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China’s City Diplomacy and Legitimacy: A Shenzhen Story

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Abstract

As cities have become a significant sub-state feature in world politics since the latter part of the twentieth century, their diplomacy has played an important role in general diplomacy in promoting global governance and improving local development. However, a larger conceptual framework for distinguishing between what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in influencing the relative success or failure of city diplomacy is currently neglected in studies of city diplomacy. Furthermore, detailed first-hand information showing how China’s city diplomacy works is lacking in English language sources. I argue that in order to understand the operational nature of China’s city diplomacy, two factors must be taken into consideration: how the diplomacy of Chinese cities has become legitimate and how this legitimacy in return affects cities’ diplomatic outcomes. This thesis contributes both theory and data to these studies through introducing legitimacy theory and the diplomatic practice of Shenzhen, the pioneering city in the reform and opening up of China.

The findings are based on participant observation undertaken while I was working part-time at the European Office of Shenzhen Government. Data were collected through observation notes from field work, published government documents, news articles and relevant secondary academic sources, which did not include any confidential or sensitive information. Drawing on insights provided by this supporting evidence, I argue that the legitimacy of city diplomacy is critical to its success. The legitimacy of city diplomacy comes from consent, which has two dimensions. The first is the support given by domestic politics, and the second is the recognition given by the overseas audience. The former standardizes the direction and behaviour of the diplomatic agent, while the latter determines the result of city diplomacy. The analytical framework of the thesis adopted two mainstream
legitimation approaches in current research on legitimacy – favourable outcomes and procedural correctness – to show the legitimation process of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. In the domestic environment, it will be shown that the former is more decisive than the latter, because favourable outcomes which serve national and local development, especially to develop the economy, are the main duty of Chinese city diplomacy. Meanwhile, procedural correctness provides the institutional framework for legitimizing Shenzhen diplomacy and then enabling its agents to reach a desired outcome. In diplomacy, a favourable outcome is vital, and will determine whether audiences perceive Shenzhen diplomacy as having legitimacy.

The thesis will first introduce the concept of legitimacy for the study of city diplomacy, outlining how the legitimation process takes place and the importance of branding and symbols in this process. It will then show how the Shenzhen European Office has become legitimized. Third, it will discuss how reform and opening up, as China’s national brand and the city brand of Shenzhen, influence the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy. Finally, the way in which symbols work in raising the legitimacy of Shenzhen on the diplomatic stage will be examined.
Lay Summary

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, cities have become more and more influential on the international stage. First, this is because of the rapid expansion of urbanisation. For example, UN Habitat predicted in 2016 that about 70 percent of the world’s population will live in cities by 2050. The second reason is because globalisation has led to more and more frequent urban connections. As important nodes bearing various dynamic elements such as finance, technology and talent, world cities have begun to transcend national boundaries to form an interconnected urban network which enables cities to become significant international actors capable of either developing local interest or addressing global issues. With cities becoming the rising stars, rather than entire countries, the role of their diplomacy has been increasingly considered by scholars and practitioners. But there remains a gap in the current study of city diplomacy, that is, how city diplomacy became legitimate, and especially how its legitimacy was accepted at both domestic and international levels.

The importance of legitimacy surrounds us everywhere in our daily life – either in making new policy, starting a new cooperation, or even in the choices between a couple about their dinner – we need a legitimate reason which will result in consent from each stakeholder to ensure the success of the outcome. The term legitimacy commonly refers to ‘a normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’. This thesis introduces the legitimization model for use in the study of city diplomacy, to inquire into the causes, consequences and implications of the legitimacy of city diplomacy. We can see the factors which influence the success or failure of city diplomacy by restoring the exact legitimization process of city diplomacy.

The research subject is Shenzhen, the pioneering city of China’s reform and opening up. As the second largest economy in the world, the influence of China on the world stage is rising. China’s legitimacy in the international community has long been a fiercely debated issue among people who are concerned about it. The examination of
the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy offers a cross-sectional study to let us understand how one of China’s political institutions - diplomacy at city level – is obtaining legitimacy domestically and internationally. The thesis will show that the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy is influenced by the achievement of favourable outcomes and by procedural correctness. These two factors support the argument that the success of city diplomacy is related to the degree to which it is considered legitimate: the stronger the legitimacy, the greater the opportunity for success, and vice versa.
Acknowledgements

I would never have been able to complete the thesis without the trust, patience, and encouragement from my supervisors Natascha Gentz and Daniel Hammond. Their kindness has influenced me not only to learn how to do research but also how to become a better person. Especially since the outbreak of the pandemic, their love enabled me to believe that I also have a family in Edinburgh.

I am also so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work at the Shenzhen European Office. Thank you very much, my colleagues at the Office and in Shenzhen. This experience helps me to keep thinking about the communication and integration between different cultures and raises my confidence to believe that there will be a more beautiful world in the forthcoming future.

The first letter of Edinburgh in Chinese is ‘love’. I hereby use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to those people who love and keep supporting me, and you know that, I love you too. Especially Katherine, let’s move on bravely and keep enjoying the moments which only belong to you and me.

Finally, I hope the wind from the North Sea can carry my thoughts to Shenzhen:

I have been blessed to be taken care by you over the past thirty years, my dear Mom and Dad. From now it is time for your son to look after you.
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CCP     Chinese Communist Party
FAO     Office of Foreign Affairs Work Committee of CCP Shenzhen Municipal Committee
ORO     Overseas Representative Office
SZEO    Shenzhen European Office
Chapter 1 Introduction

Cities have operated as diplomatic agents for millennia. The earliest known example of cities playing a role in diplomacy can be found in the Greek Poleis and Italian Signorie. Nowadays, cities’ role on the diplomatic stage is far more significant. First, this is because of the fast expansion of urbanization. At the beginning of the 20th century, only about 15 percent of the world’s population lived in cities; by 2050, the number is expected to rise to 70 percent. This predicted growth will allow cities to continue to play a more vital role in global economic growth. The second reason for the rise of the role and significance of cities in diplomacy is their increasing social influence in developing local interest and addressing global issues. The division of labour and cooperation in global production have led to more and more frequent urban connections; cities have gone beyond the concept of static geography and grown into world cities embedded in the global economic network under globalization. As important nodes bearing various dynamic elements such as material, finance, technology and talent, world cities have begun to transcend national boundaries to form an interconnected urban network. As a result, the rising dynamic role of cities and their authority has become crucial in handling global affairs such as climate governance. But although there is much evidence that academics and practitioners of city diplomacy take seriously the legitimate role of city diplomacy, the concept of the legitimacy itself rarely receives attention in the discussion. Here I propose the overarching argument running through the entire thesis, that is, the success of city diplomacy is related to the degree to which it is considered legitimate. The stronger the legitimacy, the greater the opportunity for success, and vice versa.

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2 Ibid.
3 Grandi (2020), p38; also see Nicolson (1954).
4 UN Habitat (2016).
6 Friedmann (1986).
8 Hoffmann (2012), p2-16.
What is legitimacy? It is ‘the recognition of the right to govern’.\textsuperscript{9} It is ‘a normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’.\textsuperscript{10} It is ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’.\textsuperscript{11} From these classic definitions in the current literature, we can see that legitimacy refers to two dimensions. First, legitimacy is the right of an authority (such as government, regime, institution, organization) and second, legitimacy is the acceptance of this right. In other words, in order to explore how city diplomacy is considered legitimate, it is necessary to examine the influencing factors which play a role in this process.

The definition of legitimacy I used in this thesis is ‘it is a normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’.\textsuperscript{12} The detailed reason for this will be shown in Chapter 2. The thesis introduces the legitimation model for use in the study of city diplomacy, to inquire into the causes, consequences and implications of the legitimacy of city diplomacy and the influencing factors which form and maintain, and increase or reduce this legitimacy.

If the basis of legitimacy is formed by recognition, then the basis of recognition is formed by consent. As Coicaud argued, the necessary condition for recognition is consent, without which it would be a sign of a lack of political legitimacy.\textsuperscript{13} The source of the consent which legitimizes city diplomacy comes from two levels: the domestic politics, and the overseas audience. The former standardizes the direction and behaviour of the diplomatic agent, which is the fundamental factor that legitimizes the right of city diplomacy; while the latter determines the result of city diplomacy, which increases or reduces the legitimacy of city diplomacy and this result in return influences the degree of acceptance of city diplomacy from the overseas audience. The

\textsuperscript{9} Coicaud (2002), p10.  
\textsuperscript{10} Hurd (1999), p381.  
\textsuperscript{11} Suchman (1995), p574.  
\textsuperscript{12} Hurd (1999), p381  
\textsuperscript{13} Coicaud (2002), p14.
analytical framework of the thesis adopted two mainstream legitimation approaches in current research on legitimacy – favourable outcomes and procedural correctness – to show the legitimation process of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. In the domestic environment, it will be shown that the former is more decisive than the latter, because favourable outcomes which serve national and local development, especially to develop the economy, are the main duty of Chinese city diplomacy. Meanwhile, procedural correctness provides the institutional framework for legitimizing Shenzhen diplomacy and then enables its agents to reach a desired outcome. In diplomacy, a favourable outcome is vital, and will determine whether audiences perceive Shenzhen diplomacy as having legitimacy.

The thesis works on three levels. It identifies key legitimacy issues from the discipline of city diplomacy and applies them to an examination of the practical diplomatic operation of the city of Shenzhen. Therefore, the thesis can be read as a supplement on city diplomacy, as a document of studies on Shenzhen and as a cross section of Chinese politics, all of which contribute to theory and empirical research.

The central purpose of the thesis is to introduce the concept of legitimacy to the study of city diplomacy. Although legitimacy is commonly used in academic fields such as politics, law and sociology, the concept lacks attention in studies of city diplomacy, especially with reference to what it means or how it works in the discipline of studying city diplomacy. As will be shown below, the current literature on city diplomacy is mostly centred on why cities have become significant players on the diplomatic stage, especially since the latter part of the twentieth century. However, how city diplomacy became legitimate, especially how its legitimation completed at the domestic and international level, has been neglected. The latter is vital to consider because this reflects whether the intended audience recognizes the city diplomacy, and this recognition finally will determine the outcome of the city diplomacy.

Hence, my goal here is to introduce a workable model of legitimation from legitimacy theory for use in city diplomacy to inquire into the causes, consequences
and implications of legitimacy, and use this model to explain city diplomacy’s empirical phenomena. This model itself, revised by borrowing from the existing literature on legitimacy, especially that which shows the legitimation process of city diplomacy, fills a gap in city diplomacy that distinguishes between what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in influencing the relative success or failure of city diplomacy. In the absence of a consideration of legitimacy, the credibility, the effectiveness and the directivity of city diplomacy in practice will become a potential problem.

Legitimacy theory, therefore, contributes in two ways: first, by establishing a means of examining how city diplomacy is considered legitimate at the domestic and international level, and how this legitimacy is maintained, increased and reduced by internal and external stakeholders; and second, by using city diplomacy as a means to examine the legitimation process of Chinese politics and its vital influencing factor. On its contribution to studies of city diplomacy, the thesis shows the importance of considering the issue of legitimacy and legitimation when trying to understand either the origin or the current practice of the diplomatic role of cities. From the establishment and day-to-day operation of Shenzhen European Office to the exploration of how reform and opening up constructed the direction and strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy, and to the role of symbols and their influence on the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy, we can see the fundamental role played by the process of legitimation in all that the diplomacy of Shenzhen does. It is reasonable to say that Shenzhen diplomacy has influence when it is seen as legitimate and loses influence when this recognition is receding. All the actions of the designers and agents of Shenzhen diplomacy to some extent have concerned whether their decisions will increase or reduce or destroy the diplomatic action of the city for various participants, from domestic to international. In particular, legitimacy concerns can be determinant for the international audience to decide whether to cooperate with Shenzhen. In the frontline of diplomacy, especially when different parties start to communicate, the
central role of legitimacy is clear for the Shenzhen side. The examples in the thesis show how the consideration of legitimacy influences the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy both in the city’s domestic context and the European local environment.

There were four reasons for choosing Shenzhen. First, Shenzhen is the representative city of China’s reform and opening up, it is ‘a model for the rest of China and as an example for the rest of the world to see China’s capability and commitment to reform’.\textsuperscript{14} Second, since 1978, Shenzhen’s speedy development has been a microcosm of China’s development. Third, Shenzhen’s city culture of welcoming talent gives the thesis a sufficient foundation of data to investigate the reasons why Shenzhen is regarded as legitimate in diplomacy. A fourth reason is that Shenzhen is a wholly new place which is the representative of a new, reforming China and gives it an added representational and symbolic meaning.

Shenzhen European Office is led by its Chief Representative and other staff are employed locally in the countries where the Office’s branches are located. The chief representative is appointed by the office’s leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. The reason for establishing SZEO is to promote the relationship between Shenzhen and Europe (actually with the countries of the Office’s branches). The major work of SZEO includes investment and business attraction, city promotion, talent introduction, liaison and coordination, and services for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’.

The fundamental role that legitimacy plays in diplomacy is complex, and a way to monitor and decipher the conditions which result in legitimacy or illegitimacy is essential for this research. Legitimacy has the power to define the goals and interests of actors and to construct actions that the actors take for granted.\textsuperscript{15} To study city diplomacy without paying attention to the influence of legitimacy would arguably leave insufficient understanding of common acts such as establishing a sister city,

\textsuperscript{14} Bach, in O’ Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017), p29.
\textsuperscript{15} Hurd (1999).
promoting city image, and attracting investment and talent. It is helpful to understand the underlying reasons behind these diplomatic actions by exploring their legitimation processes, for example why city A becomes sister city with city B rather than C, and why talent in certain areas is particularly welcome. It is necessary to understand separately what the diplomatic actors and audiences of the cities regard as legitimate so as to interpret whether those common diplomatic actions of cities will be successful or not.

The thesis explores the legitimacy issue through the practical workings of the Shenzhen European Office. It examines how it became legitimized in Shenzhen, and how it came to be seen as legitimate in Europe. The macro reasons for the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy and the micro legitimation process have not yet been explored academically either in studies of Chinese city diplomacy or in studies about Shenzhen, although there is plenty of material reporting how quickly the city developed and how successfully it interacts with the world. Even the obvious act of cooperation, which contributes to the influence and development of cities through diplomacy, has complex internal causes and effects. This complexity comes from neglecting the role of legitimacy and legitimation in the routine diplomacy of Shenzhen. In particular, it is hard to understand the diplomatic behaviour and outcome of Shenzhen diplomacy without understanding legitimacy based on recognition.

Consider, for instance, a simple question: why would a local European political, business, educational and cultural network be willing to cooperate with Shenzhen? It is because they believe their needs will be met through a particular cooperation project with Shenzhen. For example, Shenzhen wants to invite new investors, and there is a local European company that is interested in expanding into the Chinese market; this means that a city promotional event held by Shenzhen can be effective when the needs of both sides match. Another example is that there are talented Chinese researchers who want to return to China from Europe to develop their career, and the funding provided by Shenzhen is significantly higher than other cities in China, thus attracting
these individuals to join Shenzhen’s universities, enterprises or other institutions. While the city’s strength allows it to provide a quality material payoff, that does not mean that Shenzhen’s diplomacy is always successful. There are always enterprises that do not choose to invest in Shenzhen for their own reasons. For example, according to my field notes, of the 136 European Fortune 500 companies in 2020, 59 have not invested in or cooperated with Shenzhen. The key is whether Shenzhen is offering what its diplomatic target audience wants.

This investment reality results in a conundrum for Shenzhen diplomacy and raises several questions. For example, how can Shenzhen’s diplomacy succeed if the city’s comparative advantage among Chinese cities is no more competitive or if the material payoff is no longer necessary to attract foreign investors? In fact, what exactly is the attraction that drives Shenzhen’s diplomatic outcomes and where does it come from? More broadly, what exactly is the appeal of Chinese cities to the global community? In the context of China seeking to build a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation, the answers to these questions are fundamental to the claim that cities matter at all in overall diplomacy. In this context, how Shenzhen reconsiders the legitimacy of its diplomacy, and in particular how its diplomatic role is perceived as legitimate by China, Shenzhen’s policymakers and the international community, is crucial.

1.1 CITY DIPLOMACY

Origin, Definition and Role

The interdependence among politics, economics, society and culture worldwide has been continuously deepened by globalization in the 21st century. In international relations, it blurs the boundaries between national and subnational politics and

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16 Investment status of European Fortune 500 companies in China (2020).
17 Win-win situation means ‘a situation by which cooperation, compromise, or group participation leads to all participants benefiting’ (UN, 2020). In the thesis’s context, China believes that this relationship will result in ‘the dignity, development interests and peace and security of all countries and peoples’ (Wang, 2015).
increases the variety of actors on the world stage. This trend leads to two simple assumptions about international politics: the state has lost its monopoly to manage international affairs because of the significance and rise of transnational or supranational regimes; and non-state actors such as associations of nations, NGOs and multinational corporations are taking their responsibilities on the diplomatic stage. Cities, especially global cities, are a significant sub-state factor which play an important role in contemporary global governance. What is city? It is ‘a permanent and densely settled place with administratively defined boundaries whose members work primarily on non-agricultural tasks’. 2007 marked the first time in human history that the population in urban areas exceeded that in rural areas, more than half of the world’s population now live in urban areas — increasingly in highly-dense cities. This growing trend of urbanisation requires cities to be ‘inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’, which means the responsibility of cities in social affairs have also increased. According to the development of the cities, the definition of global city has changed over time. It was first understood as a ‘world centre’ for three main reasons: political significance, economic strength and population size. Global cities can also be defined as national and international centres of political power; centres of national and international trade, acting as focal points for their own and also for neighbouring countries; centres of professional activity; centres of consumption, information and diffusion of technology through means of mass communication, culture, entertainment and service industries. Currently, they are the drivers of economic globalization where a disproportionately high share of economic and political institutions are focused.

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18 Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
19 Davenport (2002); Langhorne (2005); Muldoon (2005).
20 Acuto (2013).
23 Geddes (1968).
25 Ushakov (2013).
Indeed, as one of the basic units of organising social life and production, the value of global cities is increasing. In particular, global cities are participating in almost every stage of international politics and progressively influencing diplomatic procedures. Consequently, city diplomacy, as a type of sub-state diplomacy, plays a special role in general diplomacy in promoting global governance and promoting local development.²⁶ Pluijm and Melissen described this role as ‘the institutions and processes by which cities engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another’.²⁷ In short, the city as a sub-state actor in international relations is gaining attention not only from academics but also practitioners.

As part of a soft diplomacy strategy, city-to-city links have been enthusiastically promoted by China and far more proactively than for instance cities in the UK.²⁸ For instance, President Xi Jinping values the importance of city diplomacy. He once emphasised that peace is most precious in Chinese culture and that city diplomacy has an important role in maintaining world peace through resource sharing, complementary advantages and cooperation in order to realise a ‘win-win’ situation.²⁹ Promoting Sino-foreign cooperation through city diplomacy has also become a regular work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. In March 2016, the Ministry invited foreign diplomatic envoys and businesses to hold face-to-face discussions with representatives of Chinese provinces in the Blue Hall of the Foreign Ministry.³⁰ Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasised that this platform aims to help foreign diplomats develop zero-distance contact from Beijing with governments and businesses of various provinces, regions and municipalities to seek more effective business opportunities and cooperation. ³¹ Shenzhen, for instance, by extending its

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²⁶ Pluijm and Melissen (2007); Acuto (2013).
²⁷ Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
²⁸ For instance, from my working note on the number of sister cities of Edinburgh and Shenzhen, Edinburgh has had 14 international sister cities from 1954 to 2019, and Shenzhen has had 24 from 1986 to 2021.
²⁹ See speech by Xi Jinping (2014).
transnational cultural relations with Edinburgh and Scotland, and strengthening the internal capacity of urban construction, aims to be a modern international creative city in China and to be a pioneer city in international creative culture and technology, which will increase its role in China’s external cultural relations.\textsuperscript{32}

Arguably, the role of the city is more important than ever before in history. The United Nations reported that more than half of the world’s population live in cities, and by 2030 the urban population will reach 60 per cent of people globally.\textsuperscript{33} World cities such as London, New York and Beijing act as a distinct node in the global network, dominating the world’s political, economic and social life. The rising status of cities enables scholars not only to concentrate on studying cities per se, but also on the diplomatic aspect, raising new concepts in the studies of international relations and diplomacy, such as paradiplomacy, two worlds of world politics and multilayered diplomatic theory.\textsuperscript{34} Apart from city diplomacy, the discussion on the diplomatic role of cities also refers to municipal diplomacy, citizens diplomacy and city-to-city diplomacy.\textsuperscript{35}

The definition of city diplomacy was not introduced until the 21st century. It was first mentioned at the 2003 Glocal Forum in Rome, noticed as a distinct diplomatic tool of glocalisation and as an outcome of the interaction between decentralised diplomacy and cities.\textsuperscript{36} In 2007, the United Cities and Local Governments’ (UCLG) City Diplomacy Committee explained city diplomacy as ‘the tool of local governments and their associations in promoting social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction with the aim to create a stable environment in which the citizens can live together in peace, democracy and prosperity’.\textsuperscript{37} The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe accepted UCLG’s definition.

\textsuperscript{32} The Newsroom (2012); Edinburgh Gov (2015).
\textsuperscript{33} United Nations (2017).
\textsuperscript{34} Rosenau (1990); Duchacek (1990); Hocking (1993).
\textsuperscript{35} Musch (2008), p10.
\textsuperscript{36} Global Forum (2003).
\textsuperscript{37} Sizoo (2007).
in 2008, and enhanced city diplomacy ‘can be seen as a natural development in the role of cities as members of the international community, sharing values of democracy, rule of law and human rights’, and it also defined city diplomacy ‘as the activity whereby a municipal authority in a conflict area receives support from one or more municipal authorities outside of the area’.\textsuperscript{38}

These definitions perceive city diplomacy as an action or a tool to handle diplomatic relationships. Pluijm and Melissen broadened the concept ‘as the institutions and processes by which cities engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another’.\textsuperscript{39} They outlined five significant factors that determine the pattern of involvement of cities in diplomacy, which borrowed from Hocking’s description of the factors which are important in determining how states become involved in diplomacy,\textsuperscript{40} which are: 1) the resources the city is able to command; 2) the degree of perfection of the city’s system; 3) the relationship and interaction between the city and its central government; 4) the geographical location of the city; and 5) the extent of a city’s internationalisation.\textsuperscript{41} They indicated that the field of city diplomacy includes security, development, economics, culture, cooperation and representation. \textsuperscript{42} Acuto demonstrated how the planning of a sporting mega-event, such as the Olympic Games, could enhance subnational authority and substantially influence public diplomacy. More specifically, his idea that cities have the potential to be global green leaders is the key point that current policy makers are considering.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{City diplomacy in China}

\textsuperscript{38} In Arne Musch (2008), p10.
\textsuperscript{39} Pluijm and Melissen (2007), p11.
\textsuperscript{40} See Hocking (1993), p47-57.
\textsuperscript{41} Pluijm and Melissen (2007), p15-17.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Acuto (2013).
City diplomacy is also becoming crucial in China’s diplomatic practice. Since the reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping emphasized that international sister cities should serve economic development and promote international cooperation, and city diplomacy has become increasingly active.\textsuperscript{44} City diplomacy as an important part of national diplomacy, which is a semi-official diplomacy. With respect to purely civil diplomacy, it is official; as opposed to official diplomacy pursued by the central government, it also has a nongovernmental sector. Besides, it also has characteristics such as subordination, mediation and so on.\textsuperscript{45} At the opening ceremony of the China International Friendship City Conference on 8th November 2008, Chen Haosu, president of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, stressed that city diplomacy should follow and serve entire national diplomacy.\textsuperscript{46} As of December 16, 2015, there were 30 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government (excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao) and 449 cities in China have established 2,225 pairs of sister city (province/state) relationships with 485 provinces (prefectures, counties, regions, provinces, etc.) and 1,488 cities in 133 countries on five continents.\textsuperscript{47}

Other Chinese scholars emphasize more the locality of city diplomacy. Su and Chen define the concept as local diplomacy. Their view is that the diplomacy of local government is guided by national policy, and its role should be clearly positioned as a part of China’s diplomacy.\textsuperscript{48} Xiong and Wang also pay attention to the locality, though they stress the use of ‘city diplomacy’ should be more precise in order to highlight the legality of international diplomatic activity authorized by national government which is for cities in particular.\textsuperscript{49} Yang’s definition is similar, in that city diplomacy is an extension of state diplomacy with the following features: non-
sovereignty in the constitution, complementariness in national strategy, finiteness in power, intermediary in behaviour, sociality in function and so on. Clearly, the generalized definition of city diplomacy in China emphasizes its characteristics of locality, but it clearly follows national sovereignty, law and foreign policy. In consequence, the focus of the range of definitions of city diplomacy in China is different from the international concept probably because it is a component of national strategy, which is authorised and guided by the central government.

One of the core problems of city diplomacy in China is system design, which has three parts: the spirit of the city, diplomatic system and operating mechanism. These lead to five key considerations on Chinese city diplomacy, including legislation, definition of responsibility, determined strategy, clarified regulation and resource. Another crucial consideration is local government should distinguish the right and responsibility of central government to avoid offside and untouchable red lines. On this basis, a key factor of city diplomacy is the role of external communication, which includes media, cultural exchange, human bridges and international forums. This shows a progressive form of city diplomacy: publicity, economic and cultural trade, discourse establishment.

All in all, the function of city diplomacy is to serve national development. City diplomacy is an important part of national diplomacy and should follow and serve it. It is a component of national strategy, which is authorised and guided by the central government. As Yang defined, city diplomacy is an extension of state diplomacy. The first function of city diplomacy in China is to enhance the friendship between

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51 Zhao (2016).
52 It belongs to the city’s culture, it is the temperament and soul of the city, which attracts migrant and supports its citizens to settle their lives. For instance, the city spirit of Shenzhen is openness, inclusiveness and innovation.
53 Zhao (2016).
56 Zhao (2016), p56-75.
countries and citizens. Before the 1970s, the diplomatic autonomy of the city did not exist in China. As Bilder argued, the diplomacy authority of local government was extremely limited.  

The first constitution of China published in 1954 stipulated the central government had all powers to conduct external affairs. Under this condition, local governments had neither the power to develop foreign relations nor the motivation to do so. The high degree of centralization in diplomacy determined that every diplomatic action at that time was guided by the central, rather than local, government, and every act of city diplomacy was responsible for achieving the national diplomacy goal as an extension of the state’s will. An example of this was that in order to normalize the diplomatic relationship with Japan, Tianjin and Kobe signed the sister city agreement in 1973. This was China’s first international twin city, and a notable achievement of Chinese city diplomacy in action.

Since 1978, the implementation of the reform and the opening up policy formed two legal national protections to empower local government in diplomacy. On the one hand, the 1982 constitution stipulated that the people’s congresses of provinces and municipalities and their standing committees may enact local regulation on the promise that they do not contradict the constitution, laws or administrative regulations. After several rounds of decentralization, the central government has delegated the power of cadre management, administrative management, social management and fiscal, tax and finance powers to local governments, which has brought about a readjustment in the relationship between the central and local governments, and the latter has become an important participant in China’s foreign affairs.

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60 Chen (2001), p247.
61 Xie(2009), p8; China Daily (2019).
63 Zhao (2016).
On the other hand, the macro diplomacy environment and the goals were changed - the distinct diplomatic theme of China’s transition from ‘against imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism and support the independence and liberation of the oppressed nationalities for national revolution’ towards ‘peace and development’.64

Thus, following these new situations, another function of city diplomacy in China was born – assistance for developing the economy. This includes promoting the export-oriented development of the local economy to enhance local foreign trade and other foreign economic cooperation and improving the local business environment through setting a series of preferential foreign policies such as attracting foreign investment.65 In particular, cooperation through city diplomacy could be a positive power – a visible hand – to benefit the local economy. At the First US-China Governors Forum held in Salt Lake City in July 2011, the local delegations of the two sides signed 28 cooperation agreements, letters of intent or memorandums in the areas of sister cities, energy, environmental protection, science and technology and medicine, with approximately 3.2 billion US dollars under the theme of ‘Strengthening local cooperation and promoting common prosperity’.66 As Shen indicated, diplomacy of local government can enhance the transmission of economic and trade information, strengthen exchanges with enterprises and serve them to exploit and expand the international market.67

Setting up an overseas representative office (ORO) is a component of city diplomacy, but very little has been studied on it in either English or Chinese. It was McNiven and Cann who made the first steps in a 1993 study. However, their research was just focused on the provincial level. They explained how Canadian provincial offices had worked in America since 1940 by concentrating on trade, tourism and investment promotion through 12 types of activities: facilitating official meetings, monitoring

64 Xie (2009), p8.
66 Li (2013).
67 Shen (2009), p64-65.
legislation, networking with consulates of third countries, assisting with meetings related to form structures, assisting with agreements, directing relations with state government staff, organizing joint promotions, assisting with incoming trade missions, helping develop state-provincial roundtables, assisting with educational and cultural exchanges, assisting with unofficial meetings, and assisting ‘sister-city’ relationships.\(^{69}\) After the ground-breaking work of McNiven and Cann, the study of city diplomacy then moved to its second focus, which was about how the state offices of America worked in Europe in 1994. Besides functioning in trade, tourism and investment promotion, OROs can also gather valuable business information such as market and importer data to perform beneficial services to fulfil the development need of their states.\(^{70}\)

The third step in the shifting focus of the city diplomacy discipline, and also the first Chinese academic material about OROs, was conducted by Chen Zhiming in 2001. In his book *Subnational Government and Foreign Affairs*, his conclusion on the functions is the same as the previous English language studies: representation, information gathering and promotion.\(^{71}\) Another contribution of Chen is that he points out the differences between each nation in their attitude to OROs, influenced by the policy of the central government and categorised into three types\(^{72}\):

1) Directly allowed by the central government, such as in America, Canada and Australia.

2) Restricted by the central government at the beginning, but then an ORO is opened because of the external changing situation, such as in Germany.

3) A complete prohibition, such as in Italy and China.

\(^{69}\) Ibid, pp178-181.


\(^{71}\) Chen (2001), p131-135.

\(^{72}\) Ibid, p136-138, with more details.
However, the sources Chen used were from the 20th century, and the ORO situation in China has totally changed in recent years. In this thesis, I will take Shenzhen European Office as a case to introduce and discuss why the ORO has become important and show its legitimation process.

*Theorizing City Diplomacy*

The theory surrounding city diplomacy can be divided into three schools: traditional (realism), nascent (liberalism) and innovative (constructivism). The first school is traditional (realism). Realists traditionally consider that international relations concern the struggle around power and interests, and diplomacy is still predominantly the responsibility of central government. So-called city diplomacy is only the implementation of the central policy by a city, and there is no independence of a city in international activities. As Waltz underlined, the foundation of behaviour in politics is to first guarantee the benefit of ruler and country. Especially when cities need to hold an international event such as the Olympic Games, it is impossible to be successful without permission and support from the central government. In China, whether from the legal division of authority or the practice of policy guidance, the baseline for Chinese local government to facilitate its foreign affairs work is to serve the diplomatic policy of central government and maintain national sovereignty and benefit. Thus, the realists see the reality that state-centric politics is still dominant, especially in the areas of national defence and diplomacy. No matter how influential city diplomacy is, it is still not strong enough to break the bonds of national diplomatic policy, or is at least not yet developed to the extent that it could replace national diplomacy.

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73 Murray (2008).
74 Lee and Hudson (2004); Rana (2004); Berridge (2010).
75 Waltz (2010).
76 Zhao and Chen (2013), p74.
Second, supporters of the nascent (liberalism) school, liberals, indicate the importance of subnational diplomacy. As explained by Putnam, foreign policy is influenced by a two-level game between diplomacy and domestic policy. Duchacek discusses the diplomatic methods of national and subnational government through two parallel routes: the central and the peripheral, named para-diplomacy. This means that foreign activities which are facilitated by the subnational government constitute a regional differentiation and functional differentiation of the foreign affairs of a country. This phenomenon not only enables every government department to be involved in diplomatic affairs, but also raises the diplomatic initiative of all levels of government. Subnational diplomacy already has the diplomatic requirements such as objective, strategy, mechanism, activity, means and other elements, without any difference with national diplomacy. Rosenau describes this phenomenon as the two worlds of world politics. On the one hand, state actors operate in the state-centric world. On the other hand, there is a diverse multicentric world in which cities and other non-state actors operate.

Liberals examine how city diplomacy can be considered an alternative diplomacy different from central diplomacy. Cities and local governments have gradually expanded their international networks by setting up offices around the world, and even bypass the central government’s foreign policy to carry out independent diplomacy. Especially in solving world issues such as human rights, assistance, development and environmental protection, cities and local governments have more diverse and more professional knowledge to accomplish this, and also have unique advantages in building peace and mitigating conflicts. Therefore, liberals emphasize making diplomacy localized, breaking the state-dominated diplomatic environment and norms, and incorporating NGOs, transnational corporations and transnational social movements into the diplomatic order. Liberals believe that no country can avoid

77 Putnam (1988).
78 Duchacek (1986).
diplomatic transformation. Apparently, however, it seems that the school has optimistically overestimated the diplomatic jurisdiction of city and local government, and also ignored the limitations when cities bypass central government to carry out foreign affairs. These deficiencies weaken the school’s influence to some degree.

Compared with the traditional and nascent school, the innovationist’s (constructivism) idea is compromise. Hocking’s multi-layered diplomatic theory considers that international interdependence has promoted local government enthusiasm to participate in foreign affairs. This participation could impact a country’s diplomacy before, in the process of and after negotiations. Whether in the so-called international diplomacy or domestic diplomacy areas, subnational government is an actor which cannot be ignored. Clearly, in Hocking’s view, the participation of the national government makes diplomacy a multi-level game, and subnational diplomacy becomes an independent layer of multi-layered diplomacy. As Pluijm and Melissen indicated, it could now be argued that state and city are following the same route, albeit not in the same vehicle.

Innovationists admit that current diplomacy is still guided by sovereign state and central government, which means that city diplomacy hardly goes beyond the red lines set by the state. But this situation is changing gradually, and the influence of city diplomacy is quite different on the various world issues, political systems, countries and areas. More importantly, the city has been substantially involved in foreign affairs, and its methods, means, rules and forms are increasingly mature, professional and practical. Arguably, to deny city diplomacy is equally to ignore the reality of developing diplomacy.

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80 Riordan (2002); Der Derian (1991).
81 Hocking (1993).
Innovationists suggest that in different working environments, central and city diplomacy respectively have their own advantages, which is neither a question about who is good and who is not nor black or white. They emphasize converging central and non-central diplomacy and absorbing the city into the diplomatic process to revise diplomacy as an open system.\textsuperscript{84} Innovationists are unlike traditionalists, who stick to the precepts of central diplomacy and deny the influence of city diplomacy. Also, they do not exaggerate city diplomacy, unlike liberals, who argue that it can bypass central diplomacy. Innovationists argue that the rule of city and local government diplomacy should be improved progressively and be integrated into the overall system of foreign policy by following a middle road.

In general, as a form of diplomacy, how to position and assess the potential of city diplomacy and its relationship with state diplomacy has become an important discussion. One view is that the conflict between city diplomacy and foreign activities, which are led by national government, might weaken central diplomacy, and therefore be harmful for a country’s diplomacy.\textsuperscript{85} However, a contrasting view is that city and state correspondingly have their advantages, which could be complementary.\textsuperscript{86} Besides, both conflict and cooperation exist nationally and locally, and this ‘competitive cooperation’ depends on the harmonious and effective coordination between central and local government.\textsuperscript{87} Scholars and practitioners take diverse approaches to city diplomacy. But in the era of globalization, cities need to establish a global perspective, improve their traditional diplomatic frameworks and establish a global political and economic network. In so doing, no matter the city or country, the space for development will be wider and wiser.

\textit{The Gap and the Research Aim}

\textsuperscript{84} Sharp (1999); Sharp (2001).
\textsuperscript{85} Coolsaet (2004).
\textsuperscript{86} Wang (2006), p34.
\textsuperscript{87} Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
There are three gaps in the existing literature on city diplomacy. First, although the role of city diplomacy is clear – that is, either participation in international governance to handle global issues or serving national diplomacy and local development – a question remains. That is, how can the researcher and the practitioner observe and evaluate the factors which influence the degree of the legitimacy that results in the success or failure of city diplomacy? Second, the narrative of showing how China’s city diplomacy serves national and local development, especially to develop the economy, is not thorough enough to explain the reality of the complex legitimation process. Third, there is a lack of empirical research to show how the diplomacy of a Chinese city becomes legitimate or can be seen as legitimate domestically and internationally.

As discussed, the central purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the overarching argument of the thesis, that is, the success of city diplomacy is related to the degree to which it is considered legitimate. The stronger the legitimacy, the greater the opportunity for success, and vice versa. This leads to the following research questions: What are the factors that affect the legitimacy of China’s city diplomacy? What is the exact legitimation process of a Chinese city’s diplomacy?

1.2 LEGITIMACY

The vagaries of the world situation and the rising influence of the city in world politics enable us to reasonably bring the legitimacy issue of city diplomacy into focus. Diplomacy is the main form of communication, exchange and interaction between cities; the greater the legitimacy of city diplomacy, the more likely it is to succeed, and the outcomes of diplomacy can help cities expand their influence on the world stage. The term legitimacy commonly refers to ‘a normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’. Whether an institution has legitimacy is defined by the

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88 Hurd (2007); Flathman (1993); Tyler (2006).
audience’s perception, and therefore the legitimacy has a subjective nature. The key question here is where does this subjective belief come from and how does it work? One answer is provided by Hurd, a pioneer in applying the concept of legitimacy to international relations:

The actor’s perception may come from the substance of the rule or from the procedure or source by which it was constituted. Such a perception affects behaviour, because it is internalized by the actor and comes to help define how the actor sees its interests. Once widely shared in society, this belief changes the decision environment for all actors, even those who have not been socialized to the rule, because it affects everyone’s expectations about the likely behaviour of other players.

If rules or institutions generate legitimacy by being obeyed, then the source of legitimacy for city diplomacy is far more complex than ‘obeying’. I am not denying that obedience can generate legitimacy for city diplomacy, but it is not the only element. In the context of China’s city diplomacy, obedience is relatively applied. It refers to the obedience of city diplomacy to serving the overall national diplomacy, and also the obedience of the diplomatic agent to serving the overall diplomatic goals and strategies of the cities. But from the perspective of policy makers and the target audiences (global investors, talent, etc.) of city diplomacy, obedience cannot explain why they see city diplomacy as legitimate. Beyond obedience, recognition is the core element of producing legitimacy. As Coicaud defined, legitimacy is the recognition of the right to govern. This is in line with Lipset’s assertion that the political institution leads people to accept that the existing regime is the most suitable system for society. These definitions result in a consideration of where the recognition of city diplomacy comes from and its suitability.

