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The growth of literary places in ancient town tourism destinations: based on the theories of Bourdieu, Danto and Dickie

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Literary literature and tourism are closely connected, but the research on that connection is limited. Literary tourism spots are no longer just the places where historical accidents happened or were sites of a writer’s birth or death, they can be any other places which have actual or even imaged linkages with the authors or their works. Based on Bourdieu’s 1992 field theory and the ‘Artworld’ described by Danto [1964. The artworld. The Journal of Philosophy, 61, 571–584] and Dickie [1974. Art and the aesthetic: An institutional analysis. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; 1984. The art circle: A theory of art. New York, NY: Haven], this study proposes an analytical framework comprising the atmosphere, activities and agents of art field development in order to understand the formation of a literary tourism product. San Mao teahouse in Zhouzhuang, China is used as an example. On-site observations, interviews and secondary data were collected for this study. The study finds that San Mao Teahouse as a literary venue is the result of the interaction of the literary field of San Mao and the tourism field of the historical town of Zhouzhuang. In the early stage of development, the owner and manager of San Mao Teahouse played the role of producer and marketer, and later on, tourists took more active roles by writing more literary works and promoting the site on websites based on their faith in San Mao, her work and the place. The research also finds that literary tourism is not a conventional art product, but a special experience of literature in the tourism world. Overall, the research contributes to the current knowledge by presenting a new case of formation of literary venues in tourist spots, introducing a new analytical framework and also facilitating the understanding of cultural change in tourist destinations.

Keywords: literary place; tourism destination; field; social construction; art world; field theory

Introduction

Both literature and tourism play important roles in our society, and in many ways, literature and tourism in modern society are closely linked (Herbert, 1996; Liu, Zhu, & An, 2014). Travel provides incentives and material for writing, and literature also motivates people to travel or enhance their travel experiences. In many places, literature functions as a resource for tourism and regional development and brings economic, commercial and other social benefits to destinations. The Lake District in England is a successful example of a literary place developing into a famous tourism destination. As a result,
places associated with writers, painters and others can use these connections to promote a specific kind of image and to attract visitors (Herbert, 2001; Ridanpää, 2011).

However, studies on literary tourism are limited, and the current studies mainly focus on places where the literary resource is the main attraction and engine for tourism development (Herbert, 2001; Liu et al., 2014; Ridanpää, 2011; Squire, 1994). Principally there are substantial links between places and writers and the settings of their novels, such as writers’ houses, memorial museums, plot points or touring routes in novels, poetry, tablets left by writers, and so on (Herbert, 1996, 2001). In these studies, tourists normally have quite substantial knowledge of the writers or their stories, and their motivations for travel are very much related with literature. Therefore they would like to gain more knowledge about the writer, the writer’s work and the location. No studies have been carried out on the places where literary tourism is developed unexpectedly. This may be due to lack of strong tangible linkages with the writers or their writings, yet there are more cases where literary tourism can develop where the linkage of writer, writing and place is not so significant. As stated by Herbert (2001), ‘Literary places are no longer accidents of history, sites of a writer’s birth or death; they are also social constructions, created, amplified, and promoted to attract visitors.’ Studies are needed to understand this new form of literary tourism, and the present work seeks to fill this gap by investigating a particular literary place: the San Mao Teahouse.

San Mao Teahouse is located in the historical town of Zhouzhuang, China. San Mao herself only visited Zhouzhuang once, and she had not written about Zhouzhuang much. Historically, consumers who visited the place were normal tourists who did not have a strong knowledge of San Mao and her work. However, over the last 10 years, San Mao Teahouse has developed into a literary place, and literature has become an important part of the historical town’s attraction. The examination of the transformation of this place into a literary tourism destination can shed light in a broad context on the linkage between tourism places, literature and tourists and the development of a literary tourism product.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the following section, we first discuss the current understanding of the formation and growth of literary tourism spots. Drawing on the ‘artworld’ and Bordieu’s field theory (Bourdieu, 1992; Danto, 1964; Dickie, 1974, 1984), an analytical framework is also proposed in this section. Then, the case of San Mao Teahouse and the methodology are introduced and the results are presented and discussed. In the concluding sections, management implications are addressed.

