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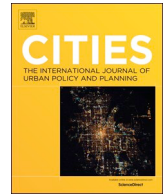
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# Economic city branding and stakeholder involvement in China: Attempt of a medium-sized city to trigger industrial transformation

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## ABSTRACT

Among known studies of city branding by Chinese megacities to realise urban transformation, there is no explorative study of how smaller Chinese cities engage in city branding and attempt to trigger industrial transformation. In response, this article presents an in-depth case study of city branding processes in a medium-sized Chinese city. Roles, resources and interactions among the city's stakeholders are analysed during the brand creation and implementation stages in two different economic city branding projects. The stakeholder involvement mechanisms we identify confirm that city branding creation in China primarily follows political rather than business channels. Chinese local public authorities and more specifically key politicians, departments, and public enterprises are core stakeholders in branding creation. However, this leads to challenges in the branding implementation, since key public sector players tend to withdraw themselves when implementation begins, leaving previously uninvolved private (and public) players to implement the brands. The unsuccessful transformation contrasts with those observed in Chinese megacities, where involvement of powerful corporations and support from higher levels of government are both much higher. It appears that the imperative of broad stakeholder involvement to make city branding successful as we know it for Western cities may also apply in medium-sized Chinese cities.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese cities have experienced unprecedented economic growth rates in the last forty years (Deng, Huang, Rozelle, & Uchida, 2010; Fleisher, Li, & Zhao, 2010; Zhang, Wang, & Wang, 2012). This has brought many positive changes, especially in terms of quality of life and material prosperity for a great many people who live in these cities (de Jong et al., 2018). On the other hand, a variety of social and ecological problems is associated with urbanisation and industrialisation. Examples of social problems include growing (regional) disparity between cities (Fan, Kanbur, & Zhang, 2011; Wang & Fan, 2004) and a growing gap between the wealthiest and the underprivileged living inside these cities (Cai, Wang, & Du, 2002; Fan et al., 2011; Wang & Fan, 2004; Zhang, 2001). Environmental problems which are increasingly plaguing industrialised Chinese cities are traffic congestion, air pollution, and a growing waste-pile (Chien & Wu, 2011; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Shao, Tang, Zhang, & Li, 2006; Yeh, Yang, & Wang, 2015). The

mentioned problems are especially poignant in cities in the nation's densely populated western and central heartlands, which are less prosperous than those in the coastal provinces. Furthermore, there is intense competition between cities due to their limited access to resources (e.g. a highly qualified workforce, financial and cultural facilities) and a growing mobility among inhabitants. For these reasons, many local policymakers are exploring new pathways to stimulate economic development and generate a sustainable urban transformation. Many decision-makers have embraced city branding as a key strategy to guide their municipalities' industrial transformation process. City branding is viewed as an essential strategy to remain 'competitive' (Kavaratzis, Warnaby, & Ashworth, 2014). Supporters argue that city branding is crucial to realise a metropolitan vision which feeds into sustainable urban transformation (Bellosso, 2011; Goess, de Jong, & Meijers, 2016; Rius Ulldemolins, 2014), whereas critics have claimed that city branding is a vague policy term and merely a tool that is employed by local governments to greenwash a city's image (Braun,

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2012; de Jong, 2019; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Schuetze & Chelleri, 2016; Zenker & Martin, 2011).

City branding in the more advanced coastal regions in China have gained some attention in academic studies. For example, Berg and Björner (2014) studied city branding in Chinese megacities, including Beijing and Shanghai. City branding in the Pearl River Delta and the Bohai River basin (around Beijing and Tianjin) are similarly discussed (de Jong et al., 2018). Other scholars have studied different aspects of city branding in Chinese settings. For example, Wu (2000) has focused on urban development and place promotion in Shanghai, while Zhu, Qian, and Gao (2011) investigated the globalisation and city image in Guangzhou. Especially, the relationship between large international events and city branding has been extensively studied by hosts of scholars, for example, the Beijing Olympics (Chen, 2015; Zhang & Zhao, 2009), the Shanghai World Expo (Dyner, 2011; Yu, Wang, & Seo, 2012), and the Guangzhou Asian games (Chen, 2012). Obviously, city branding has been widely adopted by Chinese cities as a strategy to achieve a variety of urban development goals. However, little is known of what the smaller and lesser known cities located in China's central heartland provinces do in this regard, even though they represent the large majority of Chinese cities and its urban population. This is remarkable since we would argue that these regions and cities are of more importance from a policy perspective than the 'outliers' which have been studied so far; megacities in China harbour less than 13% of the overall population in China (NBSPRC, 2017).

This contribution focuses on city branding activities of a medium-sized Chinese city, Jingmen. Jingmen represents a typical average Chinese city. This type of city faces an increasingly complex mix of economic and environmental problems. On the one hand, governmental officials and departments face a relentless competition for resources, economic activity and residents with other cities (Jessop & Sum, 2000; Xu & Yeh, 2005). On the other hand, policymakers have the unenviable task to 'reinvent' and 'transform' these cities to become more sustainable (Joss & Molella, 2013; Ye, 2011; Zhan & de Jong, 2018). Some cities experience this challenge as deeply conflictual, others perceive this as a challenge and consequently embrace city branding as an opportunity to engage in industrial transformation (Ma, Schraven, Bruijine, Jong, & Lu, 2019). Jingmen belongs to the second category employs city branding strategies to generate industrial transformation (and the promise of economic growth resulting from that). Jingmen thus avoids using the outdated branding label 'Industrial City' and explores new brands and underlying economic 'business models' in an attempt to generate economic growth. These include brands which focus on general aviation, more specifically navigation equipment (the General Aviation New Town brand) and the local food industry and tourism (small private farmers and local food producers as destinations for food tourism) (China's Agricultural Valley brand).

The design of a city brand and the subsequent implementation of the brand via city branding is influenced by stakeholder involvement (Dinnie, 2010). Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for the acceptance of city branding and can help fix and convey the image of a place (Kavaratzis, 2012). Stakeholders' attitudes and roles are essential factors in the process of city branding (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015). However, public sector players are still the most influential stakeholders in China, and other ones tend to be followers rather than participants (Lu, de Jong, & Chen, 2017). More needs to be known about what roles these stakeholders take on, and to what extent and how they are involved in the city branding process.

Therefore, this article seeks to explore *how a medium-sized Chinese city engages in city branding strategies that help trigger industrial transformation*. More specifically, we examine *how different stakeholders get involved in the city branding creation and implementation phases of developing a city brand*.

Section 2 explores the relationship between city branding and local economic development and industrial transformation. The practice of stakeholder involvement in Chinese political systems is explained. It

identifies the types of stakeholders in Chinese cities, their roles and resources and provides an analytical framework to analyse our empirical data. In Section 3, we explain our research process, methodology and the representativeness of Jingmen in the broader population of small and medium-sized cities in China and present detailed information regarding our fieldwork. Section 4 offers a brief description of Jingmen city, its industrial structure, and a concise history of brand development. In Section 5, a comparative analysis is made of two processes of brand creation and implementation we encountered in Jingmen, which allows us to analyse the roles, resources, and interactions between city departments and stakeholders in each project. Furthermore, we analyse the barriers encountered during brand implementation. We demonstrate that specific stakeholder roles are underrepresented, what resources are missing and subsequently assess the consequences for Jingmen's city branding strategy. Section 6 provides an in-depth discussion about city brand creation and implementation. Section 7 concludes by summarizing how mechanisms for stakeholder involvement work in medium-sized Chinese cities, where their weaknesses lie and we offer some suggestions for further study.

## 2. Stakeholder involvement in city branding in Chinese cities

### 2.1. An economic policy-oriented view of city branding and China's application

City branding has been intensely studied in both the academic and professional domains in the last ten years, particularly in urban planning and governance (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011; Ma et al., 2019). In this contribution, we consider city branding as "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). On the one hand, city branding has a strong connection with local economic development (Anttiroiko, 2014; Blakely & Leigh, 2013; Cleave, Arku, Sadler, & Gilliland, 2016; Rowe, 2009) and responds to global intercity competition (Anttiroiko, 2015). It aims to direct towards business relocation, expansion and investment (Baker, 2012; Harvey, 2013). Many Chinese cities apply city branding to obtain a competitive advantage and improve their economic position (Lu et al., 2017). For example, economic city brands are adopted in Greater Pearl River Delta as a policy instrument to trigger economic development (Lu et al., 2017). On the other hand, city branding as a process stimulates and enables cities to experience in-depth urban and industrial transformation, economic restructuring and policy change (Boisen, Terlouw, Groote, & Couwenberg, 2018; Joo & Seo, 2018; Ye & Björner, 2018). Thus, in this article, city branding can be understood as an economic policy instrument, covering the industrial dimension of city branding.

Ye and Björner (2018) claim that city branding has become a growth-driven urban policy and governance strategy in Chinese megacities. In the Chinese context, city brands are widely adopted as brand identities in various plans, such as the Urban Master Plans and Five Year Social-Economic Plans, which provide a local vision on social, economic and industrial development (Lu et al., 2017). National, provincial, and local plans provide the direction for urban development and guide industrial change. Ideally, all the campaigns, promotions and policy actions should be fleshed out in line with these plans.

Baker (2012) identified the key factors for branding small cities in some countries, such as making a consistent effort to achieve a vision with reality matching the positive expectations. However, research on city branding in Chinese small cities is non-existent.

