

Ancient Kaifeng Relived: Hyper-real Experiences and Place Image Shaping in Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden



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Abstract

Using a case of a painting themed cultural park Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden in Kaifeng, this thesis investigates the ways in which a place image becomes identified with tourist experiences in the completely artificial attractions. Lying upon the knowledge foundation of the post-modern concept 'hyper-reality', I engage with how contrived cultural attractions become 'more real than real' in visitors' perceptions. Based on extended participant observation of the theme park and in-depth interviews, this paper discusses the ways in which hyper-realization is achieved through immersion and enjoyment of tourists, and the consequences of this on projecting Kaifeng culture and shaping place image.

Key words: Post-modernism, Hyper-reality, Theme Park, Place Image, Tourist Experiences, *QingMingShangHeTu*, Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden, Kaifeng

Acknowledgement

This research explores the ways in which a place image can be shaped through hyper-realization of a themed environment. The fieldwork took place from March to April 2014; in an outstanding cultural theme park Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden, locating in an inland Chinese city Kaifeng. My experience as a traveller and a researcher in Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden will always remain as unforgettable experience, as I deepened knowledge unfamiliar with my interested research topic.

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1 Introduction

Past and contemporary decades have witnessed the componential growth and increasing diversity of tourism industry ever since its inception. Since the late 1970s, an increasing number of academicians have addressed association between post-modernism to tourism spaces and tourist activities (Uriely, 1997, 2005; Reichel *et al.*, 2008). The flourishing of alternative tourism such as volunteer tourism and eco tourism, the booming attractions of nostalgia, dark history and heritage, the rising diversity of tourist desires, the proliferation of simulated tourism environments are positioned in post-modern tourism, wherein the multiplicity of environments, culture, tourist motivations and experiences is emphasized (Uriely, 1997; Reichel *et al.*, 2008). Focusing on the simulated tourism environments, the analysis of hyper-real experiences in the contrived tourist attractions such as the art museums and theme parks is remains a high frequency following the concept of hyper-reality framed by Umberto Eco (1986) and Jean Baudrillard (1994; 2007).

Themed spaces play an important role in displaying and projecting culture (Lukas, 2007). Cultural theme park is closely associated with the promotion of place image by exhibiting particular regional or national culture (Richards, 2002). Drawing on postmodern insights of hyper-reality and themed spaces, this thesis concentrates on the ways in which a place image is shaped by various tourist experiences in the artificial themed sites. The research is conducted in Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden, one of the outstanding cultural theme parks in China.

The following introduction text is structured into four sections to provide background information of Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden as a themed space worthy researching from a post-modern perspective. In the first section, information over Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden, the cultural theme *QingMingShangHeTu*, and Kaifeng, in which city the theme park locates is demonstrated. Following, an explicit problem statement of this thesis is given in the second section. Based on the background information and problem statement, the third section forwards to research

objectives and research questions of this thesis. The last section outlines the whole structure of this thesis.

1.1 Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden

1.1.1 The cultural theme: *QingMingShangHeTu*

Among all Chinese paintings, *QingMingShangHeTu* (QMSHT) is the most renowned and preeminent artistic work. Before its official public ownership in 1950s, QMSHT had been collected, restored and copied over centuries. The translated literal meaning of the painting title QMSHT is Along the Riverside during Qingming Festival; however, the festive aspects such as tomb sweeping and praying for ancestors are not depicted as the theme of the painting. But rather, using the season around Qingming Festival (early April) as a temporal frame, the painting has captured lifestyle of all societal levels in Bianjing by delineating period clothing, architectures from city to rural areas, and different economic activities from rich to poor. This masterpiece is designed with a river meandering throughout the whole length, and the bridge across the river named Rainbow Bridge (Hong Qiao) is the center and main focus of the painting. With 5.25 meters in length and 25.5 centimeters in height, QMSHT involves 814 humans, 28 boats, 60 animals, 30 buildings, 20 vehicles, 9 sedan chairs and 170 trees within its content.

The peaceful life of people and the magnificent landscape of the capital city of North Song Dynasty Bianjing (ancient name of Kaifeng) constitute the theme of QMSHT. Ironically, the original author of QMSHT, Zhang Zeduan, lived in the historical period when the prosperousness of Bianjing was reaching the end and the perdition of North Song Dynasty was approaching. Realistically, topics around the exact information of the painting, such as the accurate year when QMSHT was initiated, the precise temporal period for which Zhang Zeduan aims to present, the authenticity and reliability of the contents, as well as the underlying meanings beyond the visible contents of the painting still remain contentious. Nonetheless, despite those complicated debates between historians and artists, the scene of Bianjing simulated by QMSHT is widely assumed, learned and reproduced as the exhibition of how Kaifeng in North Song Dynasty appears to be.

1.1.2 Kaifeng

Contemporary Kaifeng is a prefecture-level city administrated by Henan Province, China. Populated with approximately 5 million residents in the urban area, Kaifeng does not belong to the world of metropolitan cities in China regarding to its size. Derived from biased national development strategies and unbalanced resource distribution in China, Kaifeng is a less developed city with lagged transportation system and rare international accessibility. Due to the geographical characteristics as an inland city locating in central China, Kaifeng is barren of destination resources such as sun, sea and beach to satisfy mass tourism consumption. Although being identified as one of the Nine Ancient Capitals of China (together with Xi'an, Luoyang, Nanjing, Beijing, Hangzhou, Anyang, Zhengzhou, Datong), 'a city rife with poverty and unsafety' has overweighed 'an ancient capital full of inherited cultural elements' on the ways in which Kaifeng is thought out owing to the relatively frequent criminal issues broadcasted by social media.

