

GTPP RESEARCH COMPETITION

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

MONACO, 2012

Impression Series 印象

Tourism Innovation in China

China's real landscape entertainment performances

Team Members: Jiangxiang Zheng

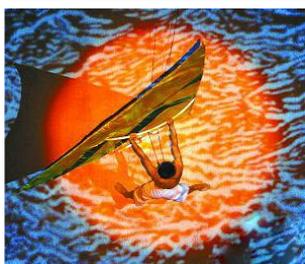
Jie Chen

Instructor: Bao Qu



浙江商业职业技术学院  
ZHEJIANG BUSINESS COLLEGE OF CHINA

Zhejiang Business College, China



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company. The Hertz Companies, the world's largest worldwide airport/general use car rental brand. World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the global forum for business leaders in the Travel & Tourism industry.



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## **Part I. Introduction**

Tourism has been enjoying great pace of development in China over the past few decades. China started to develop its tourist industry in late 1970s as an important part of its economic reform and opening to the world. Hotels and guest houses of different sizes and grades were built all over the country, more historic and scenic spots were renovated and opened to tourists, and professional guides and other service personnel were trained. With its splendid natural scenery and unique culture, China has soon become a major tourism destination country. The number of international tourists visiting China rose from 230,000 in 1978 to 55.98 million in 2011, making it the 3rd most visited country in the world.

Meantime, with China's fast economic growth, mid-1990s saw the boom of domestic tourism. There is no doubt that domestic tourism turned out to be a new growing point in many areas of China. China, a country with an amazing population of over 1.3 billion, has an incomparably large domestic tourism market. In the recent decade, domestic tourism has a continuous increase of around 10% each year, which now contributes over 4% to the growth of the country's GDP and greatly enhances the

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employment, consumption and the economic development of China. The most popular destinations for Chinese tourists include Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Guilin, Hangzhou, Sanya, Lhasa, Chengdu, Lijiang, etc. With an immense increase in domestic demand as well as an active potential in developing inbound and outbound tourism, China had already formed the largest domestic tourist market by 2011 and ranks the third in the world for the inbound and outbound tourism.



Some popular tourist cities in China

According to the latest prediction from the World Tourism Organization, there will be an annual increase of 43 million international tourists over the next 20 years, and the number will soar to 1.8 billion by 2030.

## **Part II. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Innovation**

As is known to us all, innovation is the soul of a nation's progress, and it's an inexhaustible power for a country's prosperity. The word "innovation" has several definitions. Generally, it means something new that adds value. Here are two definitions posted by the Journal of Innovation.

According to GTTP website, KarimKarim, Hirji from IBM Canada Ltd once said, an innovation is invention + exploitation.

"My definition of innovation: The ability to deliver new value to a customer. After all, it is not innovation until the customer says it is. While most of us have traditionally associated innovation with technology

## Tourism Innovation in China

advance, in a free market innovation can be as simple as a new way of doing things or a new way to create customer satisfaction."

According to Schumpeter and a range of his successor, the term 'innovation' is defined in close connection with another term: 'invention'. Inventions are major scientific and technological developments brought about without any specified industrial use in mind.

## 2.2 Tourism Innovation

Lots of innovations have been used in the tourism industry to sustain tourism development. Many scholars of tourism agree that tourism innovation can be a combination of technological innovation, knowledge innovation, service innovation and other related fields of innovation.

Others believe it should be an act or a result that has never been commercialized or practiced before. It can come in many sizes and shapes. For example, information technological innovations can improve the visitor's travel experience; The Internet offers tools we can use to deliver information to potential visitors, help them plan their trips, make their reservations, and make their stay more enjoyable.

Moreover, as some scholars believe, “up to now, tourism has principally been concerned with visiting, seeing, and living in a different mode of life. The new element-experience adds a somehow comprehensive living adventure to the short time the tourist spends in his destination.”

## **2.3 Tourism Innovation in China**

After nearly 40 years of rapid development, people in the tourism industry began to think: What innovation can be done to upgrade the tourism products to offer tourists with unique experience? How to bring together the beautiful natural resources in China with its splendid local culture? How to attract more and more repeated guests to come back to the destination areas for a second or a third visit? How to prolong the duration of tourists’ stay in the destination areas?

It is under this drop back that the impression series, one of china’s most successful tourism innovative products, came into being. We choose it as our case study on tourism innovation in China.

This paper documents the process that we had experienced when undertaking our case study on Tourism Innovation in China. In this project,

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we visited tourist destinations, conducted questionnaires, interviewed focus groups and did our research in the library and through surfing on internet. We also made our conclusions and suggestions at the end of the paper.

## **Part III. Impression Series, a successful innovative tourism product**

### **3.1 General introductions to the Impression Series**

The Impression Series refers to a series of outdoor entertainment shows with nature as their stages, under the same brand “impression” and with the same group of directors and producers led by China’s most influential film director Mr. Zhang Yimou. Their common place is reflected in the creative use of the "Panorama," the idea of the big stage, the total scheduling landscape view based on a long history and a world-class tourist attraction. However, each of them has its own theme and characteristics. Among them, the first one is “*Impression Liu Sanjie*” in Guilin, Guangxi

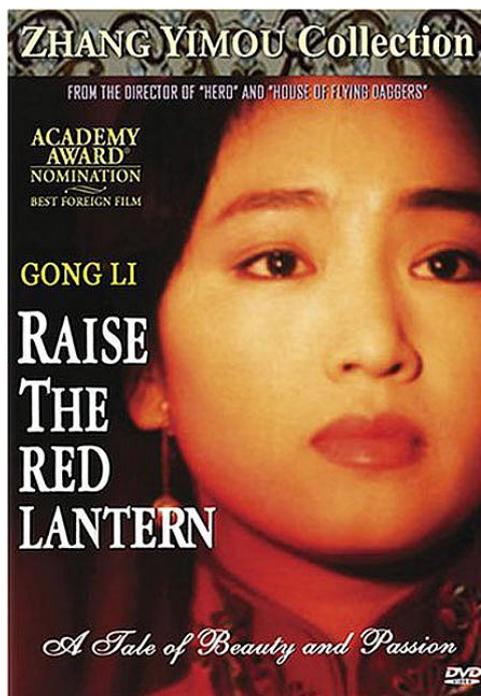
Province, which was formally presented to the audience on a branch of Li River with mountains as its background on Mar 20, 2004. Then it is followed by “*impression Lijiang*” set at the bottom of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Lijiang, Yunnan Province in 2006, and “*impression West Lake*” in our hometown Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. This kind of real landscape performances could certainly let visitors have a unique experience of the local “impression”, which has formed a kind of new and more experiential tourism product - a perfect combination of local tourism innovation and tourists’ requirements. Impression Series is the hybrid of tourism and entertainment industry, and a successful innovation product in the development of tourism. After the success of the above performances, more and more tourism destinations in China have sought to reproduce the model with their local special flavor. So far, altogether 7 “impression” shows have been on in various parts of China all year around. And the 8th is on its way.

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Photo of Guilin's Scenery

The shows were all directed by the same director-group led by Mr. Zhang Yimou. Zhang's early film works were produced in 1980s and 1990s, which won him great honor and attention all over the world.



Zhang Yimou's early movie posters

Later, he has shifted from a film director to stage director as well. He started his new career in *Impression Liu Sanjie*, the first one of the Impression Series, followed by *Turandot* in 2005 in Forbidden City, *The First Emperor* in Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2008, and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Inauguration and Closing Ceremony. His works are particularly noted for their use of colors and symbolisms. He is referred as the master of Chinese media and production promotion. The Impression Series extended his brand equity, which meets the trend of China's self-presentation to the outside world as a deeply authentic, culturally rich country. In the Impression Series, Zhang Yimou successfully presents the Taoist concept of "harmony between nature and mankind" through the combination of natural landscape as stages and rather primitive singing and dancing style.



