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This book examines the formation and development of China CCI (Cultural and Creative Industries), contexualised in six regional performing arts' socio-economic and artistic evolution: from Xi'an *qinqiang* creative destruction, Suzhou garden *kunqu*, Fujian *xiqu* ritual economy to Zhejiang *yueju* gaming industry. By unravelling the complex socio-economic and political conditions around Chinese Theatre at central and regional levels, this book facilitates readers to gain a deeper understanding on China ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) rooted CCI distinction.

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The Story behind The Story

My personal experience of China post-industrial 1990s transformation contributes to shaping this book. My parents were the send-down urban youth (*zhiqinq*); they were the generation born in the dawn of the People's Republic of China, participated in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and when it turned violent they followed Mao Zedong's call to 'go into the mountains and remote rural areas' to build a new China. My parents volunteered to go to Xinjiang. Unfortunately, like most *zhiqinq*, they never settled in their host region. Having grown-up in Shanghai, where the resources were richer and the weather milder, they struggled to root in Xinjiang, where the winter temperature dips to minus 40 degrees Celsius and lamb and cabbage were often the only staple. My parents dreamed of returning to Shanghai. In the 1980s, *zhiqinq* across the country staged nationwide demonstrations, demanding returning to their hometowns; most of them were from Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin. Directly after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, a national policy was published in response to their request. The irony was that instead of allowing the *zhiqinq* to return home, the policy sanctioned *one* of their children aged 16 and above to return. I was one of the millions *zhiqing zinv* or *zhiqinq* children, who arrived in Shanghai in the early 1990s amid the devastation of the *zhiqing* and the frustration of their relatives who automatically became the guardian of *zhiqing* children under the national policy. The bitter mood is well captured in the semi-documentary TV drama *The Karma* (*Nie Zhai* 1994), directed by Huang Shuqin.

I arrived in Shanghai in the year of 1990 just after I turned 16. My parents utilised all their guanxi had me enrolled as an apprentice at Shanghai Watch Factory, which at the time was regarded one of the most prestigious state owned enterprises with excellent social welfare. At Shanghai Watch Factory, I was impressed with the working condition: all workshops had central air-condition, which was rare in the early 1990s; there were weekly supplements for

every staff – from large cartons of top quality apples, silk jackets to endless theatre tickets of various performances – all for free. It was around 1993, we began to hear announcements calling for voluntary redundancy in weekly staff meetings. Soon, list of names for compulsory redundancy were put up in the canteen area, where weekly supplements were distributed. Everything happened so swiftly, few comprehended the scale of the change. This is the nationwide State Owned Enterprise (SOE) reform, launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1992.

As a youngster, I and other youth, took full advantage of the reform. For the first time in our life, career path did not have to be sanctioned by party leaders but were market driven. In response to widespread skill shortage and a growing demand of human resource, numerous training programmes and even university degree courses were open to the public. I enrolled in English class, Japanese class, computer class, as well as took the national university entry exam and passed and being accepted at East Normal University for an undergraduate degree in English. Whilst studying, I worked as a waitress in Shanghai's first 5-star Hotel, a typist at Shanghai's first mobile communication company operated by the People's Liberation Army, a receptionist in an American Computer Company, and even fulfilled my dream of becoming a professional *yueju* performer, after passed interviews and being accepted as a *xiaosheng* role at Shanghai Luwan All-female *Yueju* Troupe. I soaked in knowledge, hopped between jobs, excited with new opportunities that were suddenly available to us. For the young generation, it was a great new era when everything seemed possible.

At the same time, concerns and worries loomed around SOE workers who were made compulsory redundant at the age of 45 and above. My parents' generation once again fell into this group. This generation grew up under Mao Zedong's socialist doctrine had lived and worked all their life in the SOE system. They could not comprehend the ideological change, nor were prepared for the socio-economic transition. They were bitter and confused. I remember one day my mother came home and told me that she had been made redundant: 'I

devoted all my life to the party, I was obedient and followed everything the government and the party asked of me. Now they ditch me like a piece of used rag; I am only 45! What am I going to do?' I remember my response at the time was: '45 is old enough (to retire)! There is plenty you can do, enrol yourself in Old People's University, sing *yueju*, enjoy yourself!' She did not reply. Only years later, when I turned 45, I realised how hurtful my words to my mum were at the time. We never discussed her redundancy after that brief exchange. We kind of understand each other's feeling – the joy and excitement of the youth and the pain and confusion of the older generation; yet, we could not share our experience nor truly understand each other. It is as if there is an invincible wall between us, the two generations separated by Deng Xiaoping's reform.

