

Discursive Construction of a Glocalized Chinese Identity on the Official Tourism Website of China

Xiao Rong

Abstract—Place is a critical consideration to tourism experiences. This study is mainly concerned with the central role that place characteristics play in the construction of a glocalized Chinese identity during online tourism discursive practices. Under the theoretical lens of mediated discourse analysis, this paper first explores the intricate ways in which Chinese identity is mediated discursively from a global perspective, and then clarifies the local aspect of China as an independent country with its own language, culture, cuisine, etc., as distinct from the western world. Rather than taking the binary view of Global-Local, what this paper suggests is a Glocal reading and construction of Chinese culture whose place identities are constantly being reinforced through both the global writing of China, and the Chinese representations of the world, with the local and the global constituting one another in dynamic tension.

Index Terms—Global, local, glocal, Chinese identity, website.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long been recognized as a rapidly growing sector of great importance in the process of globalization. Many researchers have noted that the tourism industry has a significant impact on regional social and economic development [1], [2], especially in developing countries and regions [3].

China is no exception to this. According to the *2015 Yearbook of China Tourism Statistics*, China's tourism industry has enjoyed fast growth over the past three decades. While globalization provides growing international interconnections among societies, cultures and economies, international tourism has become more and more popular in recent years.

According to Frew & White [4], tourism, in the globalization age, can be considered as a mirror and constructor of national identities. Through tourism, 'states actively manufacture cultures as part of the wider construction of a nation-state and national identity' [5]. Given this background, the ways in which tourism resources are displayed will become increasingly important to the economic and social development of a country. Communicative practices, especially those revolving around the mass media, have been identified as of central importance in tourism activities [6], [7]. One of the quickest and most convenient ways for tourists to learn about their destinations is through the internet.

The present study intends to conduct a mediated discourse

analysis on the English version official tourism website of China from the Department of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) (<http://en.cnta.gov.cn/>) to investigate how it creates a glocalized China that speaks to international tourists through reinventing, reconstructing and renegotiating marketable Chinese identities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Linguistic Studies of Tourism and National Identity Construction

As one of the key global cultural phenomena, world tourism has received much attention from researchers in a number of academic traditions. In the sphere of linguistic research, a wide range of genres of tourism media products have been studied, including brochures, postcards, photographs, travel writing, movies, and more recently tourism websites.

The language of tourism in general has been studied comprehensively by Dann [8] from a sociolinguistic perspective. He analyzes the general properties of tourism discourse and the features of different registers of tourism discourse as nostalgia tourism, health tourism, and so on.

National identity, as a type of collective identity, according to Smith [9], is a cultural identification based on either territory or ancestry. As one's self-identity indicates how "self" is different from "other", national identity also encompasses unique psychological characteristics that distinguish one nationality from another [10]. In this respect, national identity is related to tourism because of the shared need for uniqueness and difference, which are central elements in tourism marketing. Therefore, national identity can be incorporated into tourism as a way of showcasing how each country is exceptional and worthy of a visit.

As such, the discourse of tourism can be taken as a discourse of identity construction, promotion, recognition, and acceptance which contributes to the content and modalities through which nations promote themselves [11]. When considering this background, it is no surprise that the study of national tourism identity has seized the attention of many scholars from an array of disciplines and drawn increasing attention from a number of linguists.

In the field of linguistics, Thurlow & Jaworski [12] investigate touristic textual practices and the touristic use of language in newspaper travelogues, television holiday shows and guidebook glossaries to understand the role and nature of language and communication in tourism as a global cultural industry. Special attention is paid to the way language is deployed multimodally as a semiotic resource for the

performance of both local identities and global identities. It is further stated that the boundaries between these two identities are far from clear with one overlapped with the other in the highly mobilized global world. As a result, national identities have also acquired greater complexity in response to the increasing tourist mobilization as well as the values and practices of the globalized social cultural system.

However, as Samlim, Ibrahim, Hanita & Hassan [13] point out, the literature on national identity constructed in tourism discourse at present is still dominated by studies focusing upon history and politics, and calls for further studies from a linguistic perspective. Furthermore, there are very few studies focusing on tourism websites or blogs and on analyzing both verbal and visual aspects of the tourism discourse. No existing study is conducted on Chinese tourism websites.

