

00:00 – 03:41

Kerrine: Hello and welcome to another podcast hosted by culture360.ASEF.org, the arts and culture portal of the Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF. So today we will be continuing our conversation with Xiaoyi. This podcast is the second in this series, where we delve into the topic of environmental sustainability in cultural mobility, particularly in the context of China. So, Xiaoyi welcome back to the podcast.

Xiaoyi: Thank you, Kerrine.

Kerrine: So for this second podcast, let's start with a broader question first. There has been a lot of interest in the intersection of travel, environment and sustainability in recent years. So how do mobility funding calls and programmes in China actually address these issues?

Xiaoyi: All I can say is that from what I have seen is very, very little. This is because China is still relatively stuck in the demand for programmes. Of course I have seen some, you know, visual or performing arts projects, especially research based and residency programmes where artists are recruited to conduct local research and interact with the community to create work on environment and sustainability issues.

Another situation is the cultural tourism project I mentioned earlier in another podcast. And some of these projects are beginning to focus on the topic of space, especially unconventional space, alternative space, which makes it necessary for artists to have a better understanding of the overall environment and to conduct research and then create work related to environment and sustainability.

There are also more and more arts projects happening in the countryside. And there will be a greater focus on travel, the environment and the sustainability issues, brought about by China's urban development. But overall for a rapidly developing country, China still has a long way to go in this regard, I think.

I have friends who have been supported by foundations to become resident arts groups in the countryside, carrying out research, residency programmes and creations related to the environment. And I also have friends who have gone on residencies in the mountains, which have been greatly affected by China's urban development. Often these foundations are from the private sector, not governmental.

And we're seeing that these organisations, these agencies are more visionary and more willing to support these kinds of arts activities. I think it's a good sign. And I'm sure there will be more and more of these cases in the future in China.

03:42 – 06:24

Kerrine: That's good to hear that we have a very optimistic future ahead, especially in the direction that we're heading towards for China. I guess I'm also interested in finding out, because as we

talked about in the first podcast, China itself is a very huge country, very huge area. And with the concept of slow travel where people travel by land and sea compared to traveling by plane, how often actually do people in China or do artists and cultural professionals in China actually actively use such an approach when traveling domestically? Or is plane still a preferred option for many?

Xiaoyi: China does not believe in slow. I have never heard anyone mention the concept of slow travel in China. But as we all know, China has a very advanced high speed railway system. And in many places, almost every city has its own railway station, which makes intercity travel very convenient.

And on the other hand, similar to many places, airports are usually built farther away from the city center. For these reasons, there are definitely many people who would prefer land transport. While I don't think slow travel is a widely realised concept in China, I do think that China has the potential and conditions to explore the concept in the near future.

And just now I said China doesn't believe in slow, because they are still in the midst of fast. They even think that it's not fast enough and China is, is proud of being fast. The speed of building infrastructure, the speed of travelling, the speed of development and so on. And I think believing in and choosing slow can be a privilege because we have a choice.

And so I am also understanding and adapting to the Chinese idea of being fast. Of course, is there an alternative to slow and fast? That is also a question in my mind. For example, maybe it's not about speed. It's not really about travelling fast or slow but it's about staying and living.

06:25 – 09:25

Kerrine: So instead of using slow as a time factor, like how long would we take to travel from one place to another. Maybe it's about choosing to stay for a longer time in a certain place. Maybe that could be the definition of slow travel as well, which is interesting to explore.

So I guess when we talked about the concept of slow travel and making travel more sustainable in China. When we think about the infrastructure and things like that, what do you see as the biggest challenge in making travel more sustainable in China?

Xiaoyi: I think it's not just about China. It's also an Asian issue, because the biggest challenge to making travel more sustainable is that our our land mass is so large that cities or countries can be very far from each other. We have certainly all heard about the plans to build a high-speed railway to connect China and Southeast Asia, right? But the plan has been slow to fully realise.

We also know that we are separated by seas and oceans, China and Japan and South Korea, East Asia and Southeast Asia. Not to mention West Asia, are all very far away from each other. So what to do?

I think firstly, I would certainly think that online communication is a very good alternative. Although it can't completely replace face to face communication, but it can assist us with some

of the pre and post communication. Secondly, I would suggest to make travelling more variable, more sustainable by making arts projects more long term.

So like what we said just now, it's a totally different time concept – it is about the duration. And so for example, you have to fly to a place and if I can stay for a month or even three months, rather than just a week or so in one place, I think that's one way to make travelling more sustainable.

Another suggestion is that instead of flying a long way each time just to go to one place or for one project, we can link up some projects and kill two or more birds with one stone. But, but this is not easy, because this requires artists to have a macro perspective to not just, you know, focus on their creations, but to be more flexible, more aware with their resources and thinking about how to leverage on different projects and platforms to link them together.

