Title:

Paris Offscreen: Chinese Tourists in Cinematic Paris

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Yun-An Dung (1986) has recently obtained her MSc in 'Sociology of Media, Culture and the Arts' from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research interests stem from two main themes. The first one focuses on the relationships between popular culture and contemporary tourism. The second area concerns the sociology of love, especially in the domain of heterosexual relationships and the relation to late modernity.

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Paris Offscreen: Analysing the Chinese Tourist Experience of Cinematic Paris

Abstract

This article examines from a European-Asian perspective the relationship between media representations and the tourist's imagination. We use the case of Chinese tourists in Paris to investigate how these non-European tourists imagine Europe, and how these imaginations are being realized, challenged, and modified during concrete tourist experiences. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with tourists and field observations, this paper shows how the Chinese tourist imagination of Europe is strongly influenced by popular representations from the media. More in particular, the Chinese tourist experience of Paris as it turns out is characterised by an on-going negotiation between media-inspired fantasies and personal experiences of the 'real' Paris. As a result of this, the way the Chinese imagined Europe before their visitis reinforced, but also challenged. Chinese tourists tend to develop a hybrid perspective: they learn to re-appreciate Paris in its complexity, while at the same time re-constituting their own cultural identity vis-à-vis the European Other.

> *To grasp its secret, you should not then begin with the city and move inwards toward the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards toward the city.*
>
> (Baudrillard, 1988:56)

Introduction

One afternoon in the spring of 2011, we followed the queue to enter the Louvre Museum in Paris. In front of us, there was a group of about 20 Chinese tourists listening to a man with a red flag on his bag, pointing out the spot where the actor Tom Hanks kneeled down in front of the glass pyramid in the movie *The Da Vinci Code*. Later that day, in the *Café les 2 Moulins*, two Taiwanese girls asked us to take a picture of them in front of the poster of the movie *Amélie*.

After a long period of national isolationism – following the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949[1] - Chinese outbound tourism started to take off in the early 1980s, at first mainly to Asian and Pacific regions. In 2004, when various European countries opened up as new tourist destination to citizens of China, a significant increase in the amount of Chinese tourists travelling to Europe has been observed.[2] In 2010, 2.3 million Chinese visited Europe.

Where do these 'new' tourists go to? Without a doubt, France and in particular its capital Paris, are on the top of the list. Of the 2,3 million Chinese tourists in 2010, almost half of them visited France (China Tourism Academy, 2011). And the numbers are growing fast: recent estimates state that 1,800,000 Chinese tourists are expected to visit France in the season of 2013/2014 (Sani, 2012). According to Chen's report on Chinese tourist behaviour in France, the average time Chinese tourists travel in France is 3.5 days of which they usually spend 1.5 days in Paris (Chen, 2006).

How do Chinese people imagine the city of Paris and from that choose this location – almost on the other side of the world - as their tourist destination? What are the crucial deciding factors in this process of destination decision-making? Part of the answer can be found in the omnipresence of Paris in (Chinese) popular culture. Of all foreign cities, Paris is one of the cities that are represented most in Chinese popular culture, with many recurring, well-known stereotypes of Paris city life, such as images of the Eiffel Tower, street corner cafés and young couples walking the streets dressed in haute couture. For many Chinese, Paris' has become an adjective, a synonym of an exotic, cultural, artistic European bourgeois lifestyle (Liu, 2004).

Though the precise effect remains unclear, numerous previous tourism studies have indicated that there is a strong connection between representations in the popular media and how tourists imagine their destination to be (Crouch, Jackson and Thompson, 2005; Bolan and Williams, 2008; Iwashita, 2006; Kim and Richardson, 2003 et al.). In contemporary society, people receive a vast and complex amount of information, images and representations of the world via visual media, particularly in the form of popular culture products such as movies and TV series. These all-pervading screen images constitute a system of understanding for individuals to imagine the world 'out there' in their mind (Schofield, 1996).

In recent years, the influence of the popular media on the tourist gaze has been acknowledged by the tourist industry, and diverse strategies have been developed with the goal of influencing this process, e.g. by informing directors and production companies of the possibilities for shooting movies at a desired location. As Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2006, p.185) describe, 'managing the place brand becomes an attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in ways that is deemed favourable to the present

circumstances and future needs of the place.'

In this paper, our intention is to show how Chinese tourists - as the 'new-comers' to the European continent - experience Paris when they walk through the doors of Charles de Gaulle Airport. More in particular, we will focus on the importance of popular media, cinematic representations in particular, in the process of Chinese tourists' imaginations, constructions and experiences. How do film representations contribute to the Chinese tourists' imagination of Paris? And how are these images being realized, challenged, and modified by the Chinese tourists' concrete experience of Paris?[3]

Media tourism

The observation that tourists are drawn to media locations is not new. There is a history of people going on trips to locations from famous novels. For instance, in *The literary tourist. Readers and places in Romantic & Victorian Britain* (2006), British literary scholar Nicola Watson describes how visiting locations from popular novels was a widespread phenomenon in 19th Century Britain (Watson, 2006: 12). Oral folk culture also has a tradition of 'legend trips': people travelling to locations – castles, bridges, burial sites – that are tied in with popular folk or ghost stories (Ellis, 1989; 2001).