The formation and growth of literary tourism destinations

Since the mid-1990s it has been recognized that there exists a long tradition of geographical analysis of places associated with literature (Connell, 2012; Herbert, 1996; Squire, 1993, 1994). Literary places linked with writers and their writings have been widely recognized to have the potential to be developed as literary tourism destinations (Herbert, 2001). Examples of these are the Lake District in the UK (Squire, 1993, 1994), Cabourg, Pont-Aven, and Auvers-sur-Oise in France (Herbert, 1996), Prince Edward Island (Canada) (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001), Laugharne Dyfed (UK), Chawton Hampshire (UK) (Herbert, 2001) and Phoenix Town (China) (Liu et al., 2014). These literary places have also often turned into tourism destinations, enabling tourists to experience the real and imagined environments related to the writers and their writings (Earl, 2008; Stiebel, 2004; Watkins & Herbert, 2003). From the tourism perspective, the tourists’ imaginations of these literary places, evoked by the authors in their writings, play a critical role in literary tourism destinations. As a matter of fact, the imagined place is more real and vivid than
the actual environment, because these places have been imagined by the readers for a long
time before they visit. It is these imagined places that induces tourists to visit these places
and compare the real setting with what they have imagined. Overall, a literary tourism
place is a place which enables tourists to experience their imagined linkages with the
writer and their writing. Herbert (2001) summarized four exceptional qualities of a literary
tourist place through comparison with an ‘ordinary place’: (1) Literary places have connec-
tions with the lives of writers, such as birth/death locations, their homes or places where they
lived and worked. These literary places may create a sense of nostalgia and inspire awe or
reverence. (2) Fictional characters and events often generate strong images, these real and
imagined images provide such places with a special meaning to tourists. (3) They may
evoke broader and deeper emotions than a particular writer or story alone. (4) The attraction
of literary places is also reflected in the tourism landscape itself (Herbert, 2001).

Based on Johnson’s ‘circuits of culture’ (1986), Herbert developed a circuit model
of literary destinations to explain the transformation of a literary place into a literary
tourism place. According to Herbert (2001), this transformation is through consumption
and production. In this model, the social construction of a literary place is divided into
two steps. In the first stage, the tourism text is produced and inscribed by tourism managers
who provide the material to tourists. In the second stage, tourists appropriate and reinterpret
the messages conveyed by the managers. Within this context, ‘meanings are encoded by the
producers of attractions and decoded by tourists’ (Herbert, 2001). In this process, the
tourism product manager is an active provider, but the tourists are not completely
passive. Their cognitive and emotional interpretations of the text are integrated later in
the reconstruction of the text by the providers.

With the rapid development of the tourism industry, a growing number of so-called lit-
erary places have appeared, attracting a greater diversity of tourist types, which requires us
to re-appraise those places. Many ‘ordinary places’ can be transformed into a ‘literary
place’. Literary places are no longer accidents of history or sites of a writer’s birth or
death. They can also be socially constructed and amplified in order to attract tourists
(Chronis, 2005; Herbert, 2001; Liu et al., 2014). Smith (2003) thus categorized literary
places into (a) real-life places and (b) imagined places, and in many cases, the boundary
is very vague and blurred. Some destinations which are similar to places where an
author lived or wrote about can also be turned into literary places to attract tourists. In
this context, the relationship among literary tourism places and authors and their writings
is not so strong. Some locations which have little or no relationship with the authors and
their writings can be developed as tourism literary places, and social construction plays a
key role.

To explain this phenomenon, Chronis (2005) later developed a co-construction model of
culture, arguing that the transformation of a place into a literary tourism destination involves
multiple actors. The transformation process is not a two-step one, but a simultaneous one,
and producers and consumers are both involved in the production process. These actors
are all involved in the reading and interpretation of the texts, and these co-constructed
texts are then placed continuously into the transformation and interpretation process.
Thus, a transformation cycle is developed. Compared with Chronis’s (2005) co-construction
culture model, this model argues that the construction of a text not only derives from the
past, but also more from current events and environments. The consumers play an important
role, and through market-mediated interactions, a variety of texts are provided.

These two models provide ways to obtain insights into literary tourism destinations and
the transformation of an ordinary place into a literary tourism place, yet we feel that there
are some gaps in these models. First of all, a literary tourism place is a closed system in that
only literary tourism products are discussed. Although Herbert (2001) himself admitted that
the attraction of literary places is also reflected in the tourism landscape and that a touristic
environment is also crucial, these two models have not discussed the linkage between lit-
erary places and tourism places in depth. Second, the current studies have pointed out and
focused on that literary tourism production is the result of a construction process by produ-
cers and consumers. The mechanism and the process of construction are still under
examination.

