

# The Construction and Development of Cultural Heritage in Cultural Tourism Performances: Perspectives of Neo-classical “Structural Functionalism”

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*This paper applies the Neo-classical “Structural Functionalism” to study the mutual construction relationship between cultural heritage and cultural-tourism performance during the integration and development process of culture and tourism. The relationship mainly presents two forms: “macro-structure” and “micro-structure”. The term “macro-structures” refers to the original forms of scenic sites and tourist destinations within the cultural tourism framework, while “micro-structures” denote the embedded structural relationships—such as coexistence, opposition, and interconnection—within these macro-structures, as well as the differentiated relational configurations across various sub-genres of performance. There are three main types of “micro-structures”, namely Landscape-base Live Performances, Immersive Scenario Performances, and Carnival-style Theme Park Performances. The inheritance of cultural heritage within these structures primarily satisfies the three experiential functions: traditional way of viewing, immersive viewing, and consumption while playing. Therefore, the mutual construction between cultural heritage and cultural-tourism performances stems from a dialectical composition that is both “unified” and “diverse”, emerging from shared aesthetic empathy of the era. The core principles of constructing this mutual construction relationship are unified dramatic form, differentiated composition, cultural deconstruction, and modern expression.*

*Keywords: Neo-classical “Structural Functionalism”, cultural heritage, cultural tourism and performance, modern transformation*

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, two main attitudes exist in the academic community regarding the study of cultural heritage: the first believes in the need to salvage and protect the authenticity and integrity of a cultural heritage, and the second believes in the innovative development of its authenticity and productivity. Regardless of whichever attitude, the fact is that the original environment of cultural heritage has already changed. In addition, the public’s aesthetic appreciation of cultural heritage is changing, too, and the demand for cultural heritage has penetrated various aspects of social life, such as in the preservation and restoration of authenticity and digital recording, as well as in the productive utilization of cultural heritage through tourism and commercial activities. Among them, Intangible Cultural Heritage (referred to as “ICH” below) is closely related to the lives of the people and is passed down through generations in a living form,

emphasizing the constancy and variability of the living state itself, and focusing on both the preservation of the solidified elements in the living state and the development of the heritage itself. So cultural heritage not only needs solidified protection but also continuous survival and active development.

The composition of ICH comes from three levels: people, objects, and time-space. “People” are the main inheritors, “objects” broadly refers to both the intangible and tangible skills externalized, and “time-space” refers to the time and space in which people and objects exist. These three factors are relatively stable but also in a state of constant change, condensing the cultural core and spiritual expression that contains a collective unconsciousness over long historical periods. It can be said that the inheritance of ICH is similar to the inheritance of Chinese historical culture, which has undergone changes in forms, styles, and aesthetic through different periods, eventually taking its current unique forms. However, there is a gap between these unique forms and the aesthetic needs of the public. Thus, this article argues that ICH should be integrated into the lives of a society and the public in a comprehensive and multi-form manner. This requires not only strengthening their interconnectedness but also expanding the relational dimensions between them. Multi-dimensional and multi-layered collaboration across different groups of people is essential to advance the preservation and development of cultural heritage.

Nowadays, a deep integration of culture and tourism has created new platforms for the development of ICH, providing both opportunities and long-term challenges for integrating its elements or fragments into tourism performances. Culture is the function, and tourism is the project. They are effectively integrated into the concept of cultural tourism, providing a new development path for the early tourist song and dance performances, and producing a form of cultural tourism performance combining art and culture. The way is used as a fundamental element in the construction of such dramas is a transcendence of the ontology of creative content. As a cultural heritage, especially a creative inheritance and effective dissemination of ICH, Cultural Tourism and Performance (referred to as “CTPA” below) have built a platform for creative and living transmission. It can be seen that the construction relationship between cultural heritage and CTPA is mutually beneficial. This, however, raises a question: How is the constructing relationships established, and how to incorporate cultural heritage into CTPA’s works? This question is not only related to the authenticity and inheritance of cultural heritage, but also affects its effective dissemination, and directly impacts the social and market effects of CTPA’s works.

At present, relevant research has focused on the integrated pathways of culture and tourism, landscape-based live performances, and theme park performances. The first type is the research perspective on the integration pathways of culture and tourism, which can be divided into three categories: (1) studying the optimization path under the background of cultural tourism integration from the perspective of the development of tourism and entertainment in a specific region; (2) from the perspective of the cultivation of performing arts talents in vocational education to studying the new model of “order-based education model and new landscape classroom practice as a training platform” under the background of the integration of culture and tourism, and (3) from the perspective of the commercial model of live performance in the cultural industry to explore the value chain and project management process model. The second type of the research perspective on landscape live performances can be divided into two categories: (1) to conduct a special study on the research template of a specific or a certain type of live performance project, (2) to focus on, theoretical reflections on concepts, patterns, and paths. The third type of research perspective on theme park performances mainly explores the performance products, management mechanisms, and operation of specific theme parks. It is evident that research in this respect lacks a holistic discussion on the relationship between cultural heritage and CTPA.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Methods**

This research mainly applies the method of Neo-classical “Structure-Functionalism”<sup>1</sup>, put forward by Zhang Jijiao, is used here in this article to analyze cultural tourism performing arts, and examine the constituent elements, structural forms, multiple functions and interrelationships of cultural heritages within them. This theory was developed by integrating the practical problems in China, on the basis of absorbing

Malinowski's Function Theory and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's Structural-Functional Theory. Brown's Theory provides a static perspective to solve the problem of "what it is"; while Zhang's Theory offers a dynamic perspective for studying social change and development. This theory holds that culture development but not static. Due to the different economic and social structures in which culture exists, its functions will also change accordingly. The theoretical significance of cultural transformation lies in the fact that culture generates new functions and structures.

Therefore, this article argues that cultural heritage has generated new momentum in the new field space of CTPA today, and cultural heritage has generated new power under the integration and promotion of cultural tourism live performance's works. Although the integrity of cultural heritage is somewhat deconstructed, "creative reshaping" has extended the inheritance utility of some elements of cultural heritage, giving rise to new forms and endowing them with new functions. This paper takes the performing arts dramas emerging in the current cultural and tourism market environment as the research object, and uses the Neo-classical "Structure-Functionalism" to analyze the "macro-structure" and "micro-structure" patterns by CTPA dramas in the process of current cultural and tourism integration and development.