Nevertheless, today we are witnessing a popularization and wider-scale eruption of the phenomenon. Visiting 'fictional' locations from 'popular culture' has become an important economic activity, with a far-reaching impact on the towns and villages involved, their inhabitants and the visiting tourists (Beeton, 2005). For many cities, stimulating media tourism has become part and parcel of their city marketing policy. Hence, while 19th Century literary tourism was restricted to a small group of literary fans, contemporary examples lure tens of thousands of tourists every year.

This new development - variously labelled as 'TV tourism', 'movie tourism', 'movie-induced tourism', 'film-induced tourism' or simply 'media tourism'[4] - has been studied from the perspective of a wide range of disciplines, including tourism studies, media studies and cultural geography. For example, there have been studies about the attraction of the set of *Coronation Street* at Granada Studios near Manchester (Couldry, 2000) and the Manhattan TV Tour in New York (Torchin, 2002). Other scholars have focused on the popularity of *Blade Runner* in Los Angeles (Brooker, 2005), *Braveheart* hotspots in Scotland (Edensor, 2005), The Sound of Music Tour in Salzburg (Roesch, 2009), *Harry Potter* settings in the UK (Iwashita, 2006), James Bond locations worldwide (Reijnders, 2010), The Sopranos Tour in New Jersey (Couldry, 2008) and tourism to sites where *The Lord of the Rings* was shot in New Zealand (Tzanelli, 2004; Roesch, 2009).

Unfortunately, much of the literature in this interdisciplinary research field has an Anglo-Saxon bias, both with regard to the study of media tourists, and in terms of the societies and identities they are seen to have an impact on. There have been only a few exceptions where it concerned the relevance of non-Western tourists, for example, the investigation on the social and spatial consequences of the increasing presence of Indian Bollywood tourism in Switzerland (Frank, 2011); and the studies on the popularity of South Korean television drama tourism in East Asia (Chan, 2007; Kim and Wang, 2012), in most of the earlier tourism studies, the gaze is usually from "the West" to "the rest".

Acknowledging this missing "Eastern gaze" in the study of tourism in general and media tourism in particular, there is an urge to identify the salient dimensions of the non-Western tourist in a Western destination. Furthermore, the boom of non-Western tourists challenges the general argument that tourism is a new form of neo-colonial imperialism (Smith, 2009). Such an argument is influenced by the work of Said (1995), in which the relationships between the Occident and the Orient are interpreted as part of the hegemonic nature of European culture. In Said's work, the relation between 'the West' and 'the rest' is defined in terms of 'viewer' and 'the viewed'. However, different authors have shown how such a binary opposition between the West and the non-West is problematic in several ways: firstly, it disregards the variations within the non-Western world and the fact that each of those regions maintains different historical relations to the West; secondly, it denies the fact that 'the rest' stereotypes the 'West' as well – stereotyping is not a one way process; and finally, the presumption of Western predominance in the interaction with other cultures leaves no room for dynamic discourse and, more generally, can be said to be at least problematic when confronted with the new political reality, e.g. the economic rise of the BRIC countries since the early 2000s (Bonnett, 2004).

Yet, the emerging literatures on Occidentalism over the past decade have challenged such rigid affiliation (e.g. Bonnett, 2004; Buruma and Margalit, 2004). The non-Western narratives of the West aims to examine the image of the West from its own right, as intrinsically essential and as 'possessing a degree of autonomy from Western global hegemony' (Bonnett, 2004:7). Though studies in Occidentalism have allowed a new dimension to inspect the relation between the West and the East, it is noticeable that most works remain historical and theoretical. There is a lack of empirical studies investigating how the idea and the image of the West has been constructed and how the non-West conceives the West in contemporary societies. What happens when 'the rest' becomes the client and knocks on the door of the West?

Since 2004, the Chinese tourist is able to travel to most European countries.

This new tourist flow from the East to the West brings us an opportunity to find out about how the West is defined, imagined and experienced by the Easterners, within the context of tourism. How do the 'exotic' differences Western society presents play out in the eyes of a Chinese tourist? Are there significant differences with the standard literature of media tourism based on Western tourists?

Method

In order to understand how Chinese tourists form their image of Paris under the influence of film representations and how they experience, realize, and modify what they imagine in their actual visits, we have applied a multi-method approach, including individual interviews and ethnographic fieldwork on various film locations in Paris.

