Night-Time Economy and Place Branding: A Case Study in Guangzhou, China

Guang Luo   Mingliang Lin   Yinbin Lin   Min Wang

South China Normal University

The night-time economy (NTE) of Europe, as a strategy to stimulate the urban economy, has spread around the world. Since the beginning of the 21st century, branding the NTE has become a new governance of Chinese cities for increasing revenue and enhancing their reputation. This study, taking Xingsheng Road in Guangzhou as a case, investigates how the NTE was constructed through place branding in a non-Western city. The results show that local stakeholders reshape the meaning of night-time space through a place branding strategy to propose that grassroots forces with their place culture be considered. As a continuous political process, place branding has changed in regard to the dynamic relationships among stakeholders, leading to the negotiation of night-time space. The local government intervened to maintain the order of urban night-time space, which shows nonneoliberal urban governance in China and supplements a global/Eastern perspective on the NTE.

Keywords: night-time economy, place branding, urban governance, Guangzhou

Introduction

The night-time economy (NTE), as a city planning strategy to revitalize the inner city, has spread quickly from Europe throughout the world and has encountered different urban cultures and institutions (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Heath, 1997; Roberts et al., 2006). Participants in the NTE reconstructed the meaning of night in their space practices (Williams, 2008), and the problems brought about by their night-time actions have become a new challenge in urban governance (Jayne et al., 2008；Roberts et al., 2006). In encounters with local institutions and culture, the NTE has produced different chemical reactions. However, the extant NTE research focuses more on European and American countries, lacking a perspective of Asian countries. Thus, we believe this study on a Chinese urban case can expand the connotation of the NTE from a nonneoliberal perspective.

Guang Luo, School of Fine Arts, South China Normal University; Mingliang Lin, School of Urban and Regional Science, South China Normal University; Yinbin Lin, School of Geography, South China Normal University and Min Wang, School of Geography, South China Normal University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Min Wang, School of Geography, South China Normal University, No.55, Zhongshan Avenue West, Guangzhou, 510631, China. E-mail: wminmin@m.scnu.edu.cn

Night-time space is constructed by the social relations among multiple subjects (Edensor, 2015), and it is not only a consumption space but also a place-making space at the street level (Hadfield, 2015). The street, as a commodity, is packaged by nightlife culture for marketing and forms a place brand (Masuda & Bookman, 2018) to promote people to come the street. According to Kavaratzis and Hatch's (2013) view, place branding is a process of stakeholder participation and is based on the common association between different subjects. With the force of the NTE, night-time space can attract consumers and increase brand equity to promote the value of the place (Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018).

In China, social practices at night have a long history. The NTE in China was driven by grassroots forces in an informal space, and it was difficult for the city government to derive substantial benefits; thus, because of the absence of government support, the NTE often existed in informal space, facing problems of sanitation, traffic, safety and community conflict (Su-Jan et al., 2012; Zeng, 2009). With the expansion of the NTE, the problem for local governments has become how to formalize the NTE in urban space and promote its orderly development. Since 2000, many cities in China have incorporated the NTE into urban governance policies (Chew, 2009a). There is a disconnect between what the government expects from the night and grassroots' consumption, which has filled the night-time space with different power struggles.

This study, taking an NTE case in Xingsheng Road, Guangzhou, China, investigated how bottom-up place branding forces promote the production of NTE space. In this case, stakeholders in a community-based NTE cluster district transformed the informal NTE space into a formal and orderly NTE-consuming space through place branding strategies, which turned Xingsheng Road from an ordinary street into a famous night-time consumer destination. We also examined how urban governance forces intervened in NTE space and reconsidered the impact of the NTE on urban space from the perspective of nonneoliberal urban governance.

Literature Review

NTE and Space Practices

The NTE was proposed as a city planning concept by Comedia Consultancy in the UK (Comedia, 1991) to improve the utilization of urban space at night and revitalize the inner city (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Heath, 1997). The NTE can be regarded as an urban governance strategy of postindustrial cities that encourages consumption and boosts city incomes through the leisure industry at night (Bianchini, 1995; Böse, 2005). Consumption occupies the urban space at night and reproduces social space. The meanings of night-time darkness have been redefined by NTE practices, and new issues for social control at night have been raised (Williams, 2008).

