



'China's leading historical and cultural city': Branding Dali City through public–private partnerships in Bai architecture revitalization



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ABSTRACT

Competing with other Chinese cities for investment and tourism, various governmental bodies with jurisdiction in Dali City have begun to make use of local historical and cultural assets in order to brand the city. This paper aims to reveal how partnerships between the public and private sectors in heritage management have functioned as an approach to city branding, and how local people perceive and are influenced by these partnerships. Applying perspectives from the scholarly literature on city branding and public–private partnerships, this paper examines two cases in Dali City – Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center – to detail how local government and elite entrepreneurs have partnered in support of Bai architecture revitalization with tourism in mind. This paper also considers opinions from the local general public regarding these partnerships, and investigates the complex relationships among local government, elite entrepreneurs, and the public.

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1. Introduction

Dali City, located in Yunnan Province, Southwest China, was the capital of both the Nanzhao Kingdom (738–902) and the Dali Kingdom (937–1254), both of which connected ancient China to South and Southeast Asia. It is the home of the ethnic minority Bai, which constitutes approximately 68 per cent of the city's total population (C. Wang, 2013). As early as the New Stone Age, ancestors of the Bai and Yi ethnic groups, along with as many as 23 others, began residing in what is now Dali City, forming a city of remarkable diversity (Dali Municipal Government, 2011). The city has been designated as a 'National Scenic Area' and a 'National Nature Reserve' by the State Council, and was designated 'China's Excellent Touristic City' by the National Tourism Administration. The City was also listed as one of 'China's Ten Most Attractive Cities' by China Central Television, competing with nearly 100 other Chinese cities (Dali Municipal Government, 2011; Yang, 2014).

These honorary titles have been used, along with slogans¹ proposed by the municipal government, to market Dali City and propel the development of tourism in the city. Arguably, the title that has played the most significant role in attracting tourism is 'China's

leading historical and cultural city', which was awarded to Dali City by the State Council in 1982. The municipal government has made explicit efforts to live up to this title by maintaining the city's historical and cultural heritage. Namely, the Protection Regulation on Historical and Cultural Dali was enacted on July 1, 2007, laying the legal ground for local heritage preservation (Wu, 2010). Three years later, Dali City's Cultural Heritage Bureau was established to work specifically on heritage management (*ibid.*).

In Dali City, many Bai architecture revitalization projects are carried out on a public–private cooperative basis. This paper aims to reveal how such partnerships in heritage management have functioned to brand Dali City as a leading historical and cultural city in China, and how this branding is perceived by local people and influences their lives. The paper draws upon existing literature on city branding and public–private partnerships (PPPs), especially their applications in heritage management and city branding. Specifically examining the two cases of Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center, this paper details how local governments² and the private sector work in partnership, either in the typical form of

² 'Local governments' in this paper refers to the municipal government and the prefectural government together. In Dali City, some officials who work in the municipal government have positions in the prefectural government, which is said to facilitate decision flows between the two levels of government. These two levels of government often work together on affairs related to Dali City. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish decisions originally made at the municipal level from those made at the prefectural level. In such complex circumstances, 'local governments' is used with intended ambiguity.

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¹ Slogans include: "Dali, a place everyone must visit in his or her lifetime" and "Dali's beautiful scenery should be shared by people all over the world".

PPP or other forms, to support Bai architecture revitalization projects. Considering the voices and opinions of local people, this paper investigates the complex relationships among local governments, elite entrepreneurs, and the general public.

2. City branding

Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) contend that cities “have long felt a need to differentiate themselves from each other, to assert their individuality in pursuit of various economic, political or socio-psychological objectives” (p. 506). In the era of globalization, where cities compete for attention, influence, markets, investment, businesses, and visitors with growing intensity (Zhang & Zhao, 2009), city branding has become common practice (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Zenker, 2009). City branding refers to the process of applying product branding practices to cities, aiming at integrating and highlighting a city’s competitive advantages through persistent imaged identities, or brands (Kavaratzis, 2007; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Chinese cities began branding themselves in the 1980s, which has since yielded both positive and negative outcomes. In one instance, branding projects in Xuyi County brought market value to the city and facilitated the building up of a cross-boundary economic network (Luo, Wang, Zhang, & Hu, 2013). Conversely, branding Hong Kong as ‘Asia’s world city’ has in a way led to the loss of Hong Kong’s integral uniqueness by hybridizing the local culture with a generic globalism (Chu, 2011). Or, distinctively, branding Shanghai via the Expo can be seen as an exercise in regime branding (rather than city branding) that legitimizes the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (Dynon, 2011). However, while much research on city branding in China has focused on economic or political centers like Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong (e.g. Chu, 2011; Dynon, 2011; Lui, 2008; Zhang & Zhao, 2009), third-tier cities such as Dali City have received significantly less attention.

Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argue that city branding is more difficult than product branding and marketing, owing to the complex nature of cities. A city is simultaneously a place of residence, a place of work, a destination to visit, and a place of investment opportunity. A city’s brand, therefore, has to accommodate all stakeholders’ demands in order to strengthen the city’s overall competitiveness (*ibid.*). Researchers have come up with a variety of strategies for branding, including the following: associating a city’s identity with its history, demography, economy, politics, and policies (Zhang & Zhao, 2009); emphasizing relatedness to a national brand and inheriting the benefits of national image (Olins, 2004); forming positive images through the use of slogans or logos (Gammack & Donald, 2006); initiating prominent flagship projects that are globally visible (Yeoh, 2005); and making use of existing positive associations with particular locations, international events, organizations, prestigious forums, companies, and so on (Björner, 2013). All in all, a good city brand has to incorporate a city’s resource endowment (Luo et al., 2013) and distinctive characteristics (Zhang & Zhao, 2009).

Recently, researchers have increasingly begun to recognize the critical role of local people in city branding. It is argued that city branding has to take local people’s identity and core values into consideration (Ahn, Hyun, & Kim, 2015; Khirfan & Momani, 2013) and be accepted by local people (Lui, 2008; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). City branding that corresponds to local people’s identities appears authentic and fosters social sustainability (Greenop & Darchen, 2015). Positive local attitudes toward city branding strengthens the public’s sense of connection to the brand, which motivates individuals to advocate for the brand and perform other duties that uphold its image (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012). Given the importance of involving local people in the process of

city branding, this paper examines how local people perceive and are influenced by PPPs in city branding in Dali City, a third-tier city in China.

3. Public–private partnership

Webb and Pulle (2002) define public–private partnerships (PPPs) as partnerships “between the public sector and the private sector for the purposes of designing, planning, financing, constructing and/or operating projects which would be regarded traditionally as part of the public sector” (p. 1). The term was first applied to social public projects like schools, hospitals and prisons in the United Kingdom, Australia and United States, and its use was later expanded to other places and to a wide range of contexts (Adams, Young, & Wu, 2006; Engel, Fischer, & Galetovic, 2010; Ke, 2014). In a typical PPP arrangement, the private sector funds the construction of a project, maintains and operates it for a long period of time, after which it is transferred to the public sector – the government (Tieva & Junnonen, 2009). Since China’s economic reforms in 1978, PPP has become a popular modality of funding projects in China (Ke, 2014; Zhang, Gao, Feng, & Sun, 2014). PPP was applied in China first in industrial development; later, it was adopted as a strategy to finance infrastructure during China’s rapid urbanization process (M. Wang, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Wang (2004) describes three distinct types of PPP that predominate in China: outsourcing, concession, and divestiture. Outsourcing refers to partnerships where the public sector signs service contracts, management contracts, or turnkey contracts with private sector actors. Among Wang’s three types of PPP, outsourcing partnerships pose the smallest risk for the private sector. Concession refers to situations in which the private sector has to invest in projects, sharing risk with the public sector. Divestiture, the most risky type of partnership for the private sector, involves private sector ownership of projects that operate under the public sector’s supervision (*ibid.*). Rather than a true representation of public will, however, the public sector in China is often understood to consist of government officials who make decisions based on their own judgements or preference, while the private sector consists of private companies (Adams et al., 2006; Ke, 2014; Ke, Wang, & Chan, 2012). Within this understanding, PPP in China is in other words a government–private company nexus that the general public do not have access to.

As an alternative form of public funding, PPP is intended to benefit all partners in joint investments and long-term relationships. Partners can achieve their own objectives and at the same time produce synergies that could not be achieved through independent action alone (Brewer & Hayllar, 2005). In regards to society as a whole, PPP reduces the burden on taxpayers in the delivery of both capital and services by relying on private capital, expertise, and business practices (Adams et al., 2006). The provision of public goods via the private sector can have higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness when the public sector is hindered by bureaucratic, mechanistic, and politicized methods of operation (*ibid.*). In China, however, the outcomes of PPPs vary from case to case due to the lack of a legal framework for implementation, the lack of transparency and public participation, unclear risk allocations, weak supervision, inconsistency in policy, and disagreements between the central government and local governments (Adams et al., 2006; Ke, 2014).

