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## Walt Disney and China: How Glocalization Shaped Shanghai Disneyland

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Walt Disney and China: How Glocalization Shaped Shanghai Disneyland

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## Dedication and Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This thesis applies the glocalization theory to a comparative study of the Disney theme parks in the United States and Shanghai, China. It argues that Walt Disney's glocalization through integrating Chinese culture into the Shanghai Disney theme park brought commercial success to the company. Additionally, it also set up a good example for other businesses interested in global expansion.

## Walt Disney and China: How Glocalization Shaped Shanghai Disneyland

### Introduction

In the discussion of globalization, cultural homogenization is a large factor. Businesses expanding internationally create this homogenization when operating on the ‘global culture’ mindset, which prioritizes implementing Western culture and norms across the world.

Glocalization, however, is a business process that utilizes both global and local cultural elements to create a more diverse product. In other words, businesses expand beyond just replication of the same exact product or experience; rather, it is a global product constructed with local touch and consideration. Companies considering and utilizing elements of local culture camouflages the global companies into the local markets. For example, the television network MTV “added an India-dedicated network with Indian performers” and “ratings jumped” in India (Zwingle, 1999). Similarly, the global company of Coca-Cola cites its success in operating under the “multi-local business” mindset, allowing the company to “act according to local need, local laws, local culture,” etc. (Svensson, 2001). The Coca-Cola Fanta drink is more curated for the audience, such as the “tart taste in Germany and a sweeter drink for Italy” (Svensson, 2001). Zwingle (1999) references this phenomenon as companies “going native.” Companies can fail from not “going native”, such as Starbucks’ failed expansion into Australia—a country that has boutique cafe-style coffee culture where people meet up for ‘brunch,’” rather than the fast-paced globalized Starbucks model (Drew, 2022). The concept of going native does not stop at just physical products, but also to cultural aspects. Starbucks brought the product, but did not consider the culture. In the case of Shanghai Disneyland, the enmeshment of Disney’s Americanized culture and China’s culture is a response to the process of glocalization. Shanghai

Disneyland reflects the future Chinese culture by maintaining important elements such as ancestor worship, but adding popularized global elements such as a Disney Castle.

Shanghai Disneyland is a unique Disney park in comparison to any other Disney theme park project due to the notable cultural differences between China and the United States. Ranging from the current consumption of media to differing historical and cultural contexts, China and America have distinct differences that Disney, a distinctly American company, had to consider with the construction of the Shanghai Disneyland park. Examining the cultural and historical differences between America and China shows how and why Disney made specific choices in the creation of the theme park for Shanghai. Three specific areas that are considered quintessential Disney will be examined in relation to both American and Chinese cultures. The castle centering Shanghai Disneyland, as well as the lack of a Disney Railroad and the Haunted Mansion attractions exemplify Disney's shift to a glocalized, distinctly Chinese theme park.

Glocalization as a cultural process, rather than strictly a business one, will be examined through Disney in this study. In order for businesses to succeed internationally, there must be a combination of both 'global' and 'local' culture. In other words, businesses cannot just replicate the processes and structures that are successful in their domestic markets; rather, they must have cultural knowledge of the intended consumers to create a responsive and successful product.

### **Overview of the Paper**

This paper first explains the theory of glocalization and its connection to Shanghai Disneyland. Secondly, the paper will look at the first Disney castle in Anaheim, California with the Enchanted Storybook Castle in Shanghai Disneyland and demonstrate the differences in cultural contexts. Disney's dominance in American media over the last 80 years has substantially influenced American contexts surrounding "Princess Culture" (Hains, 2004). In China, where

Disney does not have an official channel or streaming service, Disney creates a castle that celebrates and introduces the Chinese audience to the Disney Princess Culture (Bradsher, 2005). Thirdly, the paper discusses the Walt Disney Railroad, and the importance of railroads and their nostalgia in America. In contrast, the Chinese history that struggled for modernization, combined with the current progressive transportation technology in China show that a ‘distinctly Chinese’ Disney park would not have a railroad attraction. Lastly, this paper examines the Haunted Mansion attraction and the American culture surrounding the afterlife. The comparison to China’s culture of ancestor worship will explain Disney’s shift away from one of their most popular attractions. Each element discussed is, in the minds of Americans, distinctly Disney. In order for Disney to shift and create a distinctly Chinese Disneyland, the company’s considerations of cultural differences was vital.