Arising from its geographical situation, Kaifeng is not a renowned city on international level. Derived from its current social practice, Kaifeng is not a destination for travelling and migrating preferred by domestic Chinese people. However looking back to history, Kaifeng was once one of the largest cities in the world, with a population of 600,000 to 700,000 during China's North Song Dynasty in 11th century. Historical and cultural tourist sites such as Ancient Kaifeng Government and Imperial Street of Song Dynasty have constituted attractions of Kaifeng. The majority of the attractions are artificial, established in modern era based on historical and literal documents relevant with North Song Dynasty, as most of the original ancient architectures had been ruined and invisible.

1.1.3 Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden

Locates in Kaifeng, Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden (QRLG) is one of the large-scale cultural theme parks in China, with a total space of 400,000 square meters. Based on the contents of QMSHT, QRLG began to be built in 1992 and opened to public in 1998. With a local name 'Millennium City Park', QRLG has materialized lively prosperous scenes of Kaifeng during China's North Song Dynasty when the

city reached its peak importance. With the promotional theme ‘Once You Appreciate the Painting, You can Dream about Scene before 1000 Years’, the rarely seen thousand-year inherited local culture of Kaifeng is displayed in in QRLG. Grasping mass tourist demand for seeking fun, amusing elements on basis of folk-custom cultures, heroic stories and legendary tales under the context of North Song Dynasty are embraced in cultural exhibition in the theme park. The action shows such as Hard Qi Gong and Yuefei Poking Chaigui, interactive experiential programs such as Marriage of Landlord Wang’s Daughter are integrated with the still ancient style architectures. The 3D movie show and the large-scale on-water performance have annotated QingMingShangHeTu and history of North Song Dynasty as a whole.

1.2 Problem Statement

Since the issuing of the national economic reconstruction policy, tourism has become a development strategy in China (Lew, 2003; Xiao, 2006). A growing number of tourism studies have emerged afterwards, mainly focusing on tourism policies, tourism marketing strategies and regional development. Specifically, a typical form of rural tourism, farmhouse joy or ‘*Nongjiale*’, and heritage tourism, which includes a unique form communist heritage tourism or ‘red tourism’, have prevailed domestic research interests (e.g. He *et al.*, 2004, *Nongjiale* in Chengdu metropolitan area; Zhang *et al.*, 2013, *Nongjiale* leisure sports and rural development in China; Li and Hu, 2008, red tourism in China; Yan *et al.*, 2007, red tourism development in Hunan).

Since the opening of Disneyland in 1955 in California, ‘theme park’ has become a global phenomenon, the consumption of which comes onto modern stage as a favorite mode of mass consumption (Clavé, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2009). In China, ‘theme park’ is a relatively new concept, as the first Chinese modern theme park Splendid China was only established in 1988 (Ren, 2007). Hundreds of theme parks have been constructed since then, with themes of domestic and external culture. However, in comparison with rural tourism and heritage tourism, ‘theme park’ has not widely aroused research interests. The limited theme park studies, with no difference from the major trend, are mostly conducted from a positivist approach oriented by political and economic objectives in response to the macro universe development strategy of China,

neglecting the diversity of geographic and ethnographic characteristics. Besides, cultural theme parks situated in the less developed inland Chinese regions like Kaifeng, which are less touched by international flows and lack of supportive promotions, are less attentive than they deserve to be. As a consequence, the image of inland Chinese regions and the particularities of the theme parks locating in these regions are less understood.

1.3 Research Objective and Research Question

To compensate for the prominent deficits of previous Chinese theme park studies, this thesis applies the post-modern concept ‘hyper-reality’ as the theoretical basis, takes the particularity of local culture and the multiplicity of tourist experiences into account, to investigate the role QRLG can play in projecting culture and shaping place image of Kaifeng.

Complementary to the research objective, the research question is identified as:

How is the image of Kaifeng shaped through hyper-real experiences of visitors in the cultural theme park Qingming Riverside Landscape Garden?

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is comprised with six chapters. This first chapter introduces the reader background information of the research topic and the researched cultural theme park QRLG. The research objectives and research questions are explicitly stated in this chapter to formulate an overview of the thesis contents. The second chapter comes the theoretical framework of this thesis. Within this chapter, theories of themed spaces, place image and hyper-reality are reviewed and reflected. A conceptual framework is structured upon these knowledge bases. Methodology is covered within the third chapter. In this chapter, the post-modernism as the philosophical guide of this thesis is illustrated firstly. Following, the positionality of the author is reflected. The demonstration of the qualitative research design, procedures of data collection and data analysis method comes next, including the description of the time, location and the participants researched during the fieldwork. The fourth chapter proceeds to

illustrate the research results derived from thematic coding. To answer the research question of this thesis, the fifth chapter comes the discussion. Consequently, the sixth chapter follows as the conclusion. This part involves a summary of the whole thesis, the importance of this research and suggestions for further academic investigations.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theming Spaces, Displaying Culture and Shaping Place Image

A widely applied definition for place or tourist destination image was initiated by Crompton (1979), as ‘the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination’ (page 18, see also Jenkins, 1999, page 2; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, page 41). A number of subsequent scholars have contended that place or destination image pervades tourist behaviors during the whole travelling experience, including destination decision-making before a trip, participation and consumption during the trip, and re-thinking of the place after the trip (Gartner, 1994; Jenkins, 1999; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Haahti and Yavas, 2004). Culture, which broadly encompasses all values, beliefs, actions and material productions associated with a certain place (Meethan, 2003), is closely related with place image promotion (Richards, 2001; Selby, 2004). In modern society, culture has been identified as an instrumental resource to generate economical, social and political achievements (Meethan, 2003; Oakes, 2006; Richards and Wilson, 2006). According to Oakes (2006) with three case studies of cultural villages in China, culture can be transformed from an ideological concept into an effective place-based economic growth machine and therefore positively impact regional and national entrepreneurialism. Culture in accordance of Gottdiener (1997) is a basic resource, for mainly economic purpose, to label and maintain difference, from which themes and narratives essential for distinctive place image creation process are arising (cited in Richards and Wilson, 2006, page 1209). Culture-related products such as heritage sites, museums, theme parks, festivals and performing arts, mostly for marketing-oriented purposes, are established and branded to produce unique and favorable destination image (Hughes and Allen, 2005).

