BETWEEN POSTMODERNISM AND CHINESE FOLK ART

An Analysis of The Yelang Valley

Yue Huang

Degree 30 ECTS credits
Thesis in China studies
Master’s in East Asian Studies (120 credits)
Spring term 2018
Supervisor: Monika Gaenssbauer
Abstract

Postmodernism and folk culture with their references to the past and the present may appear to be two contradictory concepts. But nowadays many postmodern artists have blended folk culture and other traditional elements into their art works, especially in China, a country with a long history and a tremendous amount of traditional cultures, including a variety of folk cultures. In combining folk culture with postmodern features, art establishes relationship with the country’s history and gets close to the local people, it becomes special and regional. This thesis focuses on analyzing a piece of land art in Guiyang, China, in order to show how this art work has been reflecting features of postmodernism and of folk art in China. This study shows that postmodernism is still exerting influence on art in mainland China and that it is a vogue to create art works bearing elements of folk cultures and traditions.

Key words

Chinese land art, postmodernism, folk culture, Chinese traditions, Nuo culture, ecology, seclusion culture, Chinese folk artists
Acknowledgement

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Monika Gaenssbauer, for her considerate guidance, generous advice and support during the study.

I would also like to thank the artist Song Peilun, the ‘father of Yelang Valley’, for his generous hospitality in Yelang Valley and for patiently answering my interview questions. It is his work that made this study possible.
# TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................5
   1.1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY ......................6
   1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS ..................................................7
   1.3. METHODOLOGY ................................................................8
       1.3.1. DATA COLLECTION ......................................................8
   1.4. LIMITATIONS .................................................................11
   1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW .....................................................12

2. BACKGROUND RESEARCH ....................................................13
   2.1. THE ANCIENT STATE OF YELANG AND YELANG CULTURE..........13
   2.2. SONG PEILUN AND CHINESE FOLK CULTURE ..........................15
   2.3 FOLK CULTURE IN MODERN CHINA ......................................18
   2.4 “NUO” CULTURE（傩文化） ...............................................20
   2.5 POSTMODERNISM IN CHINA ..............................................23
   2.6 LAND ART ...................................................................27

3. AN ANALYSIS OF YELANG VALLEY FROM THE
   PERSPECTIVE OF POSTMODERNISM .....................................30
   3.1 SIMULACRUM ................................................................30
   3.2 DECONSTRUCTION ..........................................................33
   3.3 ECOLOGY ....................................................................36
   3.4 NOSTALGIA ..................................................................38

4. FROM YELANG VALLEY TO CHINESE AESTHETICS AND
   TRADITIONS ........................................................................42
   4.1 A CULTURE OF SECLUSION ..............................................42
   4.2 XUNGEN CULTURE ..........................................................47

5. RECEPTION AND IMPACT OF YELANG VALLEY ......................50

6. CONCLUSION .......................................................................53

7. LIST OF REFERENCES ..........................................................56
1. Introduction

There is a stone castle located in Yelang Valley (yelang gu 夜郎谷), Guiyang(贵阳), China, which has been built over a period of 20 years, using elements of Miao(苗) culture from Guizhou and Nuo(傩) folk religion as its inspirations. This castle has attracted worldwide attention. The artist who built this castle is named Song Peilun(宋培伦). Song was born in Guizhou province. As an artist, he has been influenced by both Chinese and Western art works. Therefore, Yelang Valley shows both features of folk culture and of postmodernism.

Postmodernism was introduced to China in the 1980s, in a long and slow process, firstly in literature, then in art, and today it can be found in every field related to people’s daily lives. During the 1990s, due to the
development of both the economy and the art in China, postmodernism and visual art have undergone a rapid development, too. Many postmodern art works have come into existence and more and more artists in mainland China have been influenced by postmodern art.\(^1\) It was also during the 1900s that Song started his art project — Yelang Valley.

1.1. **Background and purpose of the study**

The artist Song Peilun is called the “Father of Yelang Valley” because from 1996 onwards, he spent 20 years designing the village of stone figures. Yelang Valley with its massive collection of art spans over two million square feet and includes castles, lakes, and freestanding towers adorned with facial features. This land art work was inspired by “Crazy Horse”, a mountain monument dedicated to a Native American warrior, in the US state of South Dakota. After a visit to the United States, Song dedicated his life to building a memorial to the artistic heritage of Yelang Valley.

The aim of this study is to analyze a land art work in China which bears both features of folk art and postmodern art. In my definition of folk art, I follow the British-American art historian Shearer West: Folk art is art produced from an indigenous culture or by peasants or other laboring

tradespeople. In contrast to fine art, folk art is primarily utilitarian and decorative rather than purely aesthetic.² There is no agreement about the definition of postmodern art. In this thesis I identify postmodern art as art that shows generally acknowledged postmodern features and can be seen as a reaction to modern art. I strive to trace its origin and development, and to inquire how this art work has influenced Chinese people. One aim of my study is to shed light on the question how Chinese folk art and postmodern art are currently perceived. Moreover, I would like to scrutinize the relations among Chinese folk art, postmodern art and Chinese aesthetics and traditions.

1.2. Research questions

Accordingly, to achieve the purpose of analyzing Yelang Valley and its features of folk art and postmodern art, the following research questions are in focus:

What were the origins of Yelang Valley Castle and why did this form of art become popular in China?

Which kind of aesthetics and traditions are connected with this art work?

Which kind of reception has this specific art work experienced and what kind of influence is it exerting on Chinese culture and art?

______________

1.3. Methodology

The research of this thesis is based on an individual case study. As the researcher of adult education Sharan B. Merriam has shown, “a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system”, with three special features: particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. For the social scientist Robert K. Yin, “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”

As the aim of my research is to analyze the relationship between Chinese contemporary art and two special features, elements of folk culture and postmodernism, I found a specific art work, the Yelang Valley, characteristic in its combination of both features. Moreover, Yelang Valley shows in my view cultural specific, unique features which are connected with Chinese aesthetics and traditions.

1.3.1. Data Collection

In my research I have been collecting two sorts of data: primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected from an interview and direct observation, and the secondary data stem from existing data in both fields.

____________________

of research: postmodernism and folk art. The latter data I have collected from book sources, scientific journals and the internet.

**Personal interview**

One source for my primary data was a personal interview. On January 30th, 2018, I conducted an interview with the artist Song Peilun in Yelang Valley. This was a one-hour interview with twelve questions. In all forms of qualitative research data are collected through interviews,\(^4\) this is the most direct and effective way to collect data. My design of the interview questions directed to Song followed the “flexible case design” described by Yin,\(^5\) which means the interview questions can adapt to the process of the interview. This design allows to gather potentially unexpected and important information during the interview. My interview questions were mostly open-ended, in order to include the artist’s experiences, opinions and background. I asked how Song defines and interprets his work. I asked about his opinions on local, national and international cultures, the connections between Yelang Valley and other Chinese artists who live there, etc. The interview data have been recorded.