In recent decades, many governments have used PPP for heritage management (Cheung & Chan, 2012; de Vries, 2007; Dubini, Leone, & Forti, 2012; Klimpke & Kammeier, 2006). Private sector engagement with the public sector in heritage management activities is governed by clear definitions of responsibility and allocation criteria for time and resources among partners (Dubini et al.,

2012). In Western cities, PPP has emerged as an effective approach to heritage management where historic authenticity and commercial activities co-exist harmoniously within heritage sites (de Vries, 2007). In China, however, PPP is not widely used in heritage management (du Cros, Bauer, Lo, & Rui, 2005).

In addition to its role in heritage management, PPP's potential for city branding has also been analyzed in scholarly literature: in Western cities, city branding-related PPP has been successful in facilitating business development (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Maheshwari, Lodorfos, & Vandewalle, 2014) and in helping cities navigate trends in profit-based urban transformation projects (van der Toorn Vrijthoff, 2006). To date, however, PPP in heritage management and city branding has yet to be examined in the Chinese context. This paper seeks to fill that gap through an empirical investigation of how heritage management PPPs in Dali City function in city branding and of how local people perceive and are influenced by these PPPs.

4. Methodology

This paper is based on fieldwork data that were collected from early May to late August 2014 in Dali City, China. In the early stages of my fieldwork, Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center frequently came up in interviews. Local people who introduced these two sites to me considered them to be iconic Bai houses that displayed the attractiveness of Bai architecture. Tourists who either had visited or had planned to visit these two sites also mentioned them during interviews as representative of Bai houses. Concluding that the sites were of importance, I proceeded to collect more data on Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center in order to explore their roles in the branding of Dali City and how those roles had been achieved through PPPs.

Three qualitative research methods were used, including participant observation, unstructured interviews with the general public and entrepreneurs involved in projects related to Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center, and semi-structured interviews with government officials. Participant observations in these two sites aimed to chart the sites' social and cultural contexts (Hoggart, Lees, & Davies, 2001). By visiting these two sites and their neighbourhoods three times, I was able to observe touristic activities in and around the sites and observe how local people's daily lives were influenced by these two projects. The unstructured interviews covered a wide range of topics, including interviewees' impressions of the city and of Bai architecture, as well as their understandings of the PPPs in Bai architecture revitalization. The questions in semi-structured interviews focused on three topics: the individuals involved in revitalizing certain Bai houses, the relationships among certain partners, and the dynamics of PPP in Bai architecture revitalization and city branding. My interviewees were selected on a nonprobability basis due to the cost and timeline of my research and the low importance of statistical reliability in the research (Lo, 2009). I used purposive sampling methods to acquire specific types of information; for example, I interviewed officials who worked specifically in heritage management to collect official information on Bai architecture revitalization and PPPs in related projects. I used convenience sampling to select local people and tourists in order to seek their impressions of Dali City and its Bai houses. I also used snowball sampling to contact further interviewees (Monk & Bedford, 2005).

87 people in total, including 10 local officials, were interviewed during the fieldwork process. I also reviewed relevant government documents and relevant news from the *Dali Daily*, a local official newspaper with a wide circulation in Dali City that represents the local governments' perspectives. All of the fieldwork data were analyzed through coding processes – I developed *a posteriori* codes,

following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) instructions on initial coding and focused coding, after which thematic codes were drawn out.

5. Bai architecture revitalization

The ancestors of the Bai people in Dali City learned construction skills from the Han people, which over time led to the creation of a distinct Bai architecture, often considered a representation of Dali City and the ethnic minority Bai because of its context-specific nature (Liu, 2000). Bai buildings are characterized by freestanding white walls, colorful paintings, and carved wooden doors and windows (Liu, 2010; Wang, 2014). The patterns of carved woodwork and the paintings on walls and ceilings are associated with positive meanings such as wealth and health. Bai dwellings constitute an important part of Bai people's lives, and building a quality house is a lifelong pursuit for many Bai people. As one construction worker (Bai, male, age 40)³ told me, "a Bai man works hard to save money so that he can build a good house for his family, which will make him self-fulfilled." Rich Bai people often build grand compounds with three or more courtyards. Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center, which this paper focuses on, are two classic examples of Bai houses built with complex layouts.