Recent years have witnessed increasing emergence of theming on a cosmopolitan scale in various areas (Wong and Cheung, 1999; Ren, 2007). A themed environment incorporates a narrative or a story into a controlled space, integrating culture and entertainment in a leitmotif (Yeoh and Teo, 1996; Wong and Cheung, 1999; Lukas, 2007). Ritzer (1993) described the themed environment as a ‘camp ground’, wherein visitors can stay in predictable settings with little or no connection to the unpredictability of nature and native life (page 23; page 92). West (2006) critically reflected Ritzer’s argument with the empirical study of Aussie theme pubs in London. As claimed by West (2006), rather than automatically isolating consumers from their nation and living reality, the Aussie theme pubs in London work to project Australian culture in a global sphere and create national identity of Australians who live overseas. Themed spaces alike, including the themed restaurants, shopping malls, hotels, casinos and sports stadiums have become a dominant business practice in leisure and service sectors (Ren, 2007). Theming can highlight a particular culture by allowing a place to become more aesthetic, visitable and playful (Dicks, 2004; West, 2006). Richards and Wilson (2006) listed examples of cities, which were themed to distinguish themselves: New York as the ‘cultural capital of the world’, Sheffield as the ‘Sports City’, and the four Autonomous Communities on the north coast of Spain as ‘Green Spain’ that emphasizes natural environment, rural tourism and traditional culture (page 1211). In the research done by Richards (2001) focusing on Splendid China cultural theme parks in the Netherlands, it was argued that the miniature of famous Chinese landmarks in the themed environments is established to unmask the image of Chinese culture and shape international understanding of China.

The examples of previous studies have indicated that culture can be projected and presented to visitors through theming, in which process a ‘unifying and immutable’ idea is established throughout the built space (Dicks, 2004; Lukas, 2007, page 2; Schlehe *et al.*, 2014). As explained by Richards and Wilson (2006), the themes were developed to brand local culture of these regions with distinctive place image and obtain visitor familiarity. ‘Whether an image is a true presentation of the given region is less important than the mere existence of the image in the mind of the person’ (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, page 41), the themed spaces can work to feature the ‘imaginative geographies’ that visitors intend to think and affirm, rethink and reaffirm

their gazed image from a deeper perspective based on the culture exhibited in the themed environment (Said, 1978, cited in Gregory, 1995, page 447).

2.2 Hyper-reality

From a postmodern perspective, the contemporary world is viewed to be replete with hyper-real objects, symbols and spaces (Venkatesh, 1999; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Steiner, 2010). Regarding the literal meaning, hyper-reality can be understood as the phenomenon in which the artifact appears to be more real than the real thing (Berthon and Katsikeas, 1998).

Quantities of studies associated with hyper-reality have echoed theories initiated by Eco (1986) and Baudrillard (1994; 2007). Using the journey to art museums in America for analysis, Eco (1986) has illustrated instances of how experiences for ‘real’ can be achieved through the imagination and enjoyment attained from the fabricated ‘fakes’ (Page 8). ‘The logical distinction between the Real World and Possible worlds has been undermined’, as concluded by Eco (1986, p.14), the art museums has blurred the boundaries between game and illusion, and between the historical reality and fantasy by creating indulgence of visitors for the ‘fakes’. As explained by Steiner (2010), hyper-realization in accordance of Eco is the situation when something based on the imitation of reality becomes more real than its archetype, and such situation is because the copy presented is the direct object in people’s perception, demand and imagination. In parallel with Eco, Baudrillard (1994) identified hyper-reality in terms of simulation and simulacra, wherein the contradictions between true and false, reality and imaginary, originality and representation are eradicated. The imaginary landscape of Disneyland as a typical example, was claimed by Baudrillard (1994, p. 13) as neither true nor false, but provided a fantastic miniature of larger American society. Simulation is ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real’, according to Baudrillard (1994, page 7), the signs and images are not limited to be reflection or imitation of any real material objects, but have preceded realities in principle, created their own pure simulacrum without past or founding truth for reference. The hyper-realities, which Baudrillard called simulacra, have substituted the ‘real’s in our living world (1994; 2007).

Hyper-reality is experienced in the mental processes and everyday life of human beings that realities can be constructed by imaginations, ingenuities, fantasies, and pragmatic needs of humans; examples can be continuously found in people's beliefs about human roles and relationships in the guise of soap operas, their perceptions towards a commodity under the guide of pre-purchase service experience provided by a supermarket, their knowledge about spatial territory or landscape formulated by maps, their recognition about science or history on basis of TV series, as well as their understandings of a particular culture shaped by a tourist experience in an artificial cultural park (Berthon and Katsikeas, 1998; Venkatesh, 1999; Darley, 2003; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Baudrillard, 2007; Steiner, 2010).

