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Tourism representation by DMOs at religious sites: A case of Shaolin Temple, China

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1. Introduction

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2011) reported that visitors from Asia constitute approximately 50% of an estimated 600 million religious visitors worldwide. With its diverse culture and long history, China is endowed with a plethora of religious sites that constitute more than one-third of the Chinese UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNWTO, 2011). According to the UNWTO (2011), 'Religious tourism is as old as Chinese history' (p. xvii), sites such as Shaolin Temple have been considered as a mysterious frontier. This temple is regarded as the birthplace of the Chan (also known as Zen) sect of Buddhism (Shaolin Temple, 2017), and the film, *Shaolin Temple*, shot in the 1980s and promoted both domestically and overseas, served as excellent promotional material for the monastery (Su, 2016). Because of its significant position in Buddhism and the widely broadcast film, the temple has been receiving tourists for more than 35 years–almost two million in 1984 (General Office of Henan Province, 1985), and 10 million in 2015 (Liu, 2016). It is a top Chinese religious site both in number of visitors and in being among the first opened for tourists. Therefore, its management and representation may have large implications for other religious sites with similar or smaller scales of visitation. Arguably, religious tourism has gained increasing attention and made notable contributions to Chinese tourism.

Increasing quests for spiritual fulfillment have intensified demand for religious tourism. The UNWTO (2011) elaborated this spiritual desire from the social change perspective and reported that the shake-up of the capitalist order has given rise to the pursuit of and search for ethical values. Similarly, academic researchers identified a trend of searching for essential answers to human existence, such as 'What is the meaning of life?' (Olsen & Timothy, 2006, p. 4). Other factors also support religious tourism research, such as official acceptance, government support in the maintenance and development of religious sites, and improved of mass transportation (Cohen, 1984; UNWTO, 2011). The growing importance of spiritual journeys and religious sites necessitates understanding both; however, gaining such understanding is often extremely difficult, due to the 'high sensitivity of the subject', 'the lack of scientific data', and 'its overwhelming domestic nature' (UNWTO, 2011, p. 15). Even Shaolin Temple, considered the world's most famous Buddhist temple, has attracted little academic attention to date (Shahar, 2008).

Although Shaolin Temple is a religious site, not all visitors there are religious tourists. For dedicated Buddhists, its shrines are the site for holy practices; for kungfu movie fans, it is where their on-screen heroes linger in their minds, eyes, and countless dreams; whereas for tourists regardless of their religion, it is a must-see top attraction. Tourists' roles and motives can also be mixed. Even though some roles are compatible and fluid, others might be conflicting and non-negotiable, so choosing what to promote is extremely difficult for local organisations because as a one-size-fits-all approach rarely satisfies anyone completely. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how local organisations understand and represent the temple, and negotiate its conflicting identities. The current study contributes to the literature on religious and film-induced tourism by critically scrutinising the cultural representation of religious sites, specifically internationally popular ones.

2. Cultural representation

Hall (1997) defined cultural representation as producing of the meanings of our minds' concepts through language, signs, and images, then divided it into three parts: culture, mental representation, and systems of representation. In mental representation, a subjective perception process, people form concepts in their mind to help themselves perceive tangible and intangible parts of a culture (Hall, 1997). They then organise, cluster, arrange, and classify their mental formulations to deliver information to others. Systems of representation concern how to organise and manage information for delivery to a third party, which accordingly determines how the third party considers the original things (Hall, 1997). People from the same culture usually intercommunicate more easily because they share similar processes of mental representation and systems of representation.

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Most of the literature analyses cultural representation from the following perspectives: self-identity, selectivity, and the involvement of power (Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006; Mellinger, 1994; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Yang, 2011). Self-identity is involved in the process of mental representations, and selectivity mainly concerns the system of representation. Different perceptions are derived from the same culture among different groups of destination stakeholders (Yang, 2011). Selectivity is an inevitable process because locals might formulate various self-identities. They will then choose the identities that should be presented to the wider international community and how to organise the representation of those selected identities. However, the selective process has frequently been questioned. For instance, Edward Bruner (2005b) critiqued the selected identity that 'works as a filter which excludes as much as it includes' (p.2). With so many identities, which identity is ultimately selected to represent the destination depends on various factors.

Power is exercised throughout the whole representation process. The most critical challenge towards power relationship in the cultural representation process is explicated in Edward Said (1979)'s classic book, *Orientalism*. For the West, the East is a narcissistic and self-consolidating other. The East perceives itself based on the West's imagination and also describes itself in the same pattern to cater to the taste of the West. In addition to adjustment and modification in representation processes, the culture of the East itself might be changed under the influence of the West (Bruner, 2005a, 2005b; Geertz, 1983; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Considering the most popular coastal destination, Bali as an example, the place has been articulated as suffused with artists by culture interpreters, such as expatriate painters, novelists, philologists, and ethnographers. In fact, the 'Balinese language has no word for art and no word for artist' (Geertz, 1983, p. 52). However, the original Balinese culture has been adapted to match the identity represented by these culture interpreters. The local people perceive themselves as artists and behave as artists. Bali has become a veritable locus of artistry under the influence of outsiders. Clearly, the West and Western tourists play an active role in shaping the local identity and behaviour of people in the East. Similar asymmetric power relationships are also notable within a country between the dominant and some marginalized groups.

In summary, Hall's (1997) theory divides cultural representation into three subtle parts: culture, mental representation, and systems of representation—a division that allows a finer distinction between different parts. This division guided this study to explore both DMO's perceptions of the Shaolin culture (mental representation) and actual ways of representation (systems of representation). Current literature on cultural representation has focused on all three parts and shed light on the influence of power in the representation process. Such power might not only influence a culture's representation, but also the culture itself. The asymmetric power relationships involved in cultural representation happen both between countries and within a country, thus serving as potential points of analysis in our study.

3. Cultural representation in tourism

In the context of tourism, cultural representation inevitably involves orientalism because it is expected to effectively present local culture (the nondominant group) to tourists (the dominant group) who are physically and culturally located far away from the destination (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Urry & Larsen, 2011). The destination should create a sense of 'otherness' for tourists (Bruner, 2005a & 2005b). The more 'othered' a place is, the more attractive it is for visitors. Nash (1989) elaborated on how the destination infrastructure can be constructed to cater to the requirements of tourists from metropolitan areas. In such a situation, the destination, including its representation, has been ideologically controlled by the metropolitan centres or by the State (Nash, 1989).

What tourists see and experience while travelling actually intensifies and reproduces orientalism (Bruner, 2005b). One purpose of travelling is to explore the site to confirm preconceived images from the media (Urry & Larsen, 2011). For tourists coming from metropolitan centres to an alien place, the major concern is to experience the otherness of this place rather than the similarity. The landscapes, the cultures, the local people, and other surroundings all cultivate a feeling of exoticness. Coincidentally, the purpose of observing and experiencing otherness conspires with and enhances orientalism to otherise the other.

Both promotion for reaching out to tourist sources and onsite activities heavily rely on visual impressions. Travel is fundamentally a visual experience (Urry, 1992)—the major argument of Urry's (1990) tourist gaze theory; tourists seek 'visually extraordinary' stuff to gaze upon. The visual impressions of promotion photographs are often enhanced through various ways, including embellishment, erasing, exaggeration, stereotyping, and repetition (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Purposive photographs thrill and seduce the eye, thus also arousing viewers' desires to visit the place in these compelling photos. Although visitors' interpretation of the locals might be ill-informed, some local communities adjust their activities by dressing and dancing based on these coloured stereotyped photos to conform to tourists' expectations (Urry, 1992).

Seeing is 'what the human eye does', whereas gazing is a much boarder concept that 'involves cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents, and capturing signs photographically' (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 1). The initial tourist gaze theory was challenged that travel is more than just seeing. Thus, the newly developed gaze theory—Tourist Gaze 3.0—incorporates the 'performance turn' that proposes the multisensory nature of travel experiences. 'Multisensory' indicates that tourists are not just gazing the destination but also actively interacting with locals and tourist workers; thus, prewritten scripts of promotion materials are revised and updated in the actual travel experience with improvising possibilities.