B. Discourse Studies on Chinese Tourism

Research on tourism in China has mainly focused on particular scenic spots, ethnic tourism, rural tourism, and provincial identities. Most of this research is conducted from a tourism management perspective.

In recent years, mainland Chinese linguists such as Lan, Ding and Tian have initiated the movement to work on tourism discourse in China. Lan [14] investigates the creation of China Pan-Beibu Gulf tourism image from the perspective of discourse rhetoric vision. Ding [15] focuses on the interpersonal idiomatic expressions in tourism discourse in two English world magazines - *The Times Magazine* and *Newsweek*. While Tian's work [16] gives us a more general picture of conducting tourism research from a discourse analysis perspective. This is a theoretical article proposing the necessity to combine tourism with discourse analysis. Tian [16] notes that introducing the methods and theories of discourse analysis to tourism research can further unearth the value of tourism spots, thus creating a seemingly harmonious relationship between the local people and the tourists.

However, as we can see, although Lan, Ding, and Tian work from a discourse analytic perspective, Lan's research focuses on the partial image of China in Pan-Beibu Gulf, and no attention is paid to integral Chinese identities; Ding and Tian's works are not concerned with the Chinese identity.

As Tian [16] notes, in China, although interdisciplinary research in the field of tourism is largely recognized as of significant importance due to the nature of tourism industry, the investigation of tourism discourse from a linguistic perspective and the constructive role of language in tourism still need further exploration in China.

In view of the above limitations in previous research on tourism discourse and especially in the situation of China with tourism websites, the present study intends to conduct a mediated discourse analysis of the official website of CNTA with the aim of examining the global and local aspects of Chinese culture as manifested on the website.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The data of this research are collected in early 2016 from the official tourism website of China sponsored by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA)

(<http://en.cnta.gov.cn/>). CNTA is the agency in charge of tourism in People's Republic of China and is directly affiliated to the State Council of China. One of CNTA's main responsibilities, as stated in Announcement Number [2008]95 by the State Council, is to "organize external publicity and significant promotional activities on the overall image of China's tourism and to promote the international communication and cooperation of tourism".

This official website of CNTA can be accessed in three versions: simplified Chinese; traditional Chinese; and English. As the present study aims to investigate the globalized culture that China builds for itself that speaks to the rest of the world, the English version official website of CNTA will be the major concern.

Operating within the methodological framework of Mediated Discourse Analysis, the study will first explore the intricate ways in which Chinese culture is mediated and constructed discursively from a global perspective, as tourism in China, as well as in many other nations, is inevitably influenced by the traditions and styles of other counterparts over the world, following the trend of globalization. It will then clarify the local aspect of Chinese culture, with China as an independent country with its own language, music, architectural style, etc. as distinct from the western world.

However, it should also be noted that the local-global duality is adopted in this study as an analytical construct, arising as a "heuristic necessity" [17]. The conclusion of this paper tries to deconstruct the binary opposition of an abstract globalism and a concrete localism to gain a dialectical perception of Chinese identity in tourism discourse from a spatial perspective.

IV. ANALYSIS

A. Chinese Culture as a Global Construct

In the path to China's modernization, the emphasis on globalization has been crucial for the power bloc as a means for the construction of Chinese identity. This interconnectedness between China and the rest of the world in the construction of a modernized Chinese culture could be investigated on the CNTA website.

Just as tourists pre-visualize before their holidays the famous landmarks to be visited, local leisure activities to be engaged in, so is the linguistic situation in the destination scrutinized and assessed. Considering the linguascope in China, as a subsection "About China" states, "Fifty-three ethnic groups speak their own distinct languages and 23 ethnic groups have their own writing scripts", of which English is certainly not an inherent member. This linguascope indicates the difficulty for the majority of Chinese locals to relate to this English version website. Thus, it might be safe to conceive the English version website as mainly indexing its audience as, either directly or indirectly, international tourists and, to a lesser degree, Chinese national expatriates, which confirms its status as a globally oriented genre of discourse and the identities thus constructed as globally oriented Chinese identity.