Specifically within the area of tourism, numerous previous studies have resonated with the postmodern perspectives of Eco (1986) and Baudrillard (1993; 2007). For instance, Pretes (1995) assessed the touristic value of Lapland's Santa Claus in Finland as enabling tourists' consumption for the intangible concepts 'Santa Claus' and Christmas. Santa Claus is an image without originals, yet the contrived spectacles themed by Santa Claus attract tourists and successfully advertised Lapland as the hometown of Santa Claus. Using the example of the Australian cultural park Tjapukai, Edelheim (2010) perceived the staged realities, which refer to the reproduced aboriginal culture presented and consumed in the park, are not real but hyper-real for the reason that the park encapsulates all music, dance and craft performances on exhibition for the majority of tourists to purchase, experience and better understand Australian context. Edelheim (2010, page 253) appraised hyper-reality as 'increasingly a part of modern tourism'. Similarly, Steiner (2010) assumed hyper-realization of tourism spaces as a trend of future heritage tourism and destination development based on current examples of the projects such as the Medinat Hammamet, Burj Al Arab, and The Palm Islands in the Middle East and North African countries. In the research of The Greek Myth Hotel and Casino in Macau conducted by Simpson (2009), the themed structures established based on 'Greek Mythology' without any actual material referents from neither China nor Greece, are post-modern products in the age of simulation, are functioning as indexes for movement, experience and consumption. Besides cultural and heritage tourism studies, in the research conducted by Reichel, Uriely and Shani (2008) relating to

ecotourism, the results of tourist attitudes collected towards an integrative planning approach designated for Negev Desert in Israel showed that tourists are in favor of experiencing a combination of simulated attractions and nature-based sites in Negev Desert. Such result indicated that, according to Reichel, Uriely and Shani (2008, page 38), the artificial simulations are complementary rather than contradictory to nature in a post-modern tourist experience. These cases, in response to Eco (1986) and Baudrillard (1993; 2007), have revealed that the conventional distinction between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ are broken down when tourism spaces provide intriguing experiences for visitors. The man-made sites such as art museums and themed spaces as illustrated above, instead of being destruction to authenticity, can create a hyper-real environment that transforms the abstract term ‘culture’ into visible, tangible and understandable settings.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

From the reviewed theories in previous studies, it is reasonable to assume that the themed space can function to shape place image by creating hyper-real experiences of the visitors. Applying these theories, the conceptual mode of hyper-reality and place image is framed as Figure 1.

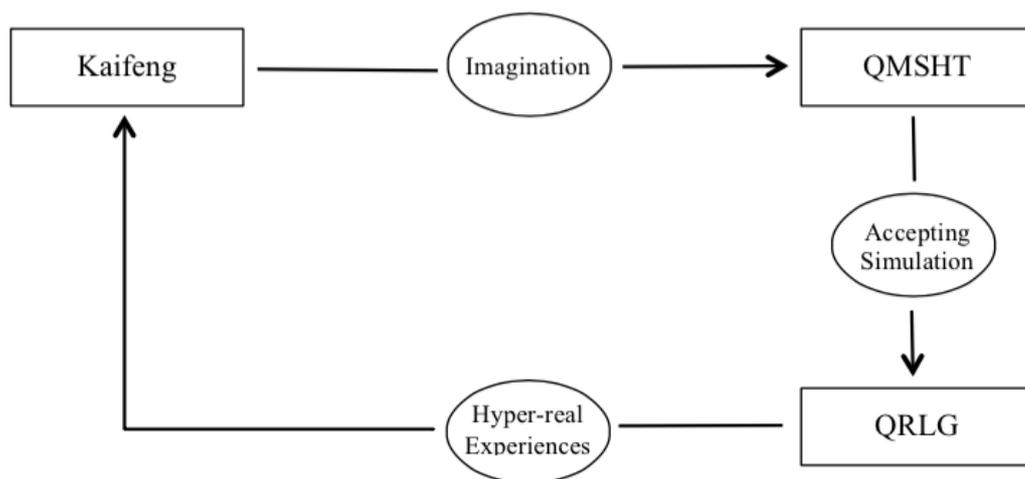


Figure 1 The conceptual mode of hyper-reality and place image.

It is visible in this table, that QRLG is established based on the acceptance of ancient

Kaifeng simulated in QMSHT. The logical debates about whether QMSHT is an imitation of Bianjing, or a masterpiece derived from Zhang Zeduan's imagination are collapsed in this process. The following text will discuss how the contrived attractions in QRLG, reproducing contents of QRLG, as 'fake' established from 'fake', become more real than real in tourist experiences and thus shape place image of Kaifeng as a millennium city.

3 Methodology

Following a post-modern approach, this thesis is worked out with qualitative research methods. Using tourists as the main source of information, I expect to answer the research question by investigating multiple visiting experiences and the underlying theoretical meanings behind the phenomenon. Participant observations and narrative interviews are applied, to explore diverse imaginations, perceptions and experiences associated with cultural theme, hyper-reality and place image.

This methodology chapter is sub-divided into six sections. Coming first is a brief description of how the philosophy of post-modernism has guided my research. The methodology part then proceeds to introduce my research design to demonstrate how participant observations and narrative interviews are structured during the fieldwork. The third section gives data collection, illustrating demographic characteristics of the chosen participants and the methods to record information. The measurements of data analysis follow as the fourth section. The fifth section comes my positionality, to provide the readers about the role I play and how my individual background has influenced the whole research. Based on the information above, this methodology chapter ends with the limitation of this research.

