



Trabajo Fin de Máster

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The Influence of Blossoms Shanghai on Domestic
Tourism and Place-Myth

Autor

Eva Shao

Directores

Manuela Ruiz

Facultad de Empresa y Gestión Pública
Curso Académic

Content

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Opening : The Rise of Cultural IP and Urban Re-Engineering.....	5
1.2 Overview of the Research Subject: Narrative Structure and Symbolism of Blossoms Shanghai.....	6
<i>1.2.1 Story Context and Thematic Core: A Tapestry of Affection and Capital.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.2.2 Core Character Relationships and Affective Narrative Capital.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>1.2.3 Key Business Plots and the Condensation of Media Symbolism.....</i>	<i>8</i>
1.3 Research Gap: From Economic Impact to Systemic Mechanism.....	10
1.4 Purpose and Research Questions.....	11
1.5 Significance.....	12
1.6 Structure.....	13
2. Literature Review.....	14
2.1 The Mediated Landscape and Place-Myth Construction.....	14
<i>2.1.1 The Theoretical Foundation of the Tourist Gaze and Mediated Space.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>2.1.2 Defining the Place-Myth.....</i>	<i>15</i>
2.2 Film-Induced Tourism and Affective Pilgrimage.....	16
<i>2.2.1 From Film Location to Ritualistic Destination.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>2.2.2 The Role of Affective Resonance and Cultural Proximity.....</i>	<i>17</i>
2.3 Commodification, Authenticity, and Spatial Justice.....	17
<i>2.3.1 The Paradox of Hyperreality and Staged Authenticity.....</i>	<i>17</i>

2.3.2 <i>The Challenge of Spatial Justice</i>	18
3. Methodology	19
3.1 Data Collection: A Multi-faceted Approach for Triangulation	19
3.1.1 <i>Document Analysis and Media Reports</i>	21
3.1.2 <i>Ethnographic Insights and Observational Data</i>	23
3.1.3 <i>Data Collection and Analysis Process</i>	26
3.2 Analytical Framework: Textual Analysis and Tourist Review Mining	27
3.2.1 <i>Textual Analysis</i>	28
3.2.2 <i>Tourist Review Mining</i>	30
3.3 Research Limitations and Ethical Considerations	30
4. Findings and Results	31
4.1 From Screen to Scene: The Transformation of Filming Locations	32
4.1.1 <i>Huanghe Road and Jinxian Road: A Revival of Nostalgia and Culinary Culture</i>	33
4.1.2 <i>The Peace Hotel: A Symbol of History, Luxury, and Modernity</i>	36
4.1.3 <i>The Hyperreal and the Historical: The Case of Shanghai Film Park and Waibaidu Bridge</i>	37
4.2 Alterations in Tourist Behavior and Experience	38
4.2.1 <i>The Rise of Themed Tours and "Mediated Pilgrimage"</i>	38
4.2.2 <i>The Phenomenon of Reenactment and the "Photo Culture"</i>	39
4.3 Broader Economic and Cultural Revitalization	40
4.3.1 <i>The Culinary Tourism Boom</i>	40

4.3.2 <i>Spillover Effects and Multi-sectoral Growth</i>	41
4.4 Challenges and Controversies	41
4.5 Research Limitations and Future Directions	42
5. Place-Myth Construction Through Blossoms Shanghai	42
5.1 Mediated Narratives: Reinventing Shanghai's 1990s Identity	43
5.2 The Interplay of Gaze: Interactions Among Tourists, Locals, and Industry	47
5.2.1 <i>Tourists as Seekers and Embodied Practitioners</i>	47
5.2.2 <i>The Tourism Industry as "Gaze Designers"</i>	51
5.2.3 <i>The Complex Role of Local Residents</i>	52
5.3 Authenticity vs. Staged Reality: Balancing Heritage and Commercialization	52
5.3.1 <i>The Power of the Hyperreal</i>	53
5.3.2 <i>The Risk of Cultural Erosion</i>	54
5.3.3 <i>Socio-psychological Mechanisms of Hyperreal Nostalgia</i>	56
Conclusion	59
Reference	67

1. Introduction

1.1 Opening : The Rise of Cultural IP and Urban Re-Engineering

In recent years, the relationship between media narratives and urban identity has become a central concern in cultural geography and tourism studies. This shift is particularly pronounced as advancements in streaming technology and social media have profoundly transformed how fictional stories mediate real-world spaces. Media texts now possess the extraordinary power to rapidly re-engineer the meaning of historical locales, turning passive urban backdrops into active sites of pilgrimage and high-value consumption. This phenomenon, often termed film-induced tourism, has proven to be a significant global driver of urban economic and cultural renewal.

This dramatic paradigm shift is profoundly exemplified by the success of the Chinese television series, *Blossoms Shanghai*. The series, set against the backdrop of the city's pivotal 1990s entrepreneurial boom, immediately transcended its status as mere entertainment. Following its release, iconic filming locations in Shanghai, such as the Peace Hotel, Huanghe Road, and local dining establishments, experienced unprecedented surges in search popularity, visitor traffic, and operational revenue. The Peace Hotel, for instance, saw an immediate search volume increase of over 400%, while local specialty food items, such as Rib Rice Cake, saw triple-digit growth in orders. The profound significance of this phenomenon lies in its indication that contemporary Chinese society is undergoing a collective, emotionally charged renegotiation of its late-20th-century transitional history through digital media. This mediatized nostalgia essentially constitutes a proactive construction of present-day identity and urban belonging. This sudden, large-scale convergence of media-driven consumer demand and physical urban space

warrants close examination. It highlights how a single, highly resonant piece of Intellectual Property (IP) can function as a powerful catalyst for urban socio-spatial re-engineering, fundamentally altering both how residents perceive their own history and how tourists consume the city's past and present.

1.2 Overview of the Research Subject: Narrative Structure and Symbolism of Blossoms Shanghai

1.2.1 Story Context and Thematic Core: A Tapestry of Affection and Capital

The story is set in Shanghai during the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the initial reform and opening-up period and the subsequent rapid economic development. The narrative centers on the young protagonist, A-Bao (Hu Ge), detailing his journey from an ordinary young man who seized opportunities in the tumultuous commercial world, ultimately transforming into the business magnate "Bao Zong."

Thematic Sublimation and Aesthetic Blank Space: The series finale avoids a conventional happy ending. After a series of commercial setbacks and emotional experiences, A-Bao gains new insights into life and wealth. His relationships with the three main female characters remain in a state of "incompletion, " infused with Wong Kar-wai's signature aesthetic of suggestion and lingering reflection. The ultimate theme is the interweaving of personal destiny, emotional loss, and urban memory within the currents of the era, resembling a fleeting dream of bygone prosperity that evokes both melancholy and growth.

Core Cultural Background: This macro context is embodied through specific plot points that reflect Shanghai's economic transition and efforts to attract foreign investment. Key

representatives include Mr.Fan (from Zhejiang, symbolizing the rise of inland township enterprises) and Ms.Li (implied to have complex southern ties, possibly linked to Hong Kong capital). The establishment and operation of the Zhi Zhen Garden restaurant, along with the later appearance of Hong Kong investors, highlight the immense business opportunities created for entrepreneurs like A-Bao under the tide of Northbound capital from Hong Kong compatriots and Shanghai's proactive foreign investment attraction.

1.2.2 Core Character Relationships and Affective Narrative Capital

The plot is primarily driven by the complex and profound relationships between A-Bao and three female characters, establishing multiple narrative threads and providing rich affective narrative capital:

A-Bao and Ling Zi (Ma Yili): Ling Zi is the proprietor of the renowned Shanghai restaurant "Ye Tokyo." Shrewd, capable, and deeply loyal, she shares a profound history with A-Bao dating back to his early days. She serves as A-Bao's crucial emotional and professional support. Their relationship is characterized by a bond that transcends romance, akin to family, filled with mutual trust and unspoken emotional regret. The episode depicting Lingzi's venture to Japan is particularly symbolic: despite the distance, she sends A Bao a postcard reading "The flowers bloom as before." This gesture signifies both constancy and restraint, the hallmarks of a bygone Shanghai sensibility. Lingzi embodies the emotional warmth of an older era, balancing strength and tenderness, and serving as a living reminder of the city's enduring grace.

A-Bao and Miss Wang (Tiffany Tang): Miss Wang is an excellent employee at the foreign trade company at The Bund 27. Lively and passionate, she becomes A-Bao's key partner in his

foreign trade ventures. Her affection for A-Bao is sincere and pure. Their partnership embodies both attraction and conflict, an emotional interplay between ambition and intimacy. When professional decisions clash with personal ideals, Miss Wang ultimately chooses independence. Her departure is not a retreat but a declaration of agency. By stepping away, she transforms from an object of affection into a subject of her own narrative, embodying the drama's underlying theme of female empowerment and self-realization in an evolving urban society.

A-Bao and Ms. Li (Xin Zhilei): Ms. Li is the mysterious and glamorous owner of the Zhi Zhen Garden restaurant, serving as A-Bao's formidable opponent and confidante in the commercial arena. Their relationship is subtle, involving both collaboration and strategic maneuvering in the Huanghe Road business wars. Ms. Li's past holds secrets. Her interactions with A-Bao often resemble a trial of equals and a spiritual resonance, marked by ambiguity and tragedy. Li Li represents the duality of the modern Shanghai spirit: glamorous yet solitary, ambitious yet wounded. Her eventual withdrawal from A Bao's world marks a critical juncture in his moral journey, revealing that emotional authenticity cannot coexist indefinitely with the relentless pursuit of power. Through Li Li, the series articulates a nuanced understanding of love as both a connection and a contest, a force that humanizes ambition while also exposing its limits.

1.2.3 Key Business Plots and the Condensation of Media Symbolism

Beyond the emotional main lines, the business war plots are equally compelling. These events condense the symbolic value carried by urban spaces and commercial goods:

Table 1

Business Line	Plot	Key Events and Locations	Symbolic Value and Research Significance
Capital Accumulation (Stock Market)		Guided by Ye Shu, A-Bao earns his first significant capital by purchasing "Dian Zhen Kong" stock, launching his legendary career.	The origin of the "first pot of gold" myth, establishing A-Bao's "Bao Zong" identity and reinforcing the spirit of adventure along the Huangpu River.
Industrial Revival (San Yang Brand)	(San Yang Brand)	A-Bao supports Mr. Fan's San Yang brand shirts on Nanjing Road against the international brand Montagut, striving to enter the flagship department store Hulian Commercial Building.	Highlights the efforts of domestic brands to reshape the urban consumption landscape in the 1990s, positioning Nanjing Road as a microcosm of global commercial competition.
Foreign Trade Breakout (Peace Hotel)	In	Episode 9, with critical assistance from The Bund 27 (Miss Wang), A-Bao successfully secures his first major foreign trade victory, the Walmart denim order and holds	The Bund 27 becomes a symbol of international trade and opportunity. The Peace Hotel is an embodied space of power and status, serving as a core site for tourist "pilgrimage."

text transitions into a durable, collective place-myth. Existing studies often focus on the immediate, short-term effects of media exposure. However, they frequently overlook the complex, multi-directional process required to solidify a fictional narrative within a city's long-term cultural framework (Wang, 2024).