**China's leading filmmaker-- Mr. Zhang Yimou**

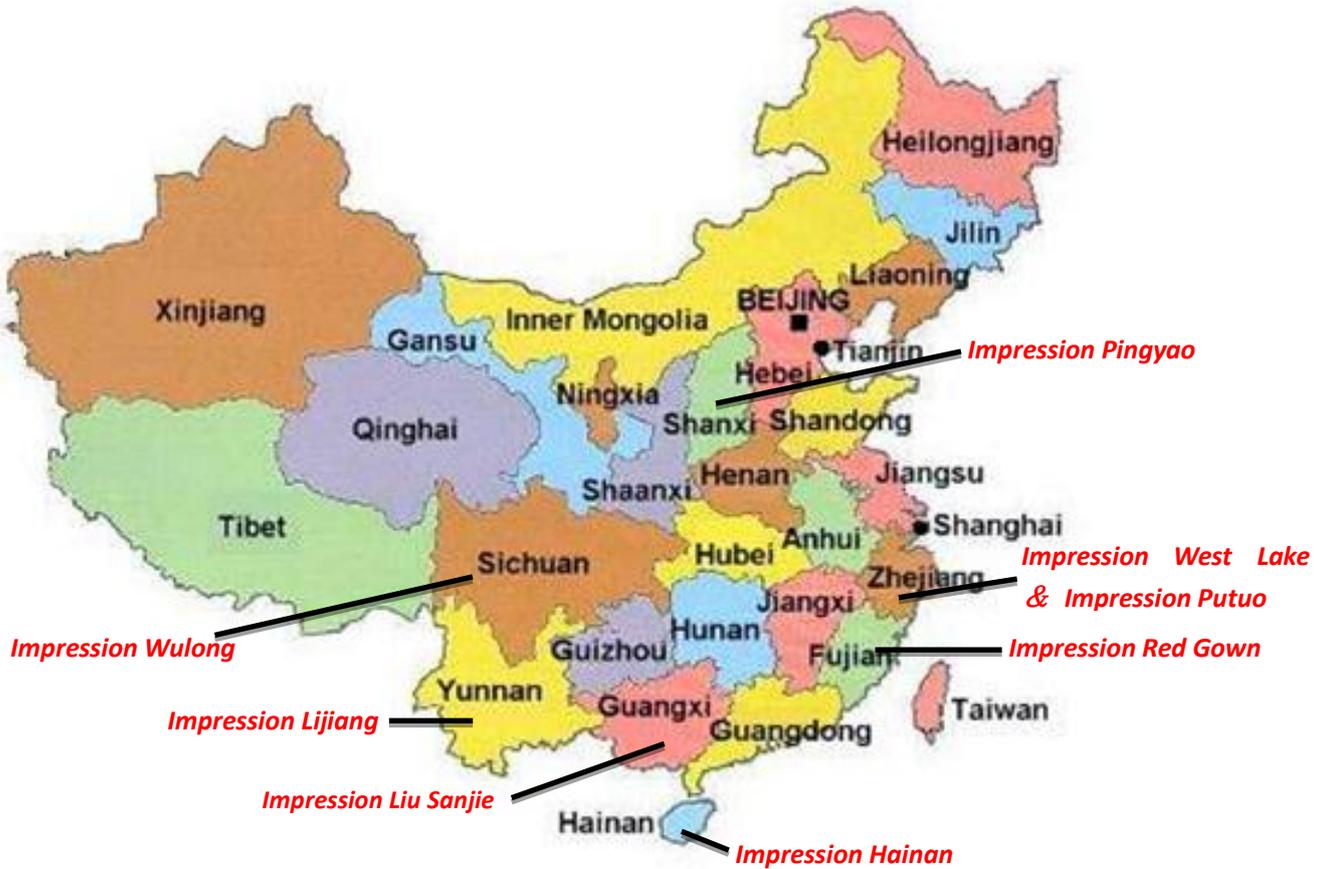


**The opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics 2008**

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### 3.2 Introduction to eight individual Impression Performances

#### Performances



Map of China & eight individual Impression Performances

**Chart 1: Information about each impression show**

<b>Performance</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<i>Impression Liu Sanjie</i>	Guilin, Guangxi Province	Zhuang ethnic group Culture
<i>Impression Lijiang</i>	Lijiang, Yunnan Province	Naxi & Mosuo ethnic group Culture
<i>Impression West Lake</i>	Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province	Southern Song Dynasty Culture
<i>Impression Hainan</i>	Boao, Hainan Island	Marine Culture
<i>Impression Red Gown</i>	Mt. Wuyi, Fujian Province	Oolong Tea Culture
<i>Impression Putuo</i>	Zhujiajian Islet, Zhejiang province	Buddisht Religion and Local Culture
<i>Impression Wulong</i>	Wulong, Chongqing City	Bashu Culture along Yangtze River

***Impression Liu Sanjie***

*Impression Liu Sanjie* is an outdoor show with 12 mountains and a river in Guilin as the backdrop. When the show debuted in 2003, it created a sensation. Subsequently, the China Lijiang Natural Landscape "Theatre", where the show was performed, was listed as one of the first cultural industrial bases in China. The show combines classical folk songs, ethnic folkways and lights on fishing boats to express and create a sense of harmony of man and nature.

The hour-long show is divided into four sections: The white-impression dreamland of Lijiang, the red enthusiasm and festivity of Lijiang, the silver fairyland and misty rain of Lijiang, and the golden holy

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poem and brocade of Lijiang. The four colors change the two-mile-long landscape into the four seasons.

The show has been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records in two categories-the world's largest drum-tower series, and the world's largest theatre with real landscape as its stage.



**Impression Liu Sanjie**

### ***Impression Lijiang***

The performance stage is specially designed to showcase the mountain as the best backdrop of the show. More than 500 local people from ten ethnic groups have been selected over 16 towns and villages nearby to take part in the performances which includes folk songs, dances as well as rituals for tourists.

Unlike many other shows which take place in the evening and a lot of lighting devices can be applied in order to increase the performance effect while covering up mistakes and blemishes, *Impression Lijiang* which Zhang

Yimou has spent two years for the preparation which is innovatively staged in the morning. As an outdoor performance in full daylight, no room for mistakes is allowed. Zhang Yimou has become the first one who dares to put an outdoor performance during daytime.

The performance begins with more than 400 male performers in their traditional costumes of respective ethnic groups that line up accordingly along the mountain path and shouting to the sky “We are farmers, we are stars”. All the songs and dances reflect the daily life of the local people.



**Impression Lijiang**

### ***Impression Westlake***

*Impression West Lake* is a unique metropolitan out-door performance on natural stage setting in Hangzhou.

Staged on the wavy, mellow and changing West Lake, the

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performance appears vivid and natural. Contented with the myths and legends of the West Lake, the show leads audience to a sweet thousand-year dream.

The special concealable auditorium provides a wide and bird's-eye view. Each seat is a wonderful place to enjoy the panoramic view of the West Lake even without watching the show. The pioneering individualized sound system, combined with the sound-oriented system, is surely to offer a surprising musical enjoyment.

In a way, *Impression West Lake* has become a converter: It can help visitors understand the connotation of Hangzhou, and experience the essence of urban culture.



**Impression Westlake**

### ***Impression Hainan Island***

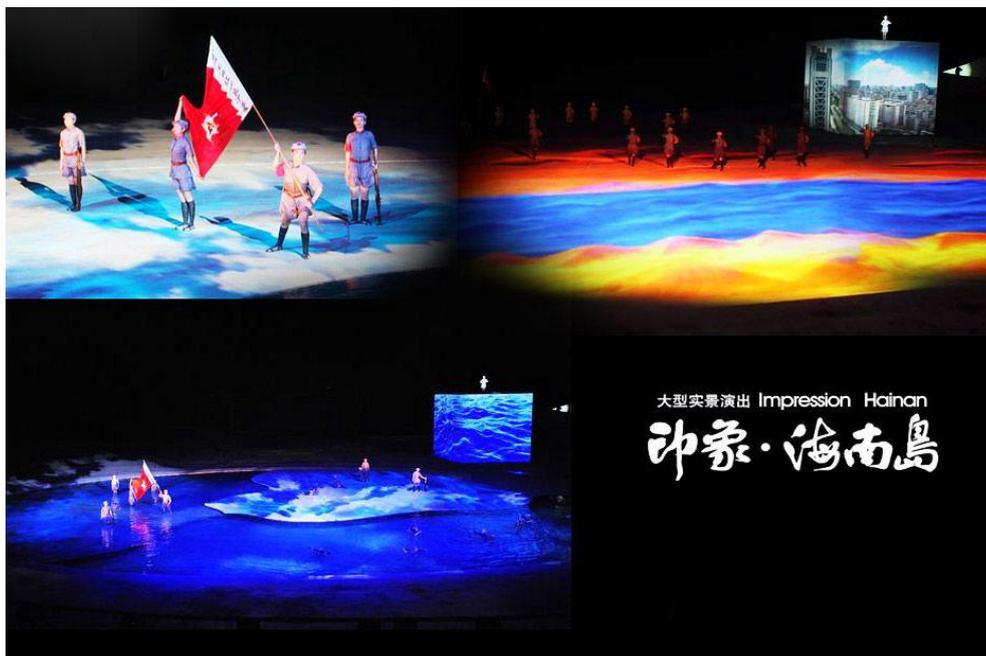
The show is high in color and spectacular visual effects and is held in an open air theater built specially for the event. It owns the world's most

## Impression Series

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advanced lighting and audio equipment, which were used in the Opening Ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games, and blends perfectly with Hainan's natural scenery, including the nearby beach, swaying coconut trees and sea views. The show employs multimedia projection technology. For a moment, the stage has a great expanse of ocean as its backdrop. Then, all of a sudden, it turns into a sandy beach, bathed in sunshine.