### **Analytical Framework**

They consider cultural heritage as authentic heritage, and performance as a form of original-ecological performance. So, why propose the Neo-classical "Structural Functionalism"? Because they only conduct ontological research. Traditional cultural heritage research involves original-ecological performances, but CTPA we are concerned with are just a modern transformation of traditional culture. Among them, some cultural heritages are original-ecological, while others are not. Classical theories cannot explain how traditional cultural heritage is manifested. They focus on the ontology of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to use the Neo-classical "Structural Functionalism" for research.

Four papers have been written using the Neo-classical "Structural Functionalism" to study the modern transformation of ICH. This paper is one of them, exploring the compositional relationships and structural types between ICH and CTPA. It explores in detail the categorized composition, structural differentiation, and specific functions of cultural heritage in CTPA. The research approach has three folds: first, investigating and analyzing the types of cultural heritage included in different types of CTPA forms; second, tracing how the traditional structure of cultural heritage is presented in various types of performances; third, using the Neo-classical "Structural Functionalism" to explore the functions and values of various performance from the dimensions of performance works and viewing relationships.

This article proposes the two main concepts of "macro-structure" and "micro-structure" in its analytical framework, and makes an analysis of the relationship between them. It is believed that adding a "micro-structure" to the original "macro-structure" means that the latter becomes part of the former. In the process of structural change, the two mutually promote and develop in symbiosis. Thus, the presentation of the new structure is different from the original structure, thereby acquiring new functions.

This article examines performance-based theatrical works emerging in the current cultural tourism market, employing the neoclassical "structure-functionalism" framework to analyze the "macro-structures" and "micro-structures" manifested by these works in the integrated development of cultural tourism. The so-called "macro-structure" was originally the main form of scenic spots in tourism culture, but, with the upgrading of mass tourism demand, especially the proposal of the integration of culture and tourism, the styles of "micro-structure" have been added to the "macro-structure", and it is CTPA's works. So far, three main forms of "structural-functional" styles have been formed, including landscape-based live performance structure (山水式实景演出结构), immersive scenario performance structure (沉浸式情境演出结构), and Carnival-style theme park structure (狂欢式主题公园演出结构), each of which has further differentiated into many series of substructures. The existence of types and substructures indicates that CTPA have a stable structure and social demand, which is manifested in a complex market demand. Furthermore, this has formed a cultural industry model with certain market influence, such as the brands of "Impression ("印象"系列)" and other repertoire works.

## Case Studies

This paper conducts a comparative study using multiple cultural and performing arts drama. These cases mainly include:

1. The “Impression” series of “Impression: Liu Shanjie 《印象·刘三姐》” in Guangxi Guilin, “Impression: Lijiang 《印象·丽江》” in Yunnan, “Impression: Wulong 《印象·武隆》” in Chongqing, “Impression: Dahongpao 《印象·大红袍》” in Fujian Wuyihshan, “Impression: Putuo 《印象·普陀》” in Zhejiang.
2. The “Most Memorable” series ( “最忆” 系列) of “Most Remembered Hangzhou 《最忆是杭州》” in Zhejiang, “Most Memorable: Shaoshan Chong 《最忆韶山冲》” in Hunan.
3. The “Return” series ( “归来” 系列) of “Returning to the Three Gorges 《归来·三峡》” in Fengjie County, Chongqing.
4. The “Seeing Again” series ( “又见” 系列) of “See Pingyao Again 《又见平遥》” in Shanxi.
5. The “Reunion” series ( “重逢” 系列) of “Reunion: Weifang 《重逢潍坊》” in Shangdong.
6. The “Eternal Love” series ( “千古情” 系列) of “The Romance of The Song Dynasty 《宋城千古情》” in Zhejiang, “Eternal Love in Sanya 《三亚千古情》” in Hainan.
7. China Folk Culture Villages (中国民俗文化村) in the Shenzhen’s Overseas Chinese Town Enterprises (referred to as OCT Group below) of OCT Tourist Resort (华侨城旅游度假区) in Shenzhen and The “Chimelong” series ( “长隆” 系列) in Guangzhou.

All the plays in these series are of “micro-structure”. In other words, in terms of structural classification, these CTPA works fall into the category of “micro-structure”, mainly consisting of three structural types: Landscape-based Live Performances<sup>2</sup>, Immersive Scenario Performances<sup>3</sup>, and Carnival-style Theme Parks Performances<sup>4</sup>. Each structural type of CTPA repertoire also contains several “sub-structure” concepts.

The first type is the Landscape-based Live Performances, a new performing art structure which is different from traditional scenic spot performances. It externalizes the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of landscape through modern performing forms, using natural landscapes and cultural sites as performance venues while incorporating local folk customs. Examples of a small structure include the pioneering “Impression” series, such as “Impression: Liu Sanjie”, and later works like “Impression: Lijiang”, “Most Remembered Hangzhou”, and “Returning to the Three Gorges”. Its “macro-structure” refers to the natural landscapes, cultural landscapes and other fields where performance plays are generated.

The second type are the Immersive Scenario Performances, which utilizes high-tech technologies such as digitization and intelligence in plot creation, blending real scenery with virtual images to present the development of the plot. Different from the traditional fixed viewing perspective, it emphasizes that the audience actively enter the plot scene, creating an immersive experience. Unlike the landscape-based live performances, it is a performance form composed of several themed spaces, mainly focused on indoor situational experiences. For example, “See Pingyao Again” has become a hallmark of this structure. Its “macro-structure” refers to the entire ancient city or tourist attraction where the theater is located.

The third type are the Carnival-Style Theme Park Performances, which refers to the carnival style small plot performance activities in theme park areas, including both fixed-site and mobile performances. Examples include the “Guangzhou Chime-long Paradise (长隆欢乐世界)”, Shenzhen’s OCT Group, which includes miniatures of Chinese cultural landscape and feature theme parks such as “Splendid China (锦绣中华)” and “Chinese Folk Culture Village”, and Songcheng Group in cooperation with World Land Group operates “Romance of Song Dynasty” in Hangzhou and “Eternal Love in Sanya” in Hainan. Its “macro-structure” refers to the entire park scene and related activities except for the performance form.