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90 Ibid.
92 Lipset (1981), p64.
Legitimacy is a complicated concept, difficult to both study and deconstruct. Aron suggests a way to deconstruct legitimacy, that is, to justify simultaneously political power and obedience. In other words, with regard to the relationship between recognition and obedience, we can see that the latter is contained by the former. The necessary condition for recognition is consent, without which it would be a sign of a lack of political legitimacy. Therefore, for this study, I investigate where this recognition comes from and how it is constructed. Because of the complex and subjective nature of legitimacy, the thesis can only analyse what constitutes the conditions of legitimacy, that is, it tries to discern the basis of the belief that gives rise to legitimacy, instead of to evaluate how this legitimacy in turn influences city diplomacy. The research strategy of the thesis is as follows. First, it analyzes what conditions produce such recognition, considering political, economic, social and cultural factors. Second, it establishes whether these conditions really affect the legitimation process of city diplomacy through the first-hand data obtained from field work. Third, it identifies the factors that most enhance or weaken legitimacy and then determine what this means for the theory of legitimacy.

Legitimacy is worth studying because it first presents a fundamentally important method of offering an account of the mechanism of city diplomacy. The core issue here is whether there is legitimacy, and the degree of it. Second, legitimacy is of interest because its role is impacted domestically and internationally, which both forms and constrains the actual conduct of city diplomacy. The higher the degree of legitimacy, the greater the success of city diplomacy. This degree of legitimacy is impacted at two levels. Macroscopically, the changing international and domestic environments determine the goal and function of city diplomacy and set the boundaries of the operation of agents such as the Shenzhen European Office. Microscopically, the operation strategy of the agents of city diplomacy determines the extent to which city

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95 Habermas (1984).
diplomacy can be achieved. As discussed above, all these sources of the legitimacy of city diplomacy are either domestic or international, which can not only influence whether cities’ diplomacy becomes legitimate but also influence the degree of city diplomacy to be seen as legitimate.

The definition of legitimacy I used in the thesis is ‘it is a normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’. In this thesis, the term legitimacy has two dimensions. First, legitimacy is the right of city diplomacy and second, legitimacy is the acceptance of it. In other words, in order to explore how city diplomacy is legitimised and why it is considered legitimate, it is important to examine its legitimation procedure and the influencing factors which play a role in this process.

In sum, the gap in the existing research on how city diplomacy becomes legitimate, especially how China’s cities complete their legitimation process, leaves a research opportunity for my PhD study. As Acuto suggests, questions about city diplomacy such as the place of cities in global governance and the volatility of the boom in city diplomacy have become important in recent years. This indicates a trend towards questioning the sustainability of the role of city diplomacy and also raises questions about the legitimacy of the city diplomacy discipline itself, which so far lacks a discussion of how and why legitimacy appears among cities.

The path I pursue in the thesis investigates the legitimation of city diplomacy through a historical examination of Shenzhen and a participant observation at Shenzhen European Office. The research subject has highly representative value because the city was the pioneer of modern urban life in China and it is the city which represents the brand of reform and opening up of China. Three broad categories of research are presented: first, the legitimation process of the diplomatic agent of China’s city (that is, Shenzhen European Office); second, the reason why reform and

96 Hurd (1999), p381.
97 Amiri and Sevin (2020), p X.
opening up shape the motivation, goal and strategy of Shenzhen; and third, the influence of the city’s symbols on the diplomacy outcome. The thesis will show that legitimacy matters to city diplomacy (domestic and international) because it influences the decision calculus of the policy maker, diplomatic agent and the target audience of the city diplomacy.

1.3 THE CITY OF SHENZHEN

Shenzhen is worth studying because of its speedy development among world cities and because it is the representative and pioneering city of China’s reform and opening up. In 1978 when China started the reform and opening up policy, Shenzhen was a small town of only thirty thousand people. In 1980, in line with Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, Shenzhen was selected as China’s Special Economic Zone, which was established to develop foreign economic cooperation, technological exchanges and promoting socialist modernization. In the early stages of reform and opening up, due to its proximity to Hong Kong and its advantages of low labour and land costs, Shenzhen developed the industry of the 3+C model\textsuperscript{99} which resulted in the formation of the development model of investment based on foreign investors, production based on processing and assembly, and products based on exports, and became an important centre in China’s electronic information industry and a destination for global manufacturing transfer. Nowadays, by November 2020, the GDP of Shenzhen had reached around 2.76 billion RMB and the permanent population of the city was 17.561 million.\textsuperscript{100} The meaning of Shenzhen for the world is significant. Vogel once commented, ‘no city in the world has ever grown as rapidly as Shenzhen’.\textsuperscript{101} In the history of China’s development since 1978, Shenzhen’s role as the pioneering city of

\textsuperscript{99} See Huang (2017), in O’Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017), p76; and will introduce its detail in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{100} Commerce Bureau (2021). ‘Permanent people’ means persons living in Shenzhen with registered permanent residence in Shenzhen or whose registered permanent residence is to be determined; persons who live in Shenzhen and have been away from their registered residence for more than half a year; those who have registered in Shenzhen and have been away for less than half a year or are working or studying abroad. See China National Bureau of Statistics (2021).

\textsuperscript{101} Vogel, in O’Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017), p vii.
China’s reform and opening up has always been maintained. For example, as the Brookings Institute presented in 2013, ‘Shenzhen’s economic model has to some extent become synonymous with China as a whole’\textsuperscript{102}. This makes Shenzhen a representative test case for the operation of legitimacy in the city diplomacy system: it not only shows how a relatively new global city interacts with the international community, which is of reference value for the innovative development of cities worldwide; at the same time, as a representative city of China’s reform and opening up, Shenzhen’s diplomatic experience is also instructive to other cities in China. This section gives a brief overview of Shenzhen and explains why the city is an ideal research subject to see the legitimation consequences of city diplomacy.

Shenzhen is one of the largest cities on mainland China. In 2020, in a ranking of Chinese cities’ GDP, Shenzhen came third after Shanghai and Beijing\textsuperscript{103}. It is located in southern China, extremely close to Hong Kong, and has seen incredible development in the past decades with the support of the national policy of reform and opening up. As an important gateway to the outside world for China, Shenzhen boasts the largest number of ports in the country and has a distinctive edge in comprehensive communication. Its geographic location is of strategic importance in the area of Guangdong, Macau and Hong Kong. This makes the city a highly open economy and a good choice for overseas investors eager to tap into the huge Chinese market. As one of the fastest-growing cities in the world and one of the most developed cities in China, Shenzhen’s average annual GDP growth rate reached 25% over the past three decades. The city stated its aim is to build a government ruled by law and owns law-making rights as a special economic zone, and a free, transparent and fair market. Besides, Shenzhen is also one of the best cities for innovation in China. Its research and development investment accounted for 4% of its GDP in 2013, a greater proportion than that of some European and American cities. The high-tech industry is its foremost

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, p1.
\textsuperscript{103} Chinanews (2021).
industrial pillar. It is the birthplace of many internationally renowned high-tech enterprises, such as Huawei, ZTE and BYD. Shenzhen was named by UNESCO as City of Design (2008) and as a Global Model for the Promotion of Reading.

The current literature on Shenzhen’s development centres on areas such as political reform, economics, anthropology, cultural studies, city design and so on. For instance, O’Donnell, Wong and Bach explain the progression of Shenzhen from an experimental city to a model of China’s reform and opening up between 1979 to 2011, pointing to social and economic reform experiments, urban planning and construction, the changing process of the modern urban civilization, social and humanistic changes, cultural and artistic development, and medical system construction. Shenzhen’s reform performance has been recognized by scholars that it brings China and Chinese citizens a ‘Shenzhen speed’ to reach modernization, making the poor become rich, helping migrants to settle down.

For this thesis, there were four reasons for choosing Shenzhen. First, Shenzhen is the representative city of China’s reform and opening up, it is ‘a model for the rest of China and as an example for the rest of the world to see China’s capability and commitment to reform’. This representative nature of the city shows that the city is an appropriate case to examine how China’s city diplomacy works nowadays. Second, since 1978, Shenzhen’s speedy development has been a microcosm of China's development. We can therefore use the interaction between Shenzhen and the world as a mirror to see what role Shenzhen (and China) needs city diplomacy to play, on the one hand, and what is the core reason for the global community to interact with Shenzhen (and China) on the other hand. Third, Shenzhen’s city culture of welcoming talent as a city of internal migrants and immigrants, and its advantage of attracting and supporting the private economy among Chinese cities, give the thesis a sufficient foundation of data to investigate the reasons why Shenzhen is regarded as legitimate.

105 Koolhaas et al. (2000); Chen (2006); Vogel (2011).
by both internal migrants and, especially, immigrants. A fourth reason to look at Shenzhen is that, unlike China’s other major and well-known cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Shenzhen is a city largely built since 1978; it is a wholly new place which is the representative of new, reforming China. This gives it an added representational and symbolic meaning.

The answer to the question about legitimacy that underlies these reasons will be shown in the thesis. First, as the pioneer city of China’s reform and opening up, what does this feature mean for Shenzhen’s diplomacy? What impact did reform and opening up have on the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy? What does this influence mean for Shenzhen’s diplomatic behaviour and achievements? Second, in the process of diplomacy, how is Shenzhen regarded as legitimate or not by the international community and local audiences? How did Shenzhen’s diplomacy (or its diplomatic agents such as the European office) become legitimized? And third, how does Shenzhen’s attraction function in the diplomatic process? Does it work directly or does it need a mediator?

The following chapters provide answers to these questions. I studied the origin of Shenzhen diplomacy and take part in the diplomatic work of Shenzhen European Office, enabling me to illustrate the operation of legitimation and show the fundamental difference between the legitimation of Shenzhen’s diplomatic agents in Shenzhen and Europe. The former is to legitimize the agent for each operation, and the latter is to enable the office to be seen as legitimate and then proceed to the next cooperation stage.

The full-time staff structure of Shenzhen European office (SZEO) by 2019 is one Chief Representative (CR) and other staff who are employed locally in Brussels, Nuremberg, Munich and London, to cover their local work. The chief representative is appointed by the office’s leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. The reason for the establishment of SZEO is to promote the relationship between Shenzhen and Europe (actually with the countries of the Office’s branches).
The function of the Office also focuses on various ‘serving work’, which aims to serve the development of Shenzhen’s reform and opening up. Its major categories include investment and business attraction, city promotion, talent introduction, liaison and coordination, and services for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’.

Chapter 3 discusses the Shenzhen European Office and shows how it became legitimized. Chapter 4 examines how the overall legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy was affected by reform and opening up. Chapter 5 explores how symbols of the city influence the legitimacy of Shenzhen. Based on these three empirical chapters, the concluding chapter brings a generalization of the theory of legitimation to the study of city diplomacy.

1.4 NOTE ON METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The method of the thesis is primarily based on participant observation while working part-time at the European Office of Shenzhen Government. This thesis aims to explore the reason of how Shenzhen diplomacy become legitimate, and I have been able to contribute the latest diplomatic practice of Shenzhen and introduce legitimacy theory to the studies of city diplomacy. The primary source material I collected at Shenzhen’s diplomatic events and while doing the routine work of the European Office have been used to reappraise those secondary sources related to my study.

The genesis of my PhD study rested on many motivations, but mostly on my life experience in Shenzhen. First, my experience of growing up in Shenzhen meant that I was already familiar with the city culture, especially the first-hand experience of how reform and opening up positively influenced a migrant family (from Chongqing). This pushed me to think about how Shenzhen became successfully developed through reform and opening up. Second, my previous work experience in the political circles of Shenzhen helped me to understand the thinking and the
behavioural logic of being a government official of Shenzhen (and China).\textsuperscript{107} For instance, since I received my bachelor’s degree from Shenzhen University in 2013 and joined an institution of Shenzhen Municipal Government, Invest Shenzhen (the predecessor of the Commerce Bureau), I started to think about how Shenzhen uses the method of attracting investment and promotes the city’s image on the international stage. More importantly, my experience of working at the General Office of Shenzhen Party Committee enabled me start thinking about how the whole city should develop and why it should be developed in a (or some) certain way(s).

The third reason for choosing Shenzhen as a case study is because of its representativeness of being the pioneer of China’s reform and opening up,\textsuperscript{108} this representativeness enables my study to be generalizable for understanding China’s city diplomacy and to be applicable for a broader narrative of China’s foreign policy and relations. In particular, I want to explore the external reasons for its rapid development. These reasons motived me to focus my research on Shenzhen, and that I am familiar with Shenzhen arguably means that I have deeper understanding to interpret the meanings, sources, function, and consequences of Shenzhen diplomacy and how these are implicated in domestic and also in a wider, international context.\textsuperscript{109}

The method of participant observation provided me with first-hand experience of the research project (Shenzhen’s diplomacy).\textsuperscript{110} My previous part-time work at Shenzhen European Office gave me greater access than that which would be granted to an outside observer and also reduced the distance between politics and academic research. Of course, all the research materials were published, and I did not have access to any confidential information. Over the part-time work experience, I traced the working processes of Shenzhen European Office. This enabled me to have coherent research material ‘of the pressures, incentives, motivations, and decision-

\textsuperscript{107} During the correction period, I quitted my part-time job at the Shenzhen European Office.

\textsuperscript{108} Academically, see Vogel, in O’ Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017); Officially, reform and opening up is the city theme of Shenzhen, see Shenzhen Talent (2021).


\textsuperscript{110} Halperin and Heath (2017), p314.
making calculus in any given instance of action’.\textsuperscript{111} My duties include taking charge of the general affairs of the Office, such as writing monthly and annual reports, organizing the Office’s meetings, researching published information on the European economy and business, attending economic and trade events, visiting local British institutions and organizing Shenzhen diplomatic events and so on. The experience at the front line of Shenzhen’s diplomacy meant that I had direct contact with and enough time to experience the establishment, process and the outcome of the diplomacy of Shenzhen; and interaction with the stakeholders either of Shenzhen or of the European side at diplomatic events held by the Shenzhen government. These experiences enabled me to directly observe, listen to, understand, empathize with, and rethink the action and language of these two major parties in the diplomacy.

Keeping rigor is vital for me to complete this PhD study, and also a serious standard of thesis quality. As Mackieson, Shlonsky and Connolly demonstrated, ‘step-by-step implementation of a purposeful methodology using trustworthy documentary data can effectively increase rigor and transparency, thereby reducing potential bias, in a qualitative analysis’.\textsuperscript{112} In social science, accusations of bias are a recurrent event.\textsuperscript{113} Bias means the influence that result in a distortion in the results of a study, which ‘deriving from a conscious or unconscious tendency on the part of a researcher to produce data, and/or to interpret them, in a way that inclines towards erroneous conclusions which are in line with his or her commitments’.\textsuperscript{114} It is important to say that when I wrote down my thoughts, I am a serious academic scholar not an employee of the Office. How to mitigate and minimalize the bias issue in this PhD project is vital to introduce here, which means that I need to ‘critically examined my own role, potential bias and influence during formulation of the research questions, data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location’.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} George and Bennett (2005); Parsons (2010).
\textsuperscript{112} Mackieson, Shlonsky and Connolly (2019).
\textsuperscript{113} Hammersley and Gomm (1997).
\textsuperscript{114} Polit and Beck (2014); Hammersley and Gomm (1997).
\textsuperscript{115} Galdas (2017), also see Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2017).
The key is the rightful selection of data and the way to interpret them. The rigor of the data collection reflects in ‘reflexivity’. It is crucial to strengthen rigor and minimize potential bias in qualitative research, ‘reflexivity’. Reflexivity means an interaction between researcher’s awareness and the research process\textsuperscript{116}, and therefore result in the researcher’s ongoing reflection on their engagement with their collection and analysis of data\textsuperscript{117}, and then requires researcher to discuss and record the meanings they associate with social interaction in their constructions of knowledge\textsuperscript{118}. These processes enable researcher to establish the ground for the rigor and trustworthiness of their research\textsuperscript{119}.

There were several steps taken to maintain the validity of the data for making the thesis rigor. Before conducting diplomatic work, I needed to understand the reason behind this action: why, to whom, the goal and the ideal result. After the diplomatic event, I found that there were three differences between the planning of and the reality of Shenzhen diplomacy: the difference between Shenzhen’s diplomatic policy planning and its actual implementation, the ideal and the actual behaviours of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, and the difference between the desired and the actual results of the diplomacy. These differences helped me to analyse what factors had actually influenced the diplomatic process and the outcome. Also, the feedback from the European locals through my diplomatic work was vital to explore the reasons that led to the outcome. This was direct feedback from the participants of Shenzhen’s diplomatic activities rather than the responses to a designed experiment, which adds authenticity and value to the data to support the argument of the thesis. The conversations between the locals and me, either at meetings or diplomatic events or through email and phone calls, were beneficial to both. For many of the locals, my office was a useful channel to receive information about what the attractiveness of

\textsuperscript{116} Probst and Berenson (2014).
\textsuperscript{117} Fischer (2009).
\textsuperscript{118} Gringeri et al (2013).
\textsuperscript{119} Probst and Berenson (2014).
Shenzhen is and how Shenzhen can be helpful to their career, and I could understand what Europeans want from Shenzhen.

The collected data came from three sources. The first was from my working notes, communication with my office colleagues and officials in Shenzhen, feedback from European work contacts and participants in diplomatic events held by Shenzhen. These were anonymized, and I also informed respondents of my PhD student status before a potential in-depth communication began. As noted, I did not discuss any confidential or sensitive topics, and fully respected the other person's willingness to communicate and the answers given. The second source of data was from official or other published documents and archives to understand the development and status of city diplomacy in China in general and its practice in Shenzhen in particular. This provided an accurate picture of city diplomacy in the Chinese context. The documents included published municipal documents about Shenzhen’s diplomatic activities, programs and their development, and Shenzhen’s diplomatic accomplishments and goals mentioned in news and websites that published documents about individuals and NGOs, companies or other institutions who have engaged in and made contributions to the development process of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. These provided direct evidence from Shenzhen diplomacy and of the politics of its legitimation. The third source of data was scholarly accounts to contextualize or support my argument. The thesis is theoretically driven, and I therefore leave the explanation of the overall framework of analysis to the next chapter. Also, in each introduction of the empirical chapters 3, 4 and 5, I demonstrate the validity and the reliability of the data presented in that chapter.

1.5 PLAN OF THE THESIS

The structure of the thesis shows the legitimation framework applied in city diplomacy, and then uses it to show the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy. Chapter 2 presents the argument for the significance of legitimacy in city diplomacy. Centred
on the argument that legitimacy is based on recognition, I introduce the legitimation framework to the study of city diplomacy. The chapter first defines legitimacy and explains why it matters to city diplomacy. It then answers a key question, that is, what makes an institution become legitimate? Here I draw on two approaches - the favourable outcome and procedural correctness – as the two key active legitimizing forces in the legitimation process of city diplomacy. The chapter also introduces the importance of branding and symbols for the legitimacy of city diplomacy. All these legitimation processes and forces of influence will be shown at work in concrete example in later chapters.

Chapter 3 examines the legitimacy process of a diplomatic agent of Shenzhen, the Shenzhen European Office. Three legitimizing forces influence the office: the geographical advantage of the office and its branches; its leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality; and its chief representative. The geographical advantage enables the Shenzhen European Office to be recognized by the Shenzhen side, which perceives that the office can play a role in conducting diplomatic work such as promoting Shenzhen’s global reputation, bringing benefit to the relationship between Europe and Shenzhen, and assisting Shenzhen’s city development. The Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality determines the working function of Shenzhen European Office, such as attracting investment and business, enhancing Shenzhen’s image and reputation, promoting talent cooperation, handling affairs of liaison and coordination, and serving Shenzhen’s enterprise ‘going out’, which are also the performance evaluation criteria of the office. The Bureau also has the power to select the chief representative. This appointment is crucial for the office because the role of the chief representative is vital as his work ideas and operational strategies influence the final performance of the office, and the performance determines the office’s legitimacy. The more achievements that the office can bring to the Bureau and Shenzhen, the more the office will be valued as a result to enhance its degree of legitimation. Throughout the chapter we can see that the
favourable outcome was essential to the legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office and procedural correctness was the supporting force for legitimizing SZEO to reach its outcome.

Chapter 4 shows how reform and opening up, as China’s national brand and the city brand of Shenzhen, influences the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy. First, the design of reform and opening up in order to seek a new development path in the late 1970s in China strongly indicated that the branding measure was crucial to legitimize the strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy. Reform and opening up was being adopted as the main political measure for both China’s national government and the local government of Shenzhen. Furthermore, such measures have shaped and valued the goals and direction of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, allowing its diplomatic strategy to be legitimate at the domestic design and implementation level. Second, the role of reform and opening up is important to the process of internalization, which is vital in the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy. This is because when people internalize a rule’s content and refigure their interests according to this rule, then this rule will become legitimate to them and even become significant for their behaviour. Third, influenced by reform and opening up, the nature of Shenzhen diplomacy is to take on the pioneering role. Since 2019, this role has improved from a focus on achieving economic benefits to improving international influence and competitiveness. This evidence provides substantive support for the favourable-outcomes hypothesis on legitimation discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5 shows that the key to the legitimation of Shenzhen in Europe is whether the city is seen as legitimate by the locals. It argues that the mediator between SZEO and the European local network, which enables the former to be seen as legitimate by the latter, is the symbol of Shenzhen. The legitimating symbols of Shenzhen were resources in the hands of SZEO striving to reach its working outcome. Whether it is to increase the reputation of Shenzhen, to attract investment and talent, or to launch a potential cooperation between Shenzhen and the European local network, the role of
symbolic resources mediate to provide a material payoff. The reason the Europeans are attracted by the symbols is because these symbols denote opportunity linked to the bigger narrative of Shenzhen as a developing opportunity or benefit, and this recognition is the basis of Shenzhen European Office’s legitimacy as a diplomatic actor.

Finally, Chapter 6, the conclusion, gathers and develops implications drawn from the thesis, which are divided between those of interest to the study of the legitimacy of city diplomacy and those directed to the practical problem of China’s city diplomacy and foreign relations. As for the former, I concentrate on the contribution of introducing legitimation theory to city diplomacy studies and the contribution it may have for the study of other international cities, and on the discussion of the legitimacy of China’s politics. For the practical diplomatic problems, my findings provide useful thoughts for legitimizing new roles for city diplomacy, and for making sense of China’s foreign relations under the current uncertain international situation. This final chapter also returns to the different legitimation sources outlined in Chapter 2 and uses the findings from Shenzhen to address them.
Chapter 2 Examining the Legitimacy of City Diplomacy

Legitimacy is important for the actors in world politics. For example, in 1971, the People’s Republic of China restored its legal rights in the United Nations; 30 years later it became a full member of the WTO. A city state such as Vatican City is widely recognized in the global network because of its unique religious status. These cases illustrate the value of legitimacy in the international community, that is, the recognition of the right of the government of China. Whether the leaders of the international community and international organizations have recognised China, and the degree of this recognition, determines China’s international status, role and influence. In other words, in the diplomatic arena, actors need legitimacy to gain support to accomplish diplomatic goals. This leads to important questions for this thesis which concern the relationship between legitimacy and diplomacy: what is legitimacy and what is its power for city diplomacy?

States are sovereign in the current world political system and therefore legitimacy is vital for those states to govern and exercise power. However, unlike states, cities are not sovereign: they are subordinate to their states or are part of their national politics. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the origin of the legitimacy of city diplomacy. Four dimensions are central to this discussion. First is the process by which cities gain legitimacy for having power in and of themselves to play their role on the world stage. Second, is the reason why those cities operate in the international system while not being sovereign, not holding legitimacy in the traditional sense, and only having power as an extension or part of the state. Third, the reason why and the method by which cities pursue international diplomacy, and the reason that they are treated as legitimate actors in this regard. Fourth, the reason that other actors in diplomacy treat cities as legitimate.

Exploring these legitimation processes and outlining for city diplomacy the related concept of legitimacy, which is currently overlooked in the literature is the goal of this
Grasping the operational definition of legitimacy helps us to determine how and under what circumstances it operates in city diplomacy, and how it contributes to outcomes. The material supporting this chapter draws on the theoretical and empirical literature discussing legitimacy. I used this information on legitimacy to provide a new theoretical framework as no attention is paid to this concept in the literature on city diplomacy. Part of my conclusion is that the stronger the legitimacy that city diplomacy has, the better outcomes it can accomplish. The empirical evidence for this argument will be introduced in the subsequent chapters, and the theoretical supplement for studies of city diplomacy comes at the end of the thesis.

The different aspects of the conceptual approach to legitimacy come in the three sections of this chapter. The first reviews what legitimacy is and the basic definition I use in my thesis. It will then discuss why legitimacy matters in studies of city diplomacy. The third section suggests a conceptual model to restore the source of legitimacy, which will be applied to examine how Shenzhen diplomacy is seen as legitimate in chapters 3 to 5. The final section will draw out the importance of symbols and branding for my study.

2.1 EXAMINING LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is widely used in academic discussion. It is a privileged research object in disciplines such as philosophy, political science, law, sociology and political anthropology.\textsuperscript{120} Especially in politics, it is a central problem.\textsuperscript{121} As a historical concept, legitimacy extended from the Latin word \textit{legimus}, meaning lawful, according to law, and then transmuted into what conforms to ancient custom and to customary procedure in the medieval period.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Coicaud (2002).
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] Flathman (1993), Beetham (2013).
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Sternberg (1968), p 245.
\end{itemize}
It has different meanings under different contexts. It can be understood that the practice conforms to the law,\textsuperscript{123} or the explicit and implicit consent of the public to governance.\textsuperscript{124} It is a subjective concept. Coicaud stated that ‘legitimacy is the recognition of the right to govern’.\textsuperscript{125} This is in line with Lipset’s assertion that the political institution leads people to accept that the existing regime is the most suitable system for society.\textsuperscript{126} In the context of politics, legitimacy refers to people’s beliefs about both political authority and obligations. On the one hand, a regime is legitimate as long as it conforms to fairness and justifiable standards. In the historical context, for instance, Plato and Aristotle believed that justice and morality were the eternal standards used to measure legitimacy, or the theory of the divine right of kings. Rawls considers that conditions such as freedom and equality are fundamental.\textsuperscript{127} Meanwhile, democracy is regarded by some contemporary political scientists as a necessary condition for political legitimacy, including the fairness of democratic procedures,\textsuperscript{128} or the quality of democratic results,\textsuperscript{129} or both of them.\textsuperscript{130} On the other hand, the legitimacy of a regime is measured by the perspectives of the people. It is important to consider Weber’s study on legitimacy since his formulation of legitimacy became central in sociological and political analysis.\textsuperscript{131} As Weber argued, it is a form of social action that ‘may be oriented by the actors to a belief in the existence of a legitimate order’.\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, the prestige of states is built on ‘the belief, held by their members, in a specific consecration: the legitimacy of that social action which is ordered and regulated by them’.\textsuperscript{133} In other words, for a political regime to have legitimacy means that its participants must have certain beliefs concerning it: ‘the

\textsuperscript{123} Merquior (1980), p2-3.
\textsuperscript{124} Ashcraft (1991), p524.
\textsuperscript{125} Coicaud (2002), p10.
\textsuperscript{126} Lipset (1981), p64.
\textsuperscript{127} Rawls (1971).
\textsuperscript{128} Manin (1987), May (1952).
\textsuperscript{129} Raz (1995).
\textsuperscript{130} Pettit (2003).
\textsuperscript{132} Weber (1968), in Clark, p8.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige’. According to Weber, the legitimacy of a state derives from three aspects: tradition, charisma and legality. Tradition means that a state is legitimate because its participants think it is inherited or has always existed. Charisma means the people of the state perceive their state leader has exceptional quality through the leader’s mystical experiences and personal qualities. Finally, the state has legitimacy because of its legality, which means that the rationality of the rule of judicial and administrative principles which form a society are trusted. However, Weber did not define legitimacy, and his claim to legitimacy is not part of legitimacy, nor is it equivalent to legitimacy itself.

Regardless of whether it is determined by a certain value standard or by the people’s perspective, legitimacy is difficult to grasp. One of the reasons why it is difficult to apply this concept is partly because the standards and opinions of those who define and recognize it are not unified. The debate over whether to have legitimacy or how to legitimize lies in the fact that the winning party satisfies the ruling standards, but it does not mean that its views are correct. From the historical point of view, the reason why a political regime is legitimate is because it has the power to write history, the power to set the discourse, the power to influence public opinion and so on. However, although these powers enable a regime to govern, it does not mean that the regime itself is legitimate. It depends on who decides what constitutes legitimacy. In terms of legitimacy per se, therefore, one is that it is legitimized by itself, and the other is that its legitimacy is endowed. This involves the difference between continuity and a pioneering regime. Therefore, because of the complexity of defining legitimacy, I need

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136 Gilley (2009).
137 Huntington (1993), p46.
to objectively identify the standard and the manifestation of legitimacy and the factors that affect it.

How to define the standard of legitimacy seems to have an answer in the study of international politics. Existing literature invariably regards legitimacy as an indispensable force influencing the world system and the international community. In other words, the role that legitimacy can play is a central focus in the international arena rather than being used to explain the right of governance in domestic politics. This role is to construct the international relations among countries. Realism emphasizes the functional and moral legitimacy of hegemony to maintain the stability of the world order. In this aspect, there are four sources acting as the supportive power of the legitimate governance of the hegemony: the hegemonic power needs to bring positive results, it must follow established procedures and abide by certain ethics and conform to the natural order. As Cummings emphasized, hegemony is not in the form of rule but in the form of a legitimate global leader to gain legitimacy. From a realist point of view, the legitimacy of the state’s leadership in the international system comes from the recognition of other participants in the system; the prerequisite for satisfying this recognition is to meet certain conditions to achieve legitimation. I will discuss the source of legitimacy later in this chapter.

Compared with realism, which focuses on national power, the liberal school focuses on the effectiveness of the norms, rules and order of the international institution in international relations when discussing the issue of legitimacy. Clark considers that legitimacy as an authority in the international community refers to the degree of acceptance and compliance of established rules and power relations by members of the international community. The core discussion is about who has the legitimate power. Since international society does not have a unified central government like domestic politics, the international system is a set of formal or informal rules and

139 Cummings (1999), p484.
arrangements that stipulate the responsibilities of actors and restrict their actions.\textsuperscript{141} For example, an international institution can reduce transaction costs between countries, reduce risk and uncertainty by providing information, provide incentives or penalties to member states through incentive arrangements, bring together the expectations of the member states and provide them with common knowledge, promote the formation of continuous steady-state relations, dispel fear in the international community, and increase trust, etc.\textsuperscript{142} In other words, the legitimacy of the international institution comes from a demand from members of the international community for the common expectations of the benefits brought by the international institution. As Wang argued, the legitimacy of the international institution comes from its effectiveness; the higher the effectiveness, the higher the degree of its legitimacy.\textsuperscript{143} This effectiveness, or performance legitimacy, means that performance is a critical variable to raise legitimacy in the international context, as well as being vital domestically.

The constructivists emphasize that it is recognition that legitimizes the international order and its relationships. As Hurd argued that the concept of legitimacy refers to the mutual recognition of countries.\textsuperscript{144} In other words, the actors in international politics, especially national identities and interests, are not established, but are the result of the construction of the international system. National interests are defined through social interaction in accordance with internationally recognized norms and understandings.\textsuperscript{145} This is in accordance with Hurd’s explanation:

The operative process in legitimation is the internalization by the actor of an external standard. Internalization takes place when the actor’s sense of its own interests is partly constituted by a force outside itself --- in this case, by the standards, laws, rules, and norms that exist in the community. A rule will become legitimate

\textsuperscript{141} Keohane (1989), p3.
\textsuperscript{142} Su (2007).
\textsuperscript{143} Wang (2016), p80.
\textsuperscript{144} Hurd (1999).
\textsuperscript{145} Sui (2004).
to an individual (and therefore become behaviourally significant) when the individual internalizes its content and reconfigures his or her interests according to the rule.\textsuperscript{146}

Therefore, legitimacy in international politics stems from the state’s recognition of whether the current international rules and institutions are legitimate; the key to the existence of legitimacy lies in whether these rules and institutions can inspire the state’s belief in it.\textsuperscript{147} From this point of view, the legitimacy recognized by the constructivists is based on the actor’s compliance with rules and norms. Even the unipolar hegemon dares not easily oppose them, because it will lead to resistance and checks and balances from other countries.\textsuperscript{148} These kinds of legal international norms and concepts are even an important incentive for changes within a country;\textsuperscript{149} according to this, international and domestic politics can be linked by the constructivist approach to discuss legitimacy problems, especially in the field of city diplomacy, which is the combined politics impacted by those domestic and international factors.

From the viewpoints of the above schools – realism, liberalism and constructivism - we can see that the function of legitimacy in international politics lies in its ability to influence and shape the behaviour of a country. Although they have their own understanding of the source of legitimacy in the international system and have different focuses on the factors shaping legitimacy, none of them neglect the irreplaceability of the function of consent. However, it is not easy to conduct empirical research on this identification. As I explained above, the internal situation of an individual is difficult to obtain and be measured and is subject to the distortion of the observer and the observed. Hurd proposes two approaches to examine how actors internalize external standards to achieve legitimation: the first shows ‘that states are

\textsuperscript{146} Hurd (2007), p31.
\textsuperscript{147} Hurd (1999), p379-408.
\textsuperscript{148} Finnemore (2009), p61-68.
\textsuperscript{149} Bukovansky (2002), p15-60.
acting instrumentally toward their goals but within the context of taking existing rules or institutions for granted’; second, the evidence ‘comes from where we see states attempt to manipulate others by developing resources derived from legitimated institutions’. Therefore, the discussion of legitimacy in international politics pays more attention to its instrumentality, so as to achieve a certain purpose of the actors.

The instrumentality of legitimacy is the main principle used to apply the concept of legitimacy in this thesis. Concentration is put on how Shenzhen’s diplomacy works through the influencing power of legitimacy rather than judge whether it meets a so-called discourse standard of legitimacy from the moral or legal level. In other words, this thesis uses the source of the legitimation of city diplomacy to examine whether the diplomacy of Shenzhen is successful or not.

The current literature on the legitimacy of China’s politics is vital if we study the legitimacy of city diplomacy of China. In the study of contemporary China’s politics, legitimacy matters as a central question and the core element of Chinese politics is the Communist Party of China. Performance is a major concern when examining the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Performance legitimacy refers to the idea that if the government functions of a state are justified by its performance, then the state has the right to rule. Zhao emphasized the importance of performance, arguing that the performance of government is the only source of legitimacy in China. This includes two dimensions: economic performance and social stability. Economic performance is the first key element of performance legitimacy. As Saich explained, the capacity of the CCP to deliver the economic goods built the legitimacy of the Party. Meanwhile, economic performance is not the only element which

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151 Zeng (2016).
153 Zhao (2009), p428.
154 Yang and Zhao (2014); Zhao (2009); Laliberté and Lanteigne (2008); Perry (2008); Wang (2005); Shambaugh (2001).
155 Saich (2004), p347.
affects performance legitimacy, which also includes social stability. Authors such as Shue consider that legitimacy is being staked on the CCP’s ability to maintain social ability.

Another variable to explain the legitimacy of China’s politics is nationalism. Various scholars argue that nationalism is significant for the legitimacy of the CCP’s rule. Bajoria states that today the most powerful legitimating ideology is nationalism. However, while Beetham asserts that nationalism itself cannot offer any legitimacy to any political regime or the election system of political actors, Zeng argues that it is a critical part of constructing ideology. This is because it is citizens’ subjective perceptions of government performance that generate legitimacy but not those performances per se, and ideological factors play a crucial role in forming the perception of citizens. Ideology nowadays is crucial for the legitimacy of the Party under Xi Jinping’s leadership. Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova explained that ‘(practicing ideology) is aimed at maintaining a sustainable system of one party rule, as well as an assertion of discipline and control in the core tactical spaces of political power’. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the CCP’s survival is also based on the institutionalization of leadership succession, which refers to ‘the creation and perpetuation of formal and informal guidelines that stipulate how and by whom leaders are selected and removed from power’.

The above studies on China’s political legitimacy are valuable but some modification is needed for me to borrow from them. Performance will be discussed further in my study, especially economic performance, which is a key source to attract

159 Bajoria (2008).
161 Zeng (2016), p11. Also, in China’s official statement, nationalism is a part of the socialist core value system, see Full Text of Xi Jinping’s report at 19th CPC National Congress (2017).
163 Zeng (2014).
attention either domestically or internationally for legitimizing city diplomacy. The ideology part involves the perspective of the participant on China in the practice of city diplomacy; consent is the key factor to determine the degree of legitimacy and lead to the outcome of city diplomacy. Institutionalization, also, provides practical evidence for me to show the legitimation process in my study.

The examination of the legitimacy of China’s city diplomacy, on which there is little research, is actually a cross-section and a supplement of studying the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. As I mentioned above, the higher the legitimacy the agent of city diplomacy has, the greater the success rate in achieving diplomatic goals, and vice versa. This study, especially the issue of the source of the legitimacy of city diplomacy in the international system, should reflect international society’s views on China, which is of certain supplementary value to the study of Chinese politics.

### 2.2 WHY LEGITIMACY MATTERS IN CITY DIPLOMACY

If the legitimacy problem is crucial for city diplomacy nowadays, two significant questions can therefore be raised. How does city diplomacy come to be seen as legitimate? How does legitimacy affect the strategic behaviour of an agent of city diplomacy? The instrumentality of legitimacy is the main principle used to apply the concept of legitimacy in this thesis and takes two importance dimensions into consideration. The first is focus on the legitimation of city diplomacy, and the second focus is on how city diplomacy works through the influencing power of legitimacy. The former can be used to observe what legitimation criteria help city diplomacy succeed and the latter is useful to analyse whether the city diplomacy succeeds or not. The legitimation approach for the thesis to analyse the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy will be introduced later in this chapter.

Two key justifications can be proposed for this enquiry. First, legitimacy is worth studying because it presents a fundamentally vital method of offering an account of the mechanism of city diplomacy. The core issue here is first whether there is
legitimacy, and then the degree of it. Second, legitimacy is of interest because its role is impacted by domestic and international politics, which both forms and constrains the actual conduct of city diplomacy.

**Legitimacy of City Diplomacy**

In the above section I showed that legitimacy is used to describe the right to rule of a government in domestic politics, but in the context of international politics, the discussion of legitimacy is focused on its capability to influence and construct the behaviour of countries. Both discussions lead to the outcome that legitimacy creates authority.\(^{164}\) Authority, as Barnett and Finnemore defined it, is ‘the ability of one actor to use institutions and discursive resources to induce deference from others’.\(^{165}\) Hurd stated that an institution occupies a position of authority in society when it is seen as legitimate, for instance international organizations, states, religious movements and the market have been called authoritative in international relations.\(^{166}\) A city’s political role and diplomatic system also give it authority. Its diplomacy emphasizes non-sovereign issues such as the implementation of a country’s foreign policy and the pursuit of city security, prosperity, and value.\(^{167}\) It is therefore the first evidence to show why legitimacy can be used as a framework to discuss city diplomacy, because this concept can interpret the origin of the authority of a city in the context of international politics, which legitimizes the diplomatic behaviour of that city.

Second, the review of the current literature on city diplomacy in the Introduction of this thesis showed what city diplomacy is, how it works, and what characteristics it has. However, there is a gap in the literature as it does not fully explain how city diplomacy gained its legitimacy. I therefore use the concept of legitimacy to explore the legitimation process of city diplomacy. By considering definitions of city diplomacy, there are some clues that can be identified. City diplomacy is ‘an action or

\(^{164}\) The discussion on legitimacy lead to the consideration on authority. See Coicaud (2002).


\(^{166}\) Hurd (2007), p60-61.