The NTE has become an important strategy for urban renewal in European and American cities since the 1990s (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003), emerging in the fields of sociology, geography and urban studies. Hadfield (2015) summarized the three phases of NTE study. The first is the entrepreneurial shift in urban governance, which reflects the challenges that the NTE presents for urban governance. The second is the concern about the negative effects of the NTE, as it conflicts with local communities and leads to stigmatized exclusion. The third is reterritorializing night-time city spaces. The neoliberal policy changes the night-time space practice through the NTE, which, as a form of urban planning and governance, is considered a neoliberal practice, and the NTE aims to revitalize the inner city by suiting the tastes of the middle class.

Social practice at night produces special affective meaning, which makes the city space culture dynamic (Van Liempt et al., 2015). The NTE not only increases the vitality of urban nightlife and prolongs consumption time but also normalizes the meaning of the night-time space, which represents a neoliberal consumption practice.

Western literature on the NTE focuses on the criticism of neoliberalism. Ural (2017) regards neoliberalism as a kind of discourse and value in daily life and believes that the groups that do not conform to neoliberal values tend to be marginalized in the development of a community-based NTE. By rendering the affective atmosphere and cultural significance in line with the middle class, young people or other people who are willing to consume at night, the NTE provides a standardized consumption experience, and space exclusion is formed (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Eder & Öz, 2015; Shaw, 2010). The practice of neoliberalism excludes people who "nonparticipate in night consumption" or have low consumption capacity, which leads to the gentrification of the community (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). In addition, consumerism has become an important feature of night-time space. Under the influence of night-time lights, night is endowed with a dark esthetic atmosphere, which can provide people with an intimate and joyful emotion. Based on an "assemblage urbanism" approach, Shaw (2014) proposes that the affective atmosphere of nightlife is an assemblage of bodies, materials and practices, which becomes the space of consumer preference. However, the absence of urban governance power at night provides opportunities for people to violate the rules and laws of the day (Bromley & Nelson, 2002; Nelson et al., 2001). For example, alcohol, drugs, sexual industries, violence, crime and so on bring continuous fear to people (Schwanen et al., 2012). Night space is also a space of subculture, which provides a specific spatiotemporal place for marginal groups hiding in the dark. Ethnic, LGBT, youth and other consumer groups add more uncertainties to the night-time city (Gallan, 2015; Valentine et al., 2010; Waitt et al., 2011).

Therefore, it is worth focusing on how the spatial practices of different subjects construct the NTE. Moreover, the literature pays too much attention to the consumption space, ignoring the impact of the NTE at the street level (Hadfield, 2015). The NTE has not only reshaped the space as consumption but also established new relationships and orders of night-time space among stakeholders. From a view of place branding, this study intends to propose a broader influence of the NTE on night-time space.

Place Branding Strategy

The concept of a brand is derived from marketing, giving value and meaning to a product and defining its identity (Ashworth, 2009; Campelo, 2017; Kavaratzis, 2005). The process of place branding is essentially the process of strengthening place assets with a cohesive force and creating new value in the space (Grenni et al., 2020).

Traditionally, place branding, as a top-down planning and management measure, has used marketing concepts for reference and applied marketing theories and methods to governance. How

to effectively convey the unique image of the place and the formation of brand personality is a core topic in the literature (Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Parkerson & Saunders, 2005; Patteeuw, 2002). However, the pillar of the brand lies in the narrative of its story. The story of a place brand needs to arouse people's perception of the place. The story often reflects the varying nature of the discourse, which makes the place brand uncontrollable and unstable (Grenni et al., 2020; Hospers, 2020; Nogué & San-Eugenio-Vela, 2018). Transforming the culture, history, infrastructure, architecture, landscape and environment of a region or city into an identity acceptable to various people is a key solution (Shirvani-Dastgerdi & De-Luca, 2019). A successful place branding practice should make the image conform to the psychological association of most people. Geographical knowledge of place perception is an important foundation of place brand practice (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). Increasing practices have proven that the marketing strategies of "one size fits all" ignore place characteristics.

