

Rhythms of Citywalk: How Does “Citywalk” Influence Urban Habitation and Revitalization in a Chinese Atmospheric Community

Xiangxiang Chen^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Geography, University College London, United Kingdom*

a. xiangxiangdeidara@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Originating from Jane Jacob's walking tour, “Citywalk” has gradually developed into a Wanghong (social media trending) activity, contributing to a revitalized mode of urbanism in post-modernized China. In China, Citywalk connects the walking patterns of urban residents with the Wanghong economy and even with social class dynamics, forming a distinctive research topic. This area of study fills a gap in research on urban residents’ lifestyles and the middle class within the context of Wanghong economy and urbanism. This research uses short semi-structured interviews and a comparative model, aiming to explore the motivations and experiences of participants in Citywalks, as well as the economic impact they generate. The research location was in Foshan's most historic area - the Chuihong neighborhood, which is situated in the metropolitan area of the Guangdong province. The paper finds that social media in China has significantly influenced urban revitalization, leading to a new kind of gentrification mode. It suggests that the government should allow historical and cultural neighborhoods enough freedom to develop independently. This paper aims to provide strategies for urban revitalization to build a Citywalk-friendly and aesthetically attractive neighborhood in China.

Keywords: Mobility, Urban Regeneration, Citywalk, Social media, China

1. Introduction

In the recent year and a half, there has been an activity growing popular around metropolitan China. Young people, especially young women, enjoy dressing up, going for short walks with one or two friends, and carefully choosing a route while taking photos. They call this activity Citywalk and it has been searched and viewed over 1600 million times on one of China’s most popular social media-“Red”. Taking the example of an online trending Citywalk neighborhood in Foshan, this article explores the reasons people engage in Citywalk and how the Citywalk activities has boosted the local economy. While they inhabit space and places through walking and navigating, the article focuses on the emotional benefits they gain from the activity and what makes this specific community so attractive for people to practice Citywalk repeatedly.

Findings from Foshan, a mid-size city filled with cultural and historic relics, located between two of the four most developed cities in China (Guangzhou & Shenzhen), suggest that many people living there are willing to spend time and a bit of money on leisure activities. While searching “Foshan

Citywalk” on Red, the most popular Citywalk routes are located in the Chuihong community. Thus, the Chuihong community was chosen as the case study for this research, aiming to explore not only the relationship between the Citywalk practices and their impact on the local economy but also the narratives of those people who love this community. These individuals enjoy strolling through the streets whenever they have the time, hoping that the atmosphere, vibe, and buildings of the community will remain unchanged.

As the social, cultural, and economic influence of the Citywalk activities and the Chuihong-Lingnan Tiandi area has not been researched yet, this article aimed to discover how the Citywalk becomes popular and impacts on the development of the historic and cultural community of Chuihong.

2. Empirical context

The research focus, the Chuihong community, is in the old district of Foshan, which has been recognized as one of the most suitable districts for Citywalk by most local residents and visitors by the surrounding cities (e.g. Guangzhou & Shenzhen). The neighborhood, which was dominated by the bourgeoisie, started to grow as an atmospheric neighborhood in the mid-2010s. In the meantime, 15 minutes walking distance away, an area surrounding Foshan's top-rated attractions - the Ancestral Temple and the Longtang Poetry Society - has attracted the government's interest. The local government planned to revitalize the area in 2019 and named it Foshan Lingnan Tiandi (the area of the south Chinese culture in the city of Foshan). Connected with the Sensing Bookstore, the Chuihong-Lingnan Tiandi neighborhood has constructed one of the most popular routes for Citywalk in Foshan.

The information of on the online trending Citywalk routes are collected on one of the most popular social media in China - Xiaohongshu (Red). Red is similar to a combination of Twitter and Instagram, in the situation of Citywalk, users usually search Citywalk to acquire information [1]. As there are lots of Citywalk routes shared on Red, the study looked into posts which have more than 2,000 likes or collects. The roads and stores which that appear most in these posts are Tongji Road, Chuihong Road, Nature One Coffee, Sensing Bookstore (Chuihong Road Store & Lingnan Tiandi Store), The Ancestral Temple, and Lingnan Tiandi, and noted down the same parts of these Citywalk routes to produce a draft of the Citywalk city route. Then, the study added stops which are included in some of these routes while also close to (<100m) my draft. Therefore, the version of the urban trail routes applied in this study can be referenced in Figure 2.



Figure 1: The view of the Sensing Bookstore and a part of the Lingnan Tiandi (Longtang Poetry Society).