Today, the Shanghai M50 Contemporary Arts Cluster, a former textile factory turned China's first creative cluster stands proudly as the symbol of China's successful transition from 'made in China' to 'created in China'. There is little trace of the painful process, and those born in the new millennium have no memory of this part of the history as it is now the 'dark heritage' and a taboo topic to discuss in mainland China (Ma 2022). This book records China's post-industrial transition, the progress from Mao's socialist experimentation to Deng's marketisation and Xi's ICH rooted CCI, contexualised in Chinese Theatre, *xiqu.* It examines the ideological shift and the continued struggle of individual and community cultural expression and identity construction. I dedicate this book to the generation which sacrificed themselves in China's post-industrial transformation and to the generation which embraced China's brave new world with passion and ambition.

Introduction

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)

Hesmondhalgh in *The Cultural Industries* (2002) states that in the early 1980s there was a conceptual shift from 'the culture industry', a term coined by Theodor Adorno in the 1940s (1991), to 'the cultural industries'. Whilst Adorno regards the digitalisation of cultural production and consumption as capitalist mass deception, the later scholarly debate takes a more positive outlook, highlighting the art market as highly 'complex, ambivalent and contested' (O'Conner 2010, Hesmondhalgh 2002).

The term 'creative industries' was announced in 1997 by the UK Labour Government, five years after the Australia government launched its Creative Australia project, to address Britain post-industrial socio-economic decline. The creative industries are to promote 'individual creativity, skill and talent which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS 1998). The latest discourse is to include wider sectors which were not previously included in the cultural industries, such as the entertainment and leisure business (Kong 2014, Flew 2013, O'Connor 2011). Creative industries as a major national policy was swiftly adopted across the Asia Pacific including Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia and India (Tschang 2009: 30, Banks & O'Connor 2009: 365). It arrived in China in late 2004, initially in Shanghai and subsequently spread to Beijing and other regions (Keane 2007).

Scholars have pointed out the interchangeable use of 'the cultural industries' and 'the creative industries', exemplified in Kong's self-explanatory titled article *From cultural industries to creative industries and back* (2014). The lack of definitional precision of the creative industries is a conceptual weakness, arising from the origin of the term itself in economic and regional policy rather than in disciplinary analysis (Oakley 2004); in other words, as 'the politicians have thought of it first, not the social scientists' (Hartley 2009).

In China, the first Cultural Industries Research Institute was established at Beijing University in 1999, funded by the central government. In 2004, the Centre for Creative Economy was inaugurated by John Howkins at Shanghai Theatre Academy. Su (2015) points out the interchangeable use of the cultural industries (wenhua chanye) and the creative industries (chuangyi chanye) in different regions of China. Within the ongoing discourse evolution and debate, the Chinese government has preferred the term cultural and creative industries (wenchuang chanye, CCI) to include its rich traditional culture as the source of creative output and has identified CCI as China's pillar economy by 2020 (Kong 2014: 594, Mommaas 2009: 51). This books adopts the term cultural and creative industries or CCI for analysis.

Chinese Theatre or Chinese Opera?

Ritual performance existed in Chinese Theatre since the pre-historic period. Pre-modern Chinese Theatre flourished during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when Emperor Xuanzong took a personal interest in training the musicians and performers in his palace, the Pear Garden (Liyuan). To this day, Chinese *xiqu* artists regard themselves as 'the children of the Pear Garden' (Liyuan Zidi). The Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) was ruled by the Mongols, which rejected the Chinese Confucius scholar-official class as the traditional political-administrators. Many scholars put their literary skills in writing scripts for Chinese Theatre to seek comfort and delight; this led Chinese drama script reached its peak in both quantity and quality. Chinese Theatre matured artistically during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when various roles evolved combining singing, dancing, role-play and visual spectacles, represented in *kunqu*. Diverse regional *xiqu* rose in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and overtook *kunqu*'s popularity; the late Qing court's preference for the more rigorous and colourful *jingju* led the nation to follow its suit and further decline of *kunqu* (Zhou 1990, Mackerras 1983, Dolby 1976).