Stakeholders form the place meanings through their daily life and embodied experience of the place. The brand image expected by city managers is not completely consistent with the brand image formed by the target audience (Green et al., 2018; Wang, 2017; Zenker & Braun, 2017).

Thus, place branding is no longer solely regarded as a marketing strategy but rather as a way in which to construct the relationship network of different stakeholders through branding (Green, et al., 2016; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) believed that the essence of place branding is the dialog and interaction between stakeholders and the consultation of individual meaning in the place. Place branding is the process of creating unique and positive place identities and images in the minds of stakeholders, awakening their place experiences and influencing their behavioral intention (Kislali et al., 2020; Nogué & San-Eugenio-Vela, 2018). Expressing views on the value of place brands in different ways not only has become a factor of brand generation but can also be a force that destroys a brand (Chan, 2019; Vallaster et al., 2018). Brands can be cocreated or can die in the "antibrand" fight (Masuda & Bookman, 2018). Personal experience and values will lead to different decodings of place brands (Vallaster et al., 2018). Therefore, place branding should be performed in the power negotiations of stakeholders, which also makes place branding a political tool (Schmiz, 2019).

Anderson (2020) believes that culture can enter the economic field as an "assemble effect" and have an important influence, focusing on how specific cultures respond and reproduce in the relations and processes of power. In the process of promoting the development of a place brand, the NTE, as an active actor, participates in place politics. The place meanings associated with the NTE are the intangible assets of place branding, which are jointly created by various forces. Place branding not only defines brand personality and spreads the place image but also contains the interaction and communication of place power (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Stakeholders share the brand equity brought about by the NTE and participate in the branding process through agent actions (Grenni, et al., 2020). The NTE becomes the mediation in the negotiation of place branding. In other words, the emergence of the NTE has reconstructed place power relations and led to a new political process, which is shown through the construction and deconstruction of place brands.

Based on place branding strategies, the NTE is growing rapidly in China. Considering the different night-time cultures between the Chinese and Western contexts, stakeholders' negotiation process of brand politics helps us understand the formation of the NTE in China.

Chinese Context of Branding the NTE

In the context of Chinese cities, the cultural meaning of the night has different characteristics. Although night in China is filled with scary tales of ghosts and monsters, going out at night was not forbidden. From ancient China to the founding of the People's Republic of China, night-time economy has become daily consumption and Chinese unique night culture formed. After the reform and opening up in 1979, modern and Western NTE began to emerge in China. The Chinese pursuit of Western leisure culture has led to the emergence of various night-time consumption places, similar to those in the West (Chew, 2009a), such as bar space (Farrer, 2009), karaoke space (Fung, 2009), nightlife cluster zones (Zeng, 2009), and dance musical culture (Chew, 2009b). These studies consider China's NTE as a product of cosmopolitanism and the outcome of opening up. In addition, the NTE in Chinese cities has long existed as a kind of informal space, which is dominated by itinerant hawkers for food and small commodities trading. These informal spaces are able to meet the daily needs of residents and help activate urban spaces at night (Song et al., 2016) and their mobility reconstructs the meaning of night-time space on street-level without the limitation of fixed NTE site.

China's NTE has flourished since the 21st century. Especially, in 2012, the Chinese government put forward "the new normal of the economy", emphasizing the strategy of consumption-driven economic development. NTE can become an important tool to stimulate urban consumption. Therefore, the local government began to standardize the management of NTE, creating "agglomeration area" and forming policy discourse such as "late-night canteen", "moonlight economy" and "24-hour city". NTE is not only the engine of a city economy, but also a

cultural capital to promote city image.