This point is further exemplified as viewers click into the

page of “Travel in China”. The subcategory of “Travel in China” opens up with a brief introduction to China which starts with the geographic location of the country:

Situated in eastern Asia, and on the western shore of the Pacific Ocean, the People’s Republic of China covers a land area of 9.6 million square kilometers, with an inland and coastal water area of more than 4.7 million square kilometers and an eastern and southern continental coastline extending for about 18,000 kilometers. [...] China shares common borders with 14 countries and is adjacent to 8 nations on the ocean. [...]

[Extract 1, Cited from About China]

By situating China on the global stage, as in eastern Asia and on the western shore of the Pacific Ocean, adjacent to many other nations, the Chinese geographic identity is defined with reference to its counterparts in the world and China’s status as an inherent member of the global market is thus constructed and appropriated.

Given that the English version website mainly aims at international English-speaking travelers, the topics of the sections/subsections and of the descriptive parts of many extracts are also frequently focused on global themes. For instance, a section of *Immigration* is introduced in *Travel in China* which presents an obvious focus on global mobility and contains three subsections: *Money*, *Customs*, and *Visa*, where the Application Form for the People’s Republic of China Visa, and the Customs of China are introduced, while the subsection of *Currency* introduces the Chinese currency and the situation of foreign currency exchange in the country, as well as foreign credit card business available in China. All these, together with the mention of some frequently used items in the global market like “Master Card”, “Visa Card”, “American Express Card”; “Japanese Yen”, “German mark”, etc., create a sense of familiarity with China among the potential western tourists and lend further support to the internationalization of a cohesive Chinese nation state.

Also in this section, the Passport/Visa application policies, the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law of the PRC, the Customs Law of the PRC and other applicable laws and regulations are made clear, which expound the articles prohibited or restricted for import and export, the regulations to control the foreign exchanges of potential tourists, and to guide the frontier health and quarantine inspection and to protect human health. For example, the following extract from the Money subsection states clearly Regulations for the Control of Foreign Exchange of “Foreign Visitors”:

1. *The foreign exchanges of foreign organizations stationed in China and individuals visiting China received or taken from abroad can be kept by themselves, deposited or sold to banks designated to handle foreign exchange businesses on the principle of free will. They can also be remitted or carried abroad by showing the original customs declaration form.*

2. *Foreign organizations stationed in China and individuals visiting China must pay all expenses in RMB after arriving in China. If the converted RMB notes are not used out, they may be converted into foreign currency within the period of validity of six months before the date of departure and then taken or remitted out of China.*

3. *Foreign organizations stationed in China and*

individuals visiting China are not allowed to buy or sell foreign exchanges privately in China.

[Extract 2, Cited from Currency]

Beyond an external orientation towards the international tourists and organizations, these examples detail China’s official foreign exchange policies, which ideally positions the preferred travelers at a more equal level vis-à-vis the local Chinese people and institutions, potentially equating the problematic power relationship between the Occident and Orient inherent in many tourism encounters. In this sense, the examples given here create an innovative notion of the world subjugated to Chinese understanding and imagination, which further establishes China as an independent nation state/region with equal rights and power positions to its counterparts, actively (and influentially) leveling power relationships and constructing its own identities in the global market.

Besides, the subsection of *Hotel* orienting to international tourists who arguably identify themselves with this sort of self-image lend further support to this interpretation. As noted in this section, “more than half of China’s hotels open to foreigners have been star rated”, while the description of the star-rated tourist hotels frequently focuses on typical lists of recognizable luxuries such as “ball room”, “massage parlour”, and “florist’s shop”. In some four-star or five-star hotels, the travelers are even exposed to “swimming pools, bowl golf courses, saunas, safety-deposit boxes, as well as facilities for fishing, boating, horseback riding, hunting, sharp shooting and other sports”. These signifiers of extreme luxury lifestyle further reinforce the status of accommodation in China as glamorous and quintessential, geared to international standards.

On the CNTA website, it is remarkable that readers are continuously surrounded by international, touristic signage, a resolutely English landscape, and also the application of a globalized discourse genre. This constant interaction with the global features enables the potential travelers to engage in the process of Chinese cultural globalization. It is this interaction between China and its “Other” – the rest of the world – that makes it possible for China to construct and maintain its identity in the global market in a more or less unambiguous manner.