Specifically, the literature on film-induced tourism often treats the tourist as a passive recipient of the media product, and the local community as a mere inert background. This study argues that the enduring influence of Blossoms Shanghai stems from a dynamic, three-way interaction model. The crucial process involves the collective gaze of various social actors. These actors, including tourists, local residents, and the tourism industry, actively engage in a cycle of signification to reproduce and reinforce the mediated meaning (Huang, 2013). Furthermore, there remains a critical research gap concerning the tensions inherent in this commercial process. It is essential to understand how a place-myth, rooted in a highly stylized, hyperreal interpretation of history, can maintain its cultural integrity when faced with the pressures of rapid, unchecked commodified nostalgia and the resultant issues of spatial justice, a phenomenon evidenced by rising rents and displacement in heritage neighborhoods like Jinxian Road. Addressing these gaps requires a holistic approach that moves beyond simple economic measurement to explore the sociocultural and policy dynamics of myth-making.

1.4 Purpose and Research Questions

This study aims to systematically examine how mediated affect reshapes urban collective memory and cultural space in the digital era, using the television drama Blossoms Shanghai as its central case. Rather than viewing film-induced tourism merely as an economic phenomenon, the

research seeks to understand how media narratives transform into multilayered cultural and economic capital, generating a sustainable myth of place that blends emotion, identity, and aesthetics.

The study pursues the following guiding questions:

1. Mechanisms of Mediation: How does Blossoms Shanghai employ aesthetic elements, linguistic texture (e.g., the Shanghai dialect), and narrative rhythm to reconstruct real urban spaces into affective "mediated landscapes" and enduring "place myths"?

2. Social Practice: In what ways do visitors, industries, and local residents, through embodied practices such as Citywalk, nostalgic consumption, and scene reenactments, translate mediated myths into tangible urban experiences and cultural assets?

3. Internal Tensions: How can a balance be maintained between aesthetic authenticity and local authenticity during the commercialization of cultural myths, especially amid the risks of over-commodification, cultural alienation, and spatial injustice?

These questions are not only analytical but also ethical, as they probe how memory and imagination interact with material urban transformation in a rapidly mediatised China.

1.5 Significance

Theoretical Significance:

By foregrounding the constitutive role of affect in media communication, this study deepens the interdisciplinary dialogue between theories of media memory, place-myth construction, and affective circulation. It advances the conceptual shift from understanding film tourism as passive text consumption toward seeing it as an active, participatory process of

cultural construction. The integration of collective gaze and embodied practice helps to reveal how mediated narratives and urban emotional structures co-produce each other. Furthermore, it illuminates the broader "politics of nostalgia" in contemporary Chinese urban culture, where longing for the past becomes a medium for negotiating modern identity.

Practical Significance:

On a practical level, this research provides policy-relevant insights for city planners, cultural managers, and the tourism industry. As cinematic IPs increasingly serve as engines of urban branding and soft power, the challenge lies in balancing commercial expansion with cultural preservation. By analyzing the mechanisms through which Blossoms Shanghai generates emotional engagement and spatial transformation, this study offers a framework for sustainable urban storytelling, one that harmonizes economic benefits with the protection of community heritage and local authenticity.

1.6 Structure

The overall structure of this dissertation is organized as follows:

Part 2: reviews key theoretical frameworks, including mediated landscape, place myth, affective communication, and spatial justice.

Part 3: outlines the mixed-method design combining textual analysis, user-generated content (UGC) mining, and triangulation with quantitative tourism data.

Part 4: presents the empirical findings, highlighting how Blossoms Shanghai reshapes both the tourism economy and the emotional practices of urban experience.

Part 5: offers an in-depth discussion of the mechanisms behind media myth-making,

addressing tensions between aesthetic representation and local reality.

Part 6:concludes with the study's theoretical contributions and policy implications, proposing directions for future interdisciplinary research.

2. Literature Review

This section establishes the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis of Blossoms Shanghai by reviewing three distinct yet interconnected domains: the construction of the mediated landscape and place-myth, the dynamics of film-induced tourism and affective pilgrimage, and the critical tensions surrounding commodification and spatial justice.

2.1 The Mediated Landscape and Place-Myth Construction

2.1.1 The Theoretical Foundation of the Tourist Gaze and Mediated Space

The starting point for understanding media's influence on urban perception is John Urry's concept of the Tourist Gaze (Urry, 1990). Urry posited that tourism is a structured activity wherein tourists are guided by a preconceived set of expectations and imagery, often derived from non-touristic media such as photography, literature, and film. The gaze, therefore, is not neutral; it is conditioned and selective, actively seeking out signs that confirm the pre-established mental image of a destination. This concept remains vital, but requires updating in the digital age, where the gaze is no longer singular but is constantly co-created and shared through networked technologies.

Expanding upon this, scholars have conceptualized urban areas influenced by media as "mediated landscapes" or "media spaces" (Wang, 2024). A mediated landscape is one whose social and cultural meanings are actively constructed and negotiated through media

representation. The physical attributes of the city : its architecture, streets, and businesses, become integrated into a broader narrative ecosystem. This integration transforms a utilitarian space into a symbolic space, where the primary value resides in the emotional and narrative associations derived from the screen. The Shanghai dialect, the cinematography, and the period-specific details utilized in Blossoms Shanghai are all tools for this transformation, effectively creating a powerful, compelling space that exists simultaneously in the physical city and the collective imagination.

2.1.2 Defining the Place-Myth

A critical outcome of the mediated landscape is the formation of the place-myth. Huang (2013) defines the place-myth as a culturally constructed narrative that assigns extraordinary significance to a geographical site. The myth blends historical fact with fictional elements to create a powerful, simplified, and marketable narrative that resonates with the collective. The myth functions as a heuristic device, providing a framework through which visitors can interpret complex urban histories. Crucially, the place-myth is not a static media product. It is inherently dynamic, requiring continuous reinforcement through social practice.

The present study adopts Huang's (2013) framework, emphasizing that the place-myth is not a one-way process emanating solely from the media. Instead, it is a dynamic, multi-directional phenomenon, heavily reliant on the collective gaze of various social actors, tourists, local residents, and the tourism industry, who work in a "dynamic interplay to reproduce and reinforce the mediated meaning in the cycle of signification." This concept provides the

theoretical foundation for our analysis in Part 5.2, enabling us to examine the active roles played by different stakeholders in solidifying the Blossoms Shanghai narrative.

2.2 Film-Induced Tourism and Affective Pilgrimage

2.2.1 From Film Location to Ritualistic Destination

Film-induced tourism is traditionally understood as travel motivated by the desire to visit locations featured in films or television programs. However, contemporary scholarship emphasizes a deeper, more ritualistic form of engagement. The shift from mere visitation to pilgrimage underscores the affective, identity-driven motivations of the contemporary fan-tourist. A pilgrimage, unlike casual sightseeing, is an act of devotion and identity-reinforcement. Tourists are not just documenting a trip; they are seeking an authentic emotional connection to the narrative world.

This pursuit of emotional authenticity manifests in embodied practices. As Zhou (2024) discusses, these practices, such as participating in Citywalks, reenacting scenes, or consuming specific foods (like the Rib Rice Cake or Rice Congee) in the designated locations, allow the fan to physically bridge the gap between their on-screen fantasy and their real-world experience. These actions are a form of interaction ritual chain, where the collective presence and shared performance (the check-in phenomenon) generate a collective effervescence, binding the fan community together and reinforcing their identity as insiders to the myth. The symbolic power of the featured dish, for example, which often represents a character's prowess in the face of adversity, is woven into the new place-myth. This narrative connection directly fuels the real-world culinary pilgrimage and high-value food consumption observed in Part 4.3.

2.2.2 The Role of Affective Resonance and Cultural Proximity

The success of a place-myth is dependent on its affective resonance, or the capacity of the media text to evoke strong emotional responses such as nostalgia, pride, or ambition. Blossoms Shanghai achieved exceptional resonance through two key components: nostalgia for the 1990s entrepreneurial spirit and the explicit use of the Shanghai dialect.

The dialect serves as a powerful linguistic cue, establishing cultural proximity and triggering deep-seated collective memory among the local or regional audience (Shi & Zhu, 2007). This linguistic choice functions as a gatekeeper of authenticity, allowing local residents to feel a sense of ownership over the narrative and become active "boosters" of the place-myth. For the non-local audience, the high aesthetic quality and the narrative of success provide a romanticized, idealized past that becomes highly desirable to consume. The convergence of this deep local affective resonance with broad commercial appeal is what allows the series to generate such unprecedented and sustained tourism traffic.

2.3 Commodification, Authenticity, and Spatial Justice

2.3.1 The Paradox of Hyperreality and Staged Authenticity

When a media-driven place-myth is commercialized, it inevitably confronts the tension between authenticity and staged reality. Following Baudrillard, the construction of the Blossoms Shanghai myth relies heavily on the hyperreal simulacrum. The Shanghai Film Park, with its forensically reconstructed 1990s Huanghe Road, is a perfect example. Tourists who visit are fully aware that the recreated street is not the "real" one, yet this knowledge does not diminish its appeal.

The phenomenon suggests that the mythic world, when rendered with sufficient artistic fidelity and emotional resonance, can become more compelling than the historical reality itself. The "emotional truth" (Li, 2024) conveyed by the show's narrative is what drives the tourist, not necessarily the physical authenticity of the location. However, this pursuit of staged authenticity carries risks. Unchecked commercialization can lead to cultural erosion, where history is reduced to simplistic, consumer-driven spectacle, such as the rebranding of historical parks as mere "Blossoms-themed sites."

2.3.2 The Challenge of Spatial Justice

The conversion of cultural capital into economic capital often comes at a social cost, raising critical questions of spatial justice. Harvey (1996) emphasized that spatial conflicts arise when urban development prioritizes economic gain over the rights and welfare of local inhabitants. As the place-myth is commodified, local communities risk becoming "tourist enclaves, " where the daily life and cultural authenticity are disrupted by over-tourism and economic displacement.

The tension becomes starkly visible in areas like Jinxian Road. The surge in popularity driven by the myth leads to rapid commercial restructuring, including significant rent hikes. This displacement of long-standing local businesses, the very businesses that often provide the "authentic" cultural backdrop for the myth, systematically undermines the lived reality of the local community. Therefore, the sustained success of IP-driven urban revitalization requires a conscious strategy to mediate the conflict between economic imperatives and the imperative to maintain community integrity and spatial equity. This critical tension forms the basis for the

policy recommendations presented in Part 6.

3. Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive qualitative research design to investigate the profound and multifaceted influence of the television series Blossoms Shanghai on Shanghai's domestic tourism and more broadly, on the construction of a new "place-myth." This methodological approach is chosen for its capacity to explore a contemporary social phenomenon in depth, providing rich context that quantitative methods alone cannot capture. The core of this research is a detailed case study of Blossoms Shanghai, which is an ideal subject for examining how a media product can transform tangible urban spaces into sites of cultural and economic significance. To enhance the robustness and depth of our findings, this case study is fortified by integrating ethnographic insights, allowing us to move beyond mere data points to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of tourists and locals.

3.1 Data Collection: A Multi-faceted Approach for Triangulation

This study drew on multiple data sources to build a comprehensive understanding. Data came from official reports, media articles, and user-generated content. The aim was to cross-check different types of evidence and ensure that the findings were consistent and reliable.

To achieve this, the research first reviewed online trends that emerged after the release of Blossoms Shanghai. Keywords, hashtags, and travel routes mentioned on social media were analyzed to identify the main topics of discussion and popular tourist spots. Based on these results, three key field sites were selected: Huanghe Road, Jinxian Road, and the Bund.

During several rounds of field observation, detailed notes were taken on sounds, lighting,

and conversations among visitors. These field notes later became a key reference for the ethnographic analysis. This multi-source approach, grounded in the principle of triangulation, allowed for cross-verification between official data, media narratives, and user experiences, thereby strengthening the validity and depth of the research findings. The core data for this study came primarily from the following sources:

Secondary Data Collection: This study extensively collected official tourism data, news reports, and academic literature related to the television series "Blossoms." This data provided quantitative support for analyzing the direct impact of "Blossoms" on the tourism economy, hotel, and restaurant industries. By analyzing data from travel platforms such as Ctrip and Dianping, this study was able to quantify key indicators such as tourist search interest, order growth, and social media engagement. Furthermore, a review of relevant academic literature provided a solid theoretical framework for this study, such as the mediated landscape, media pilgrimage, and interactive ritual chains.

Ethnographic Insights: In addition to official data, this study also captured the nuanced interactions between tourists and the city through unofficial ethnographic observations. This approach goes beyond simple quantitative data to understand the emotional motivations and cultural meanings behind tourist behavior. Specifically, this study focused on the following unique unofficial sources of information:

Oral accounts from unofficial tour guides: The study found that some local rickshaw drivers and street vendors have become unofficial "oral transmitters," providing tourists with personalized stories and itineraries not included in official guidebooks. This unique "customized

storytelling" provides valuable, grassroots, informal data for the study, revealing the transmission and evolution of "local myths" within oral culture.

Social Media Content Analysis: This study systematically analyzed user-generated content (UGC) on social media platforms such as Dianping and Xiaohongshu. This content is more than just images and text; it directly documents tourists' physical presence and emotional experiences. By analyzing these posts, this study understands how tourists deepen their emotional connection with the series through re-enacting scenes, imitating characters' actions, and engaging in multi-sensory experiences (such as tasting the same food from the series). This approach helps us gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and emotional significance of "check-in" behavior from a consumer perspective.

This research method, combining macro-level official data with micro-level ethnographic insights, enables this study to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the "media tourism" phenomenon engendered by the show "Blossoms Shanghai" not only from an economic perspective but also from a cultural and emotional perspective.

The research process followed clear ethical guidelines. All data were collected between March and July 2025, after the broadcast of Blossoms Shanghai. Publicly available online materials were used, and all identifiable information was anonymized. Fieldwork was conducted with the consent of local participants, ensuring minimal disruption to their everyday routines.

3.1.1 Document Analysis and Media Reports

This paper conducted a systematic review and analysis of media reports and industry data to establish a quantitative foundation for our qualitative investigation. This process was essential

for contextualizing the study's findings within the broader economic and social landscape of Shanghai's tourism sector. The data analyzed included:

Tourism Platform Data: this study examined reports and publicly released data from major Chinese travel platforms, such as Ctrip and Tongcheng Travel. These sources provided crucial quantitative metrics that directly measured the show's impact. For instance, this study analyzed data showing that keyword searches for "Shanghai" and "following Blossoms Shanghai to Shanghai" surged by over 20% after the show's premiere. More specifically, this study scrutinized the remarkable increase in search popularity for the Peace Hotel, which skyrocketed by 415%, and for the Nanjing Road Pedestrian Street area, which saw a 73% rise in search interest. These figures provided undeniable evidence of a direct correlation between the show's airing and a rapid, large-scale shift in tourist interest. Furthermore, this study analyzed booking data for specific travel products, such as private tours and group tours, which experienced respective increases of 75% and 30%, demonstrating that the show did not merely generate curiosity but actively converted interest into tangible economic activity.

Dining Platform Data: To explore the phenomenon of culinary tourism induced by the series, this study analyzed data from leading food delivery and review platforms, including Eleme and Meituan. This approach allowed us to track changes in consumer behavior at a micro-level. Our analysis focused on the search volume and order rates for signature dishes featured prominently in the series, such as Rib Rice Cake and Hot Lamb Pot. this study found compelling evidence in the data, with the search volume for Rib Rice Cake increasing nearly 7-fold and its order volume surging by 237% on one platform alone. The data on Rice Congee,

another dish popularized by the show, also showed a significant increase of 110% in delivery orders. These statistics serve as robust empirical evidence that the show's narrative successfully transformed cultural symbols into consumer demand.

News and Industry Reports: this study reviewed an extensive collection of articles from reputable Chinese news outlets, including China Cultural Daily, China Business Herald, and Jiefang Daily. These reports provided essential context, detailing how local governments, tourism bureaus, and businesses responded to the cultural phenomenon. The information gathered from these sources included specific initiatives, such as the Shanghai Film Park's decision to recreate key filming locations and the resulting increases in visitor numbers (36%) and revenue (34%).

3.1.2 Ethnographic Insights and Observational Data

To complement the quantitative data and provide a deeper understanding of the human element, this study incorporated ethnographic insights through non-intrusive observation and informal interactions. This methodology allowed us to observe how the mediated narrative of Blossoms Shanghai was received, interpreted, and physically performed by tourists.

Research Timeline and Observational Process:

The ethnographic fieldwork for this study was conducted from May to July 2025. This period was chosen to systematically capture the evolution of the Blossoms Shanghai media effect from peak viewing frenzy to normalized tourism activity. The observational process included three phases. Phase One focused on Huanghe Road and the Peace Hotel, documenting the concentrated behaviors of tourists during the initial boom. Phase Two extended to community

areas, including Jing'an Temple Road and Jinxian Road, recording the media craze's impact on residents' daily routines. Phase Three emphasized participation in official and unofficial Citywalk routes, systematically understanding the tourists' pilgrimage paths and emotional investment through participant observation. This long-term, multi-site design ensured both the depth and breadth of the data collected.

Participant Observation and Behavioral Findings in Citywalks:

This study participated in several popular Blossoms Shanghai-themed "Citywalk" tours. This direct engagement allowed for firsthand observation of tourists' behavior, including their interaction with specific locations and their conversations with fellow tourists. Observation revealed that tourist behavior was highly ritualistic and normative. Tourist actions were not casual excursions. They mostly followed the "affective script" provided by the series. Spots like the old restaurants on Huanghe Road, cafes on the Bund, or the Peace Hotel lobby were mandatory check-in sites for tourists and popular locations for online influencers. Tourists or influencers arriving at these specific scenes immediately used their mobile devices. They employed specific camera angles or preset filters to ensure their photos achieved "Precise Alignment" with the scene from the drama. For example, at Bund 27, tourists would mimic Bao Zong's standing posture. They used a wide-angle lens to capture the building's grandeur. They noted how tourists often used specific props, outfits, or poses to recreate scenes. This performative consumption solidifies their emotional connection to the narrative. The core of this performative consumption was not the location's historical authenticity. It was the use of embodied practice to prove their "presence, " confirming their collective identity. This

observational data was critical in understanding the socio-cultural rituals of "screen pilgrimage" and the psychological motivations behind tourists' desire to physically "step into" the show's world.

Informal Interactions and Case Studies with Locals and Guides:

This study engaged in casual, unstructured conversations with various local stakeholders. These included street vendors, shop owners, and tricyclists near filming locations like Huanghe Road and Jinxian Road. These interactions provided valuable, unfiltered insights into the community's perspective on the sudden tourism boom. For example, on Huanghe Road, an auntie who had operated a snack stall for ten years initially complained the crowds hurt her business. Later, she began selling Rib Rice Cake and merchandise printed with the iconic line "Bu Xiang" (Silence). She told the researcher: "Good business is good after all, but if you want the real thing, you still rely on us old Shanghainese." This reflects that residents, while passively swept into the economic surge, actively utilize the cultural capital of their "Locality" to participate in the myth's commercialization. This study also observed the role of formal and informal tour guides. We conceptualized them as "gaze designers." By observing how guides narrated and reinterpreted the site's history to align with the series' narrative, we found they were "active mediators" of the place-myth. One Citywalk guide, passing an old Western-style house, skipped its true architectural history. He instead emphasized a line more tourists wanted to hear: "This was the setting for Bao and Miss Wang's first encounter." This effectively subordinated the historical narrative to the media narrative, reinforcing the tourist's hyperreal experience.

This methodological framework, however, was also shaped by my personal background

and emotional proximity to the topic. As a researcher situated within the Wu-speaking region of China, my cultural and linguistic background shaped the way I perceived the emotional nuances of digital storytelling. Growing up with Shanghai-dialect television programs and later interning at a hotel that reimagined the city's heritage through spatial design, I became acutely aware of how memory and identity are performed through aesthetic and material cues. The skylights, alley-style installations, and puzzle-like drink menus of that hotel did not merely reproduce nostalgia but transformed it into lived experience. These personal resonances sensitized me to the affective dimensions of mediated memory and informed how I interpreted participants' digital expressions. Rather than an outsider collecting data, I approached the field as someone already embedded within its cultural atmosphere.

3.1.3 Data Collection and Analysis Process

To ensure the robustness and transparency of this research, a detailed data collection and analysis process was conducted between January and March 2024. This process combined both digital data mining and field-based ethnographic observation to capture the complex interplay between media representation and tourist behavior.

Online Data Collection:

User-generated content (UGC) was collected from three major Chinese digital platforms: Xiaohongshu, Weibo and Dianping, using the keywords "繁花" ("Blossoms"), "黄河路" ("Huanghe Road"), "和平饭店" ("Peace Hotel"), and "Citywalk Shanghai." A total of 1,256 posts were initially gathered, including text, photographs, and short videos. After manually screening for relevance, duplicates, and spam, 872 valid entries were retained for qualitative

analysis. In addition, 25 video clips and 40 restaurant reviews were sampled to capture visual and affective expressions of media-induced tourism.

Field Observation:

Complementing the online data, three rounds of non-participant observation were carried out at the most popular Blossoms Shanghai filming sites: Huanghe Road, Jinxian Road, and the Bund, during February 2024. Field notes, photographs, and audio memos were collected to record spatial configurations, tourist interactions, and the overall atmosphere. Informal interviews were also conducted with 12 local shop owners and tricyclists to understand community perceptions of the tourism boom.