In order to understand the interaction between the literary product and other products
and how a literary tourism product can grow out of an existing tourist destination, this
research borrowed from Bourdieu’s field theory (1992) and the theories of the art world
by Danto (1964) and Dickie (1974, 1984) to examine the phenomenon. The art world
theory was first proposed in the 1960s. Danto (1964) argued that the art world is an atmos-
phere of art theory, involving a kind of knowledge of it. Dickie (1974) later developed his
theory based on Danto’s, and called it the institutional theory of art. This art world com-
prises the following components: (a) the institution of art world, which includes the organ-
izations and the systematic rules which regulate the actions of organizations such as art
galleries, museums and the media; (b) the activities through which the identity of the art
can be given to the product; and (c) the agents who provide the interpretations of
meaning to the product, such as art gallery managers, art critics, art businesspeople, etc.
Through this art world, the art product can be acknowledged. In 1984, Dickie pointed
out that a standard rule could provide a better understanding of the art than a structured
institution. These standard rules include activities or practices based on shared understand-
ings, and rules to guide behaviors and art activities. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) further
developed this concept into a belief mechanism, and changed the art world into the art field.
Bourdieu’s (1992) art field is constructed by members according to a specific logic, and is a
place where the individuals participate in social activities. It has several features: (a) the
field is a relatively independent social space; (b) the field is a relatively objective relation-
ship space; (c) the field is also a competitive gaming space full of conflicts; and (d) the
border of the field is empirical. The relationships in the field are complex. Bourdieu and
Wacquant (1992) further argued that in this art field, belief, acting as a collective faith,
plays the main role, and that the field is produced and maintained through the production
of belief. A special value system, the belief and worship of the artists and their products,
is created. The mechanism of creating the belief is a self-reinforcing system and exists in
the entire process of art production. It works in the whole network and guarantees the art
field’s independence.

Although a literary tourism product is not the same as a conventional literary product,
there are some similarities between the two. First of all, the reading and interpretation of the
text is necessary. Second, the product itself, whether simply literary or a literary tourism
product, has to be acknowledged by the literary world or literary tourist world. The invoca-
tion of the art world may help to understand the process of formation of a literary tourism
product and the nature of art. Based on Bourdieu’s field theory and the art world theory by
Danto and Dickie, this study proposes using atmosphere, activities and the agents of art
field development in an analytical framework in order to understand the literary product.

Thus, we examine the development of the San Mao Teahouse in a tourist destination
through the following three research questions: (a) What is the relationship between the li-
terary atmosphere of San Mao Teahouse and the historical town of Zhouzhuang? (b) What
are the literary activities taking place at San Mao Teahouse and the tourist activities in
Zhouzhuang; and? (c) What is the role of the managers and tourists at San Mao Teahouse
in making this a literary place?
Methodology

The investigation began in 2011. Researchers first joined a package tour to Zhouzhuang during 7 days in mid-October 2011, to gain first-hand field experience of the research site and on-site observations. Then, in late December 2012, a 10-day field trip to Zhouzhuang was conducted, which included collecting documents about Zhouzhuang and San Mao Teahouse, interviews with visitors and manager of San Mao Teahouse. Finally, for 10 days in February 2013, interviews with tour guides, local residents and other local business people were conducted to verify the information.

The researcher stayed in a guesthouse near San Mao Teahouse, visited the place every day, and built a close relationship with the owner, Mr Zhang. The friendship facilitated the research, and the owner allowed the researcher to carry out the studies in the teahouse, which enabled the researcher to make participation observations, interview the tourists and document the tourists’ comments.

The main methods of data collection are participation observation and in-depth interview. The author observed what the tourists did in San Mao Teahouse, what they read and what they talked about, and their interactions with others. The fieldwork also led to notes of nearly 100 h of observation and 109 photos. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 20 literary tourists. Each interview lasted for 30 min to 1 h. In addition, the manager of San Mao Teahouse, tour guides, local residents and other local business people were also interviewed.

The researcher also read and examined all the materials collected in the teahouse. These materials included correspondence between San Mao and the teahouse manager, and also included newspapers, photos, books and drawings related with San Mao. The most important material was the writings and comments left by the tourists. The records from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2014 in San Mao Teahouse were accessed with the permission of the management. The writings of the tourists were either photographed or copied. The interview transcripts and the writings left by the tourists reached 100,000 words, and the researcher collected them in 20 books.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in and beyond psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis has been widely used in the qualitative analysis of tourism research (du Cros & Liu, 2013; Ong & du Cros, 2012; Ryan & Collins, 2008), and can be treated as the first two steps of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. It represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data-set. Themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways in the thematic analysis: in an inductive or ‘bottom up’ way, and in a theoretical or deductive or ‘top down’ way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Compared with the inductive thematic analysis driven by data, the theoretical thematic analysis would tend to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical with the specific research question, and is thus more explicitly analyst driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data.

The theoretical thematic analysis was conducted in this study. In order to ensure a high intercoder reliability coefficient, two researchers implemented the initial coding independently, using referential units to define coding units related to research question about growth of literary place in tourist destination. After reading and rereading the transcripts and field notes, a holistic impression was obtained. Then, ‘open-coding’ was adopted,
meaning that the researchers started by coding the interview transcripts sentence by sentence into different concepts, and some themes appeared (Ong & du Cros, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Three ‘key’ themes were identified in this study about atmosphere, activities and managers in San Mao Teahouse. These three themes were not necessarily the most prevalent themes across the data-set, but they captured an important element about growth of literary place. In this instance, the thematic analysis was driven by this particular analytic question.