First, in order to recruit the interviewees we posted the research information on various well-known Chinese travel-information-sharing websites that focus on Europe or France, including Backpackers[5] (Taiwan/Hong Kong); Eurotravel[6] (Taiwan/ Hong Kong); PTT-Traveling[7] (Taiwan); Tianya[8] (China); GO2EU[9] (China); Yododo[10](China); and Zeeu[11] (China). We asked the members of the travel websites, who had experienced media tourism in Paris to participate in an individual interview. Initially we received nineteen volunteers; and, at the end, conducted twelve semi-structured personal interviews, based on the methodology described in Bryman (2004). In general, our respondents turned out to be young adults from urban settings with a high level of education[12]. All respondents were interviewed via internet-telephone, except for two interviewees who preferred to do the interview via an internet chat program - Windows Live Messenger. The aim of these interviews was to investigate in-depth the role of popular media in the decision-making process of choosing the holiday destination, the tourists' imagination of Paris and, following that, the respondents' travel experiences.

Studies of media tourism, especially on an international scale, have their limitations and difficulties. The methods we applied in this study also have their advantages and disadvantages. First, the use of online websites to recruitment offered us the potential to reach mass numbers of respondents in an efficient and cost–effective manner (Litvin and Kar, 2001). Additionally, it enabled us to contact the respondents from various regions in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the method of online-recruiting could lead to the bias of limiting respondents to fervent internet users, which could produce an unrepresentative sample frame (Litvin and Kar, 2001: 309).

Based on the interviews with the respondents, we concluded that the experience of cinematic Paris by Chinese tourists can generally be understood as a continuous

process, constituted of three stages: *the pre-visit stage* in which tourists consume destination images and construct travel intentions and expectations; *the on-site tourist experience* of the locations known from the media; and *the post-visit stage* in which tourists recollect their experiences and mentally connect the first two stages. In the next section, the results of the interviews are presented with these three stages serving as a framework.

Imagining Paris

'If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast', Ernest Hemingway wrote in 1950. This sentence has without doubt become one of the most popular slogans about Paris. During the interviews, two respondents referred to this slogan to illustrate their initial impression of Paris, before they actually paid a visit to Paris. For most of the respondents, Paris is a city that represents nothing but itself—Parisian and French.

> *'How I imagined Paris is just…French! Very Parisian! There is no other word*
> *that can describe it except itself!'*
>
> <div align="right">(Wei, 24, male)[13]</div>

Such "Frenchness" is contextualized by several terms the respondents used to describe the Paris from their imagination before they really travelled to Paris, this included terms such as: romantic atmosphere, historical buildings, artistic culture, stylish and fashionable Parisians, the good life… These initial impressions, however, are strongly derived from their mediated experiences of popular culture, especially from movies. As we asked why they would imagine Paris in such a cultural and amorous way, two respondents mentioned the influence of French literature, but all the respondents referred to the Paris-related movies. Most popular among Paris-related films mentioned were *Amélie* (2001); *Paris, I love you* (2006); *Before Sunset* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001).

Interestingly, it has not been left unnoticed that most of these movies were American productions. The employment of stereotypical Frenchness in American Hollywood film productions is recognized by the scholars in film studies. American films tend to depict an image of France, Paris particularly, that is characterized by romance, femininity, historical representations and unpredictability (e.g., Humbert, 2003; Verdaguer, 2004). With the exception of *Amélie*[14], the only French production in the Paris-related films mentioned most by the respondents, the Chinese tourists' image

of Paris is as it turns out, to a certain level, highly influenced by American film representations. This triangle relation between the Chinese tourists, the city of Paris, and American movies reaffirms the significant power of the American movie industry, which has such an impact on global audiences and their perception of not only American culture, but the rest of the world as well.

Among the five films mentioned most, four were romantic comedies. The portrait of Paris in these films is closely related to a magical romantic aura of a daily city life where unusual things tend to happen. The movie *Paris, I love you* is comprised of eighteen love stories set in the city of love, Paris. The movie *Amélie* features a girl who finds love after a series of heroic acts to help the people around her. In the movie, the director portrays the city of Paris as a colourful dreamscape by using computer-generated art (Mitchell, 2001). This creates an exotic and unrealistically romantic atmosphere for the audience to experience and imagine the city. In the movie *Before Sunset*, Paris is a still picture with the golden light of sunshine and the flowing water of the Seine (Scoot, 2004). Two lovers meet each other after nine years of separation and share the view of the city within a limited timeframe. In these movies, Paris is a dreamland filled with romantic possibilities. This characteristic of Paris seems to provide an idealistic image for the tourists to fulfil the needs of romantic escapism and for extraordinary experiences.