**Direct observation**

In addition to the interview with Song, I also applied the method of direct observation at Yelang Valley from January 29th to 31st, 2018.

Observation is another primary source of data in the research of a case study, it is also a particular helpful strategy for understanding ‘ill-defined phenomena’. As Yelang Valley is still a piece of open and undefined land art, direct observation is an important way to collect firsthand data. My observation was mainly focused on the following aspects: the situation and state of protection of Yelang Valley castle, the life and work of Song and several other artists in the Valley, as well as visitors’ perceptions of the Valley. My explorations were not only limited to Yelang Valley but also included observation of the local environment and folk cultures in Guizhou Province.

**Secondary Data**

The secondary data I used come from already existing data within relevant research areas, they stem mainly from book sources, scientific journals and internet sources. Even though a study of Yelang Valley has not started yet in China, data related to my study have not been difficult to collect. The secondary data for my thesis are sources written in English and in Chinese languages. Since this is a study related to a land art work in China and to Chinese folk culture, it is necessary to refer to historical

---

and literary Chinese sources. However, postmodernism is a term born in a Western context and developed in China as a foreign study topic. In order to apply concepts of postmodernism and postmodernism in China it is necessary to use English texts.

1.4. Limitations

As this is an individual case study which focuses on Yelang Valley, I am not going to give a general analysis of postmodernism in China and of Chinese folk culture as such. I have decided in favor of a clear focus on several relevant folk cultures in the local area of Guizhou.

Another limitation of this thesis is that until today we rarely find studies combining an analysis of postmodernism and folk culture in China, despite the fact that there do exist quite a few art works which show features of both. But there are at least a few sources that can be found in the Western context, for example, Pertti Anttonen’s work *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folk Scholarship*, which can be referred to. Anttonen is a Finnish expert in Cultural History. But for the specific context of China one can rightly state a remarkable lack of research focusing on art works displaying joint features of postmodernism and folk culture.

1.5. Literature Review

The topic of my thesis will be contextualized within the existing literature on postmodernism and folk culture in Chapter 2.
2. Background Research

In this chapter, I am going to present the findings of my background research related to Yelang Valley. I am going to focus on both, Western and Chinese perspectives, and going to apply both, English and Chinese literature. This chapter deals with the origins and the features of Yelang Valley, as well as the factors that inspired the artist to create this art work.

2.1. The Ancient State of Yelang and Yelang Culture

Regarding the land art’s name, the following can be stated: “Yelang” was one of the ancient states in ancient China with a long history and colorful cultures. During the Han Dynasty it was located in South-West China” (西南夷 xinanyi). There still exist very different opinions on Yelang in the academic community. Some scholars believe that it was located in the Bijie (毕节) section of Liupanshui (六盘水), in today’s Guizhou.⁸ A record about the ancient state of Yelang can be found in the chapter “The Southwestern Barbarians” in the Records of the Grand Historian (《史记》· 西南夷列传 Shiji · Xinanyi Liezhuan), and according to archaeological data, it is generally believed that the state existed in the Warring States Period (from BC475 to BC221). Because the Minjiang River (牂牁江) is the junction of Liupanshui City and Pu’an County.

---

county), the site of Liupanshui and Hezhangkele (赫章可乐) in Bijie is considered to be the area of the ancient state of Yelang. The Chinese historian Sima Qian\(^9\) described Yelang as the largest country in the southwest at the time. It is described as a rich state with strong armies.\(^{10}\) When the Southern Yue state was destroyed by the Han, the Yelang began to pay tribute to the Han Dynasty, and the Han emperor Wu appointed the King of Yelang. When the king of Yelang led troops against the Han Emperor Cheng, the Han Dynasty destroyed the troops and Yelang was incorporated into the Han empire as Yelang county until the times of the Song Dynasty.\(^{11}\)

The site of the ancient state of Yelang lies in today’s Guizhou province where Song Peilun was born and grew up. In the interview he said that he believed the Yelang culture to be a precious local culture. He had heard the legend of Yelang in his childhood. Therefore, he chose Yelang as name for his art work.

The Yelang of the historical time was primarily a confederation of agricultural farming tribes. The residents of Yelang are directly related

---

\(^9\) Sima, Qian (司马迁 BC145-BC86) was a Chinese historian of the early Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220).


with the following ethnic groups in today’s Guizhou: Gelao (仡佬族), Buyi (布依族), Dong (侗族), Zhuang (壮族), and Yi (彝族). These ethnic groups can still be found in today’s Sichuan-Guizhou area (川贵 Chuangui). In Song Peilun’ view they make Guizhou’s culture more colorful and unique, which is why he hopes to contribute to preserve their culture and let the world know about this culture. The manifold folk cultures and the emphasis on harmony between human beings and nature have become two of the most important characteristics of the Yelang culture. This is also the spirit that Song wants to pass on to the world through his art.

2.2. Song Peilun and Chinese Folk culture

In 1940, Song was born into a rural family in the town of Meitan (湄潭县), Guizhou Province. He dropped out from high school because of illness, and then started to draw manga. In 1957, he began to publish art works in newspapers and magazines such as the People’s Daily. Song has staged many art exhibitions in Guiyang, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong, many of his works, such as masks carved from wood, are now collected in the National Art Museum of China and the Beijing International Art Gallery. His art activities mostly focus on Chinese folk

culture, and especially on Guizhou’s local folk culture. He had also organized “mobile art exhibitions” at factories and schools. In 1986, he had built a village for painters and tried to introduce artists to the countryside with the purpose of using economic development to protect old villages, but the concept of an “artist village” was too advanced during that time so in the end the artist village was demolished.

The idea of creating “Yelang Valley” originated in 1993. Song was impressed by the Indian hero "crazy horse" giant sculpture built by three generations of an Indian family during a period of over 60 years when he visited the “President Hill” in the United States. This reminded him of the minorities in Guizhou for which he had always cared. In Song’s view the minorities in Guizhou had made the same experiences as the Indians: once strong cultures from outside infiltrated their habitat, their local cultures would vanish gradually. In 1996, Song was 56 years old and he resigned from his job as a university professor. He set aside everything and used his life savings in order to buy a two million square feet mountain space in Huaxi, Guiyang. Then he began to create Yelang Valley.\(^\text{13}\)

The reason why he chose the material of stones to build the castle is because Yelang Valley is located in a typical karst landscape, and stones can be found everywhere. Song points out that wooden material easily

rots and consumes forests, and that metals would rust, and mining could also cause pollution, whereas stones are the cheapest, the most durable and natural material.\textsuperscript{14} He attributed his art to "land art”, which means the work should be natural, environmentally friendly, and be able to integrate itself easily into the environment. Song also uses pieces of pottery with geometric patterns to stitch out the shape of totems from various local ethnic groups. Song believes that the highest realm of his art is the nature of Daoism\textsuperscript{15}, the return to nature, and that art should relate to the land. I will come back to Daoism-related features of Song’s art work later in this thesis.