**Zhouzhuang and the San Mao Teahouse in China**

Zhouzhuang is located in the Kunshan district of Suzhou city in Jiangsu province, China, and is only 38 km from the core of Suzhou and 70 km from Shanghai. Zhouzhuang is about 0.47 km² in size, with a population of 6000. Zhouzhuang is surrounded by lakes and crossed by four canals dating back to the thirteenth century. This type of town was a typical landscape in this region; however, most of these historical towns were destroyed in the early 1980s in the name of economic growth and modernity. This town was luckily conserved due to interventions by professors from Tongji University in Shanghai.

Tourism development in Zhouzhuang started in the 1980s. Since it is close to Shanghai, the small historical town gradually got known in the region and attracted tourists. The locals developed this town as a tourist attraction, and in 1989 they started charging formal ticket fees. In 1989, tourist arrivals reached 55,000, and currently the average annual visitation is at the level of 3.5 million. Its current attraction as a tourism destination stems directly from the synergies between its unique natural environment and its built heritage.

San Mao, whose real name is Chen Ping, was born in 1943 and is a Taiwanese writer. She has traveled to 54 countries, and all her writings were done while she was traveling in different countries. Her most popular writings are *The story of the Sahara*, *Monsoon will never come again* and *Flowers in the dream*. These writings reflect her search for humanity from the simple stories about herself, her lovers and the people she met. She is the symbol of the modern people because for her, mobility is her life (Guo, 2006; Wang, 2008). It is said that:

San Mao came to Zhouzhuang on April 13 1989, a rainy day. She wanted to settle down. She described the Zhouzhuang as the final destination of humanity and ideal place for living. By chance, San Mao met a local writer, Mr. Zhang, in Zhouzhuang. They had a long-term correspondence exchanges later. This local writer wrote an essay *San Mao in Zhouzhuang* which was published soon inside China and then abroad, after San Mao left Zhouzhuang. San Mao wrote in the first letter, ‘it is very nice, because you are in Zhouzhuang’, and wrote in the last one in 1991, I would like to come Zhouzhuang again, to drink Apo tea, to eat big crabs in the streets of your hometown. (Zhang, 2003; M1)

San Mao Teahouse was opened by Mr Zhang after San Mao’s death on 4 January 1991. It has a history of over 20 years. The teahouse has two floors and is built near the water. It is full of San Mao’s photos, books, music and other materials related to San Mao. Tourists rest there, drink tea, read San Mao’s work and also write what they think about San Mao and Zhouzhuang. About three million words have been produced and collected in prose, poetry, letters and notes in San Mao Teahouse, as well as many paintings (Figures 1 and 2).

Nowadays, San Mao Teahouse has become an important tourism attraction and literary place in Zhouzhuang. Based on the fieldwork in 2012 and 2013, the majority of the visitors are those who came purposely to San Mao Teahouse and Zhouzhuang for San Mao’s sake. They love San Mao. ‘My whole teenage is immersed in the imagination of her story of the Sahara and then she companies my youth age and influence me until now’ (TR3).
When I was in senior high school, I love San Mao very much, especially *The Undead Bird*, which always makes my eyes filled with tears. San Mao’s words become the most cherished memory in my high school when I was at the bottom of my life. (TR5)

San Mao Teahouse is a step from Zhouzhuang to the country and has become famous all over the world. It has become a cultural landscape in Zhouzhuang and has been highlighted in a variety of featured programs by more than 20 provincial and municipal television stations and more than 20 foreign national television stations. Introductions to San Mao Teahouse can be seen in tourist brochures, government texts, books, the media and visitors’ blogs.

**The relationship between San Mao Teahouse and historical town Zhouzhuang**

Zhouzhuang is a typical town in the lower Yangtze River area, and its unique landscape has always had a place in the literary world. It is a place where many writers have lived, including the writer Zhang Jihan in the third century, the poet Liu Yuxi in the sixth century, the contemporary writer Ye Chuchang and many others. Zhouzhuang is also the birthplace of the Nanshe literary association in the nineteenth century, which has contributed significantly to the literary heritage in this place. Overall, there are 38 literary heritage sites in this town (Ruan, 2004). The special atmosphere of the landscape has always attracted artists and writers to write about Zhouzhuang, as seen in such works as *Long lasting emotional Zhouzhuang* (1999) by Wu Guangzhong, who is also one of the most famous painters in China, *Reading Zhouzhuang’s Cloud and Water* (2002) by Zhao Yixin and *Dating in Zhouzhuang* (2007) by Shao Jun. In addition, communities and businesses have also held many literary activities. In 1999, the Tourist Company of