Notable literature in tourism has questioned the transparency and neutrality of the representation process, which has always been inscribed within socioeconomic and political spheres of power (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Yang, 2011). Mellinger (1994) urged tourism scholars 'to situate tourism representation politically, examine what they include and exclude, and expose whose interests they serve' (p. 776). Representation can be cast to cater to the taste of its source market or be projected as a paradise-like place to lure visitors. According to Buzinde et al.'s (2006) analysis of Canadian brochures by, majority groups were mainly portrayed as tourists while minority groups as entertainment providers. Tourism representation has also been criticised for reinforcing stereotypes in which whites are privileged over other ethnic groups (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Buzinde et al., 2006; Mellinger, 1994). Within a country, one major/dominate group may largely influent the representation of other minor/marginal/ethnic groups, a phenomenon which is also coined as "internal colonialism" (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Yang (2011) reported that the culture representation of ethnic groups in the Yunnan Ethnic Culture Theme Park are mainly determined by the Han Chinese. Mellinger (1994) denounced the racism in the content of postcard photographs and senders' messages. Ateljevic and Doorne (2002) articulated how tourism has been embedded in the shaping of tastes and positions of certain social classes based on their comparative analysis of promotional texts of their New Zealand case study at the beginning and end of the 20th century. Their studies supported the pertinence of analysing cultural representation in the wider context, which includes economic, social, and political factors.

4. Conflicting identities of Shaolin Temple

As mentioned in the previous section, popular culture, including novels and films, is tourists' primary source to learn about faraway places and construct and sustain their anticipations (Bruner, 2005a &

2005b; Cheong & Miller, 2000; Dung & Reijnders, 2013; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Representations in popular culture have continuously fed tourists' imaginations about destinations since the 19th century (Dung & Reijnders, 2013). With the development of digital technology in the 21st century, tracing of locations in novels has transformed into following the shooting locations of films and TV series. The travelling activities associated with these popular cultures are thus called 'media tourism', 'film-induced tourism', or 'TV tourism' (Dung & Reijnders, 2013; Hao & Ryan, 2013).

Although the 'on-screen place' might be created through special film-editing techniques such as montage effects or visual enhancement, most destinations have been trying their best to align with film-created images because some visitors are motivated by gazing upon real film locations while remembering scenes in movies (Hao & Ryan, 2013; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Discrepancies between on-screen images and the real place do, of course, exist (Dung & Reijnders, 2013). However, because of numerous and profitable visits motivated by films, it seems that most destination-marketing organisations spare no time or money in dealing with these discrepancies as long as visitors keep coming. Therefore, they either reconstruct their own versions of buildings that match those of a film (Hao & Ryan, 2013) or actively approach directors and production companies to shoot films at their locations, thus achieving effective marketing (Dung & Reijnders, 2013).

Shaolin Temple has been involved in various martial art novels and movies. The earliest and most influential movie, *Shaolin Temple* (1982), used the same name as the temple and was made in the transition time after the Cultural Revolution and before the Economic Open Reform. It used the montage effect to add images from other places to enlarge the scale of the temple. However, although most scenes were shot in the temple, the film mainly presented the kungfu genre rather than focusing on the religion. Several recurring scenes presented monks practising kungfu in beautiful mountains, in front of the temple gate, or in a room where the floors had many cracks due to hard practice. Several subsequent films, including *The New Legend of Shaolin* (1994), *Shaolin Soccer* (2001), *The Real Shaolin* (2008), *Last Kungfu Monk* (2011), *Shaolin* (2011), followed the same well-known stereotypes of the kungfu genre. That is, Shaolin Temple fuels audiences' imaginations because it is the backdrop for their on-screen heroes. Thus it achieves the place-myth goal shared by both tourism marketers and filmmakers. A crucial decision to be made by the Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) is whether they follow their own interpretation of their culture or they continue the 'story lines' of these stereotyping films. Therefore, this paper explores how DMOs portray on-screen representations in their own media communications.

Religious tourism can be restricted to dedicated believers' faith-motivated visits to the places of religious significance (El Hanandeh, 2013), or can be broadly viewed as visits to religious sites or events by both believers and non-believers (Hung et al., 2017). Whether the sacred use of religious sites is compatible with recreational use by nonbelievers is debatable. Olsen and Timothy (2006) opined that physical overcrowding by tourists destroys the sanctity and peaceful atmosphere for pilgrims; by contrast, MacCannell (1999) reported that a tourist is a type of 'contemporary pilgrim'. Urry and Larsen (2011) supported the latter opinion and highlighted that even the pilgrimages in the 13th century were 'a mixture of religious devotion and culture and pleasure' (p.5). To date, whether pilgrimage and tourism, both sacred and secular, are compatible is an ongoing and intense debate. However, the literature has documented that even non-believers seek sacredness at religious sites (Hung et al., 2017).

Despite the growing interest in religious tourism, a market segment with an estimated of 300–600 million visitors each year (Olsen, 2013), academic attention to the representation of Buddhist tourism is surprisingly limited. The most studied topic in religious tourism literature is the hot debate on the similarities and differences between pilgrimage and tourism (Jiang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2018; Olsen, 2013). Two recent studies have pointed out the limited academic attention on the sharply increasing Buddhist tourism in China. Wong, McIntosh, and Ryan (2013) carefully highlighted that while “there exists a considerable body of literature on pilgrimages and religious tourism, research on Buddhist pilgrimage sites remains scant” (p. 213). Thus, their findings brought up Buddhists' tolerant perception of tourism activities, countering previous literature that viewed tourism as non-compatible with religious sites. Five years later, academic attention still has not caught up with the fast-growing Chinese Buddhist-tourism market. For instance, although over 100 temples are organizing Zen meditation camps in China, there are scant studies on this phenomenon (Jiang et al., 2018). Similarly, among the considerable body of literature on tourism representation, little of it focuses specifically on Buddhist sites.

In the context of China, the first Chairman, Mao Ze-Dong, considered religion to be an obstacle to the communist revolution, and made it a focus of attacks during the later Culture Revolution (from 1966 to 1976) (Ryan & Gu, 2010). Therefore, as pointed out by Ryan and Gu (2010), it is necessary to increase academic understanding of how a previously marginalized belief, such as Buddhism, has been adopted into the mainstream in the name of tourism in China. Their study touched upon the tensions between government and Buddhists and questioned whether the promotion of Buddhist events indicates the willingness to promote Buddhism. In the same vein, Jiang et al. (2018) suggest that the government is using Buddhism to strengthen the “sense of being ‘Chinese’” and inculcate respect for authority.

As for the Shaolin Monastery specifically, Shahar (2008) pointed out how little academic attention had been paid to it. Even in a very recent study, Cynarski and Swider (2017) described studies on the Shaolin Monastery as “far absent in the popular discourse of mass culture and a little-known even for researchers of martial arts” (p.30); thus, they documented their participation in a Shaolin martial arts trip so as to trigger further study of the temple. Su (2016) examined how local but secular Kungfu practitioners are excluded from kungfu development under the discourse of an intangible heritage that authorizes Shaolin monks as the only legitimate inheritors. Hung et al. (2017) acknowledged the significance of Shaolin kungfu as a representation of Chinese culture.

Given the lack of research on the representation of religious tourism, we extended our search to the representation of religion. According to Knott, Poole, and Taira (2013), the religious content presented in mainstream media is based on the logics of the media rather than of religion, a major reason for misrepresentation. The main purpose of the media is to convey a good story and attract readership. Including religious elements 'adds colour to advertising, and offers an opportunity for humour and entertainment' (Knott et al., 2013, p. 184). They highlighted the difficulty of presenting spiritual information in media, which focuses only on the tangible aspects, such as history, rituals, and heritage. Consequently, they termed the religion presented in mass media as 'banal religion' or 'a secular distortion of religion' rather than 'real religion'. This point shares a similar dynamic to that in tourism representation in which tourists seek the 'visually extraordinary' rather than the intangibles of spirituality. Given the marginal position of religion in mass media, it is not surprising that we found very limited literature on the cultural representation of religious tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how Shaolin Temple is represented by local DMOs.

