

## Mediating Tourist Landscape: A Case Study of Media-Induced Tourism in China

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This study examines the rising phenomenon of media-induced tourism. The case selected is a Chinese television drama *Flowing Time* and Black Town, the location where *Flowing Time* was filmed. Through textual analysis and ethnography, this study reveals how the meaning of the landscape is mediated and how the mediated meaning is constituted by and constitutive of people's everyday lives. The results consist of two parts. First, television as "myth maker" transforms empirical time and space into the mythic world and embeds the media narrative into the landscape meaning. Second, gaze is a synthesis of discursive practices disciplining the interactions of social actors. Tourists, the tourism industry, and local residents play different roles in the discursive formation of the place-myth—as "seekers," "designers," "guiders," and "boosters." They work in a dynamic interplay to reproduce and reinforce the mediated meaning in the cycle of signification.

Media-induced tourism is a promising sector for attracting visitors to the destinations featured on television or cinema screens (Beeton, 2005; Evans, 1997; Riley, Baker, & Doren, 1998). The link between mass electronic media and tourism originates from literary tourism, and tourism and cultural geography scholarship have long acknowledged the use of textual accounts to construct "place-myths" (Shields, 1991) for a certain place (Selwyn, 1996). For instance, Niagara Falls is seen as a place of death because written texts on the subject—such as letters, newspaper clippings, diaries, poems, and novels—convey the metaphor of death (McGreevy, 1992). Media-induced tourism follows this logic to demonstrate the effects of visual media in constructing landscape meanings. According to Beeton (2005), attractions of media-induced tourism lie not only in the vivid display of the marvelous landscape view but in the narrative of the film or the television drama that grants the tourist destination a mediated meaning. It is the latter that turns the landscape into a holy place that fans are eager to make a pilgrimage to.

Recent years have witnessed several smashes of media-induced tourism in different parts of the world: the picturesque "Shire" in New Zealand (Peaslee, 2010), the "guilty landscapes" in Europe

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(Reijnders, 2009), and the Sydney Mardi Gras in Australia constructed to be a gay parade (Best, 2005) to name just a few. Keeping pace with the industry development, scholarship has paid increasing attention to this phenomenon, with a special interest in the role of media in destination promotion. Couldry (2003) coined this phenomenon as “media pilgrimage”—“journeys to points with significance in media narratives” (p. 76). According to him, visits to film studios or places where films or TV series were shot serve as a conjunction of both “media world” and “ordinary world.” It is through the symbolic power of media that media narratives are naturalized into people’s daily rituals and place-images are reproduced and circulated. Building on the “media pilgrimage” thesis, Reijnders (2010) conducted an ethnographic study on tours where three detective series were filmed in Europe and asserted that the place meanings are negotiated by various parties, such as tourists, locals, and tour guides. These places are *lieux d’imagination*, from where tourists step into the “imagined world” created by the media narrative on the physical landscape. Also drawing from Couldry’s theoretical propositions, Peaslee (2011) analyzed field data gathered in Matamata, New Zealand, where the Lord of the Rings trilogy was filmed, and described the tour journey via which visitors approach the “mediated centre” of the “Middle Earth.” He noted that the presentation of some tangible marks in the site, such as the visitor center and the statues, evoke the Hobbiton discourse and imagery for “the reconstruction of Hobbiton as a fully realized textual-spatial ‘reality’” (p. 50). Another work by Peaslee (2010) focused on the activities of local residents in Matamata and articulated the negotiations of place meanings locals have with media power in their daily practices. Although some locals are reflexive as to reify the place-images embedded by the media text, most of their activities are “emblematic,” corresponding to the media narratives and legitimizing the social orderings of media power.

Benefiting from the fruitful findings of previous studies in this field, the present research—a case study of media-induced tourism in China drawing from the theoretical articulation of “tourist gaze”—addresses the power of media narrative in reconstructing the meaning of a particular landscape. Zukin (1991) asserts that physical landscape is mediated by a process of cultural appropriation, and the mediation is accomplished by the visual consumption of agents. In this study, the cultural appropriation of landscape goes through two stages: first, the mediation by the media text and, second, the mediation by the social actors’ everyday practices through collective gaze. Media narrative plays a pivotal part in reconstructing landscape meanings by normalizing the place-myth into ordinary life. Therefore, with the production and reproduction of landscape meaning as the main focus, I raise two research questions:

*RQ1: How does media text transform the meaning of the landscape?*

*RQ2: How is the mediated meaning of the landscape constitutive of and constituted by the everyday life of social actors in media-induced tourism?<sup>2</sup>*

The case selected is a Chinese television drama titled *Flowing Time*, and the location is Black Town, where *Flowing Time* was filmed. Black Town is one of the most popular tourist destinations in China,

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<sup>2</sup> Everyday life is defined as “the ritualistic, ordinary, and often mundane occurrences that take place on any given day in a researcher or participant’s life” (Boylorn, 2008, p. 307).