*Impression Hainan Island* gives a full showcase to the unique customs, life styles and cultures of ethnic people like Li and Miao. The show is sure to leave a lasting impression on the audience.



**Impression Hainan Island**

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### **Impression Red Gown**

*Impression Red Gown* is the fifth production of Zhang Yimou's Impression Series. After the "Liu Sanjie" in Guilin, "Lijiang" in Yunnan, "West Lake" in Hangzhou and Hainan Island, China's oolong tea Red Gown of Wuyi Mountain is given the "Impression" treatment.

The biggest distinction of the Impression Series is using natural landscape as both the stage and background. But *Impression Red Gown* has another breakthrough. The seats can move and offer the audiences with a view of 360 degrees. A pivoting stage makes it possible for the 2,000 audience members to enjoy a circular view that changes as the play goes on. 15 big screens are hidden somewhere in the distant mountains. They only appear when the show needs them to help present an illusion of the touching legendary love story of two major peaks of the Wuyi Mountain.

However, all the lights and high-tech effects are employed not only to show off the beauty and grandeur of the natural scenery, but to impress upon the audience the spirit of China's traditional tea culture. As the story moves on, the auditorium turns and the scene naturally changes, as if undergoing a journey through time and space.



**Impression Da hongpao**

### ***Impression Putuo***

Tucked away in the coastal city of Zhoushan in east China's Zhejiang Province, Mount Putuo is known as a sacred Buddhist mountain. However, *Impression Putuo*, the sixth open-air show of the Impression Series is not actually set on the famous Buddhist Island but on the lesser-known island of Zhujiajian, facing Putuo, in order that, according to the production team, the peace of the Buddhist Island can be well protected. The performance at Putuo features Buddhist and China's marine cultures as its focal point. The show tries to discuss the relationship between Buddhism and human being. In one scene, with the wooden temple door animations projected on the huge screen in front of the auditorium, when the door opens and closes, it represents the Zen Buddhist idea of one door closing, another opening.

Like the previous performances in the series, there has also been great technical progress in *Impression Putuo*. The huge screens in front of the auditorium is closed like a curtain at the theater, while the auditorium itself revolves so smoothly that people are unlikely to be aware of it unless they look upward and the stars above appear to be moving.

All the 400 performers are local villagers without prior performing experience. Like other impression performances, it provides job

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opportunities to local people.



**Impression Putuo**

### ***Impression Wulong***

In December, 2010, Wulong County and the Iron Triangle, the famous directors Zhang Yimou, Wang Chao and Pan Yue signed the cooperative agreement of making the large-scale drama of real landscape - *Impression Wulong*. With the high technology of sound, light and electricity, the drama will display the World Natural Heritage, Wulong Karst resources and the local culture of Chongqing. As for the performance, the estimated investment is 200 million Yuan and the venue occupies a land of 215 acres.

The stage of *Impression Wulong* is situated at the Taoyuan village Of Xiannu Town. The auditorium is in the cliffs and canyons, surrounded by spectacular mountains and forests. The U-shaped stage of *Impression*

*Wulong* takes advantage of natural environment, with the drop height of more than 200m. The stage is by and large made up of two parts. One is the lighting stage formed by the canyon cliffs, integrated with mountains; the other is the performing platform among the auditorium, divided into the mountain pass stage and close-range stage. The stages shine with enchanting appearance among mountains.

The most amazing technical innovation of *Impression Wulong* is its stage is in the air. When a boat floats from the air in the resplendent light, heading for the other side, the colored beam gathers over the boat to form a green canopy. Then the canopy instantly becomes a stage in the sky covered with high-tech lighting.

The theme of *Impression Wulong* is the cultural spirit of the trackers pulling boats with their shoulders along the Three Gorges of Yangtze River, which has a thousand year history. Nowadays, as in the era of mechanic boats, there are only 9 boat trackers in the area of Wulong. Chuanjiang River work songs run through the whole concert from the beginning to the end. The magnificent singing voices of the local villagers, together with the vivid performance undoubtedly bring a strong visual feast to the audience.

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**Impression Wulong**

***Impression Pingyao***

Pingyao is a cultural city with a history of over 2,700 years. Covering an area of 2.25 square kilometers, it is a huge building complex consisting of city walls, streets, shops, temples and residential houses. According to the producing team, the show is aimed at displaying Pingyao's rich history and culture to visitors all over the world.

*Impression Pingyao* will be the first one based in North China in the series. It is also China's first subject-live performance which is themed at the city culture. Now the site planning and script creating of the performance is under construction, and the show is expected to release to the public in 2013.



**Impression Pingyao**

## Part IV. Innovative Tourism through a Detailed Study on *Impression West Lake*

### 4.1 Research Questions

The Impression series are scattered all over popular tourist destinations where strikingly beautiful natural sceneries can be served as natural stages for glamour performances. And among them, *Impression West Lake* is in the city of Hangzhou where our college is located. It provides us a good opportunity to do our field research. That is why we decided to start our research on *Impression West Lake* and then we furthered our study to the whole series.



A poster of *Impress West Lake*

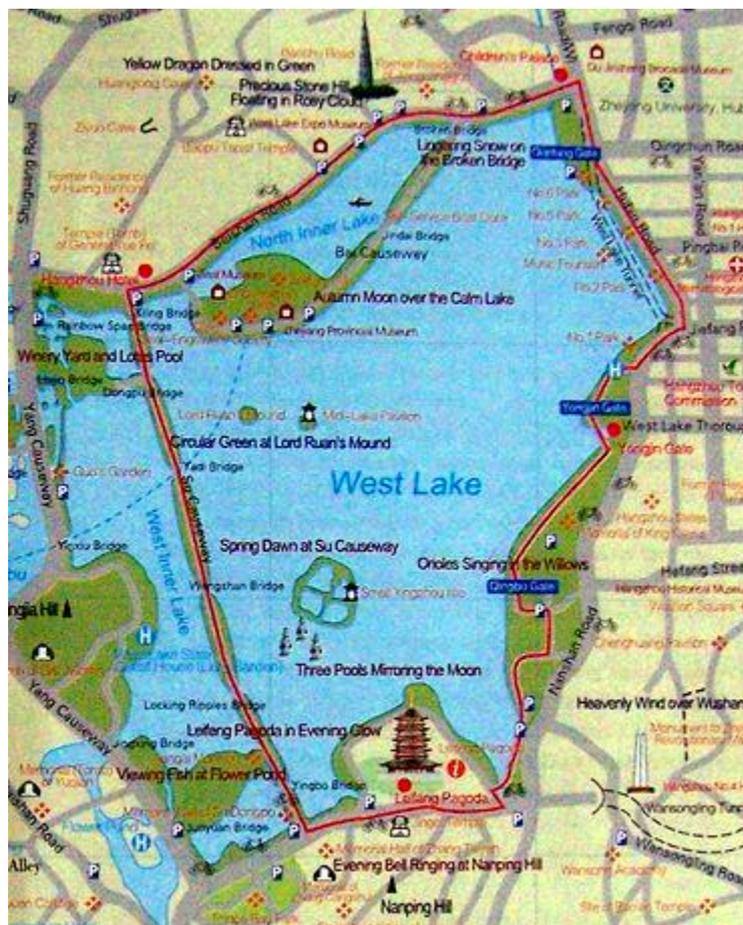
## Tourism Innovation in China

We began our research by organizing a research group of 12 fellow students and 3 teachers. We surfed on the internet about Impression series, did library research on tourism innovation and went to watch the show several times, which is performed every night on West Lake. After discussion, we agreed on these questions, which are related with different stakeholders such as:

- 1. What has been innovated in *Impression Series*? And how are they innovated?**
- 2. What do tourists think about *Impression series*?**
- 3. What do the travel agencies think of *Impression series* and what do they do?**
- 4. Which positive effects and negative effects are brought up by *Impression Series*?**
- 5. Is there still room for *Impression Series* to perfect itself?**

Based on the research questions, we designed questionnaires for local residents and audience with the guidance of our teachers. We also interview the producer and actors and actress of *Impression West Lake*. We

handed out questionnaires to 200 audiences while watching the show. We talked to the tourists and audiences. And on weekends, we did survey in 6 neighborhoods of the city and collected first-hand data from local residents. Apart from that, we interviewed general managers of China Youth Travel Service which is one of the biggest travel companies in our province and engages in both domestic and in-bound tours.