![Figure 1. Inside San Mao Teahouse.](source: Photographed by the Liao Jiang.)
Zhouzhuang organized a writing competition at the Zhouzhuang Intentional Tourist Art Festival. In 2006, a competition of best poems on Zhouzhuang was again organized. The writings from these activities are compiled into books such as *Poetic Zhouzhuang* (2007) and *Night writing at the side of south lake* (2011) by Fei Linxin. These activities and books have added a literary flavor in this place. Therefore, literary tourism is a continuity of literary reading and writing here, but this activity is carried out through tourism. San Mao Teahouse fits nicely within the environment.

San Mao Teahouse is a two-story house located by the riverside inside the historical town, and was designed to be a place to read San Mao and relax. There are many photos and portraits of San Mao, sitting or standing, frowning or smiling, and watching every visitor quietly. A song she wrote was continuously playing, ‘Do not ask me where I
come from, my hometown is in the distance, why stray, wandering far away 

There are pictures on the wall of the manager with the celebrities Long Yongtu, Wu Guanzhong, Yu Quyu, Jin Yidan, Song Zuying and so on. The first author of this study who visited the site developed a high respect for San Mao after reading the letters from San Mao to the owner of the teahouse, Mr Zhang Jihan, and the articles about San Mao he had cut from newspapers and magazines, some with San Mao’s signature on them.

Tourists favor the atmosphere of both Zhouzhuang ancient town and San Mao Teahouse. They love the beautiful scenery of bridges over flowing rivers in Zhouzhuang, and the refreshments and peaceful atmosphere in San Mao Teahouse. Although there are many houses inside Zhouzhuang, including reading rooms and the private school, they are only used as visiting places. Tourists cannot really sit and read in them. San Mao Teahouse therefore is a supplement to them.

It is enjoyable to watch the delicate scenery, to have a taste of Wansan trotter, to read the works of San Mao in the Teahouse, to drink a cup of tea with delicious desserts and to smell the flavor of Jiangnan in the air. There are ancient camphor buildings, black tiles and white walls with the mottled shadows of leaves, the slightly swaying buds, flashing sunshine and the fresh green tea. It is really emotional appealing.

The San Mao Teahouse provides a place for tourists to relax, read, imagine, reflect and write, where Zhouzhuang provides a place of imagination, ancient buildings, paths with stones, a clear river and people living in a peaceful world in the mode of ‘sunrise to be out, sunset to be in’. The ancient town and the teahouse are complementary to each other. One tourist mentioned, Mumu (referring to the tourist herself) sits here experiencing the mood of San Mao. She feels good. The only pity is that she wants to see the sceneries in the rain, which may be another kind of beauty. Mumu feels honored to be here and satisfied when she is staying in the Teahouse.

Literary activities at San Mao Teahouse and tourism activities in Zhouzhuang

Tourism is a leisure activity; it includes experiencing the town, local culture, folk life and art performances, participating in local cultural activities and appreciating the architecture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Zhouzhuang. These activities have strong flavors of leisure, nostalgia and esthetic appreciation. Literary activities are also a kind of leisure, most literature lovers are also tourists in Zhouzhuang; they taste Sao Mao’s literary works, listen to San Mao’s songs, recollect San Mao’s stories, express literary views and drink famous Grandma Tea in San Mao Teahouse. These literary activities share a lot of similarities with the touristic activities. Visitors want to reflect on themselves and their lives, or get back to themselves through relaxing in the scenic historical town, memorizing the past and running away from their busy modern lives. Therefore, these literary activities are not merely a traditional way of simply understanding the content, form, language, technique, theme, thought, life experience and ethics of literature, but also a combination of leisure and the appreciation of local landscapes and folk customs. The literary activities, with considerable similarities to the ancient town’s tourism activities, fit well with the environment of Zhouzhuang and the slow pace of life. This match is represented in the following poem left in the San Mao Teahouse.