featuring an elegant view of ancient Jiang Nan (south of the Yangtze River).<sup>3</sup> The story of *Flowing Time* was set in this town, and the television drama portrayed the town life vividly. This case study enriches the understandings of media-induced tourism in the following aspects. First, *Flowing Time* tells a love story, and this study investigates how the "romance love" narrative is embedded into the place-image. Previous studies have focused mostly on the detective and the adventure genre. The usefulness of the romantic genre in mediating touristic landscapes has not been studied. This study serves to fill this gap. Second, the fieldwork of this study reveals the roles of social actors in discursive reproduction and circulation process. The tourism industry, local residents, and tourists play diverse roles in the formation of place-myth as "seekers," "designers," "guiders," and "boosters." The classification of social actors helps to articulate the discursive formation process and shed light on tourism practices. Finally, this study draws from the theoretical propositions of the notion of tourist gaze and is attentive to some criticisms of tourist gaze. This study finds that gaze is not a visual act only, but a synthesis of discursive practices. It involves multiple parties, such as the tourism industry, local people, and tourists. Therefore, I employ the concept of "collective gaze" to describe the process through which actions and interactions of social actors are disciplined and normalized by the media narrative.

### **Tourist Gaze and Criticisms**

*The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 1990) is a canonic text in the sociology of tourism that illustrates the fundamental nature of the tourist experience. The main argument is that it is the power of the tourist gaze that endows the semiotic meaning to the physical landscape and transforms it to a tourist landscape. The theorization of tourist gaze has its roots in the work of Foucault. Urry (1990, 1992) argued that tourists' behavior of gazing upon the landscape can be seen as equivalent to a doctor's practice of viewing the patient's body in a "medical gaze." In Foucault's discursive regime, it is the gaze that shapes the relationship between a doctor and a patient in "a scientifically structured discourse" (Foucault, 1976, p. xiv). The discursive formation of knowledge is of critical importance to the establishment of "the unimpeded empire of the gaze" (Foucault, 1976, p. 39). The medical gaze is organized within an institutionalized discourse. Within the institution, the medical discourse becomes the knowledge of modern medicine, and it circulates through professional trainings. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) stated that the formation of the entire punishment system is the result of the exercise of normalizing power, and at the core of power is the production of knowledge. Norms and regulations in society constituted by knowledge are formulated by the relationships of power.

In the case of tourism, it is through gaze that the meaning of the landscape is reproduced and recaptured (Urry, 1990, 1992). Gaze enables tourists to behave as semioticians looking at landscapes to obtain signs from other discourses (Culler, 1981). As Foucault (1967, 1976, 1979) pointed out, gaze is institutionalized. Modern tourism is a mass-organized leisure industry and has its own institutionalized discourse (Lash & Urry, 1994; Urry, 1990). Soper (2006) asserted that a doctor who employs medical gaze can be replaced by a tour guide who directs the gaze of tourists. Both doctors and tour guides play

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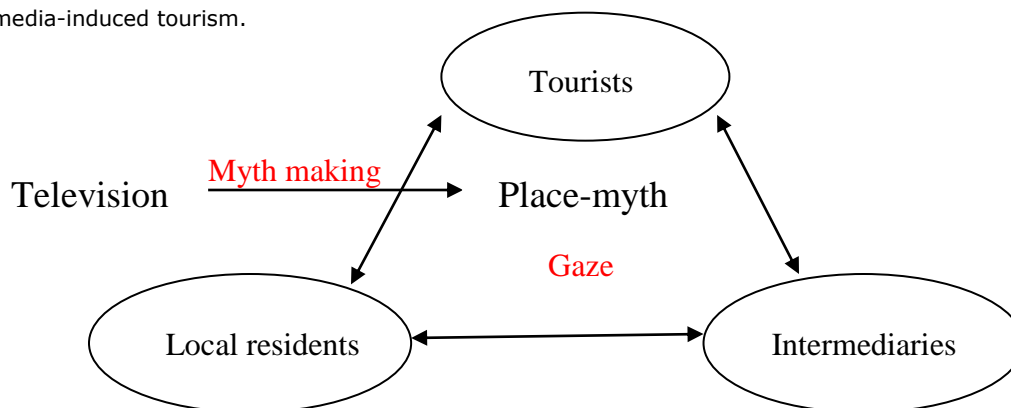
<sup>3</sup> Black Town is in Zhejiang Province. The town covers an area of 71.19 square kilometers and has a total population of 60,000, with only one-fifth of them permanent residents. It entertains about six million visitors from all over the world every year.

pivotal roles in the normalization of discourse according to their authority in production and diffusion of knowledge. In this way tourist gaze is guided by professionals to some extent (Urry, 1990, 1992).

Two criticisms on the theorization of tourist gaze have direct bearings on the present study: One is ocular-centrism, and the other is overemphasis on the role of tourists. First, tourist gaze has been criticized for its neglect of other senses. Ocular-centrism is rooted in the privileging role of visual sense in the history of Western culture (Jay, 1986), and Urry (1990) asserts that the visual sense is central to the construction of landscape meanings. Yet some scholars argue that other senses, such as smell and touch, are also involved in overall tourist experiences (Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Soper, 2006). Second, Urry (1990) argues that tourists are the gazers who grant meanings to the landscape. However, other scholars have found that the meaning of the landscape is a complex negotiation among various parties (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2008). Nash (1996) noted that the typical structure of social actors in tourism studies should be a triad consisting of tourists, locals, and intermediaries. Intermediaries refer to government, the tourism industry, and other social institutions intervening in the construction of a tourist destination. Hence, I consider the term *collective gaze* to be a more accurate description of the gaze mechanism, which involves multiple parties and embodies a synthesis of discursive practices not limited to visual acts only.