## RESULTS

Cultural heritage is not only ubiquitous in characteristic towns, urban revitalization, and festival celebrations in China, but also is an extremely important cultural resource and performing element in CTPA.

In addition to being manifested in three major structural types, there are also multiple series of structural differences, which, due to market demand and creative refinement, continue to evoke, and thus new structural categories and series will gradually emerge. The existing structural categories and series exhibit a dialectical relationship and compositional principle of unity in diversity. The term “unity” refers to the exploration of a form of performing arts that is unified within the structure of CTPA, which is a creative transformation and innovative inheritance of cultural heritage in order to reshape the regional cultural images. The “diversity” refers to the multi-level construction relationship between the dramas and cultural heritage.

The above-mentioned analysis shows that the hierarchical structure formed by “differentiation” in the structure of CTPA. For example, the structure of Landscape-based Live Performances is composed of natural landscape heritage and human-historical memory; the structure of Immersive Situational Performances is composed of human-historical memory and technology; the structure of Carnival-style Theme Park Performances is composed of human-historical memory and human-environmental landscape. Different constituent elements and composition methods have formed a differentiated “theatrical state” expression of “structure-function”.

### **The Coexisting Structural Relationship Between Cultural Heritage and Landscape-based Live Performances**

Landscape-based Live Performances mainly consist of three most influential substructures: “Impression”, “Most Remembered”, and “Return”. From the names of the structures, they all have the meaning of “back (回)” in Chinese. The “Impression” is reshaped based on the core principle of “Aftertaste (回眸)””; the “Most Remembered” is reshaped on the basis of core principle of “retrospective (回顾)””; and the “returning” is based on the core principle of reshaping “rethinking (回首)”. The constructing relationship between cultural heritage and drama structure in the three types of substructures presents a “coexisting (并存)” structure of patchwork (拼接式), embedded (镶嵌式), and serial connection (串联式).

#### *The Form of “Impression” in the Flickering Memories of “Aftertaste” Is a Patchwork Coexistence.*

Compared to other Landscape-based Live Performance substructures, the “Impression” is the most complete and mature. After experiencing prosperity and decline, the brand image has been deeply rooted in people’s minds, and resulted in a wide variety of categories. It mainly uses cultural heritage as cultural symbols to reshape the cultural images through organic patchworks, forming a “coexisting” structure with a dramatic form. The patchwork “coexisting” structure is composed of natural landscapes, cultural history, and performance spaces as constituent elements, resulting in poetic, iconic, and contextualized forms respectively. In the text, “Skeleton”, “Backbone”, and “Flesh and blood” are used as metaphors to illustrate that the three elements of natural landscapes, cultural history and performance space constitute a play in the Impression series.

The first way is a poetic construction of natural landscapes as the “Skeleton” of the drama. It is to combine the characteristics of regional cultural images and incorporate the poetic elements of natural landscape scenery of a cultural heritage into the drama as stage scenery and venues for performance. Each scenery interprets a different theatrical style with its own unique temperament. For example, the beautiful and natural scenery of Li River in Guilin of Guangxi Province, which endows the drama with divine spirituality; the primitive mystery of Lijiang’s Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Yunnan Province, which gives the drama a diverse and shocking impact; the charming and graceful scenery of West Lake’s Yue Lake in Hongzhou of Zhejiang Province, which fills the drama with poetic imagery; the relaxed and pleasant waters of Hainan Province, which give the play a dreamy and romantic atmosphere; the fine and long-lasting tea culture of Mount Wuyi, which makes the drama a flavor of pastoral scenery, and the tranquil

and surreal islands of the waters of Mount Putuo, which decorates the drama with a grandiose imagery of a Buddhist kingdom by the sea both in Fujian Province; and the diverse and peculiar appearance of Wulong Mountain in Chongqing and its canyons give the drama a majestic and magnificent sense of danger. The unique scenery and elegant temperament of these natural landscape paintings are composed of poetic elements in the drama, creating a unique regional cultural landscape that evokes an aesthetic experience that delights the audience.

The second way of composition is an iconic construction of humanistic and historical images as the “Backbone” of the drama. It is to combine the characteristics of regional cultural images and abstractly incorporate the elements of humanistic and historical imagery of the cultural heritage into the drama. Examples include the legend of Liu Sanjie, Zhuang folk songs, Zhuang dances in “Impression: Liu Sanjie”; Naxi ethnic songs and dances in “Impression: Lijiang”; the legend of Xizi in “Impression: West Lake”; and Chinese Oolong Tea, Wuyi landscape, Xiamei Ancient Village, and the traditional craftsmanship of Dahongpao in “Impression: Da Hong Pao”; Guanyin Taoist Temple in “Impression of Putuo”; and Chuanjiang Haozi, boat trackers’ spirit, spicy hotpot, sedan chair carrying, and the marriage custom of crying in “Impression: Wulong”.

These solidified element symbols extracted from regional cultural heritage and imbued with the emotions and spirits of the region, enable a creative transformation of regional aesthetics and form new connotations and culture images through the medium of drama. And they are “patched (拼接)” and “coexisted” in the live performances through stagecraft. The iconic is the secondary representation after extracting symbols, which is different from the original form of cultural heritage but is presented in the form of meaningful element symbols or paragraph combinations in the drama. For example, in “Impression: Liu Sanjie”, the emotional rendering technique of color block imagery is used to express cultural heritage elements, such as the legend of Liu Sanjie, Zhuang folk songs, and Zhuang dances. The elements of regional cultural heritage are incorporated into the red, white, silver, and yellow color blocks, and the visual emotions created by each color scheme are to create a different cognitive experience for the audience towards the familiar and well-known Liu Sanjie image. It originates from the profound cultural charm of cultural heritage spirit, such as the touching and beautiful love legend rooted in the hearts of generations of Yangshuo people in Guangxi, that has endowed traditional Zhuang folk songs with unique cultural connotations, representing the poetic aspect of life and pure emotional ways of the Zhuang people.