### **Glocalization**

The successful expansion of Disney to China testifies the power of globalization. With over 11 million visitors in its first year, Shanghai Disneyland has proven to “exceed” Disney’s “most optimistic expectations” of the theme park (Yoon, 2017). Globalization as a system connects cultures and flattens our world (Friedman, 2005). The “flattening of the world allows companies to be more global than ever, and, yet, at the same time, more personal than ever” (Friedman, 2005). The opportunity for companies to globalize also gives them the chance to localize. Glocalization, a linguistic hybrid of globalization and localization, is the “simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems” (Britannica, n.d.). In other words, multinational companies utilize elements of both international and local cultures to better suit the targeted market. Drori (2018) emphasizes that glocalization “challenges the principal binary of global/local”, and

expands the paths that businesses can take. The effects of globalization do not necessarily damage local culture; rather, the effects create the local culture “of the future” by having a “unique culture made of [the] core culture” blended with the newer cultural elements (Zwingle, 1999). In order to effectively market to the Chinese audience and the Chinese officials, Disney’s construction of Shanghai Disneyland had glocalization in mind—the quintessential Disney elements either have a Chinese cultural twist, or are completely absent from Shanghai Disneyland to better localize the theme park.

In relation to the Enchanted Storybook Castle, Shanghai Disneyland encapsulates the universal and the particular. The universalizing element of the ‘Disney Castle’ is quintessential branding for the company, and is arguably as associated with the Disney Company as Mickey Mouse himself. The particularizing element of creating a ‘generic’ castle that entails all of the Disney Princesses responds to the general Chinese unfamiliarity with the official Disney Princesses. The particularizing elements of Shanghai Disneyland not having a Railroad or Haunted Mansion ride shows Disney’s acknowledgement that American cultural norms are not universal experiences.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Castle**

The castles of every Disney theme park are the landmark structures that represent the Walt Disney Company’s physical presence in six Disney theme parks around the world. Typically, the castles at Disney parks are based off of specific Disney Princesses that promote the company’s films. In America, there is an ingrained culture surrounding the Disney films, as well

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<sup>1</sup> The Haunted Mansion attraction has been altered in Hong Kong Disneyland to focus on fantastical antique objects coming to life, rather than a focus on the afterlife (AllEars.net, n.d.).

as the concept of the Disney Princess. Thus, Disney can easily utilize concepts based on the media popular in America and have a more immediate audience interest.

When it came to a mainland China theme park, there was a challenge for Disney to create a castle that is engaging for the Chinese audience— where there is *no* legitimate access to Disney films and television. Disney’s foundational strategy for luring consumers to the theme parks is not something that can operate to lure the typical visitor. In result, mainland China’s Disney castle is extraordinarily different for the company and shifts what the park’s icon typically represents. The castle that exists in Shanghai Disneyland is one key shift for Disney to create ‘China’s Disney’. Rather than using a previously constructed castle, such as Cinderella’s Castle (the central icon for both Walt Disney World in the United States and Tokyo Disneyland theme parks), Disney opted to produce an entirely unique castle for the Shanghai park: the Enchanted Storybook Castle (Moore, 2021). Examining the significance of the castles at the American Disney parks in comparison to Shanghai Disneyland’s castle will show the adaptations Disney conforms to for the Chinese audience.

According to Mumpower (2021), the use of a castle to centralize the Disney parks was based on both Walt Disney’s “love of fairytales” and the intellectual property the company owned at the opening of the first Disneyland in Anaheim, CA in 1955. Walt’s original vision of a Disneyland theme park consisted of “a very, very conspicuous castle, because the castle [was] going to be the symbol” of the park (Jo, 2018). The company originally settled to use the Sleeping Beauty’s castle for the park opening, despite the fact “that the movie...wouldn’t come out until 1959” (Mumpower, 2021). The castle’s presence preceding the film foundationally connects the structure to the promotion of Disney films. Essentially, the castle as a structure promotes the Disney films, and the Disney films promote the theme park. Mumpower (2021)

emphasizes that the castle many American Disney guests have “gazed upon all [their] life is one big promotion for a 1959 film.” The American audience's connection to a Disney castle is not one that is just physical, but it is very much an emotional connection through the Disney films. This emotional connection in America is largely based on nostalgia and escapism.