3.1 Post-modernism

The philosophy of post-modernism comprises the conceptual threads of my research. In contrast to modernism, the post-modern scholars have challenged the feasibility of modern approaches about the objectiveness and integration of ideology and society

(Purpart, 1995). Instead, the world in accordance of post-modernists is characterized by multiple ideologies, which can undermine truths, moralities and thought systems in past ages (Joyce and Kelly, 1991; Stone and Spiegel, 1992). 'Reality gives way to image' (Berthon and Katsikeas, 1998, page 150), the understanding of time and space is obtained from different lived experiences, whereas the boundary between 'true' and 'false' in traditional guises is blurred.

Following the post-modernist approach that centralizes 'difference' and 'image', the phenomenon is theorized based on multiple tourist experiences in this research. The researcher's subjective viewpoint is not excluded in this research. Hence, this thesis should be read with an awareness of the researcher's possible biases on the application of existing theoretical literatures and the presentation of the opinions of the researched visitors.

3.2 Research Design

Before in-depth research, I spent two days walking around the theme park to lay a fundamental knowledge of the 'place-making practices' of the theme park (Pink, 2009, page 29). I paid attention to the salient architectures imitated from QMSHT, such as the Rainbow Bridge across the Bian River, Sun Yang Zheng Shop, and the City Gate Wall. I also watched the action performances following the time schedule. Additionally, I scanned overall visitors' interactions and their consumptions on souvenirs and self-paid programs such as ancient costume renting and horse-ridden carriage. This round of ethnographic research serves an instrument for me to obtain basic knowledge about the theme park, as well as primary forecasting about satisfaction and discomforts that might occur in the researched visitors.

With an overall impression of the theme park experience, the ethnography is followed up with extended participant observation and narrative interviews. During the participant observation, the author followed the participants closely. The conversations, interactions and actions of the researched visitors in different sites and experiential programs are observed. The post-visit narrative interviews compensate the participatory fieldwork. The stories told by the respondents are used to explain

interests, senses, and thoughts lying behind tourist on-site behaviors. With the aim of deeply investigating tourist feelings experiences, the author adopted a less structured interview technique so that the interviewees were encouraged to tell their own stories in a comfortable atmosphere (Elliot, 2005). Instead of regarding the interviewees as ‘epistemologically passive’ or ‘mere vessels of answers’, I facilitated the participants to elaborate their own visiting experiences comprehensively in order to gather rich textual data from the participants (Elliot, 2005, page 22).

3.3 Data Collection

To ensure the trust and rapport, the participants were intentionally selected from my family and friends. In so doing, getting their permission to conduct participatory research becomes easier without unfamiliarity or discomfort. In accordance of the research request, 20 people in different ages, educational levels and social backgrounds are chosen as the researched visitors.

For the narrative interviews, the participants were firstly asked to comment on their experiences when visiting the theme park as a whole, including pre-visit expectation, on-site experience, and post-visit sense. The narrative interview stayed open in informal settings to give space for the interviewees’ interpretive subjectivities. Following the rules of implementing narrative interview, the interviewer did not give any directive episode after a “generative narrative question” (Riemann & Schütze 1987, p. 353, cited in Flick, 1997, page 16) once the narrative started. To aid documentation, notes were taken to collect useful information during the one-to-one interview. Probes were used when the stories came to the end, in case if important materials relevant to the research questions were missing. The narratives were then transcribed and translated for demonstration and further analysis. Demographic characteristics of the participants are listed in the table below. Ensuring the diversity, research questions can be answered under the context of multiple visiting experiences in the cultural theme park.

Table 1 Profile of Research Participants.

NO.	Gender	Age	Educational Degree (major area)	Occupation
A	Male	24	MSc (Agriculture)	Student
B	Male	22	Bachelor (Art Design)	Student
C	Female	49	Bachelor (Chinese education)	Teacher
D	Male	49	Bachelor (Politics and Law)	Policeman
E	Female	52	Senior High School	Retired tax officer
F	Female	79	Primary School	Retired Accountant
G	Female	46	Bachelor (Chinese education)	Teacher
H	Male	22	Bachelor (Technology)	Student
I	Female	32	Bachelor (Sectary)	Government Clerk
J	Female	29	Bachelor (Accounting)	Government Accountant
K	Female	31	MBA	PR Manager
L	Male	30	Associate (Law)	Policeman
M	Male	46	Bachelor (Economics)	Government Administrator
N	Male	54	Senior High School	Boss
O	Male	25	Junior High School	Self-employed
P	Female	49	Associate (Management)	Boss
Q	Female	25	Bachelor (Tourism Management)	Clerk
R	Female	25	Bachelor (Early Education)	Teacher
S	Male	30	Bachelor (Computer Science)	Policeman
T	Female	24	Senior High School	Self-employed

3.4 Data Analysis

Sticking to the research questions that are already listed in the introduction chapter, the collected data are coded into segmented pieces. Thematic analysis, the most common approach to analysis of data in social sciences (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, cited in Roulston, 2001, page 280) without articulating specific techniques (Boyatzis, 1998) was applied in this thesis for the reason that it provides an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysis of qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The narratives are finally categorized into three main themes: Initial Imagination of Kaifeng, Acceptance of Simulation, and Re-thinking Kaifeng. The research reliability and validity has been aimed to increase, by encouraging the participants to formulate their own stories without my interruption and organizing diverse viewpoints into different sections.

3.5 Positionality

Being aware of the fact that theme parks are not much and well researched domestically in China, I am curious about how western post-modern theories can be applied to Chinese theme park studies. Education under European curriculum during the past four years offered me basic knowledge and skills to access and understand the relevant theories. As a native Chinese speaker, I can easily understand the annotations of visitor behaviors during the participant observations and the visiting experience stories interpreted during the interviews. Besides, I can facilitate my research by encouraging the participants to tell more comprehensively about their experiences without communication barriers.

