Preface

The idea to produce this book was born at a reasonably lively conference party in the early autumn of 2012. The place was Stockholm, and the theme of the conference was ‘Chinese mega-cities in the world: challenges, opportunities and consequences of global positioning strategies’ – a theme legitimate enough for any book, particularly given the recent interest in city branding, and the fact that China has more and faster growing mega-cities than any other nation in the world.

However, as in most cases of party-planned activities, the degree of awareness of the consequences of the decisions that we made was low, certainly when it came to estimating the amount of work that would need to be put into the book project! Today though, with the benefit of hindsight, we are very happy that we pursued the idea of this book. At the same time, we are deeply grateful for all the support we have had from the authors we have pestered with editing suggestions, as well as from the publishers who have patiently corrected our mistakes and proposed improvements.

As the participants at the Stockholm conference came from more than twenty different academic disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, we began editing the book with the idea of coming up with a multi-disciplinary, state-of-the-art review of city branding in China’s mega-cities. However, this proved to be rather too ambitious, as it would have required a reasonable command of the state of the art, in all of these disciplines. In addition, the Chinese mega-cities are rapidly changing in terms of both size and form, making a concise state of the art view of current policies and practices difficult if not impossible. Thus, the overall aim of the book was adjusted to; ‘offer a brief overview of the policies, practices and positioning strategies related to the branding of Chinese mega-cities’.

To avoid confusion, we need to make clear from the outset that the focus of this book is not simply on Chinese mega-cities per se, but on city branding as a phenomenon, with Chinese mega-cities as the main empirical field of study. As the reader will soon find out, we also include frequent examples of large as well as smaller cities from other parts of the world, in order to supply relevant insights from contexts other than the Chinese one. The inclusion of ‘lessons’ from cities in other parts of the
world, and theoretical contributions by non-Chinese scholars, contributes different perspectives and innovative views on city branding from a more general point of view.

We also need to clarify our use of the term ‘mega-city’ at this point, even though the term as such is discussed further in the Introduction and in other parts of this book. Rather than following the generally agreed upon definition of a mega-city as having a population of more than ten million people, to a large extent the authors in this book use the term as a popular designation for a ‘very large city’ in general. Since this is also the way the term is used as a descriptor of very large cities in common parlance, we have chosen to accept this meaning of the term in this book. However, the reader will easily find that the vast majority of the contributions to this book have gathered their empirical data from one or other of the mega-cities in China that have more than 10 million residents.

The phenomenon of city branding is a recent one in China, and hitherto there have been only a very limited number of academic studies of city branding of Chinese cities published in English. This book is thus a first, qualified general discussion of the branding of Chinese mega-cities. We have chosen to divide the book into three parts, containing in total 17 chapters, as well as an Introduction and a Conclusion – providing a mixture of views on the phenomenon of city branding and including Chinese and European researchers’ observations and analyses. The book includes the work of a number of prestigious researchers at some of the most important universities in China, including Fudan University in Shanghai, Tsinghua University in Beijing and Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou. Contributing authors are moreover from a variety of academic disciplines including marketing, management, communications, tourism, and leisure and culture services, as well as China studies, cultural sciences, social and economic geography, political science, economic history, geography, urban planning and public administration – enabling a thick description of the subject matter.

The target audience for this book is scholars and students at the advanced level in the area of business studies, marketing, urban studies, etc. – in Chinese as well as in Western universities. The book is also valuable for qualified practitioners with a responsibility for or interest in contemporary place branding activities (such as city planners and administrators, city marketing managers, city officials responsible for place promotion and tourism, etc.). The book can be read at two levels. Firstly, it can be read as a qualified theoretical and empirical contribution to an increased international understanding of the complex phenomenon of city branding, to be used by university students and scholars. Secondly, the book can be read as a guide, source of inspiration and critical
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reflection for those practically involved in city planning, city marketing and city management, as well as for company executives with an interest in getting an overview of the phenomenon of city branding and Chinese mega-cities.