America's connection to Princesses is largely based on Disney media. America's absence of a royal family results in interest elsewhere, such as fairy tales or the British Royal Family. Heatwole (2016) examines the concepts of Princess Culture and “Disney girlhood,” stating that the “ubiquitous canon of Disney princess films” is evidently an “Americanization of fairy tales.” When examining the Disney Princess Culture that is so prevalent in the United States, the ‘magic’ branding of classic fairytale princesses is a creation of Disney themselves. The once dark fairy tales were reimagined by Disney, with the company's first film *Snow White* being an escape for Americans during the Great Depression in 1937. The Disney princess films have American consumers nostalgic for “an imaginary time in an imaginary past” that contrasts from the reality (Heatwole, 2016). Disney's reimagination of fairy tales, combined with the historical consumer escapism associated with the company further creates the marketable ‘Disney Magic.’

The dominance Disney has in American media permeates American girlhood, where many American children dream of being not just royalty, but one of Disney's Princesses. The castles at the Disney theme parks are one connection to the fairy tale escapism associated with Disney and their Princesses. While the films connect guests to the Western theme parks' central iconic castles, that same awe and connection does not occur immediately for an audience in mainland China.

Due to the lack of official Disney films and television shows being streamed or aired in mainland China, the cultural draw for experiencing a specific Disney Princess' castle is not

present. Originally, Robert (Bob) A. Iger, Disney’s president in 2005, who then moved on to be CEO, stated that “access to television” was necessary “in order for [Disney] to even consider” a Shanghai theme park (Bradsher 2005). Iger approximately a decade later stated that the company “was kidding” themselves if they operated under the belief that they were “going to get everything [they] want” (Barboza & Barnes 2016). Disney eventually settled on the lack of television and film in China, hoping that the presence of the Shanghai Disneyland park will drive demand for the media in the future. According to Disney Imagineering, the Enchanted Storybook Castle “is a palace that celebrates all of the Disney Princesses by giving a home to each of their stories and inspiring aspiring royals to inhabit their favorite tales.” Rather than creating an experience that is specific to one Disney Princess, the Enchanted Storybook Castle has more of an emphasis on the concept of being a princess through all 12 Disney Princesses and their stories (D23, 2016).



Figure 1: Sleeping Beauty's Castle in Disneyland (California, U.S.)



Figure 2: Enchanted Storybook Castle in Shanghai Disneyland

Additionally, the castle in Shanghai not only had to impress the audience, but also the Chinese officials. The demands from Shanghai’s end consisted of a castle that is “vastly superior” than the Hong Kong Disneyland Sleeping Beauty replica castle that remained at the park from 2005 to 2020 (Mumpower, 2021). The politics between Mainland China and Hong Kong unsurprisingly seeped into Disney’s construction. Shanghai officials wanted the central icon of their park to be unlike any other, and Disney’s response was the biggest castle they ever

built: the 196-foot Enchanted Storybook Castle (Moore, 2021). Provided above (Figures 1 and 2) are images of the 77-foot Sleeping Beauty’s Castle at Disneyland in California, United States compared to the Enchanted Storybook Castle in Shanghai, China.

While the Disney castles can typically be walked through by guests, they tend to be a more representative, ‘icon’ structure than a multi functional one. Sleeping Beauty’s castle at Disneyland in Anaheim, California mostly operates as an occasional guest walk-through passage. This is not the case for the Enchanted Storybook Castle, though. It would not necessarily make sense for the Shanghai Disneyland castle to strictly operate as a visual structure, where there is not an immediate Disney Princess culture ingrained in guests as there is in America. The Enchanted Storybook Castle features “stores, a walk through, a restaurant, [and] an attraction—a Disney castle first!” (Busscher, 2021). The castle in Shanghai Disneyland features an array of unique art structures and murals depicting all of the Disney Princesses (Celestino, 2016). The Disney Princesses that are so ingrained in American culture are displayed prominently throughout the castle. The murals each depict one Disney Princess representing the four seasons. Below, Figures 3 and 4, are images of a few Disney Princess structures, as well as a season-themed Princess mural, Anna and Elsa from *Frozen* to depict winter. These images are



Figure 3: Statues of Disney Princesses Moana (Left), Anna, and Elsa (Right)



Figure 4: A mural of Princesses Anna and Elsa

just some of the murals and structures that are featured in the Enchanted Storybook Castle (D23, 2016).