In the case of media-induced tourism, mass media provide the sources of tourism imagery by making place-myths. Myth produced by the media narrative provides a story frame to interpret the landscape. Social actors gaze upon the landscape through a mediated lens, and, thereafter, their actions are normalized to conform to the routines formed by the media discourse. In this way, collective gaze reproduces and reinforces the place-myth.

The research was conducted into two parts. The first part focused on the construction of place-myth by television text. Both the myth in the media text and the place-myth in the landscape were analyzed to determine whether they are congruent. The second part of the research focused on the mediated collective gaze mechanism in people's discursive practices. Routines and rules of social actors (i.e., tourists, local people, and intermediaries) were revealed. Figure 1 presents the analytical model for media-induced tourism.



**Figure 1. Analytical framework for media-induced tourism**

### Method

The case selected is a Chinese television drama, *Flowing Time*, and the landscape in which it takes place, Black Town.<sup>4</sup> *Flowing Time* is a contemporary love story. Wen, a librarian in Black Town, meets Ying, a fashion designer from Taipei. They fall in love; however, they are incompatible due to their social backgrounds, lifestyles, and future plans. They eventually part but remain in love with each other for the rest of their lives. The television drama set the story mainly in Black Town and depicted the picturesque view. It also described the social transformation of Black Town.

Myth in the television drama and place-myth in the landscape were analyzed first to explore the production of place-myth by television narrative. Textual analysis was employed to reveal the underlying meaning of *Flowing Time*. Another key method for this study was ethnography. The fieldwork was done in two phases. The time of the fieldwork was purposively sampled according to the seasonal tourism cycle in China.<sup>5</sup> The first phase was from April 3 to April 7, 2009. Background information was collected, field relations were established, and observations were recorded. After that, preliminary data analysis was performed. The second phase was from September 29 to October 7, 2009. Extensive contacts with informants were conducted in this phase. I stayed at a family motel and observed the interactions between tourists and local business people. In addition, I participated in six tourist groups to observe the interactions between tour guides and tourists. I also had extensive contacts with tour tricyclists and observed their working patterns. Detailed information was collected specifically related to the research questions. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 23 informants: 11 tourists, 4 tour guides, 4 tricyclists, 2 family motel owners, and 2 other local residents. Field notes were written during the field period or shortly after it, and 120 photos were taken as supplementary visual materials. In addition, documents (e.g., leaflets made by locals) and artifacts (e.g., souvenirs) were collected and included in the analysis. Fieldwork discontinued when I felt that data saturation had been achieved (Saumure & Given, 2008).

During my fieldwork, I found that the tourism industry and the local government play critical roles in the development of Black Town. The Tourism Development Co. Ltd., supported by the local government, monopolizes the tourism business in Black Town. They work together to demolish old residences and build new touristic spots. They turn an obscure town into a famous tourist resort by successful branding. Based on field observations, I found that, within the triad structure of social actors (Nash, 1996), the intermediaries in this case refer to the tourism industry and the local government. In Black Town the tourism industry and the local government have reached agreement on the development of a tourism economy and the exploitation of old residences. I consider the tourism company as a surrogate of the local government with regard to the tourism development strategies. Therefore, tourists,

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<sup>4</sup> *Flowing Time* was first released in prime time on Channel 8 China Central Television (CCTV 8) in 2003. It consists of 22 episodes.

<sup>5</sup> In China, the number of tourists visiting destinations peaks during holidays. The first phase of my field research took place during the Ching Ming Festival holiday. The second phase was during the National Day vacation. During these two phases, Black Town had many more visitors than normal. The interactions among people increased in both intensity and scope.

local people, and the tourism industry constitute the core discursive community in Black Town.

### **Production of the Place-Myth**

In *Flowing Time*, Black Town is depicted as a romantic wonderland crystallized in traditional society. The televised image is highly congruent with the place-image in a touristic reading of the destination. The television text confers cultural meanings to the physical landscape: traditional society, crystallized time, and romantic love. In this regard, the television text reconstructs the place-myth by transforming time and space and embedding narrative into the innocent landscape.

### **Transforming Time and Space**

The most distinctive image of Black Town is an elegant traditional town crystallized in the river of time. Close scrutiny of the television text reveals that the binary opposition of traditional society versus modern society and the metaphor of "time flowing like water" are the main strategies used to transform time and space into the mythic world. The place-myth is based on the physical features of the landscape, and the television text works to strengthen it.