\(^{167}\) Zhao (2016).
a tool to handle the relation’\textsuperscript{168} and also ‘the institutions and processes by which cities engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another’.\textsuperscript{169} If we put city diplomacy in the context of legitimacy, some interesting questions arise. For example, how did it become an action or tool or institution or process internationally? What was the formation process domestically before it ‘showed up’ globally? These procedures substantially suggest that the path by which city diplomacy becomes legitimate is a process of legitimation.

Pluijm and Melissen outlined five significant factors that enable a city to be involved in international politics: the resources the city is able to command, the degree of perfection in the city’s system, the relationship and interaction between the city and its central government, the geographical location of the city, and the extent of a city’s internationalisation.\textsuperscript{170} All these mean that a city is able to play its role, rather than saying it will and being unable to do so. This highlights the value of examining the legitimacy of city diplomacy, because its degree depends on the actual effectiveness of the role of city diplomacy. Various examples can show how these capabilities of a city can legitimise a city’s image in the mind of those participating in city diplomacy. For instance, the more resources a city is able to command the more it can improve its image on the international stage. The comprehensive strength of cities is particularly evident when they compete for the right to host the Olympic Games. The degree of perfection in a city’s system determines the residential satisfaction of citizens and visitors, which directly affects the reputation of a city. Also, the more support from the central government the faster a city will develop, and Shenzhen is a good example of this, which will be shown in the next chapter. Finally, the geographical location and the extent of internationalization of a city are also critical to determine a city’s status.

\textsuperscript{168} Global Forum (2003); Sizoo (2007); Musch (2008).
\textsuperscript{169} Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
For example, Hong Kong is an important transit point for trade and investment between China and the rest of the world.

Zhao argued that the core problem of city diplomacy in China is system design, which has three parts: city spirit, diplomatic system and operating mechanism. He also emphasises five key points of city diplomacy, including legislation, definition of responsibility, determined strategy, clarified regulation and resource. These points such as the relationship and interaction between a city and its central government, a city’s system and its political institutions, legislation, and the extent of internationalisation are the factors which influence the legitimisation of the diplomacy of a city. They are also the determining factors which impact the degree of success of city diplomacy. In the following empirical chapters, I will use these factors to discuss the legitimisation of Shenzhen diplomacy.

Acuto’s research reflects an interactive relationship between city diplomacy and legitimacy. He found that the planning of a sporting mega-event, such as the Olympic Games, could enhance subnational authority and substantially influence public diplomacy. Authority, as a factor with substantial influence in diplomacy, can raise legitimacy. As I mentioned above, when an institution is considered legitimate, it gains authority in society. For instance, Hurd explained that ‘where an actor sees a rule as legitimate, the rule has been internalized into interests and takes on the quality of being authoritative over the actor’. In turn, we can also argue that if an institution has authority in society, it means that it has more chance to be seen as legitimate or with more legitimacy.

Acuto’s finding raises a further discussion on how a city can extend its legitimacy from being authoritative, which is the process of so-called re-legitimation. Cities increase their (international) authority through diplomatic acts (e.g., hosting events

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171 Zhao (2016).
172 Acuto (2013).
such as the Olympic Games). This authority can also increase the legitimacy of city diplomacy in the international system. For instance, hosting an international event such as the Olympic Games first can deeply promote the brand of a city, which can internationally raise a city’s identity and enable people to visualize the city. Second, the host city can use this chance to receive investment to finance the city’s much-needed infrastructure and beautification projects, and to reshape the city’s urban space.\(^{174}\) It is therefore possible to say that studying the legitimacy of city diplomacy involves two aspects. One is how city diplomacy becomes legitimate (domestically and internationally) and second, how the results of city diplomacy re-legitimize its legitimacy, which essentially is a cyclic process.

With the deepening of China’s internationalization, city diplomacy is becoming a vital part of China’s diplomatic strategy. For example, the central government delegated the power of cadre management, administrative management, social management, and fiscal, tax and finance to local governments to fully mobilize their initiative.\(^{175}\) In order to develop economically, cities have thus been empowered to become the most active actors in diplomacy. People working within or related to the field of diplomacy need to find a clear direction and arrange effective strategies in advance in the changing political, economic and social environment. To clarify the legitimacy problem of city diplomacy is the key to reach the effectiveness of any strategy: how should cities cooperate under the influence of the changing world situation? In what way should the cooperation proceed at city level? How will cities’ cooperation positively influence the relationship between states? Therefore, to clarify the legitimacy problem of city diplomacy is a key to reach the effectiveness of any strategy in city diplomacy.

As I have argued, the higher the degree of legitimacy, the more likely it is to lead to greater success for city diplomacy. This degree of legitimacy is impacted at two levels.

\(^{174}\) Grandi (2020).
\(^{175}\) Zhao (2016).
Macroscopically, the changing international and domestic environment determine the goal and function of city diplomacy and set the boundaries of the operation of agents such as the Shenzhen European Office. Microscopically, the operation strategy of the agents of city diplomacy determines the extent to which city diplomacy can be achieved. As discussed above, all these sources of the legitimacy of city diplomacy are either domestic or international, which can not only influence whether cities’ diplomacy becomes legitimate but also re-legitimize city diplomacy. In the following chapters, these processes will be presented.

*Legitimacy and the Conduct of City Diplomacy*

If the first contribution that comes from bringing the concept of legitimacy to the study of city diplomacy is to show how it become legitimate (the legitimation process) and its influencing factors, then the second is to show how the actors of city diplomacy ‘carefully consider the issue of legitimacy’ to formulate their diplomatic goals, behaviours and strategies, and also make self-adjustments. As Hurd argued, under his social constructivist approach, the actors are affected by legitimacy, which is a socially constructed phenomenon, regarding their strategic calculations and self-conceptions.¹⁷⁶

It should be noted that the nature of legitimacy is here already modified from an operational power to a standard of city diplomacy, either in perception or behaviour. For the country, for instance, shifts in norms socialize states to want different things, and to behave differently in order to attain them, and these norms enable states to change their own rules of interstate conduct.¹⁷⁷ This logic is also appropriate to the city. A city or its actors will modify their behaviour in diplomacy once they realize the factors that influence their legitimacy have changed or are going to change. Then they

¹⁷⁶ Hurd (2007). He also demonstrated that ‘legitimacy is a process of internalization which shape states’ sense of their interests. The result is a kind of socialization of states that produces congruence between (perceived) interests and the legitimated rules and institutions’. (2007, pp.40-41).
will try to regain or enforce their legitimate power through this modification to reach their diplomatic goal.

There are also some specific contexts for the consideration of the conduct of city diplomacy. First, the consideration is at the national level, that is city diplomacy needs to serve national diplomacy. Traditionally, international relations concern the struggle around power and interests, and diplomacy is still predominantly the responsibility of central government. So-called city diplomacy is only the implementation of the central policy by a city, and there is no independence of a city in international activities.\textsuperscript{178} As Waltz underlined, the foundation of behaviour in politics is to first guarantee the benefit of the ruler and the country.\textsuperscript{179} The Chinese scholar Xiong clearly points out that whether from the legal division of authority or the practice of policy guidance, the baseline for Chinese local government to facilitate its foreign affairs work is to serve the diplomatic policy of central government and maintain national sovereignty and benefit.\textsuperscript{180} It seems that no matter how influential city diplomacy is, it is still not strong enough to ‘break’ the bonds of national diplomatic policy.

The second consideration is at the domestic level, where city diplomacy is needed for cities to reach their development goal. In the globalized world, the internationalization level of a city determines whether it can have strong competitiveness, influence, relevance, and broad recognition internationally. The improvement of a city’s capability to co-ordinate international resources, realize international recognition, and enhance the added value of a city through city diplomacy have become the inherent requirements and important trends of cities’ international development.\textsuperscript{181} Cities in China put forward their strategic goal of

\textsuperscript{178} Lee and Hudson (2004); Berridge (2010).

\textsuperscript{179} Waltz (2010).

\textsuperscript{180} Zhao and Chen (2013), p74.

\textsuperscript{181} Cities have participated in every stage of international politics and the professionalization of cities’ international activities is still growing to determine the technical standard of city diplomacy. See Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
building a modernized and internationalized city; Shenzhen did this in May 2011.182 Also, the more competitive a city is on the international stage, the more resources that will accrue in return to improve the city’s development. For instance, the most influential cities are more attractive than others worldwide among immigrants, such as London and New York. This attractiveness of cities will help them to recruit talented people.

The third conduct of city diplomacy is at the international level. Globalization requires cities, especially global cities, to play a ‘node’ role. In the era of globalization, the functions of the city have also become globalized. Cities with truly global competitiveness have all actively integrated into the global system and provide a bridge between the local, national, regional and global.183 In particular with the expansion of mass media, cities have become the nodes of global networks.184 These situations need cities to have mastered the diplomatic skills to manage and balance their affairs. For instance, in addition to safeguarding national interests, cities also need to accomplish their own diversified social interests. When handling diplomatic issues in economy, finance, culture, conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction, for example, cities should not only maintain communication closely with the central government and follow its national foreign policy, but also be closer to governments, multinational companies, and non-governmental organizations in the world. To deal with all these complicated affairs, diplomatic skill is required of a city.

These three points define the origin of the legitimacy of city diplomacy. The legitimacy standard of city diplomacy comes from three needs: to serve national diplomacy, to help a city’s development and to play a node role in world society. In other words, these standards determine what a city should and can do when planning the diplomatic goal, strategy and the practical behaviour of this city, and therefore

182 SZDRC (2016).
183 Geddes (1968); Hall (1984); Ushakov (2013).
184 Zhao and Chen (2013).
result in a critical puzzle: what are the differences in the legitimation of city diplomacy when cities play their role under the above different contexts? How do cities like Shenzhen operate in the international system while not being sovereign, not holding legitimacy in the traditional sense, and only having power as an extension or part of the state? Therefore, why do cities like Shenzhen pursue international diplomacy, how do its diplomatic agents do it, why are they treated as legitimate actors in this regard, and why do other actors treat them as legitimate? The answers will be shown in the following chapters, and arguably, the answers to these questions are crucial not only to Shenzhen, but also to any cities trying to reach goals through diplomacy. Hence, it is fair to say that the legitimacy problem is becoming crucial to the study of city diplomacy. If this is conceded, it is then necessary to think more closely about the nature of the source of legitimacy --- where does it come from? The next section will introduce the traditional opinions on what establishes the legitimacy of authority, before moving on to an explanation of my own analytical model.

2.3 LEGITIMATION APPROACH

This section introduces how the traditional legitimation approaches - the favourable-outcomes approach and the procedural approach - work respectively under different conditions and environments. Legitimacy occurs from different sources in various disciplines. Although there is currently no unified causal path to legitimation, there are some clues to help us to identify the nature of legitimacy from its definition. In my thesis, legitimacy refers to ‘the belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’. 185 It is also ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the action of an entity is desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’. 186 The beliefs, perceptions or assumptions here contain the connotations of subjectivity,
standardization, and appropriateness. This begs the vital question of who is seeing something as desirable, proper, or appropriate. The stakeholders of city diplomacy are various – including the city, the nation in which the city is located, the outside world (especially who within this world) etc.; meanwhile, their views, attitudes and final decisions (such as policy, organizational behaviour, cooperation) can change depending on the changing internal and external environments. In other words, it is only when the legitimation process is obtained and maintained by the stakeholders’ approval that the diplomatic action of the city be accepted by these stakeholders.  

As Hurd says, ‘a rule will become legitimate to an individual (and therefore become behaviourally significant) when the individual internalizes its content and reconfigures his or her interests according to the rule’.  

Internalization is a tool to dissect how legitimation is accomplished. Hurd indicates that ‘internalization is the process by which an individual apprehends an ‘objective’ reality and endows it with meaning shared by others’. This is in line with Habermas, who explained that ‘one’s inner nature is adapted to society with the help of normative structures in which needs are interpreted and action are prohibited, licensed or enjoined’. In other words, legitimation begins with ‘the immediate … interpretation of an objective event as expressing meaning, that is, as a manifestation of another’s subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful to myself’. These opinions point out a vital process which shows that individuals are brought in to the information provided by the social context. This brings a picture of the internal and external environment to the participant involved in city diplomacy and helps them to understand the interactive relationship between their interests and city diplomacy.

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190 Habermas (1975), xxii.
191 Berger and Luckman (1966), p129.
Internalization does not imply that legitimacy is self-conferred. The focus of this thesis is to explore how city diplomacy becomes legitimate. Hence the value of the discussion on legitimacy is dependent on its validity. The validity of the legitimacy of Shenzhen European Office is determined by the Office’s stakeholders who legitimize the office, and who consider the office is legitimate. Of course, after the legal establishment procedure of Shenzhen European Office, for Shenzhen, the Office members are the legitimate diplomatic representatives. Within diplomacy, they are confident to work because they know they are the legitimate representatives of Shenzhen. This kind of internal morale will indeed improve their diplomatic working behavior, but if we consider the validity of the legitimacy, the recognition of the object of Shenzhen’s diplomacy is crucial. For instance, a British businessman wants access to China’s market. After being introduced by Shenzhen European Office, he finds that the Shenzhen market has potential. His recognition of the Shenzhen market will directly affect his attitude towards the Office. In this friendly recognition, the office’s investment promotion behavior is regarded as legitimate by him. More importantly, after due diligence on the Shenzhen business environment this businessman indeed receives tangible benefits from investing in Shenzhen. The legitimacy of Shenzhen European Office then will be increased in his view.

For those participants involved in deciding whether a city’s diplomatic behaviour or actor has legitimacy, internalization is an introspection process during which the stakeholder learns what it wants. This process requires that ‘an external rule, institution, norm, or idea exist before the process begins’.\(^{192}\) Then the cognition of the participant based on these standards determines the degree of the legitimation completed and legitimacy. As Hurd explained, ‘A rule will become legitimate to an individual (and therefore become behaviourally significant) when the individuals internalized its content and re-configures his or her interests according to the rule’.\(^ {193}\)

\(^{192}\) Hurd (2007), p42.
\(^{193}\) Ibid, p31.
It is therefore the first level to define the basic interest of the participant who determines the legitimation of city diplomacy. These participants come from both domestic and international contexts. This is because city diplomacy is an action of an agent of the local government of a sovereign country operating in the international context, which not only occurs in one political environment, hence it needs to be legitimized both domestically and internationally. Although the interests of these domestic or international participants will be different, there is something which influences their cognition to see city diplomacy as legitimate. As for the policymaker of city diplomacy at the national level, for instance, his interests come from the intrinsic quality and the need of the country itself, and the role, identity and culture which the country has.\textsuperscript{194} If a city’s diplomacy can bring a substantial benefit which its country wants, then it reaches the standard for the country’s internalization. Once the internalization is completed, those external features ‘enter directly into the constitution of the actors ends themselves, but such norms, are constitutive rather than merely regulative’.\textsuperscript{195} For example, why the country set up their bureaucracies is because ‘a new understanding of necessary and appropriate state behaviour is originating ‘.\textsuperscript{196} In other words, the key to showing the origin of the legitimacy of city diplomacy is to find out what interests its participants are seeking or are interested in.

The second level of internalization is to define the strategies with which to chase those interests of the participants; this is especially important for understanding the behaviour of the policymaker and the practitioner of city diplomacy. The strategy here is shaped by the ‘logic of appropriateness set out by international rules or institutions.’\textsuperscript{197} In my study, this appropriateness is not only from an international perspective but also domestic. This is to say that to formulate the goal, strategy and method of city diplomacy, it is necessary to follow the visible or invisible reality (such

\textsuperscript{194} Wendt (1999), chap 5.  
\textsuperscript{195} Wrong (1961), p186.  
\textsuperscript{196} Finnemore (1996), p65.  
\textsuperscript{197} March and Olsen (1998).
as the difference of cultural background, politics context, economic capability, interest) which might comprise the final legitimate form of city diplomacy.

Internalization is an internal operation to complete legitimation, but there are some traditional external representations which have been shown as the source of legitimacy. As introduced above, the Weberian approach to the legitimacy of a state derives from tradition, charisma and legality. To Weber’s model, Weatherley added three aspects: election and mobilization mode legitimacy, ideology legitimacy and performance-based legitimacy.\(^{198}\) Dingxin Zhao further modified Weberian modes of legitimacy, he argued legal-electoral, ideological and performance as the three sources of state legitimacy. He considered that ideological legitimacy may replace the traditional because it includes ‘any value-based justifications of the state power’.\(^{199}\) He also dismissed charisma as one of the ideal types of legitimacy which although vital tends to be an extreme form of ideological legitimacy, and also considered performance as the major dimension of legitimacy. As I have argued, performance is vital for Chinese politics, and is the key to explore the origin of how a city’s diplomatic role has become legitimate at China’s domestic level.

There is another precise legitimation approach apart from the Weberian. Applbaum indicated that this analytical classification is between procedural and substantive conceptions of legitimacy.\(^{200}\) Legitimacy is typically thought to be constitutently bound up with adherence to defined rules. Also, conversely, these rules might be counted adequate either because they generate from a ‘right source of authority’ (procedural), or because they objectify ‘proper ends and standards’ (substantive).\(^{201}\) These are the same as Spencer’s identification, namely: a legitimacy of formal rationality (legal rational norms and authority) in which laws and authority are accepted because of the formal legality attached to them … and a legitimacy of

\(^{198}\) Weatherley (2006).

\(^{199}\) Zhao (2009), p418.


\(^{201}\) Beetham and Lord (1998), p3; Clerk (2007).
substantive rationality (absolute value norms and value rational authority) in which laws and authority are accepted because of their congruence with fundamental extra-legal values.²⁰²

In other words, an object is legitimate first because it is legal (conforms to a certain procedure, such as Weber’s tradition and legality approach). This is to say that legitimacy comes from conformity to the law.²⁰³ There are two dimensions of this origin. One, legitimacy is identified with the quality of a title to govern and is presented as a legally validated political activity.²⁰⁴ As Weber stated, ‘Today, the most common form of legitimacy is the belief in legality, the compliance with enactments which are formally correct and which have been made in the accustomed manner’.²⁰⁵ Second, legitimacy not only means ‘the belief in legality’, the law here also needs to, first, be in concurrence with the constitutive values which form society’s identity; second, it has to achieve society’s values in a credible way. This means that besides applicability, the law also needs efficacy.²⁰⁶

This approach of conformity to the law is the same as the ‘procedural approach’ to legitimacy in international relations to some degree. As Hurd said: ‘As long as rules are passed according to accepted procedures and by established authorities people appear to accept them as legitimate, all else equal’.²⁰⁷

Franck gave a strong procedural explanation of the causes of legitimation. He concluded that ‘legitimacy accrues to a rule or intuition when it has come into being and operates in accordance with generally accepted principles of right process’.²⁰⁸ This means that the legitimacy of city diplomacy is because it should first satisfy certain procedural criteria, and this process is equal to legality.

²⁰² Spencer (1970), p133.
²⁰³ Coicaud (2002).
Another source to form legitimacy is based on norms. A norm decides people’s perception of what the activity of city diplomacy is to be. This means that the right of a city in the international system is a de jure act only after its participants have the agreement on those values city diplomacy has.\textsuperscript{209} This is to say that the value of city diplomacy constitutes the substance of a city’s right to act on the international stage, if, as Luhmann explained, that value means what is preferable in the recognition which leads to the production of legitimacy.\textsuperscript{210}

Furthermore, norms derive from value, and value might be formed by a favourable outcome. This argument is borrowed from the ‘favourable outcomes school of legitimacy’.\textsuperscript{211} This model includes two possible mechanisms. First, the institution has legitimacy because actors perceive this institution can provide them with material benefits.\textsuperscript{212} Second, people who intend to give their consent to those institutions can provide them with material benefits and the perception of legitimacy is generated because of this consent.\textsuperscript{213} This is to say that the ‘production of material payoffs and the satisfaction of perceived self-interest’ form the legitimacy.\textsuperscript{214} In sum, city diplomacy is valuable because it can provide benefits to those participants and then politically, economically and socially formulate a norm whereby city diplomacy works. And this norm, which might be seen as a common perception in current world politics, becomes a source of legitimacy of city diplomacy.

Both conformity to the law and the norm need a final decisive factor to crystallize legitimacy, which is consent, from the perception of the individual. Locke explained 300 years ago, and it is still a solid explanation of legitimacy, that it is ‘the final mark of all political action and institutions’.\textsuperscript{215} If we consider the legitimacy of city

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{209} As Coicaud (2002) explained, ‘to govern is a de jure act only after those who command and those who obey have agreed with one another about those values’. p 14.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Luhmann (1982), p97.
\item \textsuperscript{211} See Zelditch (2001).
\item \textsuperscript{212} Kelman (2001), Voeten (2005).
\item \textsuperscript{213} Raz (1990), p12; Simmons (2001); Zelditch (2001).
\item \textsuperscript{214} Hurd (2007), p67.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Shapiro (1986), p116.
\end{itemize}
diplomacy is the right of a city to act in the international system, then consent plays a
major and basic role therein. As Coicaud argued, ‘A right whose validity is recognized
by no one does not possess, properly speaking, the character of a right’.\footnote{216 Coicaud (2002), p11.} In other
words, it is only if people think that city diplomacy is necessary in the international
system that the right of a city to act on the world stage has validity. The nature of the
right of city diplomacy also can be a property with valid title whereby all its
participants can enjoy its full security to pursue the affairs of either the city or its
country in international society.

To sum up, legitimation is achieved through multiple causal paths. Owing to the
complexity of the conditions and environments involved in the practice of city
diplomacy, this thesis is committed to exploring the universal standard of being
legitimate rather than trying to establish whether and to what extent the legitimacy
works after completing the legitimation process in city diplomacy. Therefore, a
simplified legitimation approach will assist us to examine the data in subsequent
chapters, and I propose that the favourable-outcome and the procedural approach are
the two active legitimizing baselines. These two paths will lead to participants’
consent through internalization. Based on their character, the approaches in Figure 2.1
are respectively being contained restricted to the favourable-outcome or the
procedural. However, sources such as tradition and charisma are not so relevant to
my thesis. This is first because legality is more rigorous than tradition for discussion
in an institutional context. Second, favourable outcome arguably plays a greater role
than personal charisma in city diplomacy, as shown in the evidence presented in the
following chapter. Figure 2.2 shows the causal path of legitimation. In section 2.5
below, the details of a clearer and more consistent definition for the thesis will be
shown.
2.4 BUILDING LEGITIMACY DURING DIPLOMACY: BRANDING AND SYMBOLS

There are resources which can strengthen the legitimacy of city diplomacy during its practice. Based on my observation, highlighting the role of branding and using symbols to raise the attractiveness of the city is Shenzhen’s strategy during the diplomatic process. The symbols of Shenzhen are brought into being by the legitimation of Shenzhen’s construction and development under the influence of the comprehensive domestic and international environments, and these symbols
themselves also in turn become powerful tools in city diplomacy. This is crucial in branding particularly.

*The Content: Symbols*

Symbols exist everywhere in human society. A symbol is the expression of meaning, though it is not symbol itself which is significant, but the fact that people contribute meanings to it.\(^{217}\) There are two kinds of symbols. The first is concrete, representing tangible things, for example the national flag and emblem is the symbol of a country. The other is abstract, representing something intangible, such as an ideology or a slogan. There are also two kinds of relationships between the expression and the meaning: they themselves have important common features that are easy to associate with, such as the torch symbolizing light; and they do not have common associations but are endowed by people through myth, legend and allusion, such as the rose for love and the dove for peace. As White defined, symbolism takes place ‘when some components of an agent’s experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions and usages, respecting other components of its experience; the former set of components are the symbols and the latter set constitute the meaning of the symbols.’\(^{218}\)

Symbols are also indispensable in politics. Edelman indicated that politics is just a series of abstract symbols.\(^{219}\) As Kertzer argued, ‘At its root, politics is symbolic, because both the formation of human groupings and the hierarchies that spring from them depend on symbolic activity. [No] political identities are based on objects I can touch or see or perceive in any way except through symbolic representation.’\(^{220}\) Cohen explained that although a regime is supported by military force, its stability and continuity depend on those symbols which express authority.\(^{221}\) For example, in the Republic of China, the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) tried to construct the political

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\(^{218}\) Whitehead (1928), p9.

\(^{219}\) Edelman (1967).


symbol of Sun Yat-sen in order to seek the legitimacy of seizing power and governing. As for cities, their attractiveness in diplomacy comes from their symbols and the real (especially economic) strength the cities represent behind these symbols. For example, in Chapter 5, I will introduce how Shenzhen’s symbols of innovation and inclusiveness play a vital role in enhancing Shenzhen’s legitimate image in diplomacy.

In short, governments need symbols to define their legitimacy. The meaning represented by symbols empowers symbols, and it is thus that social structure and symbolic representation are interrelated, which then provides a path to explore how governments acquire legitimacy and maintain power. Religion, art, language, class and gender, for example, divide social space and give it meaning in order to form the social world.

It is also common in international politics to use political symbolism to acquire legitimacy, especially in the United Nations, such as the representative status of the countries, the results of the Security Council’s agendas, etc. In Hurd’s research on the United Nations Security Council, he examined that ‘symbols are used, inter alia, to legitimate the institution, to define social classed among members, to conceal or bolster power relations, to communicate, to act, to delegate power, and to establish authority roles’. In the case of the United Nations, the meaning of symbols is not only symbolic, but substantive, and determines the order of power of the United Nations and its members. The key is that this order of power is determined by their degree of legitimacy.

But after all, symbolism is a relatively complicated metaphysical concept. How to clearly dissect symbolic power in international politics is challenging. In 1999, a conceptual foundation for examining symbols in IR was provided by Barry O’Neil. It includes message symbols, those that carry a message between actors; focal symbols,
those that induce players to ‘commonly expect a certain outcome’ in an interaction; and value symbols, those that express and reinforce an identity.\textsuperscript{226} Although ‘there is no set of features that is necessary and sufficient to define the group to which all three belong’\textsuperscript{227}, O’Neil provides a conceptual basis for the study of symbolism in international politics.

It should be noted that the power generated by the symbol does not necessarily directly construct legitimacy, but the public’s perception of this power, especially their degree of recognition, determines what kind of effect this power can produce. If the effect of this power is consistent with the purpose of the political symbol, then the formula ‘symbol generates legitimacy’ is valid. In this formula I named, what we need to examine most is how the symbol constructs power, so that we can analyse the concept of how people recognize the meaning of the symbol.

So how do symbols generate power? By definition, as Brysk indicated, ‘a symbol involves the maintenance or transformation of a power relationship through the communication of normative and affective representation.’\textsuperscript{228} In other words, the purpose of the role of the symbol is to sustain and especially to distinguish the power relationship, which is beyond the nature of symbol itself. The advantage of symbolization is to highlight the source that power comes from.

For instance, the social power of an object is not generated from the physical and material nature of the object itself, but from its symbol. For example, in 2020, George Floyd, a black man in Minnesota, was crushed to death by the police, which generated a huge global protest movement. The reason the social power of this protest movement exerts its influence is because of the symbolism behind it --- such as racial justice, equal rights, anti-discrimination and so on. It is possible to say that the closer

\textsuperscript{226} O’Neil (1999).
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid, p4.
\textsuperscript{228} Brysk (1995), p561.
we understand the meaning of the symbol behind an object or action, the further we can understand where their legitimacy come from.

Once a symbol works, then power is constructed. Symbolism can empower a person or an object to do things that could not be done before. Hurd explained that it is because ‘they are associated in the minds of the audience with the authority the audience perceives in a particular institution’, such as a phrase said by a judge, ‘I sentence you to…’ and so on.\textsuperscript{229} In other words, ‘to make a symbol means to couple a physical object to a recognizable and meaningful social institution’.\textsuperscript{230} It can be seen from those examples that, as Hurd defined, ‘the social power of a symbol comes from the shared belief among those in the society that it represents an institution with an independent source of (non-symbolic) power’.\textsuperscript{231} The symbolic meaning of an object can only play a role when the referent of the symbol is understood by both the user and the audience. This is because, as Merriam indicated, there are two common methods of justification of power, namely, ‘Rational politics (Credenda)’ which appeals to popular knowledge and ‘Perceptual politics (Miranda)’ which appeals to popular moods and emotions. For example, ‘public places and monumental props; artistic design such as music and songs, flags, decorations, statues, uniforms; stories, history and ceremonies; and public demonstrations accompanied by marches, speeches, music, etc.’ can be attributed to Miranda.\textsuperscript{232} Therefore, political symbols embody people’s feelings, attitudes and values towards political life, and are an important part of political culture. Politics can be seen as the maintenance process of a cultural symbol system. In other words, a vital question is how political life is organized around the unfolding of meaning through signs, rituals, and ceremonies.\textsuperscript{233} It can be said that symbols, rituals, etc. themselves are part of the underlying structure

\textsuperscript{229} Hurd (2007), p53.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{232} Merriam (1934), P117.
\textsuperscript{233} March and Olsen (1989).
of social order, and only through them can the various characteristics of political life be explained.\textsuperscript{234}

Whether in theoretical research or practical exploration, political symbols arguably can be selectively constructed in the real world. In the process of specific practice and application, symbols stimulate people’s emotional experience, and form associations or expectations around specific political themes, which is crucial to the concept and standard form of the political system. In short, political symbols play a key role in the process of gaining legitimacy. Of course, I do not deny that ‘political symbols and rituals are only part of political operations, not all of them, for both the ruler and the ruled’.\textsuperscript{235} However, I want to make it clear that political symbols are not just vassals of power, they have an internal self-consistent logic to explain the process of political practice. It is the attempt of this chapter to show how Shenzhen’s symbols construct its legitimacy in the practice of diplomacy.

No matter in which era, there is a profound connection between a symbol and its social background. The ability to understand the symbol is the ability to understand the world on which the symbol rests. This ability shows the tightness of the power system constructed by the political society and reflects the design principles and implementation strategies of institutional ideas and ethics that have a key influence on people’s life. I will introduce the source of power as a symbol of Shenzhen. This is the key to understanding the source of the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, which is necessary for its success.

\textit{The Method: Branding}

Branding is a common strategy to raise the legitimacy of city diplomacy. It is the reflection of the value of a product per se. Especially under the influence of globalization, cities and countries are using branding strategy to win the international

\textsuperscript{234} Yu (2003), p17-18.
\textsuperscript{235} Wang (2006).
competition of attracting investors and tourists. Branding refers to the idea that ‘a product has a higher value if it can be connected with a name that promises a certain quality or characteristics of that product’, also ‘giving products and services an emotional dimension with which people can identify’. In the business arena, it is common to see that companies attempt to create a branding strategy by applying a series of instruments and methods such as logos and trademarks. Especially in diplomacy interaction, arguably, it is hard to ignore the unavoidable importance of branding. As for nations, nation branding is a tool for the projection of soft power. Soft power, following Nye’s construction, refers to the way in which ‘a country may obtain the outcome it wants in world politics because other countries - admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of property and openness – want to follow it’. A country’s culture, social values, domestic institutions and foreign policies comprehensively shape its soft power.

In other words, nation branding is not only a part of soft power to demonstrate its nation’s attraction on the world stage, but also a measure in foreign exchange to raise its nation’s soft power. This is especially relevant to world politics today, as Browning and Oliveira stated:

the nature of inter-state competition is increasingly shifting away from an emphasis on the balance of power, war and the monopolisation of resources, to a preoccupation with trade and cultural capital, and where status, prestige and success are less a function of one’s conquests and military prowess, but is increasingly tied to one’s perceived attractiveness and ability to capture the attention of others.

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236 Kotler and Gertner (2002).
239 Fahy and Jobber (2015).
240 Crilley and Manor (2020), p139.
242 Fan (2008), p149.
According to this understanding of worldwide competition, branding’s influence is far more vital in the diplomatic arena, which is ‘a process by which a nation’s image can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed to improve or enhance a nation’s reputation among a target international audience’. This is the reason for the recognition of the audience. People can find what is enduring and distinctive about the nation through its brand, because reputation relates to outside world input on a nation’s identity claims.

Before starting the interaction with other parties in diplomacy, participants will have images about the opposite side. These images might be the opposition’s nation, region or city, whether these are handled proactively as a brand or not, but first come the associations of a nation region or city which are evoked in participants’ minds; these images function as a cognitive mechanism that helps participants to make sense of the opposition’s world. This is what Van Ham indicated by stating that the brand of a state comprises the outside world’s ideas about a particular country:

These days, individuals, firms, cities, regions, countries, and continents all market themselves professionally, often through aggressive sales techniques. Indeed, having a bad reputation or none at all is a serious handicap for a state seeking to remain competitive in the international arena. The unbranded state has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention. Image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state’s strategic equity. Like branded products, branded states depend on trust and customer satisfaction.

The same as nations, cities also have branding measures and strategies. There are five arguments that recur in the current literature about city branding: it has certain

244 Fan (2010), p6.
245 Ibid; Manor and Segev (2015), p90.
247 Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002); Kotler and Gertner (2002); Kaneva (2011); and Fan (2010).
248 Manor and Segev (2015); Gudjonsson (2005).
images, its motivation is financial, it is sometimes confounded by the fact of the city\textsuperscript{250}, it consists of representational and functional dimensions, and it often focuses on culture and art.\textsuperscript{251} On a par with other real visible things, the city has its own image for recognition. Every record of the city, such as history, culture, art, films, novels and the news, shape a city’s image.\textsuperscript{252} This enables city branding as a planned practice of signification and representation, to create an image of the city which is stable and positive.\textsuperscript{253} For example, since it was established, Shenzhen was designed as the pioneer of China’s reform and opening up; this image is one of the reasons which has attracted various immigrants and investors to settle in Shenzhen.

Motivation is another important aspect when examining city branding. Middleton argued that the reason for this motivation is often financial.\textsuperscript{254} Kavaratsis considered that to promote the life quality of its citizens is the principal target of a city’s branding strategy.\textsuperscript{255} According to him, a set of favourable outcomes such as increased inward investment and tourism, achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city, and activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest are the competitive advantages which are brought by the application of city branding.\textsuperscript{256} Another explanation of this is that both the nation and city’s branding activities are embedded in the country of origin effect, which refers to the fact that the indicator of product quality is related to country of origin information when consumers purchase a product,\textsuperscript{257} such as the international reputation of French (Bordeaux) wine from the Premier cru classé. It can be seen that consumers’ emotion and cognition are led by the nation’s connotation (France) which

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{250} Excessive publicity and inconsistency with the actual situation of a city leads to the distortion of the image, which means that when people visit the city they find that the actual social environment of the city does not match the image in its branding process. See Crilley and Manor (2020, p141).
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid, p140-142.
\textsuperscript{252} Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005); Zhang and Zhao (2009); Herstein (2012).
\textsuperscript{253} Firat and Venkatesh (1993); Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005); Crilley and Manor (2020).
\textsuperscript{254} Middleton (2011), p16.
\textsuperscript{255} Kavaratsis (2004), p66.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, p70.
\textsuperscript{257} Kotler and Gertner (2002); Manor and Segev (2015).
\end{footnotesize}
is elicited by the national and city’s brand (Premier cru classé wine). In other words, people can also improve the perceived quality of a country’s product by improving the image of this country or the connotation it elicits. In this French case, for instance, the branding images of nation (France) and city (Bordeaux) are unified, but there is a problem that the nation and city branding images are in opposition. Crilley and Manor explored how the brand image of Israel is almost an obstacle for the engagement of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem with foreign audiences; hence in these two cities’ branding strategies, it is rare to see a reference to their country’s name.

There is another problem on the surface of city branding in practice. Hulberg and Kavaratzis stated that it is not the reality that ‘everything a city consists of, everything that takes place in a city and is done by the city, communicates messages about the city’s brand’. For instance, when the Olympic games was held in Beijing in 2008, there was a conflict between city branding (an eco-friendly global city that embraces modernity and tradition) and the real city conditions (insufficiently developed environment and infrastructure). Besides, an ironic reality is that the person who promotes the city brand actually has little control over it. In fact, this is a practical gap between the city’s promotion people and city’s designer (policy maker, government), and this results in an unavoidable question - is the city the same as the city on the promotional stage?

This question is vital because it is common to see in diplomacy practice whether the reality of a city and its represented image are unified, and this point determines the degree of the audience’s acceptance of the diplomatic goal and behaviour of this city. Thus, this acceptance is a kind of recognition which belongs to audience’s emotions, and there is a finding which shows that customers’ emotions could be understood as

258 Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999); Fournier (1998).
259 Chattalas et al. (2008).
260 Crilley and Manor (2020).
261 Hulberg (2006); Kavaratzis (2009).
262 Zhang and Zhao (2009).
263 Kavaratzis (2009).
the added value of city brand.\textsuperscript{264} Winfield-Pfefferkorn concluded four different sources of added value, which are people’s experience of the city, perception, belief in the city and appearance (city’s physical aspects).\textsuperscript{265}

In other words, in the process of city diplomacy, the audience's acceptance of city brands determines the legitimacy of its diplomacy. The greater the acceptance, the stronger the legitimacy, and therefore the higher the success rate of city diplomacy. This argument once again emphasizes the core argument of this thesis, that is, the degree of legality of city diplomacy determines the possibility of its success.

It is thus important to explore how branding strategy can raise the legitimacy of city diplomacy. In chapter 4, I will examine the importance of reform and opening up and its relationship to the brand of the images of both China’s nation and city. The chapter will show the influence of this Chinese branding on legitimizing the goal and the measure of Shenzhen’s diplomacy.

\begin{center}
\textbf{2.5 NOTE FOR ANALYSIS}
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As I proposed in the first chapter, the aim of the thesis is to explore how Shenzhen diplomacy became legitimate, especially how its legitimation proceeds domestically and internationally. This exploration of the legitimation and the outcome of Shenzhen diplomacy will be sufficient to demonstrate that the higher the legitimacy of city diplomacy the higher the possibility of a success outcome. In the following chapters I will explore the fundamental role played by the process of legitimation in three fields of Shenzhen diplomacy: the establishment and day-to-day operation of Shenzhen European Office, the exploration of how reform and opening up constructed the direction and strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy, and the role of symbols and their influence on the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy.

\textsuperscript{264} Auschner, Lotero Álvarez and Álvarez Pérez (2020).
\textsuperscript{265} Winfield-Pfefferkorn (2005).
Therefore, the most appropriate approach(es) from legitimacy theory should be the one that is most capable of revealing the dynamic procedure of how the legitimation takes place. From the above Figures 2.1 and 2.2 we can see that legitimation is achieved through multiple causal paths. These models range from complex to simple and I adopt the approach of favourable outcome and procedural correctness for the research to explore how Shenzhen’s diplomatic agents complete its legitimation.

The legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy itself has two levels: it is the right of an authority (how city diplomacy becomes legitimate), and second, it is the acceptance of this right (how city diplomacy is considered legitimate). These two legitimation processes involve some influencing factors: how the legitimacy occurs and is maintained, and how it increases or decreases.

The first consideration of the thesis is how Shenzhen diplomacy became legitimate. This is a focus on the institutional establishment of Shenzhen’s diplomatic agent, which is completed at the domestic and internal level. This legitimation process follows the approach of procedural correctness, and it is determined by the favourable outcome, such as the lawful establishment process of Shenzhen European Office (which aims the promote the relationship between Shenzhen and European countries) and the election procedure of the Office’s Chief Representative (which aims to find an appropriate person to lead the Office to reach its diplomacy goals).