In Song’s view everyone could be an artist, so when he was building the castle he asked the local villagers to help him, because they are experts regarding the surrounding landscape. He has compared the building of this castle with the game “building blocks” and called the villagers “the designers of the “landscape”.

Song has turned Yelang Valley into a living museum of Guizhou’s local culture. He had built a ‘performing stage’ in the valley and expressed his hope that all ethnic artists in Guizhou would come to perform on this stage. He also hopes that Yelang Valley will become a special place

\textsuperscript{14} \url{http://sd.dzwww.com/sdxwjs/zbs/201607/t20160719_14645172.htm}, as accessed on February 23th, 2018.

\textsuperscript{15} Daoism(道教) or Taoism, is a religious or philosophical tradition of Chinese origin which emphasizes living in harmony with the Dao(道). Dao has often been translated as Way.
where people can find ‘lost’ cultures of Guizhou again. During the interview Song said that Yelang Valley may never be completed because all the work he has accomplished only sums up to half of the project. The other half he wants to leave to nature and the future.

2.3 Folk culture in modern China

Although China is home to a tremendous multitude of folk cultures, folk study is a modern discipline that was developed and flourished in Europe in the 19th century. Folk study (民俗学 minsuxue) focuses on traditional oral literature and lifestyle retained in daily life. As a discipline it was introduced in China at the beginning of the 20th century, when scholars at Beijing University began to collect folk songs from all over the country starting in 1918. Due to the research conducted by many important scholars such as Liu Fu (刘复), Hu Shi (胡适), Zhou Zuoren (周作人), Lu Xun (鲁迅), Qian Xuantong (钱玄同), and Lin Yutang (林语堂), during that time folk study received a lot of attention in the country. From the 1950s on, “folk literature” (民间文学) was taught in Departments of Chinese Language and Literature at universities. However, since the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, folk literature had been strongly politicized, and many institutions and university courses for the study of

________________________

16 This activity was initiated by the professors Liu Fu (刘复) and Shen Yinmo (沈尹默), who were teaching at Beijing University at the time, and it was supported by the then President of Beijing University, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培).
folk literature have been cancelled during that time. Folk studies were restored in 1978, when the ‘Cultural Revolution’ had ended, and Wu Bing’an (乌丙安)\(^\text{17}\) established the first course in "folk studies" at Liaoning University in 1983. Subsequently, all major colleges and universities across the country started to set up courses in “Folk Studies”.

After 30 years of development, folk studies are firmly established today in the curricula of Chinese universities.\(^\text{18}\)

Currently Chinese folk studies are mainly carried out in three areas: traditional festivals; the study of "folk beliefs"; and “intangible cultural heritage.” Intangible cultural heritage includes six parts: 1) Oral traditions and language as a means of cultural expression; 2) Folk activities, ceremonies, festival celebrations; 3) Traditional performing arts; 4) Folk traditional knowledge about nature and the universe; 5) Traditional craftsmanship and experience; 6) Cultural spaces related to the above expressions.\(^\text{19}\)

Due to Guizhou’s special history and its various ethnic groups the folk studies that can be found in Guizhou count among best in the country.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{17}\) Wu, Bing’an (乌丙安) is a Chinese contemporary scholar of folk studies.


\(^{19}\) ibid, p.16.

Most of the local people belong to Non-Han ethnic groups which makes them strongly identify with folk culture. This also applies to Song Peilun. In the next sub-chapter I am going to introduce the specific local folk culture of Guizhou playing an important role in Song’s land art.

2.4 “Nuo” culture (傩文化)

Nuo, also connected with the terms "Nuo sacrifice" or "Nuo ceremony", was originally a Chinese folk religion with its own system of temples, rituals, orders of priests and gods, which is interethnic and had been practiced across central and southern China but is also intimately connected to many Chinese ethnic groups such as the Tujia (土家族).\(^{21}\) It contained also sacrificial and magical rituals held to expel evil spirits and to keep pestilence at bay. One of the most distinguishing characters of the Nuo folk religion is its iconographic style, which represents the gods as wooden masks or heads. This is also the main element that Song has used in Yelang Valley. The iconography is related to mythology, which traces the origin of Nuo to the two very first humans, who were unjustly killed by beheading and are since then worshipped as responsive divine ancestors.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Ibid. pp.55-58.
Nuo ceremonies were first recorded on oracle bones and tortoise shells during the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC), and flourished in the Zhou Dynasty (11th century-256BC). At that time, besides the grand Nuo ceremony held by the royal court, the folk Nuo ceremony also appeared in the countryside.

The Nuo dance was originally performed to drive away evil spirits at sacrificial rituals during ancient times, it gradually developed into a dance drama (or Nuo opera) and became more of a recreation performance than a ritual during and following the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Gradually the
ritual of the dance declined, and in the Central Plains of the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River it disappeared completely after the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Today, the dance can only be seen during the Spring Festival in remote mountain areas in Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Anhui provinces, inhabited mostly by minority ethnic groups.\(^{23}\)

In many scholars’ view the most complete set of Nuo culture can be still found in Guizhou because Guizhou has been in a relatively closed state for a long time, so that some ancient culture could be preserved.\(^{24}\) But the long-lasting isolation also made Guizhou lag behind in its economic development compared with other parts of the country. The province is still seen as one of the ‘backward areas’ in China. The local government and many scholars who are dedicated to preserving folk culture are mainly trying to develop tourism and help the province to develop economically, too.

The most distinctive feature of the Nuo opera is that the performers wear masks. Masks are also the main element that Song brought to use in Yelang Valley. Different roles require different masks to reveal the


characters through changing facial features and decorations. The masks also display traditional Chinese aesthetics and art. The selection of materials, colors and applications of Nuo opera masks varies among the regions and ethnic groups according to their culture and aesthetic interests. The number of masks used in one drama ranges from several dozen to two hundred. There are five kinds of masks used in Nuo opera, namely: civilian general, military general, old general, young general and woman general with other minor roles such as soldiers and Daoist monks. Each Nuo mask has a fixed name, represents a certain role and has legendary stories to tell of its origins. In Guizhou, the province with the largest Nuo drama repertoire, at least 24 masks are required to perform an entire Nuo drama piece. In Nuo cultural circles, the masks are regarded as symbols and carriers of gods. They form the core of the culture.25

2.5 Postmodernism in China

Postmodernism is a broad movement that started out from the United States and Europe in the late 1960s. It is an open discourse system with ongoing discussions. There does not exist one common artistic conception in postmodernism, and postmodernism has constantly been

interacting with various disciplines, bringing together new ideas, such as aesthetics, deconstructivism, Marxism, and feminism. Since the beginning of the 1950s, the debate on postmodernism has been one of the most heated ones in the Western academic world. In my thesis I am mainly referring to postmodern theories formulated by Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Their theories will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

As a popular social and cultural theory, postmodernism exerted a great influence in China, but the developments and contents of postmodernism in China differ from the Western ones. In what follows I am going to present the general history of postmodernism in China.