The castle also features a beauty boutique for young guests to receive a princess makeover—something that exists in other Disney Parks, but not physically within the castles (Busscher, 2021). Additionally, the Shanghai castle features multiple levels for guests to explore, which is a unique feature for a Disney castle. At the top of the castle, there is a walk-through attraction for guests to use at their own leisure, which tells the story of *Snow White* in Mandarin.

The walk-through attraction is not the only notable attraction at the Shanghai Disneyland castle. Unique to Shanghai Disneyland, there is a motorized boat attraction, *Voyage to the Crystal Grotto*, that features the Enchanted Storybook Castle and celebrates the stories and music of all Disney Princesses (Busscher 2021). This attraction is the first to take riders inside of a Disney castle. According to the D23 website, “the journey culminates beneath Enchanted Storybook Castle, where passengers discover a secret underground cavern and the ultimate source of inspiration behind the classic stories: the Crystal Grotto.” This attraction creates a unique story that can draw the audience to the castle beyond just the Princesses, but also to the ‘magic’ that is associated with Disney and their media.

### **The Railroad and its History**

When consumers typically think of Disney theme parks, not only does the iconic Disney Castle come to mind, but also the steam engine train: The Walt Disney Railroad. The attraction can take you around the perimeter of a majority of Disney theme parks. The first two Disney parks, Disneyland in California and Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom theme park in Florida, United States, highlighted the railroad. The main station for the train is located right on “Main Street, U.S.A.”, the iconic entrance to the Disney parks that is branded on “charming” American

“turn-of-the-century nostalgia” (Disneyland, n.d.). When it came time for Disney to expand their theme parks internationally, they maintained the railway in every single theme park; however, Shanghai Disneyland is the exception to this signature Walt Disney stamp. Evidently, the Walt Disney Railroad is a key feature of Disney theme parks. Walt Disney World deems the steam engine railway “a convenient– and nostalgic– way to get around” the American theme parks (Walt Disney World, n.d.). Historical differences between the United States and China surrounding the railroad system are a key factor into why the railroad is so popular in American Disney parks, but does not need to be highlighted for China’s Disneyland.

In relation to the early 1900s, America culturally feels strongly connected to the era due to major strides being made in the nation. As a part of the leaps in progress America experienced, the steam engine train is conceptually an evidently American-beloved innovation that was crucial for the nation’s development (Matusitz, 2009). However, the history and culture of China does not reflect the same sentiment surrounding the steam-engine railways that Walt Disney himself admired so dearly. The history of railways in China, from the Qing Dynasty to modern-day, will be examined to provide context for Shanghai Disneyland’s *lack* of a railroad in the theme park. The comparison between American and Chinese histories and cultural connections to the steam engine railroad provides insight into Disney as a company’s connection to Chinese culture in the Shanghai Disneyland theme park.

Primarily, examining the history of railways in China will provide the insight for why Shanghai Disneyland, in order to truly be ‘distinctly Chinese’, does not have the typical Walt Disney Railroad. The early history of railways in China is even viewed as harshly as “a historical case study of failure in railroad development” (Cunningham, 2017). Historically, railways in China date back to the Qing Dynasty, and originally came after some hesitation for the nation.

Once China began to modernize, the steam engine train simply did not compare to the expanded technology.

Following the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, restructuring of China's operations to a political landscape that is somewhat more similar to the current era for the nation occurred. The development of the Republic of China "did not lead to a centralized system right away due to the unstable political situation of fragmented government power" (Cunningham, 2019). Thus, there would not be much substantial progress made on the railway system in the 1910s-1930s.

China had a new system in place, but not one that was fully supported. It was evident that the political unrest across the nation was not diminished after the 1911 Revolution. After World War II, tensions grew in China and the minimal progress that had occurred so far on the railways was put on hold. The further political strain was specifically between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang. The tensions resulted in "a full-scale civil war" that ended in 1949 by Mao Zedong's Declaration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (United States Department of the State, n.d.). A new era for China was to begin, and the PRC began to move forward with a less than desirable railway system.