The second consideration of the thesis is how Shenzhen diplomacy is considered legitimate, which has three dimensions, namely, how the domestic, the international and the internal stakeholders see Shenzhen’s diplomacy as legitimate. The views from different stakeholders are independent, not necessarily related but likely to influence each other. For instance, when Shenzhen European Office achieves its stated material aims – business attraction, city promotion, talent introduction, liaison and coordination, and services for Shenzhen enterprises – its legitimacy degree will be promoted when its leading department the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality evaluates its performance. It will also increase the confidence of the
Office’s members and increase their recognition of themselves as the legitimate representative to represent Shenzhen’s affairs in Europe. These two situations are domestic and internal. However, at the international level, there might be some opposite views. For instance, the conflict between the U.S and China in recent years negatively impacts the normal business cooperation between them, for example high-tech cooperation projects in the semiconductor field are highly forbidden to China. This situation makes it relatively difficult for the North American Representative Office of Shenzhen to carry out its investment attraction work in the semiconductor field, and this red line (or other similar policies) of the U.S has reduced the legitimacy of the North American Representative Office of Shenzhen in the U.S and there may be hostile views against such cooperation and its agents may be seen as illegitimate. In other words, the recognition of the international world is more important than that of the domestic and internal, because this recognition will directly impact whether international stakeholders agree to the diplomacy of Shenzhen or not, and then will determine whether a cooperation between Shenzhen and this international partner can start. This diplomatic outcome in the US will affect the domestic view on the legitimacy of the American Office.

The added value of studying legitimacy in city diplomacy is to give a key to explore the reason for the success or failure of city diplomacy. Hence, how Shenzhen diplomacy become legitimate and/or how it is considered legitimate are vital to the diplomacy outcome. The order of these legitimations is not sequential, nor is there necessarily one without the other.

In sum, what does legitimacy do in city diplomacy? There are two parts to the answer, depending on whether one focuses on the domestic dimension (the city, the city’s diplomatic agent, the social environment of the country to which the city belongs), the international dimension (the objects of city diplomacy and their social environment). At the domestic level, legitimacy formulates the formation, the

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direction and the goal of the diplomatic agents through the process of internalization. At the international level, the belief in the legitimacy of city diplomacy determines the final outcome of city diplomacy. The two influences of legitimacy therefore cover the individual city and the international participant.

At the domestic dimension, the legitimation process determines the character of city diplomacy. Extended from Hurd, a legitimate rule or institution is one that has been internalized by the city so that its procedures or proscriptions have been incorporated into the city’s own sense of its interests and identity. In other words, internalization is the process of a city learning what it wants from its diplomacy. It can affect city diplomacy both at the level of defining basic interests and of deciding on strategies with which to pursue those interests. There are always some external features such as rules, institutions, norms or ideas, and these outside features will affect the internal constitutions of city diplomacy.

At the level of defining basic interest, the external features will affect a city’s diplomatic agent to discover and perceive its need and interest. Once the internalization is completed, these external features ‘enter directly into the constitution of the actors’ ends themselves’. For instance, cities in China need to seek approval and have a relationship of sorts with higher levels of government and the party state to implement their diplomacy. In its official advertising image either in China or within diplomacy, Shenzhen says it is the pioneering city of China’s reform and opening up, hence, apart from promoting the city’s development, Shenzhen’s diplomacy also aims to show the outcome of China’s reform and opening up to the world. At the strategic level, there are two processes. The first process is the normative shaping of strategies by the logic of appropriateness set out by rules or institutions which are either domestic or international. For instance, the normative strategy of

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268 Ibid, p42.
269 Wrong (1961), p186.
The added value of legitimacy to city diplomacy at the domestic level is that we can see how legitimacy is influencing the decision situation of and affecting its perception of interest. Chapter 3 (Shenzhen European Office) and Chapter 4 (the influence of reform and opening up) are concentrated on how China’s domestic politics legitimizes Shenzhen diplomacy. The former chapter addresses why the European Office was established, how it became to be perceived as legitimate domestically and what factors might influence the legitimacy of the Office and so on. The latter chapter will explain the importance of reform and opening up for Shenzhen, and how it constructed the duty of the diplomatic agent of Shenzhen.

At the international level, the belief in the legitimacy of city diplomacy from the stakeholder determines the final outcome of city diplomacy. Chapter 5 (the influence of symbols of the city in diplomacy) will show how Shenzhen’s diplomatic agent takes the symbolic resources through branding to gain recognition at the international level, that is, how symbols help Shenzhen and its diplomacy to be considered legitimate on the world stage.

Because city diplomacy is an action whereby the agent of the local government of a sovereign country operates in the international context, its legitimation process operates at the domestic and international level. The research object I used in the thesis is Shenzhen city of Guangdong Province, China. Hence, from the domestic perspective, factors from the situation of China’s politics, economy and society (national), the situation of Guangdong (provincial), Shenzhen (city level) and also other actors of Shenzhen diplomacy will be taken into account. At the international
level, I focus on influencing factors such as the relationship and cooperation between Europe and China (also with Shenzhen), and the opinions, attitudes and understanding about China and Shenzhen of Europeans. Legitimacy is vital for city diplomacy and depends on whether there is consent towards China and Shenzhen from the international community (international), Europe (regional), a particular European country (national) and other institutions related to the business of Shenzhen’s city diplomacy such as government agencies, business associations, universities, industrial parks, media and museums and individuals.

Apart from exploring the legitimation of city diplomacy and how it is seen as legitimate, it is important to be clear on what it means for city diplomacy to be ‘illegitimate’, or at the very least ‘lacking legitimacy’. The former refers to what city diplomacy should not and cannot do. For instance, the US has banned high-tech cooperation projects with China in the semiconductor field. It is highly sensitive if any Chinese cities try to initiate action in this field in their diplomacy in the US, and the consequence could be dangerous if these diplomatic agents are seen as illegitimate. As for ‘lacking legitimacy’, in Shenzhen’s overseas city promotion, for example, a diplomatic official will claim that Shenzhen’s business environment and policy welfare is good for innovation projects and starting a business. However, if the city cannot offer a real tangible benefit as it is introduced in the promotional event back to the investor, this will damage Shenzhen’s image on the international stage and reduce its legitimacy in promoting business cooperation. In the following chapters, I will point out the problem of experiencing ‘illegitimate diplomacy’ or a lack of legitimacy in Shenzhen’s diplomacy and illustrate these legitimacy problems which cities have to avoid.

Meanwhile, the relationship between international perception of city diplomacy and wider national image is important to be considered. After all, the images of cities improve or deteriorate arguably in line with images of its nation states. Although, as I introduced in the above section, the nature of city diplomacy is the implementation
of the central policy by a city, such as to serve the diplomatic policy of central government and maintain national sovereignty and benefit, it seems it is not strong enough to ‘break’ the bonds of national diplomatic policy. However, the value of enhancing city diplomacy and a city’s branding is still obvious. First, city diplomacy is valuable because it is a method for cities to reach their development goal, and the improvement of a city’s capability to co-ordinate international resources, realize international recognition, and enhance the added value of a city through city diplomacy have become the inherent requirements and important trends of cities’ international development. For instance, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem use the ‘Two Cities. One Break’ campaign, and shifting the focus from promoting Israel has successfully attracted record numbers of tourists. Second, city diplomacy is valuable because since cities have become the nodes of a global network with the development of globalisation, in addition to safeguarding national interests, cities also need to handle diplomatic issues in economy, finance, culture, conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction. In other words, apart from serving national affairs, cities also need their diplomacy to fulfill their own development needs and to participate in solving global issues, which means cities have their own images and rights on the diplomacy stage.

In the case of Shenzhen, its status of being the pioneering city of China’s reform and opening up indeed means that the success or perceived legitimacy of its diplomacy is linked with the success or perceived legitimacy of China, but it does not mean that there is no space for Shenzhen to try to engage in its own diplomacy. The following chapters will show that the vital character of Shenzhen is that since China started the reform and opening up policy in 1978, the city has been an experimental area for China to explore its development route, which means that policy welfare and legislation autonomy in the economic field are given to Shenzhen, and Shenzhen’s successful

271 Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
272 Crilley and Manor, in Amiri and Sevin (2020).
273 Ibid; Zhao and Chen (2013).
experience will be introduced to the rest of mainland China. Shenzhen’s diplomacy/branding not only represents China’s diplomacy/branding, it is also the model for other cities in China to follow.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual foundations for the empirical investigation of legitimacy in city diplomacy has been set out in this chapter. The concept of legitimacy is a key focus of political studies, which is also used in international relations, but is neglected in the study of city diplomacy. I proposed a treatment in the following way: as a subjective condition in which participants of city diplomacy internalize interest given by consent. This internalization defines the participants’ sense of their own interest and determines whether consent has been given to the city diplomacy, and finally forms its legitimacy.

The chapter also examined a series of sources about the making of legitimacy. When the evidence takes place as follows then we can have reason to confirm that legitimation of city diplomacy has occurred: (1) that city diplomacy pursues the favourable outcome; (2) that it follows the correct procedures; and (3) these two conformities bring consent.

Having set out the theoretical framework for studying legitimacy in city diplomacy, I then move to explore the empirical evidence to demonstrate how this concept is applicable for the study of city diplomacy. Using the case of Shenzhen diplomacy as my focus, the following chapters are completed in three fields: first, in chapter 3 I look at the legitimation process of one actor of Shenzhen diplomacy, the Shenzhen European Office, analysing the influencing factors which matter to its legitimacy; second, in chapter 4 I examine the construction of legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy strategy in the process of reform and opening up; and finally, in chapter 5 I show the importance of symbols in how they raise the legitimacy of Shenzhen in the diplomatic interaction. In the conclusion, I rediscuss the source of legitimacy and the
legitimation process of city diplomacy through the evidence about Shenzhen diplomacy gathered in the empirical chapters.
Chapter 3 The Legitimation Process of Shenzhen European Office

This chapter shows where the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy comes from, by exploring how the legitimation of Shenzhen European Office is accomplished. The focus is concentrated on how the Office was endowed with legitimacy at its establishment, and then shows the institutional supporting power which helped to raise the legitimacy of the Office for successfully reaching the diplomatic outcome. These two stages of the legitimation process are respectively manifestations of the favourable outcome and the procedural correctness for the Office to gain legitimacy.

Cities’ overseas representative offices act as a non-negligible link in the transformation of China’s diplomacy due to the increasingly significant diplomatic role of the city and its overseas location. The politics of legitimacy is central to the establishment of these offices. This chapter uses the Shenzhen European Office as a case to show the legitimation of China’s overseas offices. As one of the overseas representative offices of China’s local government, the Shenzhen European Office is the epitome of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. It has a wide range of rights in foreign relations, such as attracting investment (economy and trade), promoting friendly exchanges between cities (politics), promoting exchanges in the field of arts (culture), and assisting universities to cooperate (education) and so on. At the same time, it is located in Europe and has been a representative example of city diplomacy. These factors enable it to be a valuable subject for observing the legitimation dynamics in practice. The aim of this chapter is to show how China’s domestic politics – at the city level - influence its diplomatic actors, that is to say its overseas offices.

If the Shenzhen European Office works as a key link in Shenzhen’s diplomacy, then where does its legitimacy come from? If the legitimacy refers to ‘an actors’ normative belief that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed’, then it is important to determine the source of the actor’s perception of the institution --- how does the Shenzhen

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European Office come to be seen as legitimate? How do favourable outcome and procedural correctness separately play their role in legitimizing the Office? This chapter examines the legitimating strategy behind the creation of the offices, which can be followed in the location of each branch of the office in Europe, in its chief representative re-election procedure in 2019 and in the working concept of the office constructed by the chief representative. The location of the office determines its credibility and value for Shenzhen’s development and in the perceptions of partners from Shenzhen. The legal election procedure of the chief representative determines to what extent the office can gain support from its leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. Moreover, the working concept of the office determines how it is supposed to work. These three factors, the location, the election procedure, and the working concept, are the domestic sources of the legitimacy of the European office, which influenced the office before it began its operation in Europe. In this chapter, I will explain their respective importance to the legitimization of the European office.

This chapter provides evidence regarding the processes of legitimation. The first is a procedural view, which argues that ‘legitimation occurs when a decision is reached by following procedures that are generally accepted as appropriate to the situation’; the second is a favourable-outcomes view, which suggests that ‘actors see outcomes as legitimate when they produce tangible benefits for themselves’. The evidence of the location and the working concept of the Shenzhen European Office supports a favourable-outcomes view of legitimation, but the legal election procedure of the chief representative supports a procedural view of legitimation. Finally, the chapter demonstrates some overlooked aspects of the power of ‘consent’ in city diplomacy, and analyses how the location of the Shenzhen European office in Europe, the chief representative’s re-election procedure and the working concept of the office enable the Office’s partner in Shenzhen to see the office as a legitimate actor of Shenzhen’s

275Ibid, p84.
diplomacy in Europe.

This chapter presents five sections of historical and empirical evidence from the Shenzhen European Office over its development path. The first section introduces what the Shenzhen European office does. It then shows how the locations of the office were established at different times. The third examines the election process of the chief representative of Shenzhen’s overseas representative offices that took place in the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality after Shenzhen completed institutional reform in 2019. The fourth considers the influence of the chief representative on the working concept of the office. The concluding section uses these materials to help supplement further the controversies over the legitimation.

3.1 THE FUNCTION OF THE SHENZHEN EUROPEAN OFFICE

The full-time staff structure of the European office is one Chief Representative (CR) and other staff who are employed locally in Brussels, Nuremberg, Munich and London, to cover their local work.276 The chief representative has been appointed by the office’s leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality since 2019. In addition, the office also has another brand called Shenzhen Liaison Office for Overseas High-Calibre Professionals in Europe. As one of the staff members, a Talent Acquisition Specialist is responsible for inviting talented individuals (e.g., scholars and potential entrepreneurs) in Europe to start their career in Shenzhen. The Specialist reports to the Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security of Shenzhen, but the daily work is still managed by the chief representative. Although I lived in the UK, my duty was taking charge of the general affairs of the whole Office. The work includes writing monthly and annual reports, organizing the Office’s meetings, researching published information on the European economy and business,

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276 This chapter was written in 2019, hence the timeline of the discussion around the establishment of the branches is up to 2019. In 2020 and 2021, SZEO also established its Swiss Office (in Bern) and French Office (in Paris).
organizing Shenzhen diplomatic events and so on.

Similar to the functions of the overseas representative offices which McNiven and Cann\textsuperscript{277}, Levine and Vandenbrande\textsuperscript{278}, and Chen\textsuperscript{279} introduced in the previous studies as shown in the Introduction, the function of the Shenzhen European Office (SZEO) also focuses on various ‘serving work’, which aims to serve the development of Shenzhen’s reform and opening up. Its major categories include investment and business attraction, city promotion, talent introduction, liaison and coordination, and services for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’.

**Investment and business attraction**

The main function the SZEO aims to achieve is to attract investment and business from Europe to improve Shenzhen’s economy, especially to reach the needs of the city in terms of construction and industrial development. Since its establishment in 2000, although the headquarters, superior authorities, working staff, funds, and the quantity and quality of supporting resources obtained by SZEO have been continuously changing, the core function of attracting investment has never changed. The major investment and cutting-edge technology projects in line with Shenzhen’s industrial development orientation are needed in particular. These projects include, amongst other things, the world’s top five hundred enterprises, large international companies, head offices. But the number of these global enterprises is always limited.

During my part-time experience at SZEO since September 2016, I have observed that local enterprises and innovation teams that can upgrade or supplement Shenzhen’s industrial chain have become more welcome. These key industries of Shenzhen include four pillars industries (high-tech, modern logistics, finance and culture and creative industries), seven strategic emerging industries (new generation information technology, high-end equipment manufacturing, green and low-carbon,  

\textsuperscript{277} McNiven and Cann (1993).
\textsuperscript{278} Levine and Vandenbrande (1994).
\textsuperscript{279} Chen (2001).
bioengineering and pharmaceutical, digital economy, new material, and marine economy industries), and five future industries (life and health, aerospace, robotics, wearable devices, and intelligent equipment industries). Finding potential projects for these industries from Europe is the most important routine of the Office; that is, to find more projects that can be successfully set up in Shenzhen. Thereby, the office will earn more legitimacy in its leading department’s eyes having shown that it is much more capable of finding investment and attracting business.

City promotion

Few in China are unaware of Shenzhen’s reputation, but it is not in the same situation worldwide. Raising the city’s reputation in Europe is the second vital mission for SZEO to accomplish. To attract investment, it is necessary to promote the city, as it is hard for investors and companies to invest in a new market with which they are not familiar. Furthermore, Shenzhen is not as famous as Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong in Europe, and almost every time I joined a business event held at a city in the United Kingdom, I needed to explain the significance and the advantage of Shenzhen to the participants. It is obvious that Shenzhen’s global reputation needs improvement. Thus, promotional methods are needed to introduce the image of the city and the benefits and opportunities as widely as possible to attract those business people who are not familiar with Shenzhen.

Judging from the events I have participated in with SZEO, there are five kinds of promotional events for it to engage in. The first kind of event is hosted in the name of Shenzhen Municipal Government, where the municipal leader is the keynote speaker. The second is hosted by the city-level bureau, previously Invest Shenzhen now Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality, under the theme of ‘Invest in Shenzhen Wining the Future’. The third is presented by the leaders of the district to introduce the comparative advantages of their own among the ten districts of Shenzhen. The

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280 See Key sectors of Shenzhen, in Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality (2021).
fourth is to assist the Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security of Shenzhen to introduce the China (Shenzhen) Innovation & Entrepreneurship International Competition. The fifth type of event is hosted by SZEO individually or with other institutions (enterprise, innovation organization and so on) in Europe, the theme usually centring on the advantages of Shenzhen’s business environment and the functions of representative offices.

Talent cooperation

Attracting talent to Shenzhen is the third mission of SZEO. The Office was also named in Shenzhen Liaison Office for Overseas High-Calibre Professionals in Europe on September 23, 2011. There is a Talent Acquisition Specialist responsible for inviting talented individuals to Shenzhen. As a city of migrants, Shenzhen might not have developed from a small fishing village into one of the four first-tier cities in China without the support of talent from all over the country. It has been shown from Shenzhen’s practice since reform and opening up that talent is equal to development and strength and there will be no advantages in development, innovation and industries if there is no advantage in talent. Since 2010, Shenzhen has carried out its ‘Peacock Program’ in order to attract overseas high-level talent, which was the main reason for Shenzhen’s overseas office to increase their function of talent introduction. Nowadays, more and more talented people are willing to set up in Shenzhen to start or extend their careers. This is first influenced by the culture of openness and tolerance; one of the typical slogans of the city is that ‘You are the Shenzhener if you come’. Second, China’s reform and opening up give the responsibility of daring to try and experimenting to Shenzhen. This endows Shenzhen government with capabilities (such as abundant funding, high efficiency of the officials etc.) to make various polices

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281 This competition is launched in Spring every year since 2016, in order to attract numerous high-quality overseas start-up projects and to integrate innovation and entrepreneurship resources to help international innovators and entrepreneurs connect with Chinese Hi-tech industrial resources, thus expanding the Chinese market for win-win results.

282 Shenzhen Gov (2016); Commerce Bureau (2017).
to support talent to settle in Shenzhen, and allows Shenzhen more autonomy to design its policy to become the most attractive city compared with other cities in China.

*Liaison and coordination*

The fourth vital role of SZEO to play is as a bridge of liaison and coordination to deepen the cooperation between Europe and Shenzhen. First, it is to assist Shenzhen’s delegation (municipal, bureau or district level; sometimes with a university, enterprise, art troupe and so on) to visit Europe, such as contacting European local institutions for a meeting to discuss a potential cooperation or offer useful suggestions on the delegation’s working needs. Second, SZEO also helps delegations from European countries (regions, states or cities) to visit Shenzhen, mainly including government agencies, business associations, universities, industrial parks, media and museums. Of course, sometimes special circumstances might arise and SZEO needs to provide necessary assistance. For example, a Shenzhen company asked for SZEO’s help with communication to deal with the aftermath of the tragic death of its employee after the terrorist attack in Brussels in 2016.283

*Service for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’*

In 2006, the outline of Shenzhen’s implementation of ‘going out’ strategic planning was released. This was the first time that Shenzhen listed ‘going out’ as a key city development strategy. Shenzhen’s foreign policy has also shifted from ‘bringing in’ to ‘going global’. Well-known local enterprises of Shenzhen such as Huawei, ZTE, Vanke, Tencent and BYD have expanded their transnational investment and global operation businesses, and gradually formed Shenzhen’s overseas development pattern of ‘government guidance and independent expansion of enterprises in parallel, leading enterprises and the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises follow’ 284 With these links, SZEO maintains friendly contact with Shenzhen enterprises that are

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283 2016 Annual report.
already in Europe, and co-hosts promotional events, conferences and other economic and trade activities to further build the positive influence of the ‘Shenzhen brand’. Meanwhile, for enterprises interested in developing the European market, SZEO will provide them with business resources such as legal and tax affairs, financial support, office space and so on. Of course, SZEO serves enterprises going out only just to bridge them to the potential local cooperation. Whether enterprises can survive and develop in the European market depends on their own demand and strength.

To sum up, the main functions of the overseas offices shown above are to serve economic development, city (or provincial) promotion, liaison and coordination, and other affairs. However, the particularity of Shenzhen European Office can still be distinguished if put into comparison with any such overseas office of China’s local government in the world. Reform and opening up ensure Shenzhen has a high degree of autonomy to design policy to develop the city and to act as a model for other Chinese cities. In other words, there are various advantages of the city that SZEO can use in its daily operations and this enables Shenzhen to become highly competitive among Chinese cities overseas. For example, first, Shenzhen is an important base for China’s technological innovation and private economic development. The local government continues to optimize the business environment, which aims to help the private economy continue to develop rapidly and healthily. Among the top 500 private enterprises in China in 2020, four of the top ten enterprises were from Shenzhen. The city has 1.97 million private enterprises, accounting for more than 96% of the total number of enterprises in Shenzhen. The density of entrepreneurship is the highest in China, and the private economy contributes 40% of the city’s GDP. Second, only Shenzhen in the country will provide 1.6 million RMB (around 180 thousand pounds) for newly graduated overseas PhDs to settle down in the city. Other cities also provide subsidies for PhDs, but the amounts are smaller, for example Qingdao city.

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286 The fund is from the Peacock Program which started in 2010 and is renewing in 2021. The applicant must graduate from a global top 150 university.
offers around 17,000 GBP. Based on my experience at the University of Edinburgh, each year there are at least two Chinese PhD students (who did not grow up in Shenzhen or Guangdong Province) from different departments at the UOE who decided to start their career in Shenzhen because of the good welfare (funding rewards, inclusive culture, and various job opportunities etc.) offered by the city between 2018-2020. These successful cases enable SZEO’s reputation to become more convincing and reinforces its legitimacy in its operation. Although the functional work of the overseas offices might be homogeneous, the comprehensive strength of the city determines the possibility and the legitimacy degree that the city’s office can reach.

Also, if compared with the office of the European local government set up in China, its function seems to be no different on the surface. The China office of the City of London, for instance, aims to strengthen the trade and investment ties between China and the UK by promoting the UK’s first-class financial services and products, and promote long-term exchanges between the City of London and China’s financial services industry, also including participating in the arrangement of the Mayor of London’s regular visits to China and China’s Senior government officials’ and companies’ visits to the City of London.

However, differences exist because of the development situation of these two cities. First, the office of the City of London focusses on the promotion of the finance industry. This is because it has wide and deep connections with those financial enterprises and service sectors. As for SZEO, however, it seldom participates in the business activities of companies, and only contacts companies when a particular company needs it. Second, London is relatively developed but Shenzhen is still working on its developing path. This means that the City of London has a mature global reputation compared to Shenzhen and this results in the consequence that, as I indicated above, SZEO needs to spend more time and energy to consider its city promotional work, that is, to plan how to raise Shenzhen’s profile and reputation in

\[287\] Wangyi News (2020).
Europe to attract business. Moreover, the markets in the two cities have different levels of familiarity and acceptance of each other’s city (enterprise), resulting in different levels of difficulty for the offices of the two cities in promoting city products. Since the reform and opening up, or even from the late Qing Dynasty, certain European and American products such as education, cars, movies have been welcomed in China. However, the equivalent Chinese products are not as accepted in Europe and the United States. This brings a realistic challenge to SZEO about how to improve Shenzhen’s promotion in Europe. It thus leads to the legitimacy problem which has appeared, that is, how SZEO could be seen as legitimate to reach the diplomatic goal of Shenzhen.

3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE

Before the Shenzhen European Office started its operation in Europe, it had to earn its legitimacy domestically. This is because the legitimacy of the Office through its recognition in Europe is determined by whether the cooperation with SZEO is efficient and the degree of its success, and the foundation of the cooperation is influenced by whether the support from Shenzhen is effective. Hence, before the support from Shenzhen was given to SZEO, the Office had to be legitimate enough in the viewpoint of its supporter domestically. The first factor which legitimized SZEO was its location.

Table 5.1

Branches of the Shenzhen European Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuremberg</td>
<td>11th July 2000</td>
<td>Twin-city of Shenzhen</td>
<td>Headquarter (2000-2010);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The decision to choose the location of the Office was influenced by the domestic and international situation. Before 11th July 2000, the year SZEO was founded in Nuremberg, Germany, developing the export-oriented economy was the main method for Shenzhen to reach its economic growth. In 1999, Shenzhen’s total foreign trade exceeded 300 billion RMB (50 billion USD), and it had ranked first among the largest cities in China for seven consecutive years. Against this background, it was decided that establishing an overseas office might enable Shenzhen to have a direct route to link with foreign investment and build an overseas network locally to stabilize the performance of Shenzhen’s cooperation with the world.

Moreover, supported by the policy benefit from reform and opening up, Shenzhen proceeded to the transformation and upgrading, which made this city need and welcome various foreign investment to reach development. Shenzhen experienced a transformation from simply promoting foreign trade exports to establishing an export-oriented economic structure combining industry and trade, then upgraded its industrial structure with knowledge-intensive and high-tech, and then comprehensively established a modernized and internationalized economic structure.

In order to achieve this transformation goal, large-scale international manufacturing companies, multinational corporations, technology companies, service industries, finance, commerce and distribution networks were needed for Shenzhen.

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288 Office of Local Chronicles Compilation of Shenzhen (2009).
289 Feng (2005).
In the meantime, the Shenzhen Investment Committee (Shenzhen Zhaoshang Weiyuanhui 深圳招商委员会) held its second plenary meeting in March 2000, and issued a strong signal to increase investment and efforts to expand its fields, its aim being that ‘investment can be introduced, approved quickly, managed well, able to retain and grown big’. This situation of Shenzhen built a foundation for the birth of the SZEO, in order to directly contact, communicate with, and improve relationships with and invite those representatives of advanced technology and capital in Europe.

Moreover, cooperation between China and the EU continuously increased in the 1990s. In 1995, the EU adopted its first China policy document *A long term policy for China-Europe relations*, which laid the foundation for a China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership. In June 1998, since the EU adopted the document *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*, the China-EU partnership was established. Economic and trade relations became increasingly close between China and the EU. These political actions resulted in an obvious economic outcome. In 1975, the bilateral trade volume was only 2.4 billion US dollars, but it had reached 69 billion by 2000. Although the quantity of the participant countries and the character of the EU was different between the year of 1975 and 2000, these figures are of value because they show a trend of the expanded cooperation between China and the EU, this has established a friendly social environment for SZEO to conduct diplomacy in Germany, and also has become an important prerequisite for the future relocation of SZEO’s headquarters to Brussels.

But why first located in Germany and why Nuremberg? A key official insider gives the answer about this first location:

The immediate reason for setting up in Nuremberg is because it was the twin-city of Shenzhen. Setting up in Nuremberg is a direct way and network to explore cooperation opportunity in Bavaria, the most developed region in Germany and even...
Europe.\textsuperscript{292}

However, before twinning with Nuremberg in 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1997, Shenzhen already had European sister cities. The Provincia di Brescia of Italy (12\textsuperscript{th} November 1991), Poznań of Poland (30\textsuperscript{th} July 1993) and Vienne of France (28\textsuperscript{th} October 1994). But the direct reason to choose Germany was because of its industrial fit with Shenzhen in advanced manufacturing, especially the high-tech industries. Since the 1990s, high-tech industries have been the first growth point and characteristic economy of Shenzhen. Thus, it was necessary to strengthen cooperation with foreign countries with advantages in this field if Shenzhen wanted another breakthrough. Moreover, following discussion with my Office’s colleague in Nuremberg, the reason to set up a sister relationship was because a Chinese businessman had good relationships with both the business industry of Nuremberg and Shenzhen government at that time. When Shenzhen government wanted to have a sister city in Germany, this businessman played a role in matchmaking. Shenzhen was the first sister city with Nuremberg Metropolitan Region and the locals were willing to cooperate with China. All in all, it was vital to choose a most appropriate city, with friendly connections, good economic network resources, and potential investment opportunities, as the first site and headquarters of the European Office. It was thus that Nuremberg was chosen for SZEO to first settle.\textsuperscript{293}

In the first decade of the 2000s, the economic and trade exchanges and cooperation between Shenzhen and Europe deepened. This arguably was because WTO membership offered a more certain international environment to China, which ‘reduced uncertainty around tariffs and made Chinese manufacturing companies more confident, enabling them to extend international cooperation and increase their exporting capacities. Since then, the EU has seen a more significant increase in Chinese goods in its domestic market share’. \textsuperscript{294} As for the cooperation between Shenzhen and

\textsuperscript{292} Note of the communication with the former SZEO officer (2019).
\textsuperscript{293} Discussion with SZEO’s Germany manager (2019).
\textsuperscript{294} See Garcia-Herrero et.al (2020).
the EU, as of the end of 2009, Europe had invested in 705 projects in Shenzhen, with an actual investment of 3.9 billion US dollars; among the 121 countries (regions) invested in Shenzhen, the EU countries ranked third.\textsuperscript{295} Within this development process, SZEO has played a vital functional role in the frontline of Shenzhen diplomacy in Nuremberg since 2000.

Between 2001 and 2002, for example, SZEO assisted in promoting exchanges in the fields of culture, medical work, economy and education. First, a group of 20 people from Shenzhen Song and Dance Ensemble performed in Nuremberg, Erlangen, and Foote, and received a warm welcome and good response locally. Second, Nuremberg Central Hospital and Shenzhen People’s Hospital signed a formal cooperation Exchange agreement to conduct mutual visits of management personnel, exchange technical information, scientific research and teaching etc. Third, the city of Nuremberg and the Nuremberg Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry jointly organized the Shenzhen China Day to introduce Shenzhen and Chinese culture to the local people and business people. Fourth, the Shenzhen Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau and the Environmental Protection Department of the Nuremberg Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry jointly participated in the EU’s ‘Water Management’ project. Last, teachers and students from Durer Middle School in Nuremberg and Shenzhen Middle School have exchanged visits many times, and the exchanges and cooperation between the two schools have developed in depth.\textsuperscript{296}

Before the headquarters of SZEO was moved to Brussels in 2010, its works and efforts in the ‘Nuremberg era’ from 2000 to early 2010 were recognized by Shenzhen. The news from *Shenzhen Shangbao* (深圳商报) which is directly sponsored by Shenzhen Municipal Party Committee, evaluated it as follows:

Since it was established ten years ago, the Shenzhen European Office, as the first

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
external window of Shenzhen, has established extensive contact with the counterpart departments of local governments in Europe, and achieved fruitful results in attracting investment, promoting EU and enterprises to understand the investment environment and service facilities of Shenzhen.297

This compliment gives clues to represent how legitimate the European Office is. The first contribution is the commitment to acknowledging the roles played by the establishment of the overseas office in Europe, which enables Shenzhen to have a direct face to face opportunity to maintain local economic and trade network relations. It makes daily communication more effective, builds a good impression and enables the locals to understand how Shenzhen’s official (the chief representative) works and how Shenzhen wants to cooperate. Second, to set up locally, SZEO is capable of helping Shenzhen’s colleagues, enterprises and delegations to deal with those affairs which are hard to proceed with because of the distance between Shenzhen and its European partners. This legitimizes SZEO in its recognition from Shenzhen, and importantly influences its effectiveness to earn support from its city when the Office is needed. In other words, SZEO has legitimacy when it is being recognized.

On March 15, 2010, SZEO officially entered the ‘Brussels era’, and the Nuremberg office continued to be a branch. Changing the headquarters was necessary because Shenzhen is seeking to achieve a new round of reform and opening up to the world and aims to increase the intensity of the development of the urban internationalization. The first official’s claim on building a global city was shown in Shenzhen 2030 chengshi fazhan celve 深圳2020 城市发展策略 in 2005. It claims that Shenzhen will develop with the strategic transformation of urban development as the background, with the goal of Shenzhen and Hong Kong to jointly build a world-class metropolitan area, shifting from simple economic growth to comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable scientific development, and proposes the strategic goal to ‘build a sustainable global

297 Shenzhen Shangbao (2010).
pioneering city’. This is also the first legalized urban development strategy in China.\textsuperscript{298} Second, it might be because of the goal to ‘promote Shenzhen enterprises to carry out international operations, comprehensively improve their international competitiveness, and further enhance the level and level of Shenzhen’s opening up’.\textsuperscript{299}

Owing to this, Shenzhen planned to establish a government operation mechanism that adapts to internationalization. The first measure was to build a network of government overseas representative offices. This was the first time that the responsibility of the overseas offices was written into the policy document, and it emphasized the need to strengthen the support service functions of existing overseas offices to ‘Go global’ and provide comprehensive services for Shenzhen's foreign economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{300}

Therefore, it could be seen that the reason for choosing Brussels is because of its special status and influence as the ‘capital of Europe’. It is the headquarters of the European Union, NATO and other international organizations, as well as the headquarters of many international administrative centres, official groups and multinational companies. The direct opportunity for SZEO to introduce Shenzhen to these well-known international institutions can not only increase public awareness of Shenzhen in Europe, but also create more business opportunities from the European market and establish good trade relations through the EU with its members. But more importantly, the direct reason is because there is a property in Brussels which belongs to Shenzhen government, and Shenzhen aims to use it as an ‘innovation home’ for Shenzhen companies to first set up their businesses in Europe.

In a speech at the new site unveiling ceremony of the Shenzhen European Office in Brussels, the then Chinese Ambassador to Belgium said:

Over the past 40 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between

\textsuperscript{298} Office of Local Chronicles Compilation of Shenzhen (2009), p470.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid, p653.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid, p655.
China and Belgium, the economic and trade cooperation between the countries has developed steadily and healthily. Despite the impact of the international financial crisis, bilateral trade in 2009 still reached US$16.7 billion. Belgium’s direct investment in China and technology transfer have both increased steadily, reaching US$2 billion and US$2.9 billion respectively so far. At the same time, investment from Chinese companies in Belgium is also in the ascendant. For example, Huawei (of Shenzhen) has developed good cooperation with Belgian telecom companies. The good economic and trade relations between the two countries have created favourable external conditions for the Shenzhen European Office in Europe to carry out its work. Both Shenzhen and Brussels are well-known for their friendly folk customs, openness, innovation and are full of vitality. We hope that the Office will become another important bridge connecting China, Belgium and the entire Europe.⁴⁰¹

In other words, the relocation of the headquarters to Brussels is not only for Shenzhen to seek broader cooperation with Europe, but also for SZEO to play a greater role in the subsequent work to assist Shenzhen in its international construction to achieve the goal of deepening reform and opening up.

Another two branches of the Shenzhen European Office, the Munich and London offices, were established in 2016. Operating a new office in Munich was to further deepen the friendly cooperative relationship with Bavaria. As the then Mayor of Shenzhen, Dr Xu Qin, said during Shenzhen delegation’s visit to Germany (Hanover, Nuremberg and Munich) in September 2016:

Germany is China’s most important trading partner in Europe. In the best period of Sino-German relations, there is a broad space for enhancing cooperation between Shenzhen and German cities. Hope that the two sides to implement the ‘Made in China 2025’, ‘Industry 4.0’ and other major strategic as an opportunity to give full

⁴⁰¹ Xinhua (2010).
play to their comparative advantages, strengthen overall in the industrial 4.0, vocational education, high and new technology industry, culture and art, exhibition tourism, medical cooperation, to consolidate and deepen the Sino-German comprehensive strategic partnership and make a positive contribution.\footnote{Shenzhen Special Zone Daily (2016).}

He also mentioned that the most prominent feature of the German economy is the pursuit of quality. Germany as a global manufacturing power, learning its experience in industry 4.0 and strengthening cooperation with it in the industrial field is the key measure for Shenzhen to raise the global reputation of ‘Shenzhen quality’.

The London branch was officially approved in March 2015, and officially began to operate in the second half of 2016. The direct reason for opening a branch in London was because Shenzhen was planning to construct Qianhai, the China (Guangdong) Pilot Free Trade Zone Qianhai & Shekou Area of Shenzhen and the Shenzhen-Hong Kong modern service industry cooperation zone, which is also termed by officials ‘a special zone (Qianhai) in the special zone (Shenzhen)’. Meanwhile, Shenzhen wanted to increase its city status as an international financial centre. Thus, as one of the international financial centres, linking with London has vigorously strengthened its all-round economic and trade cooperation in finance, scientific research, two-way investment, creative design, health care and other fields, which is of great significance for Shenzhen’s international construction and development.

From Nuremberg to Brussels, then setting up in Munich and London, the main purpose of the Shenzhen European Office is to directly serve the city construction and internationalization of Shenzhen through attracting investment and city promotional activities and so on in Europe. The reasons for locating branches in local cities are distinct as shown above. Nuremberg is the twin-city of Shenzhen, and this friendly relationship assisted the Shenzhen European Office’s growth at the very beginning; enabling it to be familiar with local situations is easier than ‘walking alone’, especially
making Germany’s economic network reachable for Shenzhen.

In 2010, the office already had working bases, resources and reputation in Europe. It moved to Brussels, the capital of Europe, to seek more influence, and geographically, being based in Brussels, gives the Chief Representative the convenience to travel to every major city in Europe within a few hours, which can highly improve the efficiency of daily economic and trade visits. At the same time, it enables SZEO to coordinate Shenzhen and European bilateral economic and trade exchange matters efficiently. Basing itself in Munich and London is also about studying the comparative advantage of the cities’ own key industries and trying to link with Shenzhen to pursue a win-win situation through cooperative development.

To sum up, this section has shown that location is an important legitimation factor for SZEO in its diplomacy, showing that the favourable outcome is vital for legitimizing the Office. The different geographical advantages determine the different resources that the office can reach, and then determine in what way and to what extent the office can achieve its goals. This is evidence that the legitimacy problem is crucial for city diplomacy.

3.3 LEGITIMIZED BY THE LEADING DEPARTMENT

The second domestic power legitimizing the Shenzhen European Office comes from its leading department, the city-level Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. There are three dimensions of this legitimization. First, the leading department decides what SZEO should do (I have explained the function of the Office in the first section of this chapter). Second, the degree of the support from the leading department determines how effective SZEO can be dealing with affairs in Europe, because the final decision of the diplomatic work should have been determined by the department. This includes, for instance, what kind of investment and the potential innovative project it is interested in to welcome them to settle down in Shenzhen. Regarding this point, I will intersperse the analysis with examples when explaining specific cases in the following
section. And third, the right to select the chief representative of the overseas office is determined by the leading department. This is what the section below shows, the election procedure of the chief representative of the overseas office, which is an approach of procedural correctness for legitimization.