In summary, tourism representation has raised broad academic attention in guest-host relationship studies because it invokes expectations and directly affects how visitors perceive destinations. In the early 1990s, Mellinger (1994) convinced tourism scholars to critically analyse tourism representation to disrupt the power relationships behind it; this was also done by Pritchard & Morgan, 2001. However, more than twenty years later, we still feel scholars must urgently engage in the critical analysis of cultural representation due to inadequate literature, scant exploration of the 'backstage' of representation production, and limited application in emerging segmentations, such as religious tourism.

Moreover, several studies on cultural representation have conducted content analysis on destination identities that have been perpetuated in products, such as postcards (Mellinger, 1994), and brochures (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002). We argue that these promotional materials are only the final products of representation, and how and why the local culture is portrayed in certain ways is an integral part of the process of representation.

Lastly, the key concepts of this study—visual consumption and representation—have seldom been examined in a religious, especially Buddhist, context. Therefore, in this study, we extended Mellinger's (1994) line of thinking to critically analyse the cultural representation of a Buddhist site. In particular, we explored how local DMOs understand and represent the temple, and negotiate its conflicting identities, and what factors contribute to this representation process in the case of Shaolin Temple.

5. Methodology

This inquiry is situated within a constructivist epistemology, which holds the belief that 'there is no meaning without a mind' (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8–9). In this view, the meaning is constructed from the interactions between subject and object. Studies based on constructivist epistemology shift their focus from discovering the objective truth to the meaning-making/constructing process (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, the constructivist view that 'culture is emergent thrives and is a part of the process' (Bruner, 2005a, p. 161).

Rich and in-depth information was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and secondary data. Participant observation has been widely applied in anthropology and has been considered as the principal approach for obtaining close familiarities with a culture and its practices (Kawulich, 2005). Thus, it has also been broadly adopted for studying religions, such as by Ryan and Gu (2010), Wong et al. (2013), Cynarski and Swider (2017), and Jiang et al. (2018), to increase understanding of the sacred world. Researchers' focuses have varied between participation and observation, using participant observations to gain first-hand accounts of the activities of people under study in their natural setting (Kawulich, 2005). In actual field research, researchers can observe only a few specific issues. Neuman and Robson (2014) suggested three types of event sampling for selecting objects, namely, routine, special, and unanticipated. Because our first purpose is to understand how the Shaolin culture is represented; therefore, we sampled a routine event that happens every day (from 7:00 a.m. to around 7:00 p.m., depending on traffic conditions) – the most-popular daily mass-tourism visits to the Shaolin Temple. We participated in the trip as ordinary tourists and paid particular attention to how the temple was introduced by the tour guide. Photographs were taken to record what scenery and sites were introduced. Notes were jotted down about what was elaborated on and how the trip was arranged. As Neuman and Robson (2014) highlighted, "pouring fresh memories into the notes … stimulates insightful reflection" (p. 326). At night, we first wrote down detailed notes on the activities of the day, and then reflected on our preliminary thoughts in analytic memos. These memos assisted in formulating our analysis after leaving the field.

We also visited a sub-temple by hiking for nearly 3 h. Surprisingly, this physical exercises brought us mental peace before we conducted interviews with monks, thereby increasing our understanding of the Shaolin culture. The remote location of this sub-temple allows it to reduce the influence of visitors. Two monks interviewed are from this sub-temple. The interviews with three monks and a nun, not only added a novelty value to our study; but also provided insight from the devout Buddhist perspective on what Shaolin culture is and how it should be represented. In total, 543 photographs were taken in our field work, and later helped with recalling events during writing. Part of our participant-observation results are presented at the start of the findings section. However, the most important function of these first-hand experiences was in immersing us in the Shaolin culture.

In our field work, we collected brochures and electronic photos from our participants and asked them to select one image as the most representative one. Subsequently, we searched the key words "Shaolin trip/tourism" on Google to find different photos used by different DMOs' websites, such as tourism administrations and travel agencies. These secondary data helped our interpretation of the interviews.

We aimed to increase the understanding of how DMOs select and negotiate with different identities of the Shaolin Temple in their representation process; thus, participants from local DMOs with rich experience in representing the temple fit perfectly with our interview goals. Selecting cases with expertise and prior knowledge is termed "purposive sampling", and aims to gain deeper understanding rather than to generalize the results to a large population (Neuman & Robson, 2014). In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling was also used to expand our local network. A Buddhist contact, who was a local resident and had worked in the tourism industry for 20 years, generously helped us to reach out to local organisations that were active in representing the temple. Some of them introduced other interviewee to us as well, the so called "snowball" effect. Finally, sixteen members of DMOs were invited to participate in in-depth interviews: four from travel agencies, five from different levels of tourism administrations (i.e. county, municipal, and provincial), two from Buddhism-themed hotels, one from the management company of Songshan Scenic Attraction, one from the main temple, and three from sub-temples (see Table 1). Two interviews were conducted after our field trip: one via audio call and another via WeChat messages.

Tse (2016) defined destination marketing organisations (DMOs) as stakeholders, such as travel agents, hotels, governments, and attractions, who make the "effort to get people to visit the destination" (p.248). All the four types of stakeholders are included in our study. In the Shaolin case, the tourism administration, as non-for-profits entities, set up a specific marketing division to formulate official-promotional texts and lead campaigns for attractions within their territory, including, but not limited to the Shaolin Temple. The reputation of the temple makes it a focal point of all three levels of administration. Travel agencies and hotels introduce information about the temple with the particular purpose of promoting their own services to visitors. The temple itself is the attraction and has its own channels to spread information to its followers and the general public. Doubtless, coordination and cooperation among these stakeholders are necessary. For instance, some promotional events, such as the Shaolin International Martial Arts Festival, are co-hosted by all the stakeholders.

Since the Tang Dynasty, the Shaolin Temple has included a number of temples within and outside of Henan province as its sub-temples (Su, 2016). The internal management of the temple is similar to a 'family structure', which ensures that different sub-temples share the same disciplines (Su, 2016) and that monks and nuns are collectively deployed. The abbot of the main temple makes decisions about assigning abbots, monks, and nuns, and provides different types of support for sub-temples, such as renovation or funds. The sub-temples hold the flexibility of its own management, including setting up its own social media channel to connect with its followers and deciding its own visiting policy.

Most participants were in charge of marketing and managing and had extensive experience – more than ten years for twelve out of the sixteen. For instance, four participants from travel agencies had been in managerial positions for ten years, and all of them had worked as tour guides who led groups around the temple for another ten years. Similar rich backgrounds of experience were also notable in the government officers. Two officers from the provincial government had worked in the promotion of the provincial attractions for more than 30 years. Moreover, they had worked in representing the temple almost since its opening to tourists. Shaolin Temple is located in the Dengfeng County of Zhengzhou Municipal City in Henan Province. With respect to the managerial bureaus, we deliberately engaged with participants from

Table 1
List of participants.