In English, the term *xiqu* is often translated as Chinese Opera, which is misleading. Until the latter part of 20th century China remained an agricultural society. Fei Xiaotong, the founder of Chinese sociology stated in the 1940s that 'the foundation of Chinese society is rural' (1992). *Xiqu* has been popular among all social classes (Mackerras 1983) but roots in rural countryside and urban migrant communities for ritual and entertainment purposes; all of which share little commonality with the socio-artistic representation of Western high art 'opera'. The mistranslation could be traced to the early 20th century amidst the height of imperialism. When regional *xiqu* first arrived in the USA at the turn of the 20th century following China labour migration, *xiqu* was translated as Chinese Theatre. It was, however, perceived as an inappropriate translation in the face of rising American musical theatre at the time. Lei explains in *Operatic China*: 'the term "musical", implying American modernity, was not suitable for Chinese Theatre, which was figured as antique and foreign … Opera might be a better term for this alien art' (2016: 9). Chinese Theatre was therefore translated as Chinese Opera, grouping with European opera as 'the other'. Before this mistranslation could be scrutinised, Mei Lanfang's extremely successful 1920s USA tour, which used 'Chinese Opera' for marketing, consolidated the term on the international stage.

All *xiqu* forms adapt script from classic literature and follow the same theatrical training and stage convention, which are synthesis (zonghexing), symbolism (xunixing) and structuralism (chengshixing) (quoted in Zhou 1990: 86) but sang in local dialects. *Jingju* or Beijing sing-song drama, the genre in which Mei Lanfang specialised in, becomes the representative term of Chinese Opera after his USA tour (Tian 2010, Goldstein 2007, Wichmann 1991, Dolby 1976). Lei comments that the Cantonese community, which made up the majority of USA Chinese migrants, was upset as they had always regarded their home

theatre form, the Cantonese sing-song drama or Cantonese *yueju*[1], artistically superior to *jingju* (2016: 10). Such sentiment is widely shared across the over 300 different *xiqu* regions and communities, each hold their own regional form as the most valuable cultural expression and identity representation. This mistranslation has been the contentious point of Chinese Theatre on the international stage till this day. This book adopts the term Chinese Theatre rather than Chinese Opera to discuss the popular theatrical form, *xiqu*.

Xiqu and *Xiju*

China's loss of the two opium wars in 1842 and 1860 forced its opening of coastal cities, including Shanghai, Tianjing, Canton and Hong Kong. Following the 1905 abolition of centuries-old Confucius examination system and the 1911 abdication of Qing court, Modern China was born (Mitter 2009, Fenby 2008, Spence 1999, Fairbank 1979). In 1907, a group of Chinese overseas students in Japan staged *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven (Heinu yutian lu*), an adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, following Stanislavsky's Western realistic acting and directing system. The play was staged in Shanghai the following year and gained instant popularity amongst China young scholars and marked the birth of Chinese modern theatrical form, *huaju* or spoken drama (Liu 2006: 343). The suffix *ju* translates as drama, marking a movement away from the traditional music-dominated performance *qu* to script-based drama. *Huaju* was hailed by young scholars as a new educational tool to 'awaken the masses,' and the salvation of Chinese Theatre. In May 1921, a group of scholars and dramatists established a monthly journal *Popular Drama Society* and published a manifesto in its first issue declaring that 'theatre occupies an important place in modern society' and the journal was devoted to '*all* China theatrical forms under the title of *xiju'* (Mackerras 1983: 146, emphasis by author).

[1] There are two *yueju* in Chinese *xiqu*, one is Cantonese *yueju* and the other Shanghai and Zhejiang *yueju*. Both *yue* has the same pronunciation, but different Chinese characters representing respective regions.

The suffix *ju* as a symbol of modernity was soon adopted in emerging new theatrical forms during that time, such as *wuju* (dance drama), *geju* (singing drama or Western opera), and *yinyueju* (musical theatre), as well as *xiqu*. Wichmann points out that these new theatrical forms based upon the aesthetics of several Western models, however, are immediately distinguishable from the traditional sing-song drama *xiqu* (1983: 191). Many *xiqu* forms arrived in urban cities in the early 20th century following their rural migrants were modernised under the Culture Industry. The Culture Industry, a phrase coined by Adorno in the 1940s, refers to technological evolution of mass cultural production and consumption, ranging from radio, music records, magazines, novels to film (Adorno 1991). In the early 20th century, urban *xiqu* took full advantage of the Culture Industry to produce shows for their new urban audiences. This is represented in the evolution of Shanghai *yueju*.