An examination of the leading characters and related plots shows that the images of the hero Wen and the heroine Ying portrayed in the drama form a sharp contrast between traditional and modern life. Wen, who grew up in Black Town, graduated from a university in Beijing with a master's degree, then returned to Black Town to be a librarian. Wen dislikes meeting strangers and never answers the telephone. He does not talk much and always works alone. His personality is quiet and static. However, Ying, a fashion designer in Taipei, is a modern professional woman and runs her own company. She has traveled all over the world and never visits the same place twice. Compared to Wen, she is active, mobile, and good at making friends. The essence of their professions indicates the contradiction between traditional and modern society. As Wen says, "my job is restoration, while yours is creation." In *Flowing Time*, Wen's characteristics signify traditional society and Ying's signify modern society. Table 1 summarizes Wen's and Ying's characteristics.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Leading Characters in *Flowing Time*.**

Features	Wen (Hero)	Ying (Heroine)
Dressing style	Plain; sometimes sloppy	Fashionable; tasteful
Life pace	Slow	Fast
Profession	Librarian Restoration/old Handicraft Isolated work Poor	Fashion designer Creation/new Industry Division of labor in work Wealthy
Personality	Quiet Hates socializing Static	Active Good at making friends Mobile
Place	Black Town	Taipei
Signifies	Traditional society	Modern society

The binary opposition of places in this drama is represented by Black Town and Taipei. Black Town is depicted as a picturesque wonderland isolated from the mundane world, whereas Taipei is portrayed as a modern metropolis. In *Flowing Time*, the role of Black Town goes beyond a pure provider of scenic views, but functions as an essential part in the myth structure to signify traditional society. Black Town is constructed as a pristine wonderland in old times.

In addition to binary opposition, the metaphor of time flowing like water strengthens the image of traditional society by crystallizing the past in Black Town. Metaphor is defined as "the carrying-over from something of some of its meanings on to another thing of an apparently different kind" (Bignell, 2008, p. 111). Davidson (1979) and Rorty (1989) defined metaphor as "transference of meaning." In the water/time metaphor, water is the signifier and time is the signified. From a Chinese philosophical approach, time is a cyclical concept that is related to change and balance. Chinese philosopher Wang Fuzhi<sup>6</sup> wrote:

. . . something exists before, like the origin of the flow. This is called "the past." It is still there. Something is about to come, like the destiny of the flow. This is called "the future." What is actually in presence is called "the present." (cited in Chan, 2006, p. 123)

The movement of time is described vividly, like flowing water, demonstrating that the metaphor of time flowing like water has deep cultural roots in Chinese historical thinking. There are two meanings in the signifying process. First, time is fluid. Flowing is the typical movement of both water and time, characterized as fleeting and never going back. In this sense, time is related to the passing of memory. The second meaning is that time is crystallized. In Black Town, the simple and repeated traditional lifestyle is retained. In the drama, the interchangeability of instance and eternity is stated several times.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Fuzhi was a Chinese philosopher of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties.

For example, the lyrics of the theme song are, "Who makes instance resemble eternity? Who makes future resemble past?" The longitude of time is blurred, and in Black Town the good old time is crystallized. In the signification process, Black Town is critical to the meaning construction of time. The place is granted the meaning of a memory carrier. The running river resembles flowing time in shape, which becomes the distinctive attractiveness of a water town.

Generally congruent with the image in the television drama, Black Town is considered an ideal place for tourists to find the traditional lifestyle and remember bygone days. With the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal running through it, the town boasts the naturally endowed beauty of interlaced rivers and watercourses, and small watercraft with black tops ramble on the rivers. The town contains more than 40 hectares of original late-19th-century buildings and more than 100 ancient stone bridges of different shapes. Most traditional buildings are well preserved after enduring many rough years. Today, many native residents still live in their old black-wood houses and preserve the local customs and lifestyles of their ancestors.

In Black Town, the traditional workshops have been preserved and are open to tourists. The Foliage Dyeing Workshop is an example. In the front is a shop selling blue calico products. The yard is full of high poles and frames with long scrolls of cloth hanging from the top. At the back local workers display the dyeing and printing procedure. Dyestuffs used in the workshop are distilled from natural grasses and trees. Similar to the Foliage Dyeing Workshop, other tourist attractions also exhibit historical relics and traditional customs, such as the Hundred Beds Museum and the Folk Custom Museum. The overall image of Black Town provides a vivid presentation of traditional life in China. The official website of Black Town describes the town as "a living fossil of ancient oriental civilization for its profound history and culture."<sup>7</sup>

When tourists visit scenic spots in Black Town—especially at the television-related sites—they often talk about *Flowing Time* to express their feelings toward the past. Black Town Library, where Wen works in the television drama, is now a popular tourist spot named Qing Geng Yu Du, where all the displays and staged properties are kept the same way as they appear in *Flowing Time*.<sup>8</sup> At this spot, tourists easily recall the scenes and narrative of the drama and get lost in their memories. "Time is flowing. Flowing time," Liu, a middle-aged woman who came from Shanghai, said to herself at the site. Liu continued:

Normally, I am not that sentimental. But standing here, I have the feeling that I am in a different world. I saw these displays on the television, and now I see them, but I have the feeling that they are more real in the drama. They belong to the old days.

At specific sites related to the television drama, the media text is quite sensitive in generating people's imagination and forming interpretations of the landscape in a particular framework.

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.wuzhen.com.cn/wuzhen.eng/about.html>

<sup>8</sup> *Qing Geng Yu Du* means doing farm work on sunny days and reading books on rainy days, the traditional lifestyle in ancient rural China.