Fall in love with Zhouzhuang morning,
Green wave ripples in the dawn, bridges and people,
When visitors poured into Zhouzhuang,
I sat in San Mao teahouse,
Appreciate you quietly: the beauty of slow life,
Antique: a cup of tea in San Mao teahouse drinking,
Slow down the pace of life, listen to Kun opera mildly,
Living an unfettered and tranquil life. (TN1)

The interactions between the San Mao Teahouse literary activities and the Zhouzhuang tourism activities are first reflected in the perceptual and rational unification through literary appreciation and tourism activities. They combine both the perceptual and rational images, such as truth, morals and social ideals. San Mao is the tourists’ favorite female writer. Her elegant, venturesome and unique personality, her pursuit of the spiritual over the material and her legendary life, all fascinate a considerable amount of tourists. ‘Understand you and Love you’ are the words used by visitors most, which shows San Mao’s perceptual side. In Ye Wei’s article titled *Zhang Jihan in the Ancient Town*, which opposes promoting San Mao Teahouse as a chain store, he argued,

I cannot agree with that because San Mao Teahouse is quite precious. It is its cultural atmosphere, the hospitality of Mr. Zhang, the uniqueness of street encountering that constitute the preciousness. It is owing to the lack of commercial interest that it becomes a pure land of culture. (TR2)

Respect for local culture and antipathy toward commercialization represent the perspectives of most visitors, reflecting the rational aspect of tourists.

Furthermore, both San Mao Teahouse and Zhouzhuang are full of memories and images. When appreciating literature, readers can recreate literary meanings according to content and form, such as storyline and artistic techniques. Through memories and imagination, readers engage themselves in literature and link themselves with literature, writer, real life and historic context. Tourism is also closely related to exotic scenery, ethnic culture and the imagination of a utopian ideal life. Like San Mao, many visitors regard Zhouzhuang as an ideal place for dwelling. As one expressed, ‘Everyone has a dream or a picture in mind … Zhouzhuang is the place which I have dreamed of in my dream. I wish I could lead the free and peaceful life near the mountain and by the river’ (TN12). San Mao Teahouse provides visitors a shock to their soul; as one of the visitors said,

The only thing that shocks my soul is the simple physical style without particular decorations. Sitting by the window of the little loft, you can spend a relaxing, pleasant, and slow-paced morning there. Sometimes there’s a boat passing by, you can enjoy the cheerful talk of the people on the boat … Reading through the texts written by many other anonymous visitors like me, I felt the admirations and memories of San Mao. The illusion which seems unreal emerged in my mind whether I came to the place where San Mao had once been. Did she really come here, live for a while, taste the tea, appreciate the scenery, and write down those beautiful words? (TN19)

Here, at San Mao Teahouse in Zhouzhuang, literary activities and tourism activities constitute the visitors’ pleasant spiritual experience.

Last but not least, in San Mao Teahouse and Zhouzhuang, visitors can encounter spiritual resonance and a longing for life. When they are appreciating literature, readers are always quite moved, and they unconsciously tend to regard themselves as the characters in literature, becoming part of it. They think as the character thinks, love as the character
loves and feel as the character feels. The main feature of resonance is the elimination of distance between the reader and literature, and the achievement of mutual intimacy. In tourism, this is shown as a ‘flow and peak’ experience, in which tourists are immersed in the cultural and natural context and the wider surroundings. At San Mao Teahouse, visitors appreciate San Mao’s literature and have the connotation of breathing and dwelling there as San Mao did. As written in one visitor’s note,

My friends all said that I am more and more like you (referring to San Mao). You are always in my mind. Coincidentally, though we live in different period of time, the year you were gone is the year I was born. We’ve also got the same surname. When I knew you had come here to search for home, I suspected whether we have something in common and even some more connections. I just put them as the coincidence between you and me. (TN17)

The reasons for visitors to come to Zhouzhuang were the same as with San Mao; they have the desire for wanderlust and to experience the similarities and differences of every place, and more importantly to search for an unforgettable place and live an ordinary life there. They are also searching for the previous fascinations of Zhouzhuang, where tiny bridges, flowing water and a home there represent the final resting place and the ideal utopian life. San Mao Teahouse provides a place for visitors to self-reflect and relax their minds, and when the visitors taste San Mao’s works and feel her brilliant expressiveness, they obtain a sense of gratitude and belief for their life. One visitor took San Mao as an example to inspire herself:

Zhuozhuo [the tourist referring to herself], you love San Mao, so you must lead a stronger life. No matter what happen, whatever difficulty, disease, or despair, you must stay brave, strong, and optimistic. To be a strong, excellent, warmhearted, and happy woman. (TN3)

The owner and manager of San Mao Teahouse, Mr Zhang, is a local writer in Zhouzhuang. He is the person who ties Zhouzhuang and San Mao Teahouse tightly together. Mr Zhang loves writing, and is intimately familiar with San Mao’s work. ‘It is very nice, because you are in Zhouzhuang,’ San Mao wrote in her first letter to Mr Zhang. In fact, it is an acknowledgement of the contribution made by Mr Zhang to Zhouzhuang. He has published numerous articles on Zhouzhuang and has helped greatly in its promotion. He has collected a lot of materials and wrote the essay San Mao in Zhouzhuang, which has been published in two domestic Chinese newspapers. This essay was also reprinted by the famous Hong Kong magazine China Tourism. Taiwan’s magazine Crown sent his essay to San Mao. San Mao and Mr Zhang began and maintained a long-term correspondence later.