**West Lake in Hangzhou**

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## **4.2 Background of *Impression West Lake: West Lake and the City of Hangzhou***

Every Chinese knows an old saying which goes like this: On heaven there is paradise, down on the earth there are Suzhou and Hangzhou. Hangzhou, our hometown, with nowadays a population of over 6 million and the capital of Zhejiang province, is located on the east coast of China, some 200km to the south of Shanghai. Hangzhou is one of the seven ancient capitals in China. Marco Polo in his travelogue praised it as “the most elegant and splendid city in the world.” The city has nurtured and attracted numerous politicians, scientists, artists, national heroes, loyal officials, judicious governors and skillful craftsmen, who made outstanding contributions to the economic, cultural and social development of the city. (Hangzhou City Travel Committee, 2010)

Hangzhou has long been considered as a paradise city by our Chinese, and its fame mainly lies in its picturesque west lake. The 7km<sup>2</sup> lake is located to the west of the city and surrounded by mountains on 3 sides, the east is the city proper, hence the name.

The lake is a perfect combination of natural beauty and human

embellishment because the lake is a lagoon while during the past 2000 years, bit by bit, people put up several man-made causeways, man-made islets and architectures. West Lake is a perfect embodiment of Chinese aesthetic taste and it was listed as the world cultural and landscape heritage in the year 2011.

Hangzhou has been a major scenic city 1000 years ago. Nowadays, the city receives an average of 47million tourists a year, both from home and abroad.

However, the average duration of stay of visitors had been relatively short before 2007. And there had been a number of complaints about the lack of entertainment during the night from the tourists.

Inspired by the great success of *Impression Liu Sanjie* in Guilin, the *Impression West Lake* Culture Development Company was established in 2005. With strong support from the local government, after several years of preparation, *Impression West Lake* was presented to audience on March 30, 2007.

Chart 2: The Ten Sights in West Lake

	Melting Snow at Broken Bridge		Listening to Orioles Singing in the Willows
	Spring Dawn at Sudi Causeway		Viewing Fish at Flowers Harbor
	Sunset Glow over Leifeng Hill		Evening Bell at Nanping Hill
	Breeze-ruffled Lotus at Quyuan Courtyard		Three Pools Mirroring the Moon
	Autumn Moon on Calm Lake		Twin Peaks Piercing the Clouds

## 4.3 Research Findings

### 4.3.1. Field trip to *Impression West Lake*

*Impression West Lake* is on show every night almost all year around in one of the gardens around West Lake, namely Breezing-ruffled Lotus Garden. It starts every night from 19:45 to 20:55. During tourism peak

seasons, that is, from April 20 to October 31, it performs twice on weekends and during public holidays with an extra performance (21:15 - 22:25). During the daytime, it opens free of charge to the public as a park and becomes an outdoor theatre in the evening. In order that we could have a better experience, we went to watch the show several times under different weather conditions. And each time, we experienced something different. We visited the garden in the daytime, too. We talked with audiences, tourists and local people there and conducted our research surveys.



**Breeze-ruffled Lotus at Quyuan Courtyard**

#### **4.3.1.1 *Impression West Lake***

*Impression West Lake* provides a unique metropolitan outdoor experience on a natural stage setting. Unlike DVDs, the live action theatre 3-dimensional experience is overwhelming.

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*Impression West Lake* originated from a tragic love story called *The legend of the White Snake*, which happened on the West Lake in the history. However, Zhang Yimou, the director, was not interested in telling a story. His strategy was to concentrate on “impression” and keep the story simple: The original story full of twists and turns was interpreted as a universal theme of love and freedom.



**Poster of *The legend of the White Snake***

Venue of *Impression West Lake* performance is located in the north-east section of West Lake, named Yue Lake. When the night falls, colored lighting shrouds the lake with natural water and green hills as its

background setting. The stage here has been built 3 cm below the water surface, so the 300 actors and actresses seem to be dancing on the water. When the light fades, we can see fish and lotus lanterns- displayed by hundreds of actors-glimmering in the dark, providing tourists with experience they couldn't have in the daytime.

Staged on the wavy, mellow and changing West Lake, the live-action performance appears vivid and natural. The outdoor theatre is specifically designed to integrate with an historical surrounding: real heritage bridges, pavilions and pagodas. The history and rooted culture as well as the beautiful natural landscape of West Lake are the origin of *Impression West Lake*. This performance vividly shows the folklores and myths of Hangzhou and highlights the best of them. The show leads you to a sweet thousand year dream.



**Plan view of the show area**

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Map of the show area

Chart 3: Ticket price of *Impression West Lake*

Seats Category	Published Price
Area C (Normal Seats)	35US\$ per person
Area A1—A4 (Normal Seats)	50US\$ per person
Area D&E (VIP Seats on the upper floor of the boat)	95US\$ per person
Area D&E (VIP Seats on the upper floor of the boat)	75US\$ per person
VIP Balcony Room 1	US\$1200 per room
VIP Balcony Room 2	US\$ 1600 per room

We can find that there is a retractable and concealable auditorium, which can hold 1800 audiences. There are two double-deck pavilion-style boats docking at both corner of the lake where VIP seats are provided for visitors.



**Pictures of the auditorium**

The special concealable auditorium provides a wide and bird's-eye view. Each seat is a place to enjoy the panoramic view of the West Lake even without watching the show. The sound system offers musical enjoyment. As the show is dependent on lighting effects, *Impression West Lake* uses the surface of West Lake as the stage, and the existing tree and kiosk in the lake as scenery. More than 300 special lights provide the effects.

The whole performance equipments are environmentally friendly. When we visited the park during the daytime, the seats were miraculously

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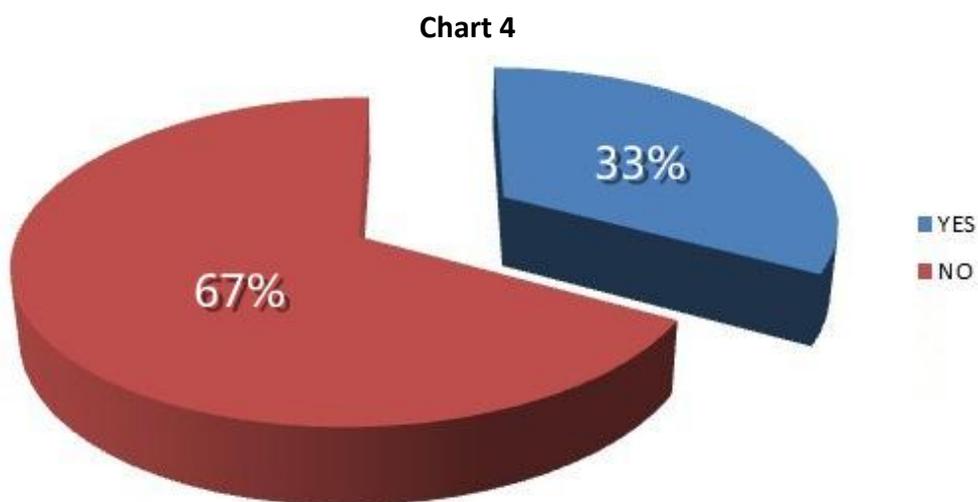
invisible. The whole auditorium can be elevated from ground during the night.

We could find signs directing audiences to the venue and way out in every part of the park during the daytime, though the signs were not so obvious during the night.

However, we were not able to find booths or shops, both in the daytime or during the night after the show, where we could purchase souvenirs related to *Impression West Lake* such as the music CDs or DVDs.