The municipal government is aware of the aesthetic, historical, cultural and economic values of Bai architecture. Departments such as the Cultural Heritage Bureau, the Institute of Cultural Relics, and the Institute of Non-Material Cultural Heritage Management share the duties of managing and renovating historic Bai houses.⁴ In 2004, the municipal government published a book, *Old Architecture in Dali (Dali Gu Jianzhu)*, which presented historic Bai houses through photos and texts with the purpose of marketing Dali City to attract tourists. The municipal government also disseminated a set of provisional Rules for Non-Historic Bai Folk Houses to regulate ordinary Bai houses and guide new construction. Realizing that local Bai people tended to build new houses with modern rather than Bai features, the government spent around USD 15 million in 2008 to restore visible features of Bai architecture to 3090 Bai houses, installing pitched roofs with grey tiles and white walls with colorful paintings, among other renovations (Tu, 2008; R. Zhao, 2010).

Various problems resulting from the inconsistency of government decisions arise during Bai architecture revitalization. One house owner (Bai, female, 35) complained that municipal officials asked her to remove solar panels from her roof because they violated the Bai architectural traditions, while allowing another Bai house two hundred meters away to keep solar panels on its roof. Preserving historic Bai houses built with wood and stone is more challenging for the municipal government than regulating non-historic ones. Wood for renovations has been rare since the enforcement of the Cangshan Mountain Protection Regulation in 2009, which strictly forbade logging on Cangshan Mountain, the only mountain in Dali City. One historic Bai house occupant (Bai, female, 45) said that she knew her house was "priceless" but had "no money to repair it". Preserving historic Bai houses that are considered public heritage requires money and expertise. Traditional ideas of heritage preservation as a public good would assign responsibility for such expenses to governments (Dubini et al., 2012). However, as one official (Bai, male, 40) stated, the municipal government does not have sufficient funding for such projects. Instead of preserving all historic houses, the government identifies those with "the greatest historical and cultural value", lists them on national, provincial, or prefectural cultural heritage lists, and

³ I present my interviewees in this way so as to provide the reader with important demographic data about my interviewees, such as ethnicity, gender, and age.

⁴ "Historic Bai houses" refers to old Bai houses that have been recognized as national, provincial or prefectural heritage sites.

seeks funding from upper levels of government. These officially recognized Bai houses are strategically preserved to maintain Bai architecture as well as the City's image. The municipal government also seeks assistance from the private sector to remedy its weaknesses in funding, expertise, and stewardship. The following discussion of Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center documents the dynamics and nuances of PPPs in these two projects.

6. Zhang's Garden

Zhang's Garden, covering an area of more than 5000 square meters, is owned by Zhang Jianchun, a local Bai entrepreneur who spent eight years and more than USD 8 million on his lifelong dream of constructing a Bai house unlike any other. Although Zhang Jianchun advertises the Garden as an innovation based on traditional Bai architecture combining tradition and modernity (Yan, 2008), a small number of people, both locals and non-locals, see the Garden more as a Suzhou-style rock garden with limited relevance to Bai culture. One tourist (Han, male, age 30) felt disappointed after visiting the garden, stating that "it is not a traditional Bai house but a tourist attraction overcrowded by tourists".

Despite criticisms about Zhang's Garden's authenticity, the municipal government has supported what it considers newly created heritage. An official (Bai, male, age 50) disclosed that the government sold the land to Zhang Jianchun at a low price in order to back the project. Right before the Garden's opening, the government organized a press conference during which the Garden was recommended as a tourist attraction and a piece of heritage (Gou, 2008a). On August 8, 2008, a few high-ranking officials at the prefectural level attended the Garden's opening ceremony and recognized the Garden as an Educational Institute of Bai Architecture (Gou, 2008b). Local newspapers grandiloquently advertised the Garden as possessing "global uniqueness" while maintaining "full retention of Bai architecture" in order to "showcase Bai culture", "respect, inherit and develop tradition", "uphold Dali City's image", "achieve harmony between diverse cultures and nature", and "ecologically combine cultural preservation with industrial development" (Gou, 2008b, para. 2; Yan, 2008, para. 3). The municipal government invested around USD 6 million to improve the built environment near Zhang's Garden by upgrading roads, building a 3000-square-meter car park (which has been rented to Zhang Jianchun) and a new farmers' market (Ma & Yang, 2008). These official projects, which improve Zhang's Garden's attractiveness and accessibility, have helped the Garden become a national AAA tourist attraction.⁵ The Garden's status as an AAA tourist attraction improves Dali City's competitiveness among China's tourist cities, which compete for higher numbers of A-rated attractions.