The third way is an overall construction of performance space fields as the “Flesh and Blood” of the drama. It is to combine the characteristics of regional cultural images and incorporate cultural heritage into the overall arrangement of the performance space pattern. From the perspective of performance space, the drama is composed of a four-in-one pattern of performance venues, stage, performance area, and performance content. The performance venue of “Impression: Da Hong Pao” is a circular theater, with the stages consisting of a circular area surrounding the live stage such as king of peaks, a tea house, tea picking garden, and bamboo forest. It revolves around the origin of the name Da Hong Pao, classical love legends, and the happy lives of modern tea farmers from ancient times to the present, using artistic forms to display tea culture. The performing venue of “Impression: Wulong” is the Taoyuan Grand Canyon Performance Theater in Xiannvshan Town, Wulong District, which consists of a video tunnel and stage performances, which are integrated with the audience area on an open-air staircase. The performance content mainly focuses on the Haozi Song Festival, showcasing the unique cultural features of Bashu (i.e. Sichuan and Chongqing), such as marriage crying, carrying a sliding pole (also known as carrying a sedan chair), spicy hotpot, artificial silk pulling, and filial piety. The performance venue, stage, and audience area of “Impression: Lijiang” are located at the foot of Yulong Snow Mountain. The content is divided into six chapters: “Ancient Road and The Caravan”, “Drinking in the Snowy Mountain”, “Heaven and Earth”, “Jumping Dance Group”, “Drum Dance to Worship Heaven”, and “Blessing Ceremony”. In each chapter, original dance segments such as saddle dance, basket dance, drinking songs and dances, jumping and drum dance are inserted, showcasing the cultural symbols of life, love, trade, and faith of Yunnan’s ethnic minorities.

The substructure of “Impression” reshaped by the core principle of “Aftertaste” is an integrated “macro-micro structure” model of cultural landscapes, cultural symbols, and performance spaces. It is manifested

as a symbolization of regional natural landscapes, cultural landscapes, and ethnic songs and dances in the form of cultural heritage, “patchwork” and “coexisting” in the viewing space, reshaping cultural images, and cultural heritage flashing through memories in a “Aftertaste” memory.

*The “Most Remembered” Substructural Form in the Emergence of Deep Memory Through “Retrospective” Is in Embedded Coexistence*

The “Most Remembered Hangzhou” is a representative work of the “Most Remembered” substructure. Based on the original “Impression West Lake”, it was created as a water symphonic concert to showcase China’s economic and cultural strength during the 2016 Group of Twenty (G20) Summit. It represents a relatively complete integrated chain model in cultural tourism industry, centered around the core night tourist product of live action dramas, surrounded by a series of industry chain models such as Shangri-La Hotel, a small number of shops and restaurants, world cultural heritage sites and the West Lake Scenic Area tourism. The cultural heritage in the drama includes folk legends, mythological stories, Yue Opera, tea-picking dances, and the ancient tune “A Moonlit Night on the Spring River”. The plot is divided into five chapters: Meeting, Falling in love, Parting, Recollection, and Impression. Each chapter combines historical elements and technology to recreate the West Lake scenery in a way that allows the audience to feel the aesthetic effect of a glance experience<sup>5</sup>. This is the “micro-structure” of the “Most Remembered” series.

The performance venue for this is the Yue Lake Scenic Spot in the West Lake. It has been a free tourist attraction during the day, when tourists can walk along the lake shore for sightseeing. At night, it is a seating area for tourists to watch the performance. The seating area can be retracted and folded, and after each night’s performance, seats are removed, leaving an open lakeside plaza for visitors to stroll in. Across the street from the scenic area is the Yue Fei Temple, which is also the reason for the name Yue Lake. The stage is built on the surface of the lake, completely dismantled and hidden during the day, not affecting the enjoyment and appreciation of natural scenery. During the evening performance, the design integrates color block lighting and a strong cast of actors into a panoramic and three-dimensional real-life environment, forming a natural and stunning scene of sky, earth, and people. This is the “macro-structure” of the “Most Remembered” series of works.

The creative theme of the “Most Remembered” substructure carries some “political” connotations. It is a chain style model that reshapes the core principle of “retrospective” and drives the development of surrounding industries with drama. The relationship between cultural heritage and the “Most Remembered” substructure is manifested as a symbiotic relationship between the “Micro-structure” embedded in the “Macro-structure”, forming two sides of the same entity. Multiple elements are embedded and coexist, such as regional cultural landscapes, historical stories, and ethnic songs and dances in the drama, and cultural heritage emerges as a retrospective memory.

*The “Return” Substructure Form In “Rethinking” Memory and Recall Is a Serial Connection Coexistence*

The CTPA’s work “Return to the Three Gorges”<sup>6</sup> directed by Zhang Yimou has a slightly different creative approach from the substructure of “Impression” and “Most Remembered”. First, the definition of the concept is different. “Impressions” refer to the marks left in the brain by objective things that have been encountered; “Most Remembered” refers to the most remembered people and events that leave the most lasting impression on people. “Return” refers to returning to the original place from somewhere else. Second, due to different investors in the drama, the creative concepts based on theme setting vary, leading to perspectives in selecting cultural heritage from various regions in the conception of the drama.

Unlike other substructures that present cultural heritage landscapes and human figures, “Returning to the Three Gorges” selects Chinese cultural poetry related to Sichuan as creative material. The drama shifts from the grand strategy of building a sea of people to a traditional cultural concept of leaving blank spaces. Each chapter is created with a poem, using poetry, music and dance to create fragmented memories from ancient times to the present. Ten poems run through the entire drama, allowing the audience to feel the aesthetic and poetic elegance. The drama combines natural scenery and water stage, uses high-tech landscaping, interprets the artistic conception and creative background of poetry works, and restores the

unique humanistic customs of Bashu, which belongs to the “micro-structure” of the “return” series. The performance venue is the relatively unchanged natural spatial-temporal landscape of the Three Gorges, highlighting the intention to return to historical scenes. Specifically, it is located in the non-navigable waters of Qutang Gorge, with the Kui Gate, Qutang Gorge, and Baidi City as physical backgrounds. The stage is in shallow waters, and the audience seats are on floating pontoons across the water. This belongs to the “macro-structure” of the “Return” series.