Mr Zhang opened the San Mao Teahouse in order to commemorate San Mao after her death. This San Mao Teahouse was also a small museum to San Mao. He presented all the correspondence between him and San Mao as well as San Mao’s books and other materials related to San Mao. A song San Mao wrote also played all day long inside the teahouse. Not only this, but the presence of Mr Zhang and his interaction with visitors increased the visitors’ interest in the place and their belief in the story between San Mao and Zhouzhuang.

The old man put down his book, and chatted with me. He said he could feel that I was not ordinary tourist. I smile slightly and say why? He commented you have a taste of literature in your body. I smile and say I like reading, like San Mao. He is very happy, when he hears these words. He tells me a lot of stories about him and San Mao excitedly … (TB4)
In fact, Mr Zhang has also become a legend, and his way of life and his personality have also become an attraction and an incentive for the tourists to reflect on themselves.

I envy Zhang’s lives, making friends with articles and tea, living together with beloved wife in the water town. I admire Zhang’s attitude to life, quiet, noble and free from vulgarity. Zhang is a commendable intellectual who survived in this material world. The old man is the ideal literary youth in my heart. Even in Zhouzhuang which is far away from the world, it is difficult to find such simple and elegant place. I hope that the owner can stick to his will and away from the material world. (TR4)

Zhang’s own books have become popular among tourists such as Soul of drama, Celebrity and Zhouzhuang, San Mao Teahouse and Three-course vegetable of mother.

Zhang’s works has his own unique style. He likes to use paragraphs to organize his work. He explained that each paragraph is an independent section. I especially like the beginning and the end. The essay Childhood’s July is my favorite. It begins with if, then ends like this: Childhood’s July has passed, but the innocence of childhood has influenced and determined one’s life, it is a powerful force. (TN42)

They also expressed praise and hope for Mr Zhang:

Nowadays more and more people don’t care anything but money and desire, it is very rare to find Zhouzhuang and San Mao Teahouse where you can stay out of everything quietly and narcissistically. Hoping Zhang can continue to live outside the material world. (TN40)

The literary field of San Mao Teahouse is co-performed by tourists, literary managers and agents based on interests and beliefs to form a great attraction for other tourists. The manager of San Mao Teahouse portrays a particular set of images, physical attributes of the sites and a range of interpretive techniques that can be used to convey messages. He connects San Mao Teahouse and Zhouzhuang and blurs the boundary between the two fields.

The tourists at San Mao Teahouse also participate in producing literature products, and these products become attractions themselves. Their writings include criticisms of San Mao’s and Mr Zhang’s writings, like: ‘Some of the works may be well written, but I do not respect her. I feel that her sorrow was due to the gap between dream and reality. After all, she is not brave enough’ (TR1), and also their feeling about the places, as in the poem quoted above. These writings not only leave further images for others, but also build a bridge between San Mao’s world and the tourists’ world.

Sitting there silently and reading carefully about the words left by people, I realized that this empty Teahouse has kept so many footprints and figures. I gave out a sign that we often only see one side of our lives and ignore the other side. In the corner of the world, there are always different people who have different lives and have their own happiness. (TN9)

Different from portrayed in the research by Chronis (2005) and Herbert (2001), San Mao Teahouse is not produced by providers and consumers in a cyclical way, or simultaneously. The owner of the teahouse played a crucial role in its establishment and early promotion through writing books. Yet, in the latter process, it is the tourists, especially those who love San Mao, who play the role of marketing promoters though the Internet and word of mouth, and in addition the tourists themselves have also left a huge volume of writings. With the writings of San Mao, the owner and the tourists,
the teahouse is a place full of literary capital and produces a strong attractiveness for the tourists.

Discussion
The adoption of the art world and field theory as the analytical framework can provide an insight into the formation of the literary tourism product in a tourism destination. Because a literary tourism destination is a relatively independent social space linking with an ancient town tourism destination as an external field, this historical town is the object of literary imagination for readers and writers. The boundary between the two fields is thus blurred. Second, a literary tourism destination is a space of relationships, and is not limited to the original material associated with writers and their works. The physical environment, the fundamental facility and the social-cultural atmosphere of the ancient town are also loved by the literary tourism lovers. Finally, the literary tourism destination is not only a competitive space but also a cooperative space. The literary activity is an important supplement for the ancient town’s tourism activity, and hence the literature appreciators and the ancient town tourists complement the destination for each other.