The local governments have utilized Zhang's Garden as a landmark of Dali City to entertain official delegations from other regions. Local officials perceive the Garden as an ideal site for delegates to experience Bai culture and observe investment opportunities in Dali City. To increase Zhang's Garden's popularity, the municipal government advises local tour operators to include the Garden in Dali One-Day Tour, a tour route designed for domestic tourists. The government also includes Zhang Jianchun as a member of official delegations that attend various tourism fairs, which have included the 2010 China International Travel Mart in Shanghai (Chen, 2010), and the 2012 China National Tourism Fair in Qingdao, Shandong Province (NetEase Tourism., 2012). The gov-

ernment also includes Zhang Jianchun in official delegations to the UK, France, Japan, and Malaysia to market Zhang's Garden and brand Dali City (*ibid.*). These official activities have contributed to the rising popularity of Zhang's Garden and Dali City, attracting more tourists to the city. The non-typical PPP between the municipal government and Zhang Jianchun (a local elite entrepreneur) has created a win-win situation for both parties: the private project (Zhang's Garden) has received publicity and the public project (city branding) has been pushed forward.

PPP surrounding Zhang's Garden has influenced local people in both positive and negative ways. Zhang's Garden enhances local people's ethnic pride and sense of place. More than one local interviewee recommended Zhang's Garden to me as a receptacle of Dali City's culture and history. The Garden also gives non-locals an impression that something old, ethnic and traditional remains in Dali City despite the trend of modernization. This impression attracts tourists to the city, contributing to tourism incomes that fund social welfare, infrastructure improvement, and heritage preservation. These public projects benefit local people in a variety of ways. On the other hand, local people who reside in neighbourhoods close to Zhang's Garden complain of waste and noise pollution caused by tourists. More evidently, the car park that was built to serve tourist vehicles displaced the old farmers' market. Local vendors were relocated to a new farmers' market and their trading practices had to be changed accordingly. At the old farmers' market, vendors would place their produce anywhere on the ground of the open marketplace, but now they have to compete for trading space close to the entrance of the new marketplace, which only has one entrance. Further, local officials have asked vendors to place their produce on stands built with the explicit intention of creating order and neatness. After six months, the stands were abandoned, as both vendors and buyers considered them an inconvenience to trading activities.

Regarding Bai architecture preservation, a few local interviewees thought that the municipal government should spend money on historic Bai houses rather than on new, non-traditional creations such as Zhang's Garden. Although all interviewees agreed that PPP surrounding Zhang's Garden contributes to city branding, a few of them suspected that there might be private connections between local officials and Zhang Jianchun, which would explain why the municipal government has decided to support Zhang's Garden instead of other private projects with potential to preserve Bai architecture and brand Dali City. These voices insinuate that although the PPP surrounding Zhang's Garden serves to brand Dali City, that PPP is of a particular modified nature – the public sector (the municipal government) represents government officials more than it represents the general public.

7. The Linden Center

The Linden Center, originally known as Yang's Compound, was built and owned by Yang Pinxiang, a local Bai entrepreneur, in the late 1940s. After China's Cultural Revolution and land reforms, the compound became public property. It was designated as a national heritage site in 2001. In 2004, Brian Linden and his wife (an American couple) attempted to buy the compound but were unable to do so due to its public status. Four years later, after two years of negotiations with the township and municipal governments, the couple established the Linden Center. Brian said during an interview that they rented the compound at a "low price" (the actual rent, however, has not been disclosed), spent millions of RMB⁶ on restoration and maintenance, and were allowed to run a boutique hotel within the compound.

⁵ In 1999, the National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China (CNTA) established premier evaluation standards for tourist attractions, identifying four categories: A, AA, AAA, and AAAA. This rating system was expanded in 2004 with the introduction of the category AAAAA. Tourist attractions are rated according to importance, accessibility, safety, cleanliness, and sanitation (Chris, Gu, & Fang, 2009).

⁶ Exchange rates at the time of writing value RMB 1.00 around USD 0.17.