No.	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Organisation	Position	Descriptions
1	Bin	Around 40	Male	Travel Agency	Vice Manager	A local Zhengzhou resident, worked as tour guide for around 10 years; held Vice Manager for another 10 years, in charge of Marketing
2	Shan	38	Male	Travel Agency	Standing Deputy General Manager	Responsible for domestic center. Worked in the current agency for 11 years in charge of domestic services. A local Zhengzhou resident. Work in tourism industry for 19 years. Worked as tour guide for 9 years, with extensive visiting to Shaolin. Visit Shaolin Temple several times per year currently.
3	Chang	Around 50	Male	Provincial government	Director	Worked as a journalist as his first job. Then worked in Tourism administration for almost 30 years, in change of promoting provincial sites.
4	Su	37	Male	Sub-temple	Monk	Lay practitioner first, then become abbot's apprentice for several years.
5	Jing	50	Male	Sub-temple	Abbot	A monk in the main temple, has practiced in the current sub-temple since 1994, promoting the Chan, Kongfu, and Medicine culture of Shaolin Temple
6	Yan	Around 60	Female	Sub-temple	Abbot	The Abbot of sub-temple of Shaolin Temple. Shaolin Temple renovated several sub-temples. The abbot was invited from other temple since the sub-temple newly renovated in 2006.
7	Xin	Around 40	Male	Hotel	Vice General Manager	The hotel under his charge is Chan-themed and belongs to a Kungfu education group. The hotel has the Buddhism, Taoist, and Confuse themes. Worked in hospitality industry of Zhengzhou city before. Shifted to Dengfeng city in 2008.
8	Nana	28	Female	Hotel	Secretary	Has Bachelor degree in education and working in hospitality industry in Dengfeng city for 7 years. Been with current hotel, the first five-star hotel of the city, for 3 years.
9	Ping		Male	County government	Director	Worked in Dengfeng tourism bureau for more than 10 years. Managed the Promotion Division prior charge the current tourism souvenir center. Familiar with the promotion work of Dengfeng Tourism Bureau.
10	Guo		Male	County government	Director	Commenced his career in tourism industry as guide. Responsible for tour guide training later. Currently, manages reception issues of Dengfeng Tourism Bureau.
11	Tao	Over 50	Male	Provincial government	Director/General Coach	Commenced his work in Sports Bureau. Participated in the setting up of the Wushu Training Center. Assigned as Director for 20 years. Has being organizing the promotion of shaolin culture, both Chan & Wushu, for 20 years. Extensive experience in international promotion. Familiar with development path of Shaolin Wushu culture promotion.
12	Hong		Male	Travel Agency	Manager	Worked in Dengfeng travel agency for more than 10 years with the career path of tour guide, operator, and manager. 2003-2009worked as tour guide, international tourists. Local resident. Familiar with the development of Shaolin temple and its international visitors.
13	Jun	Over 30	Male	Municipal government	Director	Worked in the promotion department for more than 10 years. Promoted as director of promotions for 3 years. Familiar with the promotion works of Zhengzhou city.
14	Wen	Around 40	Male	Travel agency	Manager	Began as tour guide 20 years ago. Extensive guiding experience in Shaolin temple for almost 10 years. In charge of inbound market at present. Local resident. A Buddhist.
15	Hao	Approximately 50	Male	Main temple	Monk	First visited the Shaolin Temple to learn kungfu as he was influenced by the film of the same name; After several years of practice, he became interested in Buddhism and decided to be a monk in the 1990s.
16	Ming	Around 40	Female	Attraction company	Manager	Local Dengfeng resident; Started her first work in the Shaolin Temple Attraction 12 years ago and joined the management company for 10 years. She worked in several departments, including event planning, marketing, tourist services, and brand management.

different levels. For example, among the five governmental officers, two were from the provincial level, one was from the municipal level, and two were from the county level. In addition to the monks, two other participants were Buddhists.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) emphasised that one important criteria for selecting participants is their willingness to share their genuine opinions with the researcher. Some of our participants provided as much information as they could because of their years-long partner relationship with our local contact and the belief that discussing Shaolin Temple issues in academic circles is also a way to promote it. These factors enabled us to extend the discussion in depth, and the average interview length was 61 min (This calculation does not include the length of the interview via WeChat messages). Given our research purposes, our interview questions are as follows: 1) What is the Shaolin culture in your mind? 2) Which identities are selected to represent the temple and how? 3) What factors contribute to the representation process? These questions were followed by prompts.

Ten interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Four interviews with the monks and one interview with one government officer were noted. One interview via WeChat messages was recorded in the chat history. After the debriefing on the research purposes and how the interviews will be used, participants provided us their oral consent to participate. For confidentiality, the participants were assigned with pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, then transcribed to and analysed in Chinese. All authors are fluent in both Chinese and English, which ensured accurate transfer of findings into this English manuscript.

In Altheide and Johnson's (2011) reflections on interpretive adequacy in qualitative research, they highlighted that qualitative "researchers do not discount research from small samples, even a sample of one—a case—but it is helpful if this information is available" (p.1104). Therefore, the adequacy of qualitative research should not be based on the number of participants, but on "the evidence appropriate for specific tastes and uses" (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 1099). In our study, we generated a rich and insightful picture of the representation of the temple by deliberately inviting people with extensive experience from different backgrounds (commercial and non-profit, mundane and sacred, male and female). Some scholars also recommended novice qualitative researchers with specific numbers, such as five to twenty-five participants by Creswell (1998, p. 64), and at least six by Morse (1994, p.225). Aligned with these recommended numbers, our sixteen interviews with average of 61 min are sufficient.

Content analysis that 'examines patterns of symbolic meanings within text, audio, visual, or other communication medium' (Neuman & Robson, 2014, p. 20) was conducted for data analysis. This analysis is closely aligned with and has been applied widely to cultural representation (Buzinde et al., 2006). Unlike traditional grounded theory that follows a strict process of "open, axial, and selective coding", the current study engaged with the coding process with great flexibility. As Parry and Johnson (2007) noted, studies based on the post-positivism paradigm tend to 'de-contextualise, distil and otherwise simplify' (p. 120) research, whereas other research works contextualise and encompass the complexity. Therefore, we used more notes, questions, and original sentences than a simple and brief code (or concept) in our analysis. Those diverse labels broadly served to facilitate the authors' thinking. The analysis process was facilitated by the qualitative analysis software, Quirkos 1.5. Specifically, the software assisted the analysis in three ways: marking and notes; searching on specific topics or notes; and cooperation and communication with authors who are physically located in different countries. For instance, the team could easily go back to Chinese transcripts while preparing this English manuscript. This means that the English writing has been compared with original Chinese transcripts several times and by different authors, which increases the accuracy of our translations. Throughout the whole process, the authors, not the software, directed the analysis.

Reliability and validity, which are the criteria of assessing positivist research, are respectively replaced by trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative inquiry (Altheide & Johnson, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham, & Cuba, 2011; Neuman & Robson, 2014). Altheide and Johnson (2011) contested on using fixed and standardized criteria to evaluate qualitative studies as their quantitative counterpart. Trustworthiness indicates consistency; specifically, in our study, we included three methods, namely, in-depth interview, participant observation, and secondary data, to confirm the findings from each method. In particular, we acquired first-hand experience via participant observation to improve our own understanding of the Shaolin culture. In addition, some ideas in the findings, such as the integrity of the Shaolin culture, were introduced and confirmed by several participants in separate interviews, which demonstrated that some findings were consistent among participants. "Authenticity means giving a fair, honest, and balanced account of social life" (Neuman & Robson, 2014, p. 145). In our inquiry, authenticity was achieved via at least three directions. Firstly, people from different entities of DMOs and different worldviews were invited, with detailed backgrounds as presented in Table 1. Secondly, many and long direct quotations from participants were purposively used to remain very close to the original data. Thirdly, detailed descriptions on our methodology were provided to make our research process transparent.

6. Findings

To address our research purposes, this section is divided into four themes: on-site representation, off-site representation, conflicting identities, and spiritual center vs. visual representation. The first two themes describe on how the Shaolin temple is represented on-site and off-site by local DMOs. Conflicting identities elaborates tensions under a simplistic and singular identity. The last theme identifies potential factors involved in this representation process.

6.1. On-site representation

Most groups visiting Shaolin Temple depart from Zhengzhou City, located 1 h's drive away. One-day or two-day trips are regular itineraries that are available through local hotels or travel agencies. We participated in the one-day trip. Before 7 a.m., all individual tourists gathered in several parking lots in Zhengzhou City and then got into the bus to different attractions. After the guide's brief introduction of the temple and the Dengfeng County, most tourists took naps on the bus to rest up for an exciting day. Soon, our tour guide used her gentle voice to wake us up, pointing outside the bus, where there were many kungfu schools along the streets of the county. She introduced the schools that had produced famous kungfu stars as well as the school that had performed in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. We were impressed by the reputation of the Shaolin kungfu.

As we moved on towards the temple, the Shaolin kungfu theatre was our first stop, the entry of which was included in the entrance ticket of the temple. The entry seemed to be very crowded, with long lines of tourists to enter. As we slowly moved in, it was so crowded that there were no empty seats in the approximately 200-seat small indoor theatre. The audience setting was organised by tour guides and ushers. The kungfu performances were only held four or five times a day on a fixed schedule. Accompanied by rapid, dramatic music, flashing lights, and warm applause, performers stepped on to the central stages. All performers were bare-headed and wearing monks' practice robes. It was hard to distinguish whether they were real monks, as the emcee addressed them as 'performers'. It is notable that most of the performers were children and teenagers who were approximately 8–18 years old. The performed kungfu included some regular martial arts and the hard Qigong that splits solid objects, such as wood and bricks, or uses a tiny needle to break through a piece of glass. The audience gave a thunderous applause to the appealing performances.