### 2.2. Stakeholder involvement and Chinese administration characteristics

Freeman defined a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives"

(Freeman, 2010, p.46). Stakeholder analysis has emerged as an approach to understand policy design and implementation (Bryson, 2004; Freeman, 2010), including in various fields such as place branding (Kavaratzis, 2012; Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015), urban transformation (Höijertz, 2013; Song, Guan, Wang, & Zhao, 2016), urban renewal (Zhuang, Qian, Visscher, Elsinga, & Wu, 2019), sustainable city projects (Zhan, de Jong, & de Bruijn, 2017), environmental marketing (Cronin, Smith, Gleim, Ramirez, & Martinez, 2011; Polonsky, 1995), and public and citizen participation in China (Enserink & Koppenjan, 2007; Li & de Jong, 2017).

Hankinson (2004) claims that place branding, in essence, is a set of relationships between stakeholder groups. International scholars claim that stakeholder involvement strengthens the effectiveness of city branding (Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012). Stakeholder engagement enriches and deepens the concepts of city branding, introduces new opinions, ideas, and perspectives (Dinnie, 2010; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). Some scholars emphasise the importance of involving professionals in city branding and take a more instrumental approach, while others believe inclusive, citizen-centric and socially-oriented branding to be more suitable for urban governance (Hereźniak, 2017; Joo & Seo, 2018; Paganoni, 2012).

Compared with urban development in Western countries, public authorities play a much bigger role in China (Xu & Yeh, 2005). Governments are the core stakeholders in China as most resources and policy instruments are regulated and controlled by the state (Chen, Sun, Tang, & Wu, 2011). A rich variety of public stakeholders can be identified, ranging from regional and local organisations to sections of state-owned enterprises who operate at the national level. Furthermore, politicians occupy key positions in the aforementioned government organisations, non-profit organisations, and state-owned companies (Li & Zhou, 2005). China's one-party system is organised more or less in parallel to the various government levels, so that party leaders occupy high positions both within the party and in (local) governments and state-owned enterprises. The party is thus involved at multiple-levels and in many aspects of China's societal governance down to cultural and sports organisations (Oi, 1995). However, we have insufficient knowledge of stakeholder involvement in the city branding activities of Chinese medium and small cities.

2.3. Stakeholder identification via an adopted involvement framework

The identification of stakeholders is a crucial step in any stakeholder analysis. A mixture of several techniques will be adopted, including a positional approach to map power or resources of stakeholders (Enserink et al., 2010) and a social participation approach to identify to what extent the stakeholders relate to activities (Bryson, 2004).

Here, we combine previous studies on stakeholder involvement in place branding (Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn et al., 2012; Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015), stakeholder involvement in China (Zhan et al., 2017; Zhuang et al., 2019) and Chinese institutional characteristics (Li & Zhou, 2005; Ye, 2013, 2014) to identify the stakeholder structure in city branding processes in Chinese cities. We apply Stubbs & Warnaby's model (2015) to the Chinese context as shown in Table 1 (left side) but make some crucial adjustments to achieve a better fit with Chinese institutional characteristics. Most importantly, the role of politicians should be merged into various governmental organisations and state-owned enterprises. In China, there are also professional government organisations in charge of organising cultural and sports activities. So we also merge the cultural and sports organisations into government organisations. Since religious organisations are rarely involved in the design of city-level policies and city branding, we exclude them from our analysis. We will use our adjusted stakeholder framework to identify and analyse the various (potential) stakeholders in city branding creation and implementation processes in Jingmen in Section 5.

Table 1 Stakeholder involvement framework in city branding in China.

No.	Stubbs et al.'s structure	No.	Type of Stakeholders (adjusted)	Explanations for the stakeholders	Roles	Resources
1	Politicians	1	Governmental organisations	Party executives working at different levels of government or core departments, such as party-secretaries and mayors at the provincial and municipal levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dominate the branding creation stage</li> <li>Influence brand creation and implementation, e.g. approve brand creation and push brand implementation</li> <li>Influence city branding selection and implementation</li> <li>Ask approval from higher level governments</li> <li>Execute, participate, coordinate and monitor the brand implementation process</li> </ul>	Opinion leaders
2	Governmental organisations			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different administrative level governments outside the city (top-down hierarchical organisation)</li> <li>Different governmental departments within a city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish and deliver information about brands and activities through different channels</li> <li>Invest and operate projects</li> <li>Provide knowledge, resource, technology, finance support</li> <li>Provide expert knowledge</li> </ul>	Administrative (hierarchical) power (policy-making); Financial resources; Regulatory power
3	Cultural and sports organisations			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governmental media departments</li> <li>Travel agencies</li> <li>State owned companies at different levels</li> <li>Local private companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the transport and infrastructure</li> <li>Participate in the brand implementation</li> <li>Express their opinions and provide feedback via digital media and public media platforms</li> <li>Receive brand information and participate in branding activities</li> </ul>	Media channels and the capability to respond to various audiences; Technology; Finance; Investment opportunities
4	Promotion agencies	2	Promotion agencies			
5	Businesses	3	Enterprises			
6	Academic organisations and schools	4	Academic organisations and schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local universities, schools, and academic institutions</li> <li>External experts and academic associations</li> </ul>		
7	Infrastructure and transport providers	5	Infrastructure and transport providers	Transport Construction & Investment companies		
8	Residents	6	Residents	Local citizens		
9	Religious organisations					

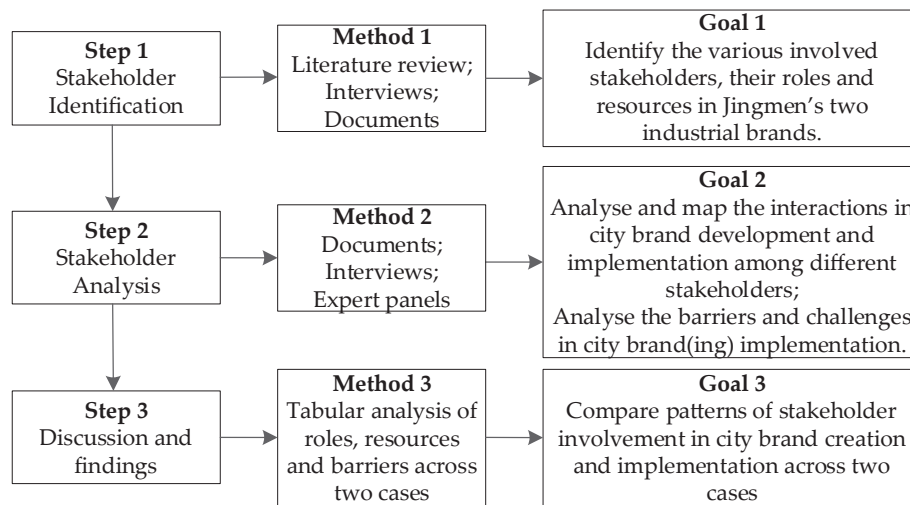


Fig. 1. Research process.

### 3. Research methodology

A case study can be used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon more deeply and to explore the underlying mechanism of this phenomenon (Yin, 2009). It is a deliberate research strategy to describe and explain the creation and implementation processes of city branding in a specific medium-sized city in China. Jingmen is a highly industrialised city and in its planning documents displays a strong willingness to experience economic, industrial and urban transformation. Roughly 600,000 of Jingmen's inhabitants live in the main urban district, which makes Jingmen a typical medium-sized municipality in China in terms of population numbers (SC, 2014). In terms of social and economic development, Jingmen closely represents the 'average' among Chinese cities. In 2017, its GDP per capita (57,357 RMB) (HBOS, 2018), closely resembles the Chinese national average GDP per capita (59,201 RMB) (NBSPRC, 2018). In 2018, Jingmen's urbanisation rate reached 59.21% (JMBOS, 2019), quite close to the national level (59.58%) (NBSPRC, 2019). Jingmen is one of the 128 "fifth-tier" cities and localities inlands in China, from a grand total of 337 listed cities in 2019, according to a Chinese media investigation (YICAI, 2019). Based on these data, we argue that the city of Jingmen can serve as a representative case to study city branding practices of a large group of cities.

Fig. 1 shows the specific research process in this article, which focuses on the involvement of stakeholders in the creation of city brands and their subsequent implementation in city branding activities. In step 1, we identify the various stakeholders that were involved in two recent city branding projects which are indicative of recent attempts at city branding in the city of Jingmen. The stakeholder framework that was developed in Section 2.3 was used to identify relevant stakeholders via interviews and document analysis during our fieldwork in Jingmen. In step 2, we examined additional information about the city branding projects via interviews and official documents to trace brand creation and implementation processes and map the interactions among the different stakeholders. Expert panel discussions were used to complete the in-depth analysis of the city branding projects to subsequently analyse the barriers and challenges experienced in both projects. Finally, in step 3, we summarise the patterns of underlying stakeholder involvement in the city brand creation and implementation phases in a medium-sized Chinese city.

Specifically, we summarise the generic economic and social information from the websites about Jingmen City and the project information of two economic brands: China's Agricultural Valley (CAV), and General Aviation New Town (GANT).

We conducted our fieldwork in Jingmen from November 2018 to January 2019 and conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of involved stakeholders. In total, 18 respondents were interviewed, among them the CAV and GANT project leaders. Four

respondents were interviewed more than once (See Appendix A). Most interviewees were employed in local government departments, such as the Jingmen Planning Bureau, Jingmen Planning and Design Institute, Jingmen Daily Media Group and Jingmen Development and Reform Commission (DRC). We also consulted experts at local universities and research institutions; and the leaders of local enterprises about their knowledge about the city branding policies.