The local governments have gradually accepted the Linden Center as a model of heritage preservation and as a partner in local economic growth. The *Dali Daily* has described it as “a window that showcases Bai history and culture” (Xin, 2009, para. 1), “China’s top romantic hotel” (You, 2011, para. 3) and “a window through which foreigners know about Dali” (Tu, 2012, para. 1), distinguishing the Linden Center’s role in promoting Bai culture and Dali City. The official media asserts that Brian “cares little about economic gains” when operating the Center (Tu, 2010, para. 9), portraying him as a passionate and sincere conservator of Bai culture. A few local interviewees expressed pride in Brian Linden’s interest in Bai culture. In 2014, the prefectural government invited the Lindens, along with seven others,⁷ to cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony of the March Fair, the largest Bai festival in Dali City (Gou, 2014), acknowledging the Lindens’ contributions to Bai architecture revitalization and city branding. At present, a local enterprise owned by the municipal government is cooperating with the Linden team in renovating *Baochengfu*, another national heritage site. In the project of *Baochengfu*, the government-owned enterprise is funding the renovation while the Linden side provides expertise in another atypical PPP arrangement where the private sector does not provide funding for renovation. Both parties have agreed that, following renovation, the Linden team will operate another boutique hotel in *Baochengfu* and share profits in lieu of rent with the government-owned enterprise.

The municipal government’s extended partnership with Brian Linden on further projects does not stem solely from the Linden model’s demonstrated successes in Bai architecture preservation. Other important factors include the model’s economic returns, Brian Linden’s positive image among locals, and the Linden Center’s English and Chinese media coverage that brands Dali City. As a heritage hotel, the Linden Center’s guestrooms are priced much higher, sometimes as much as six times more than other hotels in the city of a similar level of comfort, generating substantial profits. Brian Linden’s strategy of gaining support from the local community through a participatory approach (which includes, among other things, bakery workshops and Bai music concerts) develops his personal image in the regard of local people. One neighbour (Bai, female, age 50) praised Brian Linden, describing him as “a nice person who preserves Bai architecture”, while accusing local officials of working only out of self-interest. To promote the Center, Brian Linden and his colleagues have delivered talks, organized foreign trips to Dali City (e.g. cultural tours organized for American artists), and accepted interviews by mainstream media such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *China Daily*, and *Sina.com*. These marketing strategies advertise the Linden Center and expose Dali City to a broader audience.

Although the Linden model succeeds in branding Dali City, it is not as perfect as described by the media or the Linden team. The Linden team’s restoration works on Yang’s Compound are often criticized. A few interviewees, for example, said that Brian Linden failed to properly preserve this heritage site due to his lack of previous knowledge of Bai architecture. A local Bai architecture expert (Bai, male, age 60) commented, “the Linden Center is not a traditional Bai compound any more” now that a bar and other modern elements have been introduced. The buildings remain but their functions have been transformed from serving Bai daily lives to tourism. In this sense, Brian Linden has commoditized the heritage site, detracting from the authenticity of its Bai architecture.

Other issues are emerging from the extended partnership between the municipal government and Brian Linden. The

municipal government now has plans to relocate occupants of other historic Bai houses and turn them into tourist sites. While many local interviewees believed that the Linden team would take the lead in careful renovation of these heritage sites independently of any association with any level of government, a few interviewees suspected that the Linden team had become a kind of assistant to the municipal government. Some considered the Linden team’s rumoured leading role in the plan to be no more than a tactic to convince local people to accept a Brian-led plan that in reality was not substantially different from the official-led plan. One local resident (Bai, male, age 35) said that no one fully understood the relationship between Brian Linden and local officials, since all information regarding funding, profits, and work allocations remained undisclosed. These comments imply a local understanding of the PPP between the municipal government and the Linden team as a government-private nexus (similar to the PPP in the case of Zhang’s Garden) in which the municipal government does not necessarily consult or represent the general public.

8. Discussion and conclusion

Heritage preservation, which has traditionally been understood to rely on the public sector, is increasingly undertaken by PPPs (de Vries, 2007; Dubini et al., 2012; Klimpke & Kammeier, 2006). The analysis above of Zhang’s Garden and the Linden Center demonstrates how PPP functions as a strategy for heritage preservation and enhancement in Dali City – an understudied topic. The municipal government, sometimes along with the township and prefectural governments, identifies Bai architecture revitalization projects suitable for private management, offers financial assistance in the form of a ‘discounted’ price or rent to private managers, and invests in infrastructure that directly facilitates private management of the projects. Assisted by the municipal government in these ways, private partners (elite entrepreneurs) are then able to capitalize on various projects involving renovation of Bai architecture.