In addition to the kungfu performance, the following narratives of tour guides also addressed the kungfu element. After a lunch break, the

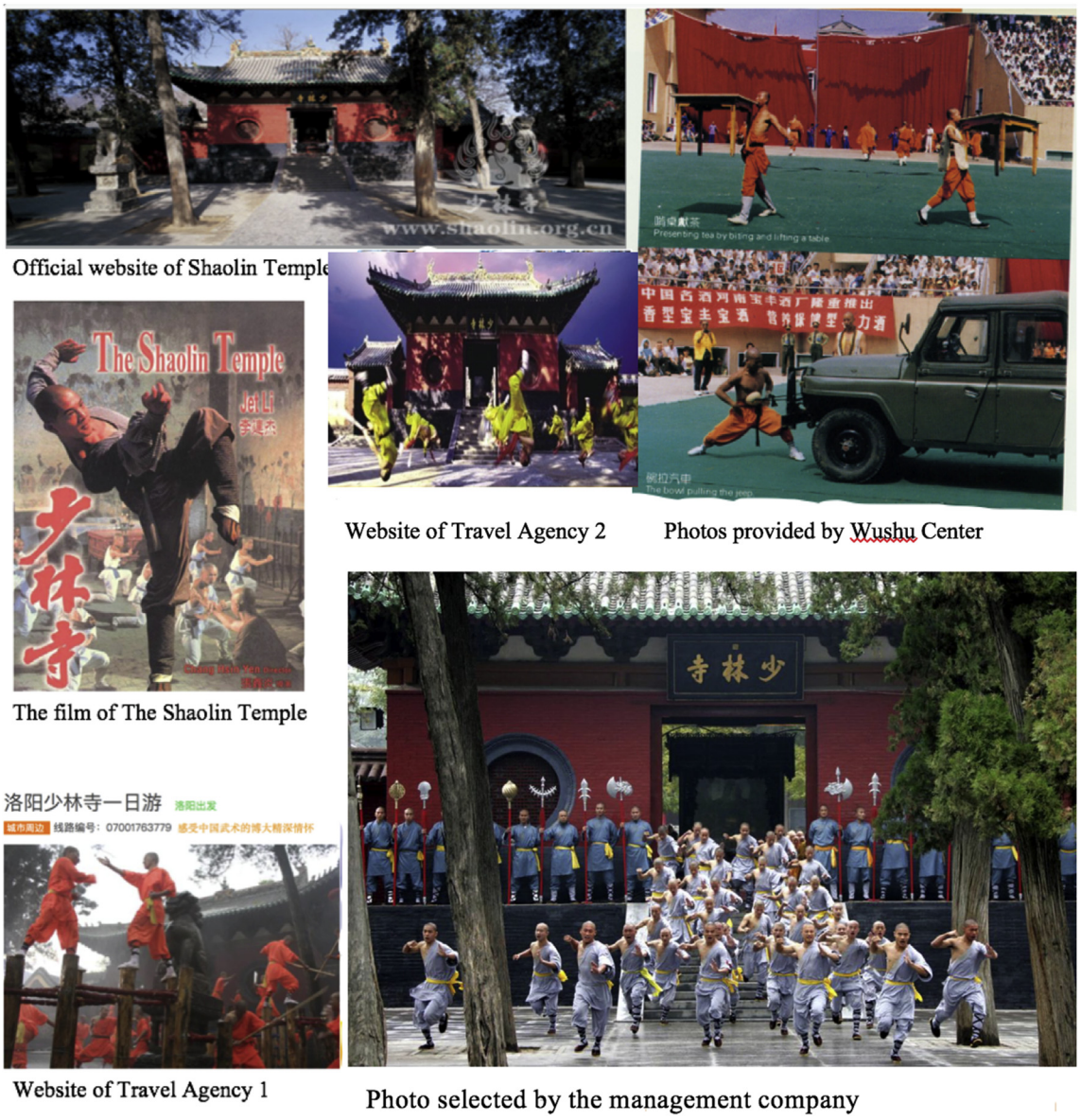

Fig. 1. Frequently used pictures in promotional materials of Shaolin Temple.

group gathered in front of the monastery. The first introduced item was the trees in front of the temple's gate. There were many holes, with finger-like diameters, on the trees, which were introduced as the marks left by monks while they were practicing kungfu activities, such 'one-finger meditation' (yi-zhi-chan). A circler itinerary was followed to introduce most historical buildings in the monastery, describing the important figures of their historical stories, functions in the daily practices of Buddhism, and some rituals in Buddhism. Several monks were in front of the Buddha statues if necessary to guide visitors, or in small kiosks be ready to provide voluntary introductions to the temple, and sell Buddhism books. The group quickly visited the Pagoda Forest with more than 200 tombs of eminent monks and abbots within 20 min and dismissed for self-exploration of the backside mountain before returning to the City.

Prominent in the above daytrip narratives in terms of the amount of introduction and visitation duration are the kungfu and historical reputations of the temple. Before embarking on this trip, we checked the itineraries on the websites of several travel agencies, which turned out to be closely overlapping and similar. Several participants agreed that most visiting groups provided similar products. Hence, the trip we participated in represented the typical group-visiting schedule. Although guaranteeing that all tour guides follow the same script is impossible, similar schedules indicate a large degree of similarity of on-site arrangement for guided tours. Most religious information was only introduced within the temple, which only accounted for about 1 h in total. The entire trip lasted about 12 h (from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) each day, including time for traffic, lunch, and shopping. This 1 h is comparatively short in comparison with the 12-h-trip.

Compared with religious beliefs, it is much easier to introduce historical stories and visible kungfu performances within visitors' tight schedules. Monk Hao confirmed that even monks from the main temple can only introduce the history, development and heritage of Buddhism to outsiders during their cultural exchanges because Buddhist ideas cannot be delivered within short time. Hao also commented that monks provided voluntary introduction in the temple because of the inaccurate information from several tour guides. Thus, monks' introduction focused on Buddhism knowledge. An example of a tricky arrangement is that tourists availing package tour were assigned to tour guides before embarking on their trips or hired one at the ticket office only to realize the existence of voluntary introduction when they enter the temple. For

this tricky arrangement, Hao believed that those who are interested in Buddhism should use this free service regardless its location. The kungfu element seems more appealing for novelty-seeking tourists than the religious component, and also makes Shaolin Temple stand out from other religious sites. In short, from the on-site representation perspective, the religious element only accounted for a small part of our tour guide's talks in this popular one-day trip.

6.2. Off-site representation

The kungfu and historical elements also dominated the off-site representations of the temple, such as travel agencies' promotional materials and cultural communications between governments. From the interviews, the DMOs used multiple channels of promotion, such as websites, booklets, television, radio, and social media. Two currently popular Chinese social media, Weibo and WeChat, were actively employed. In addition to the formal advertisement, the provincial tourism promotion office also shot short movies of individual tourists' travel experiences or with representatives from various tourism services issuing invitations. Through this indirect way, the audiences might feel like they were listening to a short story with some background on famous attractions, rather than being immersed in a purposive advertisement. The management company invites popular Internet stars to visit the temple to boost its online review rate.

The Shaolin Temple has also been frequently represented in kungfu movies. Almost all participants except the monks referred to the movie *Shaolin Temple* shot in 1982 as an influential way of promoting the temple. The film attracted a large number of visitors in the 1980s. Moreover, many other movies included Shaolin kungfu elements, which indirectly promoted the temple. Participants from travel agencies identified their most-frequently used pictures as the front gate of the temple, monks practicing kungfu in front of the gate, and the Pagoda Forest, which is also confirmed from the secondary data that were provided by participants and added via Google search (Fig. 1). Fig. 1 presents a combination of images of the Shaolin temple from brochures and websites of different parties, including the official website of the Shaolin Temple (top left), the film The Shaolin Temple (middle left), two different travel agencies (bottom left, middle), the Wushu Training Center (top right), and the management company (bottom right). Fig. 1 shows that the various images of monks practicing kungfu in front of the gate are the most frequently used. The management company elaborated the reason for selecting the photo (bottom right) as the most representative one: “The front gate is the most familiar view. Many monks practicing kungfu postures present the charm of the temple” (Ming, chat scripts). Obviously, the temple and kungfu are the two major selling points to visitors.