The consumption places derived from the NTE are often in the inner-city space at the street level, and the local community space has become the carrier of night-time culture (Bürkner & Totelecan, 2018). In the context of China, the NTE, as a place branding tool, can change the place image and create brand equity for a street space. As an intermediary of brand association, the NTE is a dynamic political process of stakeholders' participation. This study, taking Xingsheng Road in Guangzhou, China as a case, investigates how NTE was constructed through place-branding in a non-western city and extend the discussion of NTE to street space, hoping to put forward a NTE development mode dominated by bottom-up forces.

Case Introduction and Methodology

Xingsheng Road is located in Zhujiang New Town, a new central business district (CBD) of Guangzhou, with a total length of approximately 700 meters (Figure 1). The area was planned as a residential zone, with apartments built by different property developers and street-facing shops on the first and second floors. Because of the expensive land rent, most local residents in Xingsheng Road are from the middle class. Surrounded by producer services offices, many office workers move through this street every day. Meanwhile, with the relocation of business office buildings and embassies in China, Zhujiang New Town has become one of the foreigners' agglomerations in Guangzhou. In 2010, to satisfy the demand of local residents, consumer industries began to develop in Xingsheng Road. The operators took up sidewalks at night to expand their scope, and Xingsheng Road went from a normal street to an NTE cluster zone. The stakeholders, including local residents, consumers, operators and landlords, reshaped the meaning of the space through a place branding strategy. Xingsheng Road became a famous nightlife destination. However, the negative influence of the NTE made Xingsheng Road a black spot for complaints in Guangzhou, pushing local governments to balance the interest between the NTE brand and local residents. We believe that it can reflect the development of modern NTE in China and convey the different urban governance logic on NTE in Chinese context which helps to provide a new perspective for interpretation of NTE.

We conducted fieldwork from April 2017 to December 2019 a total of 8 times on Xingsheng Road. We mainly used participatory observations and interviews to investigate the development of the NTE in Xingsheng Road and the characteristics of the nightlife. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. We interviewed 26 operators, 13 consumers and 10 local residents to understand their perceptions, attitudes and actions on Xingsheng Road's NTE. Moreover, we collected online news texts related to Xingsheng Road from 2010 to 2019 (32 news reports, with duplications excluded) to sort out the development process of the NTE of Xingsheng Road and understand the roles of local government and landlords in the this NTE's development process. In addition, based on Weibo (www.weibo.com, a popular social media platform in China), we used netnography to supplement and verify the information of consumers and operators in the NTE in Xingsheng Road.
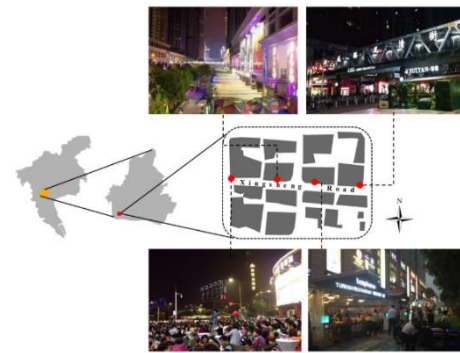

Figure 1. Location of Xingsheng Road in Guangzhou.

Sharing Night: Stakeholders and Place Branding

Xingsheng Road originally was an ordinary residential street. The first and second floors of buildings were designed as commercial spaces, and the above floors were service apartments. With a 20-meter-wide sidewalk, the first floor provided shopping and walking space for residents. The sidewalk was defined as a municipal facility, not a business location. During the day, public spaces were strictly controlled, but at night, due to the lack of management, the sidewalk became a space for expanding the scope of business space, forming an "open-air restaurant". Similar to ghosts, they disappeared during the day and appeared at night, especially after 9 p.m. The temporary use of urban space by the night economy was a temporal domain. This "open-air restaurant" was actually an occupation of public space, and it made Xingsheng Road a popular consumption space.

We consider place branding as an ongoing political process. The "open-air restaurant" at night was the center of place branding. It is a process of stakeholder consultation to inject place culture into the brand and makes place image communicate widely. "Open-air restaurant", a night-time public space, was an assemblage of different stakeholders' actions and local nightlife culture.