The positive outcomes of PPPs in heritage management in Dali City align with the outcomes of successful PPPs examined in existing scholarly literature (e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Brewer & Hayllar, 2005). Through PPPs, the municipal government and the private sector share the financial burdens of renovating Bai architecture, as well as associated economic returns – the municipal government benefits via tax income, rents, or profits, while the private sector profits directly. Notably, elite entrepreneurs in both of the cases I have discussed (Zhang Jianchun and Brian Linden) play significant roles in the PPPs. Aligning with the positive qualities of PPPs in China identified by Adams et al. (2006), these entrepreneurs are able to provide stewardship, money, and expertise to supplement governmental efforts in heritage management by making their opinions heard and accepted by the municipal government.

In the PPPs of the two projects, the municipal government promotes the projects through official media and official activities, such as inviting elite entrepreneurs to join official delegations or attend official ceremonies in ethnic festivals. The private sector applies various marketing strategies to advertise both their projects and Dali City, where the projects are situated. This double-sided advertising effort exposes the projects and Dali City to broader audiences, providing local and non-local people with the impression that Dali City is endowed with a rich historic and cultural heritage, thus branding the city as a ‘China’s leading historical and cultural city’. My local interviewees perceive these efforts as contributing to city branding, a process which they accept and feel proud of. They take pride in Bai architecture and welcome city branding via Bai architecture revitalization. These

⁷ The other seven guests included three state-recognized inheritors of Bai heritage in tie-dye fabrics, folk songs, and the Bai Raosanling Festival, respectively; three representatives of local people, and the president of the China-Ghana Chamber of Commerce.

findings demonstrate that partnerships between local governments and the private sector contribute to city branding, which consists of a participatory process due to the complex nature of cities (Ashworth & Voogd, 1988; Cao, 2011; Q. Zhao, 2010).

Along with the positive outcomes of PPPs come problems that are specific to China (as detailed by Adams et al., 2006; Ke, 2014). This paper reveals that the discrepancy between an idealized 'public sector' and the way it exists in reality complicates the applicability of the PPP concept and obscures the origin of many significant problems in Dali City. Hayllar (2010) defines 'public sector' as government representation of the general public; in the PPPs of Zhang's Garden and the Linden Center, however, 'public sector' involves a government that fails to represent the public, which renders the PPPs government-private partnerships. The municipal government does not disclose any information regarding funding, profits, and work allocations to the general public and fails to engage with dissent. People living close to Zhang's Garden were impacted by pollution and a new farmer's market, and when the Linden Center is turned into a high-end hotel, people of low socioeconomic status will find themselves less welcome as visitors to the compound. Although local people welcome city branding, it remains debatable to what extent projects can justify disadvantaging individuals' interests. Regarding information disclosure, the case of the Linden Center reveals the risks of PPPs lacking transparency: far more complex than typical PPP arrangements (see Tieva & Junnonen, 2009; Webb & Pulle, 2002), the Linden Center PPP involves not only funding and operations, but also advertising and profit sharing. Local people's comments suggest that both the Linden team and the municipal government might lose local trust if the lack of transparency is not addressed. This case illustrates that transparency in PPPs critically eases relationships between governments, private companies (or entrepreneurs), and general publics.

In addition, this paper explores the link between heritage preservation and city branding, an emerging topic in the field of urban studies (e.g. Ryan & Silvanto, 2009; Timothy, 2014). In the case of Dali City, famous for its history and culture, preserving and promoting a heritage that distinguishes the city from others (e.g. Bai architecture), is an effective method of city branding (Luo et al., 2013; Zhang & Zhao, 2009).

In sum, this paper contributes to knowledge of city brand-building processes by examining how PPPs in heritage management function in the unexamined context of third-tier Chinese cities. As the findings in this paper are only reflective of one city that has been historically and culturally branded, future research might include other cities that brand themselves through PPPs in other ways and in other contexts. Additionally, further research might stem from this paper's exploration of local people's perceptions of city branding and the ways they have been affected by associated PPPs. In turn, how do general publics influence PPPs and city branding in Chinese contexts, despite having restricted access to information and decision-making processes?

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