Reimaging Guangzhou: The 16th Asian Games and the modernization of urban China

by

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Date: 27 Sep 2013
Time: 11:00-12:30
Venue: POL Conference Room, B7516
7/F, Blue Zone, AC1
City University of Hong Kong
Language: English
City branding is a popular practice adopted by many cities in the context of intensified urban competition for footloose capital, human resources, and tourists. As part of city branding strategies, many cities pursue to organise mega-events. But such mega-events are often also met with social opposition. Recently, Chinese cities have staged the Olympics (Beijing, 2008), the Expo (Shanghai, 2010), the Asian Games (Guangzhou, 2010), and the Universiade (Shenzhen, 2011). What have the social responses to these events been? And what can we learn from these mega-events about the developing state-society relationship in China?

Against the background of these questions, this research offers an analysis of the Guangzhou Asian Games. The Asian Games intimate Guangzhou as a site of struggle and contestation, resulting from conflicts over the question whose urban reality is being represented and created, by whom, and for what purpose. The research builds on a theoretical framework that combines research literatures on mega-events, city branding, contentious politics, and state-society relationship. It is guided by the following research question: what can be learned about the development of the state-society relationship in China from the Asian Games as an instrument of city branding, and the social responses to it? A mixed methods methodology is adopted to answer this research question including document analysis, in-depth interviews, field study, and a questionnaire survey.

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