The “Return” substructure, which reshapes the core principle of “Rethinking”, is a creative model that interprets imagery through traditional poetry. Its structural relationship is manifested by combining multiple elements such as regional cultural landscapes, historical stories, ethnic songs and dances into a set of “imagery” scenes. This way of “serial connection” and “coexisting” cultural heritage serves as a rethinking memory of cultural heritage.

### **The Opposing Structural Relationships Between Cultural Heritage and Immersive Situational Performances**

Immersive situational performances are divided into two categories: “Seeing Again” and “Reunion”, its biggest feature being the use of technological means in the performance to create a virtual historical field and interactive behavior between the audience and the performance. The combination of cultural heritage as a memory of humanistic history and advanced scientific technology is like two sides of the same coin — dependent yet mutually exclusive. Therefore, relying solely on cultural heritage to create a storyline is insufficient to achieve immersive experiences. It requires the wings of technology to bridge the gap between cultural heritage and drama, thus reflecting the “opposition” relationship between cultural heritage and the performance, where they are mutually exclusive in appearance but mutually inclusive in essence.

#### *The Fusion and Interactive Substructure of “Seeing Again” Is an Interdependent Opposition*

“Seeing Pingyao Again” is a large-scale immersive situational performance officially premiered in 2013. The “immersive” concept has been a trend spreading to various fields of culture, gaming, technology, and entertainment since 2013, emphasizing the user’s on-site experience. As an imported technological concept, it has gradually evolved into a narrative immersion and technological immersion in the development of the West entertainment culture. Immersive entertainment is a type of scenic experience focusing on the plot, represented by the immersive theater. It originated in the UK and was nurtured by the cultural heritage of Broadway in the USA, transitioned from environmental theater. Another type emphasizes the scene experience brought by technology, represented by various immersive experiences produced by teamLab7, all of which have a common feature of light plot and heavy scene experience (Zheng 2018). Both types of entertainment emphasize immersive experience, which aims to recreate the scene through various means, allowing the audience to immerse themselves and experience the realism brought by virtual reality (Zhong 2019). It is different from previous viewing experiences, as it breaks through the boundaries between actors, audience, and stage. Audiences are no longer confined to their seats, but can freely participate in the development of the plot in the scene. The audience and actors work together to promote the development of the story, emphasizing interaction and participation. At the same time, the boundaries between the two are blurred, and the audience is set in as a part of the plot, while actors may also embody the audience (Han 2019). Immersive experience<sup>8</sup> is not only included in entertainment, but also significant in immersive art exhibitions and immersive performing arts.

“Seeing Pingyao Again” is one of the representative works of this “Immersive” artistic creation. The term “Immersive” in this context refers to an artist using elements such as sound, light, and electricity within a specific space to create a scenario that is different from reality, so that the audience can interact with the artwork while undergoing sensory experience, thereby evoking resonance (Li 2019). The novel “Seeing Pingyao Again” utilizes the concept of “Immersive” artistic creation and the technology of sound, light, and electricity to present traditional resources of cultural heritage in a “static observation (静观)” manner, transforming them into an interactive experience where the audience is fully enveloped. It is not limited to

visual imagery experiences with immersion, but also has a sense of reality and interactivity with situational experiences.

Viewers are immersed in a virtual scene, working together with the characters in the drama to drive the development of the plot, as if they were both outsiders and participants. This is the “micro-structure” of the “Seeing Again” drama style. Its “macro-structure” is Pingyao Ancient City, which is just 100 meters away from the Impression Theater of “Seeing Pingyao Again”. The ancient city scape is arranged in the shape of the Chinese character “土” (meaning “earth” or “soil”), lined with various museums, such as banks, ticket number, and escort agencies as well as restaurants, stages, shops, musical instrument stores, bars, cafes, hotels, guesthouses, and other commercial places for dining, accommodation, and tourism. There are also street performances featuring county magistrate’s parade, marrying the bride, parading the Zhuang Yuan (Number One Scholar) through the streets, and blessed by the God of Wealth; and City God Temple, Ancient City Wall, County Yamen, Confucian Temple, Guan Yu Temple, and other scenic spots. These ancient county cities, which are extremely imbued with the cultural spirit of Shanxi merchants, set up a preconceived scene impression for “Seeing Pingyao Again”. They not only have historical and cultural spatial existence, but also dynamic historical character interpretation, allowing people to immerse themselves in the time and space of the Shanxi merchants’ culture in the late Qing Dynasty.

It can be seen that the relationship between the “macro-micro structure” of the “Seeing Again” are mutually independent and interrelated, with the latter aspect manifested in the close geographical location of the “macro-micro structure”. Both themes are related to the cultural memory of ancient cities and have a consistency with the atmosphere of the times. Its independence is manifested in the differences in its spatial and temporal narrative methods. The “macro-structure” serves as a space for real-life sightseeing and shopping: selling goods, tickets, and services, allowing visitors to experience the charm of the historic city in the historical and temporal landscape. The “micro-structure” serves as a space for theatrical performance experience: selling humanistic stories of historical memories of ancient cities, and immersing oneself in the vivid scenes of the cultural changes of Shanxi merchants. In essence, the “Seeing Again” structure is based on the reshaping of virtual and interactive realism as the core principle. The opposition between cultural heritage and drama allows the public to immerse themselves in historical reality and achieve a transcendent satisfaction, while also providing emotional comfort for the public’s nostalgia for the past.

#### *A Holistic Scene-based “Reunion” Substructure is Exclusionary Opposition Between Traditional and Modernity*

The term “Reunion” refers to seeing again something or someone that already existed. It is different from “Impression”, as it is not constructed through scattered and fragmented memories, but relies on a holistic and three-dimensional experience of people and objects. Therefore, the “reunion” structure focuses on the emotional presentation of the current state, emphasizing a sense of the times different from the past.