Operators

For operators, an increase in the number of consumers helps

boost profits so they actively participate to extend the operating time, constructing an "open-air restaurant" to attract more consumers. The efforts of operators lay the foundation for the place branding of the NTE.

The operators in Xingsheng Road are diversified because they come from different places around the world. With the completion of Zhujiang New Town and commercial development, the residential area around Xingsheng Road has become a place where many ethnic groups live together. Xingsheng Road has also become a consumption place for many ethnic groups.

> "There are many foreigners in this street ... Liede Avenue and Mall of the World are separated here. Their neighborhood is surrounded by four roads, including Jinsheng road and Liede Avenue. Many foreigners will spend here, we see that foreigners are already commonplace."
>
> —Operator (interviewee), Feb, 12th, 2018

Multicultural symbols endow the NTE space with distinctive cultural significance. "Open-air restaurants" not only occupy the right to use the space but also characterize the new space through cultural symbols. On the one hand, ethnic operators shape the cultural symbols of other countries. The Happy Monk restaurant and bar operated by the British, the Sutan Turkish restaurant operated by the Turks, the purple restaurant operated by the French, and the Vincent restaurant and bar operated by the Italians all add cultural symbolic significance to Xingsheng Road. On the other hand, the traditional Chinese mid-night snack culture has been maintained. Hot pot, barbecue, stir-fry and other restaurants still abound in the "open-air restaurant". Besides, Foods, alcohol, hookahs, neon lights, canopies with multicultural symbols, electronic music, bands, TV sets for live games, table games in bars, and body performances of consumers have all come together to shape the NTE space of Xingsheng Road. The nightlife brings consumers a different affective atmosphere than during the day (Shaw, 2015). The blending of multiculturalism can enhance the symbolism of this place, which makes an originally obscure street shine, not only in Zhujiang New Town but also in Guangzhou.

Government and Landlords

The economic potential and problems brought about by the NTE on Xingsheng Road have attracted the attention of local governments and landlords. Although Xingsheng Road is not the only night economic gathering area in Guangzhou, the emotional atmosphere formed by the multicultural collection is unique.

Landlords need to find apartment buyers and investors in stores. Although the apartments on Xingsheng Road belong to multiple real estate developers, their common goal is how to let more people enter the street. When NTE space was produced, landlords realized the need to operate Xingsheng Road as a whole. Thus, in the case of retaining property, they transferred the shops to the CBD Administration Commission of Tianhe,[1] which made a unified investment in the NTE. Landlords renamed the area Xingshenghui, No. 6 Xingsheng Road, and Yuehe Group to improve its identification.

The commercial operation of Xingsheng Road at night requires unified arrangements and management to ensure the safety and good sanitation environment of the surrounding communities at night. Thus, local governments have built institutions and infrastructure for Xingsheng Road by establishing unofficial organizations. Xingsheng Road belongs to the XianCun Subdistrict Office,[2] which is the grassroots governance of the community. On June 6th, 2014, the XianCun Chamber of Commerce was established on the basis of the Subdistrict Office. It is the first chamber of commerce derived from a subdistrict office in Guangzhou and a platform for different merchants to communicate and implement a membership system. The first chairman of the XianCun Chamber of Commerce was the landlords of Xingshenghui who occupied a quarter of the shops on Xingsheng Road. How to enhance the reputation of Xingsheng Road at night and strengthen management became one of XianCun Chamber of Commerce's important projects. Therefore, the CBD Administration Commission of Tianhe is responsible for attracting merchants to settle in and is the link between the merchants of Xingsheng Road, improving business management.

Because Xingsheng Road is not an independent business district, the property rights of shops are shared, and there are certain difficulties in management. On December 4, 2014, Xingsheng Style Street Management Company was established to take Xingsheng Road from different owners for unified property management. Merchants operating the NTE need to pay management fees to the property management company and obey the management arrangements. The property management company has defined the standards for merchants to occupy public space at night, including the height and area of the awning and the way in which the tables and chairs are placed. In fact,

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[1] CBD Administration Commission of Tianhe: The administrative organ of the economic development zone, which is responsible for the investment attraction and enterprise management. Zhujiang New Town is one of the key economic development zones in Guangzhou.