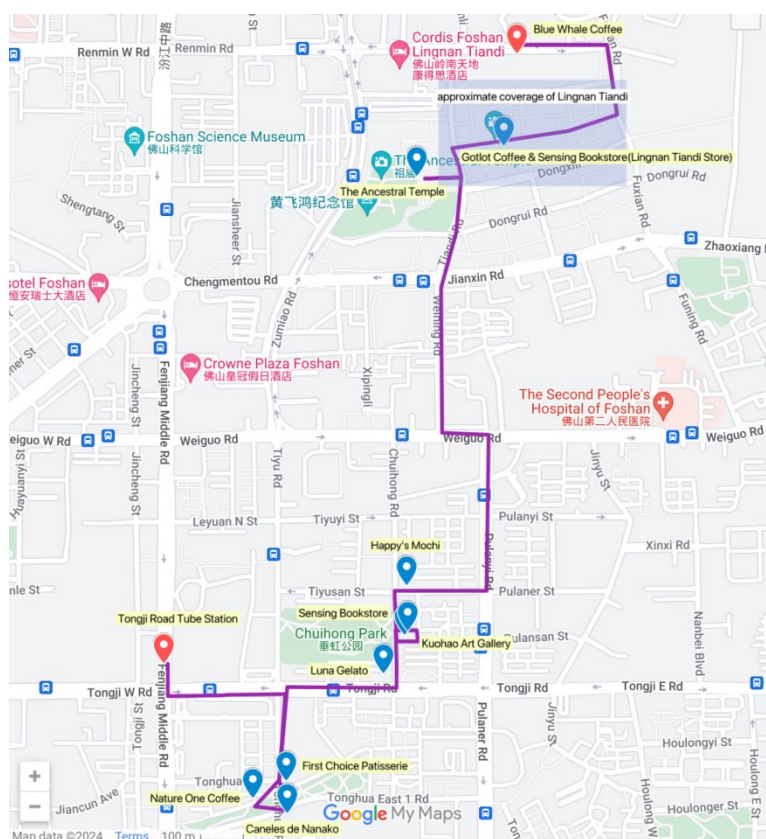


Figure 2: Citywalk route created by the author, combining the most recommended routes posted on Red.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Research context of walking the everyday city

Some recent studies about mobilities aim to examine how urban space shapes people's everyday experience while walking in the city to do their daily schedules [2][3]. These mobility practices may begin or stop at different times and maintain at different speeds, framed as mobile formations [4]. While these formations are accomplished, maintained, or dissolved under constraints, resources, and affordances, they shape our urban imaginations, which means our specific view of the city [2]. While looking into the pattern of people traveling or moving together to work, a framework of co-participation to coordinate the transitions between different modes of the walk has been constructed [2]. Besides, the built environment and residents' sociological conditions play an essential role in determining mobility choice [3], which leads to the studies of proximity dynamics in local neighborhoods. For example, Marquet and Miralles-Giasch delved into the short journeys that took place in Barcelona within the neighborhood scale [4]. These practices are situated in a broader concern with everyday urban politics and "the right to the city", which was originally put forward by Lefebvre [5]. Residents' rights to the city can be explained from two aspects: the first is the inhabitants have the right to occupy, live, and work in certain city spaces, and the second refers to residents have the right to participate in deciding political issues of their cities [3]. Most mobility-related researches focus on the first perspective; while residents exercise their right to use the city, their pedestrian activities can strengthen community bonds, promote a sense of place, and enhance their neighborhood attachment [3].

While Jane Jacobs first put forward that city walk can be used as a research tool to explore the gaps in urban planning, it has gradually developed to be a way for citizens to know more about the city where they stay [6]. Former researchers in China have defined Citywalk as an activity that has the properties of socializing and sightseeing, consisting of short, loosely-directed walks around historic, interesting, and photo-catchy neighborhoods, which emerged in these two years as an alternative to the long vacations requiring lots of time, money and energy [6][7]. Generally, travelers find a Citywalk route or site on social media, in the Chinese context, usually on platform Red, then they follow the Citywalk route at weekends and sometimes would post their feelings, emotions or simply their photos online after the trip. In this sense, the rapid growth of digital, well-framed images would influence one's feeling of the urban space, awakening our creative aspect of imagination of the city, which could also include the smell, sound, memories, and histories of the other side of the city [8][9].

Researchers have studied how social structure and the transport planning system are interrelated by the walking patterns and has made definitions for the activity of "Citywalk". However, how "Citywalk" has created new power dynamics in the post-modernized society has remained an observed field.

3.2. The background of "Wanghong economy" and "Wanghong urbanism"

In the post-covid period, a new economy emerged at a shocking speed, given the name of the "Wanghong economy", which was based online but influenced the physical space by immensely boosting the tourism economy. Wanghong has a similar meaning to 'internet influencer' in English, but it can refer to goods, places, or stores other than people who are popular on social media [10]. The origin of urban branding dates back to the 1960s or 1970s in the US, while slogans like I♥NY and other idealized pictures were promoted through outdoor advertisements and television programs to share the public image of New York City [10], today's branding in the Chinese context is more localized, fantasized and being spread in a much faster speed through the social media and further shapes its style in the isolated digital ecosystems of China.

Studies have shown that digital technologies control, transact, and appropriate our everyday lives, creating new social-economic networks and relations engendered by the Wanghong industry in China [10][11]. Local space is mediated and reframed on a surface level and was given brand new identities by algorithms, posts, and people who aim for attractions [12][13]. They usually go to online trending cafes, restaurants, galleries, etc., taking Internet-desired pictures and self-filmed videos and sharing them online. This attracts more people to go to these places and to do the so-called 'check-in' activities, which means checking the Internet-famous places onsite. Then these places will become more famous and attract people from a larger pool. While the 'going viral' of these places may only increase revenues of specific spots, the online viral of a cultural district, a shopping street, and even a city has attracted the attention of policymakers and influenced urban development strategies, which include tourism promotion and real estate development. For example, the high-tech appearance of the Liziba station in Chongqing, which passes through the middle of a building, has attracted thousands of tourists coming to 'check-in'. Besides the station, other unusual looks of the urban construction also made Chongqing become a Wanghong city and boost the economy by developing tourism [14]. Digital spaces now have become a key site for articulating place-based subjectivity and urban desires, enriching the urban space with bodily experiences and people's emotions entailed with mediated production and consumption [11].