According to the respondents, the scenery of Paris is not just a background for the story to take place. The city itself plays a major role in these movies, creating and sustaining the amorous atmosphere which is seen as a defining characteristic of romantic movies. As respondent Jia-Ling stated: 'You cannot imagine the stories happening somewhere other than Paris. If you take Paris out of these movies, you take the magic out of them.' A panoramic view of Paris is shown in all the movies selected. The picture of Paris in the Chinese tourist's mind is inextricably connected to the pictures on the screen.

Yet, not all the respondents shared the image of a romantic fairy-tale Paris before their trips. Hua-Dong perceived Paris as an 'over-praised cosmopolitan city' that 'because it is too popular and thus it loses its uniqueness and the adventurous spirit to travel to.' In addition, some respondents were informed that Paris is not as civilized, clean and romantic as seen on the screen. Most of the respondents found it hard to believe that a 'dirty' Paris is also very much part of reality. This conflicting information gives the respondents the urge to clarify the truth themselves.

Other factors also contributed to the image of Paris, partly in line with the impact of French films. For example, five of the respondents mentioned they had French in school as a second foreign language[15]. The familiarity with the language, for the

respondents, not only reflects their image of French culture but also re-enhances their adoration of it:

> *'At the beginning I had been exposed to some French works, like translated French novels and films. So I started to show an interest in the language. But, well, I was also kind of already interested in French culture. That's why I watched those French movies… I don't know which comes first actually… It's like chicken and the egg paradox. I just like its culture, I guess!'*
>
> (Shu-Jyuan, 29, female)

The statements of Shu-Jyuan indicated the fact that the fondness for the French language and the reference to French films amounts to a reciprocal causation. But what we can assume is that language brings the respondents closer to a culture. Within these French-culture-favoured surroundings, France, or the city of Paris becomes a dreamland that is familiar in their mind's eye and that needs to be unveiled.

However, this leads us to the question of why French culture, or to be more specific, the 'Parisianess' on screen is conceived as so 'charming' that it attracts Chinese/Taiwanese people to travel almost halfway around the world to visit it? For most of the respondents, what they yearn to experience in Paris is the atmosphere, the 'European' or 'French' atmosphere that is different or even opposite to their Chinese cultural background; and only appears within the media as 'the distant other' (Silverstone, 2007).

> *'I think what I expected the most was just to experience the atmosphere in Paris. It feels like the people there are kind of idle, relaxing, you know, like there's nothing to be in a hurry about or be busy about. They just seem to enjoy their lives. It's totally different from the way we are in China. All we do is just work, study and, pursue a socialized and successful life.'*
>
> (Jia-Ling, 22, female)

> *'The city presents this feeling of …. For the Easterners, the typical elegance of European culture, a romantic, humanist, and artistic atmosphere. That's something different from where we are from. I think it is the reason that attracts me the most.'*
>
> (Huei-Wen, 23, female)

The adoration of Paris was in line with the comparison between the self and the Others. For the respondents, Paris stood as an opposite Other to their Eastern cultural

identity. Paris is imagined by these travellers as a representation of Western culture, with the exterior of the classic European cityscape and an inner culture of bourgeois lifestyle that has a sharp distinction with Chinese society. Such an imagination, however, surprisingly does not differ between Taiwanese tourists and tourists from mainland China. To explain this shared similarity, we consider that first, the imaginations of Paris both from Taiwanese tourists and Mainland Chinese are influenced by the same source: American movies. In addition, as we have been arguing, the imagination of Paris results from the symbolic opposition between the self (Chinese culture) and the Other (Western European culture). Partly due to this binary opposition, small and subtle differences between Taiwanese and Chinese culture are underplayed.

To draw on the concept of collectivism or situation-centeredness (Hung and Chen, 2005; Hsu, 1981) would further explain the self-perceived comparison between the East and the West by the respondents. According to Triandis (2001), people in societies characterized by collectivism give priority to the goals and values of the in-group, such as family, work, nation, etc., instead of their own. In Chinese culture, self is generally defined by the relations an individual has with those around him, with a focus on others' needs and expectations (Gao et al, 1996).

This trait is mostly recognized when the respondents attempt to describe Frenchness in contrast to themselves. For example, respondent Jia-Ling expressed her adoration for the lifestyle of the French because 'they know what they want, and they are living it. That's something different, different from me, from us [the Chinese].' In these Chinese tourists' eyes, Parisians live a 'quality' life that is based on personal interest and taste, which is different from the ordinary life routine in Chinese society. The 'exotic' images of Paris motivate the tourists to travel to the city and to experience this distinctive pleasure of life. Therefore, in their journeys, the Chinese tourists seek out particular images to confirm their imagination. For example, French people sitting in a street café on a random afternoon, young couples lying in the sun on the banks of the river Seine; or various bizarre performances by street artists. This romantic idea of Paris is constructed with the differentiation between the ordinary and extraordinary in mind; East and West; Self and the Other.