Furthermore, we participated as observers and participants in two meetings of the Jingmen Urban Planning Bureau, and organised a workshop with the local officials and external experts to analyse and discuss Jingmen's approach to city branding projects and industrial transformation (see Appendix A). Five foreign experts from Delft University of Technology, four experts from Chinese top universities, and eight PhD students participated in the workshop discussions.

In addition, we conducted telephone interviews and email inquiries with officials and experts to obtain updates and additional information. To complement these interviews, we used information from official websites and project documents and publications to understand the urban context (e.g. *Jingmen Urban Master Plan*). Combined with the interview results in Jingmen, official documents, and the suggestions from expert panels, we present our analysis and results in Section 5, especially focusing on the interactions among different stakeholders (see Figs. 5 and 6).

### 4. General information about Jingmen

#### 4.1. A brief description of Jingmen in China

The location of Jingmen in Hubei province is shown in Fig. 2. The land area of Jingmen is 12,404 sq.km. The number of inhabitants in the administrative area is reported as 2,896,500 (JMBOS, 2019). The Gross Domestic Product of Jingmen in 2018 was RMB 184.8 billion. Historically, Jingmen belonged to Jingzhou, another city next to Jingmen (see in Fig. 2). On August 19, 1983, the State Council approved the promotion of Jingmen to prefecture-level municipality<sup>1</sup> (PGOJM, 2019). Currently, Jingmen promotes the development of equipment manufacturing, new energy and new materials, renewable resource utilisation and environmental protection, electronic information, health, fine chemicals and processing of agricultural products (PGOJM, 2019).

To obtain insight in Jingmen's economic structure, we distinguish the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in the economy. Fig. 3

<sup>1</sup> A **prefecture-level municipality** (Chinese: 地级市) is an administrative division of the People's Republic of China (PRC), ranking below a province and above a county.

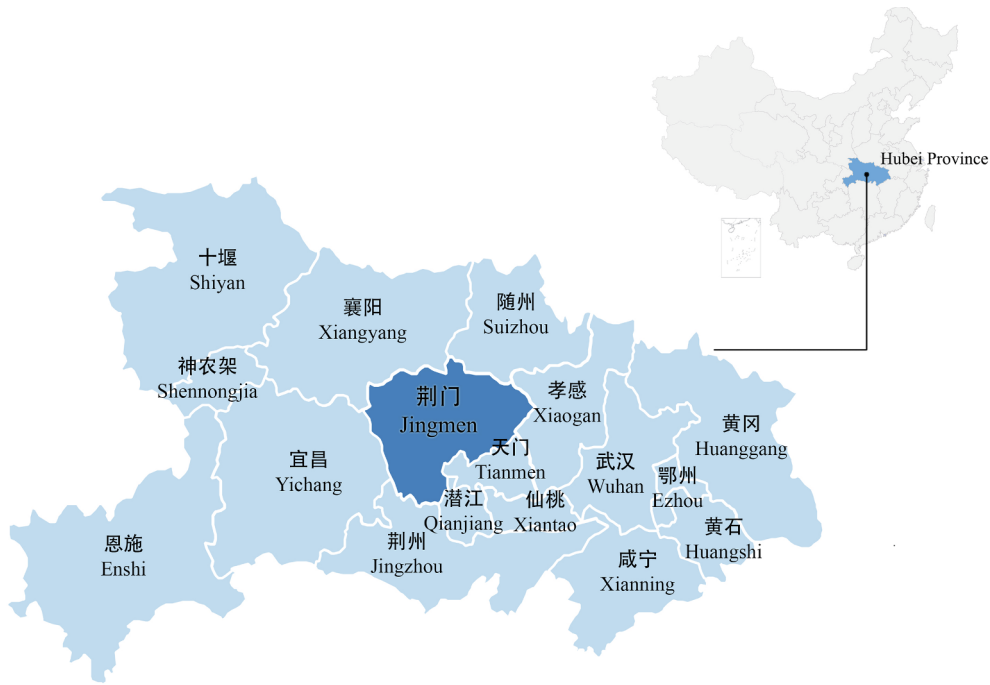


Fig. 2. Location of Jingmen in Hubei and the PRC.

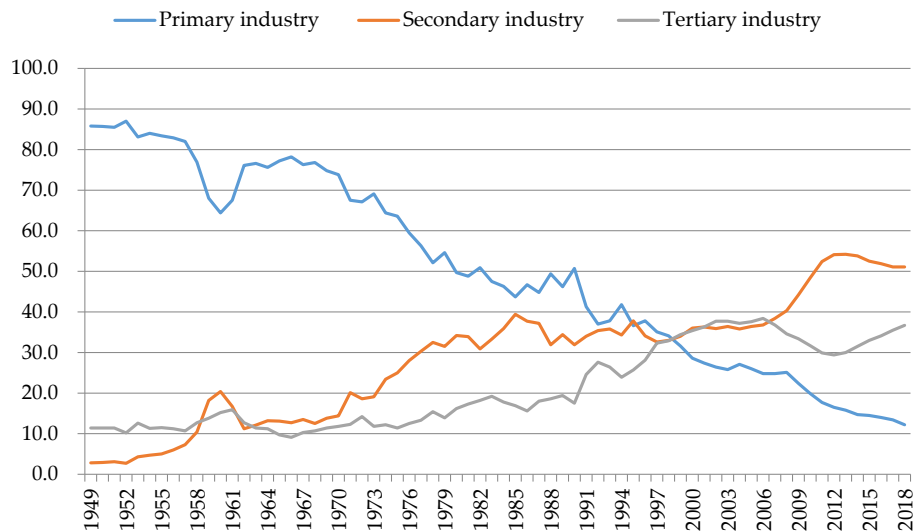


Fig. 3. Industry's relative contribution to Jingmen's GDP between 1949 and 2018.

shows the distribution of GDP across the three economic sectors in Jingmen from 1949 to 2018 (HBOS, 2018). The relative proportion of the primary sector decreases significantly over time, whereas the contribution of the secondary sector increases rapidly from the 1970s and onwards. Since then the secondary industry has maintained its economic importance in Jingmen's economy until the time of writing (2020). In 2017, the percentages of GDP in Jingmen's three economic sectors were 13.4%, 51.1%, and 35.5% respectively (JMBOS, 2019), which shows that the secondary sector still dominates the city's economic structure. In contrast, the workforce distribution of the three industrial sectors is 36.7%, 25.1%, and 38.2% respectively (HBOS, 2018). Roughly half of Jingmen's GDP is produced by a quarter of its working population. A substantial proportion of the working population is still employed in the primary sector even though its contribution to the city's GDP is relatively low. Although the tertiary industry experienced stable growth over time, its proportional contribution to Jingmen's GDP is still substantially lower than that of the secondary sector.

#### 4.2. Jingmen's city brands: evolution and development

City brand development in Jingmen has seen some shifts over the previous decades. The evolution of city brand development from the beginning of the 1970s to the current day can be broadly divided into three stages. Jingmen's first city brand (Industrial City) was created during the period of the so-called *Third Front Movement*<sup>2</sup> as part of a large-scale national plan to industrialise China's interior. A substantial number of large national companies were (re)located to stimulate economic development (Qian, 2000). As a result of this deliberate

<sup>2</sup>The **Third Front Movement** (Chinese: 三线建设; pinyin: *Sānxiàn jiànshè*) was a massive industrial development by China in its interior starting in 1964. It involved large-scale investment in national defense, technology, basic industries (including manufacturing, mining, metal, and electricity), transportation and other infrastructures investments.

national industrial policy, Jingmen evolved into an important petrochemical industrial hub and became well-known as a typical 'Industrial City' (interviewee 1).

Jingmen's Industrial City brand was maintained until 2012 when a new city brand - China's Agricultural Valley (CAV), was developed and launched as part of Jingmen's new urban development model. Being mostly located on plain land, Jingmen is an important production base for commodity grain and high-quality rapeseed oil in the country (PGOJM, 2019). The output of cotton, oilseeds, fruits, pigs and aquatic products ranks among the highest in the province (PGOJM, 2019).

As part of a deliberate local government policy to stimulate Jingmen's primary sector and economic development in the region of Qujialing<sup>3</sup> (see in Fig. 4), China's Agricultural Valley (CAV) brand quickly caught on. The CAV brand was gradually extended from Qujialing to encompass Jingmen proper, and was later even used to brand the entire Hubei Province. Spurred on by high levels of attention from leaders of municipal and provincial governments the CAV brand quickly gained popularity as an economic concept, which in turn further stimulated the developed of CAV into a city brand of Jingmen itself.

More recently, in order to realise an industrial upgrade and transform the economy, Jingmen has been exploring new options for development. Jingmen is considered one of five general aviation industrial clusters in China. Being designated as a 'general aviation industry comprehensive demonstration zone' enables Jingmen to plan and build a General Aviation New Town (GANT) as part of its ambitious growth plans. The core area in GANT is Zhanghe New District. The core areas of CAV and GANT are shown in Fig. 4.

Actually, in addition to the aforementioned brands, the city of Jingmen also boasts being 'China's Outstanding Tourist City', 'Gateway of Hubei', 'National Garden City', 'National Forest City', 'Cultural Jingmen' and 'Ecological Jingmen' as city brands (PGOJM, 2019). However, since this article aims to analyse how Jingmen uses economic brands to achieve industrial transformation. China's Agricultural Valley, Industrial City, and the General Aviation New Town brands represent three typical industrial city brands in Jingmen. Since the building of Industrial City as a brand began in the 1970s further back in time, we were unable to obtain sufficient information about stakeholder engagement during the creation and implementation of this brand. Consequently, this article considers the Industrial City as background for the study of the other two brands in Jingmen. CAV and GANT are thus selected as cases for our analysis of economic city branding strategies in Jingmen which aim to trigger sustainable industrial transformation.