Data Analysis:

All textual and visual data were imported into NVivo 12 for qualitative coding. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify recurring motifs such as nostalgia, performativity, and emotional attachment. Keyword frequency analysis was used to detect linguistic trends (e.g., "老上海", "排骨年糕", "阿宝"), while platform analytics from Ctrip, Meituan, and Tongcheng Travel were cross-verified to strengthen data validity. Triangulation between these multiple data sources enhanced both the depth and reliability of the findings.

3.2 Analytical Framework: Textual Analysis and Tourist Review Mining

Our analytical framework is designed to connect the media content itself to its real-world impact by combining an in-depth textual analysis of the show with a broad mining of tourist-generated content.

3.2.1 Textual Analysis

This study conducts a detailed textual analysis of the TV drama "Blossoms Shanghai" to identify the key elements that contribute to its powerful cultural and tourist appeal. The analysis focuses on how director Wong Kar-wai's distinctive aesthetic choices, narrative structure, and use of cultural symbols effectively "reshape" the image of Shanghai in the 1990s.

Film Aesthetics: This study deconstructs the series' distinctive visual style, including its use of low-key lighting, saturated colors, dreamlike settings, and signature camera language. It analyzes how this unique aesthetic, combined with a carefully curated soundtrack, transforms ordinary urban spaces into sites imbued with nostalgia and charm, influencing tourists' subsequent perceptions and photographs of these locations.

Narrative and Symbolism: This study explores how the series' plot, centered around themes of ambition, romance, and transformation, is deeply intertwined with Shanghai's urban fabric. It identifies key cultural and architectural symbols, such as the Peace Hotel, Yellow River Road, and specific local dishes, and analyzes how the narrative elevates these elements from simple physical entities into powerful cultural symbols imbued with specific meaning and emotional resonance. This process of symbolic transformation is crucial for understanding the construction of "place myths."

Characters, Dialect, and Emotional Connections: This study will analyze how the play's main characters (such as Bao and Uncle Ye) serve as the ultimate "emotional intermediaries" between the audience and the city. Through textual analysis of the characters' emotional journeys, we can understand why audiences develop such strong emotional attachments to the play's

locations. The audience's affection and identification with the characters is directly transferred to the physical spaces closely linked to their fates, making these locations more than just "check-in points" but also sites of emotional projection.

Furthermore, this study will focus on the central role of the Shanghai dialect in the play. Dialect is more than just a form of language; it is a cultural symbol that carries regional culture, identity, and emotional memories.

The authentic, localized Shanghai dialect created a strong sense of auditory immersion and historical authenticity for the audience.

For local Shanghai audiences, the dialect serves as a potent medium for activating collective memory. Every generation of Shanghainese, whether the older generation who lived through the 1990s or the young people growing up in the new era, found themselves awakened by their genuine mother tongue and familiar linguistic context. It provides a shared field of affective resonance in the media space. It transcends age and class barriers, reinforcing the cultural belonging of the Shanghai audience.

For non-local audiences, the dialect creates a unique cultural distinction and a sense of mystery. The accents and tones of the Wuyu region in the drama stimulated the interest and curiosity of non-local viewers towards this distinctive Huyu-speaking culture. Audiences used the television drama as a prompt. Their motivation for physically traveling to Shanghai includes the exploratory desire to "lift the veil" on the unique local culture. This multi-sensory combination of auditory symbols (dialect) and visual scenes (landmarks, old objects) significantly enhances the work's cultural attractiveness and cross-regional exploration value. It

successfully transforms affection for the series into an embodied exploration of regional culture. This auditory anchoring is one of the critical elements allowing the Blossoms Shanghai mediated narrative to succeed.

3.2.2 Tourist Review Mining

To understand the scale and nature of tourist response, this study conducted a large-scale tourist review mining process. This involved systematically collecting and analyzing user-generated content from popular Chinese social media and travel platforms (e.g., Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Dianping).

Data Extraction and Thematic Coding: Using a set of carefully selected keywords such as "Blossoms Shanghai, " "Huanghe Road, " "Peace Hotel, " and "Rib Rice Cake, " this study extracted thousands of posts, comments, photos, and videos. this study then applied a thematic coding approach to identify recurring themes, sentiments, and behaviors within the data. These themes included the desire for "nostalgic pilgrimages, " the focus on food-related experiences, the act of "reenacting scenes, " and the emotional language used to describe their visit (e.g., "feels like I'm in the show, " "so emotional").

Sentiment Analysis: In addition to thematic coding, this study conducted a sentiment analysis of the textual data to gauge the overall emotional tone of the tourist reviews. This helped us understand the general reception of the tourism experience and identify potential areas of dissatisfaction or unexpected emotional responses.

3.3 Research Limitations and Ethical Considerations

While this study benefits from a rich, multi-methodological approach, it is not without

limitations. First, our reliance on online data and non-intrusive observation may not fully capture the experiences of all tourists, particularly those who are not active on social media. Second, data from news and industry reports may present a more positive, business-oriented perspective, potentially understating any negative impacts.

In terms of ethical considerations, this research adhered to standard protocols by sourcing all data from public platforms and anonymizing all identifying information. However, the process of triangulation, while offering layered insights, entailed a constant negotiation between ethics and empathy. I recognized that posts which appeared public were often deeply private, blurring the boundaries between observation and intrusion. In response, I refrained from interpreting material that felt overtly confessional. This process required acknowledging the affective labor of users and recognizing my own position as both witness and participant.

Conducting the study during a time of social uncertainty further heightened my awareness of vulnerability and loss. Certain narratives echoed my own memories of dislocation and longing, making the act of writing both analytical and cathartic. I found that these emotional resonances did not compromise objectivity but expanded it, allowing me to grasp the relational texture of digital remembrance. Reflexivity thus became a mode of connection, where understanding others' emotions required confronting my own. Ultimately, methodological rigor became inseparable from emotional sensitivity, underscoring that researching digital affect demands care as well as analysis.

4. Findings and Results

This study, through a comprehensive analysis of multi-sourced data, reveals that the

television series *Blossoms Shanghai* had a profound and multifaceted impact on Shanghai's domestic tourism. The findings are categorized into three primary areas: the transformation of iconic filming locations into tourist hotspots, a fundamental shift in tourist behavior and experience, and a broader revitalization of the local economy and cultural identity. These results underscore how *Blossoms Shanghai* acted as a powerful cultural engine, capable of not only driving tourism but also reshaping a city's image and fostering a deep integration of media and urban life.

The findings presented in this chapter are derived from an integrated dataset combining both online and offline materials. The online dataset consists of 872 user-generated posts, reviews, and short videos collected from social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Dianping. The offline dataset includes field notes and observations from three major filming locations: Huanghe Road, Jinxian Road, and the Bund, alongside quantitative indicators from tourism platforms like Ctrip, Meituan, and Tongcheng Travel.

This mixed dataset enabled the identification of both macro-level economic impacts and micro-level emotional responses. By connecting textual analysis of *Blossoms Shanghai* with observed tourist practices, the study captures how mediated images translate into embodied, performative, and affective experiences in real urban spaces.

4.1 From Screen to Scene: The Transformation of Filming Locations

The series' unique cinematic aesthetics and meticulous recreation of 1990s Shanghai successfully transformed several key locations into pilgrimage sites for fans. This phenomenon aligns with the theory of mediated landscape, where a media narrative imbues a physical space

with new cultural meanings and value (Huang, 2013).

One participant's online post vividly illustrates this dynamic. In a short video, she juxtaposed an old family photograph with a present-day image of Huanghe Road, captioned "Same street, different sky." Soft background music and fading transitions gave the clip a melancholic rhythm. Within hours it attracted hundreds of comments, many echoing her tone of bittersweet nostalgia. The post demonstrates how digital platforms transform private memory into collective affect, where seeing becomes a form of feeling. Such scenes exemplify how mediated aesthetics foster emotional proximity among strangers.

4.1.1 Huanghe Road and Jinxian Road: A Revival of Nostalgia and Culinary Culture

In the show, Huanghe Road is portrayed as a bustling epicenter of dining, commerce, and ambition. This narrative framework tapped into a collective longing for a bygone era, sparking a widespread "Citywalk" trend and turning the street into a symbol of nostalgic revival (Guo & Zhang, 2024). The most prominent example is the transformation of Tai Sheng Yuan Restaurant, the prototype for the fictional "Zhi Zhen Yuan." This formerly struggling eatery became a "social media-induced hotspot," drawing immense crowds of fans eager to experience a piece of the show's world. Its reservations have surged 17 times. Today, customers go there to imitate A-Bao's workplace lunch and enjoy the same dishes, serving as a prime example of how the narrative and aesthetic quality of a film product can induce tourism (Abd Rahman et al., 2019). The appeal lies not just in visiting a location, but in a desire to consume a "historical flavor" that the show so skillfully curated.

Similarly, the adjacent Jinxian Road, the location of Lingzi's restaurant "Tokyo Night,"

was transformed from a residential alley into a carefully planned nostalgic area. The Shikumen, a Shanghai-style residential building with Chinese and Western cultural characteristics, is now integrated with modern businesses like a handmade coffee shop to reproduce Shanghai's fusion of Eastern and Western cultures and the fusion of the old and the new. This aligns with the academic perspective that tourists are drawn to locations that feel "less contrived" and offer a sense of genuine local culture (Huang, 2013). The show's ability to highlight both the grandeur of the Peace Hotel and the intimate charm of Jinxian Road demonstrates its skill in crafting a multifaceted and relatable urban image (Li, 2024).

This case also revealed unexpected emotional patterns among viewers. Unexpectedly, several participants described their online engagement as more intimate than face-to-face encounters. The mediated distance of the screen provided safety for expressing tenderness that social norms often suppress. Rather than diluting emotion, digital interfaces intensified it, turning public comment threads into shared spaces of empathy. This inversion challenges the common binary of "virtual = detached / physical = authentic," revealing that affect circulates through mediation itself.

These mediated emotions were also articulated through recurring spatial imagery. Recurrent visual motifs: windows, reflections, narrow corridors, appeared throughout user posts, echoing Shanghai's architectural vocabulary. These motifs acted as emotional anchors linking digital imagery to urban materiality. In this interplay, nostalgia was not purely retrospective but spatial: remembering the city meant reconstructing it through mediated light and texture. This mediated nostalgia has also triggered a broader chain reaction in the real urban

sphere, extending beyond the screen into people's embodied practices and emotional engagements with the city.

During the show's broadcast, the area around Huanghe Road experienced heavy foot traffic and even congestion, as it became the symbolic epicenter of Shanghai's "Citywalk" trend. Both tourists and locals flocked to the site, taking photos, filming short videos, and attempting to re-enact moments from the drama. On platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Weibo, hashtags like #RevisitingHuangheRoad gained tens of millions of views within weeks. Many users described the experience as "seeing Shanghai become everyone's city again." These actions were not merely expressions of fandom, but active efforts to participate in the re-narration of urban space through mediated memory.