On January 10, 2019, Shenzhen issued its plan of institutional reform, which led to the change of the competent departments of the Shenzhen European Office, which became the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. The Commerce Bureau is built on the administrative team and function of Invest Shenzhen, and accepted the management responsibilities for foreign trade and economics, commerce and bonded area, which transferred from the previous responsibility of the Shenzhen European Office, the Economy, Trade and Information Commission of Shenzhen Municipality. Owing to the institutional reform, the supervision mode of business and personnel of the overseas office became unified under the Commerce Bureau. Previously, they were separately managed by Invest Shenzhen and the Economy, Trade and Information Commission.

In July 2019, I participated in the campaign process of the European, North American, Japanese and Australian Chief Representative and European and North American representative assistants at the Commerce Bureau in Shenzhen. This procedure is the key legitimatization process for the overseas office. On the one hand, the appointment of the chief representative is decided by the Party Leadership Group of the Commerce Bureau, and the level of the recognition on the chief representative from the Group, in a sense, determines the level of support that the overseas representative office can receive from the Bureau when they working overseas. This is because in government institutions, the Party Leadership Group is the core of

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303 Shenzhen news (2019).
304 Quote from Linkedin of Invest Shenzhen: ‘Invest Shenzhen is a government agency responsible for strengthening the city’s status as a leading location for business and creating a friendly environment for enterprises. Our mission is to attract direct investment projects and talents that are of strategic importance to Shenzhen, by providing high-quality, professional, one-stop government services to help enterprises around the world set up and expand their business in Shenzhen.
305 Now called the Bureau of Industry and Information Technology of Shenzhen. Shenzhen news (2019).
leadership and plays a decisive role in all major affairs (such as personnel, finance and key business). In other words, only by gaining recognition and support from the Party Leadership Group could the foundation for the European Office to operate in Europe be consolidated, and then it became possible to bridge Shenzhen and Europe through the office’s function. Otherwise how would the office help their overseas partner to invest or make a visit to Shenzhen without the agreement and the practical arrangement from the Bureau? On the other hand, the chief representatives determine the working direction of the offices within the functional range design by the leading department. It would be effective if the working ideas and methods were consistent from top (Party Leadership Group of the Bureau) to bottom (staff of the overseas office), and the chief representative played a connecting role in this process. The latter section will show how the European chief representative designed the working concept of the office.

The procedure of selecting process of the chief representative is transparent over the Bureau and proceeds step by step as follow:

1. The General Office of the Bureau notices the application throughout the bureau;
2. Candidates need to complete a registration report to show why and how they are the most suitable and competitive;
3. Candidates present the working plan and strategy to the bureau leaders in fluent English;
4. Finally, party members of the bureau vote for each position.

Incidentally, although the selection notice is open to the entire bureau, not everyone has the right to sign up, and everyone must adhere strictly to their own administrative rank standards. However, there was no clue that the chief representative has to be a Party member.

For example, the rank of the chief representative of Europe and the United States is
at the Division-Head level, and a candidate cannot sign up if he/she does not hold at least Deputy-Division-Head level position. As for the European and American assistant representatives, there is no particular rank requirement. Nevertheless, except for the rank standard, more or less there are other decisive factors, such as to be fluent in the local language, have a certain understanding of the local political, economic, social and cultural conditions of the host country, be competent in business, and have certain experience in foreign exchanges and cooperation.

Since its establishment, the Shenzhen European Office has been a window for Shenzhen to carry out all-round cooperation in economy, trade, talent, education, technology and culture with Europe. It is also a specific executing agency to carry out economic and trade exchanges and cooperation, and its work is inseparable from the support and help of the Commerce Bureau and other departments or organizations of the city. It is arguable that the responsibility of the office is heavy. For example, unlike the other three overseas offices of Shenzhen which only cover a country, the European office works in a vast continent with 50 sovereign countries, including 28 EU member states and 24 official languages. In terms of the daily mail, at least four languages are needed: English, French, German and Dutch. Also, the labour, tax, investment and other laws vary from country to country. At present, there are 6 staff in the office distributed in 3 different countries (Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom) with only 1 to 2 people in each place. Other offices from the local government of China do not have this pressure. For instance, although the city of Qingdao also has separate offices located in Munich and London, their work is independent: each office has a lead representative focusing on the affairs of their own countries (i.e., Germany and the UK). Unlike SZEO, the chief representative needs to coordinate all the affairs in Europe, and the work of each office intersects and is interrelated.

But to some extent, Shenzhen’s 2019 institutional reform gives the Office more

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306 America, Japan and Australia.
efficiency. As stated above, the unification of personnel and business responsibilities made the relationship between the office and its superior department simpler, and communication easier. On the one hand, the competent authorities have changed from two to one, so that the office has a consolidated communication channel and method to link with its superior. If any Shenzhen department or organization needs the office’s assistance or when it needs any support from Shenzhen, the message can be unified and managed and organized by the Commerce Bureau and then sent to both sides; this updated communication mechanism can decompress the office and enable office members to focus their time and energy on local affairs.

On the other hand, the unified communication mechanism can also help the office gain more support from its Bureau in a way. In the past, both the Economy, Trade and Information Commission of Shenzhen Municipality and Invest Shenzhen had many functions to focus on, so the attention from the top was limited for each department. Besides, it is easier to fetch water when a river is near, and owing to the European Office and other overseas offices’ geographic position, they may not get as much attention as their colleagues in Shenzhen. Following the reform in 2019, the unification of business functions at the municipal level (also district and street level) in Shenzhen will enable the representative office to more organically integrate into the overall planning of the city’s business development, and the office and its overseas colleagues will be valued more and more in the future. This led to the degree of the legitimacy that SZEO could have. The more authority, discourse and influence that the overseas office might have in the Bureau, they will be more possible to be seen with more legitimacy.

Whether to serve the Commerce Bureau continuously to create a new situation of Shenzhen’s economic development in the new era or help Shenzhen to build the pilot demonstration area and reach internationalization, as the ‘window in Europe’, the European Office has the same development target as the Bureau and Shenzhen. Thus, as long as SZEO follows the right path to reach its goal, it has power in autonomy to
makes its work more efficient and productive, and its Shenzhen superiors, colleagues and partners will provide support when necessary. The Mayor of Shenzhen indicated the importance of the overseas representative offices once in the Municipal Party Group (Expanded) Meeting:

It is necessary to listen carefully to the opinions and suggestions of the overseas representative offices, and actively solve their practical difficulties.\(^\text{307}\)

All in all, the way in which Shenzhen overseas representative office gets legitimacy from the leading department has three dimensions: What should the office do? How much support can it receive from the department? And finally, who is the chief representative in charge of the office?

### 3.4 LEGITIMIZED BY THE CHIEF REPRESENTATIVE

The third factor which influences the legitimacy of the Shenzhen European Office is based on the thought, ability and experience of its chief representative. This is because the chief representative determines the working content, direction and strategy of the Office. These performances will result in the practical outcome that SZEO can accomplish, and it will then bring the intuitive impression to its leading department. As I explained in the above section, the more performance the Office can offer, the more support will be given by the Commerce Bureau.

First, I used investment (project) attraction as an example to demonstrate the importance of the working strategy of the Chief Representative that would influence the legitimacy of the Office. Whether a company involved in a potential project is contacted by the Office itself, or the company actively contacts SZEO, the chief representative needs to evaluate and select it before introducing them to the Commerce Bureau. Since I started working part-time in SZEO in September 2016, the conditions of the project itself have been restrictive. The most popular are the Fortune

\(^{307}\) Note from a report of the office written by me (2019).
Global 500. However, it is not easy to invite them to invest in Shenzhen. The reason first is because after a 40-year development of reform and opening up in China, these enterprises which were interested in cooperating with Shenzhen and also capable of reaching the industrial fitness with Shenzhen, arguably have completed their investment layout in Shenzhen. For example, by 2020, 290 of the world’s top five hundred enterprises had settled in Shenzhen.\(^{308}\) Also, others either do not meet the requirements of the industry cooperation or have not entered or have already exited the Chinese market. There were 20 Fortune Global 500 of the United Kingdom in 2018, but only two of them cooperated with Shenzhen: HSBC and BT. Moreover, these companies have their own resources to invest in Shenzhen and do not even need to go through the Office. For example, Prudential is already well settled in China, and this means that the company is familiar with China’s government and business networks. When it established its new financial technology company in Shenzhen in 2020, there was no need for Prudential to ask SZEO’s help and resources to complete this project. Apart from the Fortune Global 500, other potential projects which might lead to cooperation are determined by the following factors: first, it is an advantageous industry locally and also itself has investment; second, it has fitness with Shenzhen industry but it is a start-up or small and medium enterprises or even just a research team from the university or research institute with visible potential. In other words, the more high-quality companies that SZEO can invite to set up business in Shenzhen, the more it will be more recognized by the Bureau, and its legitimacy will be strengthened. This is why I said that the extent to which the chief representative can lead his office to reach the goal established by its leading department will influence the degree of the legitimacy of the office. How to innovate and create new opportunities and space for potential European companies to start their business at the present needs SZEO to keep rethinking and be familiar with Shenzhen’s commercial situation.

\(^{308}\) Southern.com (2020).
The second importance of the Chief Representative’s role for influencing SZEO’s legitimacy is because the confused and confusing world situation needs the chief representative to adjust the office’s operation strategy where possible. The uncertainty of the relationship between China and the United States caused by the trade conflict has caused Chinese enterprises to shift their interest to Europe. However, some negative situations still exist. For instance, as Joshi pointed out, ‘the Europeans have tightened their scrutiny of Chinese investments and placed restrictions on those relating to sensitive industries’.\(^{309}\) This has triggered the European media and public opinion to worry about the protection of Chinese capital, technology and patents and other aspects, which will affect local enterprises’ cooperation with China.\(^{310}\) In addition, the ambiguous situation of Brexit has brought some uncertainties to the work of the office, which might impact the statutory body of the UK office and the economic and trade exchanges between Shenzhen and the United Kingdom. In addition, the global economy is negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

When facing uncertain changing situations, the office needs to improve its performance in raising influence for itself to gain legitimacy from the Commerce Bureau. Led by the chief representative, a planned development strategy is to extend the scope of the work on the basis of existing geographical, political and economic networks. First, the work of the office is centred around the Brussels, Nuremberg, Munich and London offices plus their surrounding countries. The office divides the scope of each office among three geographical areas: Belgium and Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Taking the Netherlands and Switzerland into the work plan, first, because of their geographical border with Belgium and Germany, it is relatively convenient for staff to travel for business. The second aspect of the strategy is to leverage the platform of twin-cities, such as The

\(^{309}\) Joshi (2019).

\(^{310}\) Both Chinese and German entrepreneurs have expressed their worries to either my colleagues or me. Also see Chazen (2018).
Hague and Almere in the Netherlands and Kanton Bern in Switzerland. And third is the potential for cooperation with local advanced industries. The Netherlands is well-known in the area of green and low-carbon technology, and water environment treatment. Switzerland has world-leading strength in manufacturing and modern service industries. Converging the concentration in these three areas should enable the European office to have a distinct working direction and logic, which might improve efficiency to make a better working outcome. In other words, when facing the uncertainty of the changing world situation, how the representative office can adjust its work strategy effectively to achieve its work results is of vital importance to its legitimacy. The prerequisite for achieving working performance is depends on the decision of the Chief Representative, depends on whether a useful improved routine can be found out to the outcome. This proves the influence of the Chief representative is significant to the legitimacy of the office.

Moreover, either as the window or the bridge of Shenzhen in Europe, actually, the work of the European office is a process to exert the platform effect through cooperation. Borrowing from Oxford Dictionary’s definition of effect as a change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause, I define platform effect as a consequence whereby every participant could realize their goals through access to and influence on a sharing space of information and resources. Combined with the work and function of the office, three platforms have emerged to make its work more effective. The first is the platform of city promotion, which is to constantly consolidate and enhance the city reputation and identity of Shenzhen in Europe to attract investment and talent by actively using various public events to promote Shenzhen’s working and living environment and potential opportunities. Second is the platform of economic and trade cooperation, which aims to link the target enterprises and business projects with the industrial advantages of the three areas to Shenzhen and also serves the two-way

311 Kanton Bern and Shenzhen became sister cities in February 2015, it was the first time in Bern’s history that it became a sister city with another country. See SZWA (2015).
cooperative activities. The third is the liaison service platform, which provides strong support and guarantees for the visits and city promotion events of the Shenzhen delegation by strengthening the friendly relations with local government, China’s Embassy and Consulate General, chambers of commerce, key enterprises, university, scientific research institution and other business-related organization. Only by giving full play to the platform effect can the European office prove its existence value and enhance local importance.

Meanwhile, making new achievements requires building new working methods, the same as a new history is established by breaking through the limitation of experience. Based on the traditional way of work, the European office implements innovative practices in the following three aspects: expanding the economic and trade network, city promotion and investment attraction. In addition to the three areas covered by the European Office, Shenzhen delegations also visit other countries in Europe and hold commerce events. In view of its limited manpower, the office has begun to explore ways of purchasing services to expand its business network, relying on local well-known business associations, consulting agencies or other key institutions to complete the economic and trade mission. In terms of city promotion, the office explores the cooperation model with the European institutions of Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao under the framework of building the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, so as to realize information sharing and complementary advantages, and jointly enhance the effectiveness of publicity. In the light of the changing investment attraction situation, the office is trying to promote a direct connection between European technology teams with Shenzhen’s industrial parks and venture capital, transfer from traditional reputational enterprise attraction to excavate innovative technology.

All in all, this section shows that the Chief Representative determines the working legitimacy of the office. This legitimacy is important for the office because it determines whether the office can maintain its performance. The performance is the
crucial factor which in return determines whether the office can be seen with more legitimacy by its leading department, the Commerce Bureau. The office will receive more support from the Bureau if its degree of legitimacy is higher and this will also raise the success rate of the office’s diplomatic action.

3.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THEORY OF LEGITIMATION

As I discussed in Chapter 2, legitimation takes place because of the favourable outcome and (or) procedural correctness, and this results in the consent which forms the legitimacy. Issues such as the Office’s performance, the election procedure and the working concept of the chief representative presented above provide evidence for revisiting all three aspects of legitimation to examine the order in which they occurred. The four main explanations for the legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office from domestic and internal level are:

(1) the performance which the Office can offer to both its internal and external stakeholders.

(2) the procedural correctness of the election of the chief representative determines the attitude and the degree of the support from the Bureau.

(3) the working concept of the Chief Representative determines to what extent the working outcome of the Office will raise its legitimacy.

(4) the validity of the above legitimations is determined by the degree of consent at each stage.

The Performance of The Office

Why does the performance of the office matter to its legitimacy? The first explanation is based on the favourable-outcomes hypothesis that ‘actors see outcomes as legitimate when they produce tangible benefits for themselves’.312 There are two

312 Hurd (2007), p84.
possible dimensions to suggest how this model works. The first holds that the legitimacy of institutions is perceived by the actors because the institutions provide material benefits to these actors.\textsuperscript{313} The second contends that the perception of the legitimacy of an institution is generated by the consent of the people, this consent being based on people’s belief that the institutions can provide material benefits.\textsuperscript{314} In other words, as Hurd argued, ‘legitimacy is ultimately derived from the production of material payoffs and the satisfaction of perceived self-interests’.\textsuperscript{315}

In line with this perspective, whether the performance can satisfy Shenzhen’s domestic stakeholders or whether there will be performance determines how legitimate the Office is seen to be. Hence, how the branches of the Shenzhen European Office - Nuremberg, Brussels, Munich and London – can provide substantive benefit for Shenzhen’s development or other development needs of Shenzhen’s local institutions is crucial. I use one of the functions of the office, ‘service for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’’, as an example.

A Shenzhen company wants to extend its business to London, so it asks the UK branch of the European office to help link it to London’s business resources, and the UK branch helps this company to contact bodies such as London and Partners Limited, China Chamber of Commerce in the UK or other local business networks such as investment and financing institutions, law firms, incubators, and finally this company can successfully set up its business in London. Through this process, this Shenzhen company perceives legitimacy in the Shenzhen European Office because the office has provided the company with material benefits. In other words, the location of the office legitimatizes the office as having the power to provide material benefits.

Meanwhile, offering substantive benefit to the local stakeholder within diplomacy is another vital performance that the Office needs for raising its legitimacy. The

\textsuperscript{313} Kelman 2001; Voeten 2005.
\textsuperscript{314} ‘Consent is the final legitimating mark of all political actions and institutions’ (Shapiro 1986, p116); also, Simmons 2001 and Zelditch 2001.
\textsuperscript{315} Hurd (2007), p67.
recognition of the legitimacy of the Office comes from the local participants (the Office’s partner or the potential contact) of Shenzhen such as governmental actors, companies, business associations, universities, arts institutions and so on. This consent is based on the fact that they think or admit that (the resources of) Shenzhen can provide valuable benefits; then they think that the office is capable to help them to reach the value and benefit at the site office. This enables SZEO to be considered as legitimate when doing representative works for Shenzhen in Europe.

More importantly, the legitimacy which is determined by the performance not only enables the Shenzhen side to see the European office as a legitimate diplomatic actor, but also reflects the solidity of the relationships with the European office. The strength of this relationship will directly affect whether the European office can help local partners in Europe to successfully connect resources with Shenzhen. The stronger the relationship, the better the communication and the greater the success rate. Once the local European partners of the office are helped to reach their cooperation goals with Shenzhen, or they think that the office can help them cooperate with Shenzhen, then the European Office is legitimate from the perspective of the European side. Chapter 5 will show how the legitimacy of the European office comes from within Europe.

_The Support from Bureau and Consent_

Another legitimation approach that merits attention as an alternative to favourable outcomes is procedural correctness. This approach considers ‘as long as rules are passed according to accepted procedures and by established authorities, people appear to accept them as legitimate, all else equal’. As for the legitimation of the European office, the procedural approach involves legitimizing the chief representative’s right to lead the office through the election process.

This process looks simple on the surface, but it is actually the engine of the legitimation of the office. The election indicates that the attitude of the Party

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Leadership Group of the Commerce Bureau is supportive to the chief representative. As I argued in Chapter 2, the strength of legitimacy determines the effectiveness and success rate of the overseas office’s diplomatic action. In its daily work, the European office must report to the Bureau in terms of working procedure when it finds or receives the need for cooperation with Shenzhen from the European local institutions. The greater the recognition of the cooperation project within the bureau of commerce, the stronger the support from the Bureau will be, and then the possibility of the success of the cooperation will be higher. This therefore shows that the support from the Commerce Bureau is the key source for the legitimation of the office. This support from the Bureau comes both from the Party Leadership Group and from the departments inside the Bureau.

One detail of the election process highlights the importance of the correctness of the procedure. While the General Office of the Bureau announces the campaign throughout the Bureau, it does not mean that the position of each chief representative is vacant. On the contrary, the chief representative of the European office and the Australian office are incumbent; only the position of American and the Japanese office are vacant. So why do the chief representative of the European office and the Australian office also need to re-campaign?

This is because before the institutional reform, the chief representative was appointed by the Economy, Trade and Information Commission of Shenzhen Municipality. In order to satisfy the correctness of the appointment process, the election must be necessary for the leadership team of the overseas office new competent department the Commerce Bureau to make the decision on the chief representative. This is not only a personnel appointment and removal procedure, but also reflects the authority of the leading party group of the new Bureau.

In other words, on completion of the new election process of the chief representative, the European office regains legitimacy through the correctness of the procedure. This legitimacy has two dimensions. The first is that the chief representative has the legality
to lead the office and determine the working concept. The second is the consent on the work of the office. As I mentioned above, this consent forms the support by the Bureau, leading to the determination on the degree of the legitimacy of the office in its operation.

*The Working Concept and Consent*

The influence of the chief representative is another favourable outcome of the legitimization of the European office. The chief representative determines the working content, direction and strategy of the Office, which influence to what extent that the office can accomplish its performance. The result of this internal legitimation process enhances the recognition of consent in the European office from the Bureau and also the members of the office, leading to the promotion of the degree of the perceptions of legitimacy of the office.

On the one hand, this perception leads to cooperation between the Bureau and the European office being improved. An effective working plan can bring benefits to diplomatic work, and then the support from the Bureau will be greater, and the direct consequence of this circle will enhance the legitimacy of the office. On the other hand, it also makes team members of the office clearer about their responsibilities. If the efficiency of the office increases, a good result between the cooperation might happen, and then the recognition of local partners for the European office can also be improved. The power from the chief representative is to reinforce the legitimacy of the European office, which actually is seen as a re-legitimization process, as a final stage to enable the office to work with legitimacy in Europe.

**CONCLUSION**

Legitimacy is a key to empower the Shenzhen European Office’s work in international diplomacy. This chapter has shown the rationale whereby the legitimacy of the office emerges internally before it works in Europe. The legitimation process,
such as the performance that the Office offers to its stakeholders, the procedural correctness of the chief representative’s election, and the determination of the working concept of the chief representative, provide legitimacy to the Shenzhen Europe Office. Consent, however, is the actual power that turns these legitimacies from an ideological perception into a reality for the operational success of the European office.

This chapter has provided evidence to support the argument of the thesis, that the success of city diplomacy is related to the degree to which it is considered legitimate. These three influencing factors (i.e., the performance of the Office, support from the bureau and the actions of the chief representative) show that the favourable outcome plays a vital role in legitimizing the Shenzhen European Office. Potential partners’ perception of the Office can offer real value or benefit to the diplomatic work enabling it to gain legitimacy. The institutional guarantee from the Office’s leading department, the Commerce Bureau, provides procedural correctness to ensure the Office can achieve its diplomatic outcome, such as finding the most appropriate place to establish a branch and electing the most appropriate person to lead the office.

From this chapter we see the role of Shenzhen European Office and its three influencing factors. However, this raises a question: What is the diplomatic achievement that Shenzhen European Office or the Commerce Bureau hope to achieve - whether it is investment promotion or talent acquisition – and is there a larger influencing factor that legitimizes the diplomacy of the city? The next chapter will examine how reform and opening up, as China’s national brand and the city brand of Shenzhen, influences the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy. It will show how domestics politics – especially at the national level - influences the legitimation of city diplomacy.
Chapter 4 The Influence of Reform and Opening up on Shenzhen’s Diplomacy

As the key element of China’s branding strategy, reform and opening up is the foundation from which to examine the legitimization of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. There are three reasons for supporting this argument. First, the diplomatic action serves the development of reform and opening up. Second, city diplomacy is a means for the world to see China’s implementation of reform and opening up in action. Third, the meaning of reform and opening up is extended to diplomacy and forms its goal, direction and strategy. This chapter illustrates why reform and opening up happened in Shenzhen and how it shaped Shenzhen’s diplomatic strategy.

Shenzhen is well studied in academia on areas such as political reform, economics, anthropology, cultural studies, city design and so on. For instance, O’Donnell, Wong and Bach explain the progression of Shenzhen from an experimental city to a model of China’s reform and opening between 1979 to 2011, including social and economic reform experiments, urban planning and construction, the changing process of the modern urban civilization, social and humanistic changes, cultural and artistic development, and medical system construction. Shenzhen’s reform performance has been recognized by the scholars that it brings China and Chinese citizens a ‘Shenzhen speed’ to reach modernization, making the poor become rich, helping migrants to settle down.

This chapter re-examines the importance of reform and opening up from the perspective of how it affects the legitimization of Shenzhen diplomacy. Over the past decades, Shenzhen’s actions epitomize how China pursues the goals of reform and opening up and China’s official discourse also shows that Shenzhen is the window of reform and opening up. Similarly, the diplomacy of Shenzhen is one of the angles

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318 Koolhaas et al. (2000); Chen (2006); Vogel (2011).
from which to examine how Shenzhen acts on the world stage, making friendships, setting up cooperation and accomplishing development within the context of reform and opening up. Therefore, it is necessary to set out the origin of reform and opening up to examine Shenzhen diplomacy.

In other words, the importance of this chapter is to show how China’s domestic politics – at the national level – influence the legitimation of city diplomacy. First, the implementation of reform and opening up in order to find a new development path since 1978 in China indicates that this branding measure was crucial to legitimize the strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy. Reform and opening up, both for China’s national government and for the Shenzhen government, was being adopted as the main political measure. This has shaped both the goals and direction of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, enabling Shenzhen’s diplomatic strategy to be legitimate at the levels of domestic design and implementation. Second, the role of reform and opening up is important to the process of internalization, which is vital in the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy because when its relevant stakeholders internalize a rule’s content and refigure their interests according to this rule, then this rule will become legitimate to them and even become significant for their behaviour. For instance, as I introduced in chapter 3, the work of the Shenzhen European Office has been internalized and set up around serving China’s reform and opening up and the development of Shenzhen. Third, Shenzhen was established as China’s pioneering city in the exploration of the development path of reform and opening: this pioneering role is built into the origins and nature of the city and has become its culture. Since 2019, this role has developed from providing a focus for the achievement of economic benefits to demonstrating improvement in international influence and competitiveness, which has resulted in a transformation of the focus of the city’s diplomacy. The evidence in this chapter provides substantive support for the vital influence of the favourable outcomes on legitimation discussed in Chapter 2.
The chapter is organized as follows. First, it outlines the importance of reform and opening up to China and Shenzhen. It then explains why and how reform and opening up became a distinctive part of Shenzhen’s city branding. The third section shows how it influences the diplomatic strategy of the Office of Foreign Affairs Work Committee of CPC Shenzhen Municipal Committee (FAO). The concluding section further develops the legitimation approaches proposed in chapter 2.

4.1 WHY REFORM AND OPENING UP IS IMPORTANT TO SHENZHEN

Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in 1978, China has implemented a political programme as a national development measure which continues today, namely reform and opening up. The Chinese government stated it aimed to develop the economy through internal reform and open the market to the world and also encourage Chinese enterprise to ‘go out’. This is seen as the national brand of China to achieve success: ‘China has achieved high and sustained rates of growth; it has lifted millions of its citizens out of poverty; it has become the world’s largest trading economy and holds the world’s largest pool of foreign exchange reserves. It is now the second largest source of outbound foreign direct investment, and may soon become the first, replacing the United States’.\(^{319}\) At the parallel city level, Shenzhen, which has been constructed as the pioneering city and the model of reform and opening up, has also used this policy for its city’s branding image over the past 40 years.\(^{320}\)

Shenzhen is well known for its speedy development. It developed from a fishing village with only 32 thousand people to one of the four super cities in mainland China with 11.64 million citizens within 36 years.\(^{321}\) The successful outcome of the city’s development is supported by various factors, including solid support from China’s national policy, resource integration through globalization, capital movement and

\(^{319}\) Harding (2020).
investment, talent migration and so on. In other words, these factors contribute to the construction of the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s development. When Shenzhen seeks to reach a diplomatic goal, these supporting factors can be seen as a favourable outcome that the diplomacy target (such as investment, talent etc.) can receive from Shenzhen. The more capability the city has, the more attractiveness Shenzhen can present to the world on the diplomatic stage. For example, Shenzhen was selected as one of the pioneer cities (alongside Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen) to be established as an Economic Special Zone since 1980. The goal of developing the economy through opening to the world, as a factor of the favourable-outcome approach for achieving legitimation, shaped the diplomatic strategy of the city. It is therefore crucial to explore why Shenzhen was selected as one of the pioneer and experimental cities to implement the reform and opening up policy before examining the legitimation of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. If the future is to be discussed, the past should be its introduction.

National Condition: The Premise of Establishing Shenzhen

If the original nature of Shenzhen is that of its pioneering role in being the representative city of China’s reform and opening up, then it is reasonable to review why it was urgent for China to implement this policy and how Chinese history during the late 1970s of China has influenced the establishment of Shenzhen and legitimised the city’s development goal and strategy from top to bottom. There were four vital premises in the establishment of Shenzhen. First, China needed to restore its economy and therefore needed pioneering cities to serve as experimental places from which to explore the development path. Second, Deng Xiaoping’s return to the leadership determined that China’s policy should be centred on the implementation of reform and opening up; as a result Shenzhen was enabled to receive strong support from the national government. Third, the transformation of people’s thinking from supporting the ‘Two Whatevers’ to ‘Seeking Truth from Facts’ was vital for recognizing reform
and opening up and in establishing the ideological foundation for building Shenzhen. Fourth, Shenzhen was chosen because of its proximity to Hong Kong.

Implementation of the reform and opening policy was the strategy for China’s new development from 1978. Before this, the country has experienced the chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution. This civil strife resulted in the political struggle for the leadership of China, which ‘lasted from May 1966 to October 1976, was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic’. \(^{322}\) During this period, intellectuals were suppressed, business management was chaotic, the level of science and technology was very backward, and the masses were extremely poor. After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, Hua Guofeng took over Mao Zedong’s leadership. This legacy of Mao’s power from the Cultural Revolution put Hua in an unavoidable dilemma: if he denied Mao’s hope of maintaining the goals and achievements of the cultural revolution, it would have meant that he would deny the legitimacy of his power. In order to stabilize his legitimacy to govern, Hua proposed the ideology ‘Two Whatevers’ to memorialize Mao: ‘Whatever policy Chairman Mao decided upon, we shall resolutely defend; whatever directives Chairman Mao issued, we shall steadfastly obey.’\(^{323}\) This formula resulted in a conflict between Hua and the Party veterans. After all, the top leaders in the party did not want the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution to happen again and the hope of the whole country was to re-develop China. These factors allowed Deng Xiaoping to gain more support, because the veterans realized that ‘Deng was more likely than Hua to be able to engineer the post-Cultural Revolution turnaround that most desired’. \(^{324}\) Deng’s return was the vital political foundation for the establishment of Shenzhen, as I will introduce in the

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\(^{322}\) MacFarquhar (1991), p391. Furthermore, the official position of the Chinese government on the Cultural revolution is: ‘The 10-year Cultural Revolution was a civil turmoil that was wrongly launched by the leaders and used by counter-revolutionary groups to bring serious disasters to the party, the country, and the people of all ethnic groups’, See Zhongyang zhengfu menhu wangzhan (2013), Chapter 7 The civil turmoil of the ten years cultural revolution; MacFarquhar, R. (1991).

\(^{323}\) China Gov (2008).

following section: it was Deng’s decision to set up Special Economic Zone to develop China’s economy.

The support from the veterans enabled Deng to recover his legitimacy in the leadership of the Party and to consolidate his status. On April 10 1977, Deng Xiaoping wrote to the Party Central Committee (PCC) to point out the wrong view of the Two Whatevers: ‘We must use the accurate and complete Mao Zedong’s thought for generations to guide our whole party’. Deng’s formulation to ‘use the accurate and complete Mao Zedong Thought’ created conditions for correcting the mistakes of the Two Whatevers and this was the forerunner of the whole party’s emancipation of the mind. On the Third Plenary Session of the 10th Party Congress, the plenary session passed the resolution on restoring Deng Xiaoping’s leadership, from when the standard of Seeking truth from facts was set up. On May 10 1978, an article named Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth(《实践是检验真理的唯一标准》) was published in the Central Party School’s internal journal Theory Dynamic (《理论动态》), which drew back the curtain of the mind emancipation of the whole party. Since then, people in the party who supported the Seek Truths from Facts or the Two Whatevers started their big controversy. Until December 1978, the Party Chiefs of most provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in the country, and the Heads of major regions and units of the People’s Liberation Army had successively expressed their support for Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth.326

The importance of emancipation and unity of thought for the party is because it was the psychological preparation for planning reform and opening up. On the one hand, the emancipation meant people’s thoughts transferred from supporting the Two Whatevers to Seeking Truth from Facts, which signified ideological progress to reach further development. On the other hand, the unity meant that, owing to the above

326 Cao (2016), p83.
transformation of thoughts, reform and opening up was not an opposition and became in agreement in people’s minds.

The direct reason that Shenzhen was chosen because of its proximity to Hong Kong. As an international city that is important to the world, Hong Kong also matters to China’s development, especially its cooperation with the outside world and the external economy. The leaders of China’s Communist Party attach great importance to Hong Kong. For example, during the end of the liberation war, the troops of Chinese People’s Liberation Army, which recovered Guangzhou, also received an order: go on to recover Hong Kong. However, when they arrived at Shenzhen River after their departure from Guangzhou three days before, they were told that the action was cancelled. The reason was that the foreign trade in China’s port cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin and Qingdao were almost cut off because of the US blockade policy. If Hong Kong was recovered, the only trade channel connected to the international community on China’s territory would be closed, which meant that the country would urgently need military supplies and unique foreign exchange earnings. For Hong Kong, it would also become a dead port. Therefore, retaining Hong Kong’s Freeport status for a certain period, temporarily administered by the British government, would be a solution to break the US blockade line.\textsuperscript{327}

The rapid development of Hong Kong after the Second World War is widely recognized. As discussed above, owing to the 10-year cultural revolution, the economy of the Chinese mainland was destroyed. In contrast, Hong Kong’s economy was generally smooth and made progress. The total amount of Hong Kong’s exports to foreign areas in 1974 was 22911.34 million USD. By 1977, it had risen to 35003.93 million USD.\textsuperscript{328} Besides, the goods from Hong Kong essentially cover every continent in the world. In this way, it could be seen that the land of mainland China close to

\textsuperscript{327} Cao (2016).

\textsuperscript{328} Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (1978).
Hong Kong was circled as a special economic zone to develop the economy, and this was the direct reason that Shenzhen was chosen.

The Importance of Deng Xiaoping for Shenzhen

Deng Xiaoping’s role for the establishment of Shenzhen is vital for three reasons. First, since the implementation of reform and opening up, the guiding ideology of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party shifted from class struggle to economic construction. This enabled the leadership to consider the breakthrough and method for achieving economic development, such as the planning issues for the development of foreign trade in Guangdong Province. Owing to the extremely severe economic situation, the central leadership decided to break the closed-door policy. China started to learn from foreign advanced technology and experience, to use foreign capital and wisdom, and to accelerate development through opening up.329 For instance, Deng emphasized the importance of expanding the import and export trade to his colleagues of the leadership at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee:

The policy needs to be bold, and it is worth racing against time to import equipment. The problem is how to be good at it. The current timing is advantageous…To think about it, is the mind liberated enough? Are there any obstacles? Do any problems exist in the superstructure and production technology? The questions should not be ignored in Beijing for one or two years; they need to be studied well and be solved as soon as possible… Guangdong Province now is establishing the export base, which should be supported, just give it a try.330

Moreover, a series of visits to Europe, the United States, Japan, Hong Kong and Macao brought a huge shock to the Chinese delegation’s thoughts. According to the statistics of the Hong Kong and Macao office of the State Council, from January to

330 Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), p298.
November 1978, there were 529 batches of delegations (a total of 3,213 people) that went abroad to Hong Kong and Macao for a field visit. After the eye-opening experience, they summarized three representative impressions: first, the modern world’s modernization had developed to such an advanced level, and the development gap between China and developed countries (regions) was so huge; second, the living standards of the people were much higher than in China; and last, the advanced concepts and practices in the development of the economy such as environmental protection, science and technology, and product quality were worth learning in China.

When Deng met with the outgoing Romanian ambassador to China, he talked about the large-scale overseas visit:

Foreign things serving China is an important part of self-reliance... many delegations have visited Europe and Japan, and we found that there are lots of things that can be used. Many countries are willing to provide us funds and technology, and the conditions are not harsh, which is good for us from both political and economic perspective, so why not to do it? International conditions are favourable, domestic conditions are favourable, as long as we make up our mind, the construction will be speeded up.

When meeting with the press delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany, Deng Xiaoping once again stressed:

China has contributed to the world in history, but it has been stagnant for a long time and the development is very slow. Now is the timing for us to learn from all over the world. In the past, there used to be some days that, learning advanced science and technology from foreign countries was called worshiping things foreign and fawning on foreign countries (chongyang meiwai). But now everyone

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331 China State Council (1979).
332 Cao, p89-100
333 Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), P329.
understands that this is a stupid sentence. We sent many people to go out and enable more and more people to know what the real world looks like. If we close the door, stand still and refuse to make progress, keeping arrogant, nothing will be developed. To achieve our four modernizations policy, we need to be good at studying and get a lot of international help. It is necessary to bring in advanced and advanced equipment from the international community as our starting point.334

Secondly, Deng Xiaoping was important for Shenzhen in that he played an important role in advocacy for the establishment of a Special Economic Zone. Shenzhen first came to Deng’s attention because a document reflecting the increasing number of arrivals at Shenzhen Port in September 1977; he instructed that: ‘This kind of matter needs to be dealt with specifically by the State Council. It is by no means a problem in Shenzhen. All ports must be managed well, with professional division of labour, strict rules, and rewards and punishments’.335 Later, he learned about the problem of smuggling outflow in Shenzhen that may have become the direct reason why he decided to improve the local economic situation first. After all, smuggling outflow reflects the backwardness of China’s overall economic and social environment. When Deng Xiaoping visited Guangdong province in November 1977, he reported that a large number of young people fled from Guangdong to Hong Kong and Macao every year. Deng Xiaoping pointed out that the gap in living standards on both sides of the border was the crux, and China needed to change its policies to improve the lives of people on the Chinese border to solve the smuggling problem.336 At that time, just the data of July 1977, 1031 people in the Huiyang area of Guangdong were trying to escape and 318 of them fled, which increased to 120% and 61% respectively over the same period in 1976.337 This was Deng Xiaoping’s first visit to Guangdong after he recovered his national leadership. He also proposed some advice to develop

334 Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), P398-399.
335 Shenzhen shizhi (2006).
336 Xiao (2008), p760; Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), p239.
337 He (2008), p459.
Guangdong’s economy, such as to set up an agricultural product processing centre in Baoan County (Shenzhen) and Zhuhai County to sell fresh fruit and vegetables to Hong Kong; Guangdong could build some modern hotels and tourism facilities to earn more foreign exchange.\(^{338}\) After the discussion, the national government started active research on Shenzhen to see if it could serve as a pioneer city for revitalizing China’s economy.

In March 1978, the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the People’s Bank of China, the National Import and Export Corporation and Ng Fung Hong Limited formed a joint working group with the Department of Foreign Trade of Guangdong Province in order to investigate the possibility of establishing the Baoan County (Shenzhen) Foreign Trade Base. They formulated an annual plan, also a three-to-five-year plan, and applied policies for the production and export of the Base.\(^{339}\) On this basis, the country sent another team to visit Hong Kong and Macao on 10 April to 6 May in 1978, and then completed a detailed report about the real situation of these two cities. After a comprehensive analysis of the survey results, Deng Xiaoping said that not only Baoan and Zhuhai but other counties in Guangdong and Fujian could also try it.\(^{340}\) This was the signal to reform from Deng, which prompted Xi Zhongxun\(^{341}\), the first secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, to start city construction and foreign trade export in Baoan and Zhuhai. Guangdong, similar to neighboring Hong Kong and Macao, has many overseas Chinese and a relatively developed commodity economy, and therefore the Guangdong Committee of the CCP proposed to the central government to give full play to Guangdong’s advantages and implement special support policies to allow Guangdong to take a step forward in reform and opening up. Setting up a special economic zone became a key method for

\(^{338}\) Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), p236-240; Xiao(2008), p760.
\(^{340}\) Zhu (2009).
\(^{341}\) Father of President Xi Jinping.
the ‘first step’ approach.\textsuperscript{342} Deng specifically pointed out that if Guangdong (and Fujian) got rich first, (for the country) there was no harm.\textsuperscript{343}

The third way in which Deng Xiaoping was important for Shenzhen was he left the culture and the image of keeping reform and opening to the city. Although the country had clarified the development path of reform and opening up, it was difficult to quickly reach a consensus on some major issues in the development of the special zone, especially the relationship between ‘the plan and the market’. The Special Economic Zone could only answer public opinion with its practice, but this also required a process. The first time Deng spoke for Shenzhen was in 1984 when he first visited Shenzhen, and defined that ‘Shenzhen’s development and experience have proved that our policy for establishing special economic zones was correct’.\textsuperscript{344} This temporarily quelled various disputes within the party, and made Shenzhen’s reputation reach its first peak in its development history, making the city widely regarded as a pioneer in implementing the reform and opening up policy. The second time was when he defined Shenzhen as an experimental field from 1985 and degree it should focus on an export-oriented economy centred on industry, and in 1987, the success of Shenzhen’s economy enabled Deng to say that ‘Our decision to establish a special economic zone is not only correct, but also successful’.\textsuperscript{345} During the period from 1989 to 1992, Deng Xiaoping expressed his full affirmation of Shenzhen’s development, and at the same time, he suggested that the speed of Shenzhen’s development speed should increase.\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{342} Guangdong CPPCC Cultural and Historical Data Research Committee (2002), p192.