In short, binary opposition and metaphor are textual tools used to accomplish the function of transforming time and space. Compared to time flying in the outside world, Black Town is an idyllic locale endowed with the beauty of simplicity and serenity. The attraction of a visit to what seems like another time and another place is fundamental to its being a tourist attraction (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). Based on the intrinsic anthropological and geographical feature of Black Town, the narrative in *Flowing Time* strengthens the place-image of traditional society by posing a sharp contrast to Taipei, a cosmopolitan city. In addition, metaphor works as a cultural code of signification of water/time. Through the mediation of metaphor, myth draws close cognitive and affective links between the flowing imagery of water and the past. A visit to Black Town provides an escape from mundane life and endows tourists with a journey back to the historical, natural, and pristine world. In this sense, the television myth is transferred to the place-myth by posing the binary opposition and the metaphor to construct the attraction of the landscape.

### ***Embedding Narrative***

After the release of *Flowing Time*, Black Town became an ideal romantic resort for young lovers. The physical landscape of Black Town does not convey the meaning of romantic love, so the place-myth of romantic love is imposed by the narrative of *Flowing Time*. Narrative has coded sequences to specify the underlying systemic and ordered mythic structure (Silverstone, 1981). The narrative of *Flowing Time* follows the traits and the logical sequence of the myth of romantic love (Giddens, 1992). A close analysis of the narrative finds that a sequential four-stage structure can be discerned in the narrative formula in *Flowing Time*.

In the first stage, hero and heroine find love at first glance. In episode 1, Wen and Ying met accidentally for the first time at the Black Town Library. When Ying takes a book off the bookshelf, she sees Wen on the other side. They cannot take their eyes off each other. This is "love at first glance" (Giddens, 1992), from which comes a natural mental and emotional attraction. In the second stage, they each find a soul mate to make life complete. In episode 3, Ying tells her best friend "about meeting another 'me' in the world." In the third stage, romantic love features the break from everyday routines and rules, so it often encounters external obstacles. In *Flowing Time*, the signified opposition of traditional society and modern society was the main obstacle of the love affair. In the fourth stage, their love feeds upon transgression. At the end of *Flowing Time*, Wen and Ying depart, but they remain in love for the rest of their lives.

This analysis demonstrates that the myth of romantic love is constructed by the narrative of the television drama. My field observation shows that the myth of romantic love is deeply embedded in tourists' readings of the landscape meanings. Certain places, such as the location of the fictional Black Town Library where love at first glance happened, are granted emotional meanings by the narrative. At the scenic spot Qing Geng Yu Du (Black Town Library in the drama), many tourists want to reproduce this scene in their photographs.

Chen came to Black Town with her boyfriend. They were both undergraduate students and had been dating for one year. Seeing a cordon line around the bookshelves at the library, Chen was

disappointed to find she was not allowed to approach the bookshelves, saying, "What I want to do most in this tour is have a picture of my boyfriend and me taken just like the first time Wen and Ying met here." Several young couples expressed similar wishes as they wanted to reenact some scenes from *Flowing Time*. The cordon line was established to preserve the old bookshelves, because many tourists wanted to touch them and take pictures in front of them, mimicking the scene in which the hero and heroine first meet in *Flowing Time*. This place is a fine example of the *lieux d'imagination*, which serve as connecting points between a real world and a media world (Reijnders, 2010). The cordon line in this case marks a symbolic boundary between these two worlds. It also serves to "map, freeze, and frame the past, while simultaneously desiring a 'living history' that provides a spectacular background for the present" (Minca & Oakes, 2006, p. 13). Tourists' accounts showed that their interpretation of Black Town is framed by the media narrative; they want to enter into the media world in the places where the television drama was filmed. For the audiences of *Flowing Time*, the narrative has been embedded into the landscape meanings. The sentimental elements injected in the landscape all come from the narrative, which confers every ordinary object in Black Town an iconic meaning. In this regard, the mediated place-myth has achieved the dominant role in the process of discursive formation. It is a fine demonstration of the power of narrative in transforming the innocent landscape into a romantic resort.

### **Mediated Collective Gaze**

The production of the place-myth is only the beginning of the mediation story. Analysis of the discursive practices of social actors reveals how the mediated meanings of the landscape are reproduced and reinforced in everyday life under the framework of collective gaze.<sup>9</sup> This research finds that, in the process of signification, three sets of social actors—tourists, the tourist industry, and local residents—all gaze upon the landscape and grant it cultural meanings through their discourse and practice. The place-myth is normalized into their interpretations of Black Town and internalized in their everyday routines. Social actors within the discursive community play diverse parts: seekers, designers, guiders, and boosters. Therefore, the place-myth has been reproduced in a hermeneutic circuit of signification.

### **Seekers**

In the field, tourists behave as seekers, actively seeking the views that appeared in *Flowing Time*. In Black Town, I met a tour group guided by the Colorful Jiang Nan Travel Agency. Three undergraduate women, Xia, Zhang, and Wang, were members of this group. Xia told me, "We have planned this tour for quite a time. Black Town has been the heaven in our mind since we watched *Flowing Time* several years ago. Before coming, we watched the television drama again."