## 5. Stakeholder involvement analysis: CAV and GANT

From 1964, a large number of military-industrial and national defense enterprises were assigned to Jingmen because of the national *Third Front Movement* policy. These included Sinopec, Hongtu Aircraft Manufacturing Plant, 605 Research Institute, the 330 Cement Plant, various Thermal Power Plants, the Xiangsha Chemical Plant, but also the Dongguang Optoelectronics Factory, and the Jiangbei Foundry. Many petrochemical and phosphate industries companies joined these companies and most are still present in Jingmen today and are part of Jingmen's industrial basis (PGOJM, 2019). However, the governance of these state-owned enterprises is primarily concentrated at the national and provincial levels. From 1986 to 1995, China experienced a major reform of its economic system and a transition from a planned economy to a market-based economy (Qian, 2000). The Industrial City brand was developed in response to the abovementioned urban economic reforms in the national policy environment (interviewee 1; 4). This brand also

stimulated the development of the secondary industry.

Currently, the Industrial City brand faces serious challenges. Severe environmental pollution presents an increasingly problematic living environment for local residents and challenges Jingmen's attractiveness to prospective city inhabitants (interviewee 1). When it comes to competition with neighbouring cities, the Industrial City brand has become unattractive and lacks power as it represents an image of environmental pollution and bad air quality. However, at the same time, the economic data shows that Jingmen still relies heavily on the secondary industry (interviewee 6). Nonetheless, Jingmen increasingly avoids branding itself as 'Industrial City'.

These reasons push the city of Jingmen to explore new ways of generating deep sustainable industrial transformation. The solution that the Jingmen government has chosen so far is to let the heavy industry survive but downplay the importance of the industrial sector in its external communication while promoting new aviation technology and sustainable agriculture as key economic activities. In the next sections, we will analyse the creation and implementation of these two city brands.

### 5.1. Stakeholder involvement in China's Agricultural Valley (CAV) brand

#### 5.1.1. General project introduction

China's Agricultural Valley (CAV) brand was officially kicked off in 2012 with the Jingmen municipal government as the key driver. It aims to stimulate the development towards a modern agricultural industry in the Jingmen area. China's Agricultural Valley project initially focused on the Qujialing and Pengdun areas (see Fig. 4). The brand concept initially focused on the Qujialing farming culture, the rich and diverse agricultural resources in Jingmen. Table 2 shows more detailed information about project progress.

#### 5.1.2. Stakeholder identification in CAV

The principal stakeholders, their roles and resources are shown in Table 3.

#### 5.1.3. Stakeholder analysis in CAV brand creation and implementation

Fig. 5 (a) and (b) show the interactions between different stakeholders during the creation and implementation phases of CAV city branding.

**5.1.3.1. Interactions between stakeholders during the CAV creation phase.** The concept of "China's Agricultural Valley (CAV)" originated in a master plan made by two professors at Huazhong University of Science and Technology at the end of 2008 (PGOJM, 2017). The brand was originally designed specifically for Jingmen's Qujialing area, Jingmen (PGOJM, 2017). In 2011, the secretary of the Hubei Provincial Party Committee paid specific attention to the CAV brand after reading the publication 'Boiled Agricultural Valley' in the Hebei Daily. The secretary of the Jingmen Municipal Party Committee subsequently conducted research into the Qujialing Management Area in 2011 and gave more detailed instructions which focused on the construction of the CAV. Consequently, Jingmen government agencies such as the Social Science Association, the Jingmen Development and Reform Commission, the Agriculture Bureau, the Tourism Bureau, and the CSBPP in Jingmen conducted a special investigation to study Qujialing and the construction of the CAV brand. Scholars from the Municipal Social Science Association, and experts from local media organisations put forward suggestions on how to turn the CAV concept into a city brand. The Qujialing Management District Government was subsequently selected by the Hubei Provincial Government as a pilot area for the development of an agricultural demonstration zone in 2011. In 2012, the Hubei Provincial Government decided that the 'China's Agricultural Valley' brand would be used as a provincial strategy, and would be implemented in Jingmen first.

<sup>3</sup>Qujialing is the core implementation area of China's Agricultural Valley in Jingmen, as Fig. 4 shown.

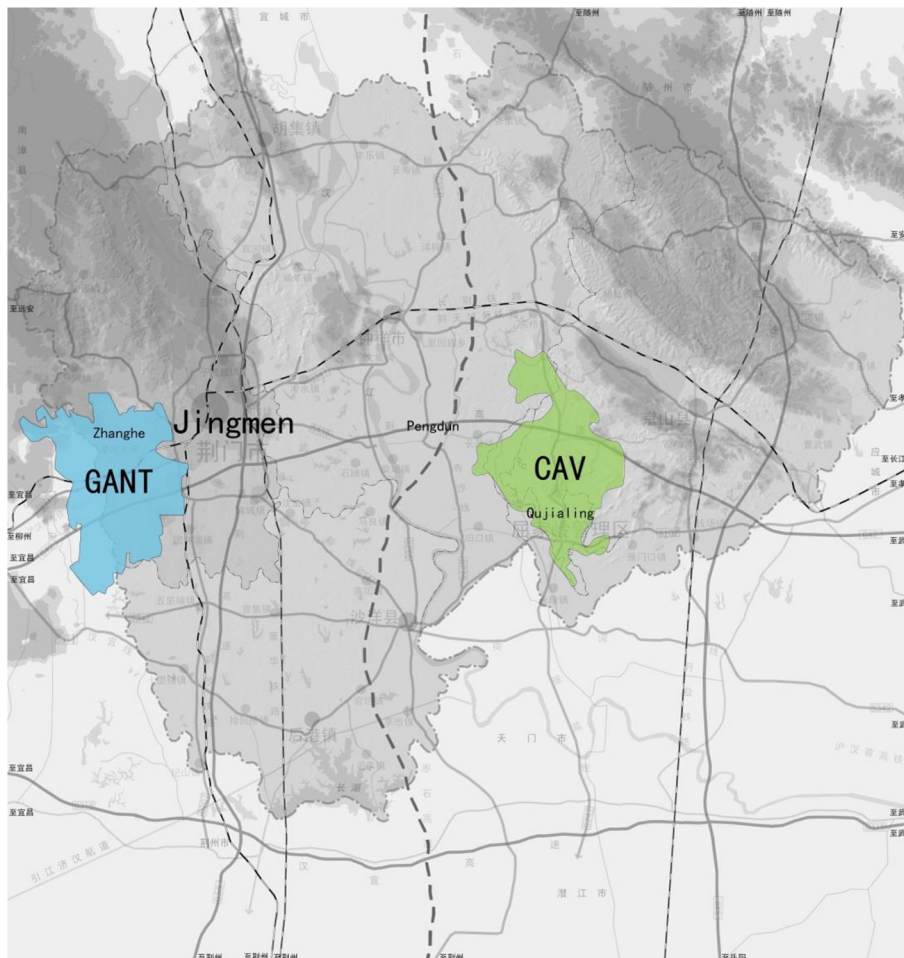


Fig. 4. Core areas of China's Agricultural Valley (CAV) and General Aviation New Town (GANT) projects in Jingmen City: Qujialing and Zhanghe (Source: Jingmen Urban Master Plan).

**5.1.3.2. Interactions between stakeholders during the CAV implementation phase.** The Jingmen Municipal Government further developed the goals of the strategy underlying the CAV brand and promoted its implementation. China Agricultural Valley Construction Leading Group of Jingmen was set up in 2012 as project organisation and charged with the management of the CAV project with Jingmen's mayor in charge. It operated directly under the Jingmen Municipal Government. China Agricultural Valley Office was a coordinating organisation that was set up to help direct the efforts of the Jingmen Municipal Government and its other bureaus. Numerous other governmental organisations execute and participate in projects under the CAV brand. For example, the Jingmen Tourism Bureau publishes ecological tourism information on Jingmen's official website and organises tourism activities, such as the CAV-Shayang Ecological Agriculture Experience. CSBPP organises annual cultural and sports activities, such as "Farmhouse activities" (interviewee 3). In 2014, Jingmen's Development and Reform Commission published the *Master Plan of China's Agricultural Valley* and in 2017 the Municipal Party Committee Office released the *China Agricultural Valley 2025 Construction Plan*.

The general media organisation and tourism agencies in Jingmen are the main promotion agencies of the CAV brand. The Daily Media Group publishes the information on CAV via media channels, such as WeChat and newspapers (interviewee 11; 12). Tourism agencies publish farming tourism information to attract outside visitors (interviewee 10).

In 2012, the Hubei Agricultural Valley Industrial Group Co., Ltd.

was established as a key part of the city's CAV branding strategy. Its equity is entirely held by the Municipal State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. Its goals are to promote the development of CAV projects and develop modern agricultural practices (interviewee 13). Jingmen Agricultural Valley Investment Co., Ltd. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hubei Agricultural Valley Group and specially established to promote the rapid development of the Hubei Agricultural Valley Industrial Group in 2015 (interviewee 14). The two companies are public enterprises that cover financial gaps incurred by the development of CAV through asset management, project investment and other economic activities related to sustainable agriculture. The Pengdun Group is a large private company which participates in the implementation of projects under the CAV brand which have a clear focus on modern agriculture (interviewee 14).

The CAV Research Institute of the Hubei Academy of Social Sciences (HAOSS) was formally established by the Jingmen Municipal Government and HAOSS in 2012. It is the first policy research institution to specialise in the development of the CAV. Jingchu University of Technology applies for research grants and expresses its opinions on the development of the CAV every year. Scholars from the Jingmen Social Science Federation and Jingchu University of Technology advise on branding and promotion to the municipal and provincial governments through expert panels. However, their suggestions are not necessarily adopted (interviewee 15). The Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences invited internal and external experts to compile the "*China Agricultural Valley 2025 Construction Plan (2016-2025)*".

The Jingmen Urban Construction Investment Holding Group Co.,



**Table 2**  
Project progress in China's Agricultural Valley (CAV) 2008–2016.

	National	Provincial government	Municipal government
2008	–	The concept of “China's Agricultural Valley (CAV)” originated from a master plan for the Qujialing area, Jingmen. Made by two professors at Huazhong University of Science and Technology at the end of 2008.	–
2011	–	On July 18, 2011, the secretary of the Hubei Provincial Party Committee, gave important instructions on the publication of ‘Boiled Agricultural Valley’ in the Hubei Daily.	On July 2011, the secretary and mayor of Jingmen Municipal Government conducted research in the Qujialing Management Area in 2011 and then gave more instructions on CAV. In 2011, the Social Science Association, Jingmen's Development and Reform Commission, the Agriculture Bureau, the Tourism Bureau, and the CSBPP conducted a special investigation of Qujialing into the terms of CAV brand construction. The experts and scholars from the Municipal Social Science Association, and local media organisations put forward suggestions on the development of CAV. On September 13, 2011, Jingmen Municipal Party Committee and Jingmen Municipal Government issued a notice on the establishment of the “China's Agricultural Valley” construction work leading group.
2012	–	In 2012, the Hubei Provincial Government confirmed the construction of China's Agricultural Valley as a provincial strategy, and it would be implemented in Jingmen. In 2012, the Hubei Agricultural Valley Industrial Group Co., Ltd. was set up to handle CAV strategy development.	–
2014	–	–	In 2014, the Jingmen Development and Reform Commission released the <i>Agricultural Valley Core Plan</i> . In October 2014, the Agricultural Valley Forum was established in the Qujialing Management Area.
2015	–	Jingmen Agricultural Valley Investment Co., Ltd. was set up in 2015.	August 7, Jingmen Municipal Government announces the cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences. August 8, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences participates in compiling the <i>China Agricultural Valley 2025 Construction Plan</i> .
2016	–	–	Jingmen Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government issue “Opinions on Implementing the Strategy of China's Agricultural Valley”.
2018	–	–	Jingmen held the 10th China Agriculture Valley-Jingmen Rape Flower Tourism Festival and the 2nd China Agricultural Valley-Jingmen (Zhongxiang) Lagerstroemia Flower Culture Tourism Festival

Ltd. (CIHG), Transport Construction & Investment Co., Ltd. (TCI), and the Transport Bureau (TB2) are the main road infrastructure and transport providers in Jingmen. They are also in charge of the infrastructure and transport construction projects and policies that have been started under the CAV brand, such as rural transportation, and farmland water conservancy projects.

Even though some residents participate in activities under the CAV brand, their participation is limited and communication about CAV is predominantly one-way; the government claims the brand, the residents receive brand information and participate in brand related activities (interviewee 16). The local farmers in the CAV area are important stakeholders, however, they only indirectly participate in CAV branding related projects. For example, the farmers sell their agricultural products to the large trading enterprises. Migrant workers participate in industrial farming work (interviewee 14). However, the farmers' participation has not been particularly massive, nor very passionate (interviewee 6).

## 5.2. Stakeholder involvement in the General Aviation New town (GANT) brand

### 5.2.1. General project introduction

In 2014, the Aviation Industry Corporation of China, Ltd. (AVIC) and the Jingmen Municipal Government reached an agreement on the construction of the Jingmen General Aviation New Town (GANT). The Jingmen Municipal Government initiated this project to stimulate local economic activity and create a new city strategy for urban transformation. General Aviation New Town is aimed at four industries: the development of navigation research and manufacturing, navigation operation and maintenance, emerging navigation services, and navigation training. More detailed information about GANT project progress can be found in Table 4.

### 5.2.2. Stakeholder identification in General Aviation New Town

The principal stakeholders, their roles and resources in GANT are shown in Table 5.

### 5.2.3. Stakeholder analysis in GANT brand creation and implementation

Fig. 6 (a) and (b) show the interactions between different stakeholders during the creation and implementation phases of GANT city branding.

#### 5.2.3.1. The interactions between the stakeholders during the GANT creation phase.

The origin of the GANT brand can be traced back to Jingmen's industrial development in the period of the Third Front Movement, as some aviation navigation manufacturing and operation facilities were located in the Jingmen area. In 2009, the State Council released a series of low-altitude flight policies to develop the general aviation industry in China. These policies provided the policy environment that enabled provincial and local government officials the opportunity to develop the aviation industry. In 2010, the Development and Reform Commission of the Hubei provincial government approved the “Jingmen Aviation Industrial Park Development Plan”. In doing so, the Hubei Province supported Jingmen in its development of a new city district for the general aviation industry. In August 2014, the Jingmen AVIC Aviation Town Project was signed by Aviation Industry Corporation of China, Ltd. (AVIC) and the Jingmen Municipal Government. The two sides agreed to build the Jingmen General Aviation New Town, a comprehensive demonstration base for general aviation industry development. In 2016, the Office of the State Council published “the introduction of the guidance of on promoting the development of the navigation industry” (SC, 2016), which strengthened the policy context for promoting the national aviation industry via GANT. Above all, GANT as a city brand was built based on the macro policy support from the national, provincial and municipal level governments.

**Table 3**  
Stakeholders identification in CAV.

No.	Type of stakeholders	Departments	Roles	Resources
1	Governmental organisations	<p>The secretary in the Hubei Provincial Government and the mayor in the Jingmen Municipal Government</p> <p><b>Government at other levels:</b> Hubei Provincial Government (PG) Jingmen Municipal Government (MG) Qujialing Management District Government (QMDG) <b>Departments or agencies inside Jingmen:</b> Jingmen Municipal Party Committee and Propaganda Department (MPCPD) Jingmen Municipal Committee of Rural Office (MCORO) Agricultural Bureau of Jingmen (AB) Tourism Bureau (TBH) Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication (CSBPP)</p>	<p>Approve the creation of CAV</p> <p>Push and coordinate CAV projects at the provincial level</p> <p>Implement various brand activities relevant to their tier of government</p> <p>Participate in city brand implementation</p> <p>Carry out city branding activities</p> <p>Organise cultural and sports activities within the CAV brand theme</p>	<p>Opinion leaders</p> <p>Policy supply and administration power</p>
2	Promotion agencies	Daily Media Group	Publish information about CAV projects	Media channels
3	Enterprises	Tourism agencies Agriculture Valley Group Hubei Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation Pengdun Group Jingmen Baigufeng Technology Co., Ltd. Jingmen Social Federation Jingchu University of Technology Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science Wuhan University of Technology Huazhong Agricultural University Jingmen Urban Construction Investment Holding Group Co., Ltd. (CHG)	<p>Publish tourism information in alignment with the CAV city brand</p> <p>Cooperate with investment companies to promote the agriculture industry and to serve project under the CAV city brand;</p> <p>Develop and cultivate modern agricultural practices</p> <p>Participate and cooperate in the realisation of projects under the CAV city brand</p> <p>Provide suggestions on CAV city brand creation and promotion to the governments;</p> <p>Participate in city branding activities;</p> <p>Participate in the formulation and compilation of the agricultural plans underlying the CAV city brand</p> <p>Provide the farming infrastructure and transport in Jingmen and Qujialing Management Area</p>	<p>Financial resources;</p> <p>Project investment</p> <p>Knowledge support</p> <p>Investment &amp; financing;</p> <p>Construction and operation</p>
4	Academic organisations and schools	Jingmen Transport Construction & Investment Co., Ltd. (TCC) Jingmen Transport Bureau (TB2) and District Transport Bureau	Provide the farming infrastructure and transport in Jingmen and Qujialing Management Area	
5	Infrastructure and transport providers	Farmers in the (CAV) Qujialing Management District Residents in Jingmen City	Sell food and agricultural products to enterprises (farmers) Participate in industrial farming (Migrant workers) Participate in CAV city branding activities and provide feedback and opinions about the brand	Agricultural product; Labor; Views

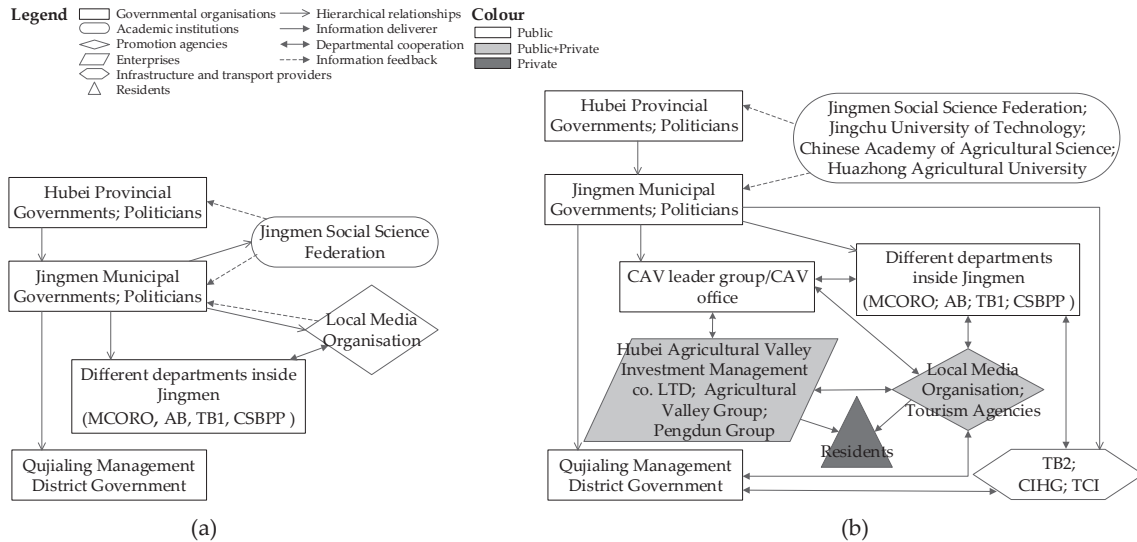


Fig. 5. Interactions between different stakeholders (CAV): (a) brand creation; (b) brand implementation;

5.2.3.2. *The interactions between stakeholders during the GANT implementation phase.* In 2013, the Hubei Provincial Government approved the establishment of the Jingmen Zhanghe New District Management Committee (Zhanghe Xinqu Guanweihui). Zhanghe NDMC represents the district in which General Aviation New Town is situated, as shown in Fig. 4. It is the main management department related to the branding of the General Aviation New Town project. The Leading Group of General Aviation Industry was established in 2017 and became the key department for coordinating the GANT related projects with other local organisational departments. Since 2015, the Jingmen Municipal People's Government, the Hubei provincial Tourism Development Committee, the Hubei Provincial Sports Bureau and AVIC General Aircraft Co., Ltd. began to organise annual Jingmen AVIC Flight Conferences (interviewee 9). It is the biggest promotional activity to support the GANT brand. The conference attracts many visitors every year. In 2017, AVIC Town, Zhanghe new district was selected as a pilot

project for sports and leisure towns by the State Sports General Administration. That denomination also pushed the development of GANT brand forward.

Local travel agencies publish travel information about GANT on their websites to attract outside visitors. The Daily Media Group also publishes news reports to promote GANT.

China Aviation Industry General Aircraft Co., Ltd. is a state-owned enterprise with experience in developing the general aviation industry. It was charged with providing technology and expertise to support the GANT projects in Jingmen. In 2017, the Hubei AVIC General Airport Management Company was launched as a flight service operation and management business at Zhanghe Airport. These public enterprises are the key stakeholders in the projects which aim to develop the GANT city brand. Some private tourism companies provide a platform and work with the government to promote the tourism industry.

During the 13th five year plan, Jingchu University of Technology

Table 4  
Project progress in General Aviation New Town (GANT) 2009–2018.

	National government	Provincial government	Municipal government
2009	In 2009, the State Council and the Central Military Commission jointly issued the <i>Opinions on Deepening China's Low-altitude Airspace Management Reform</i> .	–	–
2012	–	The master plan for the construction of Zhanghe New District was approved by the Hubei Provincial Government in August 2012.	–
2013	The Civil Aviation Administration of China issued the <i>General Aviation Flight Approval and Management Regulations</i> in November 2013.	The Zhanghe New District Management Committee was approved by the Hubei Provincial Government in February 2013.	–
2014	–	–	In August 2014, Jingmen AVIC Aviation Town Project was signed in Beijing.
2015	–	–	Since 2015, a Jingmen AVIC Flight Conference is held every year.
2016	On May 13, the State Council released the <i>Guidance on Promoting the Development of the General Aviation Industry</i> .	–	–
2017	–	–	In 2017, AVIC town, Zhanghe new district was selected as the site for pilot projects for sports and leisure towns by the State Sports General Administration. Although not directly in line with aviation activities, it was seen as strengthening the profile of the area.
2018	–	In January 2018, the Hubei Provincial Government Work Report proposed to support development of the general aviation industry.	–

**Table 5**  
Stakeholder identification in GANT.

No.	Type of stakeholders	Departments	Roles	Resources
1	Governmental organisations	<p>The main leaders in Jingmen's Municipal Government <b>Government at other levels:</b> Jingmen Municipal Government (MG); Jingmen Zhanghe District Management Committee (ZDMC); General Aviation Industry Demonstration Zone Office (GAIDZO)</p> <p><b>Departments or agencies inside Jingmen:</b> Jingmen Municipal Party Committee and Propaganda Department (MPCPD); Jingmen Development and Reform Commission (DRC); Tourism Bureau (TB); Planning Bureau (PB); Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication (CSBPP) Daily media group Tourism agencies Aviation Industry Corporation of China, Ltd.; China Aviation Industry General Aircraft Co., Ltd. Hubei Longhao Flight Training Co., Ltd.; Travel agencies Jingmen Social Science Federation; Jingchu University of Technology; Chinese Aviation Society Jingmen Urban Construction Investment Holding Group Co., Ltd. (CIHG); Zhanghe New district Zhangfu Investment Development Co., Ltd.; Investment Development Co., Ltd.; AVIC Jingmen Development Co., Ltd.; China Special Aircraft Research Institute; Jingmen Traffic Construction Investment Co., Ltd.; Hubei Zhonghang General Airport Management Co., Ltd. Local residents</p>	<p>Approve brand creation and push brand implementation Implement the projects and branding activities in different government levels</p> <p>Execute branding activities; Coordinate interests of different departments; Organise activities each year, such as AVIC Flight Conference</p>	<p>Opinion leaders Policy supply and administration power</p>
2	Promotion agencies		<p>Publish information about GANT projects</p>	<p>Media channels</p>
3	Enterprises		<p>Publish tourism information about GANT and organise the day trip Provide technical support and relevant expertise for local authorities Participate in GANT project</p>	<p>Financial and technology resources</p>
4	Academic organisations and Schools		<p>Provide suggestions on city branding to the government; Provide professional talents to the general aviation industry</p>	<p>Knowledge support</p>
5	Infrastructure and transport providers		<p>Construct Zhanghe New district infrastructure and Zhanghe airport; Invest and finance of infrastructure construction in the Zhanghe New district.</p>	<p>Financial and technology resources</p>
6	Residents		<p>Participate in GANT city branding activities and provide feedback and opinions about the brand</p>	<p>Views</p>

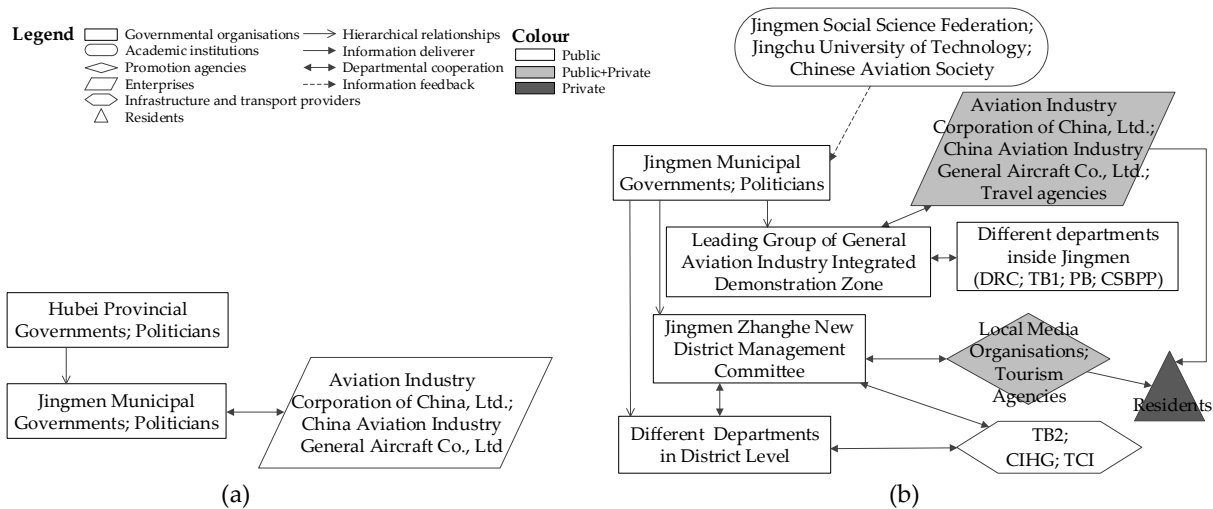


Fig. 6. Interactions between different stakeholders (GANT): (a) brand creation; (b) brand implementation;

established the School of Aviation and created graduation majors for its students including aircraft manufacturing engineering, avionics, electrical technology, and precision molding technology for aviation materials (JUT, 2016). In addition, the Jingmen Municipal Government cooperates with the Chinese Aviation Society in support of talent and technology development in the general aviation industry.

Many infrastructure and transport providers participate in the infrastructure and real estate projects which are all conducted under the GANT brand, especially in key projects, such as the reconstruction and expansion of Zhanghe airport and the roads connecting the new town with the city of Jingmen. The Hubei Jingmen Urban Construction Group is a state-owned company responsible for the construction of infrastructure in the Zhanghe New district. Zhanghe New District Zhangfu Investment Development Co., Ltd., was established in 2012, and is a state-owned enterprise. It is the main financial department for urban infrastructure construction and investment in the Zhanghe New District (ZNDZID, 2019). The China Special Aircraft Research Institute contributes to the Jingmen Zhanghe general airport reconstruction and expansion project. Hubei Zhonghang General Airport Management Co., Ltd. leads the construction of the Jingmen general airport, water terminal, temporary take-off and landing point construction project.

Residents only participate in certain projects and activities, such as AVIC Flight Conference, via their role as visitors. In other words, the role of residents in GANT brand implementation is minimal.

### 5.3. Implementation barriers in Jingmen's city branding

We use Table 6 to list the main barriers in Jingmen's city branding implementation process. Weakly represented roles among stakeholders and missing resources in industry, markets, and policy supply are shown which result in a rather unsuccessful implementation of the two brands. Both have so far failed to attract noticeable attention from the targeted groups (i.e. investors, private companies, local farmers, and prospective residents).

Even though Jingmen still uses CAV as a city brand, political and policy attention for this brand fell dramatically after 2013 because of a change in the secretariat of the Jingmen municipal government (interviewees 6; 17). Current politicians and departments are more interested in the GANT city brand and its associated projects. A fleeting political attention to branding policies in general and the lack of political attention to brand implementation can be identified in Jingmen's city branding activities.

In these two cases, the responsibility for city branding and promotion of the city was placed primarily in the hands of the local media and promotion departments, which dutifully organised some public events.

However, after some initial success visitor numbers could not be maintained and declined dramatically once the activities were organised (interviewees 2; 3; 18). Obviously, politicians and other departments withdrew their attention and participation during the implementation phase. Other types of city branding policy instruments were not developed and implemented. At the same time, based on our observations, we conclude that the level of cooperation and coordination between the various public departments and locally engaged actors seems insufficient. Residential participation and interest in the brands has been low and passive. The participation of private enterprises in the implementation of city branding is weak. Thus, two important stakeholder groups remain uncommitted to the city branding efforts. According to the interviews, many projects were not realised, sometimes even failing to kick off for lack of interest among companies and insufficient policy provided by the local government was insufficient (interviewees 8; 7). The two cases show no functioning industrial system or market-oriented operation which would benefit from the brands and so far, none have been established. In terms of infrastructure, there are still many difficulties in rural transportation, farmland water conservancy, and communication. For example, in terms of transportation, Jingmen City is the only prefecture-level city in the Hubei province that does not (yet) have a high-speed railway station. For these two cases, local government departments still need the technology input and expert advice. However, only a few suggestions from experts were adopted (interviewee 15). Little expertise and technology has been developed which could be translated into brand products.

## 6. Discussion and findings

The two economic city brands in Jingmen we investigated represent different choices with regard to the strategy towards industrial transformation. The CAV brand, leaning primary on the agricultural sector (potentially) focused on the involvement of a large share of the workforce, but of low added economic value to the Jingmen economy. The other GANT brand aims to trigger the development of an advanced, more sustainable part of the services side of the secondary sector (aviation navigation industry). However in doing so and focusing on aviation technology, the brand focuses on a very tiny percentage of the total Jingmen workforce, however one which could generate a potential high economic value. Still, we found the actual branding creation and implementation processes in both cases to show a very similar pattern.

Jingmen's local politicians and senior civil servants seem quite focused and successful in the identification and launching of potential brands which could be used to transform Jingmen. In both cases, they

**Table 6**  
The weak roles, missing resources and identified barriers in two branding projects.

	CAV	GANT	Barriers
<b>Roles</b>			
Approver or Pusher (governments; politicians)	Lack of guidance in attracting investment. Unable to build a vigorous market system for local produce.	Insufficient planning and coordination of policy implementation.	Lack of political support and interest in implementation
Coordinator	Limited encouragement of public participation from the government. Dissolution of efforts as CAV office was merged into Jingmen's Agricultural Bureau. No specific departmental responsibility and authority for CAV project implementation.	Focus more on more management than implementation. Imperfect communication and coordination.	Lack of policy interest; Problematic organisation and coordination
Executor	Local government departments simply follow higher level government guidelines.	Local government departments simply follow higher level government guidelines.	Passive participation
Information deliverers	Ineffective brand communication via traditional media channels, like newspapers and TV stations.	Only media departments are involved in publication and communication.	Limited brand publication and promotion
Advisor	Policy suggestions are not adopted.	Few suggestions for GANT creation and implementation.	Weak influence of expert advice
Participants	Insufficient participation from small private enterprises. Few large and strong enterprises support the brand.	Leading (state-owned) companies insufficiently involved. Insufficient participation from private enterprises.	Low private participation
Resources	Farmers' passion are not mobilized. Farmers' participation is relatively small. Lack of policy support from higher level governments. Insufficient policy supply results in failure during the negotiations.	Low general public participation. Lack of policy support from national government level. China lacks independent navigation regulations and standards.	Lack of political interest and support for implementation
Market	The CAV brand hasn't resulted in a viable economic market in support of providers of local produce.	Insufficient policy supply results in failure during the negotiations. Immature market for general aviation. Overall weak industry.	Lack of viable market (perspective)
Media channels	Only use of simple and traditional brand promotion channels.	High operation costs of navigation and limited low-altitude airspace inhibit the realisation of a vital market. Only use of simple and traditional brand promotion channels.	Simple and traditional promotion channels
Finance Infrastructure	Low efficiency of funds Difficulties in rural transportation, farmland water conservancy, and communications, e.g. Highways need reconstruction to connect Jingmen and the agricultural industrial plants.	Higher operating costs Insufficient infrastructure; lack of a general airport in the Hubei Province.	Lack of finance Lack of involvement in policy implementation
Technology, knowledge, and talent	Technology development was not transferred into agricultural products. Insufficient technology support for the agricultural sector. Lack of in-depth cooperation with non-public actors.	Lack of professional aviation talents	Lack of professional input

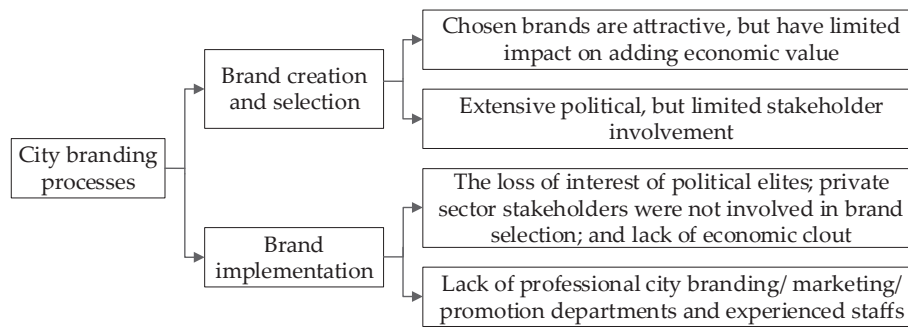


Fig. 7. Key findings in Jingmen's city branding processes.

show remarkable skill in lining up especially provincial and national governments during the brand construction phase. However, the cases at the same time reveal that after these brands are created, politicians 'leave' the implementation to other players such as local government agencies which neither have the powers and authority, nor perhaps the right skills to actually realise the original, ambitious policy goals underlying the city brands. Fig. 7 shows the key findings in Jingmen's city branding processes.

### 6.1. City branding selection and creation

A successful city brand should be aligned with national and provincial plans and policies, and based on historical and cultural traditions (Han et al., 2018). The brand ideally would take into account the current demographic and economic context, reflect future ambitions of the municipal government, set challenging yet realistic goals, be attractive and distinct from its neighbours, adopt and apply the brand for the long term through implementation across the various departments within the municipal government and connect it with other policy measures. If these conditions are fulfilled, a brand is (far more) likely to generate deep sustainable transformation. In Jingmen's cases, local government promotes new aviation technology development and sustainable agriculture, which comes across as more attractive and more sustainable. However, the economic city brands that were studied in this research did not add much economic value and employment. Jingmen allows its heavy industry, with all of the environmental problems that come associated with it, to survive and simply downplays the importance of the industrial city in its external communication. Economically speaking the aviation industry and sustainable agriculture play a far smaller role in Jingmen's local economy than the secondary sector. The manufacturing and petrochemical industries remain unaffected by the new city branding efforts. Although this is understandable, however, brand selection and creation do not go very far in achieving industrial transformation. We would have to conclude that the current state of affairs in Jingmen is not the most productive one in the long run. Actually, city labels, such as 'eco city' and 'low carbon city', are widely chosen by China's local governments in their planning contexts since these attractive labels are related to national urban development programs and influenced by national policies (de Jong et al., 2016; Lu & de Jong, 2019). These reflect cities' development visions and economic restructuring ambitions. However, in many occasions, the selected new economic brands do not meet the actual requirements of urban industrial transformation. Moreover, the new city brands barely distinguish one city from the other in terms of brands. This situation also represents a common phenomenon in many Chinese cities.

According to Baker (2012), a brand that has been developed with broad stakeholder support is more easily accepted and more quickly recognised by those at the receiving end. The brand should be widely embraced by a critical mass of stakeholders (Henninger, Foster, Alevizou, & Frohlich, 2016) within and outside the local government, and enjoy strong support from the political and administrative leaders

and city officials. The city branding organisation should integrate the city's stakeholders, such as local government departments, public and private enterprises and residents into participation in city branding management (Zavattaro & Daspit, 2016). However, in contrast to this, we found that the realisation of city branding policies in Jingmen was primarily the result of opaque and deeply political processes in which many, especially private stakeholders are not or only quite passively involved. The cases show how political leaders skillfully identify and select seemingly attractive brands such as ecological agriculture or aviation new town to realise the industrial transformation goals for Jingmen. The branding creation can be successfully built with strong support from political leaders.

### 6.2. City branding implementation

In Jingmen's cases, only the attention of influential local politicians pushes the implementation of a brand. Effectiveness of a brand seriously is tightly related to the span of political attention. According to Kavaratzis' advice (2012), city brands should be recognised and accepted by many different stakeholders and this requires their involvement throughout the entire city branding process (Baker, 2012; Kavaratzis, 2012). However, Jingmen's governmental organisations at different levels, state-owned enterprises, public media organisations are the key stakeholders in both instances of city branding that we studied. Small private companies, promotion agencies, academic associations, and residents participate in city branding to a much lesser extent, and predominantly play a role as 'participant' or 'recipient' in the implementation phase. Their absence in the creation stage results in serious consequences during the implementation phase, while the absence of many essential public sector players (especially high level politicians and civil servants) similarly affects implementation negatively. The cases seem to provide evidence that branding processes in Chinese cities lack a coherent and integrated city branding approach.

Social media activities (Cleave, Arku, Sadler, & Kyeremeh, 2017; Zhou & Wang, 2014) and mega events (Chen, 2015; Marin-Aguilar & Vila-López, 2014) are broadly adopted by policy makers to brand cities for inside as well as in outside communication. For the implementation of Jingmen's city brands, the local government has placed the responsibility primarily in the hands of its media and promotion departments. These agencies utilise general media and the organisation of specific events as key instruments to establish a positive city image. In Jingmen, however, the limited number of activities and their small scale result in limited long-term effects of city promotion activities. In China, only the mega cities are in a position to organise mega events, such as Olympic Games or the G20 summits. And even then, it could be questioned whether these events are followed up by sufficient other activities and projects to really identify long-lasting effects in terms of branding. In contrast, the activities which are organised by small and medium-sized cities tend to be small in scale and weak in effect since they do not have sufficient resources at their disposal to organise mega events. Small cities can only focus on less glamorous activities generating far less

publicity. Furthermore, we find that public information campaigns and advertising are quite passive policy instruments and therefore in themselves insufficiently powerful to singlehandedly implement brands without broader participation. The specific actions which were undertaken to implement the two brands in Jingmen are less impressive than the slogans. Potential branding policy instruments are simply not developed or applied.

The creation and implementation of city branding activities are processes which are meant to unite and align the various city departments and stakeholders in brand management, to have all the noses point in the same direction (Zavattaro & Daspit, 2016). Consistent and clear city brand recognition is the basis for successful city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004), which can only be achieved through the establishment of an appropriate city marketing organisational structure. Many international cities set up professional city branding organisations to focus on the creation and implementation of city branding projects; they focus on a specific tourist market and seek to attract growing numbers of visitors (Boisen et al., 2018; Pike, 2012). In Jingmen, the work of city branding is managed by the Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Departments (MPCPD). City branding efforts are primarily implemented by the daily newspaper media and other propaganda departments. Other departments are barely involved in the field of city image enhancement and city brand building. There is a lack of professional staff specialised in city branding and promotion (Fan, 2014). Lack of professional institutions and experienced staff obviously influences the effectiveness of implementation.

## 7. Conclusion

This article has presented a case study research to analyse economic city brands' creation and implementation processes of a medium-sized city in China. We mapped a stakeholder oriented typology of city branding practices in Chinese medium-sized cities.

City branding in China clearly is embedded within a multi-level governance context. Politicians and provincial, municipal and district governments and departments are all involved in branding activities in different stages. The politicians are heavily involved in the brand creation phase and its final approval. They subsequently mobilise public resources and authorities at the local level to push for brand implementation. They engage in specific city branding activities and rely on specific public enterprises to finance and manage projects which are developed as part of a city brand. Different levels of administrative governments and different departments are the implementers of brand projects. They are the specific executive institutions. The special work office or leading group for each brand project coordinates the various interests and ensures cooperation from different departments. The media organisations such as promotion agencies and propaganda organisations are the information deliverers of city branding implementation projects. Academic associations and organisations are the advisors for brand selection and implementation. In most occasions, state-owned enterprises, private companies, residents and infrastructure and transport providers are mainly receivers of city branding projects.

The mechanisms underlying branding creation and implementation in Jingmen that we encountered could serve as a basis to increase our understanding of city branding processes in medium-sized Chinese cities. The creation phase of city branding in medium-sized cities in China is characterised by politically sophisticated processes during which local politicians compete for the acknowledgement and alignment of potential brands for their local city within the various layers of the Chinese government. However, the implementation of the brands is an altogether different story. City brands are more easily created than implemented. Implementation is generally weak because key private sector stakeholders are not involved during the brand creation phase. However, citizens and private sector stakeholders are required for successful city branding implementation. Conversely, powerful

politicians and public organisations dominate city brand creation phase, but are hardly involved and seem hardly interested in the actual implementation phase. In other words, there remains a wide gulf between ambitious, politically inspired intentions during brand creation and a continuous and viable commitment of the majority of stakeholders during the implementation phase, which is needed to achieve industrial transformation. Long-term political and bureaucratic commitment to city branding implementation efforts after the brands are created also seem important for sustained and lasting success in city branding.

Chinese city branding practices present a different style than European or American or other Asian ones because of its unique governance culture, Chinese cities are exceptional in the sense that they do not use the universally acclaimed mechanism of broad stakeholder involvement in city branding, which is described in international literature. However, the research findings suggest that private stakeholders such as residents, farmers and private corporations should be encouraged to participate more fully in city branding creation and implementation to convey their opinions and interpretations and turn the city brand into something more than just a craftily politically engineered, temporary slogan. The case study findings provide evidence that seems to support the necessity of organising broad stakeholder involvement in place branding process (Baker, 2012; Kavaratzis, 2012). The broad stakeholder involvement also should be applied in China's city branding, which is a finding of great theoretical significance.

We are well aware that our conclusions are based on the analysis of two city branding policies within one city. However, Jingmen is representative of a large group of Chinese cities. China counts a great many medium-sized Chinese cities like Jingmen which boast high-level ambitions to use economic city brands to transform their urban economies and industrial structure into more sustainable directions. However, as becomes clear from our study, industrial transformation becomes very difficult for these cities. City officials face the daunting task of making this transition happen, with a dominant secondary sector that cannot easily be phased without incurring major economic damage, with major infrastructure issues and a lowly qualified labour force. Current institutional patterns favour politicisation of the branding creation phase, which lacks of engagement from private sector and citizen engagement. The image of city branding in medium-sized cities in China in terms of branding implementation in comparison with more visible and advanced city branding processes of larger megacities on the Eastern shore does not bode well. The outcome of our study is of importance since what actually takes place in Jingmen may reflect the result of industrial transformation patterns in many Chinese medium-sized cities. At the same time, we emphasise the need to investigate a greater number of medium-sized cities in future research to verify our findings. City branding is a potentially crucial tool for positive self-reinvention which could be enormously helpful to the majority of Chinese cities. Making this happen requires a major reconsideration of the prevalent institutional and organisational practices through which this is done.

## Author contributions

Wenting Ma is the main author of this contribution. Martin de Jong is Wenting's promotor and in charge of Jingmen's project; he helped structure the manuscript, edited the text and strengthened the narrative. Mark de Bruijne is Wenting's daily supervisor and in collaboration with Daan Schraven, he contributed to the text-editing and added his insights to the article. Martin de Jong holds the academic responsibility for the research program in which this paper is embedded.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. They conducted an



advisory study to Jingmen City about its sustainable urban transition. This article is built on the experience gained from and uses some of the data collected during the project.

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### Appendix A

Table 7

Interviewees in Jingmen in 2018 and 2019.

Interviewee no.	Departments (the location interview conducted)	Position	The interview topics
1	Jingmen Planning and Design Institute (PDI)	Vice Dean	The role of PDI in city branding implementation
2	Jingmen Planning and Design Institute (PDI)	Chief	Jingmen's city brands and characteristics
3	Jingmen Planning and Design Institute (PDI)	Officer	The state quo of Jingmen's city branding and promotion
4	Jingmen Planning Bureau (JPB)	Officer	The state quo of Jingmen's city branding and promotion
5	Jingmen Development and Reform Commission (JDRC)	Chief	GANT project implementation and promotion
6	Jingmen Municipal Committee of Rural Office (JMCORO)	Chief	CAV project implementation and promotion
7	Investment Bureau in AVIC New Town (JIB)	Chief	The industrial situation in GANT
8	Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication (CSBPP)	The Chief in Industrial Office	The industrial situation in GANT
9	Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication (CSBPP)	The Chief in Sport Office	AVIC conference and GANT construction
10	Jingmen Tourism Bureau (JTB)	Chief	City branding promotion and tourism information publication
11	The Daily Newspaper Department in Daily Media Group (DMG)	Editor A	City brand promotion and media channels in Jingmen
12	The Night Newspaper Department in Daily Media Group (DMG)	Editor B	City brand promotion and media channels in Jingmen
13	Hubei Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation (JMCORO)	Manager	CAV implementation and promotion
14	Hubei Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation (JMCORO)	Chief	CAV implementation and promotion
15	School of Media, Jingchu University of Technology (JUT)	Associate Professor	City branding communication of Jingmen
16	School of Management, Jingchu University of Technology (JUT)	Associate Professor	City branding choice and implementation
17		Citizen 1	The characteristics of Jingmen's city branding
18		Citizen 2	The characteristics of Jingmen's city branding
Meeting 1	Planning Meeting (JPB)	Officers of Jingmen Planning Bureau and Institutes	Feedback on the investigation results of Jingmen's city branding
Meeting 2	Jingmen Strategy Planning Conference 2049 (PDI)	Officers of Jingmen Planning Bureau and Institutes	Discussion on Jingmen development strategy in future
Workshop	Experts Workshop (PDI)	Experts and scholars from home and abroad	Jingmen's city branding and sustainable urban transformation

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