Since the early 1980s several authors in China began to translate postmodern theoretical works from the West, but these works were not well-received in China during those years, and among the scholars during that time there was also a lack in understanding of the term. Many Chinese critics and researchers were still indulged in the debate of "modernism" and concerned with the relationship between modernism and tradition, and they were not clear about the difference between postmodernism and modernism.26 Then in September 1985, Fredric

Jameson, the American literary critic and Marxist political theorist, was invited to give lectures at the Department of Comparative Literature and International Politics at Beijing University, and this visit became crucial for the introduction of postmodernism in China. At this time Chinese scholars began to pay more attention to this theory. It was also in the 1980s that many postmodern literary works were translated into Chinese and introduced in China. Now many works of Chinese writers began to show postmodern features, too. I would like to mention but a few: Wang Shuo (王朔), Ge Fei (格非), Su Tong (苏童) and Yu Hua (余华).

In the 1990s, when some Western critics already argued that postmodernism would be dead, postmodernism rapidly spread in China. From 1993 to 1996, postmodernism developed rapidly in both, theory and practice. Since then, postmodernism has been widely accepted in China and also became a popular theory. In 2001, Jacques Derrida visited China, and, in a series of lectures, clarified that the Chinese academic community had misunderstood the postmodern spirit, especially the term of "deconstruction" and other postmodern terms. This led to a widespread academic introspection within Chinese academic circles. This visit also

---


28 Derrida, Jacques (1930 – 2004) was a French Algerian-born philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, He is also one of the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy.

helped Chinese scholars to understand the theory better, and it became an opportunity for the development of postmodernism in China in the 21st century. New generations of Chinese scholars have begun to notice the great value of postmodernism for their own context, and they started to use postmodern methods in their research, in the fields of jurisprudence, education, architecture and art.

The reasons why postmodernism developed so fast in the 1980s and 1990s in China are directly connected with the development of China, its market economy and the rise of popular consumer culture. Both helped to spread postmodernism in China. It was precisely during that time that Song started to build the castle in Yelang Valley.

A scholar from Jiannan University, Cheng Wenzhao has emphasized the inevitability of the postmodern 'happening' in China. “First of all, the construction of modernity in today's China is quite different from the construction of modernity in England and America back in those days. It is contextualized in the worldwide discourse system of the 20th century. China has been driving forward modernity, and simultaneously the postmodern has been 'happening'...”\textsuperscript{30}

In my view, postmodernism in China shows many characteristics that are different from those of postmodernism in the West, thus under the process of modernization and the influence of the West, China gradually developed its own unique form of postmodernism, which is close to its own culture and social development. But these different forms of postmodernism still share the same origins and are wound together. The characteristics of postmodernism in China will be analyzed in detail in chapter 3.

2.6 Land Art

Land Art is a form of contemporary art, also known as Earthworks, or Earth Art, which belongs to postmodern art. This artistic movement emerged in America during the 1960s when a number of sculptors and painters were determined to direct the public’s awareness to the relationship between man and the natural world by creating art works in the world of nature. The most famous land art work is Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty of 1970, an earthwork built out into the Great Salt Lake in the US.

These land-based art works took a variety of forms. Although the meaning of each construction is different, the underlying aim of this novel type of visual art was to create artistic imagery using earth, rocks, soil and other natural material, with a view to increasing our sensibility towards the environment.
Although land art is mostly defined as contemporary art, many scholars also define it as postmodern art, not only because it developed in the same period as postmodernism but also because it shows a lot of postmodern features. The American art critic and theorist Rosalind E. Krauss states that “postmodernity lies with the development of land art”, and that the artists’ “structural transformation of the cultural field” of sculptures has been showing the logic of postmodernism.

In China, land art is becoming more and more popular. In my perspective, there are three main reasons for this. Firstly the grand and diverse landscape in China is the perfect environment for artists to create works, secondly there is the influence from postmodernism, and thirdly, and most importantly, land art is in accordance with one of the most important Chinese traditional concepts — “tian ren he yi” 天人合一 (harmony between heaven and human beings). The ecological concept and a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature are the most important features that Chinese people perceive from land art works. These are also the concepts that become obvious in Yelang Valley. There is one more reason why land art in Yelang Valley is very special and unique. The area of Guizhou is characterized by a unique

31 Krauss, Rosalind Epstein (1941- ) is a professor at Columbia University in New York City, known for her scholarship in 20th-century painting, sculpture and photography.
karst landscape environment which then is mirrored in works of land art in this area.
3. An Analysis of Yelang Valley from the perspective of postmodernism

In this chapter, I am going to analyze Yelang Valley from the perspective of postmodernism, in order to support my point of view that the valley can be seen as a postmodern art work. This art work shows perspicuous features of postmodernism, regardless whether on looks at its origins or its forms, or Song Peilun’s own intentions. For this chapter I have chosen four common features of postmodernism, i.e. simulacrum, deconstruction, ecology and nostalgia, in order to discuss the relationship of these concepts with Yelang Valley.

3.1 Simulacrum

As “one of the most high profile postmodern theorist”\(^{33}\), Jean Baudrillard claims that postmodernism is not simply a culture of the sign, it is a culture of the ‘simulacrum’. For Baudrillard, a simulacrum is an identical copy without an original. With the development of society and economy in a postmodern time, cultural art crafts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic. In this situation, the distinction between original and copy has been destroyed. Baudrillard calls this process ‘simulation’, and simulation

is “the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: a hyperreal”.

In the hyperreal world, “people can no longer tell the difference between fiction and reality: it is that in some significant ways the distinction between the two has become less and less important.”

But he also argues that the result is not a retreat from the ‘real’, but the collapse of the real into hyperrealism.

Simulacrum, one of the most important characteristics of postmodernism, is also a very important feature of Yelang Valley. First, the masked stones and the castle built by Song Peilun can be seen as copies of originals from the Nuo culture. Song Peilun copied the images of the ancient totems and the characteristics of the Nuo culture with stones and built them into a stone castle, while both, the masked stones and the castle, are not the historical original. They are copies and recreations from the ancient culture. Song Peilun hopes to recreate the ancient culture in order to attract more public attention for Guizhou’s local and ethnic groups’ culture, and when this aim is achieved, it is no longer important whether this stone castle is the same as the historical original. Artists and visitors are enjoying this copy and the art work has been achieving its first aim—to promote the local and the ancient culture.