[2] Subdistrict Office: A type of administrative region of China to manage several communities in the city.

this is the legalization of the NTE's occupation of public space at night, and the property management company even stipulates that such space occupation can only be at night. Moreover, the company redefined the place image of Xingsheng Road, renamed "Xingsheng Style Street", and a conspicuous landmark was placed at the entrances and exits of the street, which essentially established an explicit boundary. In addition, various festival activities were held at night on Xingsheng Road, and an online media account was registered for publicity. These approaches helped attract not only consumers but also investors.

The local government did not directly intervene in Xingsheng Road but intervened through the entrepreneurial governance of nonofficial organizations. Branding practice transforms communities into commodities through an enterprise model and changes the community image through marketing to transform into place brands to attract a wider range of consumers (Griffiths, 1998). While top-level design matters, place branding requires audience communication (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015).

Residents and Consumers

The original intention of attracting investment in Xingsheng Road was to meet the daily needs of residents. However, with the development of the NTE, Xingsheng Road has also become a consumption space for external consumers. The actions of local residents and external consumers help stimulate the dissemination of place brands while maintaining the vitality of the NTE space through the spatial practice of daily life.

Local residents are mostly bosses, senior managers and white-collar workers who work during the day. They have certain consumption power, which leads to the demand for consumption at night. They look forward to a lively night instead of a boring one:

> "I moved here because of Xingsheng Style Street. I like the atmosphere here, very lively fun."
>
> —Local resident (interviewee), Feb. 12th，2018

The noise and light brought by NTE can improve residents' sense of security. Before 2012, there were fewer people and no shops for consumption. Local residents believed that the night was too quiet, which made them afraid. In addition, the local residents are not only Chinese, but also ethnic groups from all over the world. Zhujiang New Town, a new CBD in Guangzhou, was becoming an international financial center and attracting many foreign workers. Many embassies in China have moved into it, resulting in an increasing number of foreigners. The consumption demand caused by the increase of ethnic residents made multicultural characteristics of NTE.

Consumers are an important part of the NTE. Their practices and performances directly promote the NTE in Xingsheng Road in daily life and form consumption landscapes. People in Guangzhou have a habit of eating at night, and their consumption stimulates the development of the NTE agglomeration area. Xingsheng Road not only is an NTE destination but also attracts consumers who pursue different cultures by virtue of its multicultural advantages, and consumer demand is also reshaping the business form of Xingsheng Road. With the enhancement of place branding, land rent has increased, which has led to the forced departure of some low-end consumption forms and caused the isolation of consumer groups. The NTE purports to provide leisure recreation for inner-city workers (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003), but their wages do not allow them to afford to do so. Therefore, the consumers of Xingsheng Road have begun to become the preferred group and have the ability to consume.

Under the joint actions of the local government, landlords, local residents, consumers and operators, the NTE of Xingsheng Road has developed rapidly. The NTE is an important mediation of sharing interests. Landlords and operators can obtain the actual economic benefits, and consumers and local residents' needs can be satisfied. In their daily practice, they constantly strengthen the "night" label of Xingsheng Road, making it famous and promoting the place brand of the NTE. However, it is worth noting that place brands are built on the relationships among stakeholders. When these relationships change, the place brand will also change.
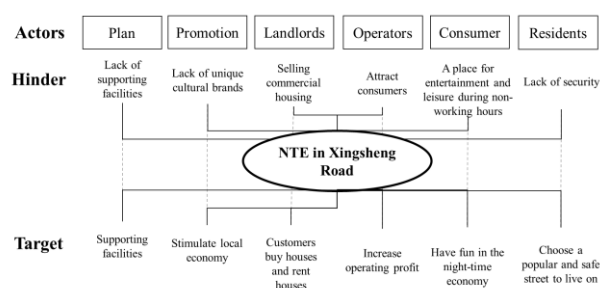

Figure 2. Construction of night-time economy in Xingsheng Road.