However, it should be noted that although "Wanghong Urbanism" also occurs in western countries, their urban-digital spectacle differs from the Chinese version. Bronsvoort and Uitermark stated that people who share social media posts about a recent online viral street in Amsterdam are mostly nearby residents, regardless of whether they are newcomers or old ones[15]. People are using social media

to express their identification with this neighborhood, and they are self-promoting this place to boost the economic development in the area and preserve a place for their socializing activities. On the other hand, Wanghong urbanism in China is a win-win strategy that is adopted by both the visitors and the store owners. The visitors usually have no intention of preserving and promoting the neighborhood and are just interested in posting aesthetically attractive photos, while the stores' owners are satisfied by the increase in revenue [10]. These two sides of the actors help promote tourism in the city but inevitably sacrifice the convenience of the residents.

While the 'check-in' activities have become viral for years, influencers and Wanghong store owners have found Citywalk as a new theme to show their aestheticized and desired everyday lives. As the research focus has changed from a spot to a large area, it has attracted government participation to utilize Citywalk to boost local economy. Thus, it is essential to explore how Citywalk has changed the scene of Wanghong urbanism from the two sides of the characters - the visitors and the local.

3.3. The relationship between Citywalk and urban revitalization

Large-scale urban regeneration plans have been undertaken not only in Western countries but also in China in the past few decades to renew old neighborhoods and villages in a property-led approach, which means selling the land use rights (or land directly) to property developers in exchange for economic growth generated by the buildings of retail stores, offices and housing of that area, usually resulting in demolition and displacement [16][17]. Thus, neighborhoods that undergo reconstruction can be subjected to repeated cycles of renewal because the project is so huge that difficulties in dealing with financial, environmental, and social conditions can easily cause stagnation [16].

Though this article aims to examine the relationship between Citywalk and its surrounding urban revitalization, several case studies about urban reconstruction driven by cultural district programs can be used as a reference for the study of Citywalk. As the term 'urban reconstruction' started to be popularized in the post-war years, the UK could be one of the first countries to embrace art programs in urban planning to redevelop dilapidated urban districts [18]. Usually, the cycle of reconstruction starts when artists move in and start bringing life to cafes, restaurants, and some shops using their artistic and cultural value, which attracts a more middle-class group of residents to move in; the leasing price of the offices and residential houses increase because of the environmental improvement, which then pushes out the original residents because they cannot afford the rental price anymore [19][20]. Meanwhile, most countries' governments are actively launching cultural district programs to spur economic activities, which includes brand the area as a tourist destination, promoting the preservation and reuse of old buildings, enhancing the commercial value of real estate and fostering the development of local culture [21]. These urban revitalization practices in Western countries always face a long process of demolition and rebuilding, usually in the periphery of large cities or the former industrial areas. For example, Gorbals in Glasgow, UK, has been planning to reconstruct since the 1960s, but finally, the whole project was finished, while some parts were dropped in the early 2000s. The reason probably came from the unconcerned cost of maintenance and the financial stresses of the government due to urban decline in recent decades [16].

China also has this kind of culture-driven urban revitalization project, many of which stagnated. To get rid of the financial burden and to help the project move on, the Chinese government found a way called 'micro-regeneration' to renew the inner-city area on a small scale by refurbishing streets, facilities, residential houses, and public space in an aestheticized, localized style [19]. One of the pilot projects was Yongqingfang, which is located in Guangzhou. Unfortunately, the mechanisms of the development of Yongqingfang were implemented through only two characters: the district government as the landlord and supervisor and the Vanke company as the investor and operator of the project, while citizens were ignored in the whole process [19]. On the other hand, Citywalk was created from the grassroots, and the local government quickly realized the commercial value of

Citywalk and promoted the trend, seeing it to generate consumption practices and a tourist economy in the local area [6]. Sometimes, the local government does not understand the inner logic of constructing a cultural and historic district, trying to recreate the Wanghong scene by a group of designers [11]. Rather, people who conduct Citywalks want to encounter accidental spectacular sites that are more immersing, atmospheric, and reflect a city's natural beauty.

Learning how to maintain and nurture Wanghong scenes is important in the urban governance of historic and cultural districts, which has gradually become an essential element of urban revitalization in nowadays society. However, it has been a new area of cultural geography research. Moreover, the developing pattern of Citywalk which was led by the grassroots has not been explored before. Therefore, this paper addresses three research questions to deal with the research gap: i) Why do people go on Citywalk and what is the emotional difference between local residents and outside visitors to the community; ii) How does Citywalk enhance local economic development; iii) What makes a neighborhood suitable for Citywalk.