Secondly, as Baudrillard has said, in the hyperreal world, “when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning”. Song Peilun established this castle on the basis of his nostalgia, which means, in his case, going back to nature and living in the environment of the ancient culture. Yelang Valley does not represent the reality of Yelang and Nuo cultures. More important are the feelings that it passes to the people, which are connected with nostalgia. Not only Song Peilun and his family are living in Yelang Valley, but also many other local and folk artists, and according to my observations, most of them are living a half-secluded life, hiding away from the city. They are using ancient utensils which are made by natural materials, such as woods and bamboo. They are producing handicraft furniture and tools by themselves, and wearing handmade ethnic clothes, trying to return to the old and most simple life. They are living in a way that is totally different from the outside world. Yelang Valley is the hyperreal world. When I was chatting with a painter of traditional paintings named Du who set up an art studio on the top of Yelang castle and has produced items of daily use from bamboo or wood displaying material art elements, he said that he was trying to build an ancient Chinese tavern where alcohol and tea were served. This tavern is a typical image in the ancient Chinese martial arts world. During our conversation he mistakenly called the modern government for which the

correct term is “zhengfu (政府)” “guanfu (官府)” instead\textsuperscript{37}. Then he laughed and explained his mistake with his reading of the novel “Water Margin”\textsuperscript{38} during that time. The artist’s verbal misstep shows the hyperreal characteristic of Yelang Valley. It shows that the people who live in the castle are far away from the real world and would prefer to live in the ancient, natural and old world instead, which sometimes leads to a confusion between the real and the hyperreal world.

3.2 Deconstruction

According to the philosopher Jacques Derrida deconstruction is a critique of the relationship between text and meaning.\textsuperscript{39} The purpose of deconstruction is to expose that the object of language, and that which any text is founded upon, is irreducibly complex, unstable, or impossible. Deconstruction also inspired deconstructivism—a movement of postmodern architecture which appeared in the 1980s in architecture and remains important within art, music, and literary criticism. It gives

\textsuperscript{37} Guanfu(官府) was the term used to designate the administrative office or residence of a local bureaucrat in imperial China.

\textsuperscript{38} “Shuihuzhuan” 水浒传 (Water Margin) is a Chinese novel attributed to Shi Nai'an. It is considered one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature. The story set in the Song dynasty (960-1279), tells of how a group of 108 outlaws gather at Mount Liang to form a sizable army before they are eventually granted amnesty by the government and sent on campaigns to resist foreign invaders and suppress rebel forces.

\textsuperscript{39} Derrida, Jacques (1930–2004) was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction. He is also one of the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy.
the impression of a fragmentation of the constructed building. It is characterized by an absence of harmony, continuity, or symmetry.

One important feature of deconstructivism is its stance against authority. Deconstructivism means the collapse of the distinction between high culture and popular culture, and between art and everyday life. Deconstructivists are against the rule of a philosophical (binary) opposition, for example between high culture and low culture in modernism. This is also what Song Peilun insisted on during our interview. From the start, Song Peilun was hoping to build this castle together with the local villagers. In his view the educational level of people cannot be equated with their artistic and aesthetic level. In his opinion everyone is an artist. He is trying to go against a standpoint that only values traditional ‘high art’, and he brings artwork closer to the people. In Yelang Valley, there is a pig-shaped sculpture. The original image on which this sculpture is grounded stems from a painting homework of Song Peilun’s six-year-old granddaughter. Song Peilun turned this children’s painting into a sculpture and built it in the woods of Yelang Valley along with other sculptures (see: Figure 3). This also shows that Song Peilun is breaking with the traditional concept of art and questioning artists who follow the orthodox tradition.

Fragmentation is another important feature of deconstructivism. Buildings or art works with this feature are often formed from components that are disassembled and reassembled in a new, unorthodox way, giving the impression that chaotic design lacks precise logic. When we look at Yelang Valley, fragmentation is one of the first impressions for the visitors. In the Valley, sculptures with different shapes and styles are scattered all over the place without any order, the castle, woods and other areas in the valley are all depicting different styles. There is a wooden horse standing in front of the folk music studio, there are stone sculptures with different masks standing at the entrance of the valley, and there are also some random sculptures without specific meanings, such as the one that Song Peilun had built, after being inspired by his granddaughter’s painting. The whole image seems chaotic because there are many different fragments inspired by different cultures, and Song Peilun pastiches them together. He wants to make the whole valley appear like a folk cultural museum.

3.3 Ecology

For Andreas Huyssen\textsuperscript{42}, ecology is one of the main characteristics of postmodernism.\textsuperscript{43} Since anti-humanism\textsuperscript{44} arose in the period following World War II, the traditional value of humanism has been questioned and with the development of economy and industry, environmental issues

\textsuperscript{42} Huyssen, Andreas is currently Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is known for his work on 18th-20th century German literature and culture, international modernism and postmodernism.


\textsuperscript{44} Anti-humanism is a theory that is critical of traditional humanism and traditional ideas about humanity and the human condition. Central to anti-humanism is the view that concepts of "human nature", "man", or "humanity" should be rejected as historically relative or metaphysical. See Childers, J./Hentzi, G. eds, \textit{The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism} 1995: p.140.
have become one of the most serious concerns worldwide. Many environmental movements have arisen since the 1960s, and people began to show concern about nature. Their appeal is to have a harmonious relationship with nature. The rise of land art, with Arcadia\textsuperscript{45} artists such as Lennart Anderson\textsuperscript{46}(see, for example, his work: Idyll I-III), shows the importance of ecology.

In China, ecology is also an important feature of postmodernism. Besides reflections on environmental issues that are similar to western postmodernism, postmodernism in China also refers back to the already mentioned traditional Chinese concept from Daoism: “tian ren he yi” 天人合一. This concept encourages people to live in a way that respects Heaven and nature and to live in harmony with both. Ecology has been resonating and still resonates deeply in China because people connected it with this historical Daoist concept. Walking into Yelang Valley, the first impression is that of a natural and ecologically friendly place. The location lies in a mountain area surrounded by trees and lake. The resources Song Peilun has been using in order to create his art works are also ecologically friendly. He did not use metal or wood in order to prevent pollution from mining and waste. So he chose the cheapest and most common material, stones, as his main building material. Song is

\textsuperscript{45} Arcadia is a term that refers to a vision of pastoralism and harmony with nature.

\textsuperscript{46} Anderson, Lennart (1928 – 2015) is an American painter. His work has been featured at several major museums, including his first major show at the Delaware Art Museum in 1992.
trying to show people a perfect unit between folk art and the natural environment, and he also lives in this environment, going back to nature and enjoying his life.