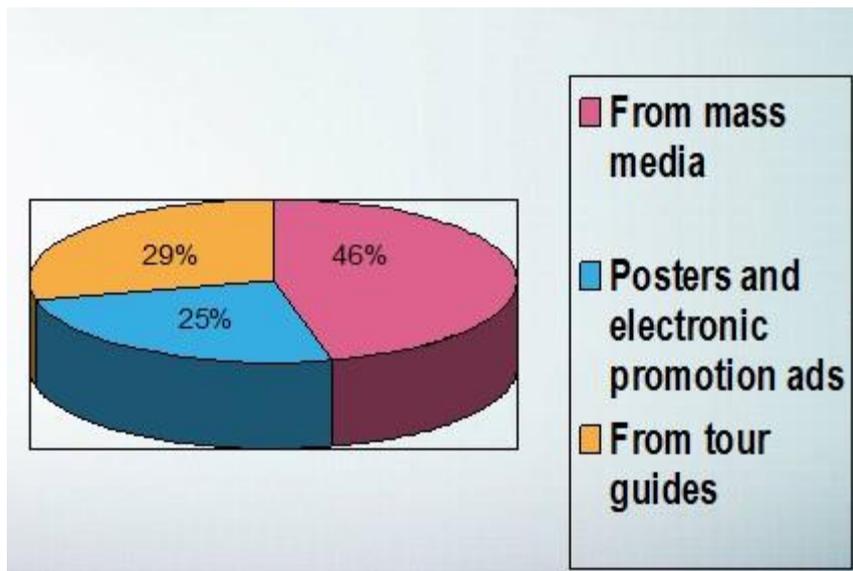
**Survey Questions**

**Survey question 1: Do you know there is an *Impression West Lake* performance on the West Lake? If yes, how do you know?**



According to the Chart 2, we can see clearly that about 67 % people chose “yes “ .The rest chose “No” which accounts for 33%.However, they are interested in the performance.

Chart 5



According to the data, 46% people get the source from mass media including newspaper, TV program and travel guide books such as “lonely planet”. It is interesting to find out that many people, especially youngsters learn from online travel tips and blogs uploaded by previous visitors. We believe that it is a new form of “words of mouth”, one of the most effective ways of communication in the cyber world. Those tourists know about *Impression West Lake* before their arrival.

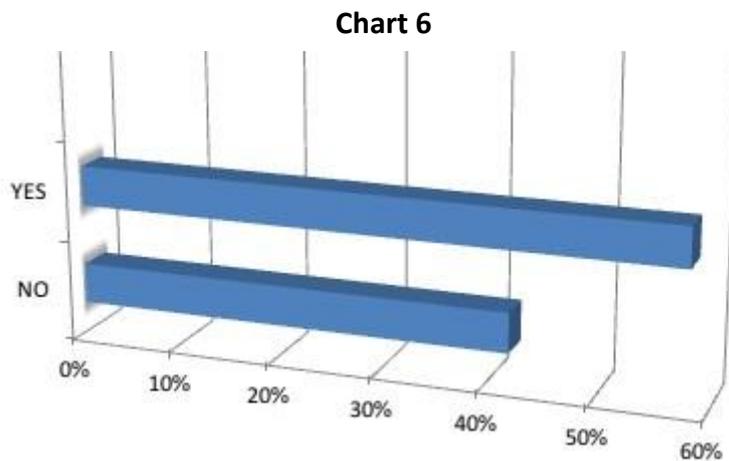
The 2nd source is posters and electronic promotion advertisements

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that can be found all around the West Lake scenic area, especially in taxis and buses, which accounts for 25%. They know little about *Impression West Lake* until their arrival.

Another source is recommendation for optional tours from tour guides which enjoys 29% of the answers. Those tourists travel with a group arranged by travel agencies.

**Survey question 2: Would you like to see the performance since you are here?**



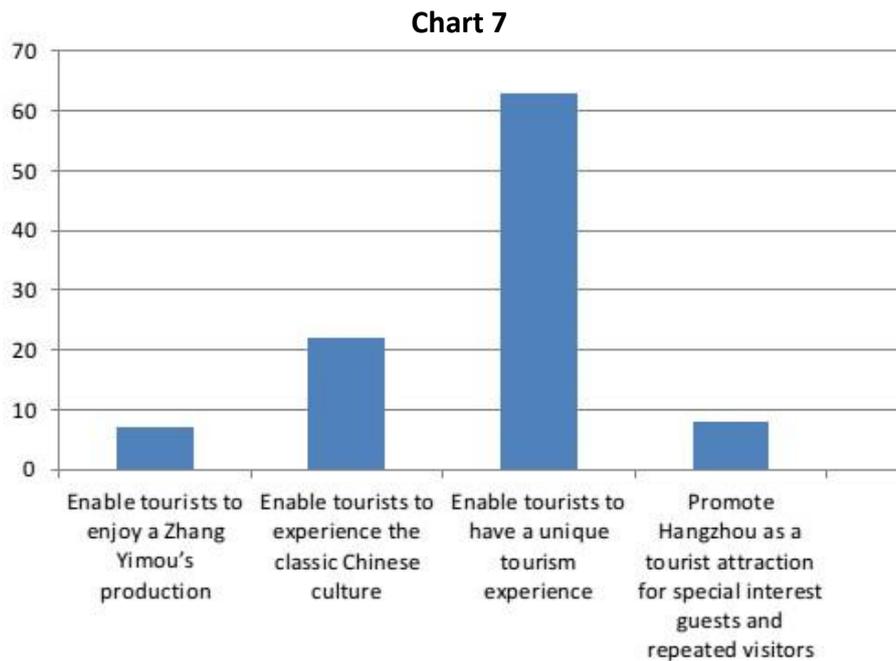
Nearly 58% answered “yes”. Among the rest who chose “no” for an answer. The top three reasons are “not enough time for the show”, “admission fee is too expensive” and “have seen too many folk shows”. The 3rd one indicates that some tourists confused *Impression West Lake* with

ordinary folk singing and dancing performance.

However, among audiences, 50% of whom were arranged by travel agencies, while 16% of them booked their tickets through internet. The rest got to know the show by TV programs, posters in the city and purchased their ticket on the spot.

**Survey question 3: What is your opinion about *Impression West Lake*?**

Please score each option from 1—5.



This is a column chart showing the opinions of the audiences about *Impression West Lake*. Tourists were asked to score each of the items according to importance. As can be seen from the chart, have a unique

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tourism experience ranked at the first of 63 average percent. Although there are many performances throughout Chinese tourism destinations, *Impression West Lake* certainly provided audiences with a brand new experience. Some others (22%) also agreed that by watching *Impression West Lake*, it enabled them to have a good experience of classic Chinese culture as *Impression West Lake* originated from a famous legendary story and the singing and dancing bore the strong flavor of the thousand-year-old Qun Drama in this area. Some audiences were, obviously, big fans of Director Zhang Yimou since he was the most influential director in China, which accounts for nearly 7% of the participants; while over 8% of them believed *Impression West Lake* can promote Hangzhou as a tourist attraction for not only ordinary tourists, but for more repeated visitors and guests with special interests as well. Those guests thought *Impression West Lake* had made Hangzhou more attractive to tourists than before.



Interviewing tourists

**Survey question 4: What do you think of *Impression West Lake*? Do you consider it as a tourism innovation?**

100% of the participants agreed *Impression West Lake* is a tourism innovation. 42 tourists stated their reasons. Following are some remarks:

"I'm from Taiwan. I'm deeply touched by *Impression West Lake*. It is such a splendid production. I've never seen anything like it anywhere else in the world."

"I'm from Poland. I'm here for the second time. It's so fantastic, so beautiful. I'm coming back once more for sure. Because it would be completely different each time I watch it. It's fantastically elegant."

"I am from Shanghai. I have been in Hangzhou many times. I am a big fan of Director Zhang Yimou and I am here for the show. It is worth every coin and every effort I spent. The harmonious mixture of the lake and the show makes the city a real paradise."

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### **4.3.2 Interviewing Producer from the *Impression West Lake* Culture Development Company**

With the help of our teachers, we arranged a meeting with Mr. Shao, Chief Operation Officer of *Impression West Lake* Culture Development Ltd on the afternoon of May 3rd, 2010. We spent the whole afternoon discussing issues relating to Impression Series, *Impression West Lake* and the company itself.



**The chief operation officer Mr. Shao and our teacher Ms. Wei**



**The picture in *Impression West Lake* Company**

The meeting began with Mr. Shao's detailed introduction to *Impression West Lake*.

### **The Government's Role in Tourism Innovation**

At the beginning of 21st century, China's central government outlined several strategic tasks for the building of an innovation-oriented country. In response to this policy, Hangzhou local government took the initiative of developing innovative tourism including art performance industries, leisure tourism and so on.