4. Methodology

The data are collected by semi-structured interviews on the site. The interviewees are randomly picked on streets and in the comments of the related posts on Red. There are 29 interviewees in total, with 21 of them are Citywalk practitioners while the others are store owners or staff (see Appendix 1). Within the 21 Citywalk practitioners, 16 of them are female and only 5 are male. It can result from the 'check-in' activities which are popular among the female population and the city routes are usually created surround the Wanghong district. Regardless of being store owners or Citywalk practitioners, most of them are residents of Foshan .

The interviews with the Citywalk practitioners can be termed as “small talk”, as these interviews have lengths between 3 and 5 minutes with loosely-structured questions. On the other hand, the interviews with the store owners and their staff were much longer, which ranged from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. The specific interview questions are listed in Appendix 2.

Besides, a model has been built to explore what makes the Sensing Bookstore so special in the Chuihong community. The variables in this model are collected from the onsite interviews, which include i) basic facilities in 100 meters; ii) architecture style, interior design, shadow coverage iii) quietness and urban cultural history. These variables are affiliated to three categories: accessibility, visual attractiveness, and senses of place, respectively. The details of the comparison model will be explained in section 5.3.

5. Result

5.1. Explaining individual's Citywalk activities from a macroscopic view

To analyze the interview materials more deeply, it is necessary to redefine the concept of "Citywalk" within the context of this research. In the case of the Chuihong community, Citywalk have two types of mobility modes, one is leisurely walking, another is destination-directed movement. Through their responses, This study interprets "Citywalk" as a leisure activity involving walking through an interesting area of the city, regardless during the weekends or free time on weekdays. However, everyday walking or walking directly to a destination can also be counted as another type of Citywalk. As De Certeau claimed that it is improbable to separate ideal patterns of city walking from everyday walking under the control of the dominating and unwanted control of digital technologies [22], thus destination-directed movements can also be defined as “Citywalk”. Especially when the Citywalk practitioners became familiar with the surroundings, it is difficult for them to conduct an explorative and tourist kind of Citywalk, as Citywalk has become a part of their everyday walking schedules.

There are various reasons for residents and visitors choose Chuihong community for Citywalk. Almost all of them answered, “This community makes me feel comfortable.” They further explain “comfortable” from the perspectives of the basic facilities including shared bikes and the flat roads, the large area of tree shadows and the visual attractiveness of the architecture. However, other new tech districts or cultural districts in Foshan such as Beijiao commercial area and Shunde district also have these characteristics. When asked what makes the Chuihong community different from other districts, most of them told me that they enjoy the community’s atmosphere. Curious about where the ‘atmosphere’ came from, most of my interviewees, who are residents, responded, “go research the Sensing Bookstore”. Thus, It became clear that the attractiveness of Citywalk in the Chuihong community largely comes from the reputation of the Sensing Bookstore.

Due to its strong reputation, the Sensing Bookstore has become a landmark and Wanghong store in the surrounding area. The relaxed environment of the Chuihong community combining with the arty-crafty atmosphere created by the bookstore has attracted lots of artists, cultural workers and freelancers to open galleries, art spaces, cafes and sweet shops in the area. While the local government takes part in community development by rejuvenating public services, they together produce a unique urban scene combining the highly developed commerce and the well-furnished facilities in the area. While these fancy stores were faded in a few years, the Sensing Bookstore has grown larger and became the Foshan No.1 bookstore on the reviewing website. "In addition to the Sensing Bookstore becoming Wanghong store, local coffee has also become a popular Wanghong destination. In 2019, one of the most popular local coffees brands - Nature One Coffee - opened in Tonghua Road. When coffee culture became more popular and the business mode of constructing Wanghong stores became more noticeable in recent years, several coffee stores and patisseries were opened around 2020 and 2021 and many of them have gradually become Wanghong stores on Red. The unique atmosphere created by these Wanghong stores, including the Sensing Bookstore has attracted lots of people come and re-come for Citywalk. As interviewee said:

“Sensing (Bookstore) is very unique, but its uniqueness is connected to the inner characteristic of this street. If it is opened on another road, I will not intentionally go.”

However, a question occurred during the interviews - “How far away does the Citywalk generated consumer behaviors expand to?” The manager of the First Choice Patisserie mentioned that she knew the prevalence of Citywalk in the area and this activity attracts consumers to the store, in contrast, the owner of Safari Coffee stated that Citywalk has nothing to do with my store. As both of these stores are located approximately 200 meters from the main route of the Citywalk, the differences may result from the urban construction of the two streets. Although the First Choice Patisserie is not exactly located on Chuihong Road, Tonghua Road shares the same elements of making people feel ‘comfortable’, which is also covered by tall trees and has the same width of the road. However, the environment on Weiguo Road, where the Safari Coffee is located, is quite different. The street is lined with large buildings constructed for hotels or offices and has fewer and smaller trees than those on the Tonghua Road. Additionally, the scattered layout of shops along Weiguo Road makes it less inviting for walking and exploration. Moreover, the manager of First Choice Patisserie told me that the Wanghong vibe stopped expanding from her store because there were only residential buildings located at the further part of the street. In conclusion, the Wanghong vibe, or the atmosphere of a Citywalk route can expand up to 200 meters from the main route, though it can also be shorter, which depends on the urban construction of the area.