Experiencing Paris
According to the respondents, the most popular film locations visited by the Chinese tourists were the 'Café les 2 Moulins' from the movie *Amélie*, 'The Shakespeare BookStore' from the movie *Before Sunset*, the tomb of Oscar Wilde from the movie *Paris, I love you*, the Moulin Rouge from the movie *Moulin Rouge*, and the Louvre

Museum from the movie *The Da Vinci Code*. For the respondents, their understanding of the city of Paris is in part a construct of representations from films. Therefore, those film locations functioned as anchors for the tourists to identify their expectations and imaginations and to experience Paris.

However, besides depicting their personal travelling map, the film locations also provide an affectionate connection for the tourists to experience the cityscape. By identifying and visiting the film locations, the Chinese tourists felt a sense of familiarity in the foreign city. In the context of media tourism, it is known that the audience tend to develop a personalised feeling of attachment towards the fictional characters as well as the filmed locations, and hence the wish to visit them arises (Kim, 2012). One of the respondents, Shu-Jyuan, told us that the movie *Before Sunset* has a significant meaning to her, due to its relation to the relationship between her and her husband.

> *'My husband and I both like the movie a lot. What happened to the main characters is kind of like the story of my husband and me. We passed each other by but met again and decided to stay together. That's why we wanted to make Paris our honeymoon destination. We feel it's necessary to visit these scenes ourselves.'*
>
> (Shu-Jyuan, 29, female)

In her story, Shu-Jyuan recognized herself and her husband in the characters from the film. In order to strengthen and realize such recognition, she and her husband visited various film locations of *Before Sunset*. Once there, they mimicked acts or scenes from the movie. For example, just like Jesse and Celine, the main characters in *Before Sunset*, Shu-Jyuan and her husband went to the Seine to walk along the riverbank. And, in line with *Before Sunset*, they also entered one of the boats. On the boat, they talked about their love as well as the love between Jesse and Celine. By visiting the places where this 'fictional' romance happened, and by making a connection between the two love stories, Shu-Jyuan and her husband symbolically anchor their love to the city of Paris.

These experiences bring to mind Reijnders's study on 'places of the imagination'. According to Reijnders (2011), our world is full of locations that derive their significance from the fact that they were used as the background for popular narratives in literature, television or cinema. These 'places of the imagination' offer fans the possibility to have a transcendent experience between two worlds: an imagined world on the one hand and that which is considered to be the 'real' world on the other.

However, in the current study, the respondents' experiences were often a little

less symbolic and hyper-real than those Reijnders discusses in his work (Reijnders, 2011). Even though the respondents did feel the urge to visit the places that were once in their minds, and even though they had personal connections to the locations, at the same time many of the respondents denied a strong sense of a transcendent experience. For example, Jing and Wei both described how their experience at the location was rather superficial:

> 'When I had just got there I really felt so excited. It was like, after all the thousands of miles of travelling, I could finally see the place. But that's it. I took a picture, and thought: so… this is what it looks like in real life. And I was gone.'
>
> (Jing, 25, female)

> 'I felt that when you were there, you wouldn't experience some kind of sensational, surreal, movie-ish feeling, but just the feeling that the surrounding gave to you at that moment, in the reality. Of course you will think about "oh, that's where it happened in the film!" But most of feeling was current, what you really saw with your eyes.'
>
> (Wei, 24, male)

There are some possible explanations for this difference. Firstly, in his work, Reijnders (2011) analyses three case studies of media tourism which focus on serial products: the detective television series, the series of James Bond movies, and the numerous Dracula movies. Due to the fact that these serial media products have been available for a relatively long time and in various forms, it causes a deep degree of viewer involvement and a sense of emotional friendship/relationship to the fictional characters (Reijnders, 2011). This finding is in line with what Kim and Long (2012) theoretically suggested: 'personalised viewing experiences through gradually intensified identification, empathy, emotional connection and parasocial interaction are associated more with TV soap operas than films'(p.178).

Without the continuation of storylines and the consistency of themes throughout the Paris related movies, two hours of movie watching gives less chance for the viewers to develop such close bonds with the fictional character or to know the details of the movie as opposed to themed media products. According to the respondents, there was hardly anyone who had watched a 'Paris' movie more than three times. Instead of becoming acquainted with all features, designs and details of the movies, only a few interesting moments in the movies as well as a holistic impression could be recollected. Clearly the connections between the respondents and

the various Paris movies are not of the same level as the ones between the fans and the TV series in Reijnders' study (2011).

