscape, development of tourism, remarkable landscape site, China

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