While the Sensing Bookstore acts as the main scenic spot of the first half the Citywalk route, Lingnan Tiandi is the center of the second half of the route. Unlike the privately managed the Sensing Bookstore, Lingnan Tiandi is a large urban development project which aims at attracting traditional tourists and major businesses like Starbucks and Missa Ice City. Most of my interviewees remarked

that “There is less atmospheric.” or said “I put it at the end point of my Citywalk.” Compared with the Sensing Bookstore, Lingnan Tiandi has less attractiveness for people who are interested in Citywalk. Therefore, it becomes a minor reason for Citywalk enthusiasts in this community.

5.2. Citywalk, Wanghong stores and their contribution of the local economic development

As mentioned in the previous section, there are several Wanghong stores in the Chuihong community. When the stores' official accounts promote their new products, both visitors and local residents shared their own recommendations on social media. Lots of people respond to these posts, expressing their intention to return. However, for the Sensing Bookstore, the discussions are divided into two sides. On one hand, some praise its architectural style and interior design, highlighting how photogenic the space is. On the other hand, some complain about the service, the price of the drinks and the old and shabby facilities inside the bookstore. The heated discussions spark curiosity among visitors, then attracting more people to come for Citywalk and visit the Sensing Bookstore. While these visitors generate more posts, likes, and shares, they help raise the profile of the Sensing Bookstore, other smaller creative businesses, and the Chuihong community on social media, the owners of these Wanghong stores admit that the visitors drawn from the social media benefits their business, however, they are reluctant to admit they are managing a Wanghong store. As the owner of the Luna Gelato said,

“I advertise my store online just to make it to “be seen”, I am not interested in building a Wanghong store and I will not say my store is a Wanghong store. However, if I am not posting my products online, no one will know this store - they are just passing by every day without noticing it.”

It is regarded that Citywalk has attracted lots of people to the community, however, the visitors or the nearby residents are not naturally turning into consumers. In fact, it is the promotion that has made some of their products get “viral” online, attracting people to try these products and helping these stores to continue in business. This phenomenon is linked to a new kind of urban revitalization which is not directly boosting the local economy; Rather, it helps unexplored places gain visibility among the local population.

It has been discovered that the Wanghong urbanism in Chuihong community has generated a situation similar to gentrification and displacement, but the rental price has not increased in recent years because most of the buildings in this area are too old and lack modern facilities (i.e. toilet) inside. Additionally, according to the interviewee's responses, the rental prices of the retail shops are high only in large commercial districts or modern shopping malls in Foshan. For example, the owner of the Luna Gelato told me that the rental prices are high in Lingnan Tiandi, which primarily attracts chain stores or large businesses to gather there. Indeed, the Wanghong urbanism has led to the replacement of population by pushing the residents out of its core business district and attracting tourists. As one of my interviewees has said:

“Tongji (Chuihong community) has changed so much in these years after the Covid-19 started, many stores got worse recently. While there are more tourists, the management of the stores did not keep pace with the flow of consumers.”

When further asked him where he would chill out at weekends, he mentioned some cafes which have high evaluations on the reviewing websites but were at the periphery of the community. He, as well as other local residents spoke to me about prioritizing the quality of the product and the environment over the design and concept of the store. Meanwhile, the tourists from the nearby cities or those from other provinces are still excited about the atmosphere of the community and the photo-catchy evaluation of the Sensing Bookstore. Therefore, the population in the Wanghong

stores is gradually replaced by tourists while local residents show less interest to these stores. The small Wanghong businesses so far can still manage in this area and generate an 'okay' revenue. Just as the owner of the First Choice Patisserie and the Small Tree Cafe said, "Basically we have a balance between income and expenditure."

In addition, the economic regression in China has a significant effect on these small businesses, most of them complained that even if they reduced the prices of each product, the consumption activities became less. As there are two types of people practicing Citywalk, the locals and the outsiders, I will explain this phenomenon from two distinct perspectives. For the outsiders, they hesitate to spend money on food and drinks while walking because they are unsure about the price of each store. On the other side, there are two ways of thinking among the locals. Some prefer to directly go to some less-known stores to consume, while others do not mind spending some money on coffee and sweets as they casually walk on the streets. However, these people also mention that they will only try once, "if it's not good, I will not come again". Overall, most interviewees thought the prices were not cheap, but they didn't complain that they were too expensive. Thus, Citywalk boosts the local economy to some extent, but more importantly, through which people get in touch with the space and explore the gap in the 'sieve order', moving forward following the former walker's steps and performing their sense of the community [22].

5.3. What makes a community perfect for city walk?

Until now, we have reached a conclusion that an iconic Wanghong store is essential to make a community attractive for Citywalk. But what makes a store grow to be a landmark Wanghong store of the community? A preliminary model of a (successful) landmark Wanghong store is developed from a review of the literature and the qualitative analysis from the interviewees. Then a revised version of this model was developed based on a second round of interviews with the Citywalk practitioners.