As soon as they stepped into the East Street, the three girls asked the tour guide where the Foliage Dyeing Workshop was. "In the television scenes, Ying was rambling on the drying ground, with a

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<sup>9</sup> Discursive practice can be a specific way of talking in a discursive community and can also be a routinized pattern of conduct within particular institutional sites (Foucault, 1976; Hall, 1997). It influences how meaningful thoughts are put into practice and used to discipline the conduct of social actors.

lot of blue calico cloth hanging around. She looked like a genius dancing with all the beautiful blue calico," said Xia, when I asked her why they were looking for the Foliage Dyeing Workshop. After entering the drying ground, they were quite excited to see the beautiful view exactly as it was on the television screen. They imitated the gestures and motions of Ying and took photos.

According to Bauman (2000), mass media are important cultural institutions to create consumption desire in modern society. Media-induced tourism is powerful in creating the desire to visit the tourist destinations where the program was shot. Tourists come to Black Town with a preconceived image set by the television drama. As seekers, they are searching for something related to the media text. They intentionally or unintentionally embed the narrative of the television drama into the physical spot and imitate the activities of the roles in the drama. The seeking activity is a kind of gaze. Through their discursive practices, the landscape is gazed upon through the television lens. Hence, the place-myth is reproduced and reinforced. On the surface, tourists appear to be making their own choice of activities, but actually their actions at large are disciplined by the mediated discourse, because most tourists are fans of *Flowing Time*. Both their desire and their consuming activities at the destination constitute an internal motivating force of interactions with designers, guiders, and boosters to keep the hermeneutic cycle running. Conversely, the actions of other social actors activate the tourists' desire.

#### ***On-Ground Designers and Guiders***

Designers and guiders are social actors who provide tourism packages directly to the tourists at macro and micro levels, respectively. In this case, there are both on-ground and underground designers and guiders. On-ground designers refer to the tourism company in Black Town, which makes branding strategies and reorganizes material and cultural resources to highlight and reinforce the place-myth. On-ground guiders are the tour guides in the scenic spots. They operate the branding strategies in their working routine.

The Black Town Tourism Development Company acts as a designer, actively promoting the destination image by embedding the mediated myth into the landscape and implementing the television text elements into its branding strategies. The company invited Liu Ruoying (the actress who played the role of Ying) to endorse Black Town and posted stage photos of Wen and her in the spots frequented by tourists. In 2010, a new promotion video starring Liu was filmed for Black Town and broadcast on major television channels in China. In the video, Liu portrays a tourist who returns to Black Town. She lives in an old black-wood house, eats traditional Chinese food with locals, and takes evening strolls. Ancient architecture and traditional life are vividly displayed in the video. The video begins with Liu's monologue—"enchanted, soft water, serene time, back to the dreamlike Black Town"—invoking the metaphor of time flowing like water. The water metaphor calls to mind a feeling of serenity and simplicity. Furthermore, the video embeds the elements of television drama into the town image. At the end of the video, Liu smilingly gazes at an old photo that shows Wen and Ying holding hands in *Flowing Time*. She says, "The beautiful memories in *Flowing Time* illuminate a corner of the past. I am not a transient guest any more. I come, and never leave." This ending is in contrast to the conclusion of *Flowing Time*, in which Ying never returns to Black Town. It draws the narrative of television drama into the interpretation of the landscape and helps to build the play-myth of romantic love.

This video is a presentation of place-image by the tourism industry. The tourism industry wants to confer upon the landscape the place-myth shown in *Flowing Time*. The use of television text elements—including the key character, the plot, and other factors—provides a framework for gazing upon the town and, therefore, disciplines people's interpretation of it.

In addition to the branding strategies employed by the tourist company at the macro level, tour guides integrate the place-myth strategy into their micro practices of everyday routine. Tour guides are "guiders" who provide clues for tourists to interpret the landscape in a certain context. Tour guides have a definite work routine of introducing spots by highlighting the television drama to attract tourists.

The tour in East Zha starts from the Feng Yuan Twin Bridge.<sup>10</sup> Local tour guides introduce this site to tourists as follows:

Welcome to Black Town! Look at your right side. This is the Feng Yuan Twin Bridge. A number of scenes in *Flowing Time* were shot here, do you remember? Huang Lei [the actor who played the role of Wen] and Liu Ruoying met here. You can take a picture here.

The tour guides intentionally mention *Flowing Time* to generate and sustain a certain gaze. Such discursive practices have been enmeshed into the everyday routine of their work. Their words actually guide the tourists' interpretation under the framework of *Flowing Time* so that the meanings are constructed and circulated. I asked one of the informants, Jiang, why all the tour guides mentioned *Flowing Time* when introducing spots. Jiang was a native of Black Town in her early 20s. She had worked as a tour guide in the scenic zone for two years. She said when she worked as an intern guide in the scenic zone, a veteran served as her supervisor. She followed the veteran and imitated the work routines. The new guides learn from the veterans through observation and participation so that the professional routines are kept and circulated.

As described above, both designers and guiders are institutionalized. On one hand, gaze is constructed by the institutionalized discourse to follow the place-myth. On the other hand, social actions of designers and guiders are disciplined and normalized in the hermeneutic cycle of meaning reproduction. Their own interpretations are television-mediated. Therefore, the gaze is both constitutive and constituted.