The new Chinese government provided opportunities for transportation expansion. New "economic and political priorities" made way for the centralized government to take control of the railway system (Xue, et al. 2016). The system inherited by the PRC was fragmented and generally inaccessible; The next 20 years would be dedicated to unifying the railways. At the end of 1978, all of the railroads in mainland China were integrated into one centralized system for the first time. The establishment of the national railway system then provided China the opportunity to begin improving the "quality of the railway, while continuing to expand the network" (Xue, et al. 2016). In the 1990s, China established the groundbreaking high-speed

railways around the nation that transformed railroad transportation (Xue, et al. 2016). The construction of these high-speed railways shows the great progress China has made in recent years with transportation.

Railroads as an institution in China is examined in Cunningham (2019)'s interview with Köll, who acknowledges and emphasizes that China's railways have a notable history. Köll states that China "does not have a very long history of railroad construction compared to other countries," but they are a nation "whose railroad history is nevertheless significant" (Cunningham, 2019). The history is definitely significant, but not necessarily a history that creates a nostalgic effect culturally. The history of railroad development in China more displays the struggles and strife the nation faced to develop. Therefore, Disney highlighting this specific area of Chinese history rather than promoting the progress that China has made and can continue to make would not necessarily reflect China's culture.

The Chinese culture surrounding the railways evidently shows why a railroad in Shanghai Disneyland would not be China's Disneyland. Many Americans who are fans of Disney are shocked by the lack of a railroad in Shanghai Disneyland; even one credible Disney blog, AllEars.net (2016), examined Walt Disney's "near obsession with railroads" and noted why the attraction is such an integral aspect of the typical Disney theme park. The 1900s American nostalgia is so connected to Disney. As a matter of fact, the general concept of "the turn-of-the-century" is something so ingrained in Americans, it is almost difficult to conceptualize that this time frame was not positively progressive globally.

Walt Disney is not the only American drawn to the history of the United States in the early 1900s. According to Matusitz (2009), the importance of railroads in America's progress at the turn of the century cannot be understated; a sea-to-sea America would not have existed

without the railway system. Although railroads were prevalent in some capacity during the 1800s in America, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that substantial progress was made on an established railway system nationally (Matusitz, 2009). The railroad transformed the western-world rapidly, and was seen as a “magic tool that would forever change the economy, society, politics..., culture, and the psycho-emotional impact of individuals” (Matusitz, 2009). The steam-engine locomotive changed culture by connecting individuals even more so than before. In combination with the Industrial Revolution, the boom of technology and progress in America transformed the nation in a way that is looked upon nostalgically for many Americans. The railway system’s impact on the “newly connected nation engendered a new kind of American society, ambitious in its scale and demands” (Matusitz, 2009). The shift to the America that exists today is generally looked upon fondly, given that it gave way to the nation becoming a dominating power.

While Americans view the invention of the steam engine train and the history of it in the nation nostalgically, the cultural fondness of the railway and the early 20th century does not necessarily translate over into Chinese culture. During the progress that was being made in the somewhat-budding United States, China was facing strife and strain as a nation. These evidently are two different experiences of the 1900s, which must be considered. Therefore, in order for Disney to actively create a theme park that the Chinese audience will respond to, the company had to stray from the American-beloved steam-engine train and the 1900s nostalgia that is associated with it. A distinctly Chinese Disney park considers important cultural differences.

### **The Haunted Mansion and Ghost Culture**

While the visual icons of the Disney theme parks such as the castle and the railroad are notable parts of Disney’s branding, the attractions are a major portion of what makes a Disney

theme park the experience that it is today. The attractions available at Disney theme parks bring immersive and unique experiences for guests, engaging their audiences in fantastical storytelling. Notable fan-favorite attractions that exist in Disneyland and Disney World in the United States tend to be replicated for Disney's international parks; the Haunted Mansion attraction located in both the United States theme parks was no exception to this mode of Disney operations. The attraction, based in the United States, takes guests through "a spooky tour" through a "house of happy haunts" full of "grinning ghosts and other spectral surprises" (Disneyland, n.d.). Since the attraction's 1969 opening, the Haunted Mansion has become synonymous with the Disney theme parks.