When the textile industry rose in Shanghai in the early 20th century, neighbouring Zhejiang girls poured into Shanghai to fuel the labour force, followed by their hometown *shaoxinxi* troupes. With capital in hand, the female textile workers became the new patron of *shaoxinxi* and saw its development to Shanghai (all-female) *yueju*. Shanghai *yueju* were inevitably staged in modern theatre adopting scenography, lighting, sound and visual effects for paid audiences; performers who mastered the use of radio and newspapers actively promoted themselves to boost box office sale and reach stardom (Ying 2002, Gao 1991). Along with Shanghai *yueju*, many *xiqu* forms embraced urbanisation and modernisation, altering their suffixes from *qu* to *ju* to reflect the artistic evolution; examples include Beijing *jingxi* to *jingju* (Mackerras 1983), Jingsu *yanhuai xiaoxi* to Shanghai *huaiju* (Du 2012), Shanghai *tanhuang* to Shanghai *huju* (Stock 2003). Before the eve of People's Republic of China in 1949, many of the over 300 regional *xiqu* forms had the suffix of *ju* and performing for urban audience in modern theatre settings. Meanwhile, *xiqu* in rural countryside continues to perform for ritual

and festival purposes in open air. The artistic and socio-cultural divisions between urban and rural *xiqu* remain till this day.

Xiqu as Ideology Insertion

Mackerras argues that 'historically, Chinese Theatre has served an important educational and entertainment function, however, modern Chinese Theatre is a microcosm of history, with politics having more impact on drama than the other way around' (2016: 10). I would like to emphasise that the biggest political impact is reflected on Chinese Theatre of *xiqu*. Until the late 20th century, over 95% Chinese population were semi-illiterate (Fei 1992). Whilst *huaju* is favoured mainly by urban scholars, its popularity has had little impact beyond its immediate audience circle. The main population, which is made of rural peasants and urban migrants, have persistently preferred their regional sing-song drama *xiqu.* This unique phenomenon was recognised by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an effective medium to interpret and disseminate its ideology (Ma 2015).

In 1942, from the then Communist headquarter Yan'an, Mao Zedong, chairman of the CCP delivered the *Yan'an Speech on Arts and Literature,* targeting urban scholars and artists who were drawn to Yan'an for the vision of building a new China (Snow 1937). In the *Yan'an Speech*, Mao criticised urban scholars and artists for divorcing themselves from rural peasants and urban workers and creating performances for bourgeois self-indulgence rather than socio-political changes. Mao emphasised that 'there is no such thing as art for art's sake'; instead, 'all art forms serve to inspire and mobilise the population, to unify the people and build a new society' (Mao 1965). Scholars and artists were sent to rural countryside to collect local folk songs and create new performances to inspire peasants and workers. Mao's ideological war was a success; despite its inferior military equipment, the CCP won the Sino-Japan war and the

civil war against the Nationalist Party. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established and the CCP legitimatised.

In the 1950s and the early 1960s, Chinese Theatre underwent unprecedented changes known as the three-reform (sangai): reform the artists (gairen), reform the system (gaizhi) and reform the play (gaxi), with the focus placed on institutionalisation and ideology insertion. Despite controversial political stands, *xiqu* artistic standards, along with performers' socio-political status were elevated (Ma 2015, Liu 2009). *Xiqu* performers were historically classified as the lowest social strata alongside prostitutes and beggars; through the three-reform, they become the 'people's artists'. Of the over 300 regional *xiqu* forms, each had at least one, often multiple, state-funded *xiqu* companies established. Scholars and artists were assigned to *xiqu* institutions assisting script and music creation, transforming *xiqu* from regional folk performance to a modern art form.

Many regional *xiqu* repertoires were made into films reaching national and international audiences for the first time, such as Shanghai all-female *yueju Love of the Butterfly (Liang Zhu* 1954*)*, Anhui *huangmeixi Marriage of the Fairy Lady (Tianxian Pei* 1955*)* and *kunqu The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan Ting* 1960). These films, known as *xiqu* art films (*xiqu* yishupian), were experimentation of synchronisation of cinematic images created from realism *huaju* and aesthetically codified *xiqu* (Bao 2010). *Xiqu* institutional reform marked the party-state's effort to legitimatise *xiqu* as the art form of China's new master of rural peasants and urban working-class; which in turn legitimatised the CCP and its regime.