### ***Underground Designers and Guiders***

Local residents are also interpreters of Black Town. Compared to tourists' short encounter with the landscape, the locals are in a more intimate relationship with the landscape. They are much closer to the concrete reality, and they experience the concrete reality and the staged reality simultaneously for a long time. In Black Town, local people have formed an important army to make sense of the landscape as

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<sup>10</sup> Geographically, the four parts of Black Town are East Zha, West Zha, South Zha, and North Zha. East Zha and West Zha are open to tourists as scenic zones, while South Zha and North Zha are for local residents. Most scenes from *Flowing Time* were filmed in East Zha and South Zha.

designers, guiders, and boosters. Meanwhile, the transformation of the landscape has also deeply influenced their lives.

Tricyclists are an important group serving tourists and offering interpretations of the town. In Black Town there are no automobile taxis. Three-wheel pedicabs are the main vehicles for tourists to take on a short route. Shao was a tricyclist in Black Town. He asked for 50 RMB (about \$7.70) for a tour of *Flowing Time's* "Old Street," which was actually South Street in Black Town. Until recently, South Zha has not been included in the commercial scenic zone, and most Black Town natives live in the old residences inherited from their ancestors. Tricyclists want to present Old Street to tourists as "the authentic Black Town," as opposed to the staged Black Town in East Zha and West Zha.

One spot Shao introduced was "Two Holes, Three Skies," which was filmed in *Flowing Time*. This spot got its name for the unique view it offers. When people stand on the street and look at the sky, they see two arched doors separate the sky into three parts. Near the arched door is a shop selling tourism souvenirs. Shao picked up a postcard from the shop counter and showed it to me, saying, "See, *Flowing Time* filmed the view here. It is unique, and you will never see such a view outside of Black Town. Once, Liu Ruoying was here, and we all saw her."

On the postcard was a stage photo of *Flowing Time*, with Liu Ruoying under the arched doors. This postcard was not new and not for sale. Other tricyclists also showed this postcard to their guests, and all were quite acquainted with the shop owner. Obviously, this postcard was a tool used to introduce this special place to tourists. Tricyclists have rearranged the private tourism resources into an organized route. In this sense, they undertake the roles of designers and guiders.

The tour route of Old Street has been developed out of the tricyclists' collective action, and it offers a distinctive interpretation of the landscape. This underground economy, compared to the official tourism company, has integrated private landscape resources into a systematic tourism product. Their interpretations of the landscape come mainly from lived experience and oral history, but now mediated experiences have been increasingly incorporated into their world as Black Town has appeared so many times in fictional stories in film and on television.

The field data reveal that the tricyclists have formed a systematic and routinized work pattern in their discursive practices. They are considered the counterparts of the tourism company and tour guides in the underground economy. They intentionally embed the elements of films and television dramas into their work routine to highlight the mediated meanings of landscape so as to form unique attractions to tourists. Through their gaze upon the landscape, the television-mediated meanings have penetrated people's daily, routine social interactions. Thus, place-myth is reproduced in everyday life through the circuit of signification, so Black Town forms a constant attraction in people's interpretation of the landscape.

### **Boosters**

In this case, boosters are the family motel hosts and local businesspeople selling souvenirs in Black Town. Distinct from designers and guiders, who intentionally package the landscape into a tourist destination based on the media narrative, boosters are not involved in providing tourism packages directly to seekers. Compared to the central role of designers and guiders in the construction of mediated tourism discourse, the role of boosters is peripheral; their daily practices are influenced by the tourism. Boosters utilize the media elements to sell their products and services. Such activities further stimulate tourists' desires to visit the destination and reproduce the place-myth.

During the second stage of my fieldwork, I stayed at a local family motel, whose owner was named Zheng. She said that after Black Town became a scenic zone in 2001, many local residents (including her) quit their jobs and began to serve the tourists to earn money. Zheng quit her job and opened the family motel in 2005. Tourists visiting Black Town for the first time would ask Zheng for advice on where to visit. Tourists had a rough idea of Black Town from the television drama *Flowing Time*, and Zheng would mention the plots of the program to help tourists organize their trips. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Zhao and their daughter visited Black Town and stayed at Zheng's motel in September 2009. Zheng recalled this conversation with the Zhaos after they checked in.

Mrs. Zhao: Aha! Where shall we go? We haven't been to Black Town before. But it seems so familiar to me. I want to see the bridge, the wine shop . . .

Zheng: Most scenes in *Flowing Time* were filmed in East Zha and South Zha. You can visit East Zha tomorrow morning and hire a tricyclist to lead your tour to Old Street in the afternoon. At night you can enjoy the elegant night view in West Zha. It is a new scenic spot designed after the night tour of Wen and Ying in *Flowing Time*.

The Zhaos' daughter: Great! I like the night scene in the drama.

Zheng held similar conversations with tourists several times a day. She had integrated the television drama elements into her work routine to conduct efficient communication with tourists. When asked why she mentioned *Flowing Time* when talking to tourists, Zheng answered,

Previously, all the visitors asked for the spots of *Flowing Time*. Later on, I introduced them before they asked, and all the other local people here did it in same way. During the past five years, I have served numerous visitors, and I think it is the best way to catch their attention in the shortest time.

Tourism has transformed the lifescape of the local people in this rural town, and tourism has become the center of their lives (Urry, 1995). Family motel hosts are enthusiastic boosters of the television-mediated landscape image, playing a role in the circuit of meaning reproduction. Local people have integrated the television drama into their interpretation of the landscape through their interactions with tourists.