\textsuperscript{343} Zhang (2002), p549-550; Party Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (2004), p506.

\textsuperscript{344} Shenzhen Shizhi (2006).

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
4.2 THE REPRESENTATION OF REFORM AND OPENING UP AS A BRANDING IMAGE OF SHENZHEN

In April 1978, the State Development Planning Commission\textsuperscript{347} and the Ministry of Foreign Trade organized a Hong Kong and Macao Trade Inspection Team to carry out on-site investigations to find a new path to build China’s economy. In the investigation report they proposed to develop Baoan County and Zhuhai County of Guangdong Province as the export base because the locations were respectively very close to Hong Kong and Macao.

In August, the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee decided to promote Baoan and Zhuhai from county to city, in order to formally develop a commodity economy. An important measure in this process in Baoan was to establish the industrial zone of China Merchants Group\textsuperscript{348} in Shekou area, which would apply the new development guideline: based on Hong Kong and Macao (立足港澳 lizu gangao), relying on the mainland (依靠国内 yikao guonei), facing overseas (面向海外 mianxiang haiwai), implementing a diversified economy (多种经营 duozhong jingying), combining industry and commerce (工商结合 gongshang jiehe), and combining buying and selling (买卖结合 maimai jiehe).\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{347} It was one of the original ministries of The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. Founded in 1954, it was responsible for the comprehensive economic planning of the Chinese government for a long time. However, with the gradual transformation of China from a “planned economic system” to a “socialist market economic system”, the functions of the State Planning Commission gradually changed and it was finally reorganized as the National Development and Reform Commission in 1998.

\textsuperscript{348} China Merchants Group is an important state-owned backbone enterprise directly managed by the central government. Headquartered in Hong Kong, it is one of the earliest Chinese-funded enterprises established and operated in Hong Kong. It is a pioneer of Chinese national industry and commerce, founded in 1872 during the Westernization Movement. China Merchants Group is the first joint-stock company in modern China. It formed the first merchant fleet in modern China, opened China’s first bank and insurance company, and created the modern national shipping industry in China.

\textsuperscript{349} China Merchants History Museum (1978).
On January 31 1979, Vice President Li Xiannian and Vice Premier Gu Mu received Peng Deqing (Vice Minister of the Ministry of Transportation) and Yuan Geng (Head of China Merchants Group) and during this meeting the idea of establishing the Shekou Industrial Zone was approved. The China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone is an embryonic form of China special economic zone. It was the first to open the door,
and also be the window, to the outside world, which shows that the spring of China’s reform and opening up had come. Likewise, it was the beginning of the story, and linked Shenzhen with the world.

On March 5, 1979, the State Council approved Bao’an County’s promotion of Shenzhen City, dually led by Guangdong Province and Huiyang District. In November 1979, the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to transform Shenzhen into a provincial-level city at the regional level. On August 26, 1980, the Fifteenth Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Fifth National People’s Congress passed the ‘Regulations on Special Economic Zones of Guangdong Province’ proposed by the State Council. The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was formally established to shoulder the important task and mission of developing foreign economic cooperation, technological exchanges and promoting socialist modernization. Shenzhen and the other three special economic zones established in the same period, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, were given the expectation that ‘the special zone is a window of technology, management, knowledge and foreign policy.’

In the early stages of reform and opening up, due to its proximity to Hong Kong and its advantages of low labour and land costs, Shenzhen developed the industry of the 3+C model which resulted in the formation of the development model of investment based on foreign investors, production based on processing and assembly, and products based on exports, and became an important centre in China’s electronic information industry and a destination for global manufacturing transfer. Compared with other mainland cities, the privileges obtained by the Shenzhen Special Economic

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352 NPC Gov (1980).
354 See Huang (2017), in O’Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017), p76: ‘The 3+C model referred to Shenzhen’s intermediary role in global processing chains and dispersed investment strategies. The 3 referred to three aspects of the processing trade and assembly manufacturing, a business activity of importing all or part of the required raw and auxiliary materials, parts and components, and accessories and packaging materials from abroad in bulk and reexporting the finished products after processing or assembly. The C referred to compensation trade, in which incoming investments would be repaid form the revenues generated by that investment.’
Zone included certain preferential conditions and policy dividends in areas such as business operations, foreign exchange, management of labour services for foreigners, and taxation. As Huang indicated, ‘China’s suppressed productive forces found their first globalizing ‘blow out’ in Shenzhen’.  

However, the development of Shenzhen in the process of reform and opening up has not been smooth sailing, and it has become the focus of several big disputes in Chinese politics. In 1982, the Shenzhen Special Zone was criticized as a ‘concession’ by some commentators, and there were some criticisms in China that ‘the Shenzhen Special Zone is to conduct capitalism on the land of China’. For example, Gu Mu, the vice premier in charge of the SEZs, recalled that these discussions added difficulties to the establishment of the SEZs and made it difficult to build and develop them. In the early 1990s, the changes in the international and internal situations such as the decline in economic development in China, the June Fourth incident, the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union provoked debate over the question of whether the character of the reform and opening up was social or capital. This caused great interference to the development of the special zone, and Shenzhen’s reform and opening up was once in danger of being interrupted. At this critical moment, Deng Xiaoping personally inspected Shenzhen and affirmed that the policy of the special economic zone was correct. Encouraged by Deng Xiaoping, Shenzhen did not engage in controversy and insisted on development as the top priority. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, it has grown from a poor fishing village to an important domestic super-large first-tier city and an international metropolis, which ranks at the forefront among domestic large and medium-sized cities in terms of GDP, local finance, taxation, import and export and other indicators.

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356 Zhang and Cheng (2020).
357 Ibid.
359 Zhang and Cheng (2020) .
Regardless of China or Shenzhen, the motivation for implementing reform and opening up is to develop the economy. Shenzhen’s success is not only due to its own comparative advantages in history, geography, and culture, but also benefits from its policy flexibility and its particularity as a test field for China. Compared with the other three areas, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen, that became special economic zones during the same period, Shenzhen’s advantage lies in its proximity to Hong Kong. The geographical advantage of being adjacent to Hong Kong, the global financial centre, has brought Shenzhen convenient conditions for contacting the world, understanding the world, and integrating into the market economy. Moreover, the close blood and cultural ties between Shenzhen and Hong Kong are another important factor that makes Shenzhen more successful than the other special economic zones.\textsuperscript{360} After 1949, some people came to Hong Kong from the mainland and accumulated wealth and knowledge. After the reform and opening up, these immigrants chose to invest in Shenzhen or other mainland cities through Shenzhen.\textsuperscript{361} The earliest foreign capital introduced in Shenzhen was Hong Kong capital, and the processing plant built through these investments was one of the main reasons for Shenzhen’s early development. Furthermore, Shenzhen is a special zone with the highest degree of immigration. This city has typical immigrant culture characteristics, that is, certain spiritual qualities and cultural qualities that are compatible with immigrant society, such as advocating a pioneering culture and newness.\textsuperscript{362} The miracle of Shenzhen’s development fundamentally derived from the power of ideas and from reform and opening up. It seems that the measure started with economic system reform, but it actually started with a renewal of ideas. Although concepts cannot directly change society, concepts can change people, and people can change society.\textsuperscript{363} As O’Donnell

\textsuperscript{360} Clark (1998); Tao (2020).
\textsuperscript{362} Crane (1994).
\textsuperscript{363} Tao (2020)
indicated, a Shenzhener should be ‘a person able to transform her- or himself and the socialist world’.  

On the basis of its own advantages, policy flexibility was another factor for Shenzhen’s success in the process of reform and opening up. On the one hand, special policies and flexible measures were adopted to break through the barriers of the planned economic system. After the establishment of the special economic zone, the central government instructed Shenzhen to jump out of the economic system and focus on market regulation in economic operations. In February 1983, for example, when the relevant central leaders inspected the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, they pointed out that the work of the special zone should follow the standard of: ‘Special things should be done in a special way, and new things should be done in a new way’ (特事特办, 新事新办 teshi teban, xinshi xinban). Meanwhile, the benefit of policy flexibility also reflected on local officials in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone who had the courage to explore and demand policies from the central government. For example, Yuan Geng took the opportunity of Gu Mu’s meeting in Guangzhou and inspection of Shenzhen to fight for the right to recruit talent from him and the Central Organization Department, in order to recruit cadres across the country. This spirit of seeking innovation and breakthroughs for development constructed the spiritual and cultural heritage of the entire city of Shenzhen and allowed Shenzhen to take the lead in many aspects of economic reform in China, such as establishing ‘the first stock exchange, the first privatization of state-owned enterprises, the first novel foreign exchange transaction systems, the first radical reforms in the commercialization of housing, the first sale of industrial land, the first labor-contract systems that aligned wages with a market system and created a professional class of entrepreneurs, and many more’.  

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365 Zhang and Cheng (2020).  
367 In Zhang and Cheng, p115; Also see O’Donnell (2017) about Yuan’s reform measure, p46-50.  
On the other hand, another aspect of policy flexibility is that the experimental function is greater than the demonstration effect. The establishment of special economic zones in China under the socialist system was an unprecedented experiment, and this kind of exploration advanced in the continuous breakthrough of the existing legal framework. In other words, Shenzhen had its exploratory nature and trial experimental function as a test field. Deng Xiaoping once clearly stated that ‘The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone is an experiment. We still need to see if we are going the right way. It is a new thing in socialism. To be successful is our wish, it can be an experience if not success’. This kind of tolerant attitude of high-level central authorities towards Shenzhen and granting the special zone the right to trial and error was one of the important factors for the success of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. For example, Gu Mu repeatedly emphasized the need to give the special economic zone the right to reform and trial and error: ‘They should be given support, policies, and powers so that they can work freely. Don’t pass everything here and there. This kind of support must be given, otherwise what is the special zone called? Some things can be solved by the special zone itself, and this right should be given’. The location advantage far away from the decision-making centre of the planned economy and adjacent to Hong Kong has given Shenzhen excellent conditions for the reform and opening up experiment. Since it is an experiment, there is a possibility of failure. Being away from the centre of China means the costs of Shenzhen’s trial and error are reduced, and the proximity to Hong Kong not only allows Shenzhen to play a window role, but also to learn from the development experience of it to promote its own development.

In general, the success of Shenzhen’s development reflects its legitimacy as a pioneer city of reform and opening up. From 1979 to 2017, Shenzhen’s GDP increased

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369 Zhang and Cheng (2020).
370 Gu and Chen (2015).
371 Shenzhen shizhi (2006)
372 In Zhang and Cheng (2020).
from 197 million RMB to 2.24 trillion RMB, with an average annual growth rate of 23%,
becoming the third city after Shanghai and Beijing with a GDP exceeding 2 trillion
yuan, and surpassing Guangzhou and Hong Kong; the per capita gross domestic
product value increased from 606 yuan to 183,100 yuan, an average annual growth
rate of 16.22%, ranking first among inland cities above the sub-provincial level,
surpassing Taiwan and approaching the level of South Korea in 2016. These
economic successes, to some extent, support the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy,
which derives from it serving economic development.

Since 2019, Shenzhen has been given two new development missions. The first was
that in February 2019 the central government issued the Outline Development Plan for
the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which is committed to building a
first-class bay area and world-class city cluster with vigour and international
competitiveness. The outline empowers Shenzhen to be embodied in the following:
first, it is clear that Shenzhen’s position in the overall planning of the Guangdong-
Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is to play a leading role as a special economic

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373 Xinhua (2018).
zone, a national economic centre city, and a national innovative city, to build a modern and international city and strive to become an innovative and creative capital with world influence. Second, it supports Shenzhen’s various measures to be integrated into the overall plan. For example, leveraging the leading role of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen alliance to deepen the cooperation between these two cities, and promoting the construction of the ‘Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Macao’ science and technology innovation corridor, and exploring policies and measures that are conducive to the cross-border flow of innovative elements and regional integration on the fields of talent, capital, information, and technology.\(^{375}\)

The second new mission for Shenzhen was the CPC Central Committee and the State Council officially announcing the Guidelines on Supporting Shenzhen in Building a Pilot Demonstration Area of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics on 18\(^{th}\) August 2019, which claims that: ‘supporting Shenzhen in building a pilot demonstration area of socialism with Chinese characteristics will help promote the reform and opening up at a higher starting point and a higher level and towards higher goals, form a new pattern of deepening reform in an all-round way, better implement the development strategy of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, enrich the new practice of the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy, explore a new path in the construction of a strong and modern socialist country, and offer strong support for the realization of the Chinese Dream of the great renewal of the Chinese nation’.\(^{376}\) It shows that a consensus has been reached at the central level whereby Shenzhen special economic zone should not only continue to be special, but, in addition, Shenzhen must also undertake the higher-level and clearer task of transforming from a single economic ‘experimental field’ to a comprehensive pilot demonstration area including economy, society, culture, rule of law, and ecology.\(^{377}\) In the history of China’s reform and opening up, it is arguable that no city like Shenzhen has been able

\(^{375}\) Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, HK Gov (2019).

\(^{376}\) Shenzhen Gov (2021).

\(^{377}\) Fu (2018).
to reflect the direction of the country's institutional changes with its development and has created a brand-new and high-performance social development model.\textsuperscript{378}

From the perspective of the goals and continuity of reform and opening up, the basis for issuing these two new policies is that performance can bring legitimacy to the CCP’s governance.\textsuperscript{379} The success of Shenzhen, that is, the city’s development and economic benefits brought by reform and opening up, is the direct evidence that the CCP has proved its governance performance from the domestic to the worldwide context. This is why reform and opening up will continue to be the core brand of China (and Shenzhen) development, as long as the implementation of this policy can continue to bring development dividends.

As Professor Tao Yitao, Director of the China Special Economic Zone Research Center of Shenzhen University, explained: ‘If we say that Shenzhen’s pioneering trial was a revolution in the face of poverty, then Shenzhen’s pilot demonstration today is a comprehensive and deepening reform after becoming rich. At that time, there was a dead end if there was no reform. People would take risks to reform because this is a life choice. However, when there is nothing to lose without reform, but there is a risk of reform, maybe people will choose not to reform. Shenzhen still not afraid of risks, continue to firmly carry the banner of reform and opening up. Today’s ‘pilot demonstration’ requires greater courage, wisdom, sense of mission and a sense of responsibility than the ‘pioneering trial’ of the past. To complete the mission of ‘pilot demonstration’ is a test for Shenzhen itself.’\textsuperscript{380}

\textsuperscript{378} Tao (2020).
\textsuperscript{379} Regarding how performance provides legitimacy to the governance of the Chinese Communist Party please see chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{380} Tao (2020).
4.3 THE PIONEERING DEMONSTRATION MEASURES OF THE OFFICE OF FOREIGN AFFIARS OF SHENZHEN

To discuss reform and opening up as the branding image of Shenzhen, the role of the Office of Foreign Affairs Work Committee of CPC Shenzhen Municipal Committee (FAO) should not be ignored because it is the official governmental institute to represent Shenzhen which connects with international affairs in the frontline of diplomacy. Although other governmental institutes also work in the frontline of Shenzhen diplomacy geographically, in particular the Shenzhen European Office, which I introduced in chapter 3, the FAO is the most representative one officially. For example, the establishment of sister cities, the exchange of delegation visits and other foreign affairs are all handled by the FAO. It is thus possible to say that the introduction of how FAO measures are helpful to Shenzhen’s reform and opening up development, especially to promote the city’s internationalization level, is vital material to examine Shenzhen diplomacy.

As the above section showed, Shenzhen has been given the pilot role and has been an experimental field for China to explore the development pathway since 1978 when the whole country started to implement the reform and opening up policy. In order to assist Shenzhen to reach the new development goal of reform and opening up since 2019 – to take the leading role in building the Great Bay Area and to be the pilot demonstration city of China – the strategy that the FAO proposed to explore the transformation of foreign work resources into the driving force of urban economic and social development through integrating international resources is carried out around four aspects. They are improving Shenzhen’s international influence and competitiveness, linking the dual circulation between domestic and international markets, integrating into the global innovation network and building the
internationalized blocks.\textsuperscript{381} This is a transformation of the legitimacy of the FAO’s work.

\textit{Improve Shenzhen’s International Influence and Competitiveness}

In 2020, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned in his speech at the 40th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone that Shenzhen must persist in opening up to the outside world in an all-round way, and continuously improve the attractiveness of ‘bringing in’ and the competitiveness of ‘going out’.\textsuperscript{382} In terms of bringing in, the FAO claims to advance three major tasks. The first is to strive to host major diplomatic events in Shenzhen, and trying to enhance the city’s public service level, amplify the effect of hosting conferences, and increase the city’s participation in international politics by implementing the strategy of ‘Organizing a conference well to invigorate a city’. For instance, the Shenzhen International Convention and Exhibition Center, Xiangmihu International Conference Center, Qianhai International Conference Center and other world-class Shenzhen conference facilities will be used as the starting point for the following: to develop the urban agglomeration economy, to promote the holding of internationally influential industry and professional international conferences and exhibitions, to attract important international sports events, to upgrade Shenzhen’s existing international events such as the High-tech Fair, Cultural Expo to continuously absorb international elements, and continue to create and expand the international influence of Shenzhen’s convention and exhibition brands. The second is to introduce more international organizations, attract them to set up innovation carriers or regional headquarters in Shenzhen, and gather more international high-end resources, elements, and talent. The third is to promote the establishment of scientific and technological cooperation organizations and platforms for leading cities in global innovation.

\textsuperscript{381} The data is reorganized from the published online stuff, See FAO (2021).

\textsuperscript{382} Bring the overseas company (investment) into China’s market, and help Chinese enterprise going out to the overseas markets.
Moreover, four main measures have been taken in terms of ‘going out’. The first is to support and encourage Shenzhen market players to participate in the construction of the Belt and Road, to strengthen practical cooperation with countries and regions along the route in the fields of economy, trade, industry and infrastructure, and to accelerate the construction of a number of key projects and platforms. The second is to expand cooperation space, accelerate the layout and construction of overseas industrial parks, and participate in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor. The third is to promote the interconnection of infrastructure, build an international aviation hub that spans the world, and build a convenient and efficient integrated transportation network that connects Shenzhen with the world. The fourth is to take pragmatic cooperation with international sister cities as the starting point to improve key cooperation projects and promote people-to-people bonds.

Further measures are to improve the layout of international sister cities, create a new situation in city diplomacy, plan to promote exchanges and cooperation with key countries and regions, support and guide the Shenzhen International Exchange and Cooperation Foundation and other non-governmental forces to participate in foreign exchanges and cooperation, and promote public diplomacy, non-governmental diplomacy, sharing the experience of the special zone, spreading the voice of Shenzhen, telling the story of China and Shenzhen well.

*Link the Dual Circulation between Domestic and International Markets*\(^{383}\)

The meaning of Shenzhen to China’s foreign trade is important. Its export value has ranked first among mainland cities in China for 28 consecutive years. Shenzhen has a high degree of internationalization and comprehensive integration with the world. It has become an important hub for connecting domestic and international markets and

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\(^{383}\) Dual circulation means ‘to reorient China’s economy by prioritizing domestic consumption (“internal circulation”) while remaining open to international trade and investment (“external circulation”), and mitigating the volatility of global markets on the international stage’, see Carr (2022).
is able to be an important meeting point for domestic and international dual circulation.

Under this context, the FAO claims that there are four dimensions it will contribute to the development of Shenzhen’s dual circulation. The first dimension is focus on how to improve the domestic economic system, and a better environment for technological innovation and international business. The second dimension is focus on speeding up interconnection between institutional mechanisms and international rules in terms of domestic and foreign trade, investment and financing, fiscal policy and taxation, financial innovation, border exit and entry. The third is focus on strengthening the connection between innovation and industrial chains through establishing the World Innovative Cities Cooperation Organization, and the proposed function of this organization aims to link the global science and technology innovation main bodies. The fourth aims to strengthen multi-level and multi-field practical cooperation with countries and regions along the Belt and Road.

Integrate into the Global Innovation Network

The FAO is taking the lead in promoting the establishment of a brand-new international organization, the World Innovative City Cooperation Organization, and aims to enhance Shenzhen’s international influence and assist in the construction of the Great Bay Area and pilot demonstration zone. The development goal of the World Innovative Cities Cooperation Organization is to become a global and open platform for innovation. It trying to promote innovative exchanges and cooperation between Shenzhen and international cities through several methods such as establishing multilateral cooperation networks, building innovative cooperation platforms, holding innovative brand activities, and strengthening innovative cooperation research. By February 2021, preliminary intentions have been obtained from 35 cities and institutions worldwide, and further confirmation and sorting are in progress.

Build the Internationalized Blocks
‘Live Local, Live Global’ is Shenzhen’s slogan for building the international blocks. This means that the FAO is using its staffs’ foreign knowledge and services to contribute to the infrastructure construction of Shenzhen city. A service network consisting of the first batch of 20 internationalized blocks was formed by February 2021, covering 10 districts in the city. For example, the first foreign-related public legal service centre of Guangdong province was built in Shekou block, and a brand-new international district service centre opened in Guanlan block. Strengthening the international innovation connection seems to have become a main method for Shenzhen to promote the exchange and circulation of talent, technology and capital, thereby making a contribution to the international development of city’s localities. Especially the Nanshan district, for instance, which ranked No.4 of China’s top ten districts, its GDP in 2021 was 763 billion RMB, has attracted many high-quality international cooperation projects such as Tsinghua Berkeley Shenzhen College, Shenzhen Brisbane International Creative Incubation Center and Apple Shenzhen R&D Center, which became a model of building an internationalized city-wide network.

Unlike the Shenzhen European Office that always maintains investment promotion as its main task, the transformation of the work of the Office of Foreign Affairs Work Committee of CPC Shenzhen Municipal Committee can be regarded as a microcosm of the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. Because the FAO is the main functional department of the Shenzhen government responsible for foreign affairs, changes in Shenzhen’s policies and strategies for diplomacy will be directly reflected in the implementation of the FAO. This section shows how the FAO intends to explore the transformation of foreign work resources into the driving force of urban economic and social development through integrating international resources. This means that when it is affected by changes in Shenzhen’s development strategies, the legitimacy of FAO’s work also changes. From simply dealing with foreign affairs in the past, it

384 FAO (2021).
stated its aim to become a more proactive user of foreign affairs resources to help Shenzhen in its international development. This section proves the argument that national politics are vital to the legitimacy of city diplomacy, and determine the goals, strategies and methods of city diplomacy. Only on the premise of meeting the country’s development needs, can city diplomacy strengthen its legitimacy at the domestic level.

4.4 HOW REFORM AND OPENING UP MATTERS TO SHENZHEN

The reform and opening up case is not only instructive for the two legitimation approaches proposed in chapter 2, but also relates to the relations between legitimacy and symbols and between legitimacy and branding. If we acknowledge that reform and opening up is seen as a legitimacy device by China’s national government, and this successfully induced Shenzhen Government and its functional department such as the Office of Foreign Affairs Work Committee of CPC Shenzhen Municipal Committee (FAO), the Commerce Bureau and Shenzhen European Office to recognize the city’s diplomatic strategy as legitimate as long as it achieves the reform and opening up development goals given to Shenzhen, then we can ask: What element of the procedural correctness and favourable outcome was the source of that legitimation? How did legitimacy affect the strategic thinking of Shenzhen government on diplomacy? In what way and to what extent did reform and opening up construct Shenzhen’s symbols and branding?

The Legitimation Sources

Chapter 2 presented the two competing approaches for how legitimation occurs, and they can be used to organize the influence of reform and opening up into alternative outcomes. The explanations for legitimation in reform and opening up are (1) that in terms of the goal of reform and opening up, Shenzhen and the central government are unified, the former is an extension of the latter, and this goal helped legitimize the motivation of Shenzhen diplomacy; (2) that the orientation of
Shenzhen’s development goal helped legitimize the diplomatic strategy of the FAO; (3) that the particularity of Shenzhen among Chinese cities helped legitimize Shenzhen’s autonomy in the action of diplomacy. All of these are variations on the combination of the legitimation process. The favourable outcomes are primary and obvious; the procedural factors are hidden but are the supporting power to achieve those outcomes.

If the basis for the formulation of Shenzhen diplomacy comes from consent on reform and opening up, then the internalization of the motivation for this political programme is the basis of this recognition. The evidence clearly shows that the motivation for implementing reform and opening up was to develop the economy, and this resulted in the goal of Shenzhen city development. Shenzhen’s diplomacy therefore came about as an extension of Shenzhen’s reform and opening up. This favourable outcome oriented legitimation is linear and unified.

China experienced the chaos brought by the Cultural Revolution, and to re-develop the country was a nationwide hope. This grim reality seems inadvertently to have helped people to legitimize their desire for a better future life. It laid a broad psychological and emotional foundation for the country to pursue development in society, and this also resulted in a social foundation to plan, implement and support the reform and opening up policy. Reform and opening up helped the country to develop the foreign economy. At the same time, it allowed Guangdong province to take a step forward, choose Shenzhen as one of the pioneer cities to implement the policy, and then launch the first shot of reform and opening up in Shekou industrial area. We can see that the favourable outcome is a powerful explanation to legitimize the motivation of Shenzhen diplomatic action, which is twofold: to serve Shenzhen’s development and to serve China’s development through serving the development of Shenzhen.

As a result, this orientation of Shenzhen development helped legitimize the diplomatic strategy of the FAO of Shenzhen, which revolves around serving its city
and China’s development missions. In addition to actively serving and integrating into the country’s overall diplomacy, Shenzhen’s foreign affairs work also must give full play to local resource advantages and channels, focus on the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and Shenzhen Pilot Demonstration Zone, and continuously serve and promote high-quality development and high-level opening to the world.\(^{385}\) There is evidence to show that in this approach the outcome institutionalizes the operation of the FAO and then the operation procedure becomes a supporting power to reach the outcome. In other words, when the goals and strategies are legitimazed, the specific actions taken by the FAO will (or seem to) be more legitimate. This kind of legitimacy is the source of the recognition in the process of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. For example, in the establishment of sister-city relations, the leading role of the FAO is irreplaceable among the various departments of the Shenzhen government. This consensus exists among overseas parties dealing with the Office and among its colleagues in Shenzhen. The legitimacy of the FAO is determined by the support it receives and the effectiveness of its internal enforcement agencies. The support provided through policy set at the national, provincial and city level is especially important in determining the organization of the Office, the parameters in which it operates and the intended outcomes of its operations.

Since the implementation of reform and opening up, Shenzhen’s uniqueness has become obvious among Chinese cities, which determines its pioneering diplomacy at the forefront of the country. From 1978 to 1979, Shenzhen was proposed to develop as the export base because it was close to Hong Kong. The city was an experimental field to show China’s attempt and effort to establish China’s version of a market economy from a planned economy. As a result, the early diplomatic action of Shenzhen was mainly focused on the cooperation opportunity with Hong Kong and aimed to operate overseas through Hong Kong. When Shenzhen was named as one of the Special Economic Zones in 1980, its mission was promoted to broadly develop foreign

\(^{385}\) FAO (2021).
economic cooperation, technological exchanges and socialist modernization. The reason why Shenzhen performed more as a special economic zone than the other three cities in the same period is also due to its unique status as the only mainland city close to Hong Kong. This benefit meant Shenzhen had more chance to connect with the world through Hong Kong than other Chinese cities. The logic of uniqueness was also evident in 2019 when China proposed its new development, whereby Shenzhen needed to take the leading role in building the Great Bay Area and to be the pilot demonstration city of China. All these factors legitimized the orientation of Shenzhen’s diplomatic action and evidence shows that its experience became a generalized standard for the country since its practice was successful. The policy welfare to a large extent helps Shenzhen have a certain degree of autonomy in formulating diplomatic strategies, provided that the goals set by the central government are met. The importance of autonomy has allowed Shenzhen to establish its own city brand and symbols and enable them to be effective in the diplomatic process.

All in all, the most plausible explanation for the success of reform and opening up in influencing Shenzhen diplomacy is that it helps to achieve the legitimation of the city’s diplomatic motivation, orientation and strategy. It also shapes the uniqueness of Shenzhen among the cities of China, which result in the city being capable of setting diplomacy strategy with autonomy and forming the branding and symbols of the city.

Shenzhen’s branding and symbols

The reform and opening up policy has legitimized the goal of Shenzhen diplomacy, which includes the motivation, orientation and strategy of serving national diplomacy and the city’s development. There is evidence above showing that it has become the brand of China and Shenzhen, presenting them to the world owing to their successful development, and a widely known characteristic of Shenzhen is that it is the pioneering city of China’s development and its effort to connect with the global network. Once reform and opening up became Shenzhen’s brand, it raised the
legitimacy of Shenzhen’s city image in the diplomatic process. The higher value we can see that reform and opening up brings to Shenzhen is development opportunities and openness to the world. It has become a beneficial gathering point of China’s modernized culture, social values, relatively advanced domestic institutions and foreign policy which shapes the soft power of the city and the country, and especially shapes the city identity of Shenzhen. On the diplomatic stage, the participant can find the enduring and distinctive characteristics of Shenzhen through its brand, which can be seen globally. This recognition from the public worldwide is the key to acknowledge and re-legitimize the legitimacy of the city’s diplomacy in action.

In other words, the significance of reform and opening up for the city branding of Shenzhen is that it gives symbolic meaning. Especially with the development and acceleration of China’s urban construction and international cooperation in the past 40 years, the establishment of branding through reform and opening up will lead to more and more obvious trends in the homogeneity of cities’ brands. As a result, the functional characteristics of Shenzhen have gradually ceased to provide the city with a competitive advantage as it did in the early stages of reform and opening up. This requires Shenzhen to reposition itself through the symbolic meaning of its brand. For instance, when the guidance on the construction of the Greater Bay Area and the Pilot Demonstration Zone was released in 2019, the strategy of the FAO was evidence of reshaping the symbolic meaning and renewing the Shenzhen city brand. When building a city brand, exploring the symbolic meaning of the city is the key to re-legitimizing city diplomacy.

The branding of a city is not always consistent with what the city symbolizes. Moreover, the symbols of cities are not always consistent with the reality of the city. That is, there is sometimes inconsistency between how a city would like to present itself and how it is perceived. This is a crucial phenomenon in city diplomacy. If the reality of a city and its represented image are not unified, its legitimacy in the diplomatic dimension will be weakened and even result in an irreversible impression
in people’s minds. As I pointed out in chapter 2, customers’ emotions are the added value of a city’s brand, which is reflected in the aspects of people’s experience of the city, perception, belief in the city and a city’s physical aspects. The next chapter will address this problem and show how Shenzhen’s symbols raise the city’s legitimacy in diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed why reform and opening up as the distinctive brand of China nationwide and especially of Shenzhen is needed and how it formed Shenzhen’s diplomatic action since 1978. The end of the Cultural Revolution ended the chaos of the social environment of China, and the need to restore the economy of the country was urgent. Deng Xiaoping’s return to the core of the leadership determined the direction of the development of China. This led to emancipation and unity of thought, especially in the Party, where there was consensus on developing the economy through reform and opening up. Owing to the proximity of Hong Kong, Shenzhen was chosen. Legitimacy added credibility and effectiveness to those above processes and enabled reform and opening up to be implemented successfully from the very beginning.

It is hard to examine the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy without the context of the legitimacy of reform and opening up. It is first because this policy was the national development direction and strategy, unchanged from 1978 until now and becoming increasingly solid. It is arguable that political actions and policy implementations, including diplomacy of course, are a component of political exploration within the advancement of reform and opening up, and are also the action to improve and accomplish it. It is thus possible to say that the spirit of reform and opening up is the supportive source to legitimize Shenzhen’s diplomatic action.

Consequently, this chapter offers two important contributions to the research of city diplomacy in the field of how branding forms the diplomacy measures of the city.
First, it projects reform and opening up as a branding concept in Chinese cities for research and makes up for the practical knowledge gap which focus on Western and European cities’ branding activities within diplomacy at the present. Second, it offers a legitimation framework for examining branding as an internalization power, and its legitimization approaches to help city diplomacy to reach success. The chapter also contributes to providing historical information about Shenzhen’s reform and opening up origins, experience and performance in English. The next chapter examines how Shenzhen is legitimized in diplomacy through symbols. It will also show how the power of legitimacy influences the possibility of success of city diplomacy.
Chapter 5 City diplomacy and symbols: How symbolic value legitimizes Shenzhen diplomacy

What does Shenzhen symbolize to people and how does this make Shenzhen a legitimate diplomatic actor? This chapter examines how symbols work to promote the legitimacy of Shenzhen and it is therefore a case that again provides evidence of legitimacy affecting city diplomacy. By emphasizing the connection between the legitimacy of a system and its symbols, I demonstrate that the key factor in the origin of the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy comes from the recognition of the local people, and the symbol of Shenzhen plays an important role in the process of generating recognition. Through symbolic resources and Shenzhen's international development strategy, it can be found that the local audience's perception of the benefit payoff determines the legitimation of diplomatic agents such as the Shenzhen European Office. This supports the overall view of the present paper that legitimacy plays a vital role in city diplomacy.

The origin of the legitimacy of a city in the diplomacy process cannot be understood without an awareness of the role of the symbolic resources. This dimension is crucial because it shows how the legitimation process of city diplomacy works internationally. This chapter first shows more precisely the effect of legitimacy in city diplomacy. Second, it attempts to conceptually clarify some common results that are complicated in city diplomacy. Combining the concept of legitimacy with the empirical investigation of the symbolic content of contemporary politics in Shenzhen’s diplomatic practice has contributed to knowledge in the studies of city diplomacy theory.

The key to the legitimation of Shenzhen in Europe is whether the city is seen as legitimate by the potential European partner. The chapter argues that the mediator
between Shenzhen European Office (SZEO) and the European local network, which enables the former to be seen as legitimate by the latter, is the symbol of Shenzhen. The legitimating symbols of Shenzhen were resources in the hands of SZEO striving to reach its working outcome. Whether it is to increase the reputation of Shenzhen, to attract investment and talent, or to launch a potential cooperation between Shenzhen and the European local network, the role of symbolic resources mediates to provide a material payoff. The reason the Europeans are attracted by the symbols is because these symbols denote opportunity linked to the bigger narrative of Shenzhen as a developing opportunity or benefit, and this recognition is the basis of Shenzhen European Office’s legitimacy as a diplomatic actor. If the locals in Europe do not have certain knowledge of Shenzhen, then the office’s work will be difficult to promote. Only when the city symbol of Shenzhen leaves a good impression and expectations for the locals might the European Office as the representative office of Shenzhen have legitimacy in Europe, and the work of Shenzhen’s diplomacy can proceed smoothly.

Shenzhen European Office not only represents Shenzhen, but also China. If a symbol ‘is the product of subjective acts of recognition and, in so far as it is credit and credibility, exists only in and through… trust, belief, and obedience…it is a power which exists because the person who submits to it believes that it exists.’ 386 The sustained rapid growth of China’s economy (especially the high dependence on foreign trade, actively introduced foreign capital, etc.) and the potential of the market have attracted overseas people who are interested in China. For these people who are willing to cooperate with China, investing in China is a symbol of return. This recognition of the Chinese and European markets and recognition of China is important enough to enable Shenzhen European Office to undergo a process of legitimation on the psychological level among the locals.

However, only if substantial economic cooperation with Shenzhen is realized will the legitimacy of Shenzhen be solidified from identification to acknowledgement and

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even become stronger in the cognition of the locals. Similar to the opinion of the favourable outcomes approach, ‘legitimacy is ultimately derived from the production of material payoffs and the satisfaction of perceived self-interests’.  

The attractiveness and deep connection of business cooperation is the key to whether the symbolic resources can continue their role. If symbolic resources cannot bring actual benefits in return, then the profile of the city will be negatively impacted and its legitimacy destroyed on the international stage. Therefore, it is vital to understand what Shenzhen’s city symbols represent, that is, where the attraction of Shenzhen comes from. If the favourable outcomes approach endows the European office with legitimacy to operate in Europe, which means that the locals can see or feel that they can expand their material benefits if they invest or work in Shenzhen, then the economic factor can be said to be the core of the symbol of Shenzhen.

This chapter considers how the symbol of Shenzhen works as a resource to maintain the city’s legitimacy in Europe. ‘It is symbols, and their power when used instrumentally by actors, that are the consequence of the successful legitimation of institutions. Legitimate institutions beget symbols which actors recognize and use as forms of power’.  

In the following sections, I argue that symbols are the crucial legitimation source by which to maintain the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy through examining the origin of the symbols of Shenzhen and the local Europeans’ perception of Shenzhen’s symbols, and exploring the specific functions, roles and limitations of symbolic resources in the work of Shenzhen diplomacy. This chapter will again conclude that favourable outcome is vital to determine the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy, especially because it will determine whether audiences perceive Shenzhen diplomacy as having legitimacy.

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5.1 The SYMBOLS OF SHENZHEN

One of the fundamental methods of Shenzhen diplomacy is hosting international promotional events in cities overseas. The Shenzhen European Office held (and co-organized) 29 promotion conferences and promotional-related activities in 2018. These promotional events were intended to create the image of Shenzhen on the diplomatic stage. Image is a central element in modern diplomacy, especially in supporting its subject’s interests and projection of values. More importantly, the symbolic meaning which is acquired by using images in diplomacy will result in a large influence on the international system. This suggests that the symbolic meaning of Shenzhen which the diplomatic agents of the city try to send and whether this meaning can be perceived and accepted by the audience are the crucial factors which influence the legitimacy of Shenzhen on the diplomatic stage. Therefore, this section will show what symbolic meanings Shenzhen sends through its diplomacy. I will explore the value of the symbols through considering how Shenzhen is introduced on the diplomatic stage.

