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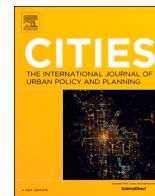
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From city promotion via city marketing to city branding: Examining urban strategies in 23 Chinese cities

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ABSTRACT

City promotion, city marketing and city branding are all frequently mentioned and examined in the literature on urban governance. Based on the goals and characteristics of different city branding strategies, this study identifies a growing level of sophistication from city promotion via city marketing to city branding and proposes that the degree of urban development of cities is positively related to the use of branding strategies. This proposition is tested among 23 Chinese cities: 21 cities in Guangdong province and two in the Special Administrative Regions – Hong Kong and Macao. The results show a positive correlation between the use of city promotion, city marketing and city branding strategies and a city's level of urban development. Only the largest and wealthiest cities, and those with the strongest tertiary sector report on the use of policies which indicate city branding. The strength of the primary sector is significantly and negatively related to all three identified forms of branding strategy. Furthermore, significant positive statistical inter-relationships exist between the different branding strategies, which confirm the existence of complex relations and overlaps between them. Our findings suggest that local governments should align their city branding strategies with their development goals.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, cities report on their efforts to generate in-depth urban transformation. As part of these efforts, cities seek to change their old image and become more sustainable, eco, low-carbon, inclusive, or smart (de Jong et al., 2015; Schraven et al., 2021; Yigitcanlar, Kankanamge, & Vella, 2020; Liang et al., 2021). Against this background, city branding is fast becoming a popular public policy instrument for governments to communicate their city image and achieve a variety of urban development goals (Dinnie, 2010; Lucarelli, 2018; ; Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016; Prilenska, 2012). This situation is no different in China, where many cities have started to apply city branding strategies to attract tourism, private investments, public resources, and inhabitants (Wong & Liu, 2017; Zhang & Zhao, 2009).

City branding has received a lot of scholarly attention over the last ten years, particularly in urban planning and public policy (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011; Ma et al., 2019). Research on city branding focussing on various aspects, such as multi-level governance (Lu, de Jong, Song, & Zhao, 2020), stakeholder involvement of city branding (Ma et al., 2020)

and the political economy of city branding (Anttiroiko, 2014). Some studies observe differences between various forms of city branding activities. For example, Boisen et al. (2018) and Cotîrlea (2012) make a distinction between place promotion, place marketing and place branding from a marketing perspective. However, very little is known about how cities actually apply and implement city branding strategies.

Available evidence suggests that city branding strategies can range from advertising and promotion to improve the exposure and reputation of a city, and policies to attract specific industries or particular groups of residents (Lu, Ma, et al.,2020; Wong & Liu, 2017) to more comprehensive and specifically designed urban governance strategies which state the vision and outline developmental pathways of local governments (Ye & Björner, 2018). City branding strategies are thus used to fulfil a variety of urban development goals, such as urban transformation, urban renewal, and sustainability (Ma et al., 2019). We propose and examine a progression proposition for three distinct, but related concepts for urban governance: promotion, marketing and branding.

Scholars in the field of media and communication study the use of promotion activities in city branding (Zhou & Wang, 2014). However,

other scholars believe city branding encompasses more than public information campaigns and advertising instruments (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009) and consists of functions and tools which are used in other policy domains such as urban governance (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013; Eshuis & Klijn, 2017; Schmiz, 2017; Ye & Björner, 2018). Obviously, there is variety in how the three concepts promotion, marketing and branding are understood in different subject areas and academic disciplines and consensus on how to classify different city branding strategies, and how to address the relationships among them is lacking. In addition, many cities claim they practice city branding. However, what they do in practice according to critics more closely resembles city promotion or city marketing (Anholt, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2004; Muñiz Martinez, 2012). Local governments do not always have a clear perception of the goals they pursue and what strategies they should follow to get there. Therefore, more needs to be known about how city branding strategies are applied.

To help bridge this knowledge gap, this article explores *how a selection of Chinese cities implement (city) branding strategies and how they can be classified as either city promotion, marketing or branding.* Further, this study contributes to the body of literature by *examining the relationship between the application of three types of city branding strategies and the level of urban development.*

Section 2 presents the state-of-the-art insights on city branding strategies based on a literature review. Important concepts such as city promotion, city marketing, and city branding are distinguished and explained. We introduce a progression proposition based on an in-depth review of the characteristics of the different city branding strategies. We subsequently study how city branding strategies are implemented in all cities in Guangdong province plus Hong Kong and Macao. Section 3 explains the methodology and presents the research design, the information from our sample cities and the indicator framework used for data collection and data analysis. In Section 4 we analyse data from 23 Chinese cities and conduct a statistical analysis to examine the proposition whether transition from promotion through marketing to branding can be considered as a form of progress. Section 5 discusses the results within the context of the international academic literature. Section 6 presents the conclusions and policy implications.

2. Theory

To enhance our understanding of the variety in city branding implementation and assess the relation between city promotion, city marketing and city branding we systematically compare their (1) main characteristics (focus and goals), (2) the strategies and the instruments they use to reach their goals, and finally (3) the activities they employ and their target groups (see Table 1). Furthermore, we present our understanding of the relationship between the three concepts and urban development in Section 2.4.

2.1. City promotion

The first research about city promotion or place promotion appeared in 1980 (Ma et al., 2019). Since then city promotion and similar concepts have appeared, which aim to sell places (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Burgess, 1982) such as place promotion (Gold & Ward, 1994; Young & Lever, 1997), and destination promotion (Goodall & Ashworth, 1988). City promotion can be defined as "the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographical localities or areas to a target market" (Gold & Ward, 1994; p.2). The main goal of city promotion is to convey an attractive image and convince people to come and visit. Visual tools are often employed to improve a city's exposure and to attract a general public (Ward, 1998). For example, one can think of a distinctive slogan or logo, and the active use of advertising and media activities, and promotional campaigns (Eisenschitz, 2010). City promotion has a short-term focus, employs traditional one-way information communication channels (Bosien et al.,

Table 1
Goals, characteristics, strategies, target groups of three key concepts in city branding literature.

Variables	Goals	Features/characteristics	Focus on
City promotion	• advertising and distinguishing oneself from other cities • conveying a good image • convincing people to visit and stay in the city as tourist • 'selling' the city to specific target groups in tailored ways • collecting and spreading information about the city	• visual elements (logo, slogan, color scheme, font, etc.) • promotional campaigns (advertising and media activities) • websites, information on social media • tourism-related activities • one-way communication, focus on attractiveness	• the general public • communication of specific information to target groups to persuade them to visit the city
City marketing		• information gathering and information dissemination (two-way communication). • application of marketing methods and techniques (place, promotion, product, and other marketing strategies). • clear interpretation of history, present and future (ambition) • description of own identity	• identifying and classifying specific (previously identified) target groups like visitors, investors, talents • actions that are specifically developed to accommodate specific behavioral determinants, to benefit the needs and wants of specific target groups
City branding	• changing and improving the city	• visibility of policy goals and actions related to identity and future ambition • focus on change and transformation • aimed towards stakeholder participation • use of different forms of communication • the result of a political process	• cooperation with stakeholders inside and outside of the city government • the gathering of support from stakeholders • development of policies with stakeholders

2018) and is aimed at the general public (e.g. city promotion does not distinguish specific groups) (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Greene et al., 2007). City promotion is typically used by small-scale units within city governments (e.g. local tourism departments or a media group) (Ma et al., 2019) to improve their cities' image and boost tourism; not to develop or improve cities in a broader sense (Boisen et al., 2018).

2.2. City marketing

Marketing can be defined as "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (Powell et al., 1987; p.344). At first, marketing was primarily targeting products, services and corporations (Hunt, 1976) and only later transferred to urban governance (Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2003). City marketing appeared in the late 1980s and has adopted many of the concepts of city promotion, including the 'selling' of cities (Madsen, 1992), place marketing (Anholt, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2007; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009), and destination marketing (Woodside, 1990). Scholars from various disciplines have offered definitions of city marketing, such as Ashworth and Voogd (1990), Kotler and Gertner (2002), and Braun (2008). We have adopted the following definition of city marketing: "the long-term process and/or policy instrument consisting of different, yet interrelated activities aimed at keeping or attracting different target groups to a certain city" Hospers (2009; p. 51; translation by the authors).

Whereas promotion primarily focuses on the communication towards an intended recipient, marketing provides a broader, more comprehensive perspective. Marketing focuses on the so-called 4P's: place, price, product and promotion (McCarthy & Perreault, 1960). In addition to attracting visitors, city marketing distinguishes various groups and explores the value-added (e.g. economic gain and talent input) of these target groups (Eshuis et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2019; Vuignier, 2014). The goal of city marketing is to attract, identify and respond to the needs of target groups and satisfy their requirements.

Scholars identify different target groups such as residents, investors and visitors (Avraham, 2004; Goovaerts et al., 2014; Zenker et al., 2017) as well as a talented workforce and enterprises (de Jong et al., 2018; Vanolo, 2008). City marketing stimulates local governments to learn more about target-audiences and develop focused and coherent policies to attract groups considered valuable for the city (Braun, 2008; Keller, 2009). In addition to communicative skills for city promotion additional entrepreneurial and managerial skills are required from local governments that seek to employ city marketing. The scope and content of city marketing policies are thus broader and more comprehensive than city promotion policies. City marketing practices are increasingly employed by cities in recent years to increase their profile and overall competitiveness in the process of intense globalisation and urbanisation (Boisen et al., 2011; Sevin, 2014). Local governments attempt to use distinctive, coherent and attractive marketing strategies to position their cities (Boisen et al., 2011; Sevin, 2014). City marketing includes specific marketing tools and approaches to attract specific (pre-defined) target groups (Keller, 2009). For example, urban governments adopt certain preferential policies to attract particular investments, recruit talents or lure specific companies. High quality urban design, infrastructure provision and flagship projects, such as free economic zones are frequently adopted instruments in city marketing (Boisen et al., 2018; de Jong et al., 2019).

2.3. City branding

Kavaratzis proposed the concept of 'city branding' (Kavaratzis, 2004), which has since spread to various disciplines, such as public policy, urban planning and the environmental sciences (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011; Ma et al., 2019). City branding covers "a whole set of actions to build a positive image of the city and communicate it among various target groups via visuals, narratives, and events locally and

internationally to gain a competitive advantage over other cities" (Vanolo, 2008, p.371). The stakeholders in the city branding process can be divided into politicians, government organisations, cultural and sports organisations, promotion agencies, businesses, academic organisations and schools, infrastructure and transport providers, residents, and religious organisations (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015). Key concepts in city branding literature are brand identity (Govers & Go, 2009), brand image (Anholt, 2008; Govers & Go, 2009; Keller, 1993), and brand personality (Aaker, 1997).

Local administrations adopt city branding to improve a city's image and reputation (Boisen et al., 2018; Yang, Lu, Scoglio, de Jong, & Gruenbacher, 2018). City branding strategies seek more long-term and complex urban development goals, such as policy goals that are designed to transform and change the city (Lu, Ma, et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2020). Consequently, city branding is a strategic and more politically driven process (Anttiroiko, 2014) which actively seeks to change the city, and which requires enduring support from politicians, public officials, key stakeholders and the public (Klijn et al., 2012). City branding plays a central role in urban planning and governance processes (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Eshuis & Klijn, 2017; Ye & Björner, 2018). As a result of its inherent strategic and political importance city branding is developed by high-level professional staff departments which strive to embed and connect the branding policies to existing city policies (Fan, 2014). An important difference of city branding compared to city promotion and city marketing is the active involvement of audiences. City branding encourages stakeholder participation and applies policy instruments (Ma et al., 2021) which goes beyond simply disseminating information to and collecting information from target groups (Dinnie, 2010; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). Target groups in city branding, such as residents and companies, are expected to become actual stakeholders in the creation (co-design) and implementation of branding practices (Ma et al., 2020).

Table 1 summarises the goals and relevant features of the different concepts that we identified in city branding literature(s). This table will be used as basis for the selection of indicators for the remainder of the research (See Section 3.2) through which we seek to assess the city branding practices of 23 Chinese cities.

2.4. The progression proposition

Based on our assessment and review of the core concepts in the city branding literature the relationship between city promotion, city marketing and city branding turns out to be quite complex. Scholars are anything but united in their assessment of the relation between the various concepts. For example, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) claim that marketing and branding are distinctive approaches to promote cities, whereas Boisen et al. (2018) believe that there is a big overlap between place marketing and place branding. Similarly, media and communication scholars argue that city branding is all about communicating a city image to outsiders (Wen, 2013), but scholars from other disciplines rather observe a transition from city marketing to city branding (Cotîrlea, 2014; Kavaratzis, 2004). Kavaratzis (2004) actually claims that city marketing is the starting point for city branding. Strikingly, few studies explore or interpret the links between the three key concepts on city branding (i.e. city promotion, city marketing and city branding) from an urban planning or governance perspective, which is our aim in the present paper.

Fig. 1 visualises our perspective on the relationship between city promotion, city marketing and city branding. Based on our review of these key concepts we propose two key dimensions to classify the various forms of city branding strategies and depict the gradual progressive relation between the key concepts. On the vertical axis, we identify the goals that are envisioned in urban development. On the horizontal axis, the strategies and specific instruments that are employed by city governments. City promotion is a one-dimensional strategy which simply aims to attract visitors to a city. City promotion
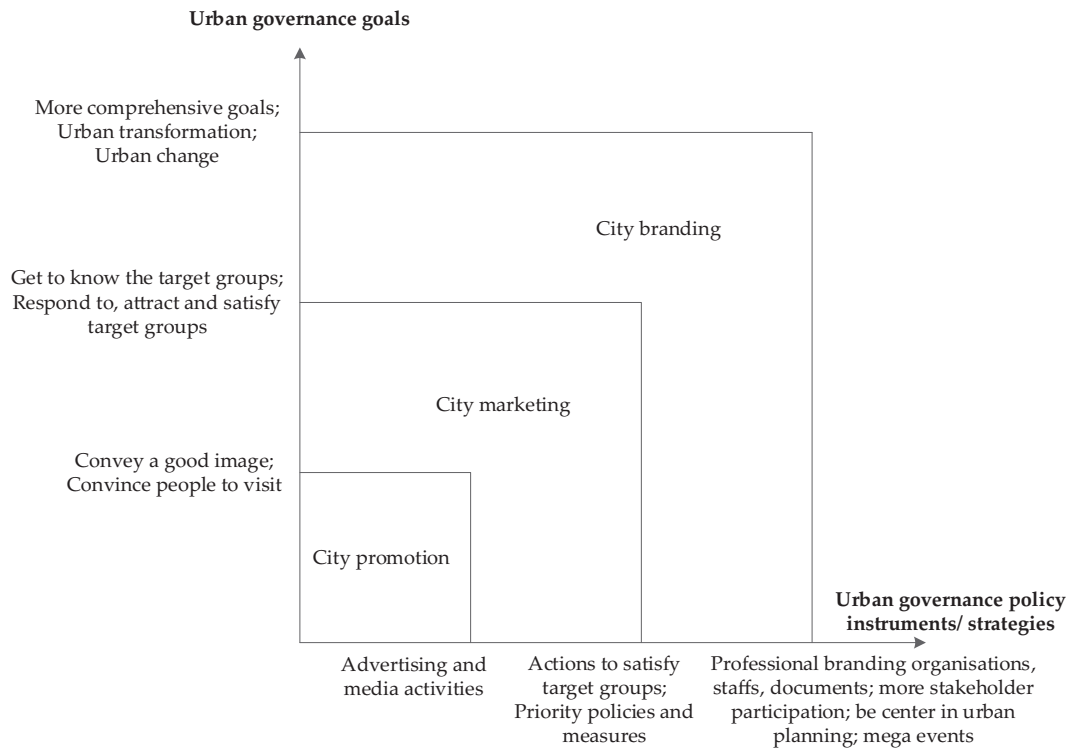
Urban governance goals

Fig. 1. The progression proposition regarding city promotion, city marketing and city branding.

is therefore quite generic, and targets a general, unspecified audience. City marketing is an overall more comprehensive analytical concept. City marketing identifies and develops policies aimed at specific target groups which provide added value to the city. City marketing is more sophisticated than city promotion and uses a wider mix of (smart marketing) approaches to reach and accommodate the target groups. City branding is even more comprehensive than city marketing and is primarily geared towards urban planning. It also more interactive in that it essentially involves target groups as stakeholders in a process of urban transformation through self-reinvention. Compared to city marketing, the variety of goals and instruments of city branding is wider and more advanced (Anttiroiko, 2015).

Based upon our analysis, we propose there exists a progressive relationship between the three key forms of city branding that can be identified in city branding literature. We argue that city promotion, city marketing and city branding can be seen as sequential stages of urban development. We call this the *progression proposition* and claim that each subsequent branding concept comprises more functions and is more meaningful for urban development (e.g. with city branding having more functions and affecting urban transformation more than city marketing).

Furthermore, we believe that cities have different visions and goals depending on their level of urban development (de Jong et al., 2018). Various levels of stages of development requires cities to adopt different types of city branding strategies to achieve particular urban development goals. Key characteristics of cities, like urban size, economic performance, and industrial structure, influence the stage of urban development cities are in (Ibid.), and the way cities are governed. For these reasons, we propose that the practices of city promotion, city marketing and city branding are in fact related to different degrees of urban development. For example, we expect that large-sized and well-developed cities- i.e. 'mega cities' (economically advanced and with an optimized industrial structure) - have a broader gamut of branding activities at their disposal, as derived from city promotion, city marketing as well as city branding. Therefore, we expect that cities with a high level of urban development have a higher likelihood of adopting city branding strategies. On the other hand, cities with a lower level of

urban development are more likely to only adopt city promotion strategies (and not the more advanced alternatives like city marketing or city branding). To verify this proposition, we seek to analyse adoption of city branding strategies among a broad set of cities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and sample cities selection

China has cities at different stages of urban development, which provides an ideal opportunity to explore practices in city branding and test our proposition. The research design on which this research settled is composed of a medium-sized exploratory analysis of city branding strategies and policy implementation in Chinese cities. In total, 23 cities are selected and studied to analyse their goals and implementation of city branding strategies. All 21 cities from Guangdong province are in the sample, plus the two Special Administrative Regions Hong Kong and Macao. In contrast to other provinces in China, Guangdong province contains a fairly representative range of city types (called tier cities in China) (2 "First-tier" cities, 2 "New First-tier" cities, 3 "Second-tier" cities, 7 "Third-tier" cities, 6 "Fourth-tier" cities, and 1 "Fifth tier city") out of the total of 337 listed cities in 2020 (YICAI, 2020). The cities vary in size and are in different phases of urban economic development and therefore focus on different city branding goals. The two developed cities, Hong Kong and Macao seem to have more experience with city branding than the others (de Jong et al., 2018; Dinnie, 2010; Mei & Ying, 2017; Sou et al., 2016). Consequently, we feel this broad selection of contiguous cities is suitable to explore the extent to which various types of cities have adopted city branding practices, and to test the progression proposition.

Fig. 2 shows the location of the 23 cities. In 2019, Guangdong province's population stood at 115.21 million and its GDP per capita at 94172 RMB (GBoS, 2020). In 2020, the contributions of the primary, secondary and tertiary economic sectors to Guangdong's GDP were 4.3%, 39.2%, and 56.5% respectively (GBoS, 2021). Table A1 (Appendix A) lists basic social and economic information of the sample
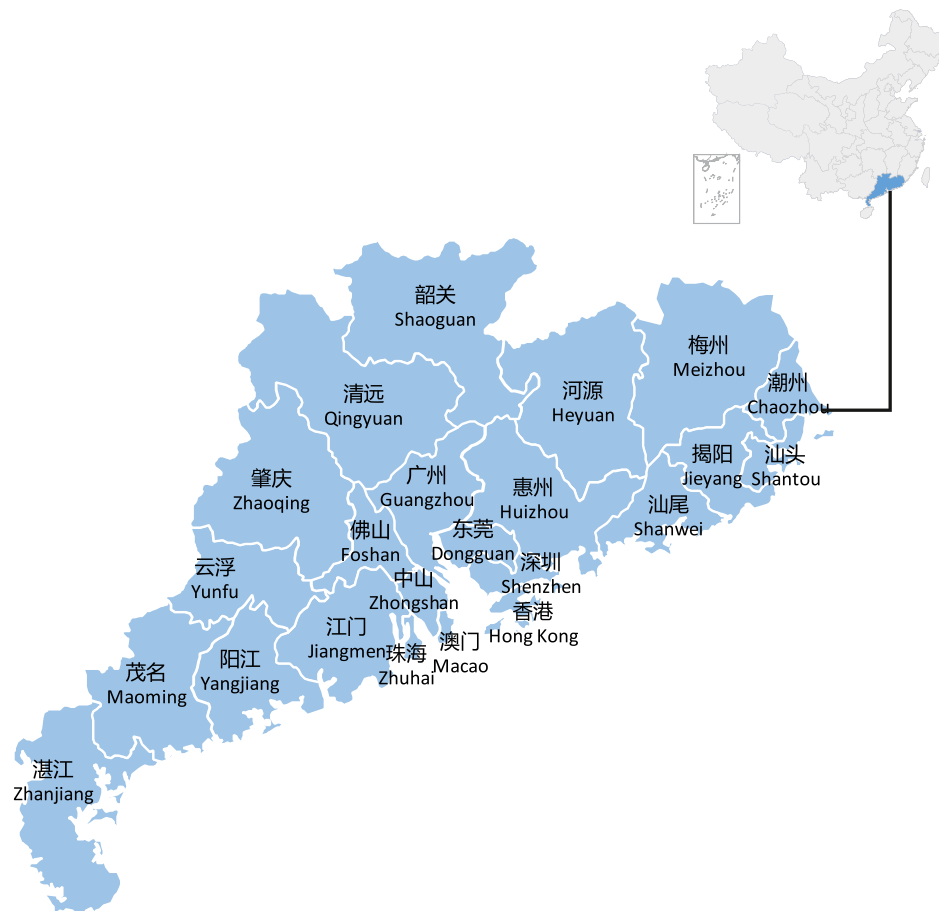
Fig. 2. Location of Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao within the PRC.

cities in 2018 (CSD, 2019; GBoS, 2019; SCS, 2018). Due to the rapid development of the cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA)[1] in the past decades, various social and environmental problems have arisen, many of which are associated with urbanisation (Yang et al., 2020). For example, Dongguan suffers from severe environmental problems, often related to the city's history as the manufacturing centre for global goods. Likewise, many other municipalities in Guangdong province, as well as Hong Kong and Macao, actively try to balance economic development with environmental protection and employ policies aimed at urban transformation.

3.2. Operationalization and data collection

Three proxy variables are used to represent a city's urban development stage: urban size, level of economic development and industrial structure (de Jong et al., 2018). To be more specific, we use permanent population, urban GDP per capita, and the proportion of three industrial sectors as indicators for the three stages of urban development.

In terms of city branding practices, we formulated a list of indicators to guide our data collection based on our classification and explanation of the three city branding concepts as presented in Section 2. Table 2 shows the framework of indicators that we used for the three concepts and also presents the sources that were used to obtain the data.

The data regarding urban developmental stages were collected from Statistical Yearbooks for each of the cities included in the dataset (see

Appendix A, Table A1). The contents of official government websites of each city and online documents on these websites provided the information for all 23 cities under study (indicators CP1–6 and CB1–3,5). Descriptions for city identities and visions were collected from Urban Master Plans of each city (indicator CB4). The specific policies and projects undertaken by cities in the context of city branding (Table 2, indicators CM1–3 and CB6) were identified via an analysis of the Government Work Reports which describe city government activities. The time period we selected covered the 13th 5-year urban plan period (2016–2020).

3.3. Data analysis

To validate the theoretical claims and conceptual notions (see Section 2) data were processed and analysed to compare and distinguish how the selected cities applied different city branding strategies. Scales were constructed and values were assigned to each condition (See Appendix A Table A2 for a detailed description of the construction of the scales). First, qualitative scores were assigned per case. Next, five point scales were developed (ranging from '1' for poor conditions, to '5' for strong conditions for city branding). Qualitative descriptions and categories were developed for all five values (1,2,3,4,5) to qualify conditions for eventually assigning quantitative values for each one of the 23 cities. Each condition of each indicator in each city was recorded and mapped in a table box by using qualitative descriptions, and an operationalization per item used (see Appendix A, Table A2).

As a third step, we provided a descriptive statistical analysis of our data variables (see Section 4.1). By adding up the scores for items in each city, we obtained a total score for city promotion, city marketing and city branding respectively. This allowed us to fathom how different

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[1] The Greater Bay Area (GBA), is a megalopolis, also known as the Pearl River Delta, and consists of nine cities and two special administrative regions in south China.

Table 2
Indicators framework.

	Variables	Code	Indicators	Data source
Urban developmental stage	Urban size		Permanent population	Statistical Yearbook
	Economy		Urban GDP per capita	
	Industrial structure		The proportion of primary/secondary/tertiary sector	
The stage of branding focus	City promotion	CP1	Presence of a city logo	Official government website
		CP2	Presence of a city slogan	
		CP3	City promotion videos	
		CP4	City promotion material (e.g. digital brochure)	
		CP5	City promotion website/webpage (separate or embedded in the municipality website)	
		CP6	Use of media platforms for city promotion in an indirect way, such as *Sina Weibo and* an *official WeChat*	
	City marketing	CM1	Specific measures/actions to attract and keep visitors	Government Work Report
		CM1–1	Use of tourism demonstration areas, e.g. *The state of global tourism demonstration area*	
		CM1–2	Tourism projects, such as *Ocean Park*	
		CM1–3	Tourism development plans and policies	
		CM1–4	Tourism activities, such as the *Light and Shadow Art Festival and Food Carnival*	
		CM2	The city has developed specific measures/actions to attract and keep investors and companies	
		CM2–1	Reform activities to adapt business systems and improve business services	
		CM2–2	Preferential policies and measures to attract business	
		CM2–3	Budget to attract companies	
		CM2–4	Hosting of business promotion activities	
		CM2–5	Measures and policies to reduce costs for business	
		CM3	Specific measures/actions to attract and keep top talents	
		CM3–1	Housing policies to attract talent	
		CM3–2	Talent recruitment measures	
		CM3–3	Talent recruitment policies and plans	
		CM3–4	Service improvement to attract talent. For example, local government will solve the problems of talent registered permanent residence (*Hukou*) and staffing establishment (*Shiye Bianzhi*)	
		CM3–5	Talent recruitment activities, forums	
	City branding	CB1	Professional city branding website	Official government website
		CB2	Professional city branding organisation or department	
		CB3	City branding policy documentation	
		CB4	Presence of a city brand identity and coherent goal, vision, strategy, roadmap or policy	Urban Master Plan
		CB5	Stakeholders involvement in city branding processes (politicians, governmental organisations, promotion agencies, companies, public, experts)	Official government website
		CB6	Organisation of professional city branding activities (e.g. conferences, forums, or mega events)	Government Work Report

cities practice their different city branding strategies (see Section 4.2). To test the progression proposition and relation between the three concepts and a city's development stage, we conducted a bivariate correlation analysis (see Section 4.3) to assess whether highly developed cities are more likely to adopt city branding strategies and lower urban developed cities tend to choose city promotion strategies.

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Descriptive statistical analysis

The means and standard deviations (SD) of the items measured are shown in Table 3. We found that the statistical mean for city promotion (3.74) is higher than that for city marketing (3.55) and city branding (2.26). This implies that in comparison to city marketing and city branding, a greater variety of city promotion strategies are used. City promotion has been in existence longer and is more widespread. The strategies of city marketing are more widely adopted than those of city

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the measured items.

Item	Indicator code	Mean	Std. Deviation	Item	Indicator code	Mean	Std. Deviation
Urban size	permanent population	528.7383	342.85035	Industrial structure	primary sector %	0.0835	0.06939
					secondary sector %	0.3909	0.13270
Economy	GDP per capita	111483.70	144907.781		tertiary sector %	0.5257	0.14875
City promotion	CP1	3.61	1.852	City marketing	CM1–1	3.76	1.044
	CP2	4.27	0.985		CM1–2	3.75	1.070
	CP3	5.00	0.000		CM1–3	3.64	1.120
	CP4	2.30	1.769		CM1–4	3.83	1.030
	CP5	4.13	1.325		CM2–1	4.23	1.013
	CP6	3.17	1.193		CM2–2	3.37	1.116
					CM2–3	3.43	0.976
City branding	CB1	1.52	1.082		CM2–4	3.56	1.153
	CB2	1.52	1.082		CM2–5	3.17	1.098
	CB3	1.78	1.445		CM3–1	3.40	0.894
	CB4	2.74	1.630		CM3–2	3.20	0.632
	CB5	2.71	0.914		CM3–3	3.50	0.850
	CB6	3.26	1.251		CM3–4	3.54	0.877
					CM3–5	3.36	0.809

branding. The findings lend moderate support for our progression hypothesis.

4.2. The application of three concepts

Fig. 3 shows the results of the application of the three city branding concepts by the cities in our sample. The specific practical results of each city for each indicator are shown in the Appendix A (Tables A3–A5). City promotion and city marketing are fairly developed and present in all 23 cities. Although city branding is also present in all 23 cities, there is a substantial variation in the intensity of city branding among cities. City branding appears to be relatively more heavily employed in large, highly urbanised cities, and less so in smaller ones.

4.2.1. City promotion practices

Except for Jiangmen and Zhongshan, all the major cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) have a special city logo. Some medium-sized cities in Guangdong province also have a city logo. In contrast, there is no professional city logo in government official websites in some medium and small-sized cities of Guangdong province.

All cities use one or more city slogans to promote their cities except Hong Kong, for which we were unable to identify a slogan. Slogans express different ideas. Some slogans emphasise industrial characteristics of a city, such as the slogan: 'Made in Foshan', which serves to reflect that Foshan is a typical Chinese manufacturing city. Other slogans reflect a city's urban development goal(s) and transformation vision, such as 'Innovative Shenzhen'. Some slogans highlight historical and cultural features of the cities, such as 'Zhongshan, the hometown of Sun Yat-sen'. The slogans of Zhuhai and Zhanjiang emphasise their specific natural resources and ecological environment, whereas other cities only make use of very generic slogans, for example, 'Beautiful Jieyang Welcomes You', 'Beautiful Shaoguan Welcomes You', 'Charming Yangjiang', or 'Beautiful Heyuan'.

All the cities provide advertisement videos to promote their cities' image on their websites. Some cities update their city videos annually, whereas others design promotional videos based on different themes. The spread of city advertising films is a widespread and rapidly developing trend which enables city governments to communicate information to target groups intuitively and directly.

Only few cities still publish brochures; digital brochures are adopted less frequently because of their limited effectiveness.

Some cities conduct publicity through official government websites, such as the website of the Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department, the website of the Civilisation Office, the website of the Tourism Bureau, and other local tourism websites. Some tourism companies' websites are also devoted to boost tourism through city promotion.

Almost all the sample cities use the official microblog or WeChat official account to publish city information. In addition to using

domestic media platforms, Hong Kong also releases city information via international media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram to boost its international image.

These data and our observations of the application of city promotion, show distinct differences in the employment of promotion tools between the cities to develop and promote their city image. Mega cities seem more capable and willing to engage in city promotion in various ways. Except for Hong Kong, the large cities invest heavily in city promotion, such as Macao, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan, followed closely by Zhuhai and Zhaoqing. In the group of medium and small cities, Meizhou and Chaozhou invest more than the rest of the small cities. This may stem from their years of commitment to industrial tourism management and city advertising. Other small cities are likely to follow the general promotional pathways and lack specific characteristics.

4.2.2. City marketing practices

Based on data about city marketing, we identified small differences between large cities and small cities in attracting target visitors. Some cities, such as Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Zhaoqing and Chaozhou, actively attract target visitors by constructing tourism demonstration areas, publishing tourism development plans, and organising tourism-related activities and projects. In contrast, according to the description of the Governmental Work Report, some cities perform less well on these items, such as Shenzhen, Dongguan, Huizhou and Jieyang (See Appendix A, Table A4). It can be speculated that these cities focus more on their manufacturing industry than on their tourism industry.

Chinese cities employ many policies and measures to attract investment enterprises and improve the business environment to support small and micro businesses and private enterprises, such as favorable loan policies. Local governments implement business system reforms to support start-ups and introduce tax and fee discounts to reduce operating costs of enterprises. They provide special funds to support small and medium enterprises and expand the channels of urban investment by holding other investment promotion conferences. Large cities are very active in attracting business investment and improving the business environment. For example, Shenzhen released more than 160 policy measures, and provided 228 billion (RMB) in special funding to support industry and business development in the years 2015–2019. According to our data, Shenzhen reduced the cost of doing business by about 466.7 billion (RMB) in this period, closely followed by Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, and Dongguan. Zhuhai and Foshan adopted fairly similar measures to attract companies and improve their business environment. Medium cities, such as Shantou and Zhanjiang, show a lower capability to attract enterprises. Some small cities, such as Yangjiang, Shangwei, and Heyuan display a limited ability to adopt measures to attract businesses in terms of preferential policies, tax breaks or support funds.

In terms of attracting talent, many cities have released talent introduction plans, solved housing problems by providing houses or housing subsidies, supported the construction of scientific research teams, and improved the service of talent management. Talent recruitment forums and conferences are also hosted to attract talents. As can be expected, mega cities provide more support in these aspects, for example, providing more attractive funds to settle families of talents and providing attractive career development platforms. Although small cities are also eager to attract talents, they only can implement some basic "Talent Plans" which are announced by Guangdong province. The ability of smaller towns to provide preferential policies and attractive conditions to the talents is very limited.

Above all, the cities of the Greater Bay Area provide many more resources and conditions to attract investments, enterprises, and talents. The rest of the cities in Guangdong province have introduced many measures to attract visitors in terms of tourism city development, but on average they have few resources available to attract business enterprise investment and talent recruitment.
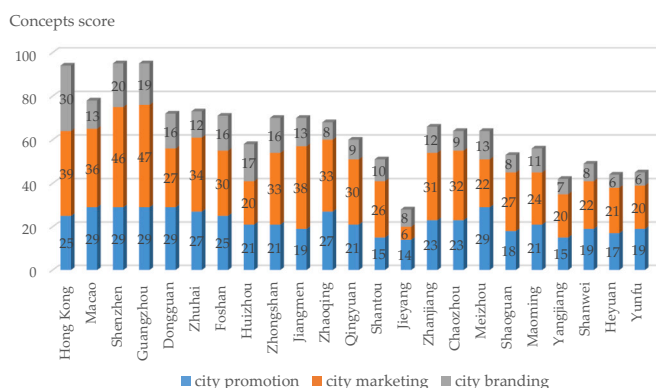

Fig. 3. Application of three city branding concepts in 23 cities.

4.2.3. City branding practices

Hong Kong scored full marks on all sub-items of city branding, followed by Shenzhen. Except for Hong Kong, only Shenzhen, Foshan, Zhongshan and Zhanjiang employ specific websites for brand associations to promote the city's enterprise climate and industrial brands. There is neither a dedicated city branding organisation nor a professional city branding website in the rest of the cities.

Hong Kong published many documents on city branding. Some cities compiled specific city branding plans, such as the "Dongguan City Image Master Plans (2011-2015)". Guangzhou released the "Report on Guangzhou Flower City Brand Strategy Planning" and the city of Zhanjiang spent a chapter on the realisation of its "Brand Promotion Research Center". The other cities in our sample pay less attention to the publishing of documents on city branding.

Most large cities such as Hong Kong, Macao, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Zhuhai and Foshan identify a clear position for their cities,. Their urban identity promotes specific conditions or advantageous characteristics that distinguish them from neighbouring cities. In contrast, small and medium cities generally adopt city identities which contain more generic descriptions in their Urban Master Plan. For example, claiming to be an "historical and cultural city", an "ecological and livable city", or a "central city" or "modernised city".

As far as the participation of stakeholders is concerned, local administrations generally play a dominant role in city branding processes. Urban governments such as Jiangmen, Zhongshan, Yangjiang, Maoming, Shantou and Jieyang collect ideas from public and network voting as part of the city image design process. Guangzhou and Qingyuan organise seminars and consult experts. Guangzhou, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Meizhou and Shanwei invite company representatives and experts to participate in city branding processes. Hong Kong and Huizhou have adopted more elaborate and more diverse forms of stakeholder participation in city branding. For example, in 2000 Hong Kong invited public and private sector representatives to provide feedback on Hong Kong's branding and extended this approach in 2010 to obtain input from an international audience via a public survey.

Activities, conferences and forums are important policy instruments cities employ to implement branding. The data shows a direct relationship between the hosting of activities and a city's economic capacity. Mega-cities such as Hong Kong, Macao, Shenzhen and Guangzhou have more opportunities and capabilities to host bigger (inter)national events. Small cities hold fewer (inter)national events and mostly focus on activities at the regional or municipal level, such as provincial sport games and local marathons.

4.3. City branding strategy in relation to urban development

In this section, we analyse the relation between a city's branding strategy and the urban development stage of cities. Table 4 shows the results of the bivariate correlation analysis between urban size,

economy, industrial structure and the practices of three branding concepts respectively. Table 5 presents the results of the bivariate analysis between the three city branding strategy concepts.

Table 4 shows the economic factor appears to be significantly and positively related to the city promotion, marketing and branding activities. More importantly, the correlation coefficient is higher for city branding than for city marketing and city promotion. The results show that economically advanced cities are indeed more likely to adopt city promotion, city marketing and city branding strategies than their less advanced peers (i.e., smaller, lower tier cities with a weaker service economy). Combined the results of Fig. 3, Macao, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Dongguan show fine-tuned adoption of city promotion, and so do some small cities, such as Meizhou, Chaozhou, and Zhanjiang. Adoption of city marketing practices varies from city to city. Hong Kong, Macao, Shenzhen and Guangzhou perform better on city marketing by adopting more city marketing items, followed by Zhuhai (see Appendix A4). With regard to the adoption of city marketing policies, most medium-sized cities score average, except Huizhou and Jieyang. Cities in GBA seem to perform better than the other cities in Guangdong province. A reason could be that medium- and small-sized cities lack experience in managing city branding strategies.

Urban size appears to be significantly and positively related to the city branding strategy, but no such relationship was identified with regard to city promotion and city marketing. This can be explained by pointing out that populous cities such as Jieyang, Zhanjiang and Maoming can still have a rather backward economy, resulting in insufficient resources and a lack of capacity to employ any city marketing policies, leaving them no option but to engage in city promotion.

When looking at industrial sectors, it turns out that primary sector presence in cities is significantly and negatively related to city promotion, marketing and branding (especially showing a stronger negative correlation towards branding than towards marketing and promotion). Cities with a large primary sector presence pay less attention to city

Table 5

Bivariate correlations between city promotion, marketing and branding (Pearson's R; N = 23).

		City promotion	City marketing	City branding
City promotion	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.651**	0.545**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000	0.004
City marketing	Pearson Correlation		1.000	0.592**
	Sig. (1-tailed)			0.001
City branding	Pearson Correlation			1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)			

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 4

Bivariate correlations between city development indicators and city promotion, marketing and branding (Spearman's rho; *N* = 23).

				The stage of branding focus		
				City promotion	City marketing	City branding
Urban developmental stage	Economy	GDP per capita	Correlation Coefficient	0.538**	0.703**	0.721**
			Sig. (1-tailed)	0.004	0.000	0.000
	Urban size	Permanent population	Correlation Coefficient	0.298	0.246	0.621**
			Sig. (1-tailed)	0.083	0.129	0.001
	Industrial structure	Primary sector	Correlation Coefficient	−0.423*	−0.575**	−0.702**
			Sig. (1-tailed)	0.022	0.002	0.000
		Secondary sector	Correlation Coefficient	−0.295	−0.273	0.045
			Sig. (1-tailed)	0.086	0.103	0.418
		Tertiary sector	Correlation Coefficient	0.478*	0.492**	0.298
			Sig. (1-tailed)	0.010	0.009	0.084

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

branding and perform less well in city promotion, city marketing and city branding. In addition, according to urban development pathway literature (de Jong et al., 2018), cities with a higher ratio of primary to other sectors tend to choose eco-tourist city, modern agricultural city and livable/green city as urban development pathways. Consequently, they pay more attention to city promotion than to city branding. For example, Meizhou actively promotes its 'Hakka culture' for tourism purposes. The secondary sector is not significantly related to any of the three branding strategies. Finally, the tertiary sector in cities is significantly and positively related to both city promotion and city marketing. It is, however, not significantly related to city branding. Cities with a high proportion of the tertiary industry show a high score on all three branding strategies, except for Macao and Zhuhai, which perform less well on city branding. By observing the city branding identity of these two cities, we found they are typical examples of tourism cities. Consequently, the significance of city promotion and city marketing for these two cities is greater than that of city branding.

In sum, the cities with a larger population, advanced economy, a larger tertiary sector and a smaller primary sector are more likely to employ all city branding strategies. Cities like Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou seem to excel in city branding policies. Cities with a larger primary sector and lower economic performance such as Shanwei, Heyuan, and Yunfu have a lower likelihood of employing city marketing or city branding strategies. Our data analysis confirms: the more developed a city, the more likely it is to display features of city branding.

Finally, we also found significant statistical inter-relationships between city promotion, city marketing, and city branding supporting our claims on the complex and overlapping relationship between the three concepts (See Table 5).

5. Discussion

5.1. The application of three concepts

5.1.1. City promotion

Many cities around the world elaborately apply promotional tools such as slogans, logos and city videos on city council websites for promotion purposes (Florek et al., 2006). Well-known examples are "I Amsterdam" and "Only Lyon". Every year, Shenzhen releases a new city video to attract high quality talent. City promotion tools are relatively cheap to produce and easy to adopt. These characteristics seem to facilitate the widespread use of city promotion tools by smaller cities in our sample so that they may be considered the basic operational tools in the arsenal of local city governments. Our findings support Wen's (2013) observation that middle level cities increasingly employ city marketing tools in search of more exposure as generic promotional tools cannot always express the specific characteristics and unique aspects of cities.

5.1.2. City marketing

Some big cities do not engage in marketing campaigns or tools to stimulate tourism and attract visitors; instead the cities of Dongguan, Shenzhen and Huizhou focus solely on efforts to stimulate the manufacturing industry by attracting enterprises and top talent. Mega cities attract sufficient numbers of visitors without deploying much effort and are more concerned with attracting high-quality talent and potential companies than tourists who come for a single visit. For example, although Shenzhen ranked 13th in the 100 top destinations in 2019 (Rabia, 2019), it scores lower on the first item (specific measures to keep and attract visitors) among the city marketing strategies (CM1, Appendix A4). In this way Chinese cities resemble international cities, such as Milan and Turin, which similarly pay more attention to lasting effects of city marketing including the stimulation of investment rather than short-term revenue from tourism (Ferrari & Guala, 2017).

Some Chinese cities are experiencing rapid development in recent years. They have a large population and advanced economic conditions, as well as a good industrial structure. These cities have adopted more

policies and made more efforts to improve their business environment and attract companies. For example, Macao establishes numerous cooperative industrial parks, and organises investment and trade forums to stimulate business. Similar measures have been identified in other countries, such as the setting up free economic zones in Dubai (de Jong et al., 2019).

In recent years, local governments in many Chinese cities have put forward a variety of talent introduction plans to recruit talents and research teams. Examples are "the Peacock Plan" in Shenzhen, the "Pearl River Talent Scheme" in Guangdong province and the "Taishan Scholars" in Shandong province. These talent introduction programs are accompanied by a great deal of policy support and benefits for talented people. Almost all local governments have a strong eagerness to attract talent, but they use different strategies to achieve this goal due to their rather different economic capacities. The use of city marketing tools to attract talent is a specific characteristic of China's situation. As a result of a sustained period of rapid economic development Chinese cities are engaged in serious competition for talent.

5.1.3. City branding

Successful city branding serves many functions for urban development, but this can be brought into play only through the implementation of city branding in urban public policies. Three out of twenty-three cities that were analysed were actually shown to have successful brands in place. Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou have clear city branding identities and positions. Most cities in Guangdong province have adopted few if any strategies/measures that can be seen as reflective of city branding.

The vast majority of cities simply lack the professional organisations specialised in city branding and any stakeholder participation (see Table A5, Appendix A). Many international cities have already set up professional city branding organisations and teams to focus on city branding, such as The Hague (the Netherlands) and Oslo (Norway) (Boisen et al., 2018; Pike, 2012). Lack of professional institutions and experienced staff obviously influences the effectiveness of city branding practices (Fan, 2014). Overall stakeholder involvement in city branding processes is thus small and the branding implementation efforts are predominantly based on one-way communication efforts of city organisations, such as official media organisations and other propaganda departments (Ma et al., 2020). They merely consult public and experts to obtain opinions on city slogans and logo selections. This goes against the commonly embraced principle of broad participation in city branding (Dinnie, 2010; Klijn et al., 2012; Ma et al., 2020; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015).

Many cities are eager to promote their international image by organising mega events, such as the Dubai 2020 Expo (de Jong et al., 2019). In China, cities in different stages of development are actively involved in various types of activities to promote urban renewal or the maximisation of local income. However, the types and opportunities for organising activities are closely related to the relative economic strength of a city.

5.2. Examining the progression proposition

In previous research, scholars explored the relationship between three concepts, such as Boisen et al. (2018) and Ma et al. (2019). Traditional studies show partial overlap and partial contradiction in their understanding of the concepts. Promotion is considered part of the marketing mix (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990) and branding is said to be a marketing strategy (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014). In contrast, the research results in our study show that from an urban governance perspective, city branding is more comprehensive than marketing and promotion. We found moderate evidence to support the claim that there is a progressive relationship between city promotion, city marketing and city branding. Our study verified the connection between urban development and the stage of branding focus.

On the one hand, the orientation towards branding increases along the different stages of urban development. Compared to city promotion and city marketing, city branding involves a more advanced and extensive scope of urban developmental goals. Some urban development targets can be achieved by implementing city branding. City branding also shows a more strategic focus on urban development. Many cities attempt to trigger industrial transformation and ecological modernisation by developing attractive city brands, such as Jingmen (Ma et al., 2020), as well as the Dutch Randstad and the German Rhine-Ruhr Area (Goess, de Jong, & Meijers, 2016). From the data we obtained about city identity we conclude that large cities generally have strategic development visions and are thus more willing and capable of developing and carrying out city branding programs and strategies. Except for adopting city promotion, mega cities tend to choose city branding strategies. This is probably because large cities are not satisfied with the functions city promotion and city marketing entail. They require more. These cities show a higher capacity in hosting mega events and cooperating with stakeholders, especially when it comes to private sector participation. For example, the Brand Hong Kong Management Unit is a very professional department in charge of city branding. Compared with small cities, large cities obtain more policy support from higher level authorities and pay more attention to city branding. We would also argue that clear city branding strategies in cities improve the quality of their city promotion and city marketing. The city can implement city promotion and marketing more targeted if its city branding position is clear and accurate. In most occasions, if a given city performs well in city branding, it is likely also to implement aspects in city promotion and city marketing as well, as is for instance the case in Hong Kong. All these conditions do not apply in small cities.

Finally, we observe that most of the cities we analysed focus more on city marketing than on city branding. This is understandable and in conformity with the urban governance characteristics of Chinese cities, which implement policies to encourage economic development and urban competition (Wu & Zhang, 2007). So, currently Chinese cities are eager to attract companies and talented workforce. However, with the growing demand among cities for urban transformation, wider adoption of city branding strategies can be expected in the future.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we contribute to the city branding literature via a systematic analysis of city branding concepts. We distinguished three concepts: city promotion, city marketing and city branding and proposed that they are in fact part of an urban governance dimension. Three consecutive stages for urban governance result in a progressively more comprehensive set of city branding strategies. Promotion is one-way communication to a broad audience. Marketing consists of a broader set of techniques to exchange information with target groups of which promotion is only one element alongside others. Branding refers to the capability of urban governments to improve themselves and their policies by co-creating and implementing a new conception of themselves in collaboration with stakeholders. Furthermore, we built a theoretical link between the three concepts and urban transformation. We proposed that each new stage can do more things than the previous one and preserves all features of the previous ones. We expected this superior set of characteristics to prepare cities better for real urban transformation.

Via our study of 23 Chinese cities which are engaged in different development stages we were able to test the progression proposition. In terms of use of city promotion strategy, we found that some medium and small cities have actively begun to engage in city promotion. However, the imitation of the general path cannot guarantee sophisticated or successful application. The adoption of city marketing strategies is influenced by the economic strength of the city. Shenzhen and Guangzhou apply most features of city marketing and do this professionally. Compared with mega cities, small and medium sized cities are subject to economic constraints in the process of city marketing. Our results show that with the exception of Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou, most cities do not actually actively brand themselves. Also, the most economically developed and best-known cities of our sample (Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou) sometimes omit or overlook particular elements in the promotion or marketing mix which less privileged cities do apply. The reason for this is that many of the tools and indicators for city promotion aim for a city to get name recognition and to maximise the number of visitors and tourists. This is, however, not so much what the more successful cities aspire to. Their conception and expectation of what they represent is not only much broader than tourism alone; in fact, for them, tourism has become a minor detail in their package of broader urban economic development.

Our findings show moderate evidence in support of the progression proposition. City size, level of economic development and industrial structure were also found to correlate to city branding strategies used. What we found was that professional city branding proved to be a tougher job than city marketing. Furthermore, skilled application of marketing techniques proved to be harder to realise than 'simple' city promotion. The findings of our analysis among 23 Chinese cities justify this conclusion. Highly developed cities are more likely to adopt and use city branding strategies. These cities have larger populations, advanced economies and sophisticated service industries. Compared to economically less developed cities, they show more willingness to reinvent themselves and truly implement their choice of brand. Variation is found in the governing capacity and financial resources different cities have available, resulting in divergent ways and intensities in which they implement their city branding strategies. The difficulties observed among cities in Guangdong province in their implementation of city branding strategies are common for many Chinese cities.

The indicators for city branding used in this article provide some clues to the implementation and governance of city brands. The important lesson to be drawn is that governments should adopt appropriate city branding strategies and instruments in line with their developmental goals and economic context. In addition, according to exogenous growth theory and endogenous growth theory, cities can either be perceived as products or as communities. They should consequently be governed in different ways to cater for their respective external and internal stakeholders. On the one hand, cities should constantly update themselves and improve their competitive advantage. On the other, they also require the use of marketing strategies to promote themselves to outsiders and satisfy external stakeholders.

The limitation of this study is that it is based on limited, second-hand data, and lacks detailed information regarding stakeholder involvement. Future research could broaden our knowledge of how stakeholders play an active role in city branding processes with rich-descriptive case studies using insights from interviews with stakeholders. The relationship between city promotion, city marketing, and city branding on the one hand, and exogenous growth theory and endogenous growth theory on the other, offers ample inspiration to conduct further investigation in a city like Shenzhen in which both seem relevant, to explore the link between city branding strategies and urban growth mechanisms. Furthermore, we only examined the 'progression proposition' in all cities in one province and two Special Administrative Regions of one particular nation. However, Chinese cities are set in a specific national and institutional context. Future research could expand our knowledge of city branding and investigate the progression proposition in different countries which have cities which display varying levels of urban development, such as Italy, Brazil and South Africa. In line with this we suggest that a comprehensive database be developed that covers data on city branding strategies, city characteristics and urban governance of different types of cities across the world. This could be used for systematic research into the adoption, use and implementation of branding strategies by local governments.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Wenting Ma: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Martin de Jong:** Conceptualization, Validation, Formal analysis, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Thomas Hoppe:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Mark de Bruijne:** Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

Table A1
Key social and economic information for selected cities (2018).

No.	Indicators Cities	Perm. Pop. at Year-end by City (10,000 persons)	Per Capita GDP by City (RMB)	Land area (sq.m)	1/2/3 as GDP (in %)
1	Hong Kong	748.25	381,870	1106.7	0/7/93
2	Macao	66.74	666,893	30.8	0/4/96
3	Shenzhen	1302.66	189,568	1997.47	0/41/59
4	Guangzhou	1490.44	155,491	7249.27	1/27/72
5	Dongguan	839.22	98,939	2460.08	0/49/51
6	Foshan	790.57	127,691	3797.72	2/56/42
7	Zhuhai	189.11	159,428	1736.46	2/49/49
8	Huizhou	483	85,418	11,347.39	4/53/43
9	Zhongshan	331	110,585	1783.67	2/49/49
10	Jiangmen	459.82	63,328	9506.92	7/49/44
11	Zhaoqing	415.16	53,267	14,891.23	16/35/49
12	Qingyuan	387.4	40,476	19,035.5	15/35/50
13	Shantou	563.85	44,672	2199.15	4/51/45
14	Jieyang	608.94	35,358	–	8/52/40
15	Zhanjiang	733.2	41,107	13,262.8	18/36/46
16	Chaozhou	265.66	40,219	3146	7/49/44
17	Meizhou	437.88	25,367	15,865	18/32/50
18	Shaoguan	299.76	44,971	18,413	12/33/55
19	Maoming	631.32	49,406	11,427.63	16/38/46
20	Yangjiang	255.56	52,969	7955.9	16/34/50
21	Shanwei	299.36	30,825	4865.05	15/44/41
22	Heyuan	309.39	32,530	15,654	11/38/51
23	Yunfu	252.69	33,747	7785	18/38/44

Table A2
Evaluation standard of indicators.

Code	Indicators	5	4	3	2	1
CP1	Presence of a city logo	The city uses a specific logo in communication		The city adopts changed font of city's name as the logo in city communication		The city doesn't have a special logo in city communication
CP2	Presence of a city slogan	The city uses slogans in city promotion which reflect specific characteristics of the city		The city uses slogans in city promotion which do not reflect specific city characteristics		The city doesn't use a slogan in city promotion
CP3	City promotion videos	The city has specifically designed advertising videos for various target groups, which are frequently updated		The city has a specific advertising video, but this is not updated very frequently		The city doesn't have a specific advertising video
CP4	City promotion material (e.g. digital brochure)	The city has professional city brochures aimed at various target groups, which are frequently updated		The city has developed guidelines for city promotion		The city doesn't have any professional city brochures
CP5	City promotion website/webpage (separate or embedded in the municipality website)	The city uses specialised city promotion websites		City promotion is embedded within the municipality website or via other (government) websites		The city does not specifically promote the city via websites

(continued on next page)

Table A2 (*continued*)

Code	Indicators	5	4	3	2	1
CP6	Use of media platforms for city promotion	The city uses diverse (inter)national media platforms for city promotion	The city uses multiple media platforms for city promotion		The city uses one media platform for city promotion	The city does not use media platforms for city promotion
CM1–1	Use of tourism demonstration areas	The city has a lot of tourism demonstration areas		The city has a few tourism demonstration areas		The city has no tourism demonstration area
CM1–2	Tourism projects	The city has a lot of tourism projects		The city has a limited number of tourism projects		The city has no tourism projects
CM1–3	Tourism development plans and policies	The city publishes a lot of tourism development plans and related documents	The city publishes a few tourism development plans and related documents		The city has developed a limited number of tourism development plans and related documents	The city doesn't have any tourism development plans and related documents
CM1–4	Tourism activities	The city hosts a lot of (inter)national tourism activities		The city hosts some tourism activities		The city did not host tourism activities
CM2–1	Reform activities to adapt business systems and improve business services	The city publishes a lot of policies and organizes activities to reform of the business system; Save start-up time and improve business services		The city formulates policies to reform of the business system		The city does not formulate policies to reform of the business system
CM2–2	Preferential policies and measures to attract business	The city formulates more than 60 policies and measures to attract business	The city formulates 31–60 policies and measures to attract business	The city formulates 11–30 policies and measures to attract business	The city formulates 1–10 policies and measures to attract business	No policies and measures are taken by the city to attract business
CM2–3	Budget to attract business	The city allocates abundant budget to attract business	The city allocates a substantial budget to attract business	The city allocates some budget to attract business	The city allocates a limited budget to attract business	The city does not allocate budget to attract business
CM2–4	Hosting of business promotion activities	The city hosts a large number of influential, high-impact activities (e.g. fairs, trade shows, etc.)	The city hosts some trade fairs		The city hosts small numbers of low-impact, small-scale activities	They did not organise marketing campaigns
CM2–5	Measures and policies to reduce costs for business	The city reduces business costs via a large number of policies and measures (more than 50 billion yuan)	The city reduces business costs a lot of policies and measures (20–50 billion yuan)	The city reduces business costs via some policies and measures (5–20 billion yuan)	The city reduces business costs via very few policies and measures (0–5 billion yuan)	The city does not employ policies and measures to reduce business costs
CM3–1	Housing policies to attract talent	The city has a comprehensive system of housing policies and measures (including subsidies) to attract talent		The city has some housing policies and measures (including subsidies) to attract talent		The city provides no housing policies or subsidies to attract talent
CM3–2	Talent recruitment measures	The city has a large number of specific preferential measures to attract talent		The city has some specific talent recruitment measures		The city has no talent recruitment measures to attract talent
CM3–3	Talent recruitment policies and plans	The city has a large number of talent recruitement policies and plans		The city has some talent recruitment policies and plans		The city has no talent recruitment policy
CM3–4	Service improvement to attract talent	The city adopts a lot of measures to improve services to attract talent		The city adopts some measures to improve services to attract talent		The city has no measures to improve service levels to attract talent
CM3–5	Talent recruitment activities, forums	The city organise large numbers of (high-impact) talent recruitment activities		The city organise small numbers of (low-impact) talent recruitment activities		The city does not organise talent recruitment activities
CB1	Professional city branding website	The city has a specific city brand website, which is regularly updated		The city has a specific city brand website		The city has no specific city branding website
CB2	Professional city branding organisation or department	The city has a special city branding organisation or department; This organisation or department is very high quality		The city has a special city branding organisation or department		The city has no special city branding organisation or department
CB3	City branding policy documentation	The city releases a large number of documents	The city releases many documents		The city releases a few documents about city	The city releases no documents about city

Table A2 (*continued*)

Code	Indicators	5	4	3	2	1
		about city branding policy making and implementation	about city branding policy making and implementation		branding policy making and implementation	branding policy making and implementation
CB4	Presence of a city brand identity and coherent goal, vision, strategy, roadmap or policy	The city has an integral perspective on urban development in which the city identity is differentiated towards different target groups and aligned with the city's characteristics, resources and conditions	The city has an integral perspective on urban development in which the city identity is distinguished from those of other cities	The characteristics of a city can be recognised from the identity of the city	The degree of differentiation of city identity is not high	The city has no integral perspective on urban development and lacks a clear identity resulting from misalignment with the city's characteristics
CB5	Stakeholders involvement in city branding processes (politicians, governmental organisations, promotion agencies, companies, public, experts)	The city organise for broad stakeholder participation in city branding processes, especially from the private sector	The city organise for selective stakeholder involvement in city branding processes	The city organises for stakeholder involvement from government, companies and experts in city branding processes in which government perspectives dominate; Community opinions are collected on city slogans and logos	Government oriented; The city organise for stakeholder involvement from government in city branding processes. Community opinions are collected on city slogans and logos	The city does not involve stakeholders in its city branding process
CB6	Organisation of professional city branding activities (e. g. conferences, forums, or mega events)	The city hosts a large number of influential international and domestic events	The city hosts a small number of international events and a large number of national events	The city hosts a small number of (inter) national events alongside regional events	The city hosts a small number of (inter) national or regional events alongside municipal events	The city hosts few events

Table A3
City promotion practices in 23 cities.

No.	Indicators Cities	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	CP6	Total points of city promotion
1	Hong Kong	5	–	5	5	5	5	25
2	Macao	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
3	Shenzhen	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
4	Guangzhou	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
5	Dongguan	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
6	Foshan	5	5	5	1	5	4	25
7	Zhuhai	5	5	5	3	5	4	27
8	Huizhou	5	3	5	1	5	2	21
9	Zhongshan	3	5	5	1	5	2	21
10	Jiangmen	1	5	5	1	3	4	19
11	Zhaoqing	5	5	5	5	5	2	27
12	Qingyuan	5	5	5	1	1	4	21
13	Shantou	1	3	5	1	1	4	15
14	Jieyang	1	3	5	1	3	1	14
15	Zhanjiang	3	5	5	1	5	4	23
16	Chaozhou	5	5	5	3	3	2	23
17	Meizhou	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
18	Shaoguan	5	3	5	1	3	1	18
19	Maoming	5	3	5	1	3	4	21
20	Yangjiang	1	3	5	1	3	2	15
21	Shanwei	1	3	5	1	5	4	19
22	Heyuan	1	3	5	1	5	2	17
23	Yunfu	1	5	5	1	5	2	19

Table A4
City marketing practices in 23 cities.

No.	Indicators Cities	CM1 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep visitors				CM2 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep investors and companies					CM3 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep top talents					Total points of city marketing
		CM1–1	CM1–2	CM1–3	CM1–4	CM2–1	CM2–2	CM2–3	CM2–4	CM2–5	CM3–1	CM3–2	CM3–3	CM3–4	CM3–5	
1	Hong Kong	–	5	5	5	–	3	3	–	5	3	–	5	5	–	39
2	Macao	3	3	5	5	3	3	–	–	3	–	–	3	3	5	36
3	Shenzhen	3	3	–	–	5	5	5	5	5	5	–	5	–	5	46

Table A4 (*continued*)

No.	Indicators Cities	CM1 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep visitors				CM2 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep investors and companies					CM3 Specific measures/actions to attract and keep top talents					Total points of city marketing
		CM1–1	CM1–2	CM1–3	CM1–4	CM2–1	CM2–2	CM2–3	CM2–4	CM2–5	CM3–1	CM3–2	CM3–3	CM3–4	CM3–5	
4	Guangzhou	5	3	3	5	5	3	4	5	3	–	3	3	5	–	47
5	Dongguan	–	–	–	–	5	4	4	5	3	3	–	–	–	3	27
6	Foshan	3	3	–	–	5	3	–	5	5	–	3	–	3	–	30
7	Zhuhai	5	5	–	–	5	3	–	–	3	3	–	3	4	3	34
8	Huizhou	3	–	–	–	–	5	–	4	4	–	–	4	–	–	20
9	Zhongshan	3	3	–	5	5	3	–	4	4	–	3	–	–	3	33
10	Jiangmen	5	5	3	–	5	4	–	4	4	–	5	–	–	3	38
11	Zhaoqing	5	3	3	5	–	2	–	4	2	–	3	–	3	3	33
12	Qingyuan	5	3	3	3	5	–	–	3	2	–	–	–	3	3	30
13	Shantou	4	2	–	–	3	5	3	–	3	3	3	–	–	–	26
14	Jieyang	2	–	2	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	6
15	Zhanjiang	3	5	3	3	3	5	–	3	3	–	–	–	3	–	31
16	Chaozhou	5	3	5	3	–	4	2	–	2	–	3	–	5	–	32
17	Meizhou	5	5	–	–	3	–	–	4	2	–	–	–	3	–	22
18	Shaoguan	3	3	5	3	3	4	–	–	–	–	–	3	–	3	27
19	Maoming	3	5	–	–	–	2	3	3	2	–	3	–	–	3	24
20	Yangjiang	3	5	–	3	–	2	–	2	2	–	–	3	–	–	20
21	Shanwei	3	3	–	3	–	2	–	2	–	–	3	3	3	–	22
22	Heyuan	3	5	3	3	–	2	–	2	–	–	–	–	3	–	21
23	Yunfu	5	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	3	3	3	20

Table A5
City branding practices in 23 cities.

No.	Indicators Cities	CB1	CB2	CB3	CB4	CB5	CB6	Total points of city branding
1	Hong Kong	5	5	5	5	5	5	30
2	Macao	1	1	1	5	–	5	13
3	Shenzhen	3	3	4	5	–	5	20
4	Guangzhou	1	1	4	5	3	5	19
5	Dongguan	1	1	5	3	2	4	16
6	Foshan	3	3	1	5	–	4	16
7	Zhuhai	1	1	1	5	–	4	12
8	Huizhou	1	1	4	3	4	4	17
9	Zhongshan	3	3	1	3	3	3	16
10	Jiangmen	1	1	1	3	3	4	13
11	Zhaoqing	1	1	1	1	–	4	8
12	Qingyuan	1	1	1	1	2	3	9
13	Shantou	1	1	1	3	2	2	10
14	Jieyang	1	1	1	1	2	2	8
15	Zhanjiang	3	3	2	1	–	3	12
16	Chaozhou	1	1	1	1	2	3	9
17	Meizhou	1	1	1	3	3	4	13
18	Shaoguan	1	1	1	3	–	2	8
19	Maoming	1	1	1	3	2	3	11
20	Yangjiang	1	1	1	1	2	1	7
21	Shanwei	1	1	1	1	3	1	8
22	Heyuan	1	1	1	1	–	2	6
23	Yunfu	1	1	1	1	–	2	6

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