The study extracted these factors from the interviews to build this model, focusing specifically on responses related to the Sensing Bookstore. The study grouped the recurring themes into three categories: accessibility, visual attractiveness and sense of place. As the factors of accessibility and visual attractiveness can easily be understood, how quietness and urban cultural history belong to the categories of sense of place needs more explanation. Montserrat Degen and Rose claimed that urban space is shaped, imagined and felt by a combination of the actual physical environment, aesthetics, governance and ideology [9]. As the parts of aesthetics and governance are independently taken out to be examined, the category of senses of urban space only includes the actual physical environment (quietness) and urban ideology (urban cultural history). The factor of quietness was chosen because other sensors like smells and colors were hard to evaluate. Also, it was individually different for having good or bad sensory experiences in this urban scene.

Besides the Sensing Bookstore, Gotlot Coffee, Nature One Coffee and Also-One Way Bookstore are chosen for the comparative cases because all of them are mentioned in the interviews and are rated high by the local residents. As one of the most prominent local coffees brands in Foshan, "gotlot" was established on the relics of the Longtang Poetry Society, the story of which has been published on the local newspaper and it has been widely known among local residents.



Figure 3: Factors chosen for the comparison model, consisting with a five-point likert scale (explained in the figure)

Nature One Coffee (2019) is also the bellwether of Foshan’s coffee culture, which can be considered as one of the first Wanghong stores in Chuihong community, owning more than five thousand posts on Red. On the other hand, the Also-One Way Bookstore, though located outside the boundaries of the Chuihong community, is still frequently recommended by the Chuihong’s residents. It is located in the center of the Beijiao commercial district, getting ‘viral’ on Red thanks to its wooden staircase and tall bookshelves. The scores for each of these store based on the factors mentioned above (Figure. 3) are outlined in the following graphs (Table 1, 2, 3).

Table 1: The averaged given points for the three factors under the category of Visual Attractiveness¹

Visual Attractiveness	Sensing Bookstore	Gotlot Coffee	Nature One Coffee	Also-One Way Bookstore
Architectural Style	4.375	3.9	3.7	4
Shadows Coverage	5	5	4	3
Interior Decoration	4.33	3.58	4.2	4.5
Average point	4.57	4.16	3.97	3.83

¹ In this article’s context, the factor ‘architectural style’ is evaluated by the photo-catchy level of a building. ‘Shadow coverage’ means the covering space of tree shadows on the street. Places in which trees covered 0-50% of the space of the ground are given 1 or 2 points; places with 50%-75% tree shadow coverage are given 3 points, while places with 90%-100% and 75%-90% tree shadow coverage are given 4 and 5 points, respectively. The reason is that too many trees create a gloomy atmosphere (interviewee 18), while too few trees can not create shelter from the sun. The factor ‘interior decoration’ includes the design style of the inside space, the conditions of facilities and the comfort of chairs or cushions. The points of each of these factors are collected by asking 5-8 consumers and calculating to get an average point.

Table 2: The average points given for the two factors (and the four indicators included in the factor of Basic Facilities in 100 Meters) under the category of Accessibility².

Accessibility		Sensing Bookstore	Gotlot Coffee	Nature One Coffee	Also-One Way Bookstore
Basic Facilities in 100 Meters	Parking Lots	3	4	3	5
	Shared Bikes	3	5	2	2
	Width of the Road	5	2	4	5
Public Transport		3	4	4	2
Average point		3.5	3.75	3.25	3.5

Table 3: The average given points for the two factors under the category of Sense of Place.

Sense of Place	Sensing Bookstore	Gotlot Coffee	Nature One Coffee	Also-One Way Bookstore
Quietness	3	3	2	2
Urban Cultural History	5	4	4	2
Average point	4	3.5	3	2

It's expected that visual attractiveness plays an important role in constructing a landmark Wanghong store. As the Sensing Bookstore receives the highest score in architectural styles and shadow coverage, it seems that these two factors are more important than the interior decoration. It can be explained that the architectural style is essential to take an artistic photo while the interior design matters less because it is hard to take great indoor photos in a bustling store. Besides, the points for interior design are not only given to the design style but also the size of the private space and the softness of cushion, indicated by the interviewees. It avoidably deviates from the intention of rating the interior visual attractiveness by asking quick questions in a noisy space. However, this doesn't imply that interior design is irrelevant; creating an aesthetic store requires a cohesive, holistic style.

Surprisingly, the Sensing Bookstore has a relatively average score in accessibility. In comparison to the other three Wanghong stores, its accessibility is even lower. The reason could be that while good accessibility is essential for a store to achieve its Wanghong status, it becomes less important when trying to be a landmark Wanghong store. On the other hand, with a relatively good but not excellent level of accessibility has made it distinguished on the road, creating a spacious while cozy area for the bookstore visitors.

In the "Sense of Place" section, the Sensing Bookstore unsurprisingly got the highest score. Almost all Wanghong stores are bustling so they are impossible to be quiet. However, most interviewees speak highly of the Sensing Bookstore for whether it integrates with residents' everyday living and draws on the history and cultural relics of the community, because both its outer rejuvenation and inner decoration were renovated from the original residents' buildings without damaging its structure.