Take for example Jing (25, female). She stayed only a few minutes in front of Pont Neuf. She recognized the bridge from the movie, and decided to take a photograph of the bridge to document this experience. But the engagement Jing had with the 'real' Pont Neuf did not go beyond the level of recognizing and photographing the bridge. Whereas for some tourists visiting media sites can become a transcendent experience, Jing's experience was rather superficial and short-lived. The same can be said of Wei. When visiting a location from *Amélie*, Wei recognized the scene but his attention quickly shifted to other aspects of this street location; most noticeable the street artists who were trying to sell their works there. Though it is difficult to generalize our findings based on such a small amount of respondents, the experiences of our Chinese respondents do seem to differ from most existing studies on media tourism, where the experience of media tourists is characterised and described as an emotional and significant event (Beeton, 2005; Reijnders, 2011).

Besides familiarity with the movies' details, the wider history of the city of Paris also plays an important role in the respondents' different experiences of media tourism. Paris is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. The Moulin Rouge, the river Seine, the tomb of Oscar Wilde in the cemetery Père Lachaise, and the Louvre Museum are all famous for their own history and are visited by numerous tourists from all over the world. Given this, the symbolic meanings created by the movies are only part of a wider network of signifiers.

Moreover, most sites turn out to be rather crowded. Silent moments of private meditation could easily be disturbed by other tourists. Urry's (2002) theoretical concept of the gazes could help us to understand this process. In Urry's work, the tourist gaze is divided into two different types: the romantic gaze and the collective gaze. A romantic form of tourist gaze is one, 'in which the emphasis is on a private, personal and semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze' (Urry, 2002: 43). What people gaze upon are ideal representations that are being internalised from various media forms. The concept of the romantic gaze is very much in line with what Reijnders (2011) discusses about the transcendent experiences, which media tourists undergo when visiting the movie/TV series' locations. Both arguments contend that the objects of the tourist gaze are appreciated through an indirect experience of reality and via the images already in their mind. However, this very personal appreciation can be interrupted by the fact that there are too many people involved on the locations. Thus it eventually becomes a collective gaze (cf. Roesch, 2009).

The collective gaze is a sort of tourist gaze that requires the presence of large numbers of other people to share the view. This sharing of the atmosphere with others takes away the unique connection between the objects and the viewer. For example, standing in front of the *Moulin Rouge*, respondent Yi-Ting noticed that she was not the only one there, but felt part of a large group of tourists. This sense of the mediocre broke the special connection between her and the film location. The romantic gaze transformed into a collective gaze.

> *'I was there… with a lot of other tourists who were taking photos of the building. So I did too. And then I just went on to the next destination.'*
>
> <div align="right">(Yi-Ting, 25, female)</div>

The disruption of personal moments was not solely caused by other tourists. According to the respondents, the local people near the sites or the interactions with their travel companions could also decrease the possibility of experiencing the crossing between inside and outside of the media world.

> *'When I was in the Park, I tried to recall what happened here in the movie. But then, a police car passed by; a man sat down next to me. It was quite difficult to concentrate on your own thoughts since there were too many interesting things happening in reality.'*
>
> <div align="right">(Zhi-Cheng, 35, male)</div>

Transcendence between reality and imagination can be a delicate affair. It can be easily intruded by various occurrences. As Zhi-Cheng concludes, this transcendent moment cannot be forced, it is something that only happens "when it comes to you".

Recollecting Paris
According to the respondents, the trip to Paris offered them not only something they had already expected, but also something new – a Paris beyond their imagination. Some of the respondents mentioned that before their trip, they were informed by other friends, or by the messages on travellers' websites about the 'dark side of Paris'. But, as one of the Chinese respondents, Fang-Yi said, most of the Chinese tourists 'couldn't buy it' until they walked out of the airport.

For the Chinese tourists, this 'unimagined' Paris is described as rubbish in the streets, smelly subways, horrible traffic, a non-English speaking environment, and the

presence of such large numbers of many former French-colonial ethnic minorities.

> *'It was just so dirty almost everywhere! It's nothing like you would imagine before*
> *you went there. It's Paris!! How would anyone imagine that Paris is a dirty city? I*
> *think even my city is cleaner than Paris.'*
>
> (Zhi-Cheng, 35, male)

Most tourists tend to understand a foreign society by viewing the public as a homogenous mass. This is especially the case with Chinese tourists in Paris. For most of the Chinese tourists, Paris, or French in general, is the culturally and geographically distant Other that was known primarily from the cinema screen. The imagination and understanding of the city was constructed based on its mediated appearances as classical, romantic, fashionable, and civilized. In Chinese eyes, Paris was the city which represented ideal Western/European culture, based on civilization, reason, bourgeois lifestyle and prosperity, and to some degree the ideal role model for contemporary Asian cities. However, experiencing 'the other side of Paris' led the Chinese tourists to reconsider the culture of Western deification in China and Taiwan and to reconfirm with regard to their Chinese cultural identity that – in the words of Yi-Ting - 'we are not so bad!'[16] This comparison between their Eastern home town and the Paris of the 'Far West' was made by the Chinese tourists with respect to details from their trip. For example, according to the Chinese tourists, the French are more easily offended by other people staring at them, they are less polite when confronted with strangers, they do not follow official regulations etc. These unexpected views and experiences led the tourists to re-evaluate their own Chinese identity.