3.6 Limitation

Following a post-modern way, participants' diverse subjective opinions are emphasized and used for analysis in this thesis. The fieldwork was conducted in March, escaping the peak season of tourist arrivals with the purpose of collecting in-depth individual stories. It is reasonable to assume that, the participants might tell different stories about QRLG and Kaifeng if a calm and pleasant atmosphere cannot be ensured. Hence, the data of this research are not generalizable to a wider

population.

4 Result Analysis

The analysis of the notes taken during participant observations and narrative interviews reveals tourists' mental processes before, during and after the visit to QRLG. The following sections report the results derived from the notes sub-divided into initial imagination of Kaifeng, acceptance of simulated culture, and rethinking Kaifeng.

4.1 Initial Imagination of Kaifeng

With different knowledge bases, past experiences and personal interests, the image of Kaifeng was shaped in various channels. When referred to imagery Kaifeng before visiting QRLG, folk stories and legendary tales associated with Bao Qing Tian (or Bao Gong) and swordsman in Song Dynasty were involved in the narratives as a first impression, which shaped initial imagination of Kaifeng.

'As soon as I hear of the name 'Kaifeng', the first thing came to me was Bao Qing Tian in Kaifeng... I was keen on Kung Fu movies and TV dramas when I was a child, and those heroes rooted in my mind are from Song Dynasty... I thought Kaifeng people must own unbelievable skills...' (Participant H)

These stories also shaped comparison between imagined ancient Kaifeng and Kaifeng in modern China.

'...Similar with other inland Chinese cities in my mind, Kaifeng is not a modern developed city, unsafe, over populated with less educated people, dirty... Unlike now, life in ancient Kaifeng must be rich, fair and peaceful, Bao Gong governed here in North Song Dynasty...' (Participant P)

Besides, the art and literal works reputed Kaifeng to respondents' perceptions.

'QMSHT was worked out based on scenes of Bianjing, in my belief Kaifeng must contain prosperous ancient Chinese cultural elements...' (Participant B)

'...How could the charming words of Song Poetries come out...Kaifeng in my imagination must carry too many stories...' (Participant M)

'...In my imagination the architectures in Kaifeng are light grey...might the novels and TV series have shaped that thought...' (Participant C)

'...TV series about ancient China called Kaifeng as the capital city, I thought there would be some heritage of ancient palaces in Kaifeng.' (Participant G)

Meanwhile, contemporary social news and paraphrases from people living around rooted place image of Kaifeng in minds.

'I was not interested, and knew nothing deep about culture or history associated with Kaifeng. I've heard Kaifeng as a tourist destination with some cultural attractions, and I've also known from others, from media, that Kaifeng as an undeveloped, unsafe and dirty city. I thought this trip must be boring... Growing up in the city not far from Kaifeng, all my impression about the city is its poverty and less educated people...' (Participant A)

All the participants in this research had not stepped into Kaifeng before this visit to QRLG; neither do they own professional knowledge or specific interests on local contexts of Kaifeng. Hence, the image of Kaifeng in their mind is unacquainted and incomplete. This allowed the phenomenon that the transcribed and simulated Kaifeng on media, in combination with their personal own thoughts, had cultivated various perceptions and imaginations of Kaifeng.

4.2 Acceptance of Simulated Environment

Responding to the promotional theme, 'Once you appreciate the painting, you can dream about scene before 1000 years', the attractions in QRLG, from facilities to

workers, from still architectures to lived action shows, are all decorated in North Song styles in reference to QMSHT to display unique Kaifeng culture. From the notes taken during the participatory research and stories collected from the researched participants, I found that certain visitors accepted the completely artificial attractions in QRLG as a holistic presentation of Kaifeng culture.

'That's the palace...that's the garden...now I could understand how grand ancient Kaifeng was...' (Participant E)

'The loom, the water wheel and the mill were already commonly used family implements in North Song Dynasty, splendid...' (Participant P)

'Here is the rainbow bridge, the center of QMSHT, people at that time always crashed on it...here it is, Sunyangzheng shop, selling wine in it...' (Participant I)

'...All the workers in the park wear suits in North Song style, the architectures looked magnificent...I think more or less I already know how Kaifeng looked in North Song Dynasty.' (Participant R)

'The theme park is filled with aesthetic elements, I feel like walking in an ancient picture, a picture what I have seen in the book or on media, but more concrete than what I read in text or watched in picture. I got more understanding about what Zhang Zeduan painted.' (Participant B)

Despite the truly historical context of QMSHT and North Song Dynasty, the visitors were immersed in the 'ancient Kaifeng' simulated by the contrived attractions in QRLG. The amusing elements, action shows and interactive experiential programs embraced in the vacant spaces of QRLG, have created a more understandable version of cultural exhibition.

'The unique skills showed in the action performances made my imagination about heroic Kaifeng people in legendary tales concrete, they can split fire, more amazing than Kung Fu.' (Participant H)

'I experienced ancient Kaifeng in the park, dressing in ancient style suit, sitting in the horse-ridden carriage, I came to know what the life of Bianjing people in North Song Dynasty was like.' (Participant Q)

'I experienced a Song-style wedding with Landlord Wang's daughter, wedding was full of traditional regulations, but also full of happiness in North Song Dynasty.' (Participant B)

Specifically, participants who purchased for the large-scale action performance on water named 'The Great Song Dynasty-Reminiscences of the Eastern Capital' at night, although with a relatively high price extra from the entrance fee, appraised it highly for its superb display of North Song Dynasty in reference to Song Poetries.