Figure 4. Another view of Yelang Castle: living in harmony with Heaven and Nature. Copyright: Song Peilun

3.4 Nostalgia

Andreas Huyssen mentions “that other obnoxious nostalgia of 1970s, the nostalgia for Egyptian mummies (Tut exhibit in United States), medieval emperors (Stauffer exhibit in Stuttgart), or, most recently, Vikings (Minneapolis)... a search for traditions seems to be involved in all these instances.”⁴⁷ In his view the Western industrialized countries were “experiencing a fundamental cultural and political crisis”, thus “the

1970’s search for roots, for history and traditions”. 48 Charles Jencks 49 also states that since 1979, “nostalgic classicism” has showed up in western art and architectural industry. 50 Many artists looked for inspiration from ancient mythology and historical cultural heritage. For example, French contemporary artist Gérard Garouste has included some gods from ancient Greece in his art works, and also directly engraved some verses from ancient poetry in his art works.

In China, the crave for nostalgia began in the mid-1980s, accompanied by the tendencies of urbanization and modernization, and the further commercialization of the Chinese society in the 1990s. Many new cities, such as Shenzhen, appeared in the place of old villages and small towns; the former old towns were replaced by new towns with their high-rise buildings, luxury hotels and shopping malls. The process of urbanization in the 1990s bears the most complicated feelings for contemporary Chinese intellectuals. On the one hand, the "progress" brings with it joy and happiness; on the other hand, the people were deprived of their homeland and thrown into a "beautiful new world." As a reaction to this paradoxical mood, the demand for nostalgia came up. 51 In this situation,

49 Jencks, Charles (born 1939) is a cultural theorist, landscape designer, and architectural historian. He has published over thirty books and became famous in the 1980s as a theorist of Postmodernism.
the emergence of nostalgia as a cultural need, first became visible in Chinese literature. From there it gradually influenced other intellectual areas.

There can be no doubt that Yelang Valley is a nostalgic work, firstly regarding its topic, which is Guizhou’s local and ancient culture. It is an art work that mixes different cultures and traditions. Secondly, as Song claims that he comes from a local village in Guizhou, and that his identity is strongly connected with Guizhou local culture and the ancient culture which had appeared in his home area a long time ago, his decision to build this art work is a way of ‘root-searching’ for him. Besides Song, there are many folk musicians and instrumentalists living in the valley. They also try to search for their roots. According to my observation and conversations with the artists, they are researching and playing very old, traditional instruments, such as traditional drums, in order to revive Guizhou’s ancient music. They usually are visiting to villages and open land to play the ancient instruments together with other folk musicians and villagers. They are trying to protect and revive Guizhou’s folk music. The musicians are all natives from Guizhou. Their work is characterized by nostalgia, too.

In bringing four characteristic features of postmodernism in relationship with Yelang Valley I hope to have shown that Yelang Valley is a postmodern art work. But I believe that Yelang Valley also displays some
quite unique features which link the art work to Chinese traditions and aesthetics. This is also one reason for its popularity in today’s China. In the following chapter, I am going to analyze the relationship between Yelang Valley and Chinese aesthetics and traditions.
4. From Yelang Valley to Chinese Aesthetics and Traditions

We have seen that Yelang Valley clearly displays features of postmodernism and folk culture. But on a deeper level this art work also points to, as I believe, specific Chinese cultural elements, such as the element of seclusion, and Xungen culture. These elements connect the art work strongly with Chinese traditions, and Chinese aesthetics. In what follows, I will focus on the Chinese culture of seclusion and on Xungen Culture and the relationship of these elements with Yelang Valley.

4.1 A culture of seclusion

If one looks at media reports about Song Peilun in China, one will notice that most of the articles call him a “recluse”. Why does a “recluse” get so much attention in China? The reason for this is the existence of a unique culture of seclusion in premodern China. The culture of seclusion has occupied a very important position in Chinese culture. It is inextricably linked with Chinese traditional culture. The earliest recorded recluses in Chinese history were Bo Yi and Shu Qi. Bo Yi was the oldest son of the lord of Guzhu from the Motai family. He was not designated to succeed

---

52 Bo Yi (伯夷) and his brother Shu Qi (叔齐) are said to be two brothers who lived in China at the time of the transition between the Shang dynasty and the Zhou dynasty (around 1140 BC), according to the Biography of Bo Yi in the Records of the Grand Historian (《史记·伯夷列传》Shiji · Boyi liezhuan). They are still remembered in Chinese literary culture for their personal and moral virtue, loyalty, and pacifist idealism.
his father, and his younger brother Shu Qi refused to mount the throne. Both of them expressed a high degree of filial piety and have been venerated by Confucian scholars as an example of ministers displaying righteousness and loyalty. After the attack against the Shang empire, the two brothers, out of disappointment about the Viscount's will to erase the Shang empire, left and withdrew to the mountains near Shouyang (首阳), where they refused to eat under the rule of the Zhou dynasty and finally died of starvation. Their stories were widely praised by later generations. It can be assumed that since that time, a culture of seclusion had begun to develop in China.

According to Wang Guosheng from the Academy of Arts and Design at Tsinghua University and other authors the Chinese culture of seclusion is closely related to Daoism. Laozi and Zhuangzi are important proponents of Daoism, especially Zhuangzi has contributed to the culture of seclusion. The figure of Zhuangzi kept himself “hidden” and chose not


55 Laozi (老子, literally "Old Master") is the name of an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer. He is the alleged author of the Daodejing (Tao Te Ching), and became a deity in religious Daoism and in traditional Chinese religions.

56 Zhuangzi (庄子, literally "Master Zhuang") is the name of an influential Chinese philosopher who probably lived around the 4th century BC. He is credited with writing—in part or in whole—a work known by his name, the Zhuangzi, which is one of the foundational texts of Daoism.
to cooperate with rulers, but to pursue instead an independent personality and absolute spiritual freedom. In the Daodejing the following sentences can be found: “Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them.” (上善若水，水善利万物而不争 Shangshan ruoshui, shui shanli wanwu er buzheg)\(^57\).

Although in the Confucian tradition literati are encouraged to get engaged in service for the empire, Confucius is said to have praised Bo Yi’s story and the practice of reclusiveness. In the Lunyu(Analects) Bo Yi and Shu Qi are described as “excellent men of old” (古之贤人也 Guzhi Xianren Ye)\(^58\) and it is said that “Men who shun the world come first.” (贤者避世 Xianzhe Bishi)\(^59\) Therefore retreat into reclusiveness can also be found in the Confucian tradition. This is what characterizes a scholar in the Confucian tradition: “Let yourself be seen when the Way prevails in the Empire, but keep out of sight when it does not.”（天下有道则见，无道则隐 Tianxia youdao zejian, wudao zeying）\(^60\).

\(^57\) Laozi (老子), Tao te ching (道德经) [Revised edition]. Translated by D.C. Lau, Hong Kong, China University Press, 2012[2001], p.11.


\(^59\) ibid. p.145.