> *'I think Parisian people are just a little bit self-centred. They don't care what other*
> *people think. If they don't want to talk English, they just won't. If they don't want*
> *to pay for the metro ticket, they just jump over the gate. It really confused me. Maybe*
> *just because I'm Asian and we follow the rules.'*
>
> (Fang-Yi, 21, female)

In this quote, Fang-Yi uses West/East cultural differences to explain the differences between her stereotypical view of Western society and the experienced reality. Recognizing the individualism within Western society led her to redefine her own "Asian" identity. Following this argument, the boundary between Eastern society and Western society was redrawn based on relatively cultural differences with fewer

hierarchical relationships..

Another element of the 'other Paris'- as highlighted during the interviews – consisted of the ethnic diversity of the Parisian street life. All the respondents mentioned the fact that they were surprised by the many 'non-White' people in Paris, which was a kind of a cultural shock for them.

'It's like there were no French people in Paris. Maybe it's because of the immigrants. There are a lot of black people in Paris, with their tribal clothes. It was exotic, but not in the way that you had imagined.'

(Jyun-Ming, 22, male)

This sense of unfamiliarity can be explained in two ways. Firstly, from a historical perspective we can see how the Chinese tourists tend to see the world in terms of China and its main counterparts, namely Europe/USA and Japan, whereas for example Africa is hardly mentioned (cf. Dikötter, 2005). This is consistent with Liu's study that for most Chinese people, European or Western society is perceived as the white society (Liu, 2004). On the other hand, although there are fifty different ethnic minorities officially recognized in China, over 90% of the Chinese population is classified as Han (Dikötter, 2005). In this sense, although there are many cultural, linguistic and regional differences within China - as there are within Europe - there are relatively fewer differences physical characteristics such as skin colour. As a result, encountering 'non-White' people in Paris was not what the Chinese were expecting or in a fundamental sense familiar with. For most respondents, this created a sense of discomfort.

The Chinese tourists are satisfied when they encounter the objects and settings which correspond to their pre-established imagination. These sights are usually related to views of European historical buildings, the banks of the river Seine, the artistic shops and cafés, the random street artists, the fashion on display in the Avenue des Champs-Elysees and, last but not least, the Paris film locations. These contribute to the sense of familiarity and to the satisfaction derived from travelling. They confirm the romance, art and history of picturesque Paris. Thus, it is fair to say that satisfaction seems to stem from anticipation, from seeking out the preconfigurations of the imagination.

At the same time, the observation of different scenes in different districts of Paris led some of the Chinese tourists to acknowledge the 'real' Paris - a versatile, multifaceted city, beyond the stereotypes of the City of Love. For these tourists, their journeys sparked a process of negotiation in realising their imagination and at the

same time in revealing and accepting the other side of Paris. This sense of reassured pleasure and adoration also made most of the respondents willing to travel back to Paris again.

Conclusion

Previous studies have indicated the strong relationship between representations in the popular media and the tourist imagination. However, these studies were largely based on the perspective of Western tourists. This paper has used the case of Chinese tourists in Paris to investigate Eastern media tourism to Europe. More in particular, we have focused on how popular media – film representations in particular – contribute to the Chinese tourists' imagination of Paris, and how these images are being realized, challenged, and modified during their concrete experience of Paris.

To answer these questions, we have analysed three aspects of the experience of Chinese tourists in Paris: the imagination, the experience and the recollection of cinematic Paris. First of all, regarding the imagination, the results of the individual interviews illustrate the crucial role that media representations play in forming a system of understanding for imagining the destination. For these Chinese tourists, Paris is not only an objective realm out there, but also a place in their minds with strong symbolic meanings, created by a series of images, signs, and symbols represented on the screen. Regardless of the different levels of prior experiences associated with French culture or the city itself, the respondents shared a similar imaginary picture of Paris before their journey: an image of a bourgeois lifestyle, romantic atmosphere and civilized culture. This image turned Paris into a dreamland for the Chinese tourists and compelled them to visit it.

As the interviews showed, the Chinese imagination of Paris is based on a fundamental binary opposition between the self and the Other; the ordinary and the extraordinary; the East and the West. In these Chinese tourists' eyes, Paris is imagined as a homogeneous city featuring characteristics different from those in Chinese society. What Paris represents is an opposite system of values: one of individualism, in which personal interest takes precedence over social obligations. On the one hand, this imagination of Paris is highly influenced by Occidental stereotypical narratives of the East and the West. On the other hand, we recognized a third party that contributed to the formation of such an image: the American view of Paris, as experienced by Chinese through the medium of American movies. Paris is seen and idealized by Chinese people based on American visions.