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Rich in tourist resources, the West Lake is the most famous scenic spot of Hangzhou. However, it needs continually invest in their leisure products or it will suffer the consequences of diminishing attractiveness. Therefore, inspired by the huge success of *Impression Liu Sanjie* in Guilin, Guangxi Province, Mr. Zhang Yimou was invited to Hangzhou in 2004 by tourism bureau and city government of Hangzhou to discuss if it was possible for Mr. Zhang to produce a show specially designed for the city. During the 4-year preparation, local government showed strong support. For example, the venue of *Impression West Lake* was chosen at the core area of West Lake, while experts and scholars argued that the show might prevent the West Lake from applying for World Cultural Heritage. Finally, government officials and experts reached an agreement-“borrowing West Lake one hour a day and rewarding tourists with thousand-year cultural experience”. Also, there is a network of official website promotions on *Impression West Lake*, with headline “*Impression West Lake: a gold name card for Hangzhou.*”

### **Extra Value to the Original Tourism Product**

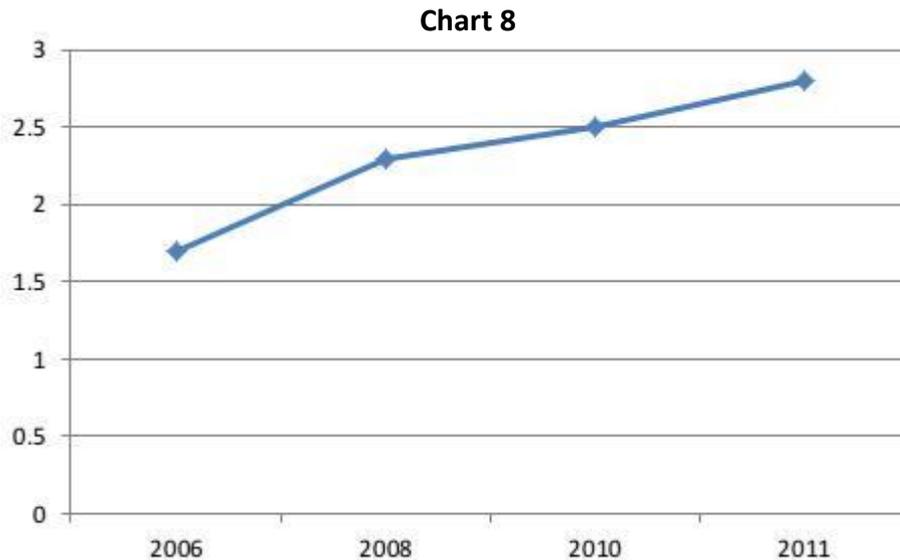
For centuries, Hangzhou has had the image of a highly cultivated

place with beautiful scenery. It is one of the key tourist destinations among Chinese and it boasts many tourism products. However, *Impression West Lake* has combined experienced tourism, culture creativity and modern technology together to form a new draw card for Hangzhou. It has added extra value to the already mature tourism product.

According to China Tourism Statistics in 2006, the number of overseas tourists who stayed overnight in Hangzhou was 1.82million; foreign tourism income was US\$909million; the number of domestic tourists was 36.82million and its income was RMB 471,240million. However, the average duration of their stay was short, at an average of 1.7 nights. Therefore, an important reason why the local government was so much interested in the launch of *Impression West Lake* was that it could help prolong tourists' stay in Hangzhou. It has also an indirect positive impact on the economy through a boost in hotel and lodging bookings, airline bookings, transport and the other industries associated with tourism. By 2011, it was estimated that the average duration of stay of tourists had become 2.8 nights. The number of foreign tourists who stayed overnight had surpassed 3.06million while the number of domestic tourists had reached 71.8million. The annual tourism income for the city has reached

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RMB119, 100million, equivalent to US\$18,900million. The local government believes *Impression West Lake* and other night tourism activities have made contribution to this figure.



**An Upgrade of the City’s Tourism Image**

According to Mr. Shao, apart from financial benefit, *Impression West Lake* has upgraded the overall image of Hangzhou as a major scenic city in China. Hangzhou’s Tourism Bureau designed a development plan for tourism called the Hangzhou Tourism Internationalization Strategy in the year 2004. The city has become an active promoter of leisure tourism since then and would change from “famous for scenic tourism” to “famous for scenic tourism, leisure tourism and Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE)

tourism". *Impression West Lake* is not only a scenic tourism product; it is an integration of scenic, cultural and leisure experience.

In 2011, West Lake was awarded the World Cultural Landscape Legacy by UNESCO after the show was displayed on the lake for over four years. Mr. Shao believes that *Impression West Lake* has become one essential part of the lake.

### **The Only Metropolitan Theater in the World**

Impression series is a brand, but its performances are not simply replicas of the previous ones. *Impression West Lake* has the only metropolitan theater in the world; as West Lake is located right in the west part of the city of Hangzhou, hence the name. Therefore, it is an innovation from other impression series.

Because of the location, environmental friendliness is taken into consideration from the preparation of the show to its daily performance. Individualized sound system was installed for prevention of sound pollution to the neighborhood. The stage was built under the water and the auditorium was a concealable one, which means the auditorium need to be set up every day.

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Audiences are given fans during the summer time and one-time raincoat in rainy nights, which both might lead to environmental issues and huge manpower are invested.

### **Problems for *Impression West Lake***

According to Mr. Shao, *Impression West Lake* has its own difficulties and problems.

First of all, because of the environmental issues are so concerned by the local government, the producers, tourists and local residents, its cost accounts for a large percentage of the expenditure for operating the performance.

Secondly, although the show was inspired from local legendary stories, *Impression West Lake* emphasizes “Impression” rather than a complete plot, which results in the fact that it is more welcomed by foreign tourists. According to statistics given by Mr. Shao, overseas audience for *Impression West Lake* occupied 37.9% last year, while overseas tourists only accounts for 4 percent of the tourists who stayed overnight in Hangzhou in 2011.

### 4.3.3 Interviewing Travel Agent

According to our survey and interview with COO of the *Impression west lake*, we find that the number of group tourists account for 50% of the audience. As tourism industry booms, a lot of tourists would like to book tours via travel agencies because it is more convenient and the price is reasonable. As one of the tourism product suppliers, travel agencies have the responsibility for promoting innovative tourism products. Therefore, we'd like to find out current practices from travel agencies.

We had Mr. Yang, vice president from China Youth Travel Service for interview.



The picture of Mr. Yang and our team members

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### **A Successful Innovative Tourism Product**

China Youth Travel Service is one of the top three travel companies in China, which has branches and sub branches all over the country. According to Mr. Yang, *Impression West Lake* is quite popular with tourists who come to visit Hangzhou. Many tourists believe that the show is something they have never experienced before. It surely helps tourists to be more impressed by the natural beauty and local culture.

### **Making Efforts on Promotion of *Impression West Lake***

According to Mr. Yang, travel agencies are doing their best to help the promotion of *Impression West Lake*. For example, tour guides can be arranged for tourists who book tickets through travel agencies. This is especially welcomed by foreign and business travelers.

*Impression West Lake* is also included in the itinerary for some of the deluxe tours to Hangzhou.

Tour guides are the key salespersons in the promotion of *Impression West Lake*, as they sold nearly 80% of the CYTS tickets. Tour guides are very effective salesperson because they can promote through their professional introduction and quality service. They are also financially encouraged so

that they are willing to arrange optional tours for tourists during the night. However, according to Mr. Yang, tour guides who take foreign groups are more successful in promoting the show than the other guides. Chinese groups are more willing to go to shows which are less expensive and more hilarious.

Travel agencies also manage to sell tickets online. However, online customers are more familiar with E-commerce travel companies such as Ctrip. Traditional travel agencies still have lots of room for improvement.

### **Feed-back from Tourists**

The feedbacks from the tourists are very important for travel agency. According to Mr. Yang, most tourists said that it was very good experience to watch the show. They also showed gratitude to the travel agency for providing the great opportunity.

However, there were also some voices said that the show is “more of a Westernized taste”. The famous legendary story has been reformed and becomes too abstract to be understood. Some complain the relatively high prices.

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### **Problems for Travel Agencies**

There are mainly two problems for the travel agencies when they promote *Impression West Lake*.

The first has to do with the characteristics of an outdoor performance: the weather conditions. Tourists would give up the show in unfavorable weather such as heavy rainy or freezing cold nights when the show is included in the itinerary. This can result in trouble between tourists and travel agencies. Tourists would be more likely to complain about the show in bad weather.

Secondly, with rapid development of E-commerce, travel agencies are losing their market share among young people. Youngsters are more used to B-C and C-C online services. Travel agencies should focus more on E-commerce.

## **Part V. Characteristics of Impression Series and its Problems**

### **5.1 An Innovative Tourism Fusion**

After a detailed study on *Impression West Lake*, we further our analytical work on the whole Impression Series through second-hand materials from newspaper, internet website and periodicals. We believe that the Impression Series is a very successful innovative tourism product. The performances usually have no plot, but present and strengthen the original ecology of Heaven and Man. It creatively integrates culture with natural landscape to provide tourists with unique experiences.