'Prosperous Bianjing relived on water... I felt I was a part of North Song Dynasty under the lights, dances and songs, and when the light-made time tunnel appeared, I had a true feeling that I'm a person who witnessed prosperousness and depression of millennium Kaifeng, this feeling could not be obtained in other piecing sites.' (Participant C)

'... In the ManJiangHong part, my heart was burning when the palace was burned on show, I know something about the stories associated with the falling of North Song Dynasty, but this performance is the only program, which could provide me this feeling. I think on TV, or even I could have visited a museum with all Song relics, or Yuefei's tomb, I could not get this feeling so true.' (Participant H)

'This performance reified the contents of Song Poetries, there could not be another site in Kaifeng, original or man-made letting me experience all historical periods and stories of North Song Dynasty so truly like this.' (Participant M)

'...QMSHT formulated my first impression of ancient Kaifeng, QRLG complemented my understanding of QMSHT, after the night performance I know, QMSHT and exhibitions in QRLG just told a half story of North Song Dynasty.' (Participant B)

The expressive words from the researched participants reveal that the history and culture of Kaifeng have been consumed and experienced in QRLG. Attractions in QRLG, replicated and reproduced contents of QMSHT, are contrived projection of ancient Kaifeng.

4.3 Re-thinking Kaifeng

Cultural theme park and performing arts are closely associated with place image shaping of a tourist destination. Themed with QMSHT, QRLG aroused visitors' re-thinking process towards the image of Kaifeng.

'Unlike...my imagination, the visit was interlaced by amazement and vitality...Now my attitude of Kaifeng...changed, Kaifeng must be a destination worth exploring.... and probably revisit Kaifeng again in near future...' (Participant A)

Perceiving scenes and programs in QMSHT as an aggregation of inherited Kaifeng culture, visitors have expressed their post-visit intention for exploring Kaifeng by visiting other tourist sites, purchasing souvenirs and tasting local foods.

'I want to visit memorial temple of Bao Gong and Ancient Kaifeng Government...The performance of acted Bao Gong reminded me of being in Kaifeng, then I must go to see the real site which presents the stories I'm most familiar with.' (Participant H)

'I want to visit other cultural sites in Kaifeng city. The millennium city must contain abundant cultural elements that I never knew before. I want to explore Kaifeng for another few days, to experience how ancient Bianjing has been changed over years.' (Participant G)

'I will spend more time in Kaifeng, to taste local food... I also want to visit other cultural sites in the city, and go to local shops to experience normal life of local residents.' (Participant Q)

With worries about lagged transportation system and safety issues, exploring Kaifeng

does not belong to the things that the researched participants would voluntarily do before visiting QRLG. It can be observed from these narratives that the themed attractions in QRLG have unlocked the curiosities of visitors on Kaifeng culture by unmasking the image of ancient Kaifeng.

5 Discussion

5.1 Hyper-realization in Themed Space

Due to the recorded years in which Zhang Zeduan lived and the hypothesized aims of this painting, the arguments of certain historian experts seem plausible, that QMSHT was an idealistic artistic masterpiece worked out with imagination but not an authentic interpretation of Bianjing. Nevertheless, echoing Baudrillard's (1994; 2007) 'simulacra' concept, prosperous Bianjing simulated in QMSHT, precedes the rigid historical context, has created widely accepted simulacrum of ancient Kaifeng. From the narratives involving the initial imagination of Kaifeng before visiting QMSHT, it can be found that QMSHT, together with Kaifeng simulated in folk-tales, in stories broadcasted on media, and in paraphrases of other people were privileged on the ways in which participants' imagination were shaped, in spite of the possible conflicts with mere history. The results from the participatory research revealed that the architectures in QRLG, as the material ramification of QMSHT, have reincarnated the grand scenes and peaceful lifestyles of ancient Kaifeng to the visitors.

Owing to the fact that the original architectures from North Song Dynasty had already been ruined and buried over centuries, it is reasonable to view attractions in QRLG as simulations without material archetype or substantive referential past. Akin to The Greek Myth Hotel research conducted by Simpson (2009), the scheduled performing arts and folk-customs in QRLG has functioned as an index for visitors to experience and imagine Kaifeng culture. Reacting to Eco (1986), the fabricated 'fake' attractions in QRLG were accepted as the 'real' exhibition of ancient Kaifeng in minds of the visitors. 'Artificiality' does not equal to 'fake' at this point, as the logical distinction between historical truths and fantastic spectaculars created from legendary tales was

blurred on the way through their indulgence in the contrived attractions. Reviewing the compliments from visitors who purchased for the night performance ‘The Great Song Dynasty-Reminiscences of the Eastern Capital’, the participants have expressed their preference on watching this kind of art performance better than visiting scattered museums and heritage sites. Hyper-realization was achieved at that moment, as the performed Kaifeng became ‘more real than real’ in audiences’ perceptions. Integrating contents of QMSHT, inherited folk-customs of Kaifeng, renowned stories and Song Poetries, this large-scale on-water night performance has produced a hyper-real projection, which was supplementary to tourists’ existing understanding on history and culture of Kaifeng.