To increase visual appeal, several travel agencies exaggerated the kungfu element either by increasing the portion of kungfu in the image (Travel Agency 1) or adding attractive kungfu positions, such as handstanding monks (Travel Agency 2) or groups of monks practicing kungfu used by the management company. The two images on the top right, collected from brochures of the Wushu Training Center, demonstrate all sorts of attractive kungfu actions, such as a monk moving a car with his bare hands, or monks lifting a table with their mouths. The interviewees also shared that the government, the management company, and the temple were the major creators of promotional texts and pictures.

Prior to these innovations, Shaolin Temple had represented and promoted its culture for nearly 30 years through events such as the martial arts festivals and the kungfu performance teams. The first Shaolin Martial Arts Festival was held in 1988 and continues to date. The festival has attracted different types of martial arts for competition and functioned as a communication platform for martial arts related business. In addition, the provincial administration or kungfu schools organised many kungfu performance teams which frequently travelled domestically and overseas. These teams were identified as major opportunities for cultural representation and promotion by participants from government, travel agencies, and hotels. These events were closely associated with the kungfu identity selected by the local DMOs and the background of that time. An officer from the county's tourism administration, Guo, revealed:

> '*At the early stage of tourism development, we did not have any promotion awareness at all. We had no ideas on producing appealing promotion advertisements or pictures. It was hard to do so. Thus, we used the way of ‘people physically walk out’ (that is sending the teams out to promote the culture)*'.

Another informant in charge of several performance teams, Tao, described the popularity of their performances:

> 'We cannot say that we have travelled to every country, but we have reached every continent, and been warmly welcomed. The audiences were even competing with each other to get the sticks broken during the performance … … '

Shaolin kungfu performances had become a unique and long-term practice in representing the Shaolin monastery. Chang had worked in the province's tourism promotion for nearly 30 years, and he shared with us this special way of representation: '*Promoting Henan Province through kungfu has achieved great positive effects because performers could deliver attractive kungfu information to audiences within a very short time*'. Chang also portrayed this popularity through the example of a German boy who attended several European kungfu shows in a monk's practice-robe and a shaved head. In Chang's words, '*audiences were astounded by the shows*'. Performance teams normally carried promotional materials for tourism products or other businesses in the county or province. From Chang and Tao's descriptions, it is not hard to imagine the appeal of promoting Shaolin culture through kungfu performance, and its positive effects.

6.3. Conflicting identities: kungfu or Buddhism?

As described in both on-site and off-site representations, the Shaolin culture was overwhelmingly presented through its kungfu, but that presentation was simultaneously overshadowed by other topics, such as Buddhism, Chan (meditation), and herbal medicine. Tensions intensified under the unbalanced representation, which promoted the stereotypes and film images instead of reality.

Only the kungfu element stands out in current representation. One informant from a travel agency reflected the visitors' responses: '*For many visitors, the kungfu shows leave them with more direct and deep impressions than the temple itself*'. However, the kungfu influences not only visitors but also local residents. Two participants, Xin and Nana, from a local Buddhism-themed hotel reported the same response that the kungfu was much more attractive than the Chan for them. Thus, it was common that even many Chinese people did not know that Shaolin Temple is the original home of the Chan sect of Buddhism, a situation reported by another marketing manager in a travel agency, Shan.

This simplistic singular identity discouraged the representing of new identities. All four informants from travel agencies stated that there was no need for innovations in promotion. One marketing manager, Wen, elaborated as follows:

> 'For attractions like Shaolin Temple there is no need for further promotion because everyone knows about it. It already has titles, such as World Cultural Heritage, Top 10 National temples of China, the origin place of kungfu. What else does it need? The glory surrounding it is already too bright for people to open their eyes to see it'.

Another travel agency participant echoed Wen's statement regarding the famous reputation of the temple and also complained that there was no discount from the temple for agencies who guide visitors to it, a major detriment that largely discouraged the travel agencies

from constructing and exploring other potential identities of the temple.

In addition to the stereotyped kungfu identity, visitors carrying expectations aroused by the kungfu movies might experience disconnections during the actual visiting experience. This has been a specific ongoing concern of the temple. One government officer, Chang, was clearly aware of this tension:

> 'Many people visited the temple because of the film. The kungfu in the film was shot like special 'magic' effects. Thus they admired the temple before their visits. There is a saying that 'you would regret not visiting Shaolin Temple and you would regret visiting it even more'. Why? On the one hand, many scenes in the film were shot at other places to create the magnificent atmosphere of the temple, whereas the temple in fact is quite small. On the other, the kungfu in the film was portrayed unrealistically, as the monks were unbeatable by knives and could fly and walk on walls, whereas the reality is a totally different story. Thus visitors are likely to be disappointed, regretting their decision to visit'.

Thus, based on Chang's narratives, it is clear that Shaolin Temple has been about to take a free ride from various movies that directly or indirectly mentioned it or its kungfu; however, it also pays a price for doing so, such as higher risks of visitor dissatisfaction. However, Ming from the management company does not consider it as a free ride and argued that the Shaolin kungfu is a marvelous part of Chinese culture that has lasted for 1000 years. Shaolin kungfu has also provided a solid foundation for pop culture, making it as appealing as other scenes in pop culture.

6.4. Spiritual center vs. visual representation

Because of their intensive experience in representing the temple, the local DMOs interviewed were much clearer that Shaolin culture is not limited to kungfu. Three participants (Guo, Chang, and Jun) in separate interviews happened to cite the same words from the previous Chair of the Chinese Buddhism Association, Puchu Zhao, '*The primary feature of the temple for the world is the Chan rather than the Quan (kungfu)*'. Most interviewees had thorough knowledge of the reasons why that was the case. As Jun from the City Tourism Bureau explained,

> 'The Shaolin culture is a close combination of Chan-wu-yi (Zen-kungfu-medicine). The Chan Buddhism appeared first. The Chan (meditation) requires monks sitting for a long period. Thus the Bodhidharma, the first Patriarch of Chinese Chan, began to teach his followers kungfu. That's why the Shaolin kungfu does not look fantastic, but functions well in strengthening practitioners' bodies. Moreover, due to their remote location [far from doctors], the physical stress of prolonged seated meditation, and the higher chance of muscle strains while practicing kungfu, the temple has also developed strong skills in medication. Obviously, the Chan Buddhism, the kungfu, and the medicines are integral elements of Shaolin Temple'.

Jun's words clearly explained why Shaolin Temple's identity should not be restricted to the kungfu. These words were nearly the same descriptions from the temple's web page. The interviews with monks further extended the understanding of the Shaolin culture. For example, Su, a monk from a subtemple described his understanding of their kungfu as.

'Buddhist culture is very tolerant rather than stereotyped and narrow. The life itself is a form of kungfu and benefiting oneself and others is also like kungfu. Kungfu is not limited to the form of 'Heng-ha' (the sounds while practicing martial arts); we practice our kungfu in our daily life, such as by chopping wood, growing vegetables, and sweeping floors, eating, and sleeping. Our kungfu is paying close attention to our mind and body in daily activities and to lighten their weight of these tasks'. (Quotation based on interview notes without audio recording).

Another monk from the main temple, Hao, illuminated how practicing kungfu is connected to Buddhism on the basis of his own experiences. Hao went to the Shaolin Temple to learn kungfu in early 1980s as he was inspired by the film of the same name. However, after several years of practice, he learned that the purpose of practicing physical kungfu is to achieve internal peace and decided to be a monk to further his spiritual exploration. A local non-Buddhist kungfu master exchanged his thoughts about practicing kungfu for 20 years with Hao. The master was surprised that his thoughts are overlapping with and have been outlined in Buddhism. By focusing on one's own postures and body, the kungfu practitioner may shift his attention from external to internal mind, a step toward the ultimate goal—forgetting yourself ("non-self", or "substanceless" in Buddhism). Therefore, Hao considered kungfu one of the many different paths to achieve internal peace.