Before we consider the symbols as shown by the data, it is necessary to address the issue of why the information provided about Shenzhen through diplomacy provides symbolic value rather than simply referring to characteristics or features. It is because when the characteristics of Shenzhen which its representatives try to present exist only as an impression, rather than a personal experience, they have more of a symbolic value. We know that Shenzhen’s promotional events are held for European locals, that the audience might have little knowledge about Shenzhen and that some of them have never been to China. This means that when audiences who have zero knowledge about Shenzhen receive information about the city from Shenzhen’s promotional events, this information constructs in their mind an imaginary Shenzhen rather than

389 2018 Annual report.
391 Ibid, p103.
the real Shenzhen. In other words, this construction determines the audiences’ impression of Shenzhen; their perception is built on symbolic meaning because it is difficult for them to make a final appraisal of Shenzhen without the experience of visiting the city. Below, I explain further this symbolic value of Shenzhen from PowerPoint slides which were shown to European audiences between 2017 and 2019. The most typical information presented about Shenzhen is its economic strength, which aims to impress the audience and result in a potential cooperation. The symbolic values are all unified into showing the economic benefit to the audience. What follows is a discussion of the four symbols which are identifiable from the presentation slides used by Shenzhen European Office when communicating to European audiences.

**Speedy Development.** Since the reform and opening up in 1979, Shenzhen’s annual GDP growth rate is 23%. Shenzhen has been in the top ten in China since 1991, and surpassed Guangzhou to rank third in the country in 2017. In 2019, Shenzhen’s GDP per head was 197,000 RMB, ranking first among mainland cities. The data comparison with Hong Kong also reflects the rapid economic development of Shenzhen. In 1979, Shenzhen’s GDP was 196 million RMB when it was named as a city. Hong Kong’s GDP was 35 billion RMB that year. The gap between the two cities was 178 times. But in 2018, Shenzhen’s GDP was 22.1 billion RMB higher than Hong Kong. In 2019, Shenzhen GDP has surpassed Singapore. These data are a microcosm of Shenzhen’s economic strength and give the audience a powerful signal that the potential for development is unlimited. As the former special economic adviser to the President of Brazil and former minister of tourism, and minister of development, industry and foreign trade of Brazil, and former president of the World Investment Association, Professor of Tsinghua University, Alessandro Golombiewski Teixeira argued that:

Shenzhen’s growth somewhat even defies economic theory. Economists coined the phrase ‘catch-up effect,’ which argues that poorer economies tend to grow more rapidly than wealthier economies, and so all economies will eventually converge in
terms of per capita income. But this fails to explain the sheer speed of the city's growth. Shenzhen has ‘leapfrogged’ ahead – a concept that comes nearer to helping us understand the city’s development. Leapfrogging theory argues that areas with poorly-developed technology or economic bases are able to skip ahead with the adoption of advanced technologies and systems and avoid wasting time and resources on the steps in-between.\(^{392}\)

**Openness.** The attraction of Shenzhen to foreign capital has been positioned from China’s national strategic level since the reform and opening up in 1978. Bach said of Shenzhen that ‘as the ‘window to the world’, it was designed as a model for the rest of China and as an example for the rest of the world to see China’s capability and commitment to reform’\(^{393}\). In this development process of the reform and opening up, foreign-invested enterprises have made important contributions to the development of Shenzhen. In other words, Shenzhen not only exudes attraction as a symbol of development, but the actual investment of foreign-invested enterprises in Shenzhen has also been rewarded. This started from the birth of China’s first foreign enterprise business license No. 0001 in Shenzhen, then the ‘Three-plus-one’ trading-mix (custom manufacturing with materials, designs or samples supplied and compensation trade) model of foreign capital utilization in the 1980s. This then led to the further expansion of investment promotion and development of the export trade, and to the transformation and development of strategic new industries. The way in which foreign capital enters Shenzhen has changed drastically.

In 1979, fewer than 100 foreign enterprises invested in Shenzhen, and the actual use of foreign capital was less than 10 million dollars. By July 2020, Shenzhen has established more than 90,000 foreign-invested enterprises and absorbed nearly 300 billion dollars in contractual foreign capital, and used more than 100 billion dollars in foreign capital. According to the data in 2019, Shenzhen has established more than

\(^{392}\) Golombiewski Teixeira (2020).

\(^{393}\) Bach (2017), p29.
5,000 foreign enterprises, and the use of foreign capital is nearly 8 billion dollars; the use of foreign capital is as high as 20% compound annual growth rate; the use of foreign capital in high-tech industry (service industry) has achieved a high growth rate of over 30% in the past three years. More than 290 of the world’s top 500 companies have invested in Shenzhen, with a total of 969 investment projects, contractual foreign investment of 19.282 billion dollars, and use of foreign capital of 14.274 billion dollars. This is the evidence that supports the European Office’s work on city and investment promotion in Europe, which at least is convincing in terms of the sustainability of development.

**Potential for China’s future.** Since 2019, China’s development plans on the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area have arguably shown the world more space for imagination on Shenzhen and strengthened Shenzhen’s economic development potential as a symbolic resource. The economic form of the Bay Area has become an important growth pole of the global economy and a leader in technological change. According to common sense, the three bay areas of New York, San Francisco, and Tokyo have shown the aggregation advantage in economic, population, science and technology, industry and other fields through their open economic structure, efficient resource allocation ability, powerful agglomeration spillover function, and developed international communication network.

As for China, on the one hand, in the continuous development and competition of globalization, China needs a new open platform. Since China entered the WTO, it has become the biggest beneficiary of globalization through large-scale ‘bringing in’ and participating in the division of labour in the global value chain. For instance, in the past 20 years, China’s GDP has increased by 8 times its former value, becoming the world’s second largest economy, and its share of the world’s economy has increased from 4% in 2001 to 17.4% in 2020. China’s exports of goods have increased

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394 Commerce Bureau (2020); Shenzhen Gov (2020 a).
by more than 7 times, becoming the largest export country. Also, after China's accession to the WTO, market competition was introduced into key sectors of the Chinese economy, which improved China's industrial structure. Foreign investment, in particular, brings capital and technology, driving employment and economic growth. These increases, in turn, raise government tax revenues and household balances, and also support technological innovation. From a global perspective, China's accession to the WTO makes it more fully integrated into the global economy and creates China's important position in regional and global value chains. However, the current global flow and optimized combination of intermediate products, knowledge, technology, capital, personnel, and services put forward higher requirements for China's development, such as the consistency of market rules and the compatibility of international standards. On the other hand, China’s economic transformation needs innovative development models. As the space for technological imitation is shrinking and the reform dividend is weakening, and the total factor productivity growth rate has continued to decline in recent years, China needs to climb to the high end of the international value chain and cultivate new economic momentum through technological innovation and industrial upgrade.

Why was the Bay Area chosen? First, it includes Hong Kong, Macau, and nine cities (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Zhaoqing) in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province, which is the region with the highest degree of openness and strongest economic vitality in China. The service industries in Hong Kong and Macau are highly developed, and the nine cities in the Pearl River Delta initially formed an industrial structure with strategic emerging industries as the forerunner and advanced manufacturing and modern service industries as the mainstay. In addition, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have a solid foundation for innovation, with outstanding technological

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395 Chen (2021).
396 From Nick Marro’s interview by BBC: Marrois the Chief Analyst of Global Trade, Economist Intelligence Unit. See Ibid.
research and development and transformation capabilities. There are a number of universities, scientific research institutes, high-tech enterprises and national scientific projects with important influence in the country and the world. The innovative elements are attractive. By 2019, the greater bay area had a total land area of 21,600 mi², aggregate economic volume of 1.6 trillion US dollars, 12% of China’s GDP share, a 71-million-resident population, 4 international airports, 202 million total passenger throughputs, 1.37-billion-ton total cargo throughput, 16 headquarters of fortune global 500 companies and 30,000+ national high-tech enterprises. By 2020, the greater bay area had total land area of 56098 mi², aggregate economic volume of 1.6 trillion US dollars, more than 10% of China’s GDP share, an 86-million-resident population, 4 international airports, 81.6 million total cargo throughput, 16 headquarters of fortune global 500 companies and 30,000+ national high-tech enterprises. 397

Second, the Bay Area has obvious geographical advantages, convenient transportation conditions, a sound foundation for cooperation, and a leading international level. As an international financial, shipping, trade centre and aviation hub, Hong Kong has a highly internationalized business environment, a global business network, and is known as one of the freest economies in the world. Macau’s role as a world tourism and leisure centre and a service platform for business cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries has been strengthened, and the function of multicultural exchanges has become prominent. The nine cities of Guangdong are the most externally-oriented economic regions in Mainland China and an important window for opening up to the outside world. 398 They also occupy an important position and role in accelerating the construction of a new open economic system across the country. Third, the construction of the Greater Bay Area is conducive to creating a globally competitive business environment,

397 HKTDC (2021).
398 The positions of these cities were given by China’s central government. See Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (2019).
improving market integration, connecting with the international high-standard market rule system, working together to open up international markets, participating in international economic cooperation, and creating new advantages of cooperation in international economic trade. This is also beneficial to advancing the ‘Belt and Road’ construction. Fourth, it is related to the new exploration of China’s ‘one country, two systems’ practice, which aims to provide more opportunities for the economic and social development of Hong Kong and Macao, and for the locals to develop in Mainland China. This also aims to maintain the long-term prosperity and stability of these two cities.

**Innovation.** Shenzhen’s position is acting as the core engine of the Greater Bay Area. It occupies approximately 22% economic volume, 18% permanent residence population, half of the global fortune 500 companies, one third of state high-tech companies of the total bay area. If this greater bay area development strategy works in the international society, this new identity of Shenzhen also might reinforce the city’s image and status globally. In the development of the Great Bay Area, China has clarified Shenzhen’s urban positioning, which is to play its leading role as the Special Economic Zone, a national economic centre city, and a national innovative city of China, accelerate the construction of a modern and international city, and strive to become an innovative and creative capital with global influence. As a national innovative city and a national independent innovation demonstration city, a number of the world’s leading companies have emerged from Shenzhen, such as the Fortune Global 500 companies Huawei, Tencent, Pingan, AMER, Evergrande Group, China Merchants Bank, Vanke and Shenzhen Investment Holdings. Moreover, the active deployment of international innovation giants in the city has verified that Shenzhen's international status as the ‘City of Innovation’ has been recognized globally. By 2018, five Nobel Prize winners had set up laboratories in Shenzhen, also, Apple, Microsoft, Arm and Airbus have extended their business in the city. Both domestically and beyond, these companies in Shenzhen will play a vital role in the innovation drive of
the Greater Bay Area. Furthermore, since reform and opening up, Shenzhen has achieved much for the country in innovation, in the field of policy, capacity, industry, openness, mechanism etc. This includes the layout of strategic emerging industries and future industries, the establishment of technology funds and financial support. It has also implemented the ‘Peacock Plan’, the talent settlement project, housing rental subsidy policies, and the foreign student entrepreneurship support plan to attract highly-skilled innovative talent to Shenzhen. This shows that Shenzhen is capable of exploring more possibilities and opportunities when developing the Bay Area and solidifies its model role for the rest of the cities.

These four symbols – speedy development, openness, potential for China’s future and innovation – were identifiable from the presentation slides used by Shenzhen European Office when communicating to European audiences. There are two reasons to support the notion that these symbols are critical for legitimizing Shenzhen European Office’s work in diplomacy. First, these symbols show a clearer image of Shenzhen to those people not familiar with the city, and especially denote opportunity linked to the bigger narrative of Shenzhen as a developing opportunity or benefit that will provide a material payoff. Second, it will then enable Shenzhen diplomacy to be recognized by the Europeans who are attracted by these symbols and interested in the opportunities behind them. This process of recognition is the first step towards Shenzhen having legitimacy in diplomacy, which is a good start for legitimizing the city’s diplomatic work but is not solid enough to maintain this legitimacy because the material payoff maybe just only an impression rather than substantive.

5.2 SHENZHEN’S SYMBOLS IN EUROPE

We can see from the above that speedy development, openness, potential for China’s future and innovation are the four main symbolic values that Shenzhen’s government tries to send to the local audience in Shenzhen’s promotional events. These symbols are all economic-oriented, showing a potential material benefit to
attract the locals. If the power of symbols works, then it will lead to the formation of consent from the audience to Shenzhen, which will first legitimize the image of Shenzhen on the diplomatic stage. The importance of the image is offering attraction. For example, according to Shenzhen government’s research data, the most common symbols of Shenzhen among Chinese people are openness, innovation, tolerance and ‘You are a Shenzhener once you come here’. 399 This attraction working through symbols has enabled Shenzhen to be seen as a legitimate place with development opportunities over the past decades in China. In other words, when local European companies are attracted to the symbols, the symbols denote opportunity linked to the broader narrative of China as a developing opportunity and benefit, and that recognition is the basis of Shenzhen’s legitimacy as an international actor.

In the context of Shenzhen diplomacy, it is therefore necessary to explore how local audiences perceive the symbolic image of the city. The following material comes from a series of news reports on ‘Learning from International Sister Cities and Walking at the Forefront of the New Era’ 400 which was jointly planned by Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office and Shenzhen Special Zone Daily in 2018 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of reform and opening up. The interview team visited 18 international sister cities of Shenzhen, 11 of which are located in Europe: London, Edinburgh, Cork, Helsinki, Amsterdam, Bern, Nuremberg, Hanover, Yvelines, Vienne, and Milan. In order to find out where the attraction of Shenzhen on the diplomatic stage comes from, I selected interviews with high-ranking local government officials and compiled a series of the symbols of Shenzhen from the European perspective.

Although these interviews were conducted in a specific setting which of course would repeat the good impression of Shenzhen, they at least showed the main symbols which supporting Shenzhen was being seen as a legitimate cooperation partner among the leaderships of European cities. This is important because it shows

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399 Shenzhen Gov (2020 b).
400 FAO (2018).
whether the perception of Shenzhen’s symbols - as presented by the Shenzhen government, and as seen by Europeans - is consistent or varies from place to place and person to person. Such similarities and differences in the symbols are key to analysing the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy. For example, what are the causes of legitimacy? What makes it stronger or weaker? These questions will be answered in the last section of this chapter.

Table 5.1

**Published Interview Data from Shenzhen Special Zone Daily**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Cities and Provinces</th>
<th>Position of Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>Deputy Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>The Lord Provost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>Director of a Department of Business Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The canton of Bern</td>
<td>Member of the Standing Committee of the Bern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canton Government Committee, Deputy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Governor, Minister of Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuremberg</td>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvelines</td>
<td>Secretary General of Yvelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienne</td>
<td>Deputy Speaker of the Vienne Provincial Assembly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2

**Symbols and Data**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols</th>
<th>Representative Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A. Openness | A1. One is the youngest city in China, and the other is a famous British city with a long history. They both welcome people with dreams from all over the world with open arms. (London)  
A2. Both Shenzhen and London are cities of immigrants. The two cities advocate a culture of innovation and have demonstrated outstanding leadership in the field of technology, creating many new employment opportunities. Therefore, London and Shenzhen are both very successful in attracting talent. (London)  
A3. Today’s cities must take the initiative to go global to find opportunities, and the mutual establishment of creative industry incubators between Shenzhen and Edinburgh is the best example of actively ‘going out’ to find ‘friends’ to achieve sustainable development. (Edinburgh)  
A4. Whether it is tourists, companies or investors, China’s opening up is welcomed by the world. Shenzhen is a very attractive city and a very suitable place for Swiss companies to invest. (Bern)  
A5. Reform and opening up has made Shenzhen a proud international city. It is a Chinese business card representing openness and innovation, and it conveys a friendly attitude to the world. (Hanover) |
| B. Innovation | B1. I hope that London and Shenzhen can jointly explore cutting-edge technology to provide more solutions to solve urban issues, and at the same time create new opportunities |
for twin-city start-ups to access the global market. (London)

B2. Shenzhen has found a point of convergence between rapid economic growth and green and liveable development. The two places can jointly explore more solutions in ecological fields such as green transportation. (London)

B3. Tencent has a wealth of data resources, and London’s AI companies and research institutions have algorithmic resources. If they can combine the advantages of both parties, they can form original ‘disruptive technologies’ and quickly spread across the world through London. This is one of the best ‘complementary advantage’ mechanisms for cooperation between Shenzhen and London enterprises in the field of innovation. (London)

B4. China has huge potential for development and Shenzhen has an excellent environment for innovation and entrepreneurship...innovation centres will be set up in more locations to better serve and support enterprises’ globalization strategies. (Helsinki)

B5. Shenzhen and Bern, both cities of innovation, attach great importance to R&D investment, talent development and technology transfer. Since the establishment of sister-city relations, the two places have been in close contact and cooperation has made substantial progress. For example, seven Swiss universities of applied sciences and Shenzhen University of Technology are actively cooperating in academic and scientific research projects. (Bern)

B6. Friendship and cultural exchanges are the foundation of
all cooperation, while the cooperation between Yvelines and Shenzhen in the economic field is based on innovation. (Yvelines)

C. Development potential

C1. China is a huge market, and the Finland-China Innovation Center (maybe leave US spelling if that is what they use?) is basically full, because too many Finnish companies want to enter the Chinese market. (Helsinki)

C2. The rapid development of China's high-tech technologies has become another focus of attention outside of Silicon Valley. I hope that both parties will join hands to create a world-class success story by creating a more attractive and competitive innovation environment. (Helsinki)

C3. We were shocked by the speed of Shenzhen's development. When we first formed the sister relationship with Shenzhen, many people did not know Shenzhen. Now Shenzhen is an international metropolis. In the past, we often said that Shenzhen can learn from us in terms of environmental protection, but now Shenzhen has surpassed us in the use of electric vehicle technology. We are very happy to see the progress of Shenzhen and hope that the two cities can complement each other's strengths in the future, continue to improve themselves, and make the exchanges between sister cities more meaningful. (Nuremberg)

C4. With the implementation of the opening policy, China is becoming a major industrial manufacturing and technological innovation country. The construction of the
Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will become a new driver of China’s industrial upgrading, and the Industry 4.0 proposed by Germany has a common ground with the transformation and upgrading of Chinese manufacturing. There is huge room for cooperation between the two parties in the innovation and development of digital, intelligent and low-carbon manufacturing. (Hanover)

C5. Perhaps Shenzhen does not have as much influence as Beijing and Shanghai, but Shenzhen is the youngest and most dynamic city in China. We are optimistic about Shenzhen’s future! (Yvelines)

C6. In the eyes of the French, Shenzhen’s development speed is so fast, they even rub their eyes, can’t believe how it is so fast! (Yvelines)

C7. A few years ago, our citizens didn’t know much about Shenzhen, but later international newspapers and French newspapers published many reports about Shenzhen. Although they have never been to Shenzhen, most of them now know the geographical location of Shenzhen and know that Shenzhen is a famous high-tech city and a wonderful example of China’s reform and opening up.

According to the above messages from the eight local government officials from European cities/provinces, we can see that the most attractive symbols of Shenzhen in their impression are openness, innovation and development potential, which are in line with the symbols that Shenzhen government tries to send through diplomacy, as shown in section 4.1. This finding is vital for providing evidence as to why symbols matter to the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy. On the one hand, the unification of
symbols of Shenzhen could build a common ground for seeing Shenzhen diplomatic action as legitimate. On the other, the material benefit behind the symbols is the favourable outcome which legitimizes Shenzhen’s image on the diplomatic stage and might lead to the formation of consent from the audience. Symbols will thus lead to three positive consequences for Shenzhen diplomacy. First, they will increase the possibility of diplomatic success. Second, they will provide more opportunities for cooperation between the two places. In particular, the consent to Shenzhen from high-level local officials can enable Shenzhen to obtain more substantial support. Third, to a certain extent, Shenzhen’s international image and influence can be enhanced.

Another significance of this section is that the formation of the three symbols show an internalization process of the local officials to legitimize Shenzhen in their perception. This leaves them with a clearer image of Shenzhen and endows it with meaning, which is then shared by the interviewer and the reader. According to my observation, there are two types of associated element which help to complete the internalization in order, namely, connectivity and cooperation orientation (table 4.3). Finding the connectivity between Shenzhen and their cities is the first step to giving consent (the potential for starting some cooperation such as promotion of an investment, organizing a joint event, sending a visiting delegation etc.) to Shenzhen, which is seen as a start in the diplomatic exchange. It will then reflect how Shenzhen and other cities can maintain their relationship. As for cooperation orientation, obviously this is a pathway for Shenzhen to enhance its relationships with cities worldwide.

This section shows the crucial role that symbols have in influencing the legitimacy of city diplomacy. Shenzhen first attracts its European partners because of its distinguishing symbolic resources such as openness, innovation and development potential. Therefore, if Shenzhen can provide European (potential) partners with evidence that can demonstrate the realization of the above-mentioned symbolic resources in the process of diplomatic work, its legitimacy will be further recognized
and endorsed. Only when the meaning behind each symbol plays its specific role can the object represented by the symbol possess and maintain its legitimacy. When the symbols of Shenzhen play their roles, such as the locals finding that to invest or settle down in Shenzhen means the opportunity to receive the rewards of development, then the promotional work of the European Office should receive specific and substantive benefits, such as gaining recognition from the locals, which is also the source of legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomatic work.

In short, there is an important economic factor in stabilizing the resources of the city’s symbols. Once the essence behind these symbols has played a substantial role, then the diplomatic actors of Shenzhen, such as the European Office, can be recognized, and this recognition can raise the confirmation of legitimacy of the Office among potential local partners. As Shenzhen’s economic strength has risen, its international influence has also increased, and the international community’s need to understand Shenzhen has also increased. In Shenzhen’s relationship with its international partners, the starting point is ‘knowing each other’. Symbols play a vital role in the process of understanding. Eliminating misunderstandings in different cultures through face-to-face communication and building a more stable and long-term foundation for cooperation are important for Shenzhen’s diplomatic actors, such as the European Office, and they are also the behavioural basis for all individuals and institutions in the process of Shenzhen’s opening to the outside world.

Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Connectivity</th>
<th>Cooperation Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>city of immigrants</td>
<td>explore cutting-edge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
technology, green transportation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Industry/Development</th>
<th>Status/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>creative industry</td>
<td>continuing to go global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>innovation culture</td>
<td>a world-class success story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>R&amp;D investment, talent development and technology transfer</td>
<td>continuing substantial progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>manufacturing</td>
<td>digital, intelligent and low-carbon manufacturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLS

Only when the symbolic resources of Shenzhen play their role in the operation of any of Shenzhen’s diplomatic actors (such as the European Office seeking cooperation through city promotion and investment promotion) can they be seen as legitimate. It does not mean that objects that include symbolism do not need to have similarities or even any connection with their symbolic meaning. The object itself is not quite irrelevant; it is neither indifferent nor arbitrary. On the contrary, in my case, the object itself and its symbolic meaning must be consistent, which means the symbolic meaning and performance themselves have common important characteristics.

In the process of promoting Shenzhen through the European Office, for instance, the symbolic meaning and performance of ‘Shenzhen equal to development opportunity’ that aroused people’s associations needs to be coherent and authentic in order to continuously maintain or strengthen the legitimacy of the European Office in the recognition of local Europeans. The symbols of Shenzhen are significant because the people who participate in the diplomatic action of Shenzhen European office

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attribute the meanings to those symbols. More importantly, if the symbolic resources can be extended to the substantive material payoff, the legitimacy of Shenzhen in diplomacy can be solidified and made even stronger. As to how symbolism affects legitimacy, the answer can be found in the symbol’s function and role.

*Function*

The above cases show that, as an important means of city promotion, symbolic strategy is necessary for city diplomacy. It is aimed at stimulating local Europeans’ awareness of Shenzhen, forming attitudes and leading to cooperative actions. Therefore, the symbolic strategy is an important and persistent driving force in the process of the European Office’s diplomatic work. The use of symbols is diverse and complex, including instrumental functions and cultural functions. As a set of technical strategies, the former is used to solve basic operational problems in city diplomacy, while the latter expresses a set of values and meanings and is used to demonstrate and defend the rationality and legitimacy of diplomatic behaviour.

The instrumental function of symbolic strategies is first manifested in their role as standards for political identification and distinction. The city diplomacy of Shenzhen represented by the European Office is not only a government action, but also a social action. In the process of city diplomacy such as economic and trade exchanges between Shenzhen and local institutions, if local people are willing and participating in activities organized by the European Office (or Shenzhen), the Shenzhen side will be naturally given political features such as attention, support, and recognition. Therefore, the use of specific symbols in city diplomacy, such as holding certain events, adopting a certain set of discourses, and public attitudes towards politicians, become the basic method to understand the local people’s attitude towards that cooperation with Shenzhen. Through these symbolic strategies, political distinctions and

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402 As same as Edelman (1967), p11.
communication between members and the outside world can be achieved, then lead to unified collective actions.

The China (Shenzhen) Innovation & Entrepreneurship International Competition is an example to demonstrate this point. This international competition has been held each year since 2017 by Shenzhen government to attract potential projects which suit Shenzhen’s industrial needs. The 2020 competition offers a total prize of RMB 9.83 million and the qualified teams will also be introduced to Chinese investors and potential business partners. There have been seven sessions of the Overseas Division Competition, which has been held in London, Berlin, Madrid, Sydney, Toronto, Tokyo and Silicon Valley. The five areas of competition include Internet, Advanced Manufacturing, Electronic Science and Technology, Biology and Life Science and Technology, Material & Energy.

Before the competition started, Shenzhen European Office received its working mission to promote the competition and to invite potential project teams as much as possible in Europe. From 2018 to 2020, the European registration teams were 540, 619 and 440 teams respectively. The reason for the decrease in the number for 2020 compared with last year is that the number of competitions has dropped from 9 to 5, and the second is because of COVID-19. The previous on-site promotion activities have been cancelled, and it is also impossible to have face-to-face visits to review potential projects and invite them to the competition. However, this does not mean that the locals have reduced their enthusiasm for the competition. This is because symbolic resources, such as the development potential of Shenzhen, are attractive, and this also extends to some tangible benefits which are presented to the competition team such as gaining a substantial cash bonus, investment opportunities from well-known institutions, first-hand experience with Shenzhen and China and also to see where the companies stand in the international scene (while competing with projects from other countries).

When symbols become real material resources to the audience, it will strengthen the
legitimacy of Shenzhen’s international competitions. When I introduced this competition to a local business partner at Edinburgh, the person in charge said:

Zijing, the key for the holder of the competition is how well they can help the team to reach their ‘reward’, and also how well they organize the feedback to those who did not win the game. Yes, we indeed can help you to share this competition with our contacts and encourage them to participate. But if they find that the things which attracted them to join the competition are finally not shown to them, it will destroy (Shenzhen’s) reputation, word spread quickly after all.403

Over the past four years, the success of Shenzhen’s international competition shows that the symbols of this city have reaped benefits in Europe, for example, more than 500 emails were sent to the European teams interested in participating in the competition and have attracted 440 teams to register in 2020. This is evidence to show that once the symbolic resources can be extended to a tangible benefit, the legitimacy of the object which the symbols represent in city diplomacy can be solidified and made even stronger.

Second, on the other hand, symbolic strategy is an important way to construct power structure and authority order. Shenzhen’s local attraction in Europe, or as a kind of power and authority order in people’s perceptions, has been continuously clarified, displayed and strengthened through repeated use, exercises and presentations of various symbols. The target people of Shenzhen diplomacy, such as local investors, talent, leaders of the potential project can be aware and clarified in the concrete perception of where the power is (why choose Shenzhen), where the authority belongs (the advantage of Shenzhen), who is more powerful (compared with other cities in China), who should obey whom (the cooperation strategy of both parties), etc. As a result, symbolic strategies have become a powerful tool to promote key diplomatic behaviours of Shenzhen, such as the legitimization and authority of

the Office’s decisions that promote cooperation.

For instance, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Shenzhen normally would send various delegations to visit Europe (also globally) and try to find potential cooperation opportunities. Holding the city promotional event is one of the main publicity strategies of the delegation. The introduction theme commonly includes the image of the city (and district), the advantageous business environment and industry, policy and talent welfare. The content depends on what kind of delegation it is (from city level, to bureau, to district or others such as media group or art performance troupe). With so many groups introducing Shenzhen, how can the promotional work become more attractive and effective for the European Office to reach its diplomacy goal? The strategy is to choose one of Shenzhen’s symbolic resources to promote according to the specific audience. For example, in order to expand the cooperation network in northern England, the office focused on the innovative features of this region and held two events named ‘Meet with Innovative Shenzhen’ in Manchester and Newcastle.

This strategy of integrating cities’ characteristics for promotion allowed the European Office to contact various economic and trade institutions in these two cities in the subsequent networking, and it enabled Shenzhen’s symbol of innovation to be accepted locally. In other words, if the diplomatic work is capable of being legitimate, the symbols that represent the operation should connect with the beneficial interest of the target people. The symbol then legitimizes the Office and enables both sides to decide to move on to the next cooperation stage. The legitimation of the office was completed because the symbol of Shenzhen works, which enabled the Office to be seen as capable of promoting the innovative work between Shenzhen and Manchester and Newcastle. However, the legitimacy degree will also be influenced depending on whether the symbols can be realised as tangible benefits in the communication and cooperation thereafter.

The second function of the symbol relates to culture. Political symbols are an
important form of meaning condensing, emotional expression and value display. The primary cultural function of symbolic strategy is to provide people with a certain ‘social memory’. In the field of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, the essence of this type of memory is the cognitive memory of Shenzhen. The main content of this cognitive memory is that Shenzhen’s urban diplomatic objects (such as local European governments, enterprises, universities, and other people who may be able to cooperate) were brought into the European Office’s discourse (such as introducing Shenzhen’s advantages, how to help companies settle in Shenzhen, etc.) during the communication process and discovered the identity features described.

As Aleida Assmann noted, memory is ‘a complex and contradictory phenomenon, even incomprehensible. It changes between different traditions (for example, mnemonics or identity discourse), different angles (individual or collective cultural memory), media of different meanings (literature, image, location) and different discourses (literature, history, art, psychology), and it is difficult to form a unified theoretical paradigm. Moreover, even if there is a unified paradigm, it cannot be applied to the contradictory phenomenon of memory’. However, Jan Assmann indicated that (cultural) memory can make identity concrete, particularly build a bridge between self-identity and collective identity and shape the society as a whole. This means that while the potential European partners have contact with the symbol of Shenzhen in their daily life, once the symbol attracts their attention or their interest, such as the impression of the city’s characteristic of innovation, then Shenzhen’s image becomes a component in their memory. Once the locals have recognition of Shenzhen, this means that the symbolic resource of Shenzhen has linked them with the city as a whole identity in the diplomacy process.

Another more direct example is raised as follows. Home is arguably a memory that everyone has or can imagine, it is a place for human beings to settle down in

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society. As the founder and CEO of LumenCache explained, the reason why he came to Shenzhen is because:

‘I feel comfortable here, so from my perspective, I definitely feel most at home. And despite everywhere I’ve been, I still feel like Shenzhen is the place where I feel happiest’. 406

This is how internalization is completed in the memory, and it is evident to show how legitimacy is created on the cognition level. In other words, Shenzhen's history, present and future are being understood as a symbolic text with obvious cognitive factors, such as the window to reform and opening up, its development potential and so on. At the same time, it also requires actors (such as the European Office or the Shenzhen government) that use Shenzhen symbols (such as potential, vitality, innovation, etc.) to arrange and combine various symbols that are used to express the meaning and value of Shenzhen in an orderly manner so that they can support and strengthen each other and avoid internal conflicts.

For instance, a dilemma commonly arises when stating that talented people are welcome to Shenzhen, that is, there is always a voice questioning that it is hard for talent to settle down in Shenzhen under the pressure owing to the high price of property. In other words, if the reality of problems such as quality of life are ignored in diplomacy and do not receive a satisfactory answer, it will influence city image. It is thus possible to say that how to use the symbols with wisdom but not to destroy their attraction is a skilled job related to the degree of the operation’s legitimacy. The integration of this kind of meaning is mainly manifested in the construction of mainstream conceptual cognition, the same as the impression of Shenzhen from the European locals mentioned above. These cognitions on Shenzhen have been continuously strengthened, reproduced and regenerated in the process of city promotion by the European Office, thereby enhancing the image of Shenzhen in

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Europe.

The symbols of Shenzhen are repeatedly introduced by the European Office to its partners or potential partners to show the substantial meaning of Shenzhen’s business environment and culture. The Office hopes that its partners will accept the cooperation intentions and carry out specific cooperation measures to achieve a win-win situation through honest communication and sincere cooperation. Only by effectively demonstrating the attractiveness of Shenzhen’s symbols might the Europeans’ goodwill and cooperative attitude towards Shenzhen be cultivated and strengthened. Otherwise, the work of the European Office, such as investment and business attraction, city promotion, talent introduction, liaison and coordination, and services for Shenzhen enterprises ‘going out’, which need to be built on the support and cooperation of local people to be successful, will be difficult to promote.

Role

The role of symbols is vital in the daily work of the Shenzhen European Office and the process of Shenzhen diplomacy. The first role of the symbol is to communicate. A good and useful communication channel for each party is crucial for raising legitimacy. The symbol is the pushing power between the European Office and the local people in Europe when they communicate with each other in business. Taking the cooperation between Edinburgh and Shenzhen as an example, the city symbol of Shenzhen is highly recognized in the communication with Edinburgh’s partners. According to a former official of Edinburgh City Council, Shenzhen and Edinburgh have much common ground: he pointed out that:

The two cities are geographically similar in that they are close to the sea with their own ports. Furthermore, they are both leading technology centres in their respective countries, they have the urban genes of the ‘Creative Capital’, they have open and inclusive city minds, and have good investment environments. The two cities matched each other in terms of urban positioning and
advantageous industries, laying the foundation for cooperation between Shenzhen and Edinburgh. Shenzhen is a representative city where innovation drives the transformation and upgrading of the economic structure. In recent years, the exchanges and cooperation between Shenzhen and Edinburgh have been deepening, starting from the initial design, culture, and creative fields, and gradually expanding to the fields of technology, finance, education, life and health. Following the signing of a memorandum between Scotland and Shenzhen in 2013 and the establishment of the Shenzhen-Edinburgh International Creative Industry Incubation Centre in 2015, we have continued to carry out extensive and close bilateral cooperation with Shenzhen. I believe that the two cities can create a brilliant future together.\textsuperscript{407}

According to the staff of the Creative Exchange, since its official opening in Bao’an district, Shenzhen in 2015, the centre has served a total of 265 enterprises in Shenzhen and Edinburgh by fully integrating multinational resources and linking the advantages of the two cities. Among them, 102 are Edinburgh companies and 163 are Shenzhen companies.

According to the cooperation between Edinburgh and Shenzhen, it can be seen that symbols use specific existences such as special signs (city of openness), languages (discourse and views on cooperation and development between the two cities), objects (enterprises, universities), behaviours (establishment of the sister city relationship in May 2019), etc., to form an effective communication channel in the work of the European Office. On the one hand, it promotes the internal connection of its own system, and on the other hand, it has set up a network of economic and trade relations with local institutions.

The second role of symbols is to promote consensus for promoting legitimacy. Symbols provide a common ground of consensus for the European Office and its

\textsuperscript{407} Note on the Creative Exchange (2020).
partners through specific meaning expressions and value interpretations, such as the perception of Shenzhen, the plan of research on commercialization, the history of cooperation between Shenzhen and Edinburgh, and the expectation and ideas for a win-win development and so on. The framework and materials of these consensuses expressions are provided to local partners through promotion conferences, interviews, forums and other activities organized by the European Office or other Shenzhen institutions, in order to form and evoke the common experience of participants, for example goodwill toward China, the experience of visiting Shenzhen, and understanding of Shenzhen industry. Through city diplomacy, Shenzhen can rely on its urban influence and communication strategies to impose these common experiences on individual memories. The main content of collective memory is represented by various symbolic strategies, such as the profound explanation of specific historical events (why Shenzhen is the window of reform and opening up) and recurring political ceremonies (city promotional events, economic and trade forums). Symbols are used to explain and replay the history of Shenzhen’s opening-up and cooperation, to celebrate and commemorate urban development events so as to evoke the common memory of Shenzhen (and China) among local people in Europe.

For example, the consensus of promoting the sister relationship deeper between Shenzhen and Nuremberg has given strong support to the diplomacy between these two cities. The Mayor of Nuremberg confirms that the relationship between Nuremberg and Shenzhen is a relatively successful and classic sister-city relationship. The reason for the success is that different institutions are involved in the interactions. For example, the Nuremberg-Shenzhen Friendship Association mainly promotes cooperation in culture and art; the Nuremberg Chamber of Commerce and Industry mainly promotes cooperation in economy and trade; the Shenzhen European office also has a branch in Nuremberg, and there is also a Confucius Institute. The contribution from the local government side is from the Nuremberg Foreign Affairs Office, which is responsible for the relationship between the sister cities. In particular,
the exchange of visits between cultural and artistic institutions of the two places is purely non-governmental exchanges, which has deepened the friendship between the citizens of the two places. This includes the exchange of visits between the citizens, among which the Nuremberg Friendship Association has made important contributions.408

The third role of symbols is to seek recognition for solidifying legitimacy. This refers to the recognition of the situation and consciousness of Shenzhen by the locals, and the practical activities of actively supporting and participating in Shenzhen cooperation based on people’s own values. If Shenzhen wants its overseas partners to recognize, respect and be willing to cooperate, an important way is to continuously promote, demonstrate and build a lot of unity related to European development history, such as a common development standpoint, a win-win understanding, and the fitness of industry. This is to personalize and concrete Shenzhen in order to strengthen the recognition of local people in Europe for cooperation with Shenzhen. For example, the consent from the Secretary General of Yvelines to Shenzhen is based on a similar development history between Yvelines and Shenzhen. This similarity determines his thought on the cooperation orientation between the two places: ‘Shenzhen and Yvelines both needed to accelerate their entry into the fast lane of technological development in the future development’.409 From the above interview material on the important local figures in Shenzhen’s European sister cities, we can see the city image of Shenzhen is getting clearer on the international stage. Symbols such as cooperation, innovation and openness are commonly recognized among locals.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Limitations

As a tool in city diplomacy, the function and role of symbolic strategy has

408 FAO (2018).
409 Ibid.
limitations. In the daily work of the European Office, the symbol is not a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of the working goal. Their influence comes from the acceptance of the meaning contained in symbolic products, especially the scope and frequency of their application. In other words, the symbolic signs of Shenzhen should be repeatedly used in order to achieve their main functions and reflect their instrumental value. In the relationship between the European Office and its local European partner, once the symbolic function is accompanied by the establishment of institutionalized cooperative development, close exchanges and contacts with Shenzhen, the deepening of mutual understanding among the citizens, the increase of common interests and the narrowing of mutual recognition gaps, then the role of the symbol could work in action. However, in the current exchanges between the European Office and Europe, there are still some obstacles and constraints that affect the symbol's influence in city diplomacy.

The first limitation is that the effectiveness of the cooperation projects determines whether a symbol of Shenzhen still works in the future promotion. As mentioned above, whether Shenzhen’s symbols can work or not depends on whether people can get benefits after contacting Shenzhen according to the direction of the city’s symbols. Although European innovative companies and small and medium-sized enterprises have gradually increased their interest in Shenzhen in recent years, the majority of the small and medium-sized enterprises have concerns in terms of capital and risk control capabilities. It is therefore whether the supporting services of the city for foreign investment projects are complete that will determine the foreign investors’ impression of Shenzhen. These services include but are not limited to preferential office space, settlement and policy consultation, financing, and the channel to the market. On the other hand, whether Shenzhen’s residential and cultural environment can attract overseas people to live long-term is also a key factor in determining whether the project can be successfully implemented. After all, foreigners and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan residents in Shenzhen currently only account for 0.0075% of the total
population of Shenzhen (150,000:20 million).