The Impression Series helps promote the development of local tourism. For those already well-known scenic areas such as Guilin, Lijiang and Hangzhou, it adds new value to the tourism destination, prolongs tourists' duration of stay and attracts repeated guests for a second or third visit. For those rising tourism destinations, it serves as good advertisements for tourism promotion.

The Impression series has become a mature business model. It brings

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admirable social impact and economic growth in those areas. For example, *Impression Liu Sanjie* has created a new tourism spot: East Street in Yangshuo County. And it provides a great deal of employment opportunities for local farmers and fishermen.

According to a speech given by co-director Ms. Wang Chao in 2010, “there were 610,000 people going to *Impression West Lake* in 2009...*Impression West Lake* provides a living for 100,000 Hangzhou local people.” We should notice that Hangzhou is located in the most developed area in China. We can certainly infer that under-developed areas such as Guilin, Guangxi Province and Lijiang, Yunnan Province have enjoyed great economic benefits from the Impression Series.

### **5.1.1 A Unique Cultural and Tour Experience**

First of all, all Impression Series performances are real landscape show staging on natural theater with real mountains and real water. For example, *Impression Liu Sanjie* boasts the biggest real landscape; *Impression Lijiang* has the highest altitude theatre in the world and *Impression West Lake* is staged on the only Metropolitan Mountain and

water theatre.

Each performance of Impression Series is inspired and created by local culture or local religion and culture is the sole of each performance. We took *Impression Red Gown* for example. It is the only real landscape show on Chinese tea culture. It owns the biggest theatre teahouse and there are 15 movie screens blended into the natural landscape of a tea-plantation.

Each performance embodies the real life and culture of local ethnic groups, emphasizing showing tourists with authentic experience. The performances are usually full of classic atmosphere while folk singing and dancing are expressed in fashionable style. It has, in some way, helped to protect non-material cultural heritage.

### **5.1.2 Technological Innovation**

The rapid development of science and technology is important to the success of Impression Series. Technological innovation ensures both the environmental friendliness and a unique audio-video feast to the audience. Let's take *Impression West Lake* as an example. The stage was built three

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centimeters below the water surface. It won't spoil the scenery during the daytime. A unique telescopic ladder auditorium is designed for *Impression West Lake*. In daytime, the entire auditorium is broken up into parts and immersed in the peripheral environment, thus the original landscape will not be affected. At night time the auditorium is unfolded and a top-grade urban landscape theatre is presented. No matter where one seats, the audience can always have a panoramic view of the stage and the feeling that they are personally on the scene. Individualized sound system was installed for prevention of sound pollution to the neighborhood while at the same time provided tourists with excellent musical enjoyment. As it is shown in the evening, more than 300 special lights provide the effects.

Technology innovation in the performance ensures a modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. It engages a palette of technical tools to weave traditional or religious tales using images, graphics, music, water and sound effects. Technology innovation converted an old legendary story into a modern, entertaining experience product. In *Impression West Lake*, by using technology, the producers recreate the Rain of West Lake, which in some ways reflects the natural charm of rain on the West Lake.



**The Rain of *Impression West Lake***

Each Impression performance has its own technological innovation. For example, *Impression Liu Sanjie* boasts the world's largest drum-tower series, and the world's largest theatre with real landscape as its stage. *Impression Lijiang* has advanced water and smoke engineering while *Impression West Lake* has advanced raining engineering. And *Impression*

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*Hainan* is performance in a bionic sea urchin theater. The seats of *Impression Red Gown* can move and offer the audiences with a 360 degrees view. Of course *Impression Putuo* is also a magic show. *Impression Wulong* owns a 225 meters' time tunnel.



Water and smoke engineering of *Impression West Lake*



*Impression Wulong's* time tunnel

**Chart 9: Technical innovation in each performance**

<b>Performance</b>	<b>Technical Innovation</b>
<i>Impression Liu Sanjie</i>	the world's largest drum tower series and the biggest natural stage
<i>Impression Lijiang</i>	daytime performance; the highest natural stage in altitude
<i>Impression West Lake</i>	advanced raining engineering
<i>Impression Hainan</i>	most advanced lighting and audio equipment
<i>Impression Red Gown</i>	a pivot stage and movable seats for audiences
<i>Impression Putuo</i>	real time film and advanced water and smoking engineering
<i>Impression Wulong</i>	225 meter time tunnel

### 5.1.3 Brand Equity

The Impression Series extended Zhang Yimou's brand equity. The benefits of brand equity are that the cost of introducing a brand-leveraged product is less than introducing an independent new product due to a much smaller investment in brand development and advertising recognition. As one of China's top directors to the outside world, Zhang Yimou's production has their personality: cultured, oriental, simplified in narrative but rich in visual display. His brand equity is accomplished, influential and competent, which is an important factor of the success and reproduction of Impression Series.

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Wang Chaoge

Zhang Yimou

Fan Yue

### 5.1.4 Community Participation and Support

Community participation of tourism planning and tourism operation is the key to the achievement of sustainable tourism development and the increase of tourist satisfaction. The Impression Series has always got strong support from local government. Moreover, the production teams paid great attention on building a friendly and co-operative relationship with local community. We can take *Impression Liu Sanjie* as an Example. Among the over 600 actors and actresses participating in the performance, most of them are local villagers from different ethnic groups. In the daytime, they are farmers and fishermen. During the night, they become actors and

actresses.

The participation of local community has proved to be very successful, both socially and economically.

The participation of local villager's means benefit-sharing and low production cost. Villagers are paid in the performance on monthly basis, which become a major income of many families in this area since Li River area is an under-developed district in China. They could also receive an annual dividend on a family basis. These measures have raised the local employment rate and the living-standard.



**The local villagers**

The participation of local villagers ensures the authenticity of the performance, which vividly embodies the daily rural life of ethnic groups in

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that area. Furthermore, it has become an important way to protect non-material cultural heritage in the rapid urbanization trend in China. Villagers get to choose staying at home instead of becoming migrant workers, keeping their traditional life-style. Local music and dances are able to pass on to next generation.

We could find similar examples of community participation in almost every Impression Series case.

## **5.2 Problems and Suggestions**

The Impression Series has won huge acclaims ever since it first appeared in 2003. It has increased the popularity of scenic spots and benefits the local economy in a great deal. However, as we find during our study, like any other tourism products, it has its own limits.

### **5.2.1 Problem 1: Environmental Issues**

After the rapid growth of Chinese economy for over thirty years, environmental protection has become the headline-grabbing issue. People

criticize that the overuse of tourism resources, and excessive investment in attractions at tourist sites, such as the installment of the largest drum-tower in the world in Li River, results in mass tourism, which may generate substantial waste and pollutions and cause environmental damage in the region.

Take *Impression West Lake* as an example. In hot summer nights, paper-made fans are given out to audience while in rainy nights, disposable rain coats are supplied free of charge. Audience may leave behind them with large amounts of trash as well.

Large crowds of tourists swarming into the outdoor theater also bring traffic problems, air and sound pollutions to the Lake District. We noticed that on their way out, some tourists trespassed on meadows so that they could arrive at the parking lots and bus stations ahead of the others. Also, as we know, the West Lake area is not large and its environment is so fragile that the outdoor theatre could be one of the factors contributing to water pollution.

### **Suggestions**

Based on our study, we suggest that the routes for audience to enter and exit the site and the parking lots should be designed for night use to

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avoid traffic jams which may lead to environment pollution.



**Billboard for *Impression West Lake***

We also believe that audience should be encouraged to return back disposable raincoats and fans at the exits. For example, they can purchase souvenirs related to *Impression West Lake* at reduced prices. As we mentioned in our report above, there were no shops for souvenirs such as CDs, DVDs and other by-products associated with *Impression West Lake*. Therefore, *Impression West Lake* should develop more commodities for tourists to purchase with the growing reputation of *Impression West Lake*.

In other Impression Series performances, environmental issues may

include lighting and sounding pollution. Therefore, the performances should be meticulously designed to be as minimally invasive to environment as possible.

### **5.2.2 Problem 2: An Imbalanced Market Segment**

Our study on Impression Series shows that outdoor live performances with nature landscape as stage are not restricted to national boundaries. According to our research, Impression Series are promoted through distribution channels such as travel agencies and exhibitions at cultural festivals both home and abroad. Another distribution channel is the internet. However, while gaining international audiences, Impression Series could encounter the problem of losing domestic audiences. According to Mr. Shao from *Impression West Lake* Cultural Development Ltd, overseas audience for *Impression West Lake* occupied 37.9% last year, while overseas tourists only accounts for 4 percent of the tourists who stayed overnight in Hangzhou in 2011.

One Chinese tourist complained that, according to our survey, Impression Series usually didn't have a strong plot but only pay attention to

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visual effects, which, he wrote, was very touristy.

We found Impression Series are keen on satisfying non-Chinese audiences. One of the directors of Impression Series Ms. Wang put it: we get nearly full marks from foreign audiences... it is interesting that foreign audiences can better appreciate the performances more than many Chinese.

However, domestic market is very important concerning its huge size.

*Impression West Lake* should try more efforts on domestic market.

### **Suggestions**

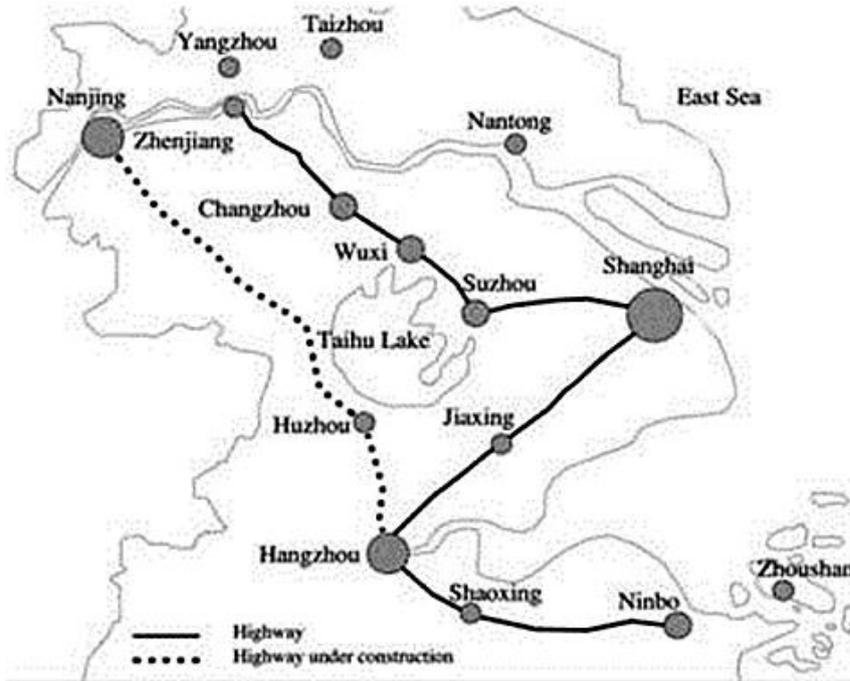
We believe marketing strategies should be adjusted to attract more domestic tourists in order to gain ultimate profit.

First, more flexible policy should be applied to the ticket price. As we mentioned above, the ticket price for *Impression West Lake* is quite high. The pricing level has different impacts on the two categories of the target audience, the domestic Chinese and international tourists. For most Chinese, the price is regarded as quite expensive. Hence, it is quite a luxury for local Chinese students or average-income workers. Therefore, a deduction of ticket price for students, soldiers and senior citizens can certainly draw more Chinese audiences.

According to our survey, local residents showed great interest in *Impression West Lake* and however, not many of them have actually watched the performance. A favorable price shall be given to citizens with local ID card during slack season. It certainly has both economic and social benefits.

Secondly, apart from putting up posters on the bus stations, and advertising through TV and newspaper, more cutting-edge technology could be attached for young people. “The postmodern tourist” is defined as an individual in restless pursuit of knowledge or pleasure and escaping from daily lives. Young generation are longing for travel and entertainment. As Hangzhou is located in the most developed area and surrounded by tens and hundreds of cities of various sizes including Shanghai, young people should be a potentially huge market for *Impression West Lake*. For younger generation, internet is their first choice. “Weibo” (Chinese version of Twitter) and “Renren” (Chinese version of Face book) are two popular advertising tools in this “self-media” or “we-media” era. We suggest Impression Series should have its own official Weibo so that various promotion activities can be spread through its followers in time in order to maximize its exposures.

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Map of Yangtze River Delta Region



新浪微博  
weibo.com



人人网  
renren.com

The LOGO of "Weibo" and "Renren"

## Part VI. Conclusion

After our hard work on Impression Series for nearly six months, we have a better understanding about tourism innovation and the success of Impression Series in China.

We agree that Impression Series is a fusion of many different elements, including culture, creativity, experience, advanced technology and tourism. It finds its root in China's spectacular natural landscape resources and is inspired by China's splendid local ethnic and religious cultures.

The case of Impression Series has demonstrated how important innovation is to tourism products and tourism destinations. Tourism is not only about visiting and seeing. By innovation, tourism can deliver tourists with unique physical and spiritual experience. Tourism innovation can help upgrade the overall image of destination and benefit local economy. In a word, innovations add extra value to the original tourism product and achieve sustainable development.

However, apart from its great success, Impression Series has its own limits. Environmental issues will result in the damage of the natural

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environment and negative relationship with local community which, in turn, will spoil the sustainable development of tourism in the destination.

Impression Series has already accomplished many “firsts” and “mosts” in terms of size, location and technology. We expect that future Impression Series will give priority to environmental friendliness. We hope future Impression Series will become the pioneer of the green trend and project a “green image” to tourists from all over the world.

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13. Official website of GTTP

<http://www.gttp.org/>

14. Official website of Impression West Lake

<http://www.hzyxxh.com>

15. Some article websites of Impression series

<http://www.yx-lj.com>

<http://www.yxlsj.com>

<http://putuo.zhoushan.cn>

<http://yinxiangpingyao.com>

<http://www.yx-dhp.cn/index.html>

Impression of China: Zhang Yimou’s Outdoor Theme Productions

[http://eprints.qut.edu.au/49875/1/Danjing\\_Zhang\\_Thesis.pdf](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/49875/1/Danjing_Zhang_Thesis.pdf)

Impression West Lake and Zhang Yimou

<http://sino-impression.com/LocalInfo2009421112546.html>

16. Some article websites of tourism in China

2010 Hangzhou Municipal Government Work Report

<http://eng.hangzhou.gov.cn/main/zpd/English/goal/gov/324611.shtml>

China National Tourism Administration

<http://en.cnta.gov.cn>

China Tourism Statistic

[http://cnto.org/ChinaStats\\_2006MajorStats.asp](http://cnto.org/ChinaStats_2006MajorStats.asp)

Hangzhou City Travel Committee

<http://en.gotohz.com/web/guest/surey>

17. Some pictures about impression series are from the following websites

<http://image.baidu.com/>

<http://image.jike.com>

<http://search.sina.com.cn/>

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## Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear friends,

Welcome to enjoy the beauty of West Lake. We are the students of Zhejiang Business College. We are currently doing a research about tourism innovation. And we hope you can help us filling out this questionnaire. Thank you very much for your help and support!

Please "√" the proper answer!

### Section 1: interviewee's data

1. Gender: \*Male \*Female
2. Age: \*under 20 \*21-40 \*41-60 \*61 or above
3. You are from: \*Hangzhou Local \*other regions of Zhejiang Province  
\*other areas out of Zhejiang Province \*foreign countries
4. What's your probably travel budget?  
\*500 RMB \*500-1000 RMB \*1000-2000 RMB  
\*2000-3000 RMB \*3000 RMB or above

### Section 2: Questions

1. Do you know there is an *Impression West Lake* performance on the West Lake?  
\*NO \*YES  
If YES, how do you know?  
A. From mass media including newspaper, TV program and travel guide books  
B. From posters and electronic promotion advertisements  
C. From tour guides
2. Would you like to see the performance since you are here?  
\*NO \*YES  
If NO, why?

- 
3. What is your opinion about *Impression West Lake*? Please score each option from 1 to 5.

1- Not important at all	3- important	1	2	3	4
2- A little bit important	4- very important				
Enable tourists to enjoy a Zhang Yimou's production					
Enable tourists to experience the classic Chinese culture					
Enable tourists to have a unique tourism experience					
Promote Hangzhou as a tourist attraction for special interest guests and repeated visitors					

4. What is the most important objective for you to watch the *Impression West Lake*?

- A. it's a part of a worthwhile trip
- B. to experience a different culture
- C. to do a research
- D. just follow others

5. What do you think of *Impression West Lake*?

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Do you consider *Impression West Lake* as a tourism innovation?

\*NO \*YES

6. Could you give some advice on the development of *Impression West Lake*?

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Thanks again for your participating!