Su and Hao's words extended the meaning of kungfu at the spiritual level. Other destination stakeholders, such as the government, travel agencies, and hotels, all had a rich knowledge of the Shaolin culture; however, only the kungfu aspect stood out in their representations. In addition, local DMOs' informants were also aware of notable drawbacks of stereotyped representation. They further acknowledged that creating a new identity for the temple would meet potential barriers, such as the need for tourism to deliver relaxing experiences, the unexplainable nature of religion, visitors' typical emphasis on visual impressions, and tensions among multiple stakeholders.

When asked about why the efforts to represent the temple's religious identity were limited and why they continued to promote the film stereotypes that overpower human visual experience, one marketing manager, Wen, explained that, in his experience, tourists visited the temple for relaxation and recreation; thus, it was not necessary to embed serious religious topics in either on-site or off-site representation.

Informants, particularly two Buddhists—Shan and Wen, articulated the difficulties in representing religion through concrete forms. Chang, with nearly 30 years' representation experience in the provincial government, presented a basic but unanswerable question: '*What is Chan Buddhism? Chan can only be comprehended in the mind rather than delivered through linguistics. Who is able to explain it clearly?*' Another marketing officer, Guo, also thought highly about Chan and believed that Chan-related tourism activities were high level, elegant, and deep tourism experiences, suitable only for small groups, not mass tourism. The Buddhists, Shan and Wen, both highlighted the peaceful atmosphere needed to convey religion. Wen explained that

> 'if there are too many explanations of Buddhism, the desired spiritual effect is lost. Religion must be comprehended through the heart. It is not necessary to teach deep and difficult Buddhist philosophy; the visitors might feel a peaceful atmosphere through the modest and calm speech and behaviour of volunteers in the temple. '

Sharing the same view with Wen, Shan believed that Buddhism could be delivered through a peaceful environment, and he specifically critiqued the limits of the environment of the current Shaolin Temple:

> 'The temple itself is 40000 square metres, and it must accommodate 100000 visitors every day. How can you pass the meditative quality to visitors? The current temple is like a scenic spot with large areas of grassland, rather than a temple that is hiding in a forest. It is too modern, and the new roads built to deal with large-scale tourism are too wide and very smooth [which encourages haste and kills the spiritual atmosphere]. It might be more peaceful with old-type stone roads'.

However, Monk Hao contended this view and confidently believed that Buddhist followers can find their spiritual attachment to the temple despite of tourists' influences.

Direct visual impression had been accounted for in the kungfu-centric representation. Tao described it as

'For outsiders, the Shaolin kungfu information is not constrained by linguistic barriers. It is a body language, and very dynamic and visually stirring. The Shaolin kungfu represents traditional Chinese culture. Some foreigners have never seen it before'.

As an insider who had worked with the Shaolin kungfu performance teams for 30 years, Tao shared his insights on the evolution of their shows. At first, only kungfu gestures were performed in the show. In 1995, they cooperated with a stage production company in Austria, which increased the dramatic and theatrical elements with music, lighting, scenes, etc. The additional theatricality enhanced audience appeal but correspondingly decreased authenticity. Since 2000, the performance teams had added different storylines to express the complex culture behind kungfu. Tao took a recently staged story-line performance, *Chan and Kungfu Are One* (Chan Wu Bu Er, the official translation is: *A Touch of Zen*), as an example. The performance was built on a revenge story with a peaceful ending after several rounds of fights. Tao described how the kungfu and Chan Buddhism were delivered through dynamic drumming, which sometimes was fast paced to stir the heart, and sometimes was suddenly stopped to create peace for meditation. The peaceful ending was aimed at reminding people that the goal of kungfu must be promoting peace and tolerance.

However, Tao was the only interviewee who brought up how Chan elements could be built into the popular kungfu performance. Monk Hao argued that expressing Chan via performances is difficult because: a peaceful mind is achieved via practicing, rather than watching kungfu. Peaceful mind is a status that even performers cannot achieve if any motivations of showing off is involved. The rest of them portrayed how kungfu was visually stirring and not restricted by linguistics. The most trenchant comment on such visualised impressions in representation was made by a monk, Su: '*Some people learn to comprehend through their eyes, some through their ears, and some through their heart*'.

Finally, nearly half of the interviewees reported tensions among different stakeholders who managed and represented the temple, including but not limited to government agencies, hotels, travel agencies, the temple itself, and its subtemples. In 2010, the government outsourced the tourism service management of Shaolin Temple and its surrounding area to an attraction management company. Tickets for Shaolin Temple attraction cost 100 RMB, of which 30 RMB went to the temple. The company and different levels of governments shared the rest. At the county government level, the Tourism Bureau, Song Mountain Management Committee, Promotion Office, and Religious Affairs Office all worked in the managing and representing process. Guo from the Tourism Bureau mocked this multiple management: '*The more visitors to the temple, the more stakeholders get involved. Because everyone thinks the temple is a piece of fatty meat [similar to 'a cash cow' in English, refers to profitable things]*'. Even this county-government involvement was complex, a complexity replicated with all stakeholders in the representation process. Wen, from a travel agency, spoke of his withdrawal from promoting the new identity of the temple: '*Maybe the new identity development process would require a lot of investment; you cannot expect too much input from travel agencies; we have no power at all*'.

Most interviewed travel agencies only received small commissions for organizing trips to the temple; they seemed to lack motivation for developing new identities and were willing to allow the various levels of governments to dominate further efforts toward improvement. The provincial and municipal levels of governments aimed to draw more visitors to the whole province and the whole city rather than only one attraction (the temple); therefore, they also limited efforts to explore better ways of representing the temple. The county tourism bureau reported their limited power among the various stakeholders. Ming agreed that the company leads the representation of the temple, and the medicine and Chan elements were under-represented. She elaborated their active efforts, such as organizing marital art competitions, providing 3D virtual tours, and developing Shaolin images into video game backgrounds. Clearly, the managing and representing of the temple involves multiple stakeholders whose performance in representation is associated with perceived profits and power.

These four points—the relaxing nature of tourism, the unexplainable nature of religion, visitors' typical emphasis on visual impressions, and tensions among multiple stakeholders—were the main ones emerging from our interviews, but the respondents described other barriers, which were beyond the scope of this paper.

7. Discussions and conclusions

Religious sites are always associated with imagination and myths (UNTWO, 2011; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The present study was undertaken to explore certain facets of religious tourism, which is increasingly important because of the escalation in quests for spiritual fulfilment and marked growth of visitors to religious sites. It is, however, extremely difficult to understand this phenomenon (UNTWO, 2011; Olsen & Timothy, 2006) because the religious world is fundamentally different from the mundane world. In particular, this study has critically scrutinised the cultural representation of religious sites; in the case of Shaolin Temple, the cultural representation is a conglomeration of religion, religious tourism, and media tourism. Evidence was collected from participant observations and in-depth interviews with sixteen informants from local DMOs and the temple; the evidence explains how a commercialised 'kungfu identity' came to overwhelm the on-site and off-site representations of Shaolin Temple, and how related tensions arose under this stereotyped and singular identity.

Surprisingly, most interviewees were well aware of these tensions caused by this single identity and the discrepancies with the temple's religious nature—in Hall's (1997) term, at the mental representation stage; however, in the actual implementation of representation to wider audiences, they still only employed this limited kungfu image—in Hall's (1997) term, at the systems of representation. Hall's (1997) theory allows a finer distinction between understanding and actual representation. How could this inconsistency occur? This paper explores the potential barriers in building new and integral identities of the temple, including the relaxing nature of tourism, the unexplainable nature of religion, visitors' typical emphasis on visual impressions, and tensions among multiple stakeholders.

Bruner (2005a; 2005b) and Yang (2011) have stressed that the selectivity process of representation is worth carefully scrutinising because diverse elements and identities are embedded in any culture. We delved into the selection process, with twelve informants who had rich experiences of representing the temple with travel agencies, government, and hotels. Visual impressions and power relationships emerged in exploring potential reasons for the current representation of the Shaolin culture. Yang (2011) explored ethnic cultural representation and reported that ethnic groups were purposively dressed in fancy and colourful traditional garb to 'freeze' their culture in an older time. In the view of Knott et al. (2013), the religion presented in mass media is 'banal religion' or 'a secular distortion of religion' because only tangible and concrete aspects, such as history, ritual, and heritages, can be represented. The representation process in the Shaolin case echoed that in previous studies concerning the emphasis on visual impressions. Only kungfu stood out among other identities, such as Chan and medicine, because of its appeal to outsiders. The visual element made the kungfu shows an independent scenic spot, apart from the temple itself, and it also pushed the local DMOs to add theatricality into the performance through music, lighting, and scenery.