“Reunion with Weifang” uses representative historical stories and legends from the Weifang region as its narrative text, restoring each story into a historical and cultural scene. Facing contemporary individuals, it explores intertwined and jumping cultural points in historical time-space, making one feel the profound accumulation and charm of the regional culture. In the drama, there are folk legends such as Longquan Double-edged Sword<sup>9</sup>, Jingzhi’s Old Well under the Pine Tree, Chao Tian Pot<sup>10</sup>, Luban Borrowing the Dragon Palace, the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, Yu and the Floods, Zheng Banqiao, and the Princess’s Messenger, as well as 39 folk stories related to Weifang. This way of cultural dots and skewers has allowed modern people to witness the uniqueness of Weifang’s rich history and humanistic sentiment through the use of cultural heritage as a narrative point. This is a “micro-structure” in the form of “reunion”, while its “macro-structure” is manifested as the three different purposes of the drama park model, namely Star Theater, Star Encounter, and Star Gathering, which are relied upon in the “Reunion”. Star Theater is an entertainment park that includes four main sections: the Reunion and Surprise Area, the Elevator Area, the Experience Area, and the Lead Actor Area. The last one is where the series of “Reunion” productions are staged, while others are auxiliary venues extended from the main performance venue.

From the “macro-microstructure” of “reunion”, it can be seen that its intention is to express the opposition between traditional and modernity. It continues to create a temporal representation of historical emotions, reflected in a new field space of modern lives of Weifang residents. This is a new cultural and tourism space that integrates six new functions: city reception room, immersive performing experience, commerce, retailing, entertainment, new theme park, urban landmark, and urban leisure complex, comprising performance parks, trendy play parks and recreation parks. The “Reunion” structure is situated within the “Performance Park” and is a comprehensive entertaining and commercial form based on the aesthetic experience of the Five Senses. It is mainly performed by real people on stage, assisted by virtual technology, reshaping the core principle of restoring the original authenticity of history, forming an opposition between cultural heritage and drama, and allowing the public to experience different Weifang regional cultural aspects through the Five Senses experience.

### **The Connecting Structural Relationship between Cultural Heritage and Carnival Themed Park Performances**

A theme park is a “theme & park” structural model that focuses on amusement facilities, miniature landscapes, film and television simulations, and anime experiences. The so-called “theme” refers to a presentation of a specific image of ideas; parks, on the other hand, are gardens which are different from government investments and provide public welfare for people. Theme parks are divided into a series of parks based on theme categories, including oceanic aquarium, sculpture, film and television, automotive, military, anime, historical, and other themed parks. China’s first truly meaningful theme park was Shenzhen’s Splendid China, which originated from a miniature scenic spot model in 1989. Since then, a regional park pattern has been formed, such as in Hainan, Shenzhen, Beijing, Shandong, Fujian, Sichuan, Zhengzhou, etc. In these theme parks, CTPA are the main way to attract customers. Among them, the representatives are the OCT’s Carnival and the “Eternal Love” series of works. They share some origins, but, due to differences in regional resources and thematic settings, the relationship between cultural heritage and drama presents significant distinctions. The former is a point-to-point connection, while the latter a linear connection. Overall, both generally emphasize the refinement of cultural development, breakthroughs in connotation, and exploration of characteristics as well as a deepening and expansion of thematic elements.

#### *Segmented “Connection”: A Carnival-style “OCT” Structure*

The most prominent projects of the OCT are the Splendid China and Window of the World, which are divided into a miniature version of Chinese regional map and cultures of various countries around the world. The carnival in Splendid China presents a segmented “connected” structural form, consisting of parades and performances similar to traditional Han folk activities such as “Shehuo (社火, communal fire rituals)” and the “Yangko (秧歌, a traditional Chinese folk dance)”, divided into folk performing parades and celebrations. In addition, there are also folk handicraft demonstrations and 360-degree panoramic screen movies that reflect the beautiful mountains and rivers of China. The carnival activities in the Window of the World feature foreign folk song and dance performances, as well as cultural landscapes and architectural wonders borrowed from the scenery.

Apart from fixed folk customs performances in scenic areas, cultural and tourist performing arts also have special themed festivals every year, such as large-scale music and dance epic performances like “Carnival World (狂欢世界)”, “Journey of Dreams (梦之旅)”, “Creating the World (创世界)”, and “Eternal Romance (千古风流)”. This belongs to the “micro-structure” of the “OCT” series. And its “macro-structure” is the overall project planning of OCT. In addition to the landscape performances of Splendid China, Chinese Folk Culture Village and Window of the World, there are also amusement facilities such as “Happy Valley”, ecological tourist resorts, and urban entertainment complexes such as “City Living Room”, forming an integrated body of “food, accommodation, transportation, tourism, shopping, and entertainment” for commercial hotels, living towns, cultural and artistic facilities, theme parks, etc.

#### *Linear “Connection”: A Time-travel-style “Eternal Love” Structure*

It is a performance launched by Songcheng Group in the scenic area, characterized by using cultural stories to express emotions and meanings. “Romance of Song Dynasty”<sup>11</sup> is a representative example of this connection structural drama, which have regional historical and cultural stories as its repertoire and uses a reverse chronological reconstruction of the plot to present a sense of return to historical contexts. The utilization of multiple elements such as wind, rain, lightning, thunder, smoke, fire, and floods in the drama creates a narrative atmosphere of surprise, danger, wonder, special, and spectacular, generating a sense of time travel. For example, the same element of water produces different shocking powers in different scenarios, with chapters such as “Light of Liangzhu,” “Banquet Dance in The Song Dynasty”, “Shining Spears and Armored Horses”, “The Legend of Xi Shi”, and “Charming Hangzhou”. It traces back to the Liangzhu ancestors, the Southern Song imperial Palace, the bravery of Yue Fei’s Army, the legend of Butterfly Lovers, the White Snake and Xu Xian, as well as the current style of Hangzhou and other historical and cultural events. This belongs to the “micro-structure” of “Eternal Love”. Its “macro-structure” is the Song city Scenic Area, which was a large-scale theme park imitating the architecture and culture of Southern Song Dynasty, featuring blue tiles, white walls, and antique buildings touching the soul of the people. The street performances of Gou Lan and Wa She<sup>12</sup> on the ancient streets, as well as the craftsmanship of the Rice Cake Workshop, Song Dynasty Oil Mill, winery, and distillery of the “72 guilds”, recreate the bustling streets and alleys in the ancient town of Jiangnan. Newly series of themed activities and various themed hotels and restaurants in the scenic area have added much flavor to the ancient city.