² "Parking Lots", which are found on the Amap to examine the number of parking lots in 600m around the store: 0, 0-2, 2-4, 4-6, >6 parking lots are given 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 points, respectively. Shared bikes is evaluated by counting the number of shared bikes in 300m around the store. 0, 0-10, 10-20, 20-30, >30 bikes around the store are given 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 points, respectively. "Width of the Road" is broken into 5 levels, from narrow to wide, and is given scores by observation. For the "Public Transport", which is divided into five levels based on the distance of the store to the tube station: >1.2km, 900m-1.2km, 600m-900m, 300-600m, <300m are given 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 points, respectively.

While it has opened for a long time and has attracted more Foshan people to establish small businesses in the Chuihong community, the Sensing Bookstore has become one of the forerunners for the creative milieu of the district. Thus, all people give 5 scores while considering its “urban cultural history”.

Overall, the Sensing Bookstore has become a landmark Wanghong store because of its visual attractiveness and its connection to the urban cultural history of the Chuihong community. Also, its slightly above average level of accessibility has created a spacious ground for people to take photos while rest and relax. With its centering effect, the Sensing Bookstore and other Wanghong stores have nourished a Citywalk-attractive community. Besides, the original arrangement in this community has contributed to a breathable spacing between each store, which scatters the population and create a sociable while not so crowded street for walk. While most of these processes are done from the grassroots, the local government only facilitates the maintenance of the shabby power lines, drawing parking lots on the street, and adding entertainment facilities in the nearby parks (interviewee 20). It is unknown whether it is possible to officially plan a Citywalk route from the top-down governance.

6. Conclusion

In the Citywalk practices, there are two lines for examination: one is the local residents, the other is the outside visitors. The study first conceptualize the reason why people engage in Citywalk and the emotional difference between local residents and outside visitors. Then, based on the interviewing materials with the small business owners, It found that these stores owners are reluctant to admit that they are operating a Wanghong business. In fact, their promotions on social media have made their stores more visible, leading to a localized Wanghong version of Wanghong urban revitalization. The revitalization has resulted in the replacement of the population in the central area of the district, but it has not led to gentrification, as the rental price remains low in the area. The study further argue that a Citywalk trending community has developed surrounding a landmark Wanghong store such as the Sensing Bookstore. The construction of a landmark Wanghong store needs a balanced approach that embraces both top-down interventions and bottom-up spontaneous actions, which is connected to the store owner’s careful considerations and deep understanding of the community’s unique aesthetics.

At the end of my research, the limitations of this study are also evident in that no data was collected on perceived bookstore owners' cooperation with the government, so the power dynamics generated by store owners' cooperation with the local government are unknown. Besides, there is no dataset for the revenues of the Wanghong stores in this neighborhood, the population visiting this neighborhood daily and monthly, and the exact numbers of people practicing Citywalk. Therefore, most research analysis of this article depends on qualitative analysis, which means the research findings may not be powerful enough. Future research could spend more time to do onsite research, getting reliable dataset or using participant action research to examine how Citywalk has changed the neighborhood’s living and business environment.

References

- [1] Alhabash, S., & Ma, M. (2017). *A tale of four platforms: Motivations and uses of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat among college students*. *Social Media and Society*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117691544>
- [2] McIlvenny, P, Broth, M. & Haddington, P. (2014). *Moving Together: Mobile Formations in Interaction*. *Space and Culture* 17(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331213508679>
- [3] Middleton, J. (2016). *The socialities of everyday urban. walking and the right to the city*. *Urban Studies* 1(20). DOI: 10.1177/0042098016649325
- [4] Marquet, O. & Miralles-Guasch, C. (2015). *The Walkable city and the importance of the proximity environments for Barcelona’s everyday mobility*. *Cities* 42, pp. 258-266.
- [5] Lefebvre, H. (1974). *Le droit à la ville*. Paris : Éditions du seuil.