The Eight Model Opera, produced by Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) are controversial cultural products. As a former *jingju* performer and Shanghai film actress, Jiang Qing had artistic knowledge of urban *xiqu*. The Eight Model Opera which includes five *jingju*, two ballets and one symphony, represent successful fusion of Western music and Chinese *xiqu* and have continued to inspire new

popular music to this day (Mittler 2012, Yang 1993). Clark argues that this is because the Model Opera series have produced a popular taste which can be enjoyed aesthetically and sensationally (Clark 2012, 2008). Meanwhile, the compulsory viewing of the Eight Model Opera for 1.2 billion people throughout a ten-year period as the only cultural consumption made Chinese Theatre an arbitrary political tool which extremely limited creative freedom and deterred even the most ardent theatre audience. Mao Zedong's death in 1976, followed by the arrest of Jiang Qing and her gang, ended the era of extreme politicisation of Chinese Theatre. A new period of intensified marketisation of Chinese Theatre is to begin.

Xiqu Marketisation

The 1980s is often regarded as the Golden Era of Chinese Theatre, when forms and genres competed for experimentation and creative outputs. The relaxed political atmosphere, however, did not last long. The open-door policy introduced in 1979 saw the increasing ideological clash between the socialist China and capitalist West. The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which rooted in the representation of peasants and workers as the new masters of the People's Republic of China now took a U-turn focusing on nurturing the rising new middle-class. This middle-class which consists of mainly university graduates, however, look up to the Western socio-political system as the legitimate model and Western culture and philosophy as their ideological inspiration. The 1989 Tiananmen Square tragedy which escalated from a global theatrical spectacle to a violent clash was an unavoidable outcome. Deng Xiaoping's determination to push further reform gambled on legitimatising the CCP through generating economic prosperity. This is captured succinctly in Deng's famous 'cat theory': 'it does not matter whether it is a black cat or a white cat, so long as it catches mice it is a good cat', implying the indifference towards capitalism or socialism in name, so long as it generates economic growth it is a legitimate regime.

It is under this new CCP ideology that China accelerated its socio-political reform in 1992. Shanghai was appointed as the head of the dragon to lead China's transformation from labour-intensive industries to knowledge-based cultural and creative industries (CCI). Nationwide state-owned enterprise (SOE) reform rolled out, factories closed down and workers laid off. Shanghai textile industry, known as China's Mother Industry, bore the brunt. Over half a million textile workers in Shanghai alone were made redundant, mostly women; the mills were shut or demolished to make way for a new cityscape: the Shanghai Pearl Tower and Shanghai M50 Contemporary Arts Cluster are just two examples.

The state *xiqu* institution reforms followed. Modelled on the SOE reform, from 2005 all state *xiqu* institutions apart from *jingju* and *kunqu* were required to enter 'marketisation' (shichanghua). Under marketisation, *xiqu* institutions must justify their value and very existence by performing for the market and generating economic profit (Ma 2015). The dilemma was that under the earlier SOE reform, the once elite working class under Mao Zedong's era is now the new 'urban poor' (Qiu 2009) with little financial means to enter the glittering grand theatre. Meanwhile, the emerging young middle-class continues to view Western culture as the most valuable and transferable socio-economic capitals for consumption and has the least interest in *xiqu*. Urban *xiqu* companies are forced to tour in the rural countryside, where *xiqu* is still indispensable for ritual and festival events. These occasions, however, prefer traditional *xiqu* repertoires rather than cutting-edge innovative plays. This creates a vicious circle and false impression that *xiqu* no longer has a market in urban cities and is artistically stagnant. The dilemma only began to ease when *xiqu* acquired a new ICH status.

ICH *Xiqu*

China may have adopted the creative industries as a national policy since 2004, how to adapt a Western socio-economic model to suit Chinese local conditions requires careful approach. A historically agricultural society, China's urban population only tipped over 50% in the mid-2010s and it was in February 2021 that China announced a total rural poverty eradication (Xinhua Net 2021). Although China's economic power has been fast rising, it also resulted in mass rural peasants' urban migration and increased rural–urban disparity. Designing a localised CCI model to ensure balanced rural–urban development is an urgent matter for the CCP continued legitimacy. The UNESCO 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention arrived timely as an inspiration and possible solution.