### **THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE NEW FUNCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The most essential element of the three major types of CTPA is the construction of drama. The quality of its content and the rationality of its relationship are important ideas for telling a unique story about a place, whose construction can be explored from three dimensions: the shaping of its elemental forms, the structuring of performance types, and the integration within cultural tourism. First, the shaping of its elemental forms is a problem of constructing the form of the drama itself. How to incorporate cultural heritage elements into dramas? Centered around the core line of the play, cultural heritage that serves the plot is extracted in elemental form according to the intention of the theme, abstracted as symbolic points of a narrative context, and then interpreted in a connected form to illustrate the development of the story plot. In the narrative process of plot, element symbols are concretized into visual presentations. It can be said that different ways of constructing element forms directly affect the formation of dramatic forms. and storytelling, constituting a narrative drama. The development of the plot is promoted by connecting the abstract forms of elements according to the multiple images, which forms the imagery drama.

Secondly, from the structuring of performance types, how to place the drama separately in landscape scenery, immersive experience, and theme parks, thus resulting in the different dramatic styles? The landscape live performance mainly takes the real natural environment of mountains and rivers as the creative element. The natural landscape of mountains and waters itself is an important part of tangible cultural heritage, and physical landscapes are generally used as the background and stage for live performances for the creation of drama content. The construction of landscape scenery and drama lies in an embedded relationship between cultural heritage elements and physical landscapes. Immersive experience in performing arts mainly relies on digital and intelligent technology to create virtual cyber space. Its construction with drama lies in the virtual real relationship between cultural heritage elements and cyberspace. Theme park performance mainly relies on the shaping of theme images as creative elements. Its construction with drama lies in the relationship between cultural heritage elements and park-themed activities.

Finally, the key to building connections within cultural tourism lies in the “drama” both deeply exploring the richness of cultural connotations and broadly guiding the public’s consumption demands. Cultural heritage, as a cultural resource in the context of tourism, transitions from a cultural value function to a capitalization. The dramas of CTPA are different from traditional stage performances, which are the construction of artistic cultural forms, while CTPA are constructed as cultural and artistic innovations. The elements of cultural form come from the construction of cultural heritage elements, which is a most

effective way to creatively activate and express cultural heritage. Creativity originates from a fusion and expression of human knowledge, wisdom, skills, and other factors. And the activation of creativity is a condition for cultural heritage to find survival in its continuation. Therefore, the dramas of CTPA are first and foremost artistic works with cultural connotations, and secondly, with commercial products containing cultural elements.

In summary, the multi-dimensional presentation of cultural heritage in the form of CTPA shows that it has a huge consumer basis and market demand, and its new functions have emerged. In the context of the performer-audience relationship, its functionality manifests in three forms of experience. The first is the traditional viewing experience. It refers to the audience's static observation of the performance of a drama, which belongs to the receptive viewing experience. In a traditional receptive viewing experience, the relationship between cultural heritage and CTPA's works coexists in a structure of patchwork of an embedded and serial connection, which presents a perception of Qiyun (气韵) in the real natural space. The second form is the immersive situational experience. It refers to the dynamic participation of the audience in the performance of a drama, of an interactive viewing experience. In the interactive viewing experience, the relationship between cultural heritage and CTPA's works coexists in a mutually arranged opposition structures, and its function presents a situational interaction in the virtual space of the cyber world. The third form is the entertainment consumption experience. In this type of performer-audience relationship, the audience consumes the performance while moving around, creating an entertainment-based viewing experience. In the carnival-style viewing experience, the relationship between cultural heritage and CTPA's works is characterized by a segmented, linear "connection" structure. Its function is to evoke emotions within a spatial context, creating a "playful expression of emotions (游玩宣情)".

It can be seen that in Landscape-based Live Performance drama types, the "macro-microstructure" presents a coexisting relationship, and the drama presents a perception of Qiyun. The dramatic form of Immersive Scenario Performance presents an oppositional relationship in the "macro-microstructure", and the situational interaction function of the observational experience is presented by the drama. The theatrical form of Carnival-style Themed Park Performances presents a connecting relationship in terms of "macro-microstructure", and the drama's function presents an entertainment and emotional expression. Under the three relationships of coexistence, opposition, and connection, some subtle differences are presented respectively. For example, in the "coexistence", there are a patchwork and coexisting structure with an "Impression" structure, the mosaic style and coexistence of the "Most remembered" structure, and the serial coexistence of the "Return" structure. In the relationship of "opposition," there is a mutual existence and opposition structure of "Seeing Again", and a mutual arrangement and opposition of the "Reunion" structure. In the "connection" relationship, there are the point-to-point connection structures of the "OCT" carnival, and the linear connection of the "Eternal Love" structure. It can be seen that CTPA's works have not only the construction of relationship between the "macro-structure" and the "micro-structure," but also differentiated substructural relationships within the "micro-structure."

## CONCLUSIONS

The continuous evolution of the social survival environment for ICH has led to a shift in its functions in social life, from entertaining gods and nature to entertaining people and displaying social gatherings, from folk culture to tourist culture, and from cultural value to economic value, thus promoting the transformation of the inheritance power of ICH. Therefore, the deep revitalizing and utilizing ICH resources with cultural tourism has formed a diversified "ICH"+ new business model through dynamic display and element creation, for example, "ICH+Small Towns", "ICH+Cultural Creativity", "ICH+Festivals", "ICH+Research", "ICH+Performances", and "ICH+Internet". The CTPA works represent a form of "Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) + Performing Arts". They disseminate and promote ICH culture through staged "dramatic" performances, incorporating ICH as creative material, content elements, and expressive forms into cultural tourism performances. This approach enhances the cultural depth of urban experiences in tourism and expands the "nighttime economy" offerings in regional tourism by providing unique cultural consumption opportunities. By transforming ICH into engaging theatrical productions, these performances

not only preserve and revitalize traditional culture but also attract audiences, boost local economies, and enrich the cultural landscape of tourism destinations.