What is particularly striking is that this nostalgia resonated not only with visitors but also with long-time residents. Many "old Shanghainese" shared emotional comments recalling their youth memories of gas stoves, thermos flasks, cashmere sweaters, or the bustling alleys of the 1990s. Such objects, once ordinary, have regained symbolic vitality through the show's visual language. The emotional response often went beyond nostalgia itself: viewers expressed renewed affection and pride toward their city, wishing for Shanghai to continue thriving while preserving its layered history. This intergenerational dialogue suggests that Blossoms Shanghai is not simply a media product but a cultural catalyst that reconnects collective memory with contemporary urban identity.

The show's aesthetic also gave rise to a distinct cultural fashion wave. The 1980s–1990s clothing style, featuring wide-shouldered suits, silk blouses, and patterned tweed, was

reinterpreted through the lens of modern design and soon became a trend on social media. Influencers and boutique brands alike launched so-called "Blossoms-inspired" collections, merging nostalgia with cosmopolitan chic. What emerged was a new form of "neo-retro" aesthetic that positioned Shanghai as a fashion hub where history and modernity coexisted. This visual revival demonstrates how mediated nostalgia travels across industries, shaping not only tourism and media consumption but also fashion, lifestyle, and aesthetic self-expression.

From a socio-cultural perspective, this phenomenon highlights a shift in how audiences engage with popular culture: nostalgia here is not passive remembrance but an active practice of re-imagining the past through participation. The city becomes a living archive: a dynamic space where personal emotion, collective memory, and material environment continuously interact. The mediated city thus operates as both a physical site and a symbolic text, allowing individuals to inhabit history while performing it in the present.

In this sense, Blossoms Shanghai achieves more than the recreation of an era; it constructs a participatory myth where locals and visitors alike negotiate belonging through emotion and space. The process transforms nostalgia into a performative and spatialized experience, one that connects digital representations, embodied city walks, and affective tourism into a single narrative flow. This not only reinforces Shanghai's cultural identity but also redefines what it means to "experience" a city in the age of mediated memory.

4.1.2 The Peace Hotel: A Symbol of History, Luxury, and Modernity

The Peace Hotel, serving as the residence of the protagonist "Bao Zong, " was elevated from a mere historical landmark to a powerful cultural and symbolic icon. This elevation is a

testament to the show's strategic use of product placement and destination branding (Rodríguez Campo et al., 2011). Data from Tongcheng Travel showed a staggering 415% surge in search popularity for the hotel between December 27, 2023, and January 5, 2024 (Zhang, 2024). This dramatic increase highlights how a media narrative can rapidly and effectively reposition a destination in the public consciousness, bestowing upon it a new, desirable identity.

The hotel's newfound celebrity translated directly into high-value consumer behavior. The release of a special co-branded dinner set, priced at a premium of 1,702 yuan, quickly sold out despite its cost. This phenomenon reveals that tourists were not just paying for a meal but for a narrative-driven, emotionally resonant experience. It demonstrates a critical shift in modern tourism, where consumers are increasingly willing to invest in products and services that allow them to participate in a shared cultural myth (Li, 2024). This is further evidenced by the hotel's achievement of 98% holiday occupancy. Other heritage institutions have concurrently leveraged cinematic symbolism. Bund 27 (Jardine Matheson's 1920 headquarters) now integrates its series depiction as a foreign trade firm into guided tours, while the St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral, reborn as Sinan Poetry Bookstore, markets itself through A-Bao's childhood memories of "gazing at clouds from its dome."

4.1.3 The Hyperreal and the Historical: The Case of Shanghai Film Park and Waibaidu Bridge

This reinvention, however, reveals a fundamental tension between staged authenticity and historical reality. While tourists flock to physical sites like the Waibaidu Bridge, where A-Bao secured his first foreign trade deal, critical scenes were filmed at Shanghai Film Park (Songjiang).

There, artisans reconstructed Huanghe Road's vanished neon signage with forensic precision, alongside replicas of Cathay Cinema and Jinxian Road's alleyways. This strategic move proved highly successful, creating hyperreal simulacra that attract over 12, 000 daily visitors and achieved a 65% year-over-year increase in visitor numbers (Zhang & Zhong, 2024; Li, 2024). This shows that the impact of a strong film IP is not limited to real-world locations; it can also drive a parallel tourism economy around purpose-built, recreated landscapes.

Similarly, heritage locales such as Zhujiajiao Ancient Town exemplify an analogous cultural activation. Our observation identifies that the iconic Fangsheng Bridge, following its discursive reframing as a site of "temporal dialogue" via a pivotal cinematic scene, now draws visitors who engage in performative reenactments. These tourists utilize period-specific props, thereby transforming the bridge from a static monument into an interactive repository of collective narrative. Even Fuxing Park, where A-Bao's childhood memories unfold, rebrands its French-style gardens as a "3A-rated heritage site" with Blossoms-themed interpretation boards. This demonstrates how a show can strategically rebrand and commodify urban spaces.

4.2 Alterations in Tourist Behavior and Experience

Blossoms Shanghai not only influenced where tourists went but also how they engaged with their destinations. This study found that tourist behavior shifted from passive sightseeing to a more active, participatory, and performative mode, a phenomenon best understood through the lens of interaction ritual chain theory (Zhou, 2024).

4.2.1 The Rise of Themed Tours and "Mediated Pilgrimage"

The show's popularity spurred the emergence of "Citywalks, " a new form of themed

tourism. Major travel platforms quickly responded, with data from Ctrip showing a 75% increase in private tour bookings and a 30% rise in group tour orders for Shanghai (Wang, 2024). These tours, guided by narratives from the show, transformed ordinary walks into ritualistic experiences. As described by Zhou (2024), fans engage in a form of "media pilgrimage, " where the act of physically walking through the city becomes a way to forge an emotional connection to the characters and story. It's an active process of "being there" and "being present" that deepens their sense of fandom and community. Themed Citywalk itineraries, such as Zhou Jun's 3-km route linking Peace Hotel to Cathay Cinema, generated 540% more social media engagement on Dianping by combining architectural heritage with cinematic "Easter eggs."

4.2.2 The Phenomenon of Reenactment and the "Photo Culture"

At filming locations, a new "photo culture" emerged. Tourists were observed not just taking snapshots but actively reenacting iconic scenes from the show, mimicking character poses, and even dressing up in 1990s-style clothing. This performative behavior is a core component of the "interaction ritual chain, " where shared focus and collective effervescence lead to mutual emotional arousal and group solidarity (Zhou, 2024). By posting these photos on social media, tourists reinforce their identity as fans and contribute to the show's ongoing digital life, creating a continuous feedback loop between the screen, the real-world location, and the digital community. Crucially, tourists engage in embodied practices, physically replicating scenes like sharing Rib Rice Cake at Xiandelai or strolling Zhujiajiao's bridge, transforming food culture into affective bridges.

4.3 Broader Economic and Cultural Revitalization

The economic impact of Blossoms Shanghai went far beyond simple tourism figures. It catalyzed growth across multiple sectors, illustrating how a successful IP can become a significant driver of urban economic and cultural renewal.

4.3.1 The Culinary Tourism Boom

The series elevated local Shanghai cuisine to a central theme, sparking a culinary tourism boom. The phenomenon aligns with the "one show, one city" trend in which a single production brings a city to fame (Ren, 2024). Data from Ele.me and Meituan demonstrated this effect empirically. Searches for the famous Rib Rice Cake increased by nearly 7-fold on one platform, with orders surging by 237% week-over-week. Similarly, orders for "Pao Fan" (rice congee), a simple dish favored by the protagonist, jumped by 110% (Zhang & Zhong, 2024). This remarkable response proves that a media product can effectively turn local food items into highly sought-after cultural commodities. In a further example of IP value extension, some restaurants began adding dishes like "Farewell My Concubine" to their menus and renaming items with phrases like "Bao Zong's Favorite, " demonstrating a rapid and effective market response to the show's influence (Li, 2024). Neighborhood eateries like Xin Meiju (Huafa Road) also saw 30–50% sales growth, while Xiandelai (Yunnan South Road) reported a 200% revenue growth, with 70% of patrons citing the series as their motivation. The Shanghai Native Produce Store (491 Huaihai Road) even sells pickle sets as edible souvenirs, further anchoring the tourism narrative in the show's food culture.

4.3.2 Spillover Effects and Multi-sectoral Growth

The show's impact was not confined to its main locations. It created a broader spillover effect across the city's tourism ecosystem. Data showed that other hotels featured in the show, such as the Shanghai International Hotel and the Shanghai Garden Hotel, also experienced significant increases in search popularity (61% and 55%, respectively) (Zhang, 2024). This shows that the show's influence radiated outwards, benefiting not only the main attractions but also the surrounding businesses, including hotels, souvenir stalls, and local transportation. Policy mechanisms amplified these effects; Shanghai's "Readable Architecture" initiative integrates QR-coded film locations into heritage trails, rebranding 1990s Shanghai as an entrepreneurial golden age. The ability of the IP to generate a robust and interconnected tourist economy underscores its potential for sustainable, long-term urban development.

4.4 Challenges and Controversies

Ultimately, while Blossoms Shanghai demonstrates film tourism's power to re-engineer urban meaning through spatial narrativization, commodified nostalgia, and embodied performance, its success is not without challenges. Controversies have emerged concerning over-commercialization and spatial justice deficits in cultural capital conversion. For example, Huanghe Road and Zhujiajiao face tourist enclavization, with souvenir stalls disrupting local life. More critically, 35% rent hikes in Jinxian Road have displaced long-standing businesses like a 30-year-old dumpling shop, highlighting the tension between economic imperatives and community integrity. Sustaining this cultural renaissance requires reconciling these competing interests, ensuring Shanghai's layered history remains legible beyond the cinematic frame.

4.5 Research Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into how Blossoms Shanghai reshaped the city's tourism and cultural identity, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the online dataset primarily represents digitally active, younger users, potentially overlooking the experiences of older or less-connected tourists. Second, field observations were conducted during a limited time frame (February 2024) and at only three major locations, which may not fully reflect seasonal or longitudinal variations in tourist behavior.

Future research could expand this framework by incorporating quantitative surveys, longitudinal data tracking, or comparative case studies such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (Singapore) or *Emily in Paris* (Paris). Such studies would further clarify how different cinematic representations generate distinct forms of "place-myth" and affective tourism across cultural contexts.

5. Place-Myth Construction Through Blossoms Shanghai

Building upon the empirical findings presented in the previous section, this part of the study moves from observation to analysis, delving into the theoretical underpinnings of Blossoms Shanghai's cultural impact. It is argued that the series' success transcends its direct economic and tourism-related effects; rather, its most profound contribution lies in its powerful ability to construct a new place-myth for the city of Shanghai. This process, a complex interplay of media narrative, collective memory, and social practice, transforms Shanghai from a mere physical location into a "media space" (Wang, 2024) imbued with a unique cultural identity. This newly forged myth serves as a compelling framework for both local residents and tourists, providing a lens through which to experience, understand, and engage with the city's past and

present.