09:26 – 11:33

Kerrine: So actually what Xiaoyi has talked about was how we have shifted more onto online and hybrid formats and how they are now being gradually complemented by in-person exchanges. So I guess my question would be, do we see more of such online and hybrid activities in China or are programmes still mainly in-person?

Xiaoyi: I think online or hybrid format is not yet the first choice they would consider. Because like I said just now, travelling in China is too convenient. But I also know that more and more arts projects in China are choosing to, to do it online.

I organised a forum in Ningbo last year, where some of the artists from China and overseas joined us online. I have also been involved in several online lectures and forums in China, where I have spoken in front of the camera from the comfort of my house. So it can be said that the pandemic has sped up the use of online and hybrid formats in China.

Of course, there is another interesting example. As I said before, many arts projects in China may have last minute schedules due to specific political reasons. So many artists from outside China don't have the means to participate in-person sometimes and they have to settle for the second best thing, doing it online.

Kerrine: Interesting.

Xiaoyi: Like I mentioned just now, I don't think online communication can completely replace face to face international exchange. We still desire dialogue and communication in real time and space, but online communication does offer a lot of convenience and saves a lot of resources.

11:34 – 15:07

Kerrine: I guess if I were to expand a little bit on that point. So are there situations or circumstances where you feel like, instead of travelling and meeting in person, we can replace

these activities or complement them with online exchanges? Under what circumstances would they actually work well?

Xiaoyi: Under COVID? One example is [The Spirits Play Online](#), the online creation I made during the pandemic, when I invited five artists from different places to create something together. In addition to that, I also invited five scholars, researchers from different places, to join us in the whole process together. So, I think for projects like The Spirits Play Online, which is not focused on the creation and the work only, but also focused on the research and dialogue, I think that could work very well by using the online or hybrid format.

I have curated a number of online arts programmes. Another example is the [Emergency Academy](#), a two-year online incubator for young cultural leaders, which has already completed two editions and the members are from all over the world.

Kerrine: Nice.

Xiaoyi: So online definitely is the the first choice. I give lectures and workshops online and the members conduct research and dialogue online. And maybe you can imagine how touching the scene could be, when they finally meet in person one day. After two years of, you know, getting to know each other and having dialogues online.

To make it more sustainable, to make it more welcoming, to make it more successful, I would suggest that online activities should have more warmth, more casual conversations to enhance mutual understanding and feelings. Not just about arts and work.

And I think that research, lectures, workshops and so on, are many options that can be done online. While creation, especially in the performing arts, is still very much a face-to-face process. Successful online exchange may be that we have common memories of our offline exchanges or we have a desire for a real meeting in the future and is not just based on doing a project, but on mutual respect, mutual learning, mutual understanding between people. I think that is very important.

Kerrine: What Xiaoyi has brought up is that online exchanges can never fully, can never fully replace in-person exchanges. And what is important out of all these interactions, it's actually the warmth and the connections between people, which I think we have come to appreciate that a little bit more, especially after COVID, where the distance and the lack of travelling can actually put certain barriers between people. And it's more important now than ever to connect with one another on a personal level.

15:08 – 18:15

Kerrine: So I guess that brings me to my final question. What does your vision or model of what sustainable travel should look like in the future and what can it look like moving forward?

Xiaoyi: I would say short-term, one-off exchanges, very often don't make much sense to me. I believe in long term. I believe in sustainable exchanges. Only through long term sustainable exchanges, it's possible to build a community. I have been doing a lot of workshops and festivals in China for the past few years. And lately I have been feeling like, I am building a community. People who may have met me or other people as a result of travel or an arts project and then we have to stay in close contact. After that we exchange information, we exchange experiences and even resources. When I or one of them meets, we may come together again. Only in this way, we are building a long-term platform, a sustainable network, a community. Every time I, I visit a city, I always want to meet the most interesting artists in that city, so as to make my travelling more meaningful and sustainable.

Kerrine: And more slow.

Xiaoyi: Yeah, and more slow. Because I think that's also part of the liveliness of the performing arts. The liveliness is not just in the theater or in the rehearsal room. It's also about people and people, body and body. And as we all know, there are more and more independent artists. And only when we all unite, we can make a real difference, a real difference and impact. That's my vision. We can't travel just to do a show or a project, but to imagine the creation of a platform and a network.

Kerrine: So I guess it's a very nice conclusion of what sustainability means to Xiaoyi, the longevity of a network, beyond just the activity that we're collaborating on, the continuation of connections and eventually forming a community where you can reach out to one another even after a project has ended.

So once again, I would like to thank Xiaoyi for his very insightful responses and for sharing your experience so generously with us today. It's been a pleasure having you on the podcast. And to our listeners, if you have any thoughts on the conversation, let us know, we would love to hear from you. And stay tuned for more conversations on arts and culture with culture360, and we hope to have Xiaoyi back again with us.

Xiaoyi: Thank you, I look forward to working with you once again in the future.