Yet in spite of an apparently sweeping trend towards homogenization, there is still a tendency for places all over the globe to “compete for visitors by auditing and developing local resources and the local sense of place” [12]. Robins [18] and Wood [19] in fact argue that tourism is appropriated by locals and used to symbolically construct culture, tradition, and identity. As such, the global does not annihilate the local; instead, the increased interest in global forces and flows has pushed notions of the local more than ever to the forefront of scholarly analyses. The local writing of Chinese national identities will be the focus of the next section.

B. Local Construction of Chinese Culture

As opposed to the global, the concept of local generally connotes ‘a smaller space characterized by close-knit social relationships, place-based identities and the realities of everyday life that turn the location from a physical “space” into an emotionally connected “place”’ [20].

Despite the employment of English as the dominant language to represent China as externally oriented discourse, this English version website, not unlike other travel texts, also adopts the national official language, Chinese Pinyin, time and again to associate predominantly with local Oriental identities.

Embedded in CNTA's narratives of China, Pinyin is frequently adopted in the description of local places, artifacts and ancient dynasties. A good case in point is exemplified in the description of the *Shadow Play* which is quoted below:

The shadow play was born in Western Han Dynasty some 2000 thousand years ago, and called Yangpi opera, also generally named as head drama or shallow play, was derived from Shaanxi Province of China, and became mature in Qin, Yu, and Jin areas in Dang and Song dynasties, and was prosperous in Hebei Province in Qing dynasty.

[Extract 3, Cited from Art]

In this extract, we can see that ancient dynasties like “Han(汉)”, “Dang(唐)”, “Song(宋)” and “Qing(清)” are all put in Chinese Pinyin, as well as province names – “Shaanxi”, “Hebei”, and local place names – “Qin”, “Yu”, and “Jin”. In this case, Pinyin is adopted here partly because of the vacancy of English equivalents in their expressions as no standardized international names are ready to be used. As such, the local Chinese Pinyin is commonly adopted even in globally oriented documents for their expression.

The localization of Chinese identity is further supported by local traditions and specialties, especially in the depiction of intangible cultural heritages, like Chinese tea culture:

China is the hometown of tea. Tea processing and tea drinking have a history of several thousand years. Famous brands of tea assemble here, mainly including green tea, black tea, oolong tea, scented tea, white tea, yellow tea and dark tea. [...] Tea tasting and hospitality with tea are decorous entertainments and social activities of Chinese people. While drinking in teahouse and having tea party are social group tea art activities.

[Extract 4, Cited from Shopping]

Like in other introductory notions of tourism attractions, the tea culture is first and foremost localized as originated from China with a long history of several thousand years, thus encoding it with a sense of inherent locality. Different types of tea are then listed (“green tea, black tea, oolong tea, scented tea, white tea, yellow tea and dark tea”) and Chinese traditional tea culture stressed with great detail (“tea tasting, hospitality with tea, drinking in teahouse and having tea party”).

Not surprisingly, food is also a prominent element used to localize Chinese identity. This is especially the case with Chinese food where different culinary schools are named after their respective regions of originality. There are all together eight renowned regional cuisines in China: *Chuan, Hui, Yue, Su, Zhe, Xiang, Min* and *Lu* dishes, which are respectively the abbreviations for *Sichuan, Anhui, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, Fujian* and *Shandong* provinces as introduced in the *Food* subsection. These culinary traditions have emerged since ancient times as a result of the influences of different climate, products and

customs in different provinces, endowed an inner sense of locality.

As Robins [18], points out, ‘local should be seen as [...] a relational, and a relative term, [...] being recast in relation to the global’. While the *Travel in China* webpage is presently tied up with the local attractions in China and also the Chinese traditions and cultures, the concept of locality must be emphasized and understood as simultaneously caught in the wider process of globalization.

On the CNTA website, the local writing of global Orientalism is mainly portrayed in a manner that emphasizes the status of Chinese attractions in the world and the impact of local specialties on the global cultural and economic development.