A majority of Disney theme parks around the world have a similar type of attraction, with caveats to appeal to the different audiences. However, Shanghai Disneyland uniquely does *not* have a Haunted Mansion attraction—or anything equivalent to it for that matter (Jennings, 2016). The Haunted Mansion attraction appeals to the American culture surrounding ghosts, which extends beyond faith-based practices; a reflection upon the United States' relation with ghosts shows why the Haunted Mansion as an attraction is so popular for the American audiences. Contrastly, China's cultural connections to the afterlife is very much ingrained with faith-based practices. Examining Chinese cultural norms surrounding those who have passed in comparison to Western culture shows why Disney would not have been successful implementing a Haunted Mansion attraction in Shanghai Disneyland. America and China evidently have contrasting cultural beliefs surrounding the afterlife, and the examination of the cultural backgrounds will provide a pathway for why the Haunted Mansion attraction not being at Shanghai Disneyland helps create the distinctly Chinese theme park.

Historically, American culture generally has a distinct relationship with the concept of ghosts in comparison to China. Ghosts in America culturally go beyond the faith-based aspects into a secular realm. Despite religious affiliations declining in the United States over the last 40 years, “belief in the afterlife remained relatively steady” (Kambhampaty, 2021). Evidently, it is clear that the interests Americans have in the supernatural realm extends beyond just the religious associations of death and the afterlife. The supernatural has become a cultural phenomenon through different popular media in America. Brown (2017) examines the phenomenon of 1940s ghost stories in Western media. Tales where spine-chilling tropes of “the vanishing hitchhiker” that you offer a ride to, or the “guardian ghost” that leads you to treasure of some sort are a prevalent part of American media (Brown, 2017). The usage of ghosts as a horror tool or an eerie fantastical element to storytelling is popular in the United States’ culture.

The fascination with ghosts in America did not diminish overtime; arguably, the American interest in ghosts may have expanded over the past 80 years. The media depictions of ghosts also do not just surround horror-based tales, but also lighthearted kid-friendly stories. Anderson (2018) reviews the work of Ferrier-Watson, who examines children’s ghost stories in America. When children-focused ghost stories began to appear in American media “beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were mock ghost stories” which mostly provided logical explanations for what appeared supernatural in the tale (Anderson 2018). As time went on, children-focused ghost stories became more popularized. Ferrier-Watson also notes the early merchandising of Halloween that ‘transform[ed] the ghost into a marketable commodity’” culturally (Anderson 2018). This popularization of the supernatural also made way for different types of children’s ghost stories as well. The most notable lighthearted ghost story that is popular in American culture is Casper the Friendly Ghost, who first appeared in 1945 (Anderson, 2018).

Children are even in on the fun of theorizing the afterlife of the supernatural. Even in the modern day, shows such as “Ghost Hunters” are popular theoretical interactions with the supernatural (Brown, 2017). With the examination of America’s historical—and current—connections to the supernatural, it is clear that the fascination with the supernatural in America is evidently a media-based interest rather than a religious one.

In relation to the Haunted Mansion, the attraction evidently plays off of the cultural popularity surrounding ghost stories. The attraction aims to create a light-hearted sense of spookiness in guests, and play on the ghost story trope that is so popular in the United States. Disneyland advertises that the “ghostly residents are friendly” on the “spooky tour” that guests will endure on the Haunted Mansion (Disneyland, n.d.). Lighthearted theming and jokes are provided throughout the attraction’s queue and the ride itself, creating kid-friendly horror for guests to experience. Disney even plays upon the popular American ghost story trope of the “hitchhiking ghost” on the Haunted Mansion attraction, where the “phantom pranksters may try to follow you home” (Disneyland, n.d.). Both the concept and the cultural commentary of the Haunted Mansion is highly rooted in American culture upon the reflections of American ghost stories.

As for China, the connection to the dead culturally is not as light-hearted. Rather, it is disrespectful to treat the dead through something such as the Haunted Mansion. Chinese culture focuses on honoring the ancestors and respecting those who have passed. The elements of family closeness and ancestor worship throughout time are examined by Jing and Zhang (2020). The importance of ancestors can be traced as far back as Confucius who stated “worship as they are.” Significantly, this statement emphasizes that it is important to honor and “pay homage to the ancestors as if they still exist” (Jing and Zhang, 2020). The respect towards ancestors extended

beyond religious practices in China and became ingrained into multiple areas of Chinese culture and social norms. Ranging from food-sharing rituals to even punishment and trials, ancestral worship is evidently a major element of Chinese mainstream culture (Jing and Zhang, 2020).