\(^60\) ibid. p.73.
In the history of China there are many famous recluses, the purposes of reclusiveness were different, but the stories were widely circulated and praised by later generations. One of the most common characteristics of those people living in recluse is that they often were well- educated intellectuals displaying an independent personality. Under the conditions of the premodern Chinese empire and the system of bureaucracy, literati often were faced with two alternative ways of living: either to work as a literati scholar for the empire or to retreat to nature and live a secluded life.\textsuperscript{61} Some of the scholars gave up everything and had been real recluses, such as Lin Bu\textsuperscript{62}, and some of them have chosen to live a secluded life after they had served an emperor, such as Zhang Liang\textsuperscript{63}. Some of them were trying to fight against sordid politics, such as Tao Yuanming\textsuperscript{64}. For many of the literati who were confronted with complex social and political circumstances it was a question of moral uprightness and inner nobility to give up fame and their career and choose to live in


\textsuperscript{62} Lin, Bu (林逋; 967–1028) was a Chinese poet who lived during the Northern Song dynasty. Lin lived in reclusion by the West Lake in Hangzhou for much of his later life.

\textsuperscript{63} Zhang, Liang (张良, 3rd century BC – 186 BC) is a strategist and statesman who lived in the early Western Han dynasty. Zhang Liang contributed greatly to the establishment of the Han dynasty, after he had served Han Gaozu, he chose to be a recluse living in the mountains.

\textsuperscript{64} Tao, Yuanming (365?–427) was a Chinese poet who lived during the Eastern Jin and Liu Song dynasties. He is considered to be one of the greatest poets of the Six dynasties period. Tao Yuanming spent most of his life in reclusion, living in a small house in the countryside, reading, drinking wine, receiving the occasional guest, and writing poems in which he often reflected on the pleasures and difficulties of life in the countryside, as well as his decision to withdraw from civil service.
seclusion instead. Moreover, seclusion did often not mean a complete hide away in Chinese history. Many recluses reappeared when the empire was in trouble and became decisive figures in the new era. Zhang Liang and Zhu Geliang can serve as examples here.

China's culture of seclusion has been formed by the Chinese traditional culture and has been developing further into the modern age. In today's China, seclusion is still a trend. Nowadays some people still choose to live in the mountains in order to practice Buddhism or Daoism. Some of them are opting for seclusion in order to create art works, just like Song and other artists who live in the Yelang Valley. There are also a lot of young people in China who follow the idea of seclusion. They quit their jobs in big cities, build lodges in nature for visitors and live the simple life. Therefore, we can see that the culture of seclusion plays an important role in Chinese culture. From ancient times until today, the culture of seclusion has been circulating and is still being chanted.

---


67 Zhuge, Liang (诸葛亮, 181–234) was a Chinese politician, military strategist, writer, engineer and inventor. He is recognized as the most accomplished strategist of his era, his reputation as an intelligent and learned scholar grew even while he was living in relative seclusion, earning him the nickname "Wolong"卧龙(hidden dragon).
For the Chinese scholar Rui Luo\textsuperscript{68}, the culture of seclusion has two main aesthetic characteristics: simplicity and the return to nature. Since Song Peilun was influenced by the culture of seclusion, Yelang Valley has also met these aesthetic features. Recluses advocate a simple life, a simple life means less desires and less struggles, which also mirrors Song Peilun and his family’s lifestyle in Yelang Valley.\textsuperscript{69} The second characteristic is the return to nature. This has applied to the famous poet Tao Yuanming, and it applies to other recluses, too: the ultimate way of their life in seclusion is to return to nature and to live embedded in the nature. This is also a feature of Song Peilun’s work and of Yelang Valley.

### 4.2 Xungen culture

In the late 1980s, the so-called Xungen Movement\textsuperscript{70} sprang up in China. It was a cultural and literary movement in mainland China emphasizing local and minority cultures. The movement developed against the background of China’s reform and opening policy. With the constant development of the economy, the demand for spiritual culture had


\textsuperscript{69} http://www.ideamsg.com/2016/07/huaxigu/, as accessed on February 28th, 2018.

\textsuperscript{70} The Xungen movement’s premise is that the Cultural Revolution damaged a pluralistic Chinese identity that had existed for centuries, and that the reconstruction of that identity required a healthy appreciation of local cultures.
increased. Up until the 1980s traditional Chinese culture had encountered many restrictions and destruction since the May Fourth Movement and the Cultural Revolution. China needed to re-develop its existing manifold cultures in order to strengthen the people’s national confidence. Chinese people also increasingly got into contact with Western culture at that time, and many famous minority literatures, for example One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez, from Latin America, had made a great impact in the Chinese literary field. This kind of literature encouraged Chinese scholars to begin with exploring their own and minorities cultures. A Cheng (阿城), Mo Yan (莫言) and Han Shaogong (韩少功) are representative writers of the Xungen Movement. The Xungen Movement developed connections with postmodernism and the phenomenon of nostalgia at that time.

The Danish sinologist Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg points out that, “‘root-seeking’ (xungen) literature, prominent since 1984, consciously tries to rediscover some traditional Chinese elements, mainly Daoism and Buddhism, but also tribal cultures, primitive myths and folklore. This search, as well as being a psychologically understandable response to the tremendous and sudden influx of Western culture and to the whole
process of economic modernization, has also been triggered off by the urge to find the roots and causes of the Cultural Revolution”. 71

Song Peilun’s art works are, in my view, also influenced by the Xungen culture. The aesthetics of xungen culture is mainly reflected in the appreciation of multiculturalism and minority cultures. Song Peilun combined Guizhou’s local and minority cultures with nature. In Yelang Valley, many other artists are following the “xungen” search. Folk musicians specialize on Guizhou’s folk songs and folk instruments. Painters are using traditional ways to paint, and many minority dancers belonging to an ethnic minority may not live in the valley but still maintain close connections with Song Peilun and the valley. All of them are contemporary Xungen artists. Song Peilun’s idea to create Yelang castle was influenced by the Xungen movement since the 1980s, and he spent 20 years building a Utopia that can serve Xungen artists, and that provides a base to contemporary local artists from Guizhou. This is also one of Yelang’s most valuable features, and one of the most important contributions of Yelang to the local cultures and art.

5. Reception and impact of Yelang Valley

In 2016, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC.com) visited Yelang Valley and conducted an interview with Song Peilun. On September 15th, 2017, the documentary about Yelang Valley and Song Peilun was released on the BBC tourism channel. The documentary bore the title: “Song Peilun. The man who built a Chinese utopia”. Since then, Yelang Valley started to attract public attention from all over the world, especially in mainland China. Every day large numbers of tourists, media people and artists show up in Yelang Valley. Yelang Valley has been given the following labels: Land Art, Folk Museum, Chinese Utopia, etc. Nowadays Yelang Valley is not only famous because of Song Peilun's castle. It has become “Chinese famous singer Gong Linna’s wedding place” and “the habitat of popular Chinese folk singers”. Even some well-known TV series actors have come there to shoot their TV series. The story of Yelang Valley was passed via the media to the world. Song Peilun has also accepted many young artists to live in Yelang Valley, providing them with a place to live and a space where they could develop.