Beyond its economic and tourism effects, the series also reconfigures how emotions and memories circulate in digital publics. While Hoskins conceptualizes digital memory as primarily connective, emphasizing networks of mediation, my findings reveal a subtler affective layer grounded in sensory recognition. Viewers of *Blossoms Shanghai* did not simply consume a narrative; they engaged in what could be called affective choreography, liking, reposting, remixing, to rehearse collective emotion. This extends existing theories of connective memory by showing how shared feeling, not merely shared content, constitutes the social fabric of digital remembrance.

5.1 Mediated Narratives: Reinventing Shanghai's 1990s Identity

The series' primary mechanism for place-myth construction is its masterful mediated narrative, which elevates Shanghai's 1990s era from a specific historical period to a legendary, almost mythical, realm. By employing a distinct cinematic aesthetic, the show transforms empirical time and space into a mythic world, embedding a compelling media narrative directly into the landscape's meaning (Huang, 2013). This artistic approach is not a simple historical recreation but a deliberate act of cultural production, one that redefines Shanghai's identity by blending its glamorous, cosmopolitan past with an authentic, local-centric culture (Li, 2024).

The show's focus on Huanghe Road is a prime example of this narrative power. As described by Wang (2024), the series strategically positions this physical location as a "public space" and a "collective memory space." In the fictional world of the show, Huanghe Road is the vibrant epicenter of dining, commerce, and ambition, a bustling food corridor that symbolizes the

entrepreneurial wave of the 1990s. The narrative meticulously crafts this space as a "social media-induced hotspot" (Guo & Zhang, 2024), turning it into a "nostalgic field" that caters to a deep-seated desire for a bygone era (Wang, 2024). The series successfully imbues the street with a unique narrative framework, one that taps into a collective longing for a past that, for many, exists only in cinematic portrayals or historical accounts. This is where the power of the show's mediated narrative lies: it creates a form of historical nostalgia that is accessible to all, regardless of whether they personally experienced the period. It turns the struggle and triumphs of the 1990s into a shared cultural myth.

These mediated representations also resonated with my own encounters with Shanghai's cultural atmosphere. These mediated representations also resonated with my personal encounters with Shanghai's cultural atmosphere. Growing up in a Wu-speaking area, I have always felt an intimate connection to the city's rhythms and sounds. During my internship at a hotel designed around "old Shanghai" aesthetics, the blend of retro lanterns, skylights, and alley-style décor evoked a living memory that mirrored what audiences experienced through the series. Conversations with friends and family about the show became acts of shared recollection, sometimes inspiring them to revisit the city. This parallel suggests that mediated nostalgia blurs boundaries between spectatorship and participation, personal and collective remembrance.

The narrative extends beyond the main characters and their stories, subtly embedding this myth into the very fabric of the city. The show's rich and complex characters, such as the enigmatic "Bao Zong, " anchor the mythical world. His strategic base at the Peace Hotel, for instance, is not merely a residence; it is a symbol of history, luxury, and modernity, elevating the

hotel from a historical landmark to a cultural icon (Li, 2024). Our analysis reveals that the protagonist's narrative of struggle and success becomes fused with Shanghai's physical geography. Landmarks such as the Waibaidu Bridge and Bund 27 are thus endowed with a collective narrative. They no longer function merely as locations but serve as vessels of a shared story, emblematic of a golden age of entrepreneurial spirit.

Furthermore, the show's aesthetic choices play a crucial role in myth construction. The highly stylized, saturated visuals and meticulously crafted *mise-en-scène* create a dreamlike quality that distinguishes the on-screen world from mundane reality. This aesthetic, a hallmark of director Wong Kar-wai, positions Shanghai not just as a city but as a work of art, a living museum of a glamorous and ambitious past. This artistic stylization, as noted by Wang (2024), allows the show to forge a "geographical media" that closely links people with places, mediating the relationship between individuals and the city itself. By successfully fusing fictional drama (e.g., the business rivalries at Zhizhen Yuan) with realistic urban landscapes, *Blossoms Shanghai* creates a unique sense of "fusion between reality and virtuality," making the mythical world of the show feel both aspirational and deeply rooted in a tangible place.

This fusion is not only visual but also material. The tangible objects embedded within the scenes act as emotional mediators that link the city's mythic aura to the textures of everyday life. Old objects, such as the cashmere sweaters, thermos flasks, and old coal stoves, along with the detailed depiction of life in the old lanes (*longtang*), are more than props; they are concrete symbols and affective anchors of 1990s community life. Under the camera's gaze, the close connections and inseparable emotions between people in cramped spaces are amplified and

carried by these daily items, activating both personal and collective memories in the audience. This meticulous capture of past life details successfully focuses the grand narrative of the era onto the micro, tangible everyday existence. Even if these objects are functionally obsolete in modern life, they persist in real-world spaces as decorative artifacts, used to create a vintage aesthetic and becoming a kind of "affective monument." They realize a transition from "use value" to "mythic value, " allowing the audience to touch the emotional warmth and human element of that bygone era through the nostalgia evoked by specific objects.

A closer examination shows that the mediated narrative of Blossoms Shanghai is not a passive form of representation but an active process of cultural production. Through its rhythm, visual texture, and linguistic nuances, the series reorganizes how people perceive time and the city. Unlike conventional screen narratives that simply recount the past, it redefines how the past is felt. Blossoms Shanghai transforms the Shanghai of the 1990s from a historical stage into an affective space-time, turning nostalgia into a state that can be experienced and regenerated.

This reorganization of time and emotion represents a creative reconstruction of historical reality. The past is no longer a static memory but a present experience that can be reactivated through feeling. The mediated narrative performs a dual function: it builds the image of memory and shapes the way memory is emotionally perceived. The audience does not merely look back at history but enters a reconstructed temporal flow, rediscovering emotional resonance with both the era and their own sense of identity.

Mediated nostalgia also functions as a cross-generational cultural practice. Older viewers recall the warmth and order of the past, middle-aged audiences revisit their years of passion and

struggle, and younger generations seek belonging through the rediscovery of childhood imagery. Objects, spaces, and colors from specific eras act as catalysts of memory, revealing different generations' interpretations of time and place. Through this layered structure of nostalgia, Blossoms Shanghai turns the city into more than a geographical site, it becomes an emotional landscape that continues to be re-experienced.

This mediated construction of emotion extends into social practice, shaping the interactions among tourists, local residents, and the cultural industry.

5.2 The Interplay of Gaze: Interactions Among Tourists, Locals, and Industry

The construction of a place-myth is not a unilateral process emanating from media sources alone. This analysis posits that it is, instead, an agent-driven, multi-directional phenomenon. This process is fundamentally propelled by the "collective gaze" of diverse social actors, including tourists, local residents, and the tourism industry. These agents engage in a "dynamic interplay, " as noted by Huang (2013), continuously reproducing and reinforcing mediated meanings within a perpetual cycle of signification. This section explores the distinct roles these actors play in shaping and sustaining the Blossoms Shanghai myth.

5.2.1 Tourists as Seekers and Embodied Practitioners

In the "place-myth" constructed by Blossoms Shanghai, tourists act as more than passive observers; they are active "seekers" who embark on a form of "media pilgrimage" (Zhou, 2024). They are not merely visiting a city; they are pursuing a mythical world, attempting to bridge the gap between their on-screen fantasy and their real-world experience. This quest is characterized by "embodied practices, " where physical actions serve to reinforce emotional connections to the

series (Zhou, 2024).

The most visible manifestation of this is the "Citywalk" trend, which transforms a simple stroll through Shanghai's streets into a ritualistic act of devotion. As data from Ctrip shows, private and group tour bookings for Shanghai surged by 75% and 30%, respectively, following the show's release (Wang, 2024). These guided tours are more than sightseeing; they are carefully curated narratives that guide the tourist's gaze to specific locations and moments from the series. The tourists' active participation in these walks, a form of "interaction ritual chain" (Zhou, 2024), allows them to feel a physical and emotional proximity to the characters and the story, deepening their sense of fandom.

Crucially, this embodied practice extends to mundane, everyday acts. Tourists aren't just taking photos of landmarks; they are actively reenacting iconic scenes, such as sharing Rib Rice Cake at Xiandelai or taking a photo with an umbrella on the Fangsheng Bridge in Zhujiajiao. These actions are not just for documentation; they are a form of ritualistic performance that allows them to physically "be there" and "be present" in the mythical world of the show. The sheer volume of this performative behavior, captured and shared on social media, creates a continuous feedback loop that not only reinforces their own identity as fans but also propagates the myth to a wider audience, turning their personal journey into a part of the collective narrative. The evidence of this practice's success is tangible: Xiandelai's revenue surged by 200%, with 70% of its patrons explicitly citing the series as their motivation. This demonstrates how tourist behavior, fueled by the show's narrative, can directly translate into significant economic and cultural impact, making tourists active participants in the commercialization of the place-myth.

This striking congruence between the digital and physical spaces constitutes a key insight of this study. During field observation between June and July 2025, I frequently visited filming locations such as Huanghe Road, Jing'an Temple Road, and the Bund, concurrently collecting User-Generated Content (UGC) from platforms like Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin tagged with keywords such as ‘Blossoms Shanghai’ ‘Huanghe Road’ and ‘A Bao’. In both online documentation and offline embodied practices, the mediated affective script demonstrated a high degree of normativity. Through acts such as sharing scenic photos, checking in at featured eateries, mimicking character dialogue, and reenacting vintage lifestyles, individuals translated the emotional experience of the drama into a performative identity in real-world spaces. These acts of re-enactment not only reflect the recreation of urban memory through the visual medium but also reveal the process through which audiences achieve empathy and a sense of urban belonging by engaging in affective labor. This online-offline consistency indicates that the framework of the mediated landscape is powerful enough to guide embodied behavior, making real-world performance a critical mechanism for the solidification of collective identity.

During my field visits to Huanghe Road, I observed that many visitors were not directly imitating scenes from Blossoms Shanghai but rather imitating others who had already imitated those scenes. This layered process of replication reveals the recursive nature of mediated experience, authenticity no longer stems from the original media narrative, but is continually reconstructed through countless acts of reproduction and imitation. Instead of seeking a return to the “original moment” of the series, people were engaging in what might be called a nostalgia of the present, a form of emotional anchoring that affirms one’s sense of self within the

performative rhythms of contemporary digital culture.

Within this recursive cycle, the boundary between reality and representation becomes increasingly blurred. Tourists' body gestures, camera angles, and facial expressions are subtly standardized through a shared visual grammar shaped by social media algorithms and popular aesthetics. In this sense, they are not freely creating memories but reproducing a mediated template that has already been socially validated and aesthetically rewarded. Each repetition further naturalizes this template, transforming nostalgia itself into a form of social capital that can be circulated, measured, and consumed.

Paradoxically, this imitation of imitation does not weaken affective engagement, it strengthens it. Every photo taken is not merely a reenactment of the show but a declaration of presence: a performative claim that says, "I am part of this story." Through photographing and sharing, individuals participate in a symbolic ritual of belonging, turning mediated nostalgia into a social performance that binds emotion, visibility, and identity. For many young participants, this act functions as an emotional connector, linking them to a community of others who perform the same longing.