Also, the fact that Shenzhen’s foreign cooperation mechanism is not unified will influence whether a symbolic source can be transferred to the real tangible cooperation. With the development of Shenzhen’s internationalization and the improvement of its influence on the world stage, the city’s departments at all levels are gradually establishing corresponding working contacts overseas, such as the Overseas Innovation Centre of the Science and Technology Department, the Shenzhen Overseas Chamber of Commerce of the United Front Work Department of Overseas Chinese Affairs, the Sister City Exchange of the Foreign Affairs Office, etc. But these various foreign cooperation mechanisms will sometimes lead to confusion for overseas partners. For example, although Edinburgh and Shenzhen signed a sister city agreement in 2019, the agreement had still not been fully fulfilled by the summer of 2020 (of course, affected by some unmanageable factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic). The local person in charge in Edinburgh approached the European Office to consult about the matter, but in reality, it should be the responsibility of the Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office. However, the Foreign Affairs Office is only responsible for signing sister city agreements, and other departments in Shenzhen are responsible for implementing specific and cooperative matters. If a unified foreign cooperation mechanism cannot be established, it will be difficult to advance specific cooperation matters, which will have a negative impact on Shenzhen's overseas image and the city’s legitimacy.

To sum up, only if the tangible resource which symbols represent in the diplomacy can be realized, for example, the policy welfare and solid investment opportunity behind the symbol of innovation, can be transferring the enterprises which are attracted by Shenzhen and then enable them to settle down. Otherwise, if the locals find that the symbols introduced in the promotional event do not match the real material benefit that Shenzhen can offer, it will destroy the legitimacy of the diplomacy work on the international stage.
The second limitation is that the perception of China in general will influence the locals’ perspective on whether they would believe the symbols of Shenzhen. The continuation of negative voices from the media about China surrounding issues such as the Sino-US trade war, Hong Kong, and the outbreak of Covid-19, might have a certain impact on the perception of China. In particular, the outbreak of the pandemic has led to the stagnation of global cooperation, such as the reduction of cross-border flights and the downward economic pressure. Channels that could have promoted global understanding of China through communication, field trips, or tourism are hindered. There are insufficient ways in which people can subjectively gain knowledge of China, and people might be easily affected by the anti-China information. Thought leads to behaviour. If the West treat China as an enemy as they did the Soviet Union during the Cold War, this will deal a huge blow to the cooperation between China and Europe.

When conducting city diplomacy in Europe (and worldwide), the diplomatic actor of Shenzhen is operating in a context very different from that existing in mainland China. There will be contest and dispute over the kind of symbols Shenzhen projects or has associated with it. Under the influence of these different voices, whether the audience themselves choose to believe them or are passively bombarded by daily media reports, any publicity about Shenzhen will be hindered to a certain extent. Therefore, whether the international situation is conducive to China, as well as China’s own development potential, the charm of cooperation, and the degree of international image and acceptance have a direct impact on symbolic resources. The importance and severity of the legitimacy problem of city diplomacy (also other international activities such as national diplomacy, international relationships etc.) is particularly urgent in the current international situation for China to face and think about effective responses and measures.

**Implications**

The use of symbols in city diplomacy is typical of the favourable outcome approach
to achieving legitimacy. Symbols enable Shenzhen’s audience to see Shenzhen has legitimacy on the diplomatic stage first because the actor perceives this institution can provide them with material benefits.\footnote{Kelman (2001), Voeten (2005).} Second, these audiences who intend to give their consent to Shenzhen and its diplomacy can provide them with material benefits and the perceptions of legitimacy are generated because of this consent.\footnote{Raz (1990), p12; Simmons (2001); Zelditch (2001).} This refers to the production of material payoffs from Shenzhen and the satisfaction of the self-interest of European locals forms the legitimacy of Shenzhen and its diplomatic work.\footnote{Hurd (2007), p67.} In other words, successful practice is the criterion for truth. A healthy and successful partnership between one city and the other must be based on reciprocity, or at least the perception of a reciprocity where both sides feel they have evidence to say they are making tangible gains from the relationship.

The legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy produced by symbolic resources has two legitimation processes. The first is that the symbolic resources such as openness and innovation behind Shenzhen’s city image enable European local potential partners to see the cooperation opportunities and the material payoffs that Shenzhen is able to offer, which enables Shenzhen diplomacy to be considered as legitimate. Second, the legitimacy will then extend to Shenzhen’s diplomatic agents such as the European office and the locals who have given their consent to cooperate with Shenzhen and who believe that the Office has authority because it is the official representative of the Shenzhen government overseas. Generally speaking, satisfying the first two legitimation processes above is sufficient for the European Office to achieve its diplomatic goals.

However, from the perspective of the long-term impact of work, if symbolic resources cannot be turned into real material rewards, then all diplomatic actions and strategies will be negatively impacted and even become bubbles. It is thus possible to say that in city diplomacy, it is not enough for diplomatic agents to have only cognitive
legitimacy. It is necessary to transform the legitimacy generated by the attractiveness of symbolic resources into legitimacy that can generate actual tangible benefits. Only in this way, the final process of legitimation, can the legitimacy of city diplomacy be truly completed and solidified.

**CONCLUSION**

In this theoretical chapter, I discussed the claim that one of the sources of the legitimacy of city diplomacy lies in the ‘favourable outcome’ approach, which means that the audience accepts those diplomatic actors, behaviours and systems that produce favourable results as legitimate. The case of Shenzhen’s symbolic resources showed in this chapter provides evidence for the formula of the benefit payoff which (might) create by the symbols allowing the audience to recognize and thus constructing the legitimacy of the diplomatic actors. In other words, symbolism helps to objectify the city, enables easier comprehension of city diplomacy, and contributes to the formation of a shared sense of the city’s identity.

The legitimacy of the European Office’s operations in Europe mainly comes from the recognition of local people. I am not claiming that technical factors such as the Office’s operational strategy or the laws and regulations of the resident countries are not the source of the legitimacy, but if there is no recognition, nothing could force the locals to walk into the cooperation.

If the diplomatic work carried out in Europe is to be recognized by the local companies, they first need to have a specific concept of Shenzhen’s city image, know which areas may cooperate with each other, and even have a good impression of Shenzhen. This also highlights the importance of symbols in foreign exchanges. If the locals recognize the symbol of Shenzhen, then the legitimation of the European Office will be successful. However, if Shenzhen’s symbolic resources cannot effectively play a substantial role, especially if they fail to bring an actual benefit payoff to European partners, it will have a very bad negative impact on Shenzhen’s city image.
Recognizing the city symbol of Shenzhen brings legitimacy to the European office, and Shenzhen’s symbol must exert actual benefits to stabilize the legitimacy of the European office. The evidence provided by this chapter shows that the success of city diplomacy is closely related to its legitimacy, and the symbol has played an important role in promoting the legitimacy of city diplomacy.
Chapter 6 Conclusion: Legitimacy of City Diplomacy

The importance of the international role of cities has increased in recent decades. The rapid expansion of urbanisation and the influence from globalisation enable cities to become the vital nodes in the global network which are capable of either developing local interest or addressing global issues. In the current studies of city diplomacy, a mainstream narrative has emerged regarding city diplomacy which emphasizes that this diplomatic method represents a trend of the expansion in transnational municipal networks, a rising role of cities in world affairs, and cities themselves emerging as actors in a wider political economy of networked (urban) governance. Existing studies of Chinese city diplomacy have explored the diplomatic role of cities. However, the causal explanation of how city diplomacy reached success has been relatively neglected. Evidence from previous studies about the place of cities in global governance and the boom of city diplomacy indicates that the current narrative lacks a larger generalized conceptual framework for distinguishing between what is essential and what is contingent or accidental in influencing the relative success or failure of China’s city diplomacy.

Therefore, the puzzles my PhD study has addressed are as follows. What are the factors which influence the degree of legitimacy that results in the success or failure of city diplomacy? What are the factors that affect the legitimacy of China’s city diplomacy? What is the exact legitimation process of a Chinese city’s diplomacy? The thesis has argued that the success of city diplomacy is related to the degree to which it is considered legitimate. The stronger the legitimacy, the greater the opportunity for success, and vice versa. The study has not attempted to analyse how city diplomacy became successful, how the city’s diplomatic role has influenced the country

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413 Santos (2021); Scott-Smith (2017).
415 Alger (1990); Van der Pluijm and Melissen (2007).
416 Davidson et al. (2019).
417 Chen (2021).
nationally or locally. The focus of the thesis is to explore how and why the influencing elements which impact city diplomacy have been successfully produced. In order to address this, the thesis adopted the concept of legitimacy to offer an explanation. This is because diplomacy is an interaction between different parties, its success is determined by a common recognition of the participants, and this recognition comes from the commitment to a shared goal.\footnote{Grandi (2020), p30.} In international politics, recognition produces legitimacy.\footnote{Hurd (1999).} Therefore, the aim of the thesis is to explore where the legitimacy of city diplomacy which leads to its recognition comes from. The theoretical framework draws on two classic legitimation approaches from international politics studies: the favourable outcome and procedural correctness. As for the subject of study, Shenzhen was chosen because the city was a pioneer of modern urban life in China,\footnote{Vogel, in O’ Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017).} and because of its speedy development. This makes Shenzhen an appropriate subject of study for the operation of legitimacy in the city diplomacy system: it not only shows how a relatively new global city interacts with the international community, which is of reference value for the innovative development of cities worldwide; at the same time, Shenzhen’s diplomatic experience is also instructive to other cities in China because it is the representative city of China’s reform and opening up. All these reasons enable Shenzhen to have representative value in the study of China’s city diplomacy.

This final chapter reviews the arguments and evidence presented in the preceding chapters of why and how legitimacy influences the degree of success of city diplomacy. It re-examines the controversial discussion about the origin of legitimacy introduced in Chapter 2 and discusses how the evidence about Shenzhen can help to determine the differences in legitimation sources under different conditions and then considers the implications for the theory and practical design of city diplomacy and China’s international relations. The combination of these strands suggests that on the stage of
international politics, it is not only countries that need legitimacy to prove, obtain, and even fight for their sovereignty and other rights or interests; cities also, as an extension of the sovereignty of these countries, require legitimacy to conduct diplomatic activities. This demonstration of the source of the legitimacy of city diplomacy is not only a supplement to the existing research on legitimacy in theories of international relations, but also an attempt to provide a generalized theoretical model to examine city diplomacy per se.

The key to examining the origin of legitimacy is to study how the legitimation of city diplomacy takes place, and how the instructive principle of the legitimation source has an effect on the diplomatic strategy of the city. As discussed, the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy involves two levels: the support given by domestic politics, and the recognition given by the ‘audience’ of its diplomacy. The former standardizes the direction and behaviour of Shenzhen diplomacy and its diplomatic agent, while the latter is vital to influence the result of city diplomacy. The findings, based on my field work while cooperating with Shenzhen government as a part-time representative in the Shenzhen European Office, suggest that the success rate of city diplomacy is related to the strength of its legitimacy. There are two levels present in the source of the legitimacy of city diplomacy: it not only needs to complete the legalization process of its operation under domestic conditions, but the degree of recognition of city diplomacy on the international stage is the key to apply its legitimacy role. These findings also suggest that the achievement of the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy is a combination of both the procedural and favourable outcomes approaches, but the role they play varies under different conditions. In the domestic context, it was first that favourable outcomes were seen from the domestic view and then to legitimize Shenzhen diplomacy per se; second, this led to the procedural legitimation of the specific strategy and measure of city diplomacy. In the international context, it is mainly the favourable outcomes which have been recognized by the target of the diplomacy that legitimized Shenzhen on the diplomatic
stage. Finally, the evidence suggests that the legitimacy of city diplomacy can be studied by adopting the ‘logic of consequences’ approach.

There are several issues that can be addressed in future research and practice. First, it has been found that whether it is for policy designers and specific implementers at the domestic level, or for audiences at the international level, the possibility and specific degree of satisfying both sides to obtain favourable outcomes determines the legitimacy of city diplomacy. However, the understanding of those outcomes does not necessarily remain unified and may even fall into conflict. This is important for the design of city diplomacy strategies in the post Covid-19 era, and the unique case of city actors in international relations will be considered below. Second, the findings also suggest that China exhibits performance legitimacy when its city diplomacy gains legitimacy from achieving favourable outcomes. Performance legitimacy refers to the idea that if the government functions of a state are justified by its performance, then the state has the right to rule. The findings of this study suggest that if the economic benefits brought by city diplomacy are strengthened and realize a mutual or multilateral benefit for the participants, then city diplomacy is in a position to offer such performance legitimacy. This may result in a more convincing expression of China’s national image on the international stage, and it is also an important manifestation of the legitimacy of the governance of the Communist Party of China.

6.1 FINDINGS: THE MAKING OF LEGITIMACY OF SHENZHEN DIPLOMACY

The legitimation problem of Shenzhen diplomacy has two challenges. As I have argued, city diplomacy is not simply about diplomacy, and therefore there is not such a sharp distinction between domestic politics and international relations if we examine city diplomacy’s outcome and efficiency. City diplomacy not only needs to complete the legitimation steps at the policy and implementation level domestically, but also needs to have sufficient resources to support it to be regarded as legitimate.
on the international stage. As for the case of Shenzhen, domestically, its diplomacy should fulfil two goals: the first is to serve national diplomacy and the second is to serve its city’s development. Internationally, it is the material benefit which Shenzhen is capable of offering to the locals that make it legitimate.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively demonstrate the significance of the issue of legitimacy to city diplomacy. Chapter 3 reviewed the origin of the legitimation process of the Shenzhen European Office. The three influencing factors - the performance that the Office can offer, support from the bureau and the actions of the chief representative show that the favourable outcome (i.e., attracting investment, organising influential events) plays a vital role in legitimizing the Shenzhen European Office. The performance can raise potential partners’ perception of the Office can offer real value or benefit to the diplomatic work enabling it to gain and increase legitimacy. The institutional guarantee from the Office’s leading department, the Commerce Bureau, offers procedural correctness to ensure the Office can operate successfully, for example in finding the most appropriate place to establish a branch and selecting the most appropriate person to lead the office, which will influence the diplomatic outcome of the office. Chapter 4 argued that reform and opening up has been a branding measure to shape Shenzhen diplomacy’s goals and strategy, enabling Shenzhen’s diplomatic strategy to be legitimate at the levels of domestic design and implementation. This chapter provides further substantive support for the influence of the favourable outcomes on the legitimation of city diplomacy. Chapter 5 examined how symbols act as a beneficial resource legitimizing Shenzhen to attract locals to the city by diplomacy. To ensure success and to maintain the possibility of success are difficult problems for sponsors and practitioners of city diplomacy, and it is therefore instructive for research into legitimation to understand how Shenzhen approached the problem.

The Legitimation of Shenzhen European Office
The legitimation problems for a new diplomatic agent are challenging. It is important for these overseas representative offices to be seen as legitimate both domestically and overseas. Chapter 3 has shown how the legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office (SZEO) is accomplished. The chapter provides some evidence for the claim that favourable outcome (i.e., attracting investment, promotion of business networks, organising influential events) is the strong legitimizing force for the office. However, the procedural correctness of the election of the chief representative determines the extent to which the office can achieve those outcomes. The resources for the legitimation of the office have different focuses at different stages and times.

The first legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office is a reflection of the favourable outcome approach; the outcome is the benefit that the branches of the Office can offer in different countries through their diplomatic work. The establishment of SZEO indicates that the Shenzhen government believes that an overseas office can play a role in promoting Shenzhen’s global reputation, bringing benefit to the relationship between Europe and Shenzhen, and assisting Shenzhen’s city development. Choosing a city in which to set up office has three dimensions. The first is whether the country is a high-ranking strong economy worldwide with competitive influence and a resource network. The second is whether the city’s advantageous industries have global reputation and strength, or the local resources are helpful for setting up a new office. The third is whether the advantageous industry of the city has a very strong relevance for Shenzhen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Country’s advantage</th>
<th>City’s advantage</th>
<th>Industry’s relevance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuremberg</td>
<td>The largest economy in Europe. China’s most important trading partner in Europe.</td>
<td>Twin-city of Shenzhen</td>
<td>Advanced manufacturing, auto industry, foreign trade etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Germany)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brussels (Belgium)  The capital of Europe. The headquarters of the European Union. Convenient transportation connections across Europe.

London (UK)  One of the most influential countries worldwide. One of the leading global cities. Finance, innovative technology, higher education, creative industry etc.

City of Bern (Switzerland)  A global steady and competitive economy. Shenzhen is the first overseas sister city with Kanton Bern. Manufacturing, watch, service and pharmaceutical industries etc.

The geographical advantage of the SZEO and its branch enables it to be perceived with legitimacy to conduct diplomatic work. The office’s direct access to connect with the local economy, trade and business networks of Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Switzerland helps to convince Shenzhen’s government (departments at city and district level) and enterprise that the SZEO is capable of providing valuable benefits. The consent legitimizes SZEO to do diplomatic work in Europe. This is to treat the office as legitimate from the overall perspective of Shenzhen.

The second legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office is influenced by its leading department, the Commerce Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality, where the legitimation process is a combination of the favourable outcome and the procedural approach. The former precedes the latter. There are two levels of the legitimizing force which determine the degree of the European office’s legitimacy. The first is a reflection of the favourable outcome approach, which refers to the working function of the overseas offices. The Bureau determines what the office shall do, such as attract investment and
business, enhance Shenzhen’s image and reputation, promote talent cooperation, handle affairs of liaison and coordination, and serve Shenzhen’s enterprise ‘going out’. Meanwhile, these functions of SZEO also are its performance evaluation criteria. In other words, the same as the above discussion, this first level shows the legitimacy is determined by the operational nature of SZEO formulated by the Bureau. The second level is about the procedural approach, which refers to the election of the chief representative of the office. This process is key to the legitimation of the office because the chief representative determines the working direction of the office and the extent to which the office can reach the desired outcome. The election has two aims. The first is to select an appropriate person for the position of the chief representative. The second is to show that the official appointment by the party group of the Bureau legitimized the selected chief representative to lead the office.

It is vital that the chief representative candidate completes the legitimization of his or her leadership through elections within the Commerce Bureau of Commerce. From the perspective of the leadership of the Bureau, on the one hand, the successful candidate has reached the standard of being a chief representative in terms of work ability and attitude. On the other hand, the leadership can also influence how and in what way the successful candidate will lead the overseas office. This will pave the way for how the Bureau can support the representative office in the future.

The support of the Commerce Bureau is crucial to the representative office. The greater the support provided by the Bureau, the greater the possibility of success of representative offices in foreign exchanges and cooperation. However, the prerequisite for offering support is that the cooperation project is recognized by the Bureau, such as attracting Fortune 500 companies to settle in Shenzhen and holding Shenzhen’s promotion events in Europe as much as possible. When the Bureau is being supportive, the representative office will obtain more cooperation resources from Shenzhen, which can raise the success rate of those cooperation projects with Europe. More importantly, the more successful the projects between the
representative office and Europe, the higher the legitimacy of the representative office in Europe. In addition to obtaining supporting resources for the success of the project with Europe, the chief representative's work ideas and operational strategies are also crucial. This directly affects the work performance of the representative office, and the work performance will directly affect the extent to which the representative office is considered legitimate.

In short, the third legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office is influenced by its chief representative. This process is to formulate the favourable outcome as the goal of the office so as to standardize the working behaviour of the team members and establish the procedure and working strategy of the office. The role of the chief representative is vital because his work ideas and operational strategies influence the final performance of the office, and the performance determines the office’s legitimacy. In other words, the more achievements that the office can bring to the Bureau and Shenzhen, the more the office will be valued as a result to enhance its legitimation degree. However, this performance is not easy to achieve. The international situation and the domestic situation of the countries where SZEO’s branches are located are changing and complex, and therefore the chief representative should adjust the work content of the office in a directional, strategic and systematic manner. While flexibly adjusting according to the situation, the chief representative should understand the development and cooperation needs of Shenzhen and the local network so as to maximize the degree of legitimacy of SZEO.

Intertwining the above influencing elements, we can see that the favourable outcome was essential to the legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office. The diplomatic performance which the Office can offer through its European local economy, trade and business network enabled SZEO to be perceived by its stakeholders as having legitimacy to play a role in promoting Shenzhen’s reputation in Europe, enhancing the relationship between Europe and Shenzhen, and assisting Shenzhen’s city development. The Commerce Bureau legitimized the working
function of the office, which standardized the outcome that the office could bring to Shenzhen from its Europe resource network.

As for procedural correctness, it was the supporting force for legitimizing SZEO to reach its outcome. It first helped the Commerce Bureau to elect the chief representative. The election process helped the leadership of the Bureau to screen out the most suitable candidate for this position, and this procedure legitimized the authority of the chief representative and his association with the Bureau’s leadership and departments. The second influence of procedural correctness on the office happened at the implementation level, which showed a standardization of the working concept and method of SZEO. The chief representative determined the working strategy of the office. This affects how the representative office allocates its resources rationally and scientifically to achieve its working outcome. The more the Office can bring to Shenzhen, the more the office will be valued and raise its legitimacy of representing Shenzhen in Europe. In other words, the legitimacy of the Office is linked to the Office’s performance. In sum, the legitimation of SZEO shows that the legitimacy of the Office has three levels: to be seen as legitimate to conduct diplomatic work abroad, to be legitimized by the Bureau, and the working concept of the Chief Representative determines whether the Office can bring a level of performance sufficiently high to solidify its legitimacy. In this case of the institutional design of an agent of city diplomacy, we can see that the legitimation was central to the future diplomatic outcome.

*The Influence of Reform and Opening up*

The controversies over how the legitimation of institutions is accomplished were outlined in Chapter 2, and the application in China and Shenzhen of the reform and opening up policy are the evidence to shed light on those proposed arguments. This episode supports the claim that favourable outcomes are the strong legitimizing force, and procedural correctness is set as the protecting mechanism in order to accomplish those outcomes. It is the case which can provide a conclusive answer to distinguish
and separate the relative influence of the favourable outcome approach and the procedural approach. Chapter 3 shows that the favourable outcomes which serve national reform and opening and Shenzhen’s domestic development needs, have legitimized Shenzhen diplomacy. This is vital to the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomatic action.

First, the design of reform and opening up in order to seek a new development path in the late 1970s in China strongly indicated that the branding measure was crucial to legitimize the strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy. Reform and opening up was being adopted as the main political measure for both China’s national government and the local government of Shenzhen. Furthermore, such measures have shaped and valued the goals and direction of Shenzhen’s diplomacy, allowing its diplomatic strategy to be legitimate at the domestic design and implementation level. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the importance of reform and opening up has been internalized and continuously strengthened since its birth in 1978. In this development process, Shenzhen was designed as the experimental field and has become the window and the pioneer of China over the past decades. Various supportive factors such as China’s national policy, resource integration benefited through globalization, capital movement and investment, and talent migration have assisted Shenzhen in accomplishing its development goal. In order to continuously realize the material benefits brought by these driving forces, Shenzhen’s diplomatic actions are closely related to them, and meanwhile the formulation of the diplomatic strategies are constantly adjusted towards the direction of success. At the domestic level, no matter how the implementation of reform and opening up measures is adjusted, under the overall framework of this political programme, it is the main power and foundation for legitimizing Shenzhen’s diplomacy.

Second, the role of reform and opening up is important to the process of internalization. Internalization is vital in the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy under the influence of reform and opening up. This is because when people internalize
a rule’s content and refigure their interests according to this rule, then this rule will become legitimate to them and even become significant in their behaviour.\textsuperscript{421} After ten years of chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution in China, everyone from the leadership of the Party to the citizens across the country had the same desire to achieve development. Developing the economy and improving people’s living standards was deeply internalized in people’s minds.\textsuperscript{422} When reform and opening up was proposed to the public and became the political measure to pursue development, it was again internalized and raised the belief that it could bring material benefit after its implementation. A similar process occurred with the internalization of Shenzhen diplomacy, which comprises the unity of Shenzhen’s diplomatic goals, strategies and behaviour to serve the city’s development goal.

Third, although the method and the emphasis of Shenzhen diplomacy has changed over the past development decades, the mission of seeking development has been solid, consistent and continuous since the implementation of reform and opening up in 1978. For instance, in the early stages, Shenzhen used the 3+C model to develop an export-oriented economy and this strategy enabled Shenzhen to become a vital centre in China’s electronic information industry and a destination for global manufacturing transfer. The nature of Shenzhen diplomacy inherited from the mission of Shenzhen in reform and opening up before 2019 is to take on the pioneering role. After 2019, since the Guidelines on Supporting Shenzhen in Building a Pilot Demonstration Area of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics announced by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, the role has been expanded to realize the demonstration effect rather than only be pioneering. Arguably, the nature has changed from ‘you can, just go, give it a try’ to ‘you must, just do, show the outcome’. This is a transformation of the development strategy of China. Under this new influence, Shenzhen’s diplomatic

\textsuperscript{421} Hurd (2008), p31.  
\textsuperscript{422} MacFarquhar (1991).
strategy has shifted from a focus on achieving economic benefits to improving international influence and competitiveness.

The influence of the change in national development need on the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy provides substantive support to the favourable outcomes hypothesis on legitimation discussed in Chapter 2. In short, we can conclude from these intertwined strands of evidence that it was essential to the legitimation of Shenzhen diplomacy to approach the goal of the branding strategy. No matter in what way the reform and opening up is designed, to pursue the targeted favourable outcome is the goal of the Chinese government, and this has been internalized in its practical implementation and also extended to its subsidiaries. It can be confirmed that the precondition of the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy and the resulting planning of the behavioural strategy and implementing the action is based on serving Shenzhen's city development under the framework of reform and opening up. This foundation is significant in the domestic context because it determines to what extent city leadership and policy can support the actors of Shenzhen diplomacy. This support legitimizes city diplomacy at the concrete implementation level and is also the key to its success; I have shown its importance in Chapter 4 through examining the case of the legitimation of the Shenzhen European Office.

The Influence of Symbols

There is a fundamental difference between the legitimation of Shenzhen European Office in Shenzhen and Europe. The former is to legitimize the office, and the latter is to enable the office to be seen as legitimate. In other words, there is a mediator that works substantively between the office and the European local economy, trade and business networks, which helps the SZEO to raise legitimacy when it operates in Europe. The role of this legitimacy is twofold. First, it determines whether the office can be accepted in starting cooperation. Second, it determines whether the office is perceived as capable of offering development opportunities. Chapter 5 argued that
the mediator between SZEO and the European local network, which enables the former to be seen as legitimate by the latter, could be the symbol of Shenzhen.

The legitimating symbols of Shenzhen were resources in the hands of SZEO striving to reach its working outcome. Whether it is to increase the reputation of Shenzhen, to attract investment and talent, or to launch a potential cooperation between Shenzhen and the European local network, the role of symbolic resources mediates to provide a material payoff. The evidence of the symbols in chapter 5 showed that their decisive capital was economic. The reason that the Europeans are attracted by the symbols is because these symbols denote opportunity linked to the bigger narrative of Shenzhen as a developing opportunity or benefit, and this recognition is the basis of Shenzhen European Office’s legitimacy as a diplomatic actor. Notable here is the unity between the symbols that the SZEO presented and the symbols that the European locals perceived. The latter determines whether the symbol plays its role as the economic capital which is capable of helping the office to be legitimized. The key is that the opportunity or benefit which the symbol represents must be substantive.

In other words, the legitimacy of SZEO is twofold, and it is not permanent. The first level of the legitimacy of the office is given by locals’ recognition when the SZEO negotiates cooperation or conducts city promotion. The second level of the office’s legitimacy is determined by whether Shenzhen can redeem the benefits behind the symbol when the office and the local network start their cooperation, and this will influence the degree of legitimacy of the office, and whether it will be maintained or be weakened. This shows that the legitimation process of SZEO in Europe is in a dynamic condition. The degree of its legitimacy lies in the unification of Shenzhen’s symbolic resources and whether the city can provide substantial payoff.

6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of the thesis suggest a new avenue for research in city diplomacy, contributing research supplementary to the literature on China’s political legitimacy
and of the city of Shenzhen. First, the thesis proposes a new theoretical framework, the legitimation approach, for analysing the elements which influence the making of city diplomacy and its success or failure. It is important to determine whether the evidence is generalizable, or, if not, determine what is peculiar about the diplomacy of Shenzhen relative to other Chinese and worldwide cities. Second, the evidence of legitimacy around Shenzhen’s diplomacy encourages research on China’s foreign relations to see whether this evidence is applicable for a broader narrative of China’s foreign policy. Third, it suggests that the performance is still dominating the legitimacy of China’s politics in the Chinese domestic context, at least at the information level which the public can reach. Finally, we can see the information and the feedback from the diplomatic interaction between Shenzhen and the world as a mirror and use this mirror to think about the construction and development of the city and influence the further process of China’s modernization.

For City Diplomacy Studies

This thesis has limitations in terms of its wider applicability. First, the example that the thesis discussed is the city diplomacy of China and its relationship with European countries. The relationship between different cities in different countries are different and it will offer different legitimacy background, foundation and influencing factor for conducting research. It is important to stress that it is not just the city itself, but who it enters into relations with that dictates a lot. An Indian city may seek and validate different kinds of legitimacy to, for instance, an American or British one. Meanwhile, the recognition of legitimacy is also different if the audiences come from different countries and have different cultures. Hence, the legitimisation model of city diplomacy which the thesis demonstrated is a Europe/China one rather than a Global/China one. Second is the limitation of the representative value of China’s city diplomacy in global terms. The legitimation process and the factors which influence the legitimacy of city diplomacy is different between democratic and authoritarian states. After all, I have argued that the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s diplomacy has been
reliant on China’s reform and opening up agenda. Not all cities beyond China have experienced their own reform and opening up or a remarkable economic rise. China has developed at a unique pace and scale. It is hard to generalize to the cities which do not have those resources and momentum behind them.

As for the contribution, the thesis introduces a legitimation approach to the literature on city diplomacy. This theoretical framework proposes that the favourable outcome and procedural correctness are the two vital elements to analyse how city diplomacy is capable of being successful with legitimacy. This was necessitated because of the appeal of city diplomacy to academia: cities have the responsibility to tackle globally shared issues (such as pandemics, migration, sustainability etc.), and in order to reach this goal, cities need a better way to conduct effective diplomacy. Therefore, city diplomacy needs a set of criteria to assess how to become successful. The key to the legitimation approach is to explore how the favourable outcome and procedural correctness relatively led to the legitimacy which produces recognition. Recognition is important because it determines whether city diplomacy can play a role and how much of a role it can play. For example, the more the policymakers recognize the importance of cities on the international stage, the more authority and resources cities can receive to conduct diplomacy, the more local audiences recognize the hosting city at a promotional event, and the greater the cooperation opportunity. The key to the legitimation of city diplomacy is how to convince its participants – the policy designers, the performers, and the audience – to see city diplomacy as legitimate. It is important to note that this legitimation approach can be generalized to other cities. Although there are differences between the political systems, economies and cultural backgrounds of the cities and their countries, the diplomatic goals such as pursuing cooperation, attracting investment and talent, and solving global issues, are the same. Therefore, the legitimation framework, either the favourable outcome approach or procedural correctness, can help cities to better

423 Amiri and Sevin (2020).
identify which elements can enhance or weaken their legitimacy in the process of formulating foreign policies and implementing diplomacy, so as to ensure the greatest degree of diplomatic success possible.

The second contribution of the thesis is that it offers a different perspective on China’s city diplomacy to that provided by the English literature on city diplomacy. The existing research mostly focuses on the role of Chinese cities’ participation in the global governance process,⁴²⁴ and claims that Chinese cities are capable of helping to consolidate China’s relations with the world and establish a new type of international relations.⁴²⁵ By contrast, this thesis focuses on the role city diplomacy plays in developing the local economy rather than its participation in global governance. It has shown how China’s national branding, that is reform and opening up, and its extended policy has motivated the goals and the strategy of Shenzhen diplomacy; a diplomatic agent of the city, the Shenzhen European Office, aims to promote the city’s relationship with Europe and uses this to improve Shenzhen’s development; and the symbol of Shenzhen helps the city reach its diplomatic goal. The competitive advantage which creates Shenzhen’s international reputation is its attractive potential development opportunity. This is because the consistent character of Shenzhen as the pioneer of implementing reform and opening up enables the city to receive policy welfare from the national government and this helps the city to have more autonomy and space to decide its development strategy. The practice of Shenzhen shows the continuing influence of a consistent national policy on city diplomacy.

*Beyond City Diplomacy*

Beyond the studies of city diplomacy, the thesis contributes in two ways. First, the examination of the legitimacy of Shenzhen diplomacy is a cross-section and a supplement contributing to the literature on the legitimacy of China’s politics. This contribution is twofold. The first is that the thesis gives evidence that performance,

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⁴²⁴ Such as Xiamen participating in solving a new marine protection problem, see Leffel (2020).
⁴²⁵ Chen (2021).
especially economic performance, is still a dominant legitimizing force when considering the legitimacy of an institution from the domestic perspective. The motivation of Shenzhen’s diplomacy is to serve economic development, and this motivates the establishment of Shenzhen’s overseas office. In other words, the evidence suggests that the economic outcome with which the Party is concerned is the main supporting power to legitimize the diplomatic role of the cities in China. In the meantime, city diplomacy is one of the measures for Shenzhen government to achieve the success of China’s reform and opening up, as well as a way to achieve local development. When city diplomacy itself becomes a method to further government performance, we can find that ideology plays a decisive role, which legitimizes the diplomatic direction and strategy of the cities. Thus, for the study of China’s legitimacy, different elements of legitimacy are affected by different variables in different periods and under different historical backgrounds. It seems that we still cannot define a dominant element of legitimacy. The role that the legitimizing element plays is relative rather than dominant.

The second important contribution of this research to the study of the legitimacy of China’s governance is that it shows a different angle, which is the perspective from overseas local networks. After all, the audience (target) of city diplomacy is local people, whose recognition and participation determine the success rate and degree of city diplomacy. In other words, from an outcome-oriented perspective, it is crucial to examine how the local people perceive the diplomatic legitimacy of China’s cities. The key is still economic. Similar to the economic performance that China’s government provides to Chinese citizens, the dominant and decisive reason which enables overseas local networks to see Chinese city diplomacy as legitimate is whether the city can offer a substantive material payoff. This shows that the research scope of China’s political legitimacy is no longer limited to the domestic circle of China, and the perspective of how China’s legitimacy is viewed outside China also become part of the overall research. Especially in the context of the US-China trade conflict and the
post-pandemic era, it is important to consider what causes China (and its cities) to gain recognition or not from diplomacy when trying to study the Chinese regime’s legitimacy and its changing degree of legitimacy.

The other contribution of the thesis beyond the city diplomacy discipline is that the study supplements the academic literature on Shenzhen. Shenzhen is the fastest-growing city the world has ever seen, but arguably, not as much scholarly attention has been given to the city as it deserves426, especially attention to the role of Shenzhen as an international and diplomatic actor. My thesis contributes in three ways. First, the diplomacy of Shenzhen shows a different angle to how Shenzhen’s diplomatic role and action assist the city’s development. The exploration of the legitimacy of the city presents a pathway for considering the specialty of Shenzhen among Chinese cities and other global cities. This led to the second contribution, that is, to explore the nature and origin of Shenzhen’s modernization. Many factors have contributed to Shenzhen's rapid development, including the policy welfare of reform and opening up, market potential, geographical advantage bordering Hong Kong, attractiveness to talent, new wealth production methods for China (from a planned economy to a socialist market economy), and new social values and norms (such as reform, innovation). These factors appeared in Shenzhen at the same time and became a support system for rapid change, and then became a key driving force for Shenzhen’s development. The third contribution is that the thesis identifies the symbols of Shenzhen, both the symbols that Shenzhen shows to the world and the symbols with which the Europeans are concerned. It is only when the latter (impression) coincides with the former (presentation) that the symbols can be evident to show its power to legitimize Shenzhen on the international stage. This also led to an examination of whether the presented symbols and Shenzhen’s reality are unified. It is crucial to maintain this unity, otherwise it will destroy the legitimacy of Shenzhen’s development opportunity.

6.3 REFLECTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While emphasizing that the contribution of a study lies in the new discoveries and the new theoretical framework it provides for the discipline, the further reflection on the study design that its limitations bring should not be ignored. First, there is an information gap between the actual policy making process and the data that the research can reach. Although my part-time experience at Shenzhen European Office since 2016 has enabled me to observe, think and act from both the policy implementer’s and researcher’s perspective, which reduces the information gap between politics and academia, the research shows it is hard to fully understand the reality of the policy making process. The study explored the conditions under which Shenzhen diplomacy was made, rather than simply provide a chronological history. Second, the complexity of China’s domestic, the European and the world situations result in a huge unit of analysis which might cause oversights because a PhD level study is not capable of the scope they deserve. The third limitation of the study is more a lead-in for a future study, that is, how city diplomacy in the post-pandemic era affects those stakeholders. Experience between cities, countries and participants both in China and the global community are still in progress at the time of writing this thesis. It will be interesting to see how the situation, strategy and legitimization criteria of city diplomacy will change in future studies.

In order to understand the future, we have to dig into the past; when we look to the future, we need to stand in the present. There are three critical areas which future research is capable of addressing. First, the legitimacy problem of city diplomacy is far more crucial under the impact of the breakthrough of the Covid-19 pandemic. The integration between participants has transferred to online platforms. This leads to a series of questions: will online communication and cooperation be effective enough to conduct city diplomacy? In what way and to what extent will the new media technology influence city diplomacy? What is the difference in the legitimacy of city diplomacy before, during and after the pandemic? The latter question, especially,
invites a bigger consideration of what the legitimacy of the current governance shall become.

The second concern is for studying city diplomacy in the Chinese context. From the study we saw that opening to, and starting cooperation with, the world helped China move to a fast development pathway. The role of city diplomacy has become significant because the world situation was beneficial to China’s development since 1978 when China started to implement reform and opening up. However, the changing situation of world politics enables us to question whether cooperation from China’s international partnerships can still exist. The ongoing conflict between China and the United States, the difficulties faced by Huawei in the West, and the suspension of the investment agreement between China and the European Union have also affected the internal and external environment of Chinese local governments to carry out diplomacy. The uncertainty of the political climate has created more widespread uncertainty. These result in a crucial question: how and in what way can Chinese cities assist the country’s diplomacy and local development through their diplomatic role? It would be worth considering how Chinese diplomacy in some contexts is feeding into the challenges that China is facing. These concerns are not just about the US, China faces problems on multiple fronts (India, Southeast Asia, for example) and the behaviour of some of its diplomatic actors has arguably not helped.

Finally, it raises an iteration of the argument on the difference between political regimes into account. The cold war has left an ideological discord between liberal democratic and authoritarian states. A crisis of confidence is returning as the benefits of cooperation between nations erode. How to stabilize the situation of peace and find new directions for development and ways of cooperation is a test for all countries and their leaders. If the key to solving the problem is not held by politicians, where will it be? Is it through the innovation of enterprises to generate new ways of production and life, to maintain peace through economic growth? Or through deeper exchanges between cultures to enhance understanding between people? Or give education more
resources to explore the limits of its influence? These grand questions seem to be far away from every individual, but their influence has a real impact on our current life. Expanded by this PhD thesis, my suggestion is to consider what is the legitimacy that would help city diplomacy to fit within the increasing competition between states and what are the legitimate favourable outcomes for the stakeholders to consider. After all, legitimacy has caused fundamental changes in relationships between people, countries and societies since very ancient times.
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