The concept of ancestor worship is prevalent in Chinese culture, and essentially nonexistent in American culture. Beyond the historical elements of afterlife rituals and beliefs, the practice of ancestor worship is still prevalent in contemporary Chinese culture. Hu (2016) examines the importance of “ancestor worship” in modern China, acknowledging its historical place as “one defining feature...of the three pillars of Chinese popular culture.” Honoring the ancestors entails specific traditional customs. The specific rituals and traditions surrounding ancestor worship include the ancestor’s ties to those who are living. In other words, “the perpetuation of [the] family line”, which is “unbroken by death” in a way that is non-existent in mainstream American culture (Hu, 2016). The practices of ancestral worship center around ancestral grave sights, ancestral tablets, and updating of family genealogy. Each element is important to historical and contemporary ancestor worship practices. There is also an element of “magic” that is associated with ancestor worship— a concept that some Chinese see as superstitious, but is still incorporated into some individuals' practices (Hu, 2016). Regardless of the perspectives surrounding the more fantastical elements of ancestor worship, it is a prevalent practice that is undeniably important in Chinese culture. Hu (2016) concludes empirically that “various practices of ancestor worship, in total, occupy over 70 percent of the population” in contemporary mainland China. Given the practice’s prevalence today, it is clear that Disney could not ignore the vitality of family kinship and ancestral worship when it came to create attractions for the Shanghai Disneyland theme park.

Upon the reflections between American and Chinese ghost culture, there are evident differences in popular beliefs surrounding the supernatural. Historically, America's connections are prominently based on secular-driven media surrounding ghosts, with media appropriate for kids and adults (Anderson, 2018). In contrast, China's cultural connections to the dead are rooted in family-kinship and the long withstanding practice of ancestor worship (Hu, 2016). When examining the differences between American and Chinese culture with the afterlife, it is evident to see that the Haunted Mansion attraction is one that overwhelmingly is based in American secular beliefs of the afterlife.

There is as much power in absence as there is in presence. In relation to the Haunted Mansion, the absence of this incredibly American attraction (or anything similar to it) in Shanghai Disneyland is more beneficial than the presence of it. In order for Disney to effectively cater to the culture in mainland China, steering away from the American trope of lighthearted references to the dead that the Haunted Mansion attraction is based on is one effective way to create China's Disneyland.

## **Conclusion**

Upon examination of the American Disney parks compared to Shanghai Disneyland theme park through the castles, the Walt Disney Railroad, and the Haunted Mansion attraction, the histories and cultures of the United States and China evidently differ in key ways. Many aspects of Disney theme parks are foundationally based on American norms and culture; therefore, Disney's construction of a uniquely Chinese theme park results in a shift from elemental factors that have won over the past Disney audiences (Barboza and Barnes, 2016). Similarly, in order for other businesses to seek success internationally, they must glocalize. In other words, there must be an enmeshment of local and global cultural elements. As seen in

Shanghai Disneyland, intentional consideration of important elements of Chinese culture (i.e. Chinese railway history, the importance of ancestor worship) plays a vital role in how the theme park was constructed.

Future studies into the demands of Chinese officials can provide further insight into how businesses can successfully integrate global and local, particularly ideological, influences into products and services. Additionally, further comparison of Disney to domestic Chinese entertainment options can provide more information about potential pitfalls in Disney's glocalization. Conclusively, Shanghai Disneyland is evidently China's Disney park through Disney's combination of the global and local cultures. Businesses seeking international success must utilize the local culture to create a unique product better fit for the consumer. Rather than replication, there must be cultural integration. The careful consideration of the local elements creates better products for targeted consumers.

It cannot be ignored that there are evident critiques against the processes of both globalization and glocalization. When discussing 'global' culture, it often becomes synonymous with "Western" culture—which is often advertised as more progressive than other cultures. Disney's presence as a global company is not immune to the critiques of cultural homogenization. Just because an international company can play the part of a local through the research and development of the product or experience, does that mean it is positive progress for culture in general? Disney may be successful with their implementation of glocalization, but that does not conclude that glocal is better than local. Regardless of whether it is 'good' or 'bad', glocalization is an evidently effective way for businesses to internationalize.

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