Commercial photographs 'overpower human vision by being more theatrical, better lit, sharper and more highly coloured' than the view itself (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 174). This description uses almost the same words used by our interviewees to describe their kungfu performances: 'rapid dramatic music, flashing lights', 'increased the dramatic and theatrical elements with music, lighting, scenes, and so on'. Urry and Larsen's (2011) analysis is based on photographs and further concluded that commercial photography creates 'imaginative geography',

also termed by Shields as ‘place-myths’. In the Shaolin case, local promoters used more than just compelling photos but also a more engaging and dynamic form of representation—the kungfu performances. These performances reached out to tourists' origins, in a way similar to the visual-enhancement technique used to achieve the same goal— ‘place myths’.

In addition to the 'multisensory' elements involved in the kungfu shows, this paper also supports the 'performance turn' –identified by Urry and Larsen (2011), through the complex power relationships involved. The case aligns with findings in the literature, in that power is exercised throughout the whole representation process (Buzinde et al., 2006; Said, 1979; Yang, 2011). Previous studies have debated about the most powerful players in the representation. Instead of a passive and still status, the 'performance turn' endows both the gazer and gazee with power. That is, neither tourists nor promoters are free subjects of their actions; thus, the representation is a situated outcome of performative interactions between the gazer and gazee (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2005; Buzinde et al., 2006; Maoz, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Several previous representation studies concluded that tourism representation is 'intertwined in a broad social, political and economic context' (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 205). The Shaolin case supports this conclusion. What circulates in the representation of the temple is not its true identity but power relationship. This dynamic is the unsaid part in the interviews. However, the incongruities and discrepancies between the understanding of the culture itself and the actual implementation of representation are clear evidence of the local DMOs' compromises to suit the tourists' tastes. The local DMOs are believed to be powerful because of their role in setting visiting agendas and demarcating the boundaries of visitors' gaze. However, in the Shaolin case, as in Pritchard and Morgan’s (2001) study in Wales, local DMOs were not free to represent local reality. Multiple questions would need to be addressed to determine whether the nature of this power relationship is equal: why did they understand the culture in one way but represent it differently? Why did DMOs complain about special 'magic' effects in kungfu movies but then attempt to replicate them in their own booklets, with attractive kungfu actions, such as a monk moving a car with his bare hands, or monks being unbeatable even against bricks? Clearly, DMOs are strongly motivated by the needs and wishes of tourists. If the audiences and tourists' responses led DMOs to accentuate the kungfu identity, the DMOs themselves also moved towards current stereotypical representations because they have continued for more than 30 years with few changes.

By contrast, tourists' trips are restricted by predesigned scripts. Urry and Larsen (2011) highlighted the scripts delivered by the tour guide who 'choreographs the consumption of what to see, how to see it and what not to see of the village' (p.203). In our participation observation in Shaolin Temple day tour, visitors were directed by the guide to look at the kungfu schools along the street, were given scant introductory information on Buddhism, and were allowed to linger at the actual temple for a limited time. These arrangements reinforce the kungfu identity represented in brochures and movies. Reviewing constraints from both promoters and tourists in the Shaolin case reflects the findings of previous studies that 'there are no defined 'dominators' and 'dominated', as both groups simultaneously undergo and exercise power' (Maoz, 2006, p. 225). If the analysis scope is enlarged to a more complex power network, both local promotors and visitors of the temple interact with visual power imposed by mass media and the overall market power dominating tourist activities. Most previous studies explored asymmetric power relationships in a racism/ethnic context (Buzinde et al., 2006; Yang, 2011); the current study confirmed this unbalanced power from a religious context, in which the sacred religious world is marginalized compared to the mundane one.

Under this dynamic power relationship, agents are important clues of resistance. In previous studies, agents at the destination that constructed their own identity have seldom been reported (Bruner, 2005b). Even when some Native Americans have worked against negative Western stereotypes, in Bruner's (2005b) view, these actions were still 'within the parameters of American imaginings (created by Westerns)' (p.2). In this study, we identify active agents in a religious site, where lessons might be drawn for mundane societies. Knott et al. (2013) found that the primary reason for misrepresentation is that mainstream media is based on the logic of the media rather than religion. Similarly, neither popular culture, such as films and novels, nor the tourism promotion of Shaolin Temple is based on the logic of religion; popular culture is based on the logic of the media and promotion is based on the logic of the tourist market. The cultural representation of religious sites is only rarely the target of researchers.

We were fortunate to have interviewed three monks and one nun for our study. Monk Su clarified that promotion is part of Buddhism because the religion comes from the public and must serve the public. However, monks from both main and sub-temples (Su, Jing, and Hao) believed that only the people karmically connected to Buddhism in their lives can receive the promotion of Buddhism; enforcing this spiritual connection is unnecessary. Su added that although promoting Buddhist culture is important, consistent discourse to promote Shaolin Temple is more important. Hao echoed Su's view. He clearly illustrated the inconsistent representation between pop culture and Buddhism; however, he thought that forcing the changes is unnecessary. Other DMOs also shaped their representations of the temple based on tourists' tastes; however, the temple itself maintained its spiritual beliefs in its representation, regardless of pressure from superior social groups. One of the subtemples even closed its doors to visitors when it was not hosting public Buddhist events. Religious sites are distant from the mundane worlds; their rigorous standards on practicing promotion are insightful lessons for many mundane tourist sites that surrender their representation rights to visitors.

The constructivist epistemological lens enables us to shift our research focus from the 'discovery' of 'true identity' of Shaolin Temple to how the destination reads, experiences, organises, and represents the culture of Shaolin. The culture of Shaolin is continually being constructed and represented. Religion has been perpetuated by people's imagination and fondness for myths. People, including the destination stakeholders, formulate their own meanings about the religious site. And, we, as researchers, are making our own meanings about the stories we hear during interviews. The current study stands out for its efforts to engage the monks' perspective. However, the words from their religious world might not be understood and interpreted accurately by us because we are part of irreligious, mundane society. Although we tried to simplify our interview questions into simple sentences, the monks still answered them with Buddhist knowledge and words. We could only present their words literally; however, we are not sure whether we understood their meanings accurately. The stereotyped kungfu identity in tourism representation identified by this study might sound problematic from a mundane perspective, but it might not bother some Buddhists or Buddhist monks considerably. Ryan and Gu (2010) and Wong et al. (2013) also shed light on Buddhists' tolerant perception of tourism activities.

This paper has extended understanding of how the Shaolin Temple has been represented, as called by a few studies explored on different aspects of the case by Su (2016) and Cynarski and Swider (2017), who focused on other facets of its nature, primarily related to marital arts. The practical implications connect back to the opening of this paper—the sharp increase in religious markets and pursuit of spiritual meaning. To meet this growing need, local DMOs should closely work with religious or Buddhist sites to preserve some sense of the spiritual in their representation—for instance, by avoiding stereotypes drawn from the movies. The incongruities and discrepancies reported in this paper might be problems not only for Shaolin Temple, but also for numerous other religious tourism destinations. We have found that most promoters do have an accurate understanding of Shaolin culture, but fail to incorporate members of the temple or sub-temples when developing representation strategies. Doing so should be prioritized in promoters'

initial activities.

8. Statement of contribution

The authors had been actively involved and contributed to group discussions from designing this study, conducting fieldwork, and to the writing of the final manuscripts. Xiaotao Yang: conducting fieldwork, analyzing the data, drafting an early version of the manuscript and the responses to reviewers' comments. Kam Hung: initiating and conceptualizing research idea, writing grant proposal and securing research funding, conducting field work, analyzing the data, revising the manuscript. Wei-Jue Huang: analyzing the data, guiding the theoretical directions, revising the manuscript and the responses to reviewers' comments. Yung-Ping Tseng: the corresponding author, revising responses to reviewers' comments, proofreading, whole correspondence during the paper submission, handling the revisions and re-submission of revised manuscripts up to the completion of the publication.

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