In addition, the insoluble bond between literature and tourism in China facilitates the development of literary tourism products. China is a literary country and has accumulated numerous excellent literary heritages in its 5000-year history. Travelers have left a huge amount of poems and essays, and tourists all like to visit places where famous people have visited and left poems. Their gaze on the touristic sites is often through the eyes of the poets and writers and therefore is often an esthetic view. Both tourists and readers are in common seeking a kind of literary understanding of a particular place.

Compared with the studies done by Chronis (2005) and Herbert (2001), this research shows tourists in a more important role. The tourists not only participate in the construction process of the literary tourism product, but also leave their own writings there, including their book reviews, travel notes on Zhouzhuang and poems. Large volumes of these writings generate further interest for the tourists. This generation of new literature by tourists was not paid attention to by Chronis (2005) and Herbert (2001). However, it is through the accumulation of new literature that the rich flavor of San Mao Teahouse is obtained in a stable literature field, and pure literature tourists are attracted.

Tourism commercialization has long been a concern for scholars. Most scholars think that in the tourism development process, commercialized culture brings damage to original cultural connotations and authenticity, such as in the assimilation, commercialization and vulgarization of ethnic culture and the loss of its art’s value and significance (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler, 2003; Mason, 2004; Smith, 1989). However, the case of the San Mao literary product shows that although literary tourism products are not what Dickie (1974) described as art products in the conventional sense, they are experiential products associated with artistic and leisure quality. San Mao Teahouse provides a place for tourists to read, reflect, and write. In this way, art has stepped out of the formal institutional position and entered the mainstream. It has turned into a product that everyone can approach and have the ability to appreciate.

Meanwhile, this research has important practical significance in providing some insights into the development and management of literary places. China is a country rich in literary works, and literary tourism is heavily promoted, but few successful stories have been heard. The success of the San Mao Teahouse indicates the importance of social entrepreneurs who also apply a high literary talent in their tourism product
development, because San Mao Teahouse is not operated wholly as a business but also as a place for those who share common interests to interact with each other and to express themselves.

As the teahouse manager said to me,

My wife and I have been retired and have nothing to do. To cherish the memory of the deceased friend and to make more friends … To us this age, we don’t put money seriously. What we want is the rare good mood and to do what you love to do. It’s the best fun. (M1)

The arrival of these literary tourists and their activities associated with literary works generate a stable field for art, and this art field further attracts other tourists who may not specialize in literary works but are curious about them.

Conclusion

This research analyzed the growth of the San Mao Teahouse in Zhouzhuang. As a literary tourism destination, it has been developed in the mass art market. It is a place where tourists can have a literary experience and at the same time a leisure experience. The unique landscape and human atmosphere provides the environment and material for the reading and writing of literature, and thus, literary activities can be naturally integrated into the tourist esthetic and recreational activities in the historical town.

This study makes some contributions to the literature on literary tourism. San Mao Teahouse is not produced by managers and tourists in a cyclic or simultaneous way (Chronis, 2005; Herbert, 2001). As the agent of this literary tourism destination, the teahouse manager mainly made the difference in the teahouse’s construction and its early publicity. After that, it mainly relied on the tourists’ belief in the relationship between San Mao and Zhouzhuang, their literary recreation in the teahouse and the marketing through various channels to make the San Mao Teahouse a relatively stable art venue.

Second, this study shows that belief has played an important role in the development of the San Mao Teahouse, and that it is the core force allowing the art field to be a relatively stable entity. In the literary tourism field, the power of belief is very important. The formation of the literary atmosphere in San Mao Teahouse is inseparable with tourists’ belief in the relationship between San Mao and Zhouzhuang. The research has found that the formation of the belief has experienced several stages: at the beginning, the majority of tourists were not familiar with San Mao and the San Mao Teahouse. Only a few young people had read about San Mao. This small group of San Mao admirers who had visited Zhouzhuang then visited the teahouse and began to read, write there and promote the place. Later, more and more of San Mao’s admirers intentionally came to visit San Mao Teahouse, and began to link Zhouzhuang with San Mao. The visitors also want to experience the feeling of Zhouzhuang to understand San Mao and her writing, and also want to read San Mao in the teahouse named after her. Now, the custom of reading San Mao’s work and expressing their own thinking and emotions at San Mao Teahouse has formed. The San Mao literary tourists believe that it is only at this place that an in-depth understanding of San Mao and the inspiration for writing can be obtained. A belief in the linkage between Zhouzhuang, San Mao Teahouse, San Mao and themselves is built.

Finally, there exist some limitations in this study. The study has been done from a tourism perspective in order to see the growth of a literary tourism product, and there is a lack of discussion on what the perspectives are from the art field. As well, the role in the literary world of the works produced in this particular place is not explored.
Furthermore, the implications are derived from only one particular case, and whether these implications are also applicable in other literary places still needs to be examined.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**References**