From the descriptions of seekers', designers', guiders', and boosters' activities, it is clear that the actions of these social actors transcend the single act of seeing and involve much physical contact and emotional involvement. Social actors even engage in economic activities. Therefore, I argue that gaze is a synthesis of discursive practices containing physical, cognitive, and affective activities (Perkins & Thorns, 2001). All the activities of social actors can be viewed as metaphorical eyes gazing upon the landscape to construct the meaning of landscape. This finding deviates from the ocular-centrism theory and proposes that tourist gaze in modern tourism has much richer meanings than pure sightseeing.

In addition, this study redefines gaze from the perspective of social interaction; the meaning of landscape is generated in a dynamic process through people's discursive practices. Gaze is not a one-way process of meaning conferral, but contains a hermeneutic circuit of meaning reproduction. Social actors playing different roles are all essential parts in the generation and reproduction of the landscape meaning.

### Reflexivity

Zhou was a native of Black Town and an undergraduate attending a university in a modern city nearby, majoring in tourism English. Her mother ran a family motel in the town. She usually came back to Black Town once a month. When she stayed at home, she worked as a helper at the motel. We had the following exchange during my fieldwork:

Zhou: My classmates all envy me because they think Black Town is a wonderland. In my opinion, Black Town is the best place, and actually the town was even better before.

Researcher: Before when?

Zhou: Before the tourism company came to the town.

Researcher: Do you think the life depicted in *Flowing Time* is the same as your real life here?

Zhou: The life in *Flowing Time* is more like the life in the town before 1998. At that time, the town was not as busy and prosperous as today, and the life pace was slow here. *Flowing Time* was successful in presenting the traditional life in the town, but Black Town has changed a lot since the tourism industry developed.

Researcher: Do you plan to go back to work here as a tour guide after graduation?

Zhou: No. I am working hard to improve my English now, and I want to go abroad in the future. I want to lead Chinese tourists to visit foreign countries.

Zhou has complicated feelings toward the town. She loves Black Town but still anticipates an odyssey into the unknown. She likes the development that modern tourism has brought to the rural town, but she still misses the good old times. In her opinion, the representation of life in Black Town in *Flowing Time* is to some extent distorted, because the concrete town life is more modern and mundane than the mediated one depicted in the television drama. Her account revealed that she had reflected on the authenticity of the mediated world in Black Town. In the context of modernity, people develop a sense of "aesthetic reflexivity" (Lash, 1993), which is described as a conscience of self-monitoring and self-interpretation in the aesthetic and cultural area. People reflect on self, others, the world, and the relationships between them. Zhou is a fine example of reflexive modern people. She realized that the

tourism discourse created based on the media text is not authentic; however, discursive practices of her family (running a family motel business) have reproduced the mediated place-myth in Black Town. Their collective actions are disciplined and normalized within the framework of media text due to the pursuit of economic interest. This puts her in a "paradox" (Minca & Oakes, 2006), where her actions were disciplined by the collective gaze, although she already reflected on the place-myth.

Although all social actors seem to act and interact out of their own choices (e.g., Zheng decided to quit her job and run the family motel), their actions come from a collective discipline. The seeking activities of seekers derive from the desire to see the locales depicted on screen, and the actions of other social actors come from the pursuit of economic interests. Their desires are in a dynamic interplay. They are all subject to the discursive power of the place-myth to rewrite the landscape meaning and are consciously or unconsciously involved in the cycle of meaning reproduction. Therefore, their actions are disciplined in the tourism Panopticon due to the human nature of desire seeking and economic laws.

### Conclusion

This study started from a sociological inquiry of media-induced tourism to examine the discursive power of television text to transform the meaning of the landscape. In response to RQ1, it finds that television as "myth maker" transforms empirical time and space into the mythic world and embeds the media narrative into the landscape meaning. As for RQ2, the fieldwork reveals the dynamic mechanism of collective gaze. Tourists, local residents, and the tourism industry have formed a core discursive community by gazing upon the landscape through the television lens. In particular, the romantic narratives of *Flowing Time* have been used extensively in the promotion of Black Town as a tourist destination and have been incorporated into people's daily discourse and practice. Recent literature has focused on the detective and adventure genres in media-induced tourism, and this case features the success of the romantic genre in tourism promotion. Tourists view the landscape from the romantic lens imposed by the narrative, which echoes with Couldry's argument that "media world" mingles with "ordinary world" and even reshapes the meaning of ordinary world. It is the symbolic power of media that rewrites the meanings of landscape.

This study proposes collective gaze as a theoretical explanation for how mediated meanings of landscape are sustained and circulated. It describes the process through which actions and interactions of social actors are disciplined and normalized by the media narrative. The classification of social actors extends Couldry's media pilgrimage argument by revealing different roles of social actors in discursive formation processes. Through mediated collective gaze by seekers, designers, guiders, and boosters, a physical landscape is transformed into a mediated pilgrimage and sustains enduring attraction. Finally, this study addresses some criticisms of tourist gaze, finding that gaze is a synthesis of discursive practices by multiple parties. It helps to resolve the theoretical controversies over media-induced tourism from the tourist gaze perspective.



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