5.2 Shaping Place Image through Hyper-real Experiences

Similar to the Lapland’s Santa Claus project from Pretes (1995), the artificial park QRLG themed by QMSHT has transformed the abstract term ‘ancient Kaifeng’ into visible and tangible settings and advertised Kaifeng as the capital city of North Song Dynasty. As reviewed earlier, previous studies have indicated the role that a themed environment can play in displaying and projecting history, traditions and folk-custom culture of a certain place (Yeo and Teo, 1996; Richards, 2001). It was found through the extended participant observations and narrative interviews that the completely ‘fake’ sites in QRLG are possible to identify the scene of a millennium city’s past to visitors. QRLG engenders a double commodification through the visitations: while the tourists purchase for entrance, experiential programs and souvenirs in the theme park, the place image of Kaifeng is also consumed. When visitors are immersed in the themed environment, their imagination has gone beyond what they gazed on ground. The hyper-real experiences in QRLG, as analyzed earlier in last section, have facilitated their mental processes of thinking and affirmation, rethinking and reaffirmation about North Song Dynasty and Kaifeng culture.

However, before visiting QRLG, the participants did not express any voluntariness to study and explore Kaifeng. It needs to be argued here, that the changing attitudes and intentions of the participants for Kaifeng induced by the visitation to QRLG also affirmed current Kaifeng as an undesired tourist destination. Although established in

reference to the salient painting QMSHT, QRLG itself has not attained coterminous reputation as QMSHT owing to its location constraints. This research proved that when hyper-realization is achieved in tourist experiences, the establishment and operation of QRLG can function to distinguish Kaifeng with a particular theme ‘millennium city’, in consistency with the proposed association between theming and place image in previous literatures. Nevertheless, an unavoidable procedure before this, to popularize QRLG and attract tourist arrivals still remains questionable.

6 Conclusion

Through an in-depth study of 20 visitors, this thesis has illustrated findings about tourist experiences, hyper-realization of the contrived attractions and place image formulation in the cultural theme park QRLG. This conclusion chapter begins with main summaries of this thesis with answers to the research question. Last but not least, this thesis ends with the importance of the research and recommendations for future studies.

6.1 Main Conclusion

Established on basis of QMSHT, the cultural theme park QRLG has taken root in the ancient inherited culture of Kaifeng. In the guide of post-modern approach, this research has been conducted with involvement of multiple tourist experiences. Throughout the extended participant observations and narrative interviews, I found that the participants’ experiences in QRLG have been practiced in Eco (1986) and Baudrillard’s (1994; 2007) hyper-reality, as the contrived attractions are accepted and perceived as more real than real for these visitors. The architectures were viewed as the materialized contents of QMSHT, and these ‘fake’ sites were accepted as the reified ‘reality’ of North Song Dynasty since they are the objects matching visitors’ perception and imagination. The amusing elements integrated with the cultural exhibition have helped the visitors to immerse themselves in the simulated environment. Despite the absence of material archetype, the themed environment in QRLG has preceded the historical or geographical contexts of Kaifeng and created its

own image of ancient Kaifeng to the tourists.

The research question about the image of Kaifeng shaped by hyper-real experiences of visitors in QRLG can thus be answered in reference to the participants' self-expressed experiences. When visitors are intrigued in the simulated environment, the boundary between 'authentic presentation' and 'contrived projection' has been eradicated. Although being artificial, the themed attractions in QRLG have facilitated the re-thinking and re-imagining processes of the visitors towards Kaifeng culture. The place image of Kaifeng has been formulated, or reformed to these visitors throughout the hyper-real experiences in QRLG. However, the collected feelings, 'reluctance' of Kaifeng before visiting QRLG, from the participants indicated that the function of QRLG in generating tourist arrivals is constrained owing to the limitation of accessibility and promotion. Hence, the inevitable process before shaping place image through hyper-realization of themed space, to repute QRLG, still remains problematic due to current undeveloped situations of Kaifeng.

6.2 Importance of the Research

'Theme park' in most of the existing researches is simply viewed as an ordinary segment in tourism industry, being studied under objective perspectives with quantitative instruments. I took specific starting points of 'theme' and 'local culture', constructed a theme park study from a post-modern perspective with emphasis on tourists' individual experiences. This thesis has highlighted how the post-modern theory 'hyper-reality' can be applied to analyze the association between themed space and place image using individual experiences as main data resource. This research has also addressed the concept 'theme park' from a broader cultural sense, beyond the world of Disneyland. Furthermore, this research has introduced Kaifeng, an inland less known city yet with unique local culture, indicating that other than the renowned internationalized cities like Beijing and Shanghai, regions wherein residents' lifestyles remain less touched by 'global culture' do exist in China and are also worthy researching.

6.3 Recommendations for future studies

This thesis has applied the concept ‘hyper-reality’ to a cultural theme park exhibiting unique local culture. Future researches can be conducted with similar conceptual frames in other themed spaces, to investigate how ‘image’ rather than ‘reality’ has been privileged on the ways in which visitors’ understandings and imaginations of culture are shaped. Participants of this research are chosen from people who had never stepped into Kaifeng before this trip. Another research can be conducted more domestically, to investigate the role QRLG can play on formulating local identity. Derived from limited time and individual ability permit for this research, the participants were selected purposefully and were aware of my study. In the future if applicable, I would have a try to get access to unfamiliar visitors passing by during my ethnographic study to obtain richer data about visiting experiences. Besides, concentrating on the research question, expressions of the researched visitors irrelevant with hyper-reality and place image are neglected. However, some of the participants did refer to ‘environmental sustainability’, ‘management’ and ‘politics’ aspects when describing their visiting experiences. These potential sources, combining with the observed function of QRLG in projecting Kaifeng culture and shaping place image, it is possible to take a further step on exploring the association between QRLG and regional development of Kaifeng, in response to the major tourism research trend in China.

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