As a central component of regional cultural tourism performance creation, cultural tourism dramas differ from traditional tourism performances such as scenic spot song-and-dance shows. They place greater emphasis on deeply exploring and developing cultural value, resulting in newly created genres rich in cultural content and IP (intellectual property) branding. From their inception, these new forms inherently possess commercial value, characterized by professional creation, corporate-style management, and brand-oriented appeal. They also begin to show the early traits of an integrated industrial chain that combines sightseeing, performance, dining, entertainment, and hospitality. From the perspective of artistic creation, CTPA's works also differ from traditional stage performances in that it breaks the single-frame, audience-stage boundary by using a real landscape space environment or real folk culture space as performing stages. The flexible and dynamic audience area is naturally combined with the stage. The performance content is about local folk customs and culture, organized and creatively edited based on a representative thematic element. An example is the "Kangxi Dynasty (康熙大典)" in Chengde City, Hebei Province that takes advantage of the historical space of Chengde, which was originally the Royal Summer Palace. This is regarded as a "macro-structure" of tourism. The live performances revitalizing the Manchu cultural heritage showcases the legendary life of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, which is a "micro-structure" added during the rise of the night economy. The style of work is a performance mode established through a mutual construction relationship of "macro-microstructure" on the aesthetic system of regional cultural characteristics. In terms of performing content, it has evolved from purely grand scenes to a creative direction focused on content innovation and creativity.

It can be seen that in the unified form of CTPA's works, differentiated extraction of unique regional cultural elements combines traditional cultural forms, modern spiritual insights, and unique aesthetic expressions. The elemental inheritance<sup>13</sup> of cultural heritage presented in CTPA can revitalize and activate the already endangered form of artistic ICH by involving the participation of regional social forces in constructing a fashionable and modern regional cultural image so as to piece together a cohesive national image. Therefore, the creative and dynamic elemental inheritance of cultural heritage is feasible in the construction of CTPA's venues. The impact on the dynamic inheritance and revitalization of cultural heritage has good prospects, and it is also a feasible path for cultural heritage to achieve social effects and enter into public life. Utilizing intangible cultural heritage in the context of cultural tourism is to develop productivity above authenticity. The new business format of "ICH+" plays an important role in poverty alleviation, rural revitalization, tourism development, and other aspects. Therefore, ICH can enter communities, schools, and scenic spots. ICH is not only a type of cultural heritage, but also a cultural resource, which can even become a medium for cultural capital and value appreciation.

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## ENDNOTES

1. The Neo-classical “Structural Functionalism” was proposed by Zhang Jijiao, based on five theories, i.e. “Cultural Functionalism (文化功能论)”, “Cultural Development and Utilization View (文化开发利用观)”, “Endogenous Development (内源型发展)”, “Competitive Advantage (竞争优势)”, and “Another Invisible Hand (另一只看不见的手)”. It claims that culture is not static, and its functions will also change due to the different economic and social structures in which it exists. The theoretical significance of cultural transformation lies in the fact that culture generates new functions and structures.
2. Landscape-based live performances are a unique creation of the Chinese people. It is a distinctive cultural model that uses real mountains and waters as the performance stage, takes local culture and folk customs as the main content, and integrates masters from the performing arts and business circles into the creative team. In live performances, there are not only categories such as “Impression”, “Most Remembered”, and “Return”, but new categories of live performances will also emerge with the continuous deepening of the market and creation. The selected cases of live performances in this article are all in the form of drama, but the presentation forms of drama are different, some focusing on narrative storytelling, while others on imagery and storytelling.
3. Immersive scenario performances are an art form that breaks the traditional boundaries between performers and audiences by simulating or recreating scenes, allowing the audience to participate in the performance as if they were on-site. It combines high-tech means such as multimedia, virtual reality, and three-dimensional environments with traditional performance art forms.
4. Carnival-style theme park Performances are created by professional groups based on specific themes and then performed by professional performing teams. This is an art performance form that serves as an important tourism attraction in theme parks. The forms of expression include parade-style performances, light and shadow shows, night-time themed performances, project-based live-action shows, large-scale indoor themed theater performances, etc.
5. The word “a glance experience” comes from Wang Yichuan’s *New Aesthetic Course* (Fudan University Press, 2007), which refers to the nostalgic experience of modern Chinese people on their own classical traditional charm.
6. *Return to the Three Gorges* is jointly produced by Guanyin and Chijia Culture and Tourism. It was premiered in 2018 as the first large-scale poetry and cultural live performance project in China, and is also the first work in the “Return” series.
7. TeamLab is a group dedicated to immersive art creation, pursuing the concept of boundless artistic creation.
8. Immersive experience, a popular internet slang, refers to the immersive makeup, dressing storage, and other activities on the internet that give us a sense of being there.
9. Longquan Double-edged Sword: Typically referred to as simply Longquan Sword, it is one of ancient China’s ten famous swords. Legend has it that a sword named Longyuan was cast by Ou Zhuzi, the sword master of the Warring States Period over 2,600 years ago. Today, it refers to a sword cast in this traditional Han technique.
10. As a famous traditional snack, it originated in the morning market during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty. According to legend, Zheng Banqiao, the then magistrate of Weixian County, saw the peasants at the morning market getting cold meals, so he ordered to set up a cauldron to cook for passersby. Due to the open-air stalls and the uncovered top, it was jokingly called “Chaotian pot.”
11. *Romance of Song Dynasty in Song Dynasty Town* is a must-see show. It is regarded as one of the top three shows in the world along with “O” show in Las Vegas, USA and the *Moulin Rouge* in Paris, France. Using artistic forms of singing, dancing, and acrobatics, it mainly showcases the local allusions and folklore of Hangzhou such as the Legend of the White Snake, the Butterfly Lovers, stories of General Yue Fei’s leading the defense against Jin invaders 《岳飞抗金》, etc. It

applies high-tech visual and audio techniques to enhance its stage effect, which definitely will offer tourists a ground-breaking visual feast.

12. A popular folk art performance venue during the Song and Yuan dynasties in China. Wa She is a commercial recreational area in the city. The performance venue set up by Wa She is called Gou Lan.
13. There are currently three types of cultural heritage inheritance structures: overall inheritance, local inheritance, and elemental inheritance. Overall active inheritance is mainly undertaken by Intangible Cultural Heritage inheritors, local innovative inheritance is implemented in the form of national education, and elemental creative inheritance is an important path in Cultural Tourist Performances.

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