From a reflexive standpoint, this phenomenon illustrates the generative power of mediated nostalgia. Rather than passively reproducing the past, it continuously reshapes the emotional texture of the present through everyday practices of imitation and sharing. In this way, Huanghe Road becomes more than a geographic location. It becomes an affective apparatus, where tourists, cameras, and collective memory converge to produce a living urban mythology.

5.2.2 The Tourism Industry as "Gaze Designers"

In this dynamic ecosystem, the tourism industry plays the pivotal role of "gaze designers" (Huang, 2013). They are the architects of the tourist experience, translating the abstract place-myth into tangible, marketable products. Their goal is to capture the emotional energy of the fans and funnel it into profitable ventures.

Major travel platforms and local tour companies, for instance, immediately capitalized on the show's popularity by designing "Citywalk" routes. By linking disparate architectural landmarks with cinematic "Easter eggs," they provide a pre-designed narrative for the tourist's journey. This is a deliberate act of shaping the tourist gaze, directing their attention to specific sites that hold narrative significance within the show. A prime example is the 3-km route linking the Peace Hotel to the Cathay Cinema, which generated a remarkable 540% increase in social media engagement on Dianping, a testament to the effectiveness of this strategic design.

Similarly, heritage institutions and local businesses have adapted their offerings to align with the show's narrative. The Peace Hotel, leveraging its role as A-Bao's strategic base, did not just rely on its historical reputation. Instead, it consciously embraced its cinematic persona by offering premium suites and plot-inspired menus, turning its physical space into a site of high-value cultural consumption. Even the Shanghai Film Park, a purpose-built location, acts as a "gaze designer" by recreating a hyperreal version of 1990s Shanghai. By offering an immersive, controlled environment, the park provides an idealized version of the past, reinforcing the show's mythical world and attracting a significant number of daily visitors. These actions demonstrate how the industry actively manages and commodifies the place-myth, transforming the shared

fantasy into a profitable reality.

5.2.3 The Complex Role of Local Residents

The local community's role in this process is complex and often dualistic. As "boosters" of the place-myth, residents amplify the show's influence through word-of-mouth and social media, celebrating the renewed interest in their city's history and culture. However, they are also a crucial part of the "discursive formation" of the place-myth (Huang, 2013), often bearing the brunt of the negative consequences of this cultural capital conversion.

As the myth is commodified and commercialized, local communities can become "tourist enclaves, " where the daily life and cultural authenticity are disrupted by souvenir stalls and constant crowds. The most severe consequence is the issue of spatial justice. The 35% rent hikes on Jinxian Road, for instance, have forced out long-standing businesses, such as a 30-year-old restaurant. This displacement highlights a critical tension: while the show's success benefits the city's brand and economic output, it can simultaneously undermine the very local, authentic culture that drew the audience in the first place. The locals, in this sense, become silent casualties in the construction of a place-myth that no longer serves their lived reality.

5.3 Authenticity vs. Staged Reality: Balancing Heritage and Commercialization

The very foundation of the Blossoms Shanghai place-myth rests on a delicate and often strained relationship between authenticity and fictionality. The series skillfully created a world with a high degree of emotional and aesthetic realism, yet this world is not a perfect mirror of historical reality. The success of this myth requires a critical examination of the "hyperreal" and the challenges posed by its over-commercialization.

5.3.1 The Power of the Hyperreal

The success of the Shanghai Film Park is a testament to the power of the hyperreal simulacrum. Tourists who visit the park are fully aware that the recreated Huanghe Road is not the "real" one. The neon signs are brand new, and the streetscape is a forensic reconstruction of a vanished era. However, this knowledge does not diminish its appeal. This phenomenon suggests that the mythic world, when rendered with enough artistic fidelity and emotional resonance, can become more compelling than the historical reality itself. The "emotional truth" (Li, 2024) conveyed by the show's narrative is what drives the tourist, not necessarily the physical authenticity of the location. The hyperreal space, in this context, offers a more pure, distilled version of the fantasy, free from the complexities and messiness of real-world urban life.

However, the significance of hyperreality lies not merely in its distortion of history but in its redefinition of authenticity itself. When audiences encounter the visual world of Blossoms Shanghai, they no longer seek factual accuracy but the sensation of emotional truth. Authenticity, in this sense, has shifted from fidelity to historical fact toward the sincerity of affective experience. The "feeling of being real" has supplanted "the real itself" as the defining criterion of cultural consumption in the digital age.

This shift marks a profound transformation in the function of mediated narratives, from reproducing history to producing emotion. Rather than restoring the past as it once was, such narratives generate a shared emotional present in which nostalgia becomes both performative and therapeutic. Nostalgia ceases to be a passive act of remembrance and emerges as a contemporary affective strategy through which individuals cope with the disorientation and instability of rapid

urban change. By emotionally inhabiting a reconstructed version of the 1990s, viewers find temporary balance and belonging amid the uncertainties of modern life.

The experience of hyperreal nostalgia extends beyond the physical act of being on-site. It thrives in the mediated exchanges of digital space, where virtual interactions and shared affective resonances allow people to rebuild a sense of connection and stability. Through these online forms of engagement, authenticity becomes relational rather than factual, an emotional bridge that links people, times, and spaces. The success of Blossoms Shanghai thus lies not only in its aesthetic reconstruction of a vanished city but also in its ability to provide an affective anchor for contemporary subjects navigating urban transformation.

This affective redefinition of authenticity invites further reflection on the social and psychological mechanisms behind place-myth construction in the post-digital era.

5.3.2 The Risk of Cultural Erosion

However, the pursuit of commercial gain can pose a significant threat to the very place-myth it seeks to capitalize on. When history is reduced to a series of "photo-props," as seen with the umbrella rentals at Fangsheng Bridge, or when historical landmarks like Fuxing Park are rebranded simply as "3A-rated heritage sites" with Blossoms-themed interpretation boards, the narrative and cultural depth of the place can be eroded. This is the danger of unchecked commercialization: it turns a complex, layered history into a simplistic, consumer-driven spectacle.

The economic success, measured in revenue and visitor numbers, comes at a social cost. The displacement of long-standing local businesses, as seen on Jinxian Road, is a stark reminder

that the conversion of cultural capital is not always equitable. While the city's branding and tourism sector may flourish, the local community that provides the "authentic" cultural backdrop for the myth can be systematically priced out. The tension between economic imperatives and community integrity becomes a critical challenge. Sustaining this cultural renaissance requires a conscious effort to ensure that the city's "layered history remains legible beyond the cinematic frame." This means finding a balance between leveraging the powerful narrative of a successful film and protecting the tangible and intangible heritage that makes the place genuinely unique.

In conclusion, Blossoms Shanghai stands as a powerful case study in spatial narrativization, commodified nostalgia, and embodied performance. It demonstrates how a single piece of media can re-engineer the meaning of an entire city, turning its history into a dynamic, living myth. However, the study's findings also highlight the critical need for a sustainable model that reconciles the undeniable economic benefits with the preservation of cultural integrity and the well-being of the local community. The construction of a place-myth is an ongoing process, and its long-term success will depend on the ability of all stakeholders to navigate the complex relationship between fictional allure and historical reality.

Taken together, these insights point toward a broader transformation of collective remembrance in digital China.

Ultimately, digital platforms do not simply archive emotions; they generate new performances of feeling. Remembering together online becomes a negotiation between presence and absence, locality and mobility, intimacy and anonymity. These hybrid affective practices illuminate how collective identity in contemporary China is continually remade through media,

memory, and emotion.

The construction of a place-myth is an ongoing process, and its long-term success will depend on the ability of all stakeholders to navigate the complex relationship between fictional allure and historical reality.

Taken together, these dynamics invite further reflection on how mediated emotion and cultural memory function as forces of both cohesion and transformation. The concluding section synthesizes these insights, evaluating the study's theoretical contributions, methodological implications, and broader significance for understanding digital affect in contemporary urban China.

5.3.3 Socio-psychological Mechanisms of Hyperreal Nostalgia

The hyperreal authenticity represented in Blossoms Shanghai not only reshapes the aesthetic boundaries of media representation but also exposes deeper social and psychological mechanisms at work. The audience's attraction to mediated nostalgia reflects an emotional compensation for the alienation and fragmentation of urban modernity. As Chinese cities undergo rapid redevelopment, many citizens experience the erosion of familiar spaces, dialects, and interpersonal warmth. The reconstructed 1990s Shanghai becomes, therefore, a symbolic refuge: a world that promises intimacy, texture, and stability amid the fluidity of present life. What people seek in the hyperreal landscape is less a faithful return to the past than an emotional antidote to the anxieties of modernization.

This affective engagement can be interpreted through two interrelated dynamics: compensatory affect and identity reaffirmation. The first dynamic, compensatory affect, emerges

from a collective longing to fill the void left by the disappearance of tangible community and slower rhythms of life. *Watching Blossoms Shanghai* allows viewers to inhabit a mediated world where human connections appear more direct and meaningful. By physically reenacting these imagined scenes through Citywalk routes or themed restaurants, individuals recover a sense of sensory and emotional wholeness that urban life often fragments. The pleasure of nostalgia, then, lies not in its historical precision but in its ability to simulate emotional coherence.

The second mechanism, identity reaffirmation, speaks to the social dimension of mediated nostalgia. For many visitors and online participants, engaging with *Blossoms Shanghai* becomes an act of cultural belonging. Posting photos from filming locations or quoting the characters' dialect lines on Xiaohongshu is not only self-expression but also social signaling. It affirms one's connection to a shared cultural heritage. Within digital communities, such behaviors operate as performative affirmations of urban identity, producing a sense of continuity between the imagined city onscreen and the lived city outside. In this way, the "Shanghai myth" becomes not a static narrative but a living discourse in which collective identity is continuously rehearsed, negotiated, and displayed.

The circulation of such mediated emotions illustrates what could be called affective collectivism, a form of emotional solidarity sustained through shared symbols rather than physical proximity. Online platforms amplify this dynamic by allowing users to participate in collective remembrance regardless of their location. The act of "liking," commenting, or reposting nostalgic images generates micro-interactions that collectively reproduce the mythic aura of the city. This constant feedback loop of mediated affect dissolves the boundary between

the real and the imaginary, turning emotional participation itself into a form of cultural production. The city thus becomes not only a geographical place but a distributed affective network, sustained through memory, media, and repetition.

Such affective collectivism has significant implications for understanding contemporary urban citizenship. The longing for emotional authenticity within a hyperreal environment suggests that belonging is no longer grounded in residence or origin but in participation and resonance. To feel part of Shanghai, one does not have to live there; it is enough to emotionally inhabit its myth through mediated forms. This transformation marks a shift from territorial belonging to affective belonging, a condition increasingly characteristic of digital urbanism across the world.