The UNESCO 2003 ICH Convention derives from the UNESCO 1980s Recommendation on Safeguarding Traditional Culture and Folklore which protects and promotes traditional cultural practices and community identity building (art. 15). It proposes five broad 'domains' within which ICH manifests:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- Traditional craftsmanship
(UNESCO 2003: 3)

By broadening the concept of assets to encompass natural, cultural and human resources, with close links to sustainability and innovation, ICH provides countries such as China an opportunity to turn their rich intangible assets into symbolic and economic wealth. *Xiqu*, an art form which embodies all five domains providing the perfect ICH representation and renewed political narrative for China socio-economic transformation.

In 2001, *kunqu* was the first *xiqu* awarded the UNESCO status of 'Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' and was recognised as 'a living fossil of Chinese *xiqu*'. In 2006, the year when China ratified the UNESCO 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Convention many regional *xiqu* were given national ICH status. In February 2015, Xi Jinping along with six other members of the Central Standing Committee of Communist Party Political Bureau (CSCCP) attended the 2015 New Year *Xiqu* Gala (Xinhua Net 2015). It is extremely rare for the seven members of CSCCP to appear in public collectivity, and the last memory of such high level political attention given to *xiqu* was in Mao Zedong's era. The highly symbolic gesture came only months after President Xi delivered the *Beijing Speech on Arts and Literature*, emphasizing that 'the future of Chinese cultural and creative industries (CCI) will anchor in traditional Chinese culture, such as *xiqu*' (Xi 2014). From 2015, all state *xiqu* institutions across the country have their full funding reinstated. By 2021, all 348 *xiqu* forms were given ICH status (China ICH Net 2021). ICH *xiqu* or feiyi *xiqu* becomes China CCI distinction.

ICH *Xiqu* as China CCI Distinction

It is often criticised that the UK creative industries do not include cultural heritage and tourism (Oakley 2004), both sectors are core to China CCI. In 2018, The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Tourism merged to become China Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The move is clearly inspired by the 2005 joint declaration of the UN, World Tourism Organisation and Ministry of Tourism which asserted tourism as a key method for alleviating poverty (Blake et. al 2008: 2). The intention of China Ministry of Culture and Tourism is to 'safeguard the eco-systems, encourage rural migrants to return to their hometowns, modify environments, protect landscape integrity and scenic quality, and to provide on-site interpretation for selected archaeological sites, which is to contextualise and authenticate the tourism experience in a more natural environment' (China Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2020). This ambitious scheme focuses on promoting local ICH to attract urban middle-class tourists to rural

countryside for a balanced rural-urban development. Performing arts are at the heart of the transformation, exemplified in landscape performance.

Chinese landscape performance was established by film Director Zhang Yimo through his seven *Impression Series (Yinxiang Xilie)*. The first of those was *Sister Liu Impression* (*Yinxiang Liusanjie* 2004), launched at Guilin, a southwest region renowned for its lush mountain and river scenery. The performance was a spectacle sensation. Whilst Zhang's *Impression Series* have drawn controversial debates, from ecological damage to local peasants' labour exploration, they transformed people's understanding of how performance can turn an obscure location into a popular tourist destination and thereby elevating ultra-rural poverty.

Xiqu followed this trend closely. In 2010, the first *xiqu* landscape performance, *Garden Kunqu The Peony Pavilion (Yuanlin Kunqu Mudanting)*, debuted at Shanghai Kezhi Garden. With a price tag of 800 RMB[2] and all tickets sold out well in advance, it symbolises an established middle-class *xiqu* audience. The government's compulsory *xiqu* education scheme, first introduced in 1994 to 'bring *xiqu* into university campus', is paying off. In 2012, *Garden Kunqu The Peony Pavilion* opened its franchised site in Suzhou and toured the USA. Landscape performance quickly becomes a formula adopted across regional *xiqu* forms to attract cultural tourists and transform regional economy.

Meanwhile, ICH *xiqu* has been pushed by the party-state as the core content to fuel CCI digital evolution. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese government has been heavily investing in building a nationwide digital infrastructure, particularly the internet and mobile phones. By the end of the 1990s, a high-speed national grid was in place, linking all provinces and major municipalities. By early 2015, 1.23 billion of the 1.3 billion Chinese population were mobile phone users and 491 million mobile gamers. Reaching the end of 2010s, the Chinese gaming industry had become the most popular entertainment amongst young consumers (Jin 2017: 144).

[2] Exchange rate at the time of research (2017-2018) was around 1sterling pound to 10RMB.