73 Gong, Linna (龚琳娜) (1975-) is a Chinese fusion singer. Her style is one which combines the traditional centuries-old melodies with new lyrics.
their creativity without being disturbed. But from my perspective, sometimes the fame also causes problems.

Since 2017, Song Peilun has been receiving a lot of messages informing him that Yelang Valley castle has been copied at other places, with some copies even looking exactly the same as the castle. These imitators did not seek permission from Song Peilun, and one of the copies even won many design awards while using Song’s design ideas. Addressing this situation, Song himself declared that he does not really mind about those copies. He used a metaphor coined by his friend who called the copies ‘Yelang Valley’s babies’. That copies of Yelang Valley have been built at other places in China can be seen as a consequence of postmodern developments in culture and art. I have named the feature of simulacrum among other factors of postmodernism in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Yelang Valley’s many visitors also help to bring Guizhou into focus again. The fame of Yelang Valley can help the province to develop tourism. The local government of Guizhou has accordingly started to develop other projects of local folk culture, such as gardens, and has organized special “Yelang” events such as “Yelang Culture Forum” in order to support folk study.

The story of Yelang Valley and of Song Peilun also earned a lot of sympathetic comments throughout the country. He was praised as “the dream seeker who gave-up everything and supported his hometown”, depicted as a “protector of folk and ethnic culture”, or “the Foolish Old Man of modern times.” Song has become a symbol for keeping up traditions. His lifestyle is naturally accepted and approved by the public. The values that he stands for, such as simplicity and an ecological-friendly life as well as the protection of local folk cultures, are encouraged and promoted.
6. Conclusion

The research questions that I tried to answer in my thesis are the following:

What were the origins of Yelang Valley Castle and why did this form of art become popular in China?

Which kind of aesthetics and traditions are connected with this art work?

Which kind of reception has this specific art work experienced and what kind of influence is it exerting on Chinese culture and art?

In my view Yelang Valley shows features of both, postmodernism and Chinese folk art. Moreover, Yelang Valley also is characterized by the Chinese traditions of seclusion and of Xungen culture.

In chapter 2 I have provided information on the name and the ancient state of “Yelang” as well as on the background of the artist Song Peilun. As he grew up in the area of the former state of Yelang he began to identify with this local culture, and, following a visit to “President Hill” in the US, he started to build his own piece of land art: Yelang Valley.

In the following steps I presented characteristics of the Nuo culture which has been influencing Song’s art works. I contextualized Yelang Valley within the area of folk studies in China.
After focusing on the reception and developments of postmodernism in China, I analyzed Yelang Valley from the perspective of postmodernism. Here I identified four characteristic features which define Yelang Valley as a postmodern piece of land art. These features are: simulacrum, deconstruction, ecology, and nostalgia. My analysis was informed by my own observations during my field work at Yelang Valley and the interview that I had conducted with Song Peilun.

But Yelang Valley is not only a postmodern art work. It also shows quite distinctive features of Chinese aesthetics and traditions: the ancient tradition of seclusion in China and the Xungen movement that started out in the 1980s and has been relevant for Chinese artists and intellectuals until today.

In the end I looked into the reasons of Yelang Valley’s popularity. My findings are the following:

Artists and local administration alike are using local ethnic cultures, in this specific case the Nuo culture, in order to protect local cultures but also to develop tourism and to propagate Yelang Valley as an exemplary, successful project that might be copied in other regions of China. That there exist copies of Yelang Valley already at other places in China can be seen as a consequence of postmodern developments in culture and art. I have named the feature of simulacrum among other factors of postmodernism.
Secondly the project Yelang Valley is promoted by Chinese as well as global mainstream media platforms, such as the BBC, Sina.com, People’s Daily, etc.

Thirdly, this piece of land art succeeds to combine Chinese aesthetics and traditions pursuing harmony between human beings and nature (天人合一, tian ren he yi). I have shown that seclusion has been a living tradition in China since ancient times. The respect for local minority cultures was also a feature of the Xungen movement in China.

In my view postmodern art will continue to flourish in China. The attention that projects such as Yelang Valley have been gaining during the last years might also help to further develop the area of folk studies in China. This is an encouraging trend for experts of folk studies.

It is my hope that in the future more experts will focus on the connections between features of postmodernism and folk culture in their research and that one day a specific field of studies related to postmodernism and folk culture is going to emerge.
7. List of references

**English sources:**


Chen, Jinhua; Chen, Judy T. “Imagined nostalgia.”. *Boundary 2*, 1997


Huyssen, A. Mapping the postmodern. *New German Critique*, 1984


Kirby A. The death of postmodernism and beyond. *Philosophy now*, 2006 (58)


Merriam, Sharan B. "Qualitative case study research." Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. *Jossey-Bass*. 2009


**Chinese sources:**


Laozi (老子), *Tao te ching (道德经)* [Revised edition]. Translated by D.C. Lau, Hong Kong, China University Press. 2012[2001]
Li, Jikai 李继凯. “Yinshi yu Zhongguo Wenhua”隐士与中国文化 (The hermit and the Chinese Culture), Huaxia Wenhua 华夏文化 (Chinese Culture), 1995 (2)


Sima, Qian 司马迁. “Shiji·Boyi Liezhuan” 史记·伯夷列传 (Biography of Bo Yi. Records of the Grand Historian), Ed. Hanwen Li, Beijing Lianhe Chubanshe 北京联合出版社 (Beijing United Publishing), vol.1, 2016

Sima, Qian 司马迁. “Shiji·Xi’nanyi Liezhuan” 史记·西南夷列传 (The Southwestern Barbarians of Records of the Grand Historian), Editor by Hanwen Li, Beijing Lianhe Chubanshe 北京联合出版社 (Beijing United Publishing), vol.1, 2016


Wang, Hongru 王鸿儒. “Yelang Wenhua Jingshen Jiqi Xiandai Jiazhi Tantao” 夜郎文化精神及其现代价值探讨 (Yelang's Cultural Spirit and its Modern Value), Guizhou Shehui Kexue 贵州社会科学 (Social Sciences in Guizhou), No.6, 2004


Wang, Yuechuan 王岳川. “Houxiandai Houzhiminzhuyi Zai Zhongguo”后现代后殖民主义在中国 (Postmodernism and post-

Zhang, Tianlin 张天林. “Shenmi de Nuo Wenhua—Nuoxi yu Nuomianju”神秘的傩文化——傩戏与傩面具 (Mysterious Nuo culture – the Nuo Opera and Nuo Masks), Zhongguo Funü 中国妇女 (Women in China), 2007(01)


http://www.ideamsg.com/2016/07/huaxigu/, as accessed on February 28th, 2018