- [6] Cai, Y-N. (2024). *Can City Walks Fix What Ails Chinese Urbanism?* Available at: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1014883>
- [7] Wu, D-D. (2023). *City walk in a gap day: potential and opportunities for tourism and leisure*. *Tourism Review*. DOI: 10.1108/TR-09-2023-0614
- [8] Borucka, J. (2019). *City walk: a didactic innovative experiment in architectural education*. *World Transaction on Engineering and Technology Education* 17, pp. 158-163.
- [9] Degan, M. M. & Rose, G. (2022) *The New Urban Aesthetic*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts
- [10] Cao, L. (2024). *From online to onsite: Wanghong economy as the new engine driving China's urban development*. *EPA: Economy and Space*, pp. 1–16.
- [11] Zhang, A.Y., Roast, A. & Morris, C. (2022). *Wanghong Urbanism: Towards a New Urban-Digital Spectacle*. <https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/2022/11/Wanghong-urbanism/>
- [12] Lin, J. (2021). *The Spatial Production of Wanghong: Political Economy, Labour Mobility and the “Unlikely” Creativity*. In: Will-Zocholl, M., Roth-Ebner, C. (eds) *Topologies of Digital Work. Dynamics of Virtual Work*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80327-8_6
- [13] Zhang, A.Y., Roast, A. & Morris, C. (2023). *Introduction: urban-digital spectacle*. *Mediapolis* 8(1). <https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/2023/03/intro-urban-digital-spectacle/>
- [14] Roast, A. (2024). *Towards weird verticality: The spectacle of vertical spaces in Chongqing*. *Urban Studies* 61(4), pp. 636-653.
- [15] Bronsvoort, I. & Uitermark, J.L. (2022). *Seeing the street through Instagram. Digital platforms and the amplification of gentrification*. *Urban Studies* 59(14), pP.2857-2874.
- [16] Clark, J. & Wright, V. (2018). *Urban Regeneration in Glasgow: Looking to the Past to Build the Future? The Case of the ‘New Gorbals’*, in Julie Clark and Nicholas Wise (eds.), *Urban Renewal, Community and Participation, The Urban Book Series*, pp.137-207.
- [17] Wang, M-Q, Zhang, F-Z. & Wu, F-L. (2022). *Governing urban redevelopment: A case study of Yongqingfang in Guangzhou, China*. *Cities* 120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103420>
- [18] Lees, L. & Melhuish, C. (2015). *Arts-led regeneration in the UK: The rhetoric and the evidence on urban social inclusion*. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 22(3), pp.242-260. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412467474>
- [19] Zukin, S. (1989). *Loft living: Culture and capital in urban change*. Rutgers University Press.
- [20] Landry, C. (2000). *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. London: Earthscan.
- [21] Portilloa, J. E. & Wagner, G. A. (2021). *Do cultural districts spur urban revitalization: Evidence from Louisiana*. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 188, pp.651–673.
- [22] De Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, : University of California Press.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Table 4: Descriptive data for interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Local or Outsider	Nationality
Interviewee 1	Female	23	Outsider	Russian
Interviewee 2	Female	22	Outsider	Russian
Interviewee 3	Male	28	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 4	Female	20	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 5	Female	25	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 6	Female	27	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 7	Male	32	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 8	Female	28	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 9	Female	37	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 10	Female	17	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 11	Female	24	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 12	Female	26	Local	Chinese

Table 4: (continued).

Interviewee 13	Female	35	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 14	Male	28	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 15	Female	40	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 16	Female	37	Outsider	Chinese
Interviewee 17	Male	27	Outsider	Chinese
Interviewee 18	Female	21	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 19	Female	22	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 20	Male	30	Local	Chinese
Interviewee 21	Female	27	Vistor	Chinese
Store 1 Owner (Matkey)	Female & Female	27	Local	Chinese
Store 2 Owner (First Choice Patisserie)	Female	35	Local	Chinese
Store 3 Owner (ZuoYou Always Jewels)	Female & Male	27	Local	Chinese
Store 4 Staff	Female	27	Local	Chinese
Store 4 Owner (SOS Perfume)	Male	40	Outsider	Chinese
Store Owner 5 (Small Tree Cafe)	Female	35	Local	Chinese
Store Owner 6 (Safari Coffee)	Male	30	Local	Chinese
Store Owner 7 (Luna Gelato)	Female	32	Local	Chinese

Appendix 2

Interview questions

1. Wanghong store owners

- Do you know Citywalk?
- Which year did you start opening the business?
- Why do you set up your business in the Chuihong community?
- Since 2023 (when ‘Citywalk’ became trending on the Internet), do you think the ‘Citywalk’ population has generated extra revenue of your store?
- To what extent do you think the ‘check-in’ population is turning into the consuming population?
- Have you considered advertising online and looking for some influencers to write blogs for your store?
- Do you think the interior design of the store is influenced by the Wanghong style?
- Which parts of the store attracting the customers most, in your opinion?
- Do you think the Wanghong urbanism in the area has produced positive or negative effect of your business?

2. Residents

For Sensing Bookstore

- When do you think this bookstore start opening business?
- How do you know this bookstore?
- What time do you think this bookstore start to get trending online?
- In what way do you think the bookstore has attracted visitors to this area?
- What do you usually do when you visit the bookstore, seeing exhibitions or reading books?
- You mentioned that you don't always go to the Sensing Bookstore now, so what cafes or bookstores do you go for instead?

For Citywalk Behavior

- How often do you go for Citywalk?
- Do you think it is happy while you are going for Citywalk now? Rank it from 1-5.
- Do you usually search for trending stores on Red and go directly to it, or look for popular Citywalk routes and practise it at weekends?

For Wanghong urbanism

- Do you feel that the population of this area has grown rapidly suddenly in the last one year and half, or you feel that everything remains the same?
- Do you know how this neighbourhood has gradually become a Wanghong neighborhood on Red?
- Do you know that there are lots of posts introducing Citywalk routes in this neighborhood?
- Do you feel that the growing number of the visitors influence your daily living?

For Local business

- While you are going for Citywalk, will you hesitate going in a store because the price is unknown?

For Comparison Model

- Do you think the architecture style of this store is good for taking photos? Rank it from 1-5.
- Do you think the interior design make you feel comfortable? Rank it from 1-5.
- Do you know the Sensing Bookstore, comparing with this store, which one do you think is better for taking photo?
- What about the interior design, which one do you think is better for taking photo?
- Do you think the style or characteristics of this store is related to the neighborhood's atmosphere? Rank it from 1-5.