During their stay in Paris, most respondents visited various film locations. These film locations are seen to serve as important physical points of reference, resulting in a

perceptional framework for the tourists to examine 'what they imagined' Paris to be. However, the Chinese tourist experience of the movie sites turned out to be rather mundane, especially when compared to existing literature on media tourism. Most Chinese tourists had little knowledge of the specific features, designs and details of the movies. Nor did the respondents report any 'spiritual' connection with the locations they visited. This is strikingly different from earlier studies on media tourism, where media tourists are sometimes referred to as 'pilgrims' and are reported to have deep, emotional experiences while being at these 'lieux d'imagination' (Reijnders 2011). Therefore, even though the Chinese tourists tended to visit various film locations in Paris, the experience of the Chinese tourists at the individual sites was on that level remarkably different from those of 'media pilgrims'.

How did these Chinese tourists recollect their journey, after having returned home? Most respondents mentioned the fact that their previous stereotypes of Paris, based on American movies, were partially confirmed but also challenged by visiting the 'real' Paris. In their journeys, so the respondents said, they quickly discovered 'the other side' of Paris, which was totally beyond their imagination, one which was characterized by rubbish and dirty streets, arrogant people, and racially-mixed populations. For them, their visit to Paris turned out to be an on-going negotiation between media-inspired fantasies and personal travel experiences. At the end, having experienced the 'real' Paris awoke these Chinese tourists from their imaginations and gave rise to a new hybrid subjective perspective in evaluating and re-appreciating the city. Along the way, these Chinese tourists learned to re-appreciate Paris in its complexity, while at the same time re-constituting their own Chinese cultural identity vis-à-vis the European Other. Consequently, the traditional relationship between Western society and the Asian home, based on the supposed idealization of the former, changed along the way.

Endnotes

[1] Chinese tourism to Paris can largely be traced back to the beginning of the 20th Century. After World War 1, Chinese intellectuals recognized the need to import Western knowledge and technology to China. For example, in 1919- 1920 more than 1600 Chinese youth were recruited to visit and work in various large cities in France as part of their education. However, in 1949 Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China, which turned China into an isolationist country in terms of self-reliance, along the lines of its Soviet benefactors. During this period of diplomatic and economic isolation, there were but very few tourist activities between China and Western countries.

[2] On 12 February, 2004, the National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China and the European Union signed the agreement called ADS, which allows Chinese citizens to travel to European Union countries. On 26 February, 2004, three Scandinavian countries also signed the ADS agreement with the Chinese government.

[3] It is necessary to clarify at the beginning that within the article, the term 'Chinese tourists' refers to a cultural as opposed to a national dimension. The word 'Chinese' here represents not only the people from China but also the people who share a Chinese cultural background and language. It includes the people from all different regions of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

[4] In line with Reijnders (2011), we have adopted the term media tourism for this paper.

[5] Accessed at http://www.backpackers.com.tw/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=113, on 24/04/2011.

[6] Accessed at http://www.eurotravel.tw/forum/thread.php?fid=5, on 22/05/2011.

[7] Accessed at telnet://ptt.cc, on 24/04/2011.

[8] Accessed at http://www.tianya.cn/techforum/articleslist/0/843.shtml, 22/05/2011.

[9] Accessed at http://www.go2eu.com/, on 24/04/2011.

[10] Accessed at http://www.yododo.com/ask/list/2-02-02, 22/05/2011.

[11] Accessed at http://www.zeeu.cn/cice.do, on 24/04/2011.

[12] The respondents were equally split into two nationalities. Six of the interviewees came from The People's Republic of China and the other six from Taiwan. Females represent two-thirds of the interviewees. All of the respondents lived in an urban environment and had finished University, while four of them even had postgraduate degrees. The twelve respondents all stated that they have had more international travel experience, in addition to their trip to Paris. Six of the respondents speak more than one foreign language (e.g. English, French and/or German). The average age of the respondents is 25, ranging from 21 to 35 year-old. The interviews were initially conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The relevant quotations were translated into English in the process of analysis, and checked by respective English and Chinese speaking academics in tourism studies. By doing so, we are convinced that the meaning of each quote did not get lost in the process of translation.

[13] The (Chinese) interview transcripts are available upon request from the first author. The respondents' first names presented in the article are fictitious due to the privacy preferences of the respondents themselves.

[14] However, many film reviews tended to argue that the movie *Amélie* was much more 'American' than French (Durham, 2008; Portegies, 2010)

[15] In Taiwan and China, besides English as the first foreign language, some high schools provide an optional second foreign language class for the students. Usually this is French, German, Spanish, or Japanese. The situation varies from region to region.

[16] Quote from the interview with Yi-Ting.

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