Brand Deconstruction and Urban Governance

The production of the NTE space on Xingsheng Road developed rapidly on the stimulus of consumption. Although the local government regulated it through nonofficial institutions, the NTE space was still illegal. The consumption space was built on the sidewalk, which was a public space full of complex relationships and has both boosted the place brand of the NTE

and generated negativity leading to brand deconstruction.

Stigmatization and Destruction

The public space was occupied by the production of the NTE, and the spatial representation was reconstructed by multicultural symbols in Xingsheng Road. The place brand reproduces the space, and the meaning of daily life was weakened, which leads to a conflict and power struggle concerning the NTE among local residents.

Noise, mess, congestion, unpleasant smell and rubbish brought about by the NTE broke people's spatial perception of it as a quiet, comfortable and safe place at night. Therefore, many residents began to use social media to expose the problems of Xingsheng Road to the public and started a place brand stigmatization narrative.

> "This is the new landmark of Guangzhou. This is the exotic street of Xingsheng Road, known as the new business card of Guangzhou, a time bomb built in the heart of the core residential area."
>
> —Tianya BBS (internet), May 10th, 2016

The stigmatization narrative attracted the attention of operators, and they tried to negotiate with residents. Operators established self-regulatory committees and signed commitments to promise to turn off all sound-emitting devices at 10 p.m. and end all outdoor activities at 12 p.m. Subsequently, the Xingsheng Style Street Management Company took regulatory measures. It conducted road closures at night, banned music and installed CCTV. However, these regulatory measures were a method of negotiation, which was to standardize the consumer use of the space instead of the living space expected by residents. In addition, these measures were taken to address the disagreement between operators and local residents, ignoring that the NTE space was produced by consumers' practices. The meaning of night-time consumption was contrary to residents' practice in daily life.

When the operator's measures failed to resolve the problem, residents took further action. In December 2016, residents of Xingsheng Road launched a protest complaint by gathering in crowds and holding demonstrations. They used the slogan "give back my home" and proposed the removal of the "open-air restaurants". Local residents' campaigns further stigmatized place brands. In the end, the local government was forced to determine that the "open-air restaurants" were illegal and issued a "removal order". At the end of December 2016, the city manager of the local government ordered the demolition of the "open-air restaurants", and NTE space was compressed. Since the second half of 2017, the renewal speed of shops in Xingsheng Road has accelerated. We found that many shops had been operating for less than three months, and they disappeared without a trace in our next survey. A shopkeeper who has been operating for a long time stated the following:

> "Now, it has nothing to do with the brand of Xingsheng Style Street. It will be much better as before, and it will be better for our business... Now, many former bosses have withdrawn from the store."
>
> —Operator (interviewee), Apr. 15th, 2018

The relocation of a large number of operators also left some shops vacant, and the night of Xingsheng Road fell into darkness. The operation of shops was at the core of maintaining the NTE, and the departure of shops made it difficult for landlords to obtain rental income. Many groups have also announced divestment. In July 2019, "Xingsheng Road No. 6" was renamed Junmao Plaza, and it sought a new way of development, without the "Xingsheng" brand.

The persistence of the negative impact of the NTE led to a difference in perceptions among stakeholders on the place brand and negatively impacted the place branding process. Although place branding is the way for the NTE to be normalized, and it also conforms to the brand association of different stakeholders, the negative impact will trump up a countercharge on the place brand. The negative impact was amplified in local residents' spatial practices, and the balance of interests between subjects was destroyed, finally leading to brand failure.

Rethinking Urban Governance of the NTE

In the context of Chinese cities, the NTE can be divided into invisible consumption spaces, such as bars, KTV, and clubs, and informal spaces exposed in public spaces. Informal space is not only a business method that helps increase profits but also a way of place-making, thus producing place brands. The appropriation of public space changes the meaning of urban nights and challenges urban governance. Although NTE features are similar to those of Western cities, the case of Xingsheng Road has different effects.

First, Xingsheng Road is surrounded by high-end residential buildings and is a gathering place for middle-class and high-end immigrants. While the Western city of the NTE is meant to attract the suburban middle class back to the city center, Guangzhou is still undergoing rapid urbanization, with many members of the middle class still clustered in the inner city. The

Western NTE reshapes the subjects in the city center through neoliberal policy and shapes the NTE in accordance with the taste of the middle class. However, most of the complaints about the NTE in Xingsheng Road come from the local middle class.

> "We have bought a 10-million-yuan house, and every night, there are parties going on around the apartment. It is not going to work."
>
> —Local resident (interviewee), Feb. 12th, 2018

Consumers believed that the night-time consumption of Xingsheng Road can meet their daily needs. However, as increasingly more consumers entered, they perceived that their lives had been violated, thus causing the stigma of place branding. In our opinion, it is not the gentrification caused by the NTE but the gentrification process that weakens the power of the NTE in the city center. The occupation of night-time space by "others" led to reterritorization.

Second, the process of place branding affects the attitude and behavior of the government. Local governments were not directly involved in place branding but allowed nonofficial organizations to regulate the management of the NTE. Although the government does not gain economic benefits directly from the NTE, the formation of place brands undoubtedly adds to the reputation of vanity projects. At the time when Xingsheng Road was gaining popularity, local governments did not outlaw the occupation of public space at night. However, as the stigma of place brand was exposed, Xingsheng Road became a black spot for complaints in Guangzhou, and the local government took measures to address these issues. Although Xingsheng Road has been reformed, it is still an important consumption cluster in Guangzhou in the plan for the NTE agglomeration area released by Guangzhou City in 2019, which indicates that its place brand has not been completely destroyed and is expected to continue through the new business possibility. Based on this, the local government did not show full entrepreneurial governance, and the place branding of the NTE is not of neoliberal logic.

Third, in this case, "open-air restaurants" were the soul of the NTE, which was an encroachment on public space at night but an effective method for place-making. It raises the spatial focus of NTE from the space of consumption to the streets and communities level. The process of territorization and interaction between different subjects in daily life has redefined the belongings of space and whether place brands can survive. The core issue of the place branding contradiction of the NTE is that increasingly more consumers entered, and consumption practices reshaped the meaning of the space, which aroused the disgust of local residents. In fact, most of the NTE development in other areas of Guangzhou occupies public space at night. These NTE are highly mobile and resist the urban governance, which brings huge governance costs to government. Unable to combat it outright, local governments have reduced its negative impact through formalization. Xingsheng Road completed the formalization process by place branding, but the problems caused by the occupation of its public space were still prominent, finally forcing the local government to intervene.

Conclusions: A Chinese Perspective of the NTE

As a tool to stimulate the urban economy, the NTE has spread from Europe throughout the world, but it has different effects in different cultural and institutional contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the NTE in the non-Western urban context. Taking Xingsheng Road in Guangzhou, China, as a case study, this paper describes the development process of the NTE through the "bottom-up" place branding process. We propose that the NTE, as a mediation for place branding, presents a process of stakeholder negotiation, which is based on the street-level space, not only shaping the meaning of consumption but also reconstructing the daily life of a street and the relationships among subjects.

The main contributions of this paper are as follows: (1) The discussion of the NTE is expanded from the perspective of the Chinese urban context, which not only focuses on the meaning of consumption space but also needs to rise to the discussion of street-level space. (2) This paper combines place branding with the NTE, emphasizes the NTE as a mediator, and focuses on how different subjects enhance place value through bottom-up actions from the political process of place branding. Place brand value originates from the association of different subjects, which will change based on the perception of the NTE, putting place brands in a dynamic state. (3) This paper links the process of place branding with urban governance and proposes that the NTE in the Chinese context not be regarded as the product of neoliberalism, as consumerism is not its fundamental feature, but should focus on urban night-time space governance. Thus, attention needs to be paid to the larger-scale space, rather than the consumption space, in the discussion of the NTE.

The discussion of the NTE in the context of Chinese cities is helpful for enriching the understanding of the NTE, and the changes in the NTE in the process of global diffusion also need to be considered.

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