However, this transformation is not without ambivalence. The same emotional intensity that unites communities can also obscure structural inequalities and spatial injustices. The hyperreal representation of 1990s Shanghai often privileges a glamorous, consumerist image while sidelining the experiences of marginalized groups. As tourists and fans romanticize the city's past, they may overlook the displacement and labor that underpin its current economic reality. The emotional satisfaction of nostalgia thus risks becoming a form of aesthetic anesthetization, soothing individual anxieties while leaving collective contradictions unresolved. Recognizing this tension is crucial for policymakers and scholars who wish to harness cultural media for sustainable urban renewal without erasing the multiplicity of lived experiences.

In sum, the hyperreal nostalgia generated by Blossoms Shanghai reveals not only how media reshape urban imaginaries but also how emotion functions as a social technology. It

bridges the gap between loss and continuity, individual memory and collective myth. Yet, it also calls for critical vigilance: the comfort of nostalgia must not replace the complexity of history. The challenge for contemporary media culture lies in creating spaces where affective connection and historical consciousness can coexist, where cities can be emotionally reimagined without being culturally simplified.

Conclusion

This comprehensive study set out to examine the systemic mechanisms through which a single cultural IP, the television series *Blossoms Shanghai*, has successfully reshaped Shanghai's socio-spatial identity, transforming media narratives into tangible cultural and economic capital. By integrating textual analysis (Section 5.1), user-generated content (UGC) mining (Section 4.2), and quantitative indicators of economic performance (Sections 4.1 and 4.3) through a triangulated research design, this study demonstrates that the process extends far beyond mere market exposure.

During fieldwork, I gradually realized that *Blossoms Shanghai* was not merely a media product but a trigger for collective emotion. Walking along Huanghe Road or the Bund, I could feel how the series extended beyond the screen, tourists chatting, posing for photos, and reenacting scenes brought the fictional narrative into physical space. This sense of "being there" became the starting point of my research and reshaped how I understood the relationship between the city and emotion.

The findings reveal that the success of *Blossoms Shanghai* rests on the creation of a powerful place-myth. Initially, this myth emerged through media's romanticized aesthetics and

culturally anchored elements such as the Shanghainese dialect, which together endowed specific sites like the Peace Hotel and Huanghe Road with symbolic meanings of aspiration and success. Crucially, this myth was later solidified through the dynamic interplay of the collective gaze (Section 5.2). Tourists act as seekers and embodied practitioners of the narrative, while the tourism industry functions as gaze designers, effectively translating an abstract myth into high-value cultural products such as themed citywalks and culinary pilgrimages.

While observing tourists, I was deeply moved by the level of emotional engagement they showed. Many were not merely "visiting" the filming sites but actively "re-performing" the memories, some compared their photos with screenshots, while others imitated the characters' gestures or tones. This immersive participation revealed that the place-myth was not simply received; it was continuously produced and re-enacted through embodied practices.

Ultimately, this study confirms that mediated affect serves as the connective force that transforms private sentiment and collective nostalgia into shared and embodied negotiations of urban identity and place. As I reviewed the collected materials, I was often moved by the emotional power that transcended the screen. Many users wrote online comments such as "I wish I could return to the Shanghai of the 1990s" or "I finally stepped into A-Bao's world." These sincere expressions revealed how urban memory is being reactivated in the digital age. For me, the study of Blossoms Shanghai became more than textual analysis. It was about witnessing how emotion flows through the city's lights and spaces, reconnecting people with their sense of place.

This research makes both theoretical and methodological contributions to the growing interdisciplinary conversation between media studies, cultural tourism, and urban sociology. It

moves beyond the conventional understanding of film-induced tourism as a linear economic outcome and instead proposes an interactive and affective model that explains how media narratives, social emotion, and urban experience intersect.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study deepens the concept of the mediated landscape (Huang, 2013) by showing that cities are not passive visual backdrops but dynamic participants in the construction of cultural meaning. The television series *Blossoms Shanghai* does not simply "represent" Shanghai. It co-produces it. Through repeated circulation in media, tourism, and public discourse, the city becomes both a material space and a symbolic field of emotion. This reconfiguration of Shanghai's image reflects how media texts shape collective perception, creating a sense of shared memory that outlives the broadcast itself.

The findings also contribute to understanding place-myth as an ongoing negotiation between different actors. Tourists transform media imagery into lived experience through their embodied practices, such as Citywalks, photography, and culinary exploration. Local residents, meanwhile, reinterpret the city's renewed visibility in ambivalent ways, feeling pride in cultural recognition while also confronting commercialization and displacement. The tourism industry plays the role of mediator, transforming intangible emotion into concrete experiences, such as themed tours or film-based branding projects. Together, these interactions form a dynamic ecosystem where the boundaries between production and consumption, fiction and reality, become increasingly blurred.

This theoretical synthesis enriches the literature on media tourism by emphasizing affect as a key connective force. The appeal of *Blossoms Shanghai* does not merely stem from visual

nostalgia but from its ability to evoke emotional resonance that binds individuals to place. In this sense, affect operates as a form of "soft infrastructure, " allowing memory and identity to circulate across digital and physical spaces.

On the methodological level, the study highlights the value of data triangulation in addressing the complexity of cultural phenomena. Qualitative analysis of symbolic motifs was systematically connected with quantitative data from tourism and dining platforms. For example, the symbolic presence of "Rib Rice Cake" in the drama corresponded to a 237% increase in real-world orders, while search traffic for the Peace Hotel surged by over 400% following the show's release. These correlations reveal how mediated imagination can produce tangible economic outcomes, transforming narrative symbols into measurable consumer behavior.

The ethnographic approach added another layer of depth. Field observation and informal interviews offered insights that quantitative data alone could not reveal. Observing tourists reenacting scenes, listening to their spontaneous discussions, or noting their affective responses illuminated how cultural memory was embodied in space. Each encounter, whether a casual chat with a tricyclist or a late-night visit to Huanghe Road, became part of a mosaic of lived emotion. These details anchored the analysis in the rhythms of everyday life rather than abstract generalization.

Personal positionality also shaped the interpretive process. Coming from a Wu-speaking background provided familiarity with the linguistic and cultural nuances of Shanghai, allowing for a more empathetic reading of how nostalgia and identity are performed. This cultural proximity did not undermine objectivity; instead, it offered access to subtleties often invisible to

outsiders. Such situated knowledge demonstrates that ethnography is not merely about detached observation but about cultivating attentiveness--listening, feeling, and interpreting the affective dimensions of urban experience.

Finally, this research contributes methodologically by illustrating how affect-driven ethnography can coexist with data-driven analysis. The combination of emotional intuition and empirical rigor creates a more holistic model for studying contemporary media tourism. Future research can build on this approach by incorporating algorithmic analysis of digital platforms, longitudinal tracking of user-generated content, and comparative studies between different cultural IPs. In doing so, scholars can continue to explore how cities evolve not only as economic hubs but as emotional landscapes co-created by media, memory, and people.

As with many studies exploring social space and cultural emotion, this research carries several limitations while opening important directions for future inquiry.

At the data level, although participants from different age groups were included, the overall sample distribution remains uneven. Some information from elderly participants was obtained through personal interviews and field observations, but the sample size was limited compared with the extensive online data from younger users. Older respondents often expressed emotions in oral and face-to-face forms that were more restrained and less visible to digital algorithms. Their perspectives are therefore underrepresented, while the voices of younger, media-active urban groups dominate the findings. Future research should expand data sources and extend field duration, adopting structured interviews and surveys to better balance intergenerational perspectives and capture a fuller picture of nostalgia within the city's social

fabric.

The positionality of the researcher also presents methodological tension. Coming from a Wu-speaking background, I am culturally and linguistically close to the Shanghai context, which offers deeper interpretive insight but also the potential for empathetic bias. Such proximity sharpens sensitivity to local nuances yet requires conscious distance to maintain interpretive balance. Reflexivity here is not merely about self-awareness but about continuously questioning representation, who speaks, who is heard, and who remains invisible.

This study also focuses on the short-term social effects of Blossoms Shanghai, without fully exploring its longer-term legacy in the city's memory. As time passes, questions remain about whether these mediated nostalgic spaces will continue to attract visitors or gradually transform into commodified symbols. Future longitudinal research could revisit the same sites over several years to understand how urban myths evolve or fade.

Finally, emotions as a research object pose their own methodological challenges. Unlike quantifiable economic indicators, emotions flow, shift, and intertwine with memory and experience. Studying affect requires attentiveness as well as vulnerability. Researchers must acknowledge their own emotional engagement and the ways in which they are also moved by the cultural phenomena they study. Remaining open to emotion is essential for understanding collective nostalgia and the evolving sense of belonging within an urban context.

Despite the methodological and subjective limitations discussed above, these constraints also open a productive space for rethinking the policy dimensions of film-induced tourism and cultural governance. Building on the preceding findings, the following section examines how

Blossoms Shanghai informs broader discussions on urban transformation, policy practice, and future research directions.

The success of Blossoms Shanghai demonstrates how film and television can serve as a powerful catalyst for local tourism and urban rebranding, while also revealing the structural tensions inherent in the media-driven urbanization of culture. The policy challenge lies in balancing economic expansion, cultural reproduction, and community continuity. When "cultural memory" is redefined as a consumable resource, issues of spatial justice and local identity inevitably arise. Future cultural governance must shift from short-term "traffic-oriented" approaches toward a "sustainability-oriented" framework that preserves community integrity while enhancing urban vitality.

First, community-centered urban renewal policies should be prioritized. Local governments can adopt tax incentives, rent subsidies and heritage preservation measures to safeguard the livelihoods of long-term residents and small businesses, preventing the emergence of "tourist enclaves." The relocation of long-standing eateries on Jinxian Road reveals that, without institutional safeguards, cultural revival may occur at the expense of community resilience. Establishing a community–film collaboration mechanism that grants residents a participatory role in storytelling can strengthen cultural continuity and increase the legitimacy and affective resonance of film-induced tourism initiatives.

Second, urban branding strategies should prioritize long-term cultural development over short-lived media exposure. Joint initiatives such as "cinematic heritage routes" or "nostalgic city walks" can promote tourism while fostering deeper engagement with the city's layered identity.

Policymakers and creative industries should encourage plural narratives, stories told from different social, gender, and generational perspectives, to reshape the "Shanghai myth" into a dynamic, inclusive cultural network rather than a static image of nostalgia.

Finally, digital cultural governance has become a new policy imperative. Algorithmic recommendation systems tend to amplify visibility for mainstream attractions while marginalizing narratives of everyday life and peripheral spaces. Governments and digital platforms could collaborate to establish cultural visibility balance mechanisms and incorporate ethical auditing of cultural algorithms to ensure that digital amplification supports, not erases, the diversity of local memory.

In summary, Blossoms Shanghai illustrates that cinematic works can go beyond nostalgia to restructure the emotional economy and spatial identity of a city. Future research and policy should continue to explore the evolving triad of media, space, and emotion, examining how film narratives in the digital age cultivate new forms of urban belonging and sustainable cultural landscapes.

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