This aspect is first and foremost illuminated on the homepage of *Travel in China* where the “Natural Profile of China” are introduced with reference to the world positions of Chinese natural resources:

The People's Republic of China, with a land area of 9.6 million square kilometers and a water area of about 4.73 million square kilometers, is the biggest country in Asia and the third largest country in the world. [...] Mt. Everest in the Himalayan mountain range and lying on the southeast edge of China at 8,848 meters above sea level, is the world's highest peak. The Yangtze and Yellow rivers, 6,300 kilometers and 5,464 kilometers long respectively, are the most important rivers in China and the Jinghang Canal, which stretches for 1,794 kilometers, is one of the longest artificial canals in the world.

[Extract 5, Cited from About China]

As we can see, this paragraph of National Profile focuses on the world position of China's “land area”, “Mt. Everest” and “Jinghang Canal”. By staging these renowned Chinese localities in the global context, it supports a reading of their conformation to the perception of the largest country in Asia; the world's highest peak; and the longest artificial canals in the world, as a form of the global Chinese identity embedded in and through the localized discourse/representations of Chinese nation. The same applies to the introduction of Chinese History which states that “China, with a recorded history of more than 5,000 years, is one of the four ancient civilizations”, which, by the same means, can be read as signifying one of the four ancient civilizations in the world through explicitly depicting China with its long history. In other words, Chinese history is here deployed as a means to construct the global concept of “ancient civilizations”, enhancing the local writing of the global, and more specifically, the locally constructed description of the world.

Despite the diverse objects under discussion, these discursive representations help China struggle through the winds of change, and allow it to maintain a distinct local identity even as it faces the homogenizing effects of globalization. As a result, they comprise a discursive theme of localization that works to commodify the self-representation of Chinese culture, and altogether forge the identity of Chinese local tourism spots as world influential, creating a sense of cultural superiority, thus constituting an important element in the construction of a globalized Chinese identity.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explores the intricate ways in which the Chinese identity is discursively constructed from both global and local perspectives. While the global construction of Chinese identity is mainly expressed and maintained through the deployment of commonly used global signs and China as a member of the global market, the English version tourism website in itself is also an inherent global format in identity construction. As a nation-state governed website, the local representations of Chinese culture are embedded throughout CNTA website, where local topics like Chinese tourism attractions, policies, transportations are introduced and explicated.

However, rather than thinking of localization and globalization as being diametrically opposed to each other, from an analytical perspective, they are conceived as being in a complex dialectical relationship [21], [22]. While the local is considered in itself as becomes a global product, in which the particular is an aspect of globalization rather than its complementary opposite [23], the local can also be used to write and is an essential constituent of the global. This intimate intertwining process of localization and globalization forms a consistent thread running through the CNTA website, formulating the way Chinese identity could be conceived from a spatial perspective—while the discursive representations of Chinese localities frequently refer to their world status, the global construction of Chinese culture is increasingly penetrated and reshaped by local particularities, cultures and identities. In short, global universalism and local particularism need to be conjoined in this highly interconnected world for a better comprehension of how tourism discourse as a complex phenomenon can mediate and construct Chinese identity (and culture). Therefore, rather than taking the binary view of Global-Local, what this paper suggests is a *Glocal* reading and construction of self-Orientalism whose place identities are constantly being reinforced and reinvented through both the global writing of China and the Chinese representations of the world, with the local and the global constituting one another in dynamic tension.

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Rong Xiao is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research is situated at the intersects of linguistics and tourism study, and discourses around tourism. Ms. Xiao's educational credentials include a bachelor's degree in english language and literature, a master of arts degree in linguistics and applied linguistics in foreign languages at Sun Yat-Sen University, and a master of philosophy degree in applied english linguistics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Her professional work experience includes teaching and researching assistantships at the Chinese University of Hong Kong within the Department of English. She has worked as a lecturer in Language Education Center at Sun Yat-Sen University. She is also the editorial assistant of the *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*. Ms. Xiao is currently a member of the Hong Kong Association of Applied Linguistics (HAAL). She has published a number of papers in *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, and *China Academy Studies